

# PHILOSOPHY AND THE WORLD AT THE END—HEGELIAN REFLECTIONS

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## Abstract

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On the background of our situation of global pandemic crisis — a situation that often produces the apocalyptic feeling of “the end of the world” — this essay discusses the relationship between philosophy and the world in Hegel’s thought with a brief detour through Kant’s famous distinction between *Schulbegriff* and *Weltbegriff* of philosophy. The question at the center of my reconstruction concerns the predicament and task of philosophical thinking when the world seems to be at its end.

Is the end of philosophy to accompany the end of the world? Can philosophy withstand the end of the world? Perhaps even forestall it? Can philosophical thinking re-invent or re-imagine the world after the end, thereby proposing, with Hegel, a sort of new dialectical cosmology (able to withstand the test of the pandemic we all live in)?

**Keywords:** philosophy, world, *Schulbegriff*, *Weltbegriff*, end.

## Resumen

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Con el trasfondo de nuestra situación de crisis, ocasionada por la actual pandemia global —que suscita a menudo un sentimiento apocalíptico de «fin del mundo»—, este ensayo discute la relación entre la filosofía y el mundo en el pensamiento hegeliano, después de un breve rodeo a través de la famosa distinción kantiana entre el *Schulbegriff* y el *Weltbegriff* de la filosofía. El problema central de mi reconstrucción concierne a la dificultad y a la tarea del pensamiento filosófico cuando el mundo parece estar llegando a su fin. ¿Ha de acompañar el final de la filosofía al fin del mundo? ¿Puede oponer ella resistencia al fin de este, o incluso —quizá— prevenirlo? ¿O puede el pensar filosófico reinventar o volver a imaginar el mundo después del final, proponiendo al efecto, con Hegel, una suerte de nueva cosmología dialéctica (capaz de pasar la prueba de la pandemia, dentro de la cual vivimos todos)?

**Palabras clave:** filosofía, mundo, *Schulbegriff*, *Weltbegriff*, fin.

Here is one of the many thoughts — or rather, one of the still un-reflected feelings — triggered by the current global pandemic crisis (winter-fall 2020, and still ongoing, no end in sight). “It is not difficult to see” — we could ascertain, following Hegel’s way of rendering the glaring, yet deceiving, evidence of what is under everyone’s eyes (TW 3, 18)<sup>1</sup> — that our present world is swiftly falling into chaos. This chaos reveals that our world, which is indeed for us the only real world, is in fact very small and limited: *there is no escape in it, no escape from it*. We cannot even entertain the illusion that flying somewhere else, i.e., to another, allegedly remote and untouched region of the world, could help us avoid the current predicament. The pandemic makes us experience directly the meaning of that overarching metaphysical “Pân” (a far more original sense of ‘globalization’). The world is the all-encompassing totality, a *totum* of homogeneous parts. What befalls one part befalls all parts, hence befalls the whole in which those parts inhere and by which they are made possible in the first place. This is revealed in the order of experience (in the *ordo cognoscendi*). In fact, properly (or in the *ordo essendi*), the destiny of the whole determines the destiny of all its parts. Indeed, this metaphysical truth produces the illusion of all-pervasive sameness that now envelops the world and risks cancelling all-too-relevant differences. For one thing, while the whole world suffers from the pandemic,

not all places (or parts) of the world suffer equally and in the same way. Hence the all-pervasive (indeed, ‘global’) explosion of violence and rightful anti-racists protests across the world. Differences do matter — even, and indeed, in particular, in times of crisis.

The pandemic discloses to us, first and foremost, this truth: there is no escape in the world, no escape from the world. But the chaos it generates raises another, historically and culturally ever-resurgent feeling, the eschatological feeling of the ‘end of the world’. Ultimately, the pandemic makes us experience the sense (or non-sense) of the world. It reveals what it means to have reached the limit, indeed, perhaps, the end; it reveals that that which we have heretofore taken as unlimited has in fact a hard limit. This I take to be “*das Bekannte*” — what is “not difficult to see” because it is under everyone’s eyes and generates a well-known feeling, and yet it is utterly obscure and opaque in its true significance. This is “*das Bekannte*” from which our current philosophical reflection must start in order to transform it into “*das Erkannte*,” i.e., into some kind of meaningful knowledge or truth that could help us pull through the crisis, perhaps reconstituting a new “world” of sort. In fact, right from the outset, instead of providing us with some comforting truth, this reflection seems to plunge us deeper into something akin to Kant’s cosmological antinomies leaving reason despairing that the world is truly *cosmos* and not *chaos*, i.e., ultimately, realizing that the world, perhaps, is not (or no longer) “world” at all.

The question I set out to investigate in this essay is whether Hegel’s dialectical

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<sup>1</sup> *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, henceforth quoted according to *Theorie Werkausgabe*, ed. E. Moldenhauer / H.M. Michael. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1970 (=TW), directly in the text.