

Some Main Theses of Hegel's Introduction to His *Philosophy of History*

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1. Philosophy brings to the study of history the thought that Reason rules the world, history has been essentially rational in its course.
2. Unlike the usual view that a hidden Providence presides over the affairs of the world, Hegel believes that the meaning of history is intelligible.
3. Hegel's Philosophy of History is a theodicy, a justification of the ways of God (Spirit) in the world.
4. The substance of history is Spirit's search for self-consciousness. Self-consciousness in general is the coincidence ("identity") of subject (that I know) with object (what I know).
5. Spirit is distinguished from matter and from nature; from matter because the behavior matter is determined by a force outside itself, e.g. gravity, while Spirit is self-determining; from nature because in nature "nothing is new under the sun," whereas novelty and creativity characterize the development of Spirit.
6. The final goal of the world is Spirit's consciousness of its freedom.
7. The means used by Spirit are the needs, passions and interests of human beings; they gain their force because they do not always observe the limits which law and morality would like to impose upon them. Noble goals play a relatively insignificant role. "Nothing great has been accomplished in the world without passion." (Hegel is directly reacting against Kant's view regarding the centrality of the good will.)
8. Nevertheless, universal aims are present in the world; they are embodied in the state, which is the "concrete meeting point and union" of the Idea and human passion. The state is the location of ethical freedom.
9. World history is not the place for happiness; it advances through struggle, discord, strife. Where these factors are dominant, harmony is absent and so is happiness: periods of happiness are blank pages in history.
10. As the heaviness of bricks is used to raise a building up off the ground, so the passions of individuals are used by Spirit in service of universal goals, its goal.

11. The passions that contribute most are those of world-historical individuals like Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon. They are great because they have drawn their energy from the deep resources of Spirit, as it readies itself to move to the next phase. They have no conscious idea of their historical significance, and they fall away like empty husks from grain once they have served their purposes.

12. The state is the union of subjective will (the individual's personal choices, passions, interests) with the rational will (the concrete universal, the totality of law, custom, institutions of a society) which corresponds more directly to the Spirit.

13. Hegel criticizes as one-sided and inadequate the "negative conception of freedom," that each should have his own small space where he can do whatever he wants so long as he respects the small space of others. He has a more positive idea of freedom made possible through participation in the ethical life of the state.

14. Hegel rejects the idea that the form of government of a land or people is simply a matter of free choice. A people's regime is bound up with its religion, art, philosophy, and generally its past insofar as it has been transmitted to the present.

15. A state is not simply its people; the people as a sum of individuals supply the subjective side, the subjective wills which have a right to be heard; but the state also has an objective side, expressed in its institutions, laws, etc.

16. There is no written history and no historical knowledge without the state. China has a long history, India (before his time) has virtually none. The ethnic groups of Eastern Europe, whose conflicts are now making so much trouble in the former communist countries, were also, from Hegel's perspective geschichtslose Völker.

17. Spirit individualizes itself in a series of National Spirits. Each national spirit advances to maturity and becomes conscious of itself; then it declines.

18. The new National Spirit that emerges uses the work of its predecessors as the material which it reworks, at a higher level. The present form of Spirit contains the earlier stages within itself.