Critique of Journalistic Reason

PHILOSOPHY AND THE TIME OF THE NEWSPAPER

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CRITIQUE OF JOURNALISTIC REASON

Morning News

Kant, Hegel

> The *newspaper reading* of the early morning [*das* Zeitungslesen *des Morgens früh*] is a kind of realistic morning prayer [*Morgensegen*]. One orients one's attitude towards the world either through God or through that which the world is. The former gives as much security [*Sicherheit*] as the latter, in that one knows where one stands [*wie man daran sei*].
>
> —HEGEL, *JENA APHORISMS*

"The *newspaper reading* of the early morning"—with these words a certain topos is, perhaps for the first time, introduced into the philosophical tradition: its preoccupation with journalism.[1] The comparison between newspaper reading and the morning prayer appears in the margins of Hegel's writings, amongst the miscellaneous fragments, notes, and reflections collected in his notebooks of the Jena years—texts written before the publication of any of his major books and only published posthumously in a local newspaper in the 1840s.[2] Also the form in which this comparison is elaborated—that of an aphorism—may suggest that it bears no relation to Hegel's systematic writings.[3] But even though it is consigned to this apparently marginal place, the scene of newspaper reading is presented here with a distinct emphasis. Set in italics and placed at the start of the first sentence, the word *Zeitungslesen* suggests that it is invested with a special significance: that this word and the scene of reading it evokes mean something more than the reader may initially assume. The emphasis on this scene is brought out only further by the resonance between the two compounds around which the aphorism is organized, *Zeitungslesen* and *Morgensegen*, both of which are composed of the same amount of syllables, similar in sound and meter, and only the slightest step removed from

rhyme. If this play of emphasis and resonance suggests anything, it is that this remark is not just a pithy reflection on the accidental resemblance of two all too familiar scenes from everyday life at the start of the nineteenth century—that there is more at stake in this aphorism than the provision of a witty observation that exists at a safe remove from Hegel's philosophical work of those same years. In their emphatic introduction, the scenes juxtaposed here rather seem to serve as two of those "abbreviations" (*Abkürzungen*) in which, as Hegel writes later, thought shows itself to be the "most powerful epitomist": scenes in which thought compresses the insights it has reached, albeit not in a language of concepts but one of figures and images.[4]

If it is possible to understand the comparison of the scenes of reading and praying presented in Hegel's notebooks as an *Abkürzung* in this sense, this is because these two scenes, taken together, epitomize the conception of history in which the planned introduction to his philosophical system—the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—would culminate. In order to grasp the precise philosophical significance with which the scene of *Zeitungslesen* is endowed in this aphorism, one would first need to turn to the scene to which it is juxtaposed: that of the Lutheran *Morgensegen*. As is well known, religious experience plays a decisive role in Hegel's philosophical writings of the preceding years, especially in their account of the absolute.[5] In the *Systemfragment* of 1800, Hegel had argued that the absolute—or what is there called "infinite life"—must remain strictly inaccessible to reflective thought and its inherent opposition of subject and object.[6] Even though reflection is destined to strive for the "elevation of the finite into the infinite life," such elevation could only be accomplished in the domain of religion. In religious experience, the subject renounces its own absoluteness and instead takes hold of the absolute, which precedes both subject and object as their common source. History and nature are both grasped as manifestations of the absolute, but insofar as this absolute remains strictly separated from its reflected image in consciousness, it does not have a historical character itself—it knows no development. The juxtaposition of the morning prayer and newspaper reading in Hegel's Jena notebooks draws on this earlier understanding of religious experience but also points to a shifted conception of the absolute. This shift is suggested by the prayer that is here supposed to capture religion's privileged relation to the absolute: the Lutheran *Morgensegen*. As an exemplary expression of what Hegel refers to in the *Phenomenology* as "manifest religion," this morning prayer is oriented toward a God that becomes incarnate in the world it has created and, after having sacrificed itself, is resurrected as holy spirit.[7] If the Lutheran prayer orients itself toward the absolute, it is an absolute being that has entered the world and actualizes itself in space, time, and history. To say the morning prayer is thus,

for Hegel, to take hold of the absolute as the holy spirit that is at work in time and history—and to grasp oneself as a moment in its development. More than any other prayer, it is the *Morgensegen*, undertaken at the dawn of every new day, that most acutely exemplifies the relation to this absolute being, which Hegel describes in the *Phenomenology* as "the spirit who dwells in his community, dies in it every day, and is daily resurrected [*in ihr täglich stirbt und aufersteht*]."[8] Insofar as it is grasped as spirit, the absolute being of the *Morgensegen* is no longer merely an absolute that manifests itself in history while remaining separate from it. Instead, history turns out to be the movement of alienation and reconciliation by which the absolute realizes itself in the world, day after day.

A *Zeitungslesen* that is comparable to the *Morgensegen* in this precise sense is thus not a newspaper reading in the familiar sense. A "newspaper reading of the early morning" that may be compared to the morning prayer cannot be satisfied with the inventory of accidental occurrences that is offered to it on a daily basis; it would have to be a reading that is oriented toward the absolute. Only insofar as it is oriented toward the absolute could this reading find the same *Sicherheit*, the same security that the morning prayer finds in its orientation toward God. But rather than representing this absolute being as a God that may dwell in the world but is still other to it, the reading that Hegel conjures up here would discover the absolute in the being of the world itself—in "that which the world is" (*was die Welt ist*).[9] Like the *Morgensegen*, such reading puts its faith in the absolute as a spirit that is at work in the world; but rather than apprehending the absolute as a holy spirit, the faith of this reader is perhaps closer to what Hegel calls a "faith in the world spirit" (*Glauben an der Weltgeist*)—a term that appears in the introduction to his lectures on the history of philosophy of the same years.[10] What distinguishes this "faith in the world spirit" from its religious counterpart is captured by the laconic phrase with which Hegel here characterizes this credo: *es geht vernünftig zu*—things go about rationally.[11] A newspaper reading that can be called a "realistic morning prayer" would be a reading that has discovered the absolute spirit that "dies every day, and is daily resurrected" to be nothing but the movement by which reason unfolds itself in the real.[12] The task of the newspaper reader would be to recover this movement from the inventory of accidental occurrences presented in the pages of the newspaper—to read the *Zeitung* as the report of the movement by which the absolute moves outside itself and returns to itself, day after day.[13]

Written in the years directly preceding the publication of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it is difficult not to read the aphorism from the Jena notebooks as a condensed expression of the speculative identity of the ideal and the real

that will organize Hegel's philosophical system and the conception of history that underpins it.[14] The juxtaposition of newspaper reading and *Morgensegen* would then anticipate one of Hegel's famous later formulations of this identity, the proposition that "the task of philosophy is to comprehend *that which is*, because that *which is*, is reason"; and by capturing this comprehension as a *Zeitunglesen*, it would also evoke the counterpart of this proposition, the claim that philosophy is "its time, apprehended in thoughts" (*ihre Zeit in Gedanken erfaßt*).[15] Despite its apparently marginal place, the aphorism would then capture the decisive insight around which Hegel's philosophical system is organized. But while many of the other aphorisms in the notebooks return in the preface to the book that was conceived to be the introduction to this system—the *Phenomenology*—the comparison between newspaper reader and morning prayer remains curiously absent. Despite the continued importance that Hegel attached to images of daybreak, the scene of reading that is conjured up here, that of the *Zeitungslesen des Morgens früh*, will not return in any of his published writings. Is this a mere coincidence—or did he suspect that this scene would work against the system it is supposed to epitomize?[16] Did the Jena philosopher, who would go on to briefly act as editor of the *Bamberger Zeitung*, sense that there something in this scene of reading that undermines the immanent movement of the concept—the same movement that is supposed to guarantee the possibility for an identification of the real and the rational, of divine providence and historical development?[17] Does this comparison pose a danger to the system—the danger that it would render the speculative identity that it ought to exemplify into a laughing matter? Does the scene evoked here not present a lapse of the most serious of matters—the comprehension of history as the unfolding of spirit—into mere jest?

"The *newspaper reading* of the early morning"—before Hegel explicitly introduces this scene of reading into the philosophical tradition, it already makes a more modest appearance in a brief but important text by Kant that was itself originally written to be published in a newspaper: the essay "A Renewed Question: Is Humankind Constantly Progressing?"[18] The figure of the newspaper reader plays a decisive role in Kant's response to the question that is raised in the title of the essay: whether there is a secure ground to hope that *das menschliche Geschlecht* continually approaches its moral destination—or whether history is, as Kant points out in the first sections of the text, a mere *Possenspiel*, a farce without a final goal or progression toward it.[19] Despite the fact that this question is raised in a seemingly marginal piece of writing, an occasional piece that appears to be no more than an appendix to the Kantian system, it stands in a close relation to a problem that is of fundamental importance to the critical enterprise: the problem of the possibility of history.[20] Like

his other writings of the early 1790s, Kant's essay on progress is an attempt to elaborate the consequences of a thought that had remained latent in the first two *Critiques*: that the realization of the supreme end of practical and theoretical reason, the "highest good" (*das höchste Gut*), cannot be restricted to the realm of personal morality alone but must extend to the creation of a moral community—a community whose realization, ultimately, requires the reshaping of the empirical world in accordance with the demands of morality.[21] The moral duty that is expressed in Kant's final formulation of the moral imperative—"Act to promote the highest good"—thus implies a task can only be developed through a concrete development in time that extends beyond the individual and must encompass the *Menschengeschlecht* in its entirety. Such a task could be called "historical" in the precise sense of the word: for it is with this task—its *Aufgabe* or "assignment" to the human being—that history first opens up as the domain of its possible fulfillment.

In the essay on historical progress, Kant is not only concerned with the manifestation of this imperative—that is to say, how the task to realize the highest good is given to the human *Geschlecht*—but also with the conditions under which it can be effective. If the historical imperative is to make an effective claim on a rational being endowed with freedom, it must not only manifest itself as a "fact" of moral consciousness; in order for this imperative to express a duty, there must also be grounds to expect that it is *possible* for the individual to contribute to its realization. This is where the question of progress comes into play: for if history would indeed be a *Possenspiel*, which Kant describes here as a play in which good and evil, moral lawfulness, and lawlessness effectively neutralize one another, there would be no way for the individual to ensure that its actions are not merely a Sisyphean effort.[22] If the historical imperative is to maintain its purchase on the subject addressed by it—if there is, in other words, to be history at all—the individual must have grounds to expect that humanity progresses toward its final moral end: for it is only in the secure expectation of progress that each human being finds itself subjected to the duty to contribute to humanity's advancement toward its ultimate destination. If Kant's "historical imperative" is not to collapse, there must be grounds to hope that history progresses toward the better. But as the essay on progress and the other historico-philosophical reflections of the early 1790s never cease to point out, securing such a ground and predicting the future course of events raise serious difficulties insofar as the history under consideration here is a moral history. Because the subject of this moral history—a subject famously described by Kant in the opening sections of the essay as a "diviner who creates and contrives the event he announces in advance"[23]—must be a rational being endowed with freedom, it is not possible to find this ground *a posteriori*

by identifying the rules and regularities of prior experience. Because the one who "creates and contrives" this moral history is also a finite being—a being that, as Kant had shown in the sections on "radical evil" in the *Religion*, not only finds itself addressed by the moral law but also possesses an "innate" and "inextirpable" propensity toward evil[24]—there is no way to decide *a priori* whether such a being will tend to obey the moral law or not, no basis to expect whether it "finds itself on the good (though narrow) path of constant progress [*Fortschritt*] from the bad to the better."[25]

It is in the context of this problem, which is laid out in the first half of his essay on "A Renewed Question," that the figure of the newspaper reader will make its appearance. The introduction of this figure is, not by chance, staged in a passage of the text that is concerned with the encounter with a historical occurrence that is referred to by Kant simply as the "event of our time" (*Begebenheit unserer Zeit*): the French Revolution.[26] In an unexpected move, however, the essay does not concern itself with the event of the Revolution itself to substantiate the hypothesis that history is continually advancing toward the better. Instead, it turns to its "spectators" (*Zuschauer*) who do not directly participate in this event but see it taking place from a distance: spectators whose model is certainly not found in the onlookers of the events in the streets of Paris but rather in the newspaper readers who, from across the Rhine, witness the unfolding of a spectacle without personal or partisan self-interest and allow their partiality to "betray itself in the open" (*sich öffentlich verrat*).[27] If the display of this affective participation with the Revolution demonstrates that there are grounds to expect a moral tendency in the human *Geschlecht*, this is because the "mode of thinking" (*Denkungsart*) that allows this participation to betray itself must belong to a "moral disposition" (*moralische Anlage*):

> The revolution of a gifted people which we have seen going on in our day may succeed or founder; it may be filled with misery and atrocities to the point that a sensible human being, were he boldly to hope to execute it successfully the second time, would never resolve to make the experiment at such cost—this revolution, I say, nevertheless finds in the minds of all spectators [*den Gemüter aller Zuschauer*]—who are not implicated in the game [*Spiel*] themselves—a wishful *participation* [*Teilnehmung*] that borders closely on enthusiasm [*die Nahe an Enthusiasmus grenzt*], the very expression of which is fraught with danger; this participation, therefore, can have no other cause than a moral predisposition in humankind.[28]

Not the revolution itself, but the participation that this event finds in the *Gemüter* of its spectators thus intimates the moral disposition in which Kant

will find the ground for the slow but uninterrupted progress of humankind toward its moral destination. The name that Kant reserves for this participation is "enthusiasm"—a state of the *Gemüt* that is here initially described as a "wishful participation" (*Teilnehmung dem Wunsche nach*). If enthusiasm is an affective participation "after the wish," this wish is not to be mistaken for an empirical desire; it must rather be understood in the precise sense in which Kant had conceived of the wish in *Religion*, the book that he had finished right before his reflection on the revolution. In the third chapter of the book, Kant had identified the idea of the kingdom of God with the highest good as the final goal of practical and theoretical reason—and as in the case of Hegel, the relation of reason to its supreme end is here associated with a prayer: "The wish of all the well-disposed is thus: 'that the kingdom of God come, that his will be done on earth [*auf Erden geschehe*]'; but what preparations must they make in order that this wish come to pass among them [*mit ihnen geschehe*]?"[29] This conception of the wish informs Kant's account of enthusiasm, of which he writes in the essay that it is "directed only toward what is ideal and indeed purely moral."[30] Enthusiasm begins as a "wishful participation" but cannot be reduced to it; for Kant, it designates that state of the *Gemüt* in which the realization of this pure, moral ideal in the empirical world is not only wished for but held to be possible. That the spectators who witness this event unfolding without being implicated in it express their "sympathy with the players on one side [*Teilnehmung der Spielenden auf einer Seite*] against those on the other" is at first the expression of a mere wish: the as yet unfounded desire that the "play of great transformations" (*Spiel großer Umwandlungen*) is not the *Possenspiel* evoked in the first half of the essay but a progression of humankind toward its moral destination.[31] Yet it is exactly the expression of this unfounded wish by the spectators of the French Revolution that, in Kant's reading, turns out to provide the ground for the expectation of its realization. Insofar as this wishful participation is "universal," felt without exception by every human being; insofar as it is "unselfish" (*uneigennützig*); and, most importantly, insofar as the spectators of the revolution even endanger themselves in expressing this feeling, it will turn out not to be a mere wish at all. For if this wishful participation is an incentive that is in itself sufficient to determine the power of choice, if it can outweigh even the natural disposition toward self-preservation, its universal expression points not only to a moral "constitution" (*Beschaffenheit*) but also to the "capacity" (*Vermögen*) of humanity to reach it.[32] The wishful reader who encounters the universal, dangerous expression of this wish on the pages of the newspaper thus discovers that there is reason to expect that humankind is capable of reaching its destination. The feeling of enthusiasm is the medium of this discovery; it is the initially groundless wish for the realization of

the moral idea that, by its sheer force, provides the ground to expect its realization and opens up the possibility for the individual to contribute to the progression of humankind toward its final goal.

But even though Kant's account of this "wishful participation" with the French Revolution is unmistakably modeled on a newspaper reader, the imagery he employs in the essay derives almost without exception from the sphere of the theatre: the relevant passage does not speak of readers, but draws on a vocabulary of spectators and actors, of the stage and the play, of the unfolding of history as a *Spiel* of great revolutions. Through this imagery, the essay, however, alludes to a quite different mode of experience—an experience of reading and writing captured in the images of newspaper readers feverishly devouring the latest news, of reporters and journalists frantically scribbling down commentaries, of rumor and gossip reverberating within the crowd.[33] In earlier drafts of the "Renewed Question," the figure of the newspaper reader is still explicitly presented as the model of the spectators whose enthusiasm will provide a ground for historical progress. The participation of the "mere spectators" (*bloße Zuschauer*) with the French Revolution is here said to find its characteristic expression in a "warm desire for newspapers" (*heisse Begierde nach Zeitungen*)—newspapers whose sole purpose would be to provide the "material for the most interesting [. . .] conversations."[34] This addition is important, for it suggests that this desire for newspapers does not serve any empirical interest: this *Begierde* does not stem from the reader's natural drives, nor is it merely an intellectual desire for the advancement of this reader's own insights. These readers desire their newspapers only as the material for the "most interesting" (*den interessantesten*) conversations—that is to say, those conversations that are concerned only with what Kant had referred to, in the second *Critique*, as the "supreme interest" of reason.[35] This is why Kant, in his draft for the essay of 1793, will add that even a "reasoning, enlightened" (*räsonnierenden aufgeklärten*) being feels this desire: the *Begierde* described here does not originate in the human being qua natural being but expresses a purely rational interest, which is unselfish and completely independent of anything outside of reason itself.[36] The feverish desire for news about this "game of great revolutions" turns out to be the expression of a need that emerges from a conversation of the most interesting kind, a wish that originates from a *Räsonnieren* in pursuit of its supreme interest—the realization of the highest good. Not only the ragged phenomenal expression of the revolution but also the *Zeitungsfieber* that accompanies it are thus salvaged and put to work in a history that advances toward its moral destination.

Kant had made a similar argument in that other study of a world-historical event that took place earlier in Kant's lifetime and that was, like the French

Revolution, inseparable from the endless commentary, rumor, and chatter it incited amongst its contemporaries: the Lisbon Earthquake. Like the *factum brutum* of the French Revolution, an event that is, by the time Kant discusses it in the "Renewed Question," incontrovertibly stained by the suffering and atrocities of the preceding years, the 1755 earthquake makes itself felt as a world-historical occurrence in front of which the whole conceptual apparatus supporting the belief in progress threatens to collapse. As in his later text on the Revolution, the study of the earthquake is written as a newspaper article; and also here, Kant's attempt to neutralize the brute facticity of this event is accompanied by a parallel attempt to curtail its experience—an experience that is, once again, figured in the newspaper reader. "Great occurrences that concern the fate of all human beings," so Kant begins his first article, "rightfully incite that renowned desire for novelty [*diejenige ruhmreiche Neubegierde*], which awakens in response to everything exceptional and tends to be accompanied by the question as to what caused it."[37] Not only are we presented here with the attempt to curtail the destabilizing effects of the earthquake on a certain conception of history, to purge natural catastrophe of moral significance; but the other tremor that takes place in response to it, the "inciting" or "stirring" (*Erregung*) of the "desire for novelty" is consigned to its rightful limits and secured for the purpose of methodical questioning, observation and reasoning. Like Kant's later article on the French Revolution, his earlier article on the earthquake does not merely ward off the threat posed by this *Begebenheit*—the tremor on the scene of world history and the tremor within the reader—but aims to extract opportunity from the wreckage, interpreting the experience of these occurrences as the sign of a disposition that can guarantee the consistent progression of humankind toward its supreme end.[38]

Despite its central role in the early draft, the "desire for newspapers" of the spectators of the revolution will disappear from the final, published version of the essay, together with the reference to the "most interesting conversation." In the published version, the figure of the newspaper reader unmistakably provides the central model for the key passage on the spectators and their affective participation with the "event of our time"—but all direct references to this figure have now been removed. At certain points in the text, the description of the spectators still contains traces of the mode of reading and writing on which it is modeled. When Kant speaks of the Revolution as an event unfolding "in our days" (*in unsere Tagen*), this wording bears the mark of an experience whose rhythm is dictated by the daily news; when he explains how the mode of thinking of the spectators "betrays itself *in the open*" (*sich öffentlich verrat*), this does not evoke the space of the theatre but rather that of *Öffentlichkeit*, of publishing and publicity; and when he claims that these spectators have a

disposition that "lets their participation become loud" (*laut werden läßt*) the words he uses to describe this self-publishing recall the German idiom for erupting rumors—*laut werdende Gerüchte*.[39] Apart from these traces, however, the published version of the text no longer contains any explicit reference to a "warm desire for newspapers"—even if this desire had already been integrated into the Kantian system by interpreting it as a need that arises from that "most interesting conversation" by which reason sets itself its highest goal.

Even though these references have been removed, Kant has not abandoned his initial model for the "affective participation" in the French Revolution. Throughout the essay, it is clear that the description of the *bloße Zuschauer* and their encounter with the "game of great revolutions" is modeled entirely on the figure of the newspaper reader and the experience of history exemplified by it. The very possibility of the central metaphor of the theatre, the play, and the spectator is predicated precisely on this experience: only for the newspaper reader has it become possible to speak of world history as something that appears as a drama unfolding in the present; only for a newspaper reader has it become possible to relate to history not just as a game of great revolutions, but one that "can be *seen* unfolding [*vor sich gehen sehen*] in our days."[40] And only for the newspaper reader, not the onlooker in the streets of Paris, does it become possible to relate to this drama as a spectator who looks at the stage "without selfishness" and "without the least intention of assisting"—both aspects of these spectators that are crucial if their wishful participation is to be understood as a pure enthusiasm.[41] Indeed, the very distinction between *Zuschauer* and *Anschauer* rests on the assumption that these spectators are not immediately affected by the *Begebenheit*, that they do not see the event that is given to them as an object of intuition but relate to it as readers. It is only the reader immersed in the daily papers who could be portrayed as a spectator that is defined at the same time by a constitutive absence from the stage of world history and by a sense of proximity that borders on presence.[42] The figure of the newspaper reader is constantly alluded to in this vocabulary, together with the scenes of reading, writing, and conversation that accompanied it in the earlier drafts of the essay—but only indirectly, avoiding all direct reference. In doing so, the theatrical imagery employed by Kant not only evokes but also conceals a scene of reading. In the passages of the essay on the Revolution, experience is consistently transposed from the sphere of reading and writing to the sphere of seeing and thinking. The reader turns into a *Zuschauer*; the event is seen rather than read about, construed as an "event before the eye" (*Eräugnen*) rather than an encounter with a text, while the participation (*Teilnehmung*) of the spectators takes the place of an imparting (*Mitteilung*). The newspaper reader is transformed into a figure that conforms to the abstract concept of

an enlightened *Leserwelt* that had made its appearance earlier in Kant's writings.[43] The literal reading that is captured in the early draft of the essay as an "impatient, warm desire for newspapers" is idealized and abstracted to the point where it becomes almost indistinguishable from seeing, just as the movement of the "most interesting conversation" that gave rise to this desire is turned into an inner movement of thought.

This transformation of the figure of the newspaper reader and the removal of direct references to reading, writing, and conversation from the published version of the essay is striking—especially because Kant certainly understood *Zeitungen* and *Zeitschriften* to be the exemplary site of his own experience of the "great game of revolutions" unfolding in his time. In a letter to Fichte, written in the year in which the *Conflict of the Faculties* was prepared for publication, Kant portrays himself as a thinker whose communication with the world only becomes possible through the *Blätter* delivered on a daily basis to his study. "For the last year and a half, my poor health and frailties of age have forced me to give up all my lecturing. Now and then I still send news of my existence [*gebe ich Nachricht von meiner Existenz*] through the channel of the *Berliner Monatsschrift* and recently also through the *Berliner Blätter*, which I do as a means of preservation, agitating the little life force I have left."[44] But despite the awareness that both the news of the *Begebenheiten* of the world and the news that is issued by Kant himself depend on *Schrifte* and *Blätter*, all direct references to reading, writing, and conversation are actively kept out of the essay on progress that will finally be published in that same year. The same question that was asked about the absence of the scene of *Zeitungslesen* from Hegel's systematic writings thus arises with regards to its concealment in Kant's reflections on history. Is there something about the figure of the newspaper reader that threatens to undermine the attempt to find the grounds for a conception of history that progresses consistently toward its destination? What made it necessary for Kant to purge the experience of history exemplified by this figure from its linguistic dimension—to turn a reader into a spectator and conversation into mode of thought?

A provisional response to these questions can be found in a text that Kant wrote between the early drafts of his essay on progress and its publication several years later: the *Anthropology*—and in particular the theory of "conversation" (*Unterredung*) that is found in the concluding sections to its first part. Here, at a safe remove from world-historical questions, Kant will allow himself an analysis of the movement of dinner-table conversations that spiral around the occurrences of the day. Any such conversation has its natural point of departure in the "novelties of the day" (*die Neuigkeiten des Tages*)—novelties that are "first domestic, then from elsewhere, having flowed in through private letters

and newspapers."[45] The conversation around such novelties follows three stages: those of "narration" (*Erzählung*), "reasoning" (*Räsonnieren*), and "jest" (*Schertz*).[46] Nothing could be more different from the slow but uninterrupted progress toward the supreme end of reason that is described in the "Renewed Question" than the movement of *Unterredung*: a movement in which reason elevates itself from the empirical world only to prepare its ineluctable lapse into jest. "The conversation," Kant writes, "naturally falls down into the mere play of wit [*das bloße Spiel des Witzes*]."[47] Not the constancy of advancement toward a final goal but the fateful lapse into jest describes the dramatic movement of *Unterredung*: a lapse that Kant, in the *Critique of Judgment*, presents precisely as an unforeseen fall into nothingness, a "sudden transformation of a suspenseful expectation into nothing [*einer gespannten Erwartung in nichts*]."[48] What corresponds to this nothingness is the collapse, in the "news of the day," of all distinctions between the important and the trivial, the great and the small. In the *Neuigkeiten des Tages*, world-historical occurrences here enter into the fabric of *Alltag* and become virtually indistinguishable from it; conversations about the "revolution of a gifted people" exist in seamless continuity with those about the most mundane occurrences and ultimately, as Kant writes, the most elementary form of news—bad weather. Weather talk is, as Kant points out on various occasions in the *Anthropology*, the beginning and the end of all *Unterredung*.[49]

Perhaps Kant's reluctance to introduce the figure of the newspaper reader into his historico-philosophical reflections of the 1790s may be understood in connection to these passages from the *Anthropology*, which stem from the same years as his essay on the "renewed question" as to whether humanity can hope for a constant progress toward its moral destination. The substitution of a scene of reading and writing with one of seeing and thinking in Kant's account of the "participation" in the French Revolution might derive from the suspicion that there is something about the linguistic character of this experience that undermines his attempts to find a secure ground for the expectation of progress. Perhaps Kant realized that the *Mitteilung* of the "game of great revolutions" does not just provide the condition of possibility for the *Teilnahme*, which will, in turn, provide the ground for a steady progression toward the supreme end of practical and theoretical reason; perhaps he sensed that the same *Mitteilung* which renders this participation possible also harbors an element that undermines the teleological conception of history that it is supposed to sustain. As the theory of *Unterredung* in the *Anthropology* suggests, Kant's removal of the references to the "warm desire" for newspapers and conversation may be no accident; instead, it might point to the suspicion that there is something about the linguistic dimension of reason that never ceases to threaten its as-

cension to lofty heights with a lapse into jest. Maybe the disappearance of the figure of the newspaper reader from Hegel's work may be understood in this light. As in the case of Kant, Hegel initially invests this figure with a central significance in his philosophy of history: even if the scene of reading the newspaper conjured up in the Jena notebooks no longer discloses history as the realm in which an ultimately unreachable idea is constantly approached, but rather exemplifies the discovery that history is nothing but the rational development of the real toward its immanent telos—a development that is completed only in its full comprehension. And as in the case of Kant, Hegel will omit the scene of newspaper reading from his systematic writings after it has made an appearance in his notebooks. Is this disappearance perhaps driven by the same suspicion that Kant had articulated in his later writings—the suspicion that there is something about this scene and its irreducible linguistic dimension that threatens to ridicule the same teleological conception of history that it ought to exemplify? What happens to the unfolding of spirit in time when it turns out to be nothing but the unfolding of the newspaper?

"The *newspaper reading* of the early morning"—this book will examine how the topos that is here emphatically introduced into the sphere of philosophy will resurface in the work of three thinkers who, each in his own way, may be understood to write "after" Hegel: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Benjamin. The writings of each of these three thinkers are punctuated by images of messengers, reporters, and newspaper readers, scenes of announcements and proclamations, reflections on rumor, chatter, and the talk of the day—but the significance of these dispersed remarks and passages has nevertheless remained largely overlooked or misunderstood.[50] My study of these images will start from a simple premise: that the recurrent concern with journalism of these three thinkers can be neither separated from their philosophy "proper" nor treated as a supplementary application or extension. Quite the contrary: as I will attempt to show, the critical engagement with journalism plays a pivotal role in their philosophical work, in particular their reflections on history, time, and language. Examining this role will require a particular mode of reading: one that understands philosophical thought to unfold not merely in concepts and propositions but just as much in a language of figures, types, images, and scenes. This figural language would have to be understood not as an "illustration" of thoughts that have already been formulated, nor as a device used to communicate them more effectively. A philosophical reading of the images of journalists and newspaper readers scattered through the work of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Benjamin would attempt to grasp how their thought is first articulated in and through these images. Such a reading would have to show how these images, even where they are ostensibly presented as illustrations, may

exceed and outdo the concepts of which they are never mere applications or appendices.

The special significance of journalism within Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Benjamin's philosophical reflections on history hinges on its exemplary status. Journalism is treated here as the expression of an experience of time and history that each of these thinkers will take to be characteristic of the time in which they are writing. In different ways, all three will examine the newspaper as a form in which the *Geschichtsbetrachtung* and *Geschichtsauffassung* of their time, its mode of perceiving and comprehending history, become available for inspection and susceptible to philosophical scrutiny. "To seize the essence of history," Benjamin writes in a hyperbolic proposition that will provide a starting point for the final chapter of the present study, "it suffices to compare Herodotus and the morning newspaper."[51] All the characteristic features of modern historical experience, everything in and through which this experience would differentiate itself from its ancient counterpart, figured by Herodotus, are here taken to be concentrated in the form of the newspaper. And just as the figure of Herodotus marks a limit point—that of the most ancient, "first" historian—so the *Morgenzeitung* appears here as a sheet of paper at the other extreme of history, at the end of the modern age of which it brings the news. It is this special status of the newspaper, the journalistic form par excellence, that points to the pivotal role journalism would have to play in any philosophical inquiry into the conditions and possibilities of historical experience. Any attempt to grasp how historical experience is constituted today—and *geschichtliche Erfahrung* is meant here not only as the experience of history but also, in a stricter sense, as that experience in and through which history first becomes possible[52]—would require a study of journalism: a study of its characteristic sense of space and time, its concepts and tropes, its modes of reading and writing, its subjective types and figures.

If journalism may be taken to exemplify the time in which Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Benjamin understand themselves to be writing, it does so by presenting this as a time marked by the crisis of the philosophy of history. In different ways, each of these three thinkers grasp the pages of the newspaper as a place where all teleological and totalizing representations of history are destined to founder, together with the conceptions of progress and development that sustain them. The figures of the journalist and newspaper reader appear in their writings as representatives of progress and perfection, of approximation and development, of the overcoming of the old and the dawn of the new—but the history of which they bring the news will invariably amount to stories of stalled conversations, of permanent confusion and restless inertia, of unreliable accounts and disputed facts, of fateful progression and endless