7. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Absolute Idealism

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7. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Absolute Idealism

Abstract
It is quite fitting for a number of reasons that this chapter on the post-Enlightenment should conclude with a section on Hegel's interpretation of idealism. He gave expression to most of the criticisms of the Enlightenment, and appropriated many of its constructive suggestions. He gave voice and content to the later period's demand for a positive and constructive philosophy, one which made room for ethics, art, and religion. The influence of his thought was tremendous, immediately in Prussia where it became a philosophical basis for the expansion of that state, and later as it spread to England and the United States, where it became the leading school of philosophy for some time. Another way of indicating the position of Hegel's idealism is to recognize the fact that most of our contemporary twentieth century philosophy represents some form of criticism of idealism as it was expressed by Hegel. [excerpt]

Keywords
Contemporary Civilization, Post-Enlightenment, Idealism, Enlightenment criticism, Hegel, philosophy, Philosophy of History

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Comments
This is a part of Section XII: The Post-Enlightenment Period. The Contemporary Civilization page lists all additional sections of Ideas and Institutions of Western Man, as well as the Table of Contents for both volumes.

More About Contemporary Civilization:
From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of "introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages."

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems. A second edition, retitled Ideas and Institutions of Western Man, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker '66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

Authors

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finally from their dispositions. Wherever you find them, surround them with noble, great and ingenious forms, enclose them all round with the symbols of excellence, until actuality is overpowered by appearance and Nature by Art. *

7. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Absolute Idealism

It is quite fitting for a number of reasons that this chapter on the post-Enlightenment should conclude with a section on Hegel's interpretation of idealism. He gave expression to most of the criticisms of the Enlightenment, and appropriated many of its constructive suggestions. He gave voice and content to the later period's demand for a positive and constructive philosophy, one which made room for ethics, art, and religion. The influence of his thought was tremendous, immediately in Prussia where it became a philosophical basis for the expansion of that state, and later as it spread to England and the United States, where it became the leading school of philosophy for some time. Another way of indicating the position of Hegel's idealism is to recognize the fact that most of our contemporary twentieth century philosophy represents some form of criticism of idealism as it was expressed by Hegel.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) enjoyed a life singularly lacking in upheavals, either inward or outward. He experienced none of the inner tensions which characterized the lives of the romantics. And outwardly, even the defeat of the German forces by Napoleon at Jena, where Hegel was teaching, seems to have left him singularly untouched. This combination of inner and outer calm manifested itself in the spectator attitude which pervades his thought, and serves to contrast him sharply with both his predecessors and his followers.

Hegel was educated at the university in Tubingen, where he was a friend of the future romantic philosopher, Schelling. Until his university appointment at Jena in 1801 Hegel served as a private tutor. Napoleon's attack on Jena in 1806 ended the first phase of his teaching career; but by that time he had written the Phenomenology of Mind (Geist), which was published the following year and set the stage for most of his later thought. At last, in 1818, he was called to the University of Berlin to take the chair of philosophy formerly held by the

romantic nationalist, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), whose contribution to German nationalism will be noted in a later chapter. Here Hegel taught until his death in a cholera epidemic. With his movement from Jena to Berlin the center of gravity of German thought shifted from the little principalities to the capital of Prussia.

In addition to the Phenomenology Hegel completed several other major books during his lifetime; but he also left a vast amount of material in manuscript form. This latter material was in various stages of completion. Most of it was later edited and published by Hegel's relatives and students. It is understandable that there should be wide differences of opinion about this second group of works. Our selection, taken from one of the posthumous works, The Philosophy of History, appears to have been one of those manuscripts which was left in rather complete form.

Hegel was very critical of all philosophical thought which had preceded him. He was critical of the English enlighteners because of their separation of reason and experience, of the a priori and a posteriori elements, which in the thought of Hume seemed to lead to nothing but skepticism. He was very critical of Kant for a similar separation of the phenomenal and noumenal aspects of reality; this separation meant, for Hegel, that reality was forever unknowable. Kant's further separation of the theoretical and practical aspects of life suggested to Hegel that in the realm of human action there was no law that governed events. If men were to act only "as if" there were such things as laws, this implied that history was something in which "anything goes," and therefore unintelligible. Finally, Hegel was critical of romanticism which emphasized the subjective aspects. Sentimentalism, mysticism, poetic genius, piouness, the sensitive soul, imagination, visions, and phantasy he avoided on the grounds that they were completely unrealistic.

And yet Hegel drew heavily on all these schools of thought which he so emphatically criticized. From the empiricists he took the emphasis on experience, although he enlarged that concept to include social and historical as well as personal and individual experience. And he insisted that reason was present in this enlarged experience, not something to be added to it or imposed on it. He took from Kant the emphasis on mind and the laws of its action, but enlarged this also to such an extent that mind was no longer merely regulative or legislative for experience, but legislative for all of reality as well: "The real is the rational and the rational is the real." Mind was an objective rather than a subjective element. Thus Hegel's thought is to be characterized as an objective idealism, and, because he substituted one all-inclusive Mind, which he called the Absolute, for the many minds of Berkeley and Kant, Hegel's thought is referred to as absolute idealism. From the romanticists he took the emphasis on will and striving, on passion and struggle, but this aspect of experience he endowed with
reason, thus combining rationality and will. This combination he called Geist. And he laid down a law of this Geist or Spirit, which is known as the dialectic. The result of all this was one of the most comprehensive and important metaphysical systems of Western Civilization.

Into the make-up of Hegel's system went several important major ideas much older than those of his immediate predecessors. One of these ideas harked back to the Greeks, whom Hegel greatly admired. It was the idea that each thing, person, or event could only be understood in terms of the whole of which it was nothing more than a part. Because the relations between each particular and the whole are rational and because they determine the very nature of each particular, they are not only epistemological relations, but metaphysical as well. When we try to understand any particular (little part) thing we find that it is a part of a whole which, in turn, is part of an even greater whole. There is no stopping of this process short of the total whole, or Absolute, of which all things are but parts.

Basic to Hegel's thought is the idea that the whole, or Absolute, or God, is both self-complete and self-explanatory. There is nothing above or beyond this whole. The only transcendence in the system is that of the whole over its parts. Hegel's Absolute is a Mind whose nature is a combination of both thought and will; and this is why Geist is often translated as "Mind." But this Mind is not a Creator in the usual sense of the word. It was Hegel's interpretation of the Mind of the Universe which characterizes his thought and serves to distinguish it from other idealisms such as those of Plato, Berkeley, or Kant. The emphasis in his idealism is thus on immanence rather than transcendence and, consequently, on the method by which the Absolute acts.

This method is the famous dialectic, which is the second major idea in Hegel's system of thought and, some would add, Hegel's most important contribution. As soon as any mind starts to think or act it begins with a partial idea or an incomplete action. No initial thought or act can be final or complete. But we can never wait until we know the Whole or are able to perform the perfect act, as the romantics had suggested. We must start when and where we are. Because each initial thought or act is only part of a larger whole, it immediately sets in operation the antagonism of the other parts of the same whole, just as the weights on one arm of a scales produce an equal and opposite reaction on the part of the other arm. The resolution of the tension between the opposing sides is not, as the enlighteners suggested, to strike a balance between them by means of compromise, but rather to press on to the more inclusive idea or action which would include both of the opposing sides. The resulting synthesis is elevated (aufgehoben) to a higher level of thought or action. Here the analogy of the scales breaks down and, as one recent writer has suggested (Henry D. Aiken in The Age of Ideology), we are more accurate
This illustration of Hegel's dialectic does not present its full scope or detail; it is intended only to suggest his method and interests. A more complete diagram can be seen in the appendix of W. T. Stace, The Philosophy of Hegel (London: Macmillan and Co., 1924).
if we use the analogy of a waltz. The three-quarter time car-
rries us through to a third step which completes the first two,
while at the same time this third step becomes the start for a
new series of steps, and so on to the end of the waltz, or un-
til we have arrived at the Absolute. Hegel calls this process
the dialectic, and names each of the three stages: thesis,
antithesis, and synthesis.

Several things should be noted about this Hegelian dialec-
tic. In the first place it is inescapable. We have to think
and act. Whenever we do we set in motion the dialectic. There
is no way in which we, or even the Absolute, can avoid acting
as parts of the Whole. Here once again the logical necessity
of the Enlightenment is brought back into human experience.
This necessity is no longer in terms of a first or final cause,
but rather in terms of dialectical opposition.

The second thing to note about the dialectic is that it is
universal. It applies to nature as well as human history. In-
deed it views everything historically. Nature is seen in terms
of history, rather than history in terms of nature, as some
earlier thinkers had suggested. Man, woman, family: this is
one of Hegel's illustrations of the application of the dialec-
tic to human institutions. Seed, soil, flower: this would
illustrate its application to nature. Athenian liberty, Roman
imperium, medieval nation states: this would illustrate the
dialectic in history. In each case the thesis sets up its an-
tithesis, and the result is a synthesis.

In the third place, we should note that the synthesis is
not at all a compromise, but rather a new idea which is at once
both complete and incomplete. It is an idea in which both the
thesis and the antithesis are caught up onto a higher and more
comprehensive level, and into a more complete whole. Nothing
is lost because everything is taken up into the new synthesis.
There is nothing of the idea of the lowest common denominator
in the whole process. But the synthesis is also incomplete,
and becomes the starting point for another round of the dialec-
tic.

The third major idea in Hegel's thought is idealism. This
has been implicit throughout what has already been said, but it
is important enough to isolate and deal with separately. Mater-
ialism, either in the form that Hobbes or Holbach gave it, is
completely rejected, and for reasons which are characteristic
of the whole post-Enlightenment period. Hegel also rejected
Locke's interpretation of ideas, for the same reasons that Ber-
keley gave. The ideas of Plato he rejected as well because
their transcendence set them apart from the whole in which he
was interested. Ideas were, for Hegel, the expression of Mind,
as they were for Berkeley. But, in order for each of us to be
able to understand them, our minds must also be parts of that
one Mind which speaks to us through them. Thus Mind, for Hegel,
determines and constitutes the whole of which we are all parts;
and the result is absolute idealism.

With these three major emphases on the whole, the dialectic, and idealism, Hegel constructed his system and made contributions which served to give Western thought a new direction for some time to come. One of these was a new interpretation of logic which broke sharply with all earlier logic. Hegel's logic was dynamic, in contrast to the static logic of Aristotle, and the form which it took was dialectical rather than mechanical. A second contribution came as a result of Hegel's emphasis on history, and helped to produce the historical approach with which we are today familiar in so many of our subjects. This historical emphasis was, in turn, to influence the biological sciences, which, in Hegel's time, were beginning to explore the possibility of evolution. A third contribution was a new emphasis on the importance of culture in the development of human history. Hegel saw culture rather than nature as the determinative factor, and thus made room for those aspects of the human spirit which the romantics were interested in furthering. And finally, Hegel's interpretation of religion as an intermediate stage between the thesis of art and the synthesis of philosophy turned the approach to religion from something evangelical and pietistic to what we know today as the philosophy of religion.

Hegel's Philosophy of History, a series of lectures given at Berlin between 1822 and 1831, was central to his whole philosophy. In the introduction to these lectures, from which our selection is taken, he laid down the principles which were to be applied in the later parts to Oriental, Greek, Roman, and German history. Hegel devoted about one third of the lectures to this introductory section. In these lectures he showed how the objectivity of the Enlightenment and the subjectivity of romanticism could only be united when one took an historical approach. History also was the only sphere in which the concrete individual and the abstract universal could be synthesized. He offered this interpretation of history as the coming to self-consciousness and self-knowledge of the Absolute in man, who alone is capable of knowing, and knowing that he knows; and who is capable of knowing what freedom means, and of following that meaning. He pointed out how the human spirit must cooperate with the spirit of history, and stressed the necessary role of the state. Both men and states, however, are but manifestations of that higher level of the whole, or culture, in which alone they find their true meaning.

This monumental effort of Hegel's was no more successful than that of Aquinas in finding universal acceptance. Hegel did make room for such things as art, ethics, and religion, which the Enlightenment was charged with having neglected. But, in turn, there seemed to be great inadequacies in his system. In the first place, the dialectic failed to provide an adequate method for the physical sciences. In fact this was the area in which it appeared to be most inadequate. As a result, scientists and many others were disillusioned by Hegelian speculations.
Returning to their own specialties, taking Kant as a guide for personal living, they left any generalizing to others. From this divorce both science and philosophy suffered severely.

Nor was it possible to avoid a split among the followers of Hegel themselves over the issue of whether the dialectic had at last come to rest in a particular area, or whether it was still in motion. The right-wing Hegelians included those who insisted that in their own particular spheres, which tended to be either politics or religion, the final synthesis had been attained, that they had reached the Absolute. There was basis for this in Hegel's thought. He surely did seem to suggest that the dialectic had come to rest in the Prussian state, the Lutheran church, and his own philosophy. On the other hand, there were the left-wing Hegelians who emphasized the fact that no thesis was attained without its antithesis. Hegel had said this too. The result was an equally strong emphasis on opposition to the status quo, an opposition which could easily become more than philosophical. Thus Karl Marx (1818-1883) aligned himself with the left-wing group and preached a doctrine of revolution.

A third and final problem remains to be raised. By his emphasis on the historical approach and the dialectical method Hegel took any straight-line characteristics out of history. Both theses and antitheses were equally parts of history. Also the emphasis on God's immanence tended to identify Him with each stage of the dialectic, giving to thesis as well as to antithesis equal value and validity. This tended to justify any historical stage, as well as its overthrow. The result was a loss of any moral priority such as Kant had suggested for judging between alternatives, and the introduction of power as the determining factor in history. Hegel's philosophy could be used to justify either what is or what ought to be. This culminated in the introduction of power in the sense that "might makes right."

II. The enquiry into the essential destiny of Reason — as far as it is considered in reference to the World — is identical with the question, what is the ultimate design of the World? And the expression implies that that design is destined to be realised. Two points of consideration suggest themselves: first, the import of this design — its abstract definition; and secondly, its realization.

It must be observed at the outset, that the phenomenon we investigate — Universal History — belongs to the realm of Spirit. The term "World," includes both physical and psychical Nature. Physical Nature also plays its part in the World's History, and attention will have to be paid to the fundamental natural relations thus involved. But Spirit, and the course of its development, is our substantial object. Our task does not require us to contemplate Nature as a Rational System in itself — though in its own proper domain it proves itself such — but simply in its relation to Spirit. On the stage on which we are observing
it, — Universal History — Spirit displays itself in its most concrete reality. Notwithstanding this (or rather for the very purpose of comprehending the general principles which this, its form of concrete reality, embodies) we must premise some abstract characteristics of the nature of Spirit. Such an explanation, however, cannot be given here under any other form than that of bare assertion. The present is not the occasion for unfolding the idea of Spirit speculatively; for whatever has a place in an Introduction, must, as already observed, be taken as simply historical; something assumed as having been explained and proved elsewhere; or whose demonstration awaits the sequel of the Science or History itself.

We have therefore to mention here:

1. The abstract characteristics of the nature of Spirit.

2. What means Spirit uses in order to realize its Idea.

3. Lastly, we must consider the shape which the perfect embodiment of Spirit assumes — the State.

1. The nature of Spirit may be understood by a glance at its direct opposite — Matter. As the essence of Matter is Gravity, so, on the other hand, we may affirm that the substance, the essence of Spirit is Freedom. All will readily assent to the doctrine that Spirit, among other properties, is also endowed with Freedom; but philosophy teaches that all the qualities of Spirit exist only through Freedom; that all are but means for attaining Freedom; that all seek and produce this and this alone. It is a result of speculative Philosophy, that Freedom is the sole truth of Spirit. Matter possesses gravity in virtue of its tendency towards a central point. It is essentially composite; consisting of parts that exclude each other. It seeks its Unity; and therefore exhibits itself as self-destructive, as verging towards its opposite [an indivisible point]. If it could attain this, it would be Matter no longer, it would have perished. It strives after the realization of its Idea; for in Unity it exists ideally. Spirit, on the contrary, may be defined as that which has its centre in itself. It has not a unity outside itself, but has already found it; it exists in and with itself. Matter has its essence out of itself; Spirit is self-contained existence (Bei-sich-selbst-seyn). Now this is Freedom, exactly. For if I am dependent, my being is referred to something else which I am not; I cannot exist independently of something external. I am free, on the contrary, when my existence depends upon myself. This self-contained existence of Spirit is none other than self-consciousness — consciousness of one's own being. Two things must be distinguished in consciousness; first, the fact that I know; secondly, what I know. In self consciousness these are merged in one; for Spirit knows itself. It involves an appreciation of its own
nature, as also an energy enabling it to realise itself; to make itself actually that which it is potentially. According to this abstract definition it may be said of Universal History, that it is the exhibition of Spirit in the process of working out the knowledge of that which it is potentially. And as the germ bears in itself the whole nature of the tree, and the taste and form of its fruits, so do the first traces of Spirit virtually contain the whole of that History. The Orientals have not attained the knowledge that Spirit -- Man as such -- is free; and because they do not know this, they are not free. They only know that one is free. But on this very account, the freedom of that one is only caprice; ferocity -- brutal recklessness of passion, or a mildness and tameness of the desires, which is itself only an accident of Nature -- mere caprice like the former. -- That one is therefore only a Despot; not a free man. The consciousness of Freedom first arose among the Greeks, and therefore they were free; but they, and the Romans, likewise, knew only that some are free, -- not man as such. Even Plato and Aristotle did not know this. The Greeks, therefore, had slaves; and their whole life and the maintenance of their splendid liberty, was implicated with the institution of slavery: a fact moreover, which made that liberty on the one hand only an accidental, transient and limited growth; on the other hand, constituted it a rigorous thraldom of our common nature -- of the Human. The German nations, under the influence of Christianity, were the first to attain the consciousness, that man, as man, is free: that it is the freedom of Spirit which constitutes its essence. This consciousness arose first in religion, the inmost region of Spirit; but to introduce the principle into the various relations of the actual world, involves a more extensive problem than its simple implantation; a problem whose solution and application require a severe and lengthened process of culture. In proof of this, we may note that slavery did not cease immediately on the reception of Christianity. Still less did liberty predominate in States; or Governments and Constitutions adopt a rational organization, or recognise freedom as their basis. That application of the principle to political relations; the thorough moulding and interpenetration of the constitution of society by it, is a process identical with history itself. I have already directed attention to the distinction here involved, between a principle as such, and its application; i.e. its introduction and carrying out in the actual phenomena of Spirit and Life. This is a point of fundamental importance in our science, and one which must be constantly respected as essential. And in the same way as this distinction has attracted attention in view of the Christian principle of self-consciousness -- Freedom; it also shews itself as an essential one, in view of the principle of Freedom generally. The History of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness
of Freedom; a progress whose development according to the necessity of its nature, it is our business to investigate.

The general statement given above, of the various grades in the consciousness of Freedom -- and which we applied in the first instance to the fact that the Eastern nations knew only that one is free; the Greek and Roman world only that some are free; whilst we know that all men absolutely (man as man) are free, -- supplies us with the natural division of Universal History, and suggests the mode of its discussion. This is remarked, however, only incidentally and anticipatively; some other ideas must be first explained.

The destiny of the spiritual World, and, -- since this is the substantial World, while the physical remains subordinate to it, or, in the language of speculation, has no truth against the spiritual, -- the final cause of the World at large, we allege to be the consciousness of its own freedom on the part of Spirit, and ipso facto, the reality of that freedom. But that this term "Freedom," without further qualification, is an indefinite, and in-calculable ambiguous term; and that while that which it represents is the ne plus ultra of attainment, it is liable to an infinity of misunderstandings, confusions and errors, and to become the occasion for all imaginable excesses, -- has never been more clearly known and felt than in modern times. Yet, for the present, we must content ourselves with the term itself without farther definition. Attention was also directed to the importance of the infinite difference between a principle in the abstract, and its realization in the concrete. In the process before us, the essential nature of freedom, -- which involves in it absolute necessity, -- is to be displayed as coming to a consciousness of itself (for it is in its very nature, self-consciousness) and thereby realizing its existence. Itself is its own object of attainment, and the sole aim of Spirit. This result it is, at which the process of the World's History has been continually aiming, and to which the sacrifices that have ever and anon been laid on the vast altar of the earth, through the long lapse of ages, have been offered. This is the only aim that sees itself realized and fulfilled; the only pole of repose amid the ceaseless change of events and conditions, and the sole efficient principle that pervades them. This final aim is God's purpose with the world; but God is the absolutely perfect Being, and can, therefore, will nothing other than himself -- his own Will. The Nature of His Will -- that is, His Nature itself -- is what we here call the Idea of Freedom; translating the language of Religion into that of Thought. The question, then, which we may next put, is: What means does this principle of Freedom use for its realization? This is the second point we have to consider.

(2.) The question of the means by which Freedom develops itself to a World, conducts us to the phenomenon of History itself. Although Freedom is, primarily an
undeveloped idea, the means it uses are external and phenomenal; presenting themselves in History to our sensuous vision. The first glance at History convinces us that the actions of men proceed from their needs, their passions, their characters and talents; and impresses us with the belief that such needs, passions and interests are the sole springs of action -- the efficient agents in this scene of activity. Among these may, perhaps, be found aims of a liberal or universal kind -- benevolence it may be, or noble patriotism; but such virtues and general views are but insignificant as compared with the World and its doings. We may perhaps see the Ideal of Reason actualized in those who adopt such aims, and within the sphere of their influence; but they bear only a trifling proportion to the mass of the human race; and the extent of that influence is limited accordingly. Passions, private aims, and the satisfaction of selfish desires, are on the other hand, most effective springs of action. Their power lies in the fact that they respect none of the limitations which justice and morality would impose on them; and that these natural impulses have a more direct influence over man than the artificial and tedious discipline that tends to order and self-restraint, law and morality.

We assert then that nothing has been accomplished without interest on the part of the actors; and -- if interest be called passion, inasmuch as the whole individuality, to the neglect of all other actual or possible interests and claims, is devoted to an object with every fibre of volition, concentrating all its desires and powers upon it -- we may affirm absolutely that nothing great in the World has been accomplished without passion. Two elements, therefore, enter into the object of our investigation: the first the Idea, the second the complex of human passions; the one the warp, the other the woof of the vast arras-web of Universal History. The concrete mean and union of the two is Liberty, under the conditions of morality in a State. We have spoken of the Idea of Freedom as the nature of Spirit, and the absolute goal of History. Passion is regarded as a thing of sinister aspect, as more or less immoral. Man is required to have no passions. Passion, it is true, is not quite the suitable word for what I wish to express, I mean here nothing more than human activity as resulting from private interests -- special, or if you will, self-seeking designs, -- with this qualification, that the whole energy of will and character is devoted to their attainment; that other interests, (which would in themselves constitute attractive aims) or rather all things else, are sacrificed to them. The object in question is so bound up with the man's will, that it entirely and alone determines the "hue of resolution," and is inseparable from it. It has become the very essence of his volition. For a person is a specific existence; not man in general, (a term to
which no real existence corresponds) but a particular human being. The term "character" likewise expresses this idiosyncrasy of Will and Intelligence. But Character comprehends all peculiarities whatever; the way in which a person conducts himself in private relations, &c., and is not limited to his idiosyncrasy in its practical and active phase. I shall, therefore, use the term "passion;" understanding thereby the particular bent of character, as far as the peculiarities of volition are not limited to private interest, but supply the impelling and actuating force for accomplishing deeds shared in by the community at large. Passion is in the first instance the subjective, and therefore the formal side of energy, will, and activity -- leaving the object or aim still undefined. And there is a similar relation of formality to reality in merely individual conviction, individual views, individual conscience. It is always a question of essential importance, what is the purport of my conviction, what the object of my passion, in deciding whether the one or the other is of a true and substantial nature. Conversely, if it is so, it will inevitably attain actual existence -- be realized.

From this comment on the second essential element in the historical embodiment of an aim, we infer -- glancing at the institution of the State in passing, -- that a State is then well constituted and internally powerful, when the private interest of its citizens is one with the common interest of the State; when the one finds its gratification and realization in the other, -- a proposition in itself very important. But in a State many institutions must be adopted, much political machinery invented, accompanied by appropriate political arrangements, -- necessitating long struggles of the understanding before what is really appropriate can be discovered, -- involving, moreover, contentions with private interest and passions, and a tedious discipline of these latter, in order to bring about the desired harmony. The epoch when a State attains this harmonious condition, marks the period of its bloom, its virtue, its vigour, and its prosperity. But the history of mankind does not begin with a conscious aim of any kind, as it is the case with the particular circles into which men form themselves of set purpose. The mere social instinct implies a conscious purpose of security for life and property; and when society has been constituted, this purpose becomes more comprehensive. The History of the World begins with its general aim -- the realization of the Idea of Spirit -- only in an implicit form (an sich) that is, as Nature; a hidden, most profoundly hidden, unconscious instinct; and the whole process of History (as already observed), is directed to rendering this unconscious impulse a conscious one. Thus appearing in the form of merely natural existence, natural will -- that which has been called the subjective side, -- physical craving, instinct, passion, private interest, as
also opinion and subjective conception, -- spontaneously present themselves at the very commencement. This vast congeries of volitions, interests and activities, constitute the instruments and means of the World-Spirit for attaining its object; bringing it to consciousness, and realizing it. And this aim is none other than finding itself -- coming to itself -- and contemplating itself in concrete actuality. But that those manifestations of vitality on the part of individuals and peoples, in which they seek and satisfy their own purposes, are, at the same time, the means and instruments of a higher and broader purpose of which they know nothing, -- which they realize unconsciously, -- might be made a matter of question; rather has been questioned, and in every variety of form negatived, decried and contemned as mere dreaming and "Philosophy." But on this point I announced my view at the very outset, and asserted our hypothesis, -- which, however, will appear in the sequel, in the form of a legitimate inference, -- and our belief, that Reason governs the world, and has consequently governed its history. In relation to this independently universal and substantial existence -- all else is subordinate, subservient to it, and the means for its development. -- The Union of Universal Abstract Existence generally with the Individual -- the Subjective -- that this alone is Truth, belongs to the department of speculation, and is treated in this general form in Logic. -- But in the process of the World's History itself, -- as still incomplete, -- the abstract final aim of history is not yet made the distinct object of desire and interest. While these limited sentiments are still unconscious of the purpose they are fulfilling, the universal principle is implicit in them, and is realizing itself through them. The question also assumes the form of the union of Freedom and Necessity; the latent abstract process of Spirit being regarded as Necessity, while that which exhibits itself in the conscious will of men, as their interest, belongs to the domain of Freedom....

I will endeavour to make what has been said more vivid and clear by examples.

The building of a house is, in the first instance, a subjective aim and design. On the other hand we have, as means, the several substances required for the work, -- Iron, Wood, Stones. The elements are made use of in working up this material: fire to melt the iron, wind to blow the fire, water to set wheels in motion, in order to cut the wood, &c. The result is, that the wind, which has helped to build the house, is shut out by the house; so also are the violence of rains and floods, and the destructive powers of fire, so far as the house is made fire-proof. The stones and beams obey the law of gravity, -- press downwards, -- and so high walls are carried up. Thus the elements are made use of in accordance with their nature, and yet to co-operate for a product, by which
their operation is limited. Thus the passions of men are gratified; they develope themselves and their aims in accordance with their natural tendencies, and build up the edifice of human society; thus fortifying a position for Right and Order against themselves.

The connection of events above indicated, involves also the fact, that in history an additional result is commonly produced by human actions beyond that which they aim at and obtain -- that which they immediately recognise and desire. They gratify their own interest; but something farther is thereby accomplished, latent in the actions in question, though not present to their consciousness, and not included in their design. An analogous example is offered in the case of a man who, from a feeling of revenge, -- perhaps not an unjust one, but produced by injury on the other's part, -- burns that other man's house. A connection is immediately established between the deed itself and a train of circumstances not directly included in it, taken abstractedly. In itself it consisted in merely presenting a small flame to a small portion of a beam. Events not involved in that simple act follow of themselves. The part of the beam which was set fire to is connected with its remote portions; the beam itself is united with the woodwork of the house generally, and this with other houses; so that a wide conflagration ensues, which destroys the goods and chattels of many other persons besides his against whom the act of revenge was first directed; perhaps even costs not a few men their lives. This lay neither in the deed abstractedly, nor in the design of the man who committed it. But the action has a further general bearing. In the design of the doer it was only revenge executed against an individual in the destruction of his property, but it is moreover a crime, and that involves punishment also. This may not have been present to the mind of the perpetrator, still less in his intention; but his deed itself, the general principles it calls into play, its substantial content entails it. By this example I wish only to impress on you the consideration, that in a simple act, something farther may be implicated than lies in the intention and consciousness of the agent. The example before us involves, however, this additional consideration, that the substance of the act, consequently we may say the act itself, recoils upon the perpetrator, -- reacts upon him with destructive tendency. This union of the two extremes -- the embodiment of a general idea in the form of direct reality, and the elevation of a specialty into connection with universal truth -- is brought to pass, at first sight, under the conditions of an utter diversity of nature between the two, and an indifference of the one extreme towards the other. The aims which the agents set before them are limited and special; but it must be remarked that the agents themselves are intelligent thinking beings. The purport of their desires is interwoven with general, essential
considerations of justice, good, duty, &c; for mere de-
sire -- volition in its rough and savage forms -- falls
not within the scene and sphere of Universal History.
Those general considerations, which form at the same time
a norm for directing aims and actions, have a determinate
purport; for such an abstraction as "good for its own
sake," has no place in living reality. If men are to act,
they must not only intend the Good, but must have decided
for themselves whether this or that particular thing is a
Good. What special course of action, however, is good or
not, is determined, as regards the ordinary contingencies
of private life, by the laws and customs of a State; and
here no great difficulty is presented. Each individual
has his position; he knows on the whole what a just, hon­
ourable course of conduct is. As to ordinary, private
relations, the assertion that it is difficult to choose the
right and good, -- the regarding it as the mark of an
exalted morality to find difficulties and raise scruples
on that score, -- may be set down to an evil or perverse
will, which seeks to evade duties not in themselves of a
perplexing nature; or, at any rate, to an idly reflective
habit of mind -- where a feeble will afford no sufficient
exercise to the faculties, -- leaving them therefore to
find occupation within themselves, and to expend them­
selves on moral self-adulation.

It is quite otherwise with the comprehensive relations
that History has to do with. In this sphere are presented
those momentous collisions between existing, acknowledged
duties, laws, and rights, and those contingencies which
are adverse to this fixed system; which assail and even
destroy its foundations and existence; whose tenor may
nevertheless seem good, -- on the large scale advantageous,
-- yes, even indispensable and necessary. These contin­
gencies realise themselves in History: they involve a
general principle of a different order from that on which
depends the permanence of a people or a State. This prin­
ciple is an essential phase in the development of the
creating Idea, of Truth striving and urging towards [con­
sciousness of] itself. Historical men -- World-Historical
Individuals -- are those in whose aims such a general
principles lies.

Caesar, in danger of losing a position, not perhaps
at that time of superiority, yet at least of equality with
the others who were at the head of the State, and of suc­
cumbing to those who were just on the point of becoming
his enemies, -- belongs essentially to this category.
These enemies -- who were at the same time pursuing their
personal aims -- had the form of the constitution, and the
power conferred by an appearance of justice, on their side.
Caesar was contending for the maintenance of his position,
honour, and safety; and, since the power of his opponents
included the sovereignty over the provinces of the Roman
Empire, his victory secured for him the conquest of that
entire Empire; and he thus became -- though leaving the
form of the constitution -- the Autocrat of the State.
That which secured for him the execution of a design, which in the first instance was of negative import — the Autocracy of Rome, — was, however, at the same time an independently necessary feature in the history of Rome and of the world. It was not, then, his private gain merely, but an unconscious impulse that occasioned the accomplishment of that for which the time was ripe. Such are all great historical men, — whose own particular aims involve those large issues which are the will of the World-Spirit. They may be called Heroes, inasmuch as they have derived their purposes and their vocation, not from the calm, regular course of things, sanctioned by the existing order; but from a concealed fount -- one which has not attained to phenomenal, present existence, -- from that inner Spirit, still hidden beneath the surface, which, impinging on the outer world as on a shell, bursts it in pieces, because it is another kernel than that which belonged to the shell in question. They are men, therefore, who appear to draw the impulse of their life from themselves; and whose deeds have produced a condition of things and a complex of historical relations which appear to be only their interest, and their work.

Such individuals had no consciousness of the general Idea they were unfolding, while prosecuting those aims of theirs; on the contrary, they were practical, political men. But at the same time they were thinking men, who had an insight into the requirements of the time -- what was ripe for development. This was the very Truth for their age, for their world; the species next in order, so to speak, and which was already formed in the womb of time. It was theirs to know this nascent principle; the necessary, directly sequent step in progress, which their world was to take; to make this their aim, and to expend their energy in promoting it. World-historical men -- the Heroes of an epoch -- must, therefore, be recognised as its clear-sighted ones; their deeds, their words are the best of that time. Great men have formed purposes to satisfy themselves, not others. Whatever prudent designs and counsels they might have learned from others, would be the more limited and inconsistent features in their career; for it was they who best understood affairs; from whom others learned, and approved, or at least acquiesced in their policy. For that Spirit which had taken this fresh step in history is the inmost soul of all individuals; but in a state of unconsciousness which the great men in question aroused. Their fellows, therefore, follow these soul-leaders; for they feel the irresistible power of their own inner Spirit thus embodied....

A World-historical individual is not so unwise as to indulge a variety of wishes to divide his regards. He is devoted to the One Aim, regardless of all else. It is even possible that such men may treat other great, even sacred interests, inconsiderately; conduct which is indeed obnoxious to moral reprehension. But so mighty a form
must trample down many an innocent flower — crush to pieces many an object in its path....

In contemplating the fate which virtue, morality, even piety experience in history, we must not fall into the Litany of Lamentations, that the good and pious often — or for the most part — fare ill in the world, while the evil-disposed and wicked prosper. The term prosperity is used in a variety of meanings — riches, outward honour, and the like. But in speaking of something which in and for itself constitutes an aim of existence, that so-called well or ill-faring of these or those isolated individuals cannot be regarded as an essential element in the rational order of the universe. With more justice than happiness, -- or a fortunate environment for individuals, -- it is demanded of the grand aim of the world's existence, that it should foster, nay involve the execution and ratification of good, moral, righteous purposes. What makes men morally discontented (a discontent, by the bye, on which they somewhat pride themselves), is that they do not find the present adapted to the realization of aims which they hold to be right and just (more especially in modern times, ideals of political constitutions); they contrast unfavourably things as they are, with their idea of things as they ought to be. In this case it is not private interest nor passion that desires gratification, but Reason, Justice, Liberty; and equipped with this title, the demand in question assumes a lofty bearing, and readily adopts a position not merely of discontent, but of open revolt against the actual condition of the world. To estimate such a feeling and such views aright, the demands insisted upon, and the very dogmatic opinions asserted, must be examined. At no time so much as in our own, have such general principles and notions been advanced, or with greater assurance. If in days gone by, history seems to present itself as a struggle of passions; in our time -- though displays of passion are not wanting -- it exhibits partly a predominance of the struggle of notions assuming the authority of principles; partly that of passions and interests essentially subjective, but under the mask of such higher sanctions. The pretensions thus contended for as legitimate in the name of that which has been stated as the ultimate aim of Reason, pass accordingly, for absolute aims, -- to the same extent as Religion, Morals, Ethics. Nothing, as before remarked, is now more common than the complaint that the ideals which imagination sets up are not realized — that these glorious dreams are destroyed by cold actuality. These Ideals -- which in the voyage of life founder on the rocks of hard reality -- may be in the first instance only subjective, and belong to the idiosyncrasy of the individual, imagining himself the highest and wisest. Such do not properly belong to this category. For the fancies which the individual in his isolation indulges, cannot be the model for universal reality; just as universal law is not
designed for the units of the mass. These as such may, in fact, find their interests decidedly thrust into the background. But by the term "Ideal," we also understand the ideal of Reason, of the Good, of the True. Poets, as e.g. Schiller, have painted such ideals touchingly and with strong emotion, and with the deeply melancholy conviction that they could not be realized. In affirming, on the contrary, that the Universal Reason does realize itself, we have indeed nothing to do with the individual empirically regarded. That admits of degrees of better and worse, since here chance and speciality have received authority from the Idea to exercise their monstrous power. Much, therefore, in particular aspects of the grand phenomenon might be found fault with. This subjective fault-finding, -- which, however, only keeps in view the individual and its deficiency, without taking notice of Reason pervading the whole, -- is easy; and inasmuch as it asserts an excellent intention with regard to the good of the whole, and seems to result from a kindly heart, it feels authorized to give itself airs and assume great consequence. It is easier to discover a deficiency in individuals, in states, and in Providence, than to see their real import and value. For in this merely negative fault-finding a proud position is taken, -- one which overlooks the object, without having entered into it, -- without having comprehended its positive aspect. Age generally makes men more tolerant; youth is always discontented. The tolerance of age is the result of the ripeness of a judgment which, not merely as the result of indifference, is satisfied even with what is inferior; but, more deeply taught by the grave experience of life, has been led to perceive the substantial, solid worth of the object in question. The insight then to which -- in contradistinction from those ideals -- philosophy is to lead us, is, that the real world is as it ought to be -- that the truly good -- the universal divine reason -- is not a mere abstraction, but a vital principle capable of realising itself. This Good, this Reason, in its most concrete form, is God. God governs the world; the actual working of his government -- the carrying out of his plan -- is the History of the World. This plan philosophy strives to comprehend; for only that which has been developed as the result of it, possesses bona fide reality. That which does not accord with it, is negative, worthless existence. Before the pure light of this divine Idea -- which is no mere Ideal -- the phantom of a world whose events are an incoherent concourse of fortuitous circumstances, utterly vanishes. Philosophy wishes to discover the substantial purport, the real side of the divine idea, and to justify the so much despised Reality of things; for Reason is the comprehension of the Divine work...

(3.) The third point to be analysed is, therefore -- what is the object to be realized by these means; i.e. what is the form it assumes in the realm of reality.
have spoken of means; but in the carrying out of a sub-
jective, limited aim, we have also to take into consider-
ation the element of a material, either already present
or which has to be procured. Thus the question would
arise: What is the material in which the Ideal of Reason
is wrought out? The primary answer would be, -- Person-
ality itself -- human desires -- Subjectivity generally.
In human knowledge and volition, as its material element,
Reason attains positive existence. We have considered
subjective volition where it has an object which is the
truth and essence of a reality, viz. where it constitutes
a great world-historical passion. As a subjective will,
occupied with limited passions, it is dependent, and can
gratify its desires only within the limits of this de-
pendence. But the subjective will has also a substantial
life -- a reality, -- in which it moves in the region of
essential being, and has the essential itself as the ob-
ject of its existence. This essential being is the union
of the subjective with the rational Will: it is the moral
Whole, the State, which is that form of reality in which
the individual has and enjoys his freedom; but on the
condition of his recognizing, believing in and willing
that which is common to the Whole. And this must not be
understood as if the subjective will of the social unit
attained its gratification and enjoyment through that
common Will; as if this were a means provided for its
benefit; as if the individual, in his relations to other
individuals, thus limited his freedom, in order that this
universal limitation -- the mutual constraint of all --
might secure a small space of liberty for each. Rather,
we affirm, are Law, Morality, Government, and they alone,
the positive reality and completion of Freedom. Freedom
of a low and limited order, is mere caprice; which finds
its exercise in the sphere of particular and limited
desires.

Subjective volition -- Passion -- is that which sets
men in activity, that which effects "practical" realiza-
tion. The Idea is the inner spring of action; the State
is the actually existing, realized moral life. For it is
the Unity of the universal, essential Will, with that of
the individual; and this is "Morality." The Individual
living in this unity has a moral life; possesses a value
that consists in this substantiality alone. Sophocles in
his Antigone, says, "The divine commands are not of yes-
terday, nor of to-day; no, they have an infinite existence,
and no one could say whence they came." The laws of moral-
ity are not accidental, but are the essentially Rational.
It is the very object of the State that what is essential
in the practical activity of men, and in their dispositions,
should be duly recognized; that it should have a manifest
existence, and maintain its position. It is the absolute
interest of Reason that this moral Whole should exist; and
herein lies the justification and merit of heroes who have
founded states, -- however rude these may have been. In
the history of the World, only those peoples can come under our notice which form a state. For it must be understood that this latter is the realization of Freedom, i.e. of the absolute final aim, and that it exists for its own sake. It must further be understood that all the worth which the human being possesses -- all spiritual reality, he possesses only through the State. For his spiritual reality consists in this, that his own essence -- Reason -- is objectively present to him, that is possesses objective immediate existence for him. Thus only is he fully conscious; thus only is he a partaker of morality -- of a just and moral social and political life. For Truth is the Unity of the universal and subjective Will; and the Universal is to be found in the State, in its laws, its universal and rational arrangements. The State is the Divine Idea as it exists on Earth. We have in it, therefore, the object of History in a more definite shape than before; that in which Freedom obtains objectivity, and lives in the enjoyment of this objectivity. For Law is the objectivity of Spirit; volition in its true form. Only that will which obeys law, is free; for it obeys itself -- it is independent and so free. When the State or our country constitutes a community of existence; when the subjective will of man submits to laws, -- the contradiction between Liberty and Necessity vanishes. The Rational has necessary existence, as being the reality and substance of things, and we are free in recognizing it as law, and following it as the substance of our own being. The objective and the subjective will are then reconciled, and present one identical homogeneous whole. For the morality (Sittlichkeit) of the State is not of that ethical (moralische) reflective kind, in which one's own conviction bears sway; this latter is rather the peculiarity of the modern time, while the true antique morality is based on the principle of abiding by one's duty [to the state at large]. An Athenian citizen did what was required of him, as it were from instinct: but if I reflect on the object of my activity, I must have the consciousness that my will has been called into exercise. But morality is Duty -- substantial Right -- a "second nature" as it has been justly called; for the first nature of man is his primary merely animal existence........

We have considered two aspects of Freedom, -- the objective and the subjective; if, therefore, Freedom is asserted to consist in the individuals of a State all agreeing in its arrangements, it is evident that only the subjective aspect is regarded. The natural inference from this principle is, that no law can be valid without the approval of all. This difficulty is attempted to be obviated by the decision that the minority must yield to the majority; the majority therefore bear the sway. But long ago J. J. Rousseau remarked, that in that case there would be no longer freedom, for the will of the minority would cease to be respected. At the Polish Diet each
single member had to give his consent before any political step could be taken; and this kind of freedom it was that ruined the State. Besides, it is a dangerous and false prejudice, that the People alone have reason and insight, and know what justice is; for each popular faction may represent itself as the People, and the question as to what constitutes the State is one of advanced science, and not of popular decision.

If the principle of regard for the individual will is recognized as the only basis of political liberty, viz., that nothing should be done by or for the State to which all the members of the body politic have not given their sanction, we have, properly speaking, no Constitution. The only arrangement that would be necessary, would be, first, a centre having no will of its own, but which should take into consideration what appeared to be the necessities of the State; and, secondly, a contrivance for calling the members of the State together, for taking the votes, and for performing the arithmetical operations of reckoning and comparing the number of votes for the different propositions, and thereby deciding upon them. The State is an abstraction, having even its generic existence in its citizens; but it is an actuality, and its simply generic existence must embody itself in individual will and activity. The want of government and political administration in general is felt; this necessitates the selection and separation from the rest of those who have to take the helm in political affairs, to decide concerning them, and to give orders to other citizens, with a view to the execution of their plans. If e.g. even the people in a Democracy resolve on a war, a general must head the army. It is only by a Constitution that the abstraction — the State — attains life and reality; but this involves the distinction between those who command and those who obey. — Yet obedience seems inconsistent with liberty, and those who command appear to do the very opposite of that which the fundamental idea of the State, viz. that of Freedom, requires. It is, however, urged that, — though the distinction between commanding and obeying is absolutely necessary, because affairs could not go on without it — and indeed this seems only a compulsory limitation, external to and even contravening freedom in the abstract — the constitution should be at least so framed, that the citizens may obey as little as possible, and the smallest modicum of free volition be left to the commands of the superiors; — that the substance of that for which subordination is necessary, even in its most important bearings, should be decided and resolved on by the People — by the will of many or of all the citizens; though it is supposed to be thereby provided that the State should be possessed of vigour and strength as a reality — an individual unity.

The State is the Idea of Spirit in the external manifestation of human Will and its Freedom. It is to the
State, therefore, that change in the aspect of History indissolubly attaches itself; and the successive phases of the Idea manifest themselves in it as distinct political principles. The Constitutions under which World-Historical peoples have reached their culmination, are peculiar to them; and therefore do not present a generally applicable political basis. Were it otherwise, the differences of similar constitutions would consist only in a peculiar method of expanding and developing that generic basis; whereas they really originate in diversity of principle. From the comparison therefore of the political institutions of the ancient World-Historical peoples, it so happens, that for the most recent principle of a Constitution -- for the principle of our own times -- nothing (so to speak) can be learned. In science and art it is quite otherwise; e.g., the ancient philosophy is so decidedly the basis of the modern, that it is inevitably contained in the latter, and constitutes its basis. In this case the relation is that of a continuous development of the same structure, whose foundation-stone, walls, and roof have remained what they were. In Art, the Greek itself, in its original form, furnishes us the best models. But in regard to political constitution, it is quite otherwise: here the Ancient and the Modern have not their essential principle in common. Abstract definitions and dogmas respecting just government, -- importing that intelligence and virtue ought to bear sway -- are, indeed, common to both. But nothing is so absurd as to look to Greeks, Romans, or Orientals, for models for the political arrangements of our time. From the East may be derived beautiful pictures of a patriarchal condition, of paternal government, and of devotion to it on the part of peoples; from Greeks and Romans, descriptions of popular liberty. Among the latter we find the idea of a Free Constitution admitting all the citizens to a share in deliberations and resolves respecting the affairs and laws of the Commonwealth. In our times, too, this is its general acceptance; only with this modification, that -- since our states are so large, and there are so many of "the Many," the latter, -- direct action being impossible, -- should by the indirect method of elective substitution express their concurrence with resolves affecting the common weal; that is, that for legislative purposes generally, the people should be represented by deputies. The so-called Representative Constitution is that form of government with which we connect the idea of a free constitution; and this notion has become a rooted prejudice. On this theory People and Government are separated. But there is a perversity in this antithesis; an ill-intentioned ruse designed to insinuate that the People are the totality of the State. Besides, the basis of this view is the principle of isolated individuality -- the absolute validity of the subjective will -- a dogma which we have already investigated. The great point is,
that Freedom in its Ideal conception has not subjective will and caprice for its principle, but the recognition of the universal will; and that the process by which Freedom is realized is the free development of its successive stages. The subjective will is a merely formal determination -- a carte blanche -- not including what it is that is willed. Only the rational will is that universal principle which independently determines and unfolds its own being, and develops its successive elemental phases as organic members. 

History in general is therefore the development of Spirit in Time, as Nature is the development of the Idea in Space.

If then we cast a glance over the World's-History generally, we see a vast picture of changes and transactions; of infinitely manifold forms of peoples, states, individuals, in unresting succession. Everything that can enter into and interest the soul of man -- all our sensibility to goodness, beauty, and greatness -- is called into play. On every hand aims are adopted and pursued, which we recognize, whose accomplishment we desire -- we hope and fear for them. In all these occurrences and changes we behold human action and suffering predominant; everywhere something akin to ourselves, and therefore everywhere something that excites our interest for or against. Sometimes it attracts us by beauty, freedom, and rich variety, sometimes by energy such as enables even vice to make itself interesting. Sometimes we see the more comprehensive mass of some general interest advancing with comparative slowness, and subsequently sacrificed to an infinite complication of trifling circumstances, and so dissipated into atoms. Then, again, with a vast expenditure of power a trivial result is produced; while from what appears unimportant a tremendous issue proceeds. On every hand there is the motliest throng of events drawing us within the circle of its interest, and when one combination vanishes another immediately appears in its place.

The general thought -- the category which first presents itself in this restless mutation of individuals and peoples, existing for a time and then vanishing -- is that of change at large. The sight of the ruins of some ancient sovereignty directly leads us to contemplate this thought of change in its negative aspect. What traveller among the ruins of Carthage, of Palmyra, Persepolis, or Rome, has not been stimulated to reflections on the transiency of kingdoms and men, and to sadness at the thought of a vigorous and rich life now departed -- a sadness which does not expend itself on personal losses and the uncertainty of one's own undertakings, but is a disinterested sorrow at the decay of a splendid and highly cultured national life! But the most consideration which allies itself with that of change, is, that change while it imports dissolution, involves at the same time the
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rise of a new life — that while death is the issue of life, life is also the issue of death. This is a grand conception; one which the Oriental thinkers attained, and which is perhaps the highest in their metaphysics. In the idea of Metempsychosis we find it evolved in its relation to individual existence; but a myth more generally known, is that of the Phoenix as a type of the Life of Nature; eternally preparing for itself its funeral pile, and consuming itself upon it; but so that from its ashes it produced the new, renovated, fresh life. But this image is only Asiatic; oriental not occidental. Spirit — consuming the envelope of its existence — does not merely pass into another envelope, nor rise rejuvenescent from the ashes of its previous form; it comes forth exalted, glorified, a purer spirit. It certainly makes war upon itself — consumes its own existence; but in this very destruction it works up that existence into a new form, and each successive phase becomes in its turn a material, working on which it exalts itself to a new grade.

If we consider Spirit in this aspect — regarding its changes not merely as rejuvenescent transitions, i.e., returns to the same form, but rather as manipulations of itself, by which it multiplies the material for future endeavours — we see it exerting itself in a variety of modes and directions; developing its powers and gratifying its desires in a variety which is inexhaustible; because every one of its creations, in which it has already found gratification, meets it anew as material, and is a new stimulus to plastic activity. The abstract conception of mere change gives place to the thought of Spirit manifesting, developing, and perfecting its powers in every direction which its manifold nature can follow. What powers it inherently possesses we learn from the variety of products and formations which it originates. In this pleasurable activity, it has to do only with itself. As involved with the conditions of mere nature — internal and external — it will indeed meet in these not only opposition and hindrance, but will often see its endeavours thereby fail; often sink under the complications in which it is entangled either by Nature or by itself. But in such case it perishes in fulfilling its own destiny and proper function, and even thus exhibits the spectacle of self-demonstration as spiritual activity.

The very essence of Spirit is activity; it realizes its potentiality — makes itself its own deed, its own work — and thus it becomes an object to itself; contemplates itself as an objective existence. Thus is it with the Spirit of a people: it is a Spirit having strictly defined characteristics, which erects itself into an objective world, that exists and persists in a particular religious form of worship, customs, constitution, and political laws, — in the whole complex of its institutions, — in the events and transactions that make up its
history. That is its work — that is what this particular Nation is. Nations are what their deeds are. Every Englishman will say: We are the men who navigate the ocean, and have the commerce of the world; to whom the East Indies belong and their riches; who have a parliament, juries, &c. — The relation of the individual to that Spirit is that he appropriates to himself this substantial existence; that it becomes his character and capability, enabling him to have a definite place in the world — to be something. For he finds the being of the people to which he belongs an already established, firm world — objectively present to him — with which he has to incorporate himself. In this its work, therefore — its world — the Spirit of the people enjoys its existence and finds its satisfaction. — A Nation is moral — virtuous — vigorous — while it is engaged in realizing its grand objects, and defends its work against external violence during the process of giving to its purposes an objective existence. The contradiction between its potential, subjective being — its inner aim and life — and its actual being is removed; it has attained full reality, has itself objectively present to it. But this having been attained, the activity displayed by the Spirit of the people in question is no longer needed; it has its desire. The Nation can still accomplish much in war and peace at home and abroad; but the living substantial soul itself may be said to have ceased its activity. The essential, supreme interest has consequently vanished from its life, for interest is present only where there is opposition. The nation lives the same kind of life as the individual when passing from maturity to old age, — in the enjoyment of itself, — in the satisfaction of being exactly what it desired and was able to attain. Although its imagination might have transcended that limit, it nevertheless abandoned any such aspirations as objects of actual endeavour, if the real world was less than favourable to their attainment, — and restricted its aim by the conditions thus imposed. This mere customary life (the watch wound up and going on of itself) is that which brings on natural death. Custom is activity without opposition, for which there remains only a formal duration; in which the fulness and zest that originally characterised the aim of life is out of the question, — a merely external sensuous existence which has ceased to throw itself enthusiastically into its object. Thus perish individuals, thus perish peoples by a natural death; and though the latter may continue in being, it is an existence without intellect or vitality; having no need of its institutions, because the need for them is satisfied, — a political nullity and tedium. In order that a truly universal interest may arise, the Spirit of a People must advance to the adoption of some new purpose: but whence can this new purpose originate? It would be a higher, more comprehensive conception of itself — a transcending
of its principle -- but this very act would involve a principle of a new order, a new National Spirit. *

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