INTRODUCTION

This book addresses two readerships: those interested in the philosophy of history as a way of grounding modern human rights, despite the skepticism of Jürgen Habermas (1993, 136) or François Lyotard (Lyotard, 1983, §221-28); and those interested more generally in an intercultural treatment of philosophy.

The human sciences interpret texts. Argument helps fix the nature of facts to which texts at times incorrectly refer. "The moon shines" refers under a false description; "The moon reflects" refers correctly. To understand a text is, among other things, to identify correctly the facts to which it refers. We better understand texts of classical Greece by knowing that it practiced slavery. We understand it even better by knowing that slavery rests on false assumptions. This book seeks to understand texts of history in light of the nature of reality. Its goal is to rehabilitate speculative philosophy of history alongside analytic philosophy of history.

The title, History as the Story of Freedom, indicates Hegel as a reference point in this interpretation. The interpretation is not philosophical by the limited artistic, legal, or other cultural objects/texts which invite interpretation, but by the open-ended range of interconnected facts which, in the end, any text proves to be about. To understand world history is in part to know whether the assumptions of a culture are strongly true, or whether they refer to facts under incorrect descriptions. Today the speculative philosophy of history seems to most philosophers overwhelming. Many ignore it, partly due to its ideological deformations. Yet since the story of human rights is now the civil religion of the world community, can we afford to ignore it? I address the vastness of world history in Chapter Nine, and cultural bias in the speculative philosophy of history in Chapters Nine and Ten. I conclude that there is no single story line. The story of freedom, despite the primacy of universal human obligations and rights, issues in different concrete world histories, all variations on the theme of surmounting despotism.

My discussions of determinism, nominalism, or theism may seem unjustified digressions, but to know that Stoic determinism refers to the cosmos under a false description, as I believe it does, alters our outlook on Roman Stoicism. We can understand determinism without knowing whether it is true, but we know it better if we know it is false. As a result, several classical themes of metaphysics will be brought into the story of freedom.

The truth in these matters will be approached the only way it can be approached, by dialogue with others. Some readers may flatter me by finding that interludes by philosophers who disagree with me interrupt pursuit of my thought in the main chapters. True, these interludes may be ignored. But most readers will appreciate these checks on the truth of what I say. Finally, readers who deny that understanding the past includes knowing whether its presuppositions are true are invited to approach this kaleidoscopic book following the subtitle, as a general treatment of philosophy in an intercultural context.
The relevant context for philosophical understanding is the cosmos. Formalist textual interpretation understands a text solely by its internal structure. Contextual interpretation understands the text by what surrounds it. If the meaning of an act or text is in part contextual, understanding cannot easily stop short of the total cosmic context. This book starts with the different world-views found in role-model cultures of history. This leads to questions of our identity. We are in the cosmos. Unless we are trapped in it as in a prison which represses our nature, its nature affects ours. The Pythagoreans, who coined the term “philosophy,” first spoke of a “cosmos.” Philosophy was the cosmos’ quest for self-knowledge in and through us. Such self-knowledge is speculative philosophy: we see different perspectives on ourselves in various culturally specific mirrors of the cosmos.

I shall present world-views and the problem of justifying them in an intercultural perspective in which people communicate as people from concrete historical traditions rather than merely as specialists. I view the now dominant Western world-view based on the human rights struggle as a construct of world history. An objection to the dominance of this frame is that it pigeon-holes non-Western or non-modern cultures on a scale of human progress. Yet the objection applies only if the scale is presented as a doctrine to which the complex facts of history are reduced. I view this scale as an ideological assumption of Western culture.

In this preface, I briefly address questions raised by use of the idea of Western human rights as a key to understanding different historical perspectives. Can this perspective do justice to non-Western or non-contemporary philosophical perspectives? How can it, with its own Western bias, help if we want to interrogate possibly provincial Western interpretations in dialogue with other cultures?

The first eight chapters aim to uncover the story of freedom. I situate classical philosophers within world history. I do not tell the story of world history as the story of freedom instead of than, say, that of power struggle. Telling it without preliminaries would be ideological, carrying the assumption that it is worth telling. But that is the question. Instead, I explore the idea of this story. Only the last two chapters reflect positively on the idea of the speculative philosophy of history, defending its possibility while gainsaying corrections of Hegel’s construction of it.

To tell the story is to start like Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* from prehistory. It leads to the fall into patriarchal despotism and subsequent struggle to surmount despotism. This struggle passes through Eastern divine kingship, an escape from divine kingship by mystical experience, the reform of divine kingship by Hebrew sacred kingship, Greek self-government by limited citizenship with no fear of the Lord, the Christian rebirth in the image and kingdom of God for all, and finally to a modern secularization of this kingdom in the quest for universal human rights.

I retold this story with Hegel in *G. W. F. Hegel* (1977). The present book’scovery of the story is conceptually prior to the telling. This book is not an account of Hegel. I write in my own voice, while adapting passages of the first book in evidencing the story of freedom lodged in the West’s identity, perhaps even in world history itself. Most of this book is wholly new, the rest is revised.
for a new purpose. Clearly I understand the “history of the story of liberty” in Hegel’s sense rather than in Croce’s non-progressive sense in his book of the same title (Croce, 1941, Pt. 1, ch. 12). Yet this book is not a book of specialized Hegel or other scholarship. Through Chapter Eight it is a periodically argumentative compendium of the Western tradition, protected from closure by including responses by other scholars and philosophers. This part is an essay on world history. In the remaining chapters, the book defends an Hegelian idea of a global narration of world history, but revises the Hegelian development of such history.

Exploring the story means uncovering more remote presuppositions of the current human rights perspective. A story is told forward, but it discovered backward, starting with the end, tracing it to its start. Hegel is the philosopher of reference. He is the most important philosopher of the story of freedom embedded in the West’s identity—the closest thing to the Homer of our multi-national world.

Philosophy has been brought back into connection with the humanities. But after critical theory, hermeneutics, and post-structuralisms, this connection no longer assumes the supremacy of a Judaeo-Christian or Western rationalist tradition. I neither endorse nor reject that assumption. My purpose is to put it at risk. Reflection on this assumption will increase in the coming century, as the Westernization of non-Western cultures proves often illusory, as Western culture ceases to give its former appearance of advancing to world domination.

I propose an introduction to philosophy for an “age of human rights.” I interrogate world history viewed as a story of universal freedom. The view has a basic ideological role in our culture. Respondents address the place of pre-historical religion, China, India, Judaism, Greece, and Christianity to contemporary human rights. While I hope it will be of interest to colleagues, the needs of general readers have been kept in mind.

A related goal is to approach classical metaphysical issues in the context of world cultures. Thus other contributors address the contemporary “death of art,” determinism in connection with Stoicism, universals in connection with classical Greek exemplarism, theistic arguments, a refutation of motion required by pantheism, and materialism versus panpsychism in connection with prehistorical animism. Metaphysical argument here is not an end in itself. It helps judge the truth of influential world-views and their impact on human rights. For example, suppose motion is impossible, as in Buddhism. Then people in motion do not exist. And so individual rights cherished in the West can only be illusory. This at least raises a question about the Western world-view.

The Western philosophy of history as a story of freedom is our heuristic dogma. Such dogmatism fosters inquiry. Our method is not the litigant’s, nor the court reporter’s, nor the judge’s, but that of an attorney. Litigants are naive protagonists. A court reporter is like the audience or spectators. A judge is an agent of destiny. But an attorney, perhaps without personally agreeing with the litigant-
client, heuristically presents the case. To philosophize as a heuristic dogmatist is do
so as an actor engaged in reflective role playing, exploiting even error.

Heuristic dogmatism differs from unconditional dogmatism by recognizing the
social nature of inquiry. Knowledge is not attained by private intuitions of self-
evidence. Nor is it attained by caving in to the first refutation. Nor is it attained
by Hegel’s dialectical method of uncovering and overcoming contradictions in
one’s thought. Hegel’s method is apt for systematically reconstructing what we
have learned, less so for inquiring into what we do not know.

New insight is attained by a dialogical method, including imaginary dialogue
with alter egos and dialogue with real human beings. Each chapter of Part One
contains one or two replies to heuristic theses for which I plead. The thesis may
interpret the world-view of a culture, or debate a classical metaphysical issue
raised by the philosophy of a culture. Certain respondents may represent non-
Western traditions. They may criticize Western (Christian, often Hegelian) re-
collection of world cultures for oversimplification. My Hegelian heuristic thesis
on world history treats these traditions as variations on the theme of despotism.

Some of the respondents may be offended by the apparently judgmental tone
of my Western or Hegelian presentations of other cultures. For such readers, my
heuristic intentions risk the unintended result of cutting dialogue short. But I am
fortunate to have respondents who realize that my simplifications or distortions
often express unspoken Western cultural preconceptions. Expressing these precox-
captions openly, exposing them to expert criticism, may show more honest respect
for other perspectives than a tolerance founded on silence.

With each respondent I have made a pact. I welcomed suggestions for re-
vision when intended to set up a more instructive target. We all have an interest
not to refute straw dolls. But afterward I made no further revisions in light of
rebuttals. I may believe my colleague has not understood, or has argued
unsoundly. No matter. Perhaps I have not stated myself clearly. Perhaps I am
wrong. The reader will judge. Inquiry must be without fear of error. (On
occasion, where I find I have clearly misstated myself, I acknowledge the
respondent in the penultimate chapter.)

The Western cultural tradition is not the history of philosophy. It belongs to
world history, expressed in world art, the diversity of world religions, and in
current events as well as past history. The history of philosophy is introduced not
for itself, but as world history thinking and rethinking itself. I heuristically uphold
a view of history as a struggle for human rights—drawing on Pythagoras, Plato,
Aristotle, Stoicism, and Hegel. In showing links between Western identity, world
history, and human rights, I indicate the presence of this struggle in history,
philosophy, art, and religion. I seek to show that human rights are not narrowly
Western. Habermas’s idea of human rights is post-metaphysical, unlike Hegel’s
idea of them as expressing the metaphysically absolute idea of personality or spirit.
Hegel justifies human rights as conditions of divine self-knowledge operating
through us. Habermas justifies them procedurally from a human viewpoint, as conditions of a quest for human knowledge whose denial amounts to a practical contradiction. The case for human rights in Chapter One starts out with Habermas. The Hegelian case amounts to revealing a gradual discovery of spirit (the principle of personality in the metaphysics of the absolute as well as in morality) along the path from East to West. That case is presented and—with the help of respondents—tested and revised in subsequent chapters. The story of freedom is the epic story of liberty against despotism everywhere, not just in the Orient. And it justifies human rights insofar as despotism proves to be incoherent.

Because the case for human rights and their place in history is heuristic, the risk exists that defense of the Western tradition and identity may result in their refutation. At stake today in the Western tradition is the tenability of individual human rights as a measure of moral progress in history. I advocate human rights, but favor a duty-based theory of them influenced by the Chinese tradition of jen.

Yet I let the Western triumphalism of reason and freedom set the agenda. The philosophical triumph of reason in history—beginning in Herodotus, Aristotle, and the Stoics, proceeding through Christian natural law philosophy in St. Thomas to the English, French, and German Enlightenment—defines official Western culture as it has constructed itself. We do not let this culture set the agenda arbitrarily. In establishing our inherited identity, it sets the agenda for us today by itself.

Like Hegel, I include China, India, and Israel as early stages of a Western story of freedom. China presents earthly divine kingship, India mystical escape from such kingship, and Israel heavenly, divine kingship. China, India, and the Hebrews, we know, form no causal sequence. India depended on China no more than Israel on India. Yet we find a conceptual sequence from external traditional authority, through the denial of such authority, to rational internalization.

Western rationalism and human rights theory are not self-evident. They are target theories for philosophers. To tell the story of freedom as Hegel does, proceeding from what is exotic or remote to what is everyday, is self-congratulatory. It is to tell our own success story. It is also exhortatory. Uncovery of this story suspends judgment on whether we wish to tell it. Our “success” stems from problematic sacrifices. For example, a sacrifice of closely-reasoned mystical experience in India, of community without the disruption of individual grievances in China, and of community with nature as a whole among hunter-gatherers.

Turning from a heuristic defense of a Western case for human rights, I conclude that the Western story of freedom ought no longer be told. International dialogue between physicists would be undermined by taking Newtonian physics as the success story of English physics. Dialogue between East and West, North and South, meets troubled waters if human rights are the success story of the West. Justifications of human rights that oblige Easterners to either Westernize themselves or sin against human rights undermine dialogue based on equity
between of different cultures. If human rights are universal, every culture can write its own epic success story of human rights—as Hegel has done for the West.

Yet epic implies confrontation. The rise of Western liberty is the fall of Oriental despotism. Instead of achieving freedom by epic struggle against a despotistic East, we achieve it by tragicomedy. Epic struggle is between cities, tragic struggle occurs today within one global city. “Oriental despotism,” tragically defeated in the universal human city, comically survives to enlighten Western victors. The emperor’s despotism masks the Confucianist authority of human conscience (jen).

The story of freedom is today challenged even in the West by a Confucianist view of history as a story of human obligation, but also by an Indian story of worldly empowerment by an experience of mystical oneness with all, a Hebrew world-historical story of human response to an absolute voice of conscience, or a Hellenistic story of human virtue as the content of great edifying art. For geopolitical reasons the most forceful challenge will come in the near future from China. A fully rational society cannot be based on rights, which are always against others, but on human obligations by all to all. My obligations assign you rights. Yet moral obligations should be met; we should not have to defend our rights. This defense should at most be an exceptional backup when obligations are not met. Rights breed conflict, not the solidarity of obligations. Even in a chiefly duty-driven society, non-respect of rights sometimes occurs. It should not face uncomprehending stares, but should be met by ready help.

The justification of retaining human rights consciousness is a measure of our imperfect rationality, but also of the practical wisdom of any society that recognizes its imperfection, and hence the unfortunate justifiability of grievances. The challenge to “rights” consciousness by “duty” consciousness may end in a compromise. The constant vigilance of duty should include a place for the periodic complaint of rights violation. Yet this is a challenge of one conceivable moral order to another, not of East to West. The overarching sense of duty which China offers the West is already on the agenda of the West. Yet China would have to undergo a considerable internal changes if Confucianist obligation is to become universal, a beacon to the world.

The history of human rights began in the West was preceded by the idea of the Greek-Roman father’s rights over members of his family. Gradually, equal rights were given to these other members. A story of human obligations begins in China with an idea of the father’s obligations to the family. It has a potential, which is higher than the Greek-Roman story’s more realistic potential, of expanding to a universal human obligation by all to all. In any case, it was surely an unfortunate misjudgment by Hegel to have echoed Aristotle and Montesquieu on Oriental despotism. Despotism is real, and freedom is its overcoming. Yet it cannot be overcome in ourselves by projecting it on an Eastern culture which history has already made considerably less alien to us.