

Notes on Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History**

The goal of the philosophical study of history is stated clearly in Chapter Two: "[I]t is the consideration of world history itself that must reveal its rational process -- namely, that it has been the rational, necessary course of the World Spirit, the Spirit whose nature is indeed always one and the same, but which reveals this one nature in the world's reality.... [T]his must be the outcome of the study of history." [13]

The Characterization of Reason in History [12]

A. Presupposition of history: "The only thought which philosophy brings with it, in regard to history, is the simple thought of Reason -- the thought that Reason rules the world, and that world history has therefore been rational in its course."

B. This claim is proven by philosophy. "Just as Reason is its own presupposition and absolute goal, so it is the activation of that goal in world history -- bringing it forth from the inner source to external manifestation, not only in the natural universe but also in the spiritual. That this Idea is the True, the Eternal, simply the Power -- that it reveals itself in the world, and that nothing else is revealed in the world but that Idea itself, its glory and majesty -- this, as we said, is what has been shown in philosophy, and it is here presupposed as already proven." [12f]

C. Reason is the **substance** of the historical world, i.e. it is the "being of reality".

D. Reason is also the "infinite power".

1. It is a **power** in that it is not simply abstract; it is more than a mere possibility, an "ideal", or an "ought". Rather, it is active and an actuality.
2. It is also "**infinite**" in that it is self-sufficient.

E. Conditions governing the empirical study of history.

1. History must be characterized "faithfully". The historian must recognize that one's view of historical data is conditioned by one's own conceptual scheme. [This is the central thesis of Historicism] Thus, one is called upon to be **reflective**. [14; Cf. 6ff]

a. The presupposition that Reason (*nous*, or "understanding in general") rules the world is historical and derives from Anaxagoras.

b. The claim that **Reason** ("Thought...freely determining itself") rules the world corresponds to the belief that the world is not contingent or subject to chance, i.e. that it is ruled by **Providence** ("wisdom with infinite power, realizing its own ends"). But this latter claim is also **contradictory**. The belief in divine Providence is not **explanatory**; it does not reach a conclusion concerning the overall course and pattern of world history. In other words, it is merely **abstract**. It posits a plan but does not reveal it. (Part of the belief in Providence is that the plan is hidden from us.) [Cf. Prolegomena, Sec. 343.] [17]

c. Since the **possibility** of knowing God entails our **duty** to know him, we have an obligation to examine the operation of Reason in history. [18]

d. This amounts to a **theodicy**, i.e. "a justification of the ways of God".

2. To do this we must have a more adequate conception of Reason.

The Nature of Spirit [19]

A. In order to gain a more adequate understanding and definition of Reason, we must be able to understand the **final goal** of the world in terms of both its **content** and **actualization**.

B. **World history** takes place "in the realm of Spirit".

1. "World includes both physical and mental nature."

2. "Spirit, and the process of its development...is the substance of history." [19]

3. Nature, which is also a rational system, affects history. However, it will not be of concern except in its relation to Spirit.

C. Thus, we need to investigate

1. "the abstract characteristics of the nature of Spirit",

2. "the means Spirit uses in order to realize its Idea", and

3. "the shape taken on by Spirit in its complete realization in the world -- the State." [20]

D. The Nature of Spirit [Cf. "History", 'The Connection Between Spirit and Freedom'.]

1. The **essence** of Spirit is "positive freedom". This is the antithesis of matter, whose essence is to be governed by an external force.

2. Matter's unity is outside itself, i.e. it strives toward its opposite -- the Ideal -- since in being free and self-determining, it is idealized.

3. Spirit's unity is within itself -- it exists as autonomous self-consciousness, i.e. "*Bei-sich-selbst-sein*" ("Being-by-itself").

4. In it, knower and known coincide. Spirit knows itself even as it produces itself. (20f)

E. World history is the working out of what is potential within Spirit. It is the realization of the consciousness of freedom. [22]

F. This is "the final goal of the world" toward which all of history has been moving.

G. Now we must ask: "What means does [the] Idea of freedom. . . [where 'the Idea of freedom' is God's own nature translated into philosophical terms] use for its realization?"

The Means of Spirit

A. Human action springs from the needs, passions, and interests of individuals.

B. The force of individual needs, passions, and interests tend to oppose the constraining force of law and morality.

C. This "drama of human passions" leads to degeneration and decline -- a sacrifice of good on the "slaughter bench" of history.

D. Thus, we are forced to ask about "the ultimate goal for which these monstrous sacrifices were made". [What is the purpose of evil?] [24]

E. First of all, we must recognize that the principle that lies behind historical change (the "final goal", the "nature and concept of spirit") is something general and abstract, i.e. **potential** -- not yet actualized.

F. Second, to be **actualized** there must be an activity, i.e. Will. (The Will is the principle of actuality -- "human activity in general".) This manifests itself as an individual drive toward **satisfaction** of one's interests, and involvement in **purposeful** work. [25f]

G. These purposes for which we act to achieve satisfaction are not whimsical and arbitrary. Rather they make sense within some larger project that we are involved in.

H. Thus, we see the workings here of **Idea** and **human passion**, the warp and woof "in the great tapestry of world history".

I. Idea and passion achieve concrete unity in "ethical freedom in the state". The Idea of freedom is the **essence** of Spirit; passion is inseparable from the will and constitutes the character of the individual. "Passion" signifies the "public character" of the person in motivating actions of a "universal scope". It is the "subjective and formal aspect of energy, of will and activity", distinct from the **goal** of content which is undetermined relative to passion itself, even though it guides passion. [27]

J. The **means** of the World Spirit for achieving its goal is the individual will (needs, passions, and interests) which is **subjective**. (The goal is for Spirit "to find itself, to come to itself, and to behold itself as actuality". [28])

K. This is carried out without the full awareness of the subjective means of individuals involved.

L. This union of the universal and subjective also manifests itself in the union of **freedom and necessity**. (**Freedom** is reflected in the individual will in action; **Necessity** in the development

of Spirit.) The metaphysics of this connection can be briefly summarized. [28; Cf. Hegel, "Prolegomena", Sec. 342.]

1. Hegel describes two aspects of **Idea**. Idea which is universal and self-sufficient -- "the substantial totality of things" -- is contrasted with Idea which is "pure abstract reflection into itself" and "formal being for itself" which belongs to Spirit as the "abstractness of arbitrary free will".
2. All particulars are posited by the absolute, universal essence and Will.
3. This positing of the antithesis provides the instability and the mechanism necessary for change. [29]

M. In historical experience we see that certain established systems of duties, laws, and rights are opposed by "possibilities" that may appear injurious to the established order.

N. This opposition, which embodies a universal concept of movement toward greater being, acts through the aims and passions of **world historical individuals**. ["The great men in history are those whose own particular aims contain the substantial will that is the will of the World Spirit..."] [32]

O. This use of individual passions does not bring happiness to the individual who is sacrificed for the higher goal of Spirit's self-realization. This Hegel calls the "Cunning of Reason". [35]

P. What is not subordinated by Spirit is morality, ethics, and religious commitment. [36]

1. Individuals, as rational beings who partake in rational goals, embody Spirit.
2. Thus, individuals must be considered **"ends-in-themselves"** and not simply a means to an end, regardless of how universal the aim may be. [Cf. Kant]
3. Individuals are ends by virtue of the divine in each one of them, i.e. by virtue of Reason or Freedom.
4. With this comes the responsibility for all actions stemming from one's awareness of one's own freedom. It is the "mark of the human" to bear such responsibility. [37]
5. Dissatisfaction can arise from an awareness of the disparity between the contemporary state of affairs and the way things **ought** to be according to the demands of Reason, Justice, and Freedom.

The State as Realization of Spirit [40]

A. The **subjective will** and the **rational will** are aspects of the essential being manifest as an ethical totality, the **State**. [41]

B. It is within the State that the individual enjoys (positive) freedom.

1. **Negative freedom** -- lack of dependence on others. Subjection to the common will is the means to assuring oneself of some modicum of free play within society.

2. **Positive freedom** -- harmony with the universal will as manifest in the ethical life of the State.

C. Thus, the State is the union of universal and subjective will as the vehicle for the realization of the **ethical life**, a life which is "rationality itself". [Sittlichkeit vs. Moralität]

D. Freedom amounts to the acknowledgement of law; action in accordance with it is free.

E. In this way, the subjective and objective wills, freedom, and necessity, are reconciled.

F. The State is a unity of expression in one spirit. The (cultural) state is expressed in its **religion, art, and philosophy**. [Cf. *Philosophy of Right*, Section 344.] [48]

G. Every state is a unique achievement of Spirit.

1. Its **form** is determined by the political principles that emerge from the character and culture of the people. [50]

2. Thus, there is nothing we can learn from other historical cultures concerning the principles that would be best for government in general. "The ancient and the modern have no essential principle in common." [50]

3. This does not hold true of art and philosophy. Ancient art and philosophy provide the basis for contemporary forms of artistic and philosophical practices.

H. Summary [51f]

1. The realization of Idea as Freedom is the absolute goal of History.

2. The means to that end is **subjective will and knowledge**.

3. The objective unity of the means and end is the state as an ethical whole.

4. Religion, art, and philosophy are the forms of the unification of the subjective and objective in the state.

5. This constitutes the culture of the state and, as such, it reflects the "Spirit of the people".
6. Within this larger ethical life of the state the individual must create its own unity.

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