

## By the Way

HEGEL (1770-1831) was a German philosopher who greatly influenced the thought of the first three-quarters of the 19th century. His time has been termed, in the estimation of the more matter-of-fact standards of scientific thought of our day, a period of romanticism in historical theory and philosophy. My gibe in last issue at what I inferred were remnants of Hegelian romanticism infecting socialist theorizing on the social problem will have little value for purging our thought of such unrealities unless I add to it explanation. So herewith.

All individuals, whether they have consciously worked it over or not and regard it as their philosophy of life, have what is termed, an "outlook" on the universe of men and things. This outlook constitutes our standpoint of judgment; it is a mental approach or point of view whose standards constitute the bases of our opinions. Opinions may vary or change in a superficial sense, merely swinging, as it were, on the pivot of our fixed standards. But again, the standards of judgment themselves undergo change and modification, which is to say, there is a shift to another point of view in outlook on life involving opinions fundamentally different to those held previously. During transition periods, brought on by changing material conditions of social life, particularly so when the method of production has changed, there goes on in every mind a more or less unconscious and confused conflict between the old social standards that are in process of breaking down and the new ones evolving out of the discipline of habits of life and economic conditions brought on by the new material factors. The philosophies have, in the main, been the reflection of such conflict of social standards.

Human conduct, in its social aspects, religious, political, economic, is predetermined by the individual's outlook on the world, i.e., on his personal philosophy of life. The competency of the philosophy as a guide to conduct is thus of great moment. For, a philosophy that does not square with the facts enlarges the reign of accident. The facts—facts of politics, facts of economics, facts of human nature—all facts break you if you ignore them. Nevertheless, it is never wholly a question of having a great collection of data, it is also necessary to have a correct point of view or method of approach to facts in order to make proper selection of those facts relevant and significant in whatever relation may be, say, for example, that of social improvement.

It is an all too common mistake to assume that the great systems of philosophy in history are the artificial creations of the study and so without social significance as having no connection with the ideas and common needs and aspirations of human beings of their time. On the contrary, "a philosophical theory is not an accident or whim but an exponent of its age and handing on its results to the future." Of course, it is true enough of the philosophers that, "the past, as they represented it was a masked, and disguised, and mythical and mystical substitute for the real experience of earlier men. The past as having been, and as having some sort of message for the present, had always, and especially since the Renaissance, brooded in and over the minds of European thinkers." Nevertheless, those philosophies that did become influential, did so because they satisfied the felt need of great social groups for a unified consistent system of thought which would express their social traditions, needs and aspirations. And whatever of survival value they have for mankind in general in all succeeding times, becomes selected and absorbed, disappearing as it were, into the general current of thought. Sometimes that which is useless also survives, but merely to justify the cults.

The Germany that our generation knew prior to the great war, a nation welded into a unity under a centralized government with an almost absolute

monarchy, was not the Germany of Hegel's time. In his time it was a loose, shambling mixture of independent principalities, politically weak and impotent and industrially backward, all within a ring fence of the ambitions and comparatively consolidated nationalities of Russia, Austria, France and perfide Albion. In this situation, the peoples of the German principalities, whatever their mutual jealousies and quarrels, had much too strong racial, cultural affinities and common economic interests not to yearn for a more perfect political unity; and beginning with a few, the will for it spread as the passing of time demonstrated more and more its need both as a protective measure and for the more ambitious project for a "place in the sun" which was to mature later on in the culmination of 1871 for which Bismark is given the credit. A sensitive soul, there are many world currents, religious, scientific and political sweeping through Hegel's philosophy, while he was at the same time, one of the articulate voices of the German desire for national unity, which, though still far over the horizon, was itself only one particular case of a general tendency in the political life of the whole world.

I am now coming to my point on what, according to our later matter-of-fact standards, is the romantic element in Hegel's philosophy. In his youth, under the influence of the ideas of the French revolution, Hegel had been a glorifier of liberty when to do so was to be revolutionary. However, with the passing of years, and as he developed his theories, he became more and more conservative and one of the chief justifiers of the Prussian State. The concept of revolutionary social change became abhorrent to him as something impossible of realization. For this direction of his thought some credit may be due to the first Napoleon who raised the devil in Continental Europe, and who, with his conquering French legions and his dictatorship, was one of the strange disillusionizing progeny of the French revolution. Perhaps also, the Prussian State, by the subtle flattery of professorial appointments drew the unconscious Hegel into its service, for until he received its favors his lot in life had been one of bitter poverty. Be that as it may, the man was undoubtedly honest in his beliefs. In the main his social theory assumed the character it did because he rested the whole weight of his interpretation of history upon the principle of "continuity"—a very great truth, though not the whole truth. History of course is more than a mere succession of events, there is a casual continuity, whatever of divergent factors of causation there be. Now "continuity" taught that "any present social situation is linked by a never entirely broken chain of historical antecedents to a past that reaches back beyond discoverable beginnings." The Conservatives interpreted that to mean that the dead hand of the past, in tradition, thought, habit and custom laid upon every generation rigid limits to the possibilities of change. Because human nature is so ancient, they said, and so persistent, social changes can only be brought about very slowly, if at all.

But there is a companion principle to the factor of "continuity" in history, to which Hegel and the Conservatives of his time gave no credit; and perhaps could not if its importance was the discovery of a later generation of psychologists and students of social group cultures, customs and institutions. The companion principle is this: "that men in groups may merge their volitions so as to supercede the predominance of historical factors and so either nullify them or relegate them to a subordinate position." Thus we see the possibility of change is enlarged. While still recognizing that a social factor never ceases to be a social factor, that every present social situation is conditioned by previous situations, nevertheless, this principle relieves us of at least some of the supposed inescapable heritage of the traditional past. So we now look into the material conditions of the present for factors at work in the formation of new habits, dispositions and

standards that may supercede the traditional. At the same time, we are free to place a new higher value on the taking thought of ways and means of social changes and of human inventiveness and ingenuity in working them out. In the scheme of things as a whole, man is shown now as more of a dynamic factor with increasing possibilities of power to control his conditions of life as his knowledge increases. As might be expected, however, it is the habit of those who desire things to remain as they are, to stress the principles of "continuity," while those who are for change are liable to rest their case mainly in the companion principle. In spite of the extremists, however, the truth lies in a due and proper appreciation of both principles in history. We may take it that the universal manner of social cause and effect is **gradualism** rather than **catastrophism**, but with the possibility of a more accelerated movement than the Conservative interests would care for.

I will now briefly outline Hegel's conception of the universal process after a recent reading of the article on him and his work in the "Britannica." As for the matter of the two historical principles, readers will find them expertly elucidated by Albion Small (Chicago University) in "the American Journal of Sociology" for May.

To the eye of our philosopher, the universe is a process of development in the background of which is a universal spirit or, as he terms it, the "absolute" eternally present. The movements of the process are the self-unfolding of the "absolute," i.e., God revealing himself in the natural world, as a series of materialized forces and forms of life; and in the spiritual world as the human soul, the legal and moral order of society, and the creations of art, religion and philosophy. So to Hegel, the community was very much more than a mere aggregation of individuals. It was an organic whole rooted in its cultural past. There was to him, in a real sense, a community spirit, partaking of the divine, ever-developing and unfolding to the end of attaining an ideal, self-realization in the centralized state, the supposed highest expression of the community spirit. He pictured the stages on to this ideal as the outcome of a process of social forms, evolving out of other forms through everlasting self-generation.

What should man do in that preconditioned scheme of things, then, except seek, not his own will, but the will of God which was to materialize itself, so happily (?) for the then disorganized Germany, in the will of the centralized (Prussian) State. Hegelianism resolved itself into this, that, in the beginning, man was created for the service of the State and not the State for the service of man. Hegel is dead of course, but his soul goes marching on. I even hear socialists, generally unwitting of the further implications of their contentions, arguing along those lines.

Marx, who was a Hegelian of the materialist "Left" in his youth, said that Hegel stood the world upon its head, meaning that the philosopher saw the historical process as the working out of the "idea." But Marx, the materialist, did not say that with the intention of disparaging the power of ideas or relegating man to a position of mere driftwood in the complex of social forces. What he was calling attention to was that the material conditions of production in society were the primary factors conditioning the character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. But that is without prejudice to the fact that both the social cause and the effects are the result of man's activities. Marx' materialist philosophy however has come down through rows and rows of lesser men, and often it is a mere play-room where animistic conceptions and traits of personality disport themselves. Spirituality is imputed to where only purposeless mechanism obtains. Holding fast to Hegel's "spiritualism" on its one side, directive and even discretionary powers are denied to men and credited to the impersonal forces of the environment. Hegel, himself, was not so fatalistic as all that, though he saw man's power to change his social life narrowly limited by traditional factors and conceived of the will of the ideal citizen as wholly submerged in the will of the "absolute" political State. Differing from Hegel in