

HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT

TRANSLATED BY

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These presumptuous utterances, which are in vogue in our time, are, strange to say, in a measure justified by the shallowness of the current philosophy. Yet, on the other hand, they have sprung from the same root as that against which they so thanklessly direct their attacks. Since that self-named philosophizing has declared that to know the truth is vain, it has reduced all matter of thought to the same level, resembling in this way the despotism of the Roman Empire, which equalized noble and slave, virtue and vice, honour and dishonour, knowledge and ignorance. In such a view the conceptions of truth and the laws of ethical observance are simply opinions and subjective convictions, and the most criminal principles, provided only that they are convictions, are put on a level with these laws. Thus, too, any paltry special object, be it never so flimsy, is given the same value as an interest common to all thinking men and the bonds of the established social world.

Hence it is for science a piece of good fortune that that kind of philosophizing, which might, like scholasticism, have continued to spin its notions within itself, has been brought into contact with reality. Indeed, such contact was, as we have said, inevitable. The real world is in earnest with the principles of right and duty, and in the full light of a consciousness of these principles it lives. With this world of reality philosophic cob-web spinning has come into open rupture. Now, as to genuine philosophy it is precisely its attitude to reality which has been misapprehended. Philosophy is, as I have already observed, an inquisition into the rational, and therefore the apprehension of the real and present. Hence it cannot be the exposition of a world beyond, which is merely a castle in the air, having no existence except in the terror of a one-sided and empty formalism of thought. In the following treatise I have remarked that even Plato's "*Republic*," now regarded as the byword for an empty ideal, has grasped

the essential nature of the ethical observances of the Greeks. He knew that there was breaking in upon Greek life a deeper principle, which could directly manifest itself only as an unsatisfied longing and therefore as ruin. Moved by the same longing Plato had to seek help against it, but had to conceive of the help as coming down from above, and hoped at last to have found it in an external special form of Greek ethical observance. He exhausted himself in contriving how by means of this new society to stem the tide of ruin, but succeeded only in injuring more fatally its deeper motive, the free infinite personality. Yet he has proved himself to be a great mind because the very principle and central distinguishing feature of his idea is the pivot upon which the world-wide revolution then in process turned:

What is rational is real;
And what is real is rational.

Upon this conviction stand not philosophy only but even every unsophisticated consciousness. From it also proceeds the view now under contemplation that the spiritual universe is the natural. When reflection, feeling, or whatever other form the subjective consciousness may assume, regards the present as vanity, and thinks itself to be beyond it and wiser, it finds itself in emptiness, and, as it has actuality only in the present, it is vanity throughout. Against the doctrine that the idea is a mere idea, figment or opinion, philosophy preserves the more profound view that nothing is real except the idea. Hence arises the effort to recognize in the temporal and transient the substance, which is immanent, and the eternal, which is present. The rational is synonymous with the idea, because in realizing itself it passes into external existence. It thus appears in an endless wealth of forms, figures and phenomena. It wraps its kernel round with a robe of many colours, in which consciousness finds itself at home.

Through this varied husk the conception first of all penetrates, in order to touch the pulse, and then feel it throbbing in its external manifestations. To bring to order the endlessly varied relations, which constitute the outer appearance of the rational essence is not the task of philosophy. Such material is not suitable for it, and it can well abstain from giving good advice about these things. Plato could refrain from recommending to the nurses not to stand still with children, but always to dandle them in their arms. So could Fichte forbear to construe, as they say, the supervision of passports to such a point as to demand of all suspects that not only a description of them but also their photograph, should be inserted in the pass. Philosophy now exhibits no trace of such details. These superfine concerns it may neglect all the more safely, since it shows itself of the most liberal spirit in its attitude towards the endless mass of objects and circumstances. By such a course science will escape the hate which is visited upon a multitude of circumstances and institutions by the vanity of a better knowledge. In this hate bitterness of mind finds the greatest pleasure, as it can in no other way attain to a feeling of self-esteem.

This treatise, in so far as it contains a political science, is nothing more than an attempt to conceive of and present the state as in itself rational. As a philosophic writing it must be on its guard against constructing a state as it ought to be. Philosophy cannot teach the state what it should be, but only how it, the ethical universe, is to be known.

Ἰδὸν Πόδος, ἰδὸν καὶ τὸ πῆδημα.
Hic Rhodus, hic saltus.

To apprehend what is is the task of philosophy, because what is is reason. As for the individual, every one is a son of his time; so philosophy also is its time apprehended in thoughts. It is just as foolish to fancy that any philosophy can transcend its present world, as that an indi-