

# Essay on how does hegel perceive the idea of time (duration) in history

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Time is of essence in providing a correct description of an historian's intellectual work (Hegel 15). Basically, historians are concerned with giving a factual description of events that happened in the past. Knowledge of the period when the events happened gives the historian a foundation to construct a credible story from the historical sources available. From time to time, historians have to make a choice about the scale of history with which they are interested. Georg Hegel tries to explain the appropriate time scale for giving historical accounts in his book *Philosophy of History*. In the introductory chapter, the philosopher begins by giving a couple of lectures regarding the relation between time and history. Georg Hegel's idea of the appropriate time scale for describing historical events edges towards the short-term, something which differs from the *Annales* school-of-thought which advocates looking at historical events comprehensively from a long-term perspective.

Apparently, historical events happen at a given period and this is the reason why historians are concerned with the time when a particular event occurs. Knowledge of the period when an event occurs provides the historian with the basis of providing an explanation of the event (Hegel 29). It becomes possible to provide the causal mechanisms, the background, and the human choices that brought about the outcome. Without knowledge of the time when an event occurred, it becomes hard to identify the social forces and activities that brought about the event. Before piecing the pieces of information together, an historian has to define the time scale within which to discuss the phenomenon of interests. This helps to describe the intentions that underlie the complex historical actions with regards to the specific

timescale.

In the book *Philosophy of History*, Georg Hegel sees a limited time and space as the best time scale for constructing an historical account. According to Hegel, history can be divided into three distinct time scales, which include original, reflective and philosophic histories. From these, an historian can decide to focus on a limited scale in time and space, something called “micro-history”. Beginning with original history, Hegel explains that this is history that is written and composed during the life-time of a given historian. In this context, the historian uses pre-historic pieces of information as the ingredients to spice up the position taken about given events and actions recorded (Hegel 34). However, the historian is at liberty to include pieces of history before his time.

Considering that the historian shares in the history that is recorded in original history, Hegel explains that historians seek to create specific mental representations in order to influence their readers and audience to view their recorded pieces of history in a given way. This means that historians, in original history, have a great influence in how different events and actions are perceived by their audience. However, one drawback to using this limited timescale is the fact that it is too particular to an extent that, the overall interest may be lost.

The second duration of history that Hegel talks about is reflective history. Unlike original history, the historian does not share in the events and actions involved in the period of history that he or she is talking about. The history goes an extra step of talking about history that is beyond the time frame in which the historian is currently living. Under this category of time, the

historian can talk about universal history which deals with world events and occurrences. The historians can also critic segments of histories that were written before his or his time. In criticizing history, historians question the accuracy of the information that might have been provided by their predecessors in writing different histories. The third subsection that falls under the category of reflective history is pragmatic history which seeks to question the theory and the ideology involved in the writing of a given segment of history. Specialized history is also another class of reflective history. This category looks at a particular thread of history such as law and art. Nonetheless, all these historical timelines that Hegel talks about focus on the short term. The Annales school-of-thought provides a contradicting stands to Hegel's, with regards to the timeframe required for giving historical accounts.

The Annales School argues that an historian can decide to focus on events that occur over a broad scale of time and space, something called "macro-history." This encompasses a specific event over a long period of time, millennia for example. The Annales School aims at shifting the focus to problem-oriented history and looking at human history comprehensively. The Annales School criticizes the analysis of historical events over short periods, simply because the historian may lose track of the social events, motives and the background of the event. This is based on the premise that the biggest task facing an historian is how to piece together archival information about an event into something that makes sense. In order to do this, the historian needs to understand pieces of evidence that exist, and fit the evidence into a logical and authentic story.

In a nutshell, the historian has to identify, conceive, contextualize and explain events that occurred in the past in a factual manner. In order to explain and interpret these historical events, the historian has to present findings that bear evidence. This evidence is found in historical records, and it would be foolhardy to come up with tangible explanations of the cultural meanings and social causes without concentrating on a prolonged scale of time. Therefore, historical accounts have to depend on theoretical reason as well as factual inquiry, based on the inferences from the evidence of the present. This makes followers of the Annales School believe that Georg Hegel's idea of analyzing historical events is wrong. However, macro-history (as advocated by the Annales School) is general and may, therefore, lose the empirical sight of the historical processes it tracks.

In order to strike a balance between micro and macro-history, the only other option available for historians is to address both points. This involves choosing a time scale which is genuinely interesting and important, and also allows a valid analysis. The premise is that the historian is free to choose a time scale which allows the best conceptualization of history, using the evidence available. Nonetheless, Hegel perceives time and duration as being highly influential in the writing of history. Hegel argues that events, actions, and situations within the time frame within the writing period of a given historians shape the kind of issues that a historian that is likely to focus on. In addition, social frameworks and institutions within different periods of writing history shape the kind of mental representations that historians create in the mentalities of their audiences regarding specific time frames.

Therefore, Hegel sees time as being highly influential in the writing of different forms of histories.

## **Works Cited**

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