

REVOLUTION AND THE CULTURALIST CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

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IN THE beginning of the nineteenth century, the thinking part of the human race was agreed that man, as a being who sees, feels and values nature, a being who sings of nature and admires her and in all sorts of ways utilizes her in his own service, in the satisfaction of his wants and as a means towards his ends, could not be simply the pure and direct product of nature alone—merely a rung in the ladder of her endless development.

After Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, this thinking part of humanity could not consider man only as a part, expression or child of nature. On the contrary, the whole of nature, i. e., everything which we perceive with our senses and comprehend as something around us and external to us, was placed in direct dependence upon human thought. For with and since Kant time and space have become forms of the human understanding, irradiations of human thought, without which the present appearance, entire composition and form of everything which goes under the name of nature would be completely lost.

Of all the living creatures which we know, man is the only one who possesses transcendental apperception, which, naturally, has not originated with man but which came to him from a higher, superhuman world. It is this transcendental apperception, a superhuman power operating in man, which gives us the entire appearance, and the whole form, as well as a great part of the content, of the wide world outside us.

"No knowledge," says Kant, "can take place in us, no conjunction of unity of one kind of knowledge with another, without that unity of consciousness which precedes all data of intuition, and without reference to which no representation of objects is possible. This

pure, original, and unchangeable consciousness I shall call *transcendental apperception*. . . . It is we who carry into the phenomena which we call nature, order and regularity, nay; we should never find them in nature, if we ourselves, or the nature of our mind, had not originally placed them there. For the unity of nature is meant to be a necessary and *a priori* certain unity in the connection of all phenomena. And how should we *a priori* have arrived at such a synthetical unity, if the subjective grounds of such unity were not contained *a priori* in the original sources of our knowledge, and if those subjective conditions did not at the same time possess objective validity, as being the grounds on which alone an object becomes possible in our experience?"

Such a viewpoint, naturally, left not the least bit of ground for any realistic or materialistic conception. Kant's teaching did not permit searching in something unpossessed of thought or feeling, spirit or soul, for causes, origins, and explanations of everything lofty, spiritual and soulful.

Kant established that originality and independence can be properly possessed only by the mind and spirit. From this it follows that for sufficient causes and explanations of all phenomena, occurrences and events, we need not seek in nature or in economics or mechanics, but appeal to a higher force which can originate with itself and which is consequently capable of producing everything by all manner of means, natural as well as supernatural.

Even before Kant approached his *Critique of Practical Reason*, he indicated in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (in which he tried to avoid speculation beyond the bounds of pure reason) that although it could not be asserted in a positive and purely reasonable manner that the spirit which issues out of the human body is imperishable and indestructible, still the opposite could never be proved.

And there is no ground for denying, by way of example, the following transcendental proposition, viz., that all of life is in reality transcendent and not subject to the vicissitudes to time, and does not begin with birth nor end with death. "We might say that our life is phenomenal only, i. e., a mental representation of the purely spiritual life, and that the whole world utilized by our senses is nothing but a picture which passes by our present status of understanding, and which, like a dream, is without objective reality in itself. Furthermore, we might say, that if we could see ourselves and other objects as they are in reality, we would see ourselves in a world of spiritual nature, where our relation to it did not begin with our

birth and will not end with our bodily death, for both of these are phenomenal."

No wonder, then, that in the beginning of the nineteenth century when Kant's idea concerning the spirit as the lawgiver of nature and the architect of matter and of everything which is fashioned, formed, and built thereof, had conquered the self-contemplating portion of humanity, the history of mankind, as well as that of individual peoples was written, read and interpreted, primarily, in the light of spiritual power and might.

The "must" hidden somewhere in the blind forces of nature, and the aimless, purposeless "necessity" that stares with glass eyes out of all the technical complications and economical relations, had never been considered by historians in general, and by historians of philosophy in particular, as the chief factors of spontaneous, human and social development. Over and against this merciless "must," over and against this blind necessity which stares and sees nothing, the *ought* and the *should* were established as the strong and powerful factors in the progress and development of man and society. Both of these spring from a universal will and conscience, permeated with aim and purpose, full of meaning and value.

In his *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, Hegel urges the reader to first of all be permeated with the idea that universal history belongs to the domain of the spirit. The term "world," he says, 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 in the course of its development is our substantial object.

History, according to Hegel, is nothing more than the development of spirit in time. The universal spirit in the course of its development is refracted, as it were, in man, just as a ray of light is refracted in a prism; and the breaking up into the diverse colors forms a spectrum of national and spiritual ideals and popular geniuses.

Naturally, none of the philosophers and historians of the early years of the nineteenth century was blind to the fact that every people as well as every man and group is influenced, and therefore limited, by forces and elements not included in the category of mind and spirit, senses or will. To them one thing was clear, however, viz., that while all these forces which are designated as natural or material over and against spiritual or ideal, may modify and complicate, accelerate or hinder various individually human and collec-

tively social phenomena, they can in no way themselves produce a single phenomenon in the world, and therefore, indeed, cannot themselves explain a single phenomenon. The power of producing from itself, something in the form of an image or phenomenon, without the least external or outside aid, belongs to the spirit and the spirit alone. This then is the sense, the meaning and the significance of spirit. This is the characteristic property of spirit. This is its chief specific peculiarity. What other properties distinguish the genius of men, if not the properties of depth and originality? And do not both of these properties constitute the power to create in an independent way something that had never existed, something that originates with itself and therefore is absolutely new?

If one only thinks well into the independence of spirit and understands the possibility of identifying spirit with absolute independence, the question: How did spirit originate?—immediately vanishes. For then it becomes clear that spirit is nothing other than self-derived power; and for this reason all explanations, all causes and origins must be sought in it and through it. Spirit itself, however, cannot be explained or caused by any thing.

For this reason, too, Spinoza opens his *Ethics* with the following definition: "By that which is self-caused I mean that of which the essence involves existence, or that of which the nature is only conceivable as-existent"; which means, that the conception of substance as something that needs no external causes for its origin, is considered as one of the primary presuppositions of any conception embracing the content and essence of the universe. For those, then, who feel and sense the intuitive meaning of this definition, the problems concerning the origin of the absolute substance of the universal spirit, or of an all-embracing God no longer exist. Substance, Spirit, and God are self-explained, and all else in the world must be explained through them.

Hegel follows in the footsteps of Spinoza.

Hegel explains that human history can have a meaning and value only when it is written and studied in the light of the following philosophic formulations: "Reason is substance as well as infinite power, its own infinite material its entire natural and spiritual life, which it originates. . . . On one hand, Reason is the substance of the Universe; viz., that by which and in which all reality has its being and subsistence. On the other hand, it is the Infinite Energy of the Universe. . . . It is the infinite complex of things, their entire essence and truth. It is its own material which it commits to its

own active energy to work upon; not needing the conditions of an external material. . . . It supplies its own nourishment and is the object of its own operations. While it is exclusively its own basis of existence and absolute final aim, it is also its energizing power realizing this aim. . . . This idea or Reason, is the true, the external, the absolutely powerful essence. It reveals itself in the World, and in that world nothing else is revealed but this and its honor and glory."

This, Hegel thinks, has been established in philosophy and must be accepted in history as a confirmed thesis.

This view in its most general and broad forms had moved Fichte to state that man must not strive directly to blissfulness. He must only endeavor to perceive as deeply as possible the highest and most powerful, which guides and regulates and rules in and over the world; and primarily to be permeated by the good, which, as Fichte insisted, is the most beautiful and highest expression of the most powerful and infinite power. Such perception of the universal spirit and its attributes and permeation with them will eventually fill man with bliss.

"Not that is good," says Fichte, "which is blissful, but on the contrary, that which is good makes us blissful."

The most important in man is, therefore, his close approach to spirit, whose characteristic properties are independence and freedom; a close approach to his deep self, to the self which borders upon the essence of the world. The nearer man draws to the world spirit, the freer and more independent he becomes. This must be the goal of all specific human ventures. The function of culture, Fichte thinks, must be to bring man to this goal. For good and evil themselves have a meaning only when they are referred to beings that are free and independent, or are striving to become such.

"Culture," says Fichte, "is the last and the highest means for the goal of man, for the full identity of man with his own self." And Fichte, therefore, defines culture as the revelation of the universal spirit which bends and utilizes every power to assure complete freedom and complete independence of all that we ourselves are in reality.

Thus the reply of the early part of the nineteenth century was, so to speak, thoroughly anti-realistic; and in the sense of a keen antithesis to materialism this reply was supremely idealistic. It was made as a no uncertain assertion, that the world as presented to us through our senses, is not the world wherein our life begins and

ends. And we must, therefore, not search in it and through it the aims and goals of our life and death.

No matter how favorable this world is to all the human, "worldly" interests, in the critical moments of our life it will be powerless to offer a solution that will fill the emptiness and ease the pain of the human soul, which yearns for meaning and value. These exist for us perhaps no longer than the flash of our eye across paints of many colors. The meaning and value of life must be sought in the world to which all our feelings strive, even though our senses can never reach it. Only this higher world, and no other, must grant us the key to all that takes place and happens in the world where the momentous comes and passes.

The culture-historical view harmonizes well with such a positively idealistic solution, which perceives in the universal culture, which is the eternal, almighty and spontaneous expression of the Universal Spirit, the chief causes, the deepest motives and the greatest forces of all historical events; which sees in the national *culture*, i. e., in the inclinations, environments, conceptions, attitudes, experiences and reactions of a people the cause and driving forces, the seeds and fruits of all national events and phenomena. The stronger and more deeply affecting a phenomenon or an event, the deeper and the more vividly must the specific characteristics of the national culture be engraved in it. Culture must, therefore, be felt most deeply in those rarest and most fundamental social and political upheavals which we usually term revolutions.

And had the world outlook which controlled human thought in the beginning of the nineteenth century, not been forced back by materialism, which, for a while, drove the human spirit to surface rather than to depths, the assertion would perhaps have been made long ago that the kind of revolution a people goes through depends directly upon the culture it possesses. For every revolution, every new order built upon the ruins of the old, is a result and reflection of the culture of a people, through which the Universal Spirit, for reasons known to It alone, has revealed itself in a certain manner.

However, before the relation between social revolutions and national cultures had become clear, materialism, thanks to the great successes and upheavals which science had achieved in the laboratory, broke its way into a considerable number of human brains. Philosophy with its idealism and spiritualism became silent for a while and science began to speak its materialistic tongue in a philosophic

manner. This philosophically feathered science offers an entirely different solution to the problems of idealism and realism.

This solution placed civilization before culture, cosmopolitanism before nationalism. Therefore, instead of seeking the causes and factors of revolutions in national cultures, they were sought in the national means of production and the cosmic material powers, with the faint light of the little materialistic lamps. The concepts of revolution chime in for a while with the conceptions of civilization in a quite mechanical manner.

Science begins to prevail over philosophy in the fifties of the nineteenth century. Metaphysical philosophy had for one reason or another abandoned the swift flight led by giants as great as Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Schleiermacher, Schlegel and Schelling. Natural philosophy now takes the place of metaphysics. Materialism and realism take the leadership over idealism and spiritualism. Nature, matter and power are considered the ultimate and primary, the almighty and all-embracing causes of all the highest and deepest, the most beautiful and best in the world. Nature, in the purely physical sense, and matter and power begin to be looked upon as the only sources out of which life and spirit, sensation and thought, soul and will had issued and continue to issue. And what nature, matter and power had meant for the cosmos, the social organization, economics and tools begin to mean for the development of society. The materialistic conception of history is being created.

From the laboratory and the scientific treatises, materialism and atheism with it, are transported into the popular scientific text books and into the halls where learning is dispensed to the masses. In this way a kind of materialistic-atheistic movement is established. For a while the masses begin to like the idea that the real thing in the world is that which can be touched with the hand, and that which can be understood by sound judgment. Man was not made by God, but on the contrary man had with his power of imagination created God. Why not? If man could invent an airplane, telegraphy, railroads and telephones which he needed for making his life more comfortable, why could he not have invented a God and discovered a religion that would help, for instance, the capitalist to exploit his fellow-man, the worker?

All these concrete discoveries of human mind, especially those that increase the comfort of human life, begin, like the idols, those ancient embodiments of the idea of God, to take the chief place. Men begin to worship them and sacrifice on their altars inner good-

ness and beauty, inner depth and excellence. In short, they sacrifice all the sensations and experiences, all the meanings and values of human life and universal existence which constitute the concept of culture. Civilization takes the place of culture. In the light of civilization national and social ideals are formed. Revolutions are foretold, prepared and made on the foundation of the complete blindness of nature, on the basis of the iron-strong matter and energy, and in correspondence with all the demands of the capitalistic idol—civilization.

Very great in number were the accomplishments of this period during which science and with it civilization reigned uninterrupted. One thing, however, all these achievements failed to accomplish, viz., to give man a little spiritual joy, a deeper penetration into happiness, and a stronger experience of blissfulness. They failed to do it because in all their deeds and works, they completely left out the meaning and value, the why and wherefore of human life. And inasmuch as revolutions of the last and this century were a part of human life, but were led by men who bowed to physical nature and material civilization, they have lost their meaning and value in the eyes of a large portion of humanity. The why and wherefore of revolution could not continue to be inspiring to those who could not give up the soul which is in them, and which can get along without them more easily than they without her. . . . "It is true," says Eucken, "that realism has not only carried the opinion of humanity with it with overwhelming force, it has also given an immense impetus to work, accelerated our whole existence, aroused us to a more manly overcoming of difficulties and to a more victorious attack upon all that is irrational."

"The nineteenth century more than any other epoch, enlarged the whole aspect of life and improved human conditions. One would have expected it to close with a proud and joyful consciousness of strength. The fact that it did not, points to an error in the type of life which dominates the period. This error is to be found in the desire of realism to eliminate the soul. *And the soul will not allow itself to be eliminated.* The very attempt to deny the soul only arouses it to greater activity."

This greater activity of the soul seems to have urged philosophy to revive and throw its strictly critical and intuitively penetrating glance at all the conquests and triumphs, at all the accomplishments and promises of science, and say to her: "I acknowledge and estimate your accomplishments, but you must, however, together with me,

recognize something that cannot be denied. You will never succeed in showing or proving how matter and energy caused, or how they succeeded in producing, life and spirit, and how life and spirit may be explained by them."

The world is not a complex of lifeless atoms. It is nothing but an exceedingly large social organism of wills. Philosophy looks upon the idea of universal associations of consciousness in its final analysis as upon the basis of that which used to be called nature, and in this manner she substitutes the full and complete synthesis of a living reality for scientific abstractions. Science considers the relation of things independently of the subject, which possesses will and thinking power; and, independently of existence in its totality, gives us merely an abstract image, an image which does not include the fullness of reality, the identity of the entire universe of things and of the spirit which is conscious of them.

Once science began to admit that it can in no way succeed and that it has no hope of succeeding in penetrating into the most concrete of the concrete phenomena, the phenomena which are called life and consciousness (and it could not help admitting this) it immediately began to spin the thread of metaphysics. Just as in the days of Spinoza, Leibnitz and Descartes, and later of Kant, Hegel and Fichte, it continues to catch within its nets the fluttering soul of man, only with surer and stronger haste.

With the revival of metaphysics culture will gain control over civilization, just as philosophy has begun to dominate science. For it is as clear as day, that the farther the spirit advances into the profundities, the less opportunities it has to spread over surface and the more man is interested in the world within him, the less he is charmed by the world external to him.

It is the same with time as with space. As man devotes his attention to the problems which touch eternity, the passing world interests him only in so far as he can find an organic relation between the transitory and the lasting. Moreover, hand in hand with the growth of human interest in everything excellent, deep and external, grows his interest in absolutisms, which surpasses his interest in relativities. And what does culture mean if not going to the roots of the problems of eternity and supernaturalness, which border upon the absolute—the something which is good for all times, all places, and all men.—For it includes in itself time, space, and man, while itself, it is not included in any one of them.

The greater the prestige culture will gain, the more urgently will social upheavals have to be suited anew and set in the light of culture. And these upheavals lead to a better, more beautiful and spiritually fuller life only when they will be urged and guided by those who consider civilization only as a means toward culture and will see in culture the meaning and value of all.

A revolution urged by the powers of civilization, and by those who bear in mind only the interests and needs of civilization, will perhaps raise the material standard of human life; it may, or may not, bring a little more well-being, but it can in no way increase the spiritual needs of human life. One of these two must happen: either man will become less human, or, remaining human and striving despite the civilizers to become more human, he will complain of the revolutionary upheaval, insisting that his loss is greater than his gain, and will with more impetus and stubbornness fight for a new, meaningful change.

A revolution from the point of view of civilization may change the external, not internal form of things. But when we speak of a revolution as an internal and fundamental change that will yield man real bliss and happiness, we must consider it from a cultural standpoint.

And culture should and must interpret revolution, give it its fundamental basis, and place before it its aims and purposes.