

Critical Analysis of Views on History by G.W.F. Hegel

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Abstract

For G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), history is the development of the spirit in time just as nature is the development of idea in space. Consciousness of idea is spirit. The synthesis of idea, nature, and development of consciousness is history. For this reason, history and idea are interrelated. This paper is an attempt to solve the problem why Hegel's view on history is idealistic. It is because the Hegel's view on history is based on idea. This paper seeks to understand Hegel's idealistic view on history.

Introduction

Hegel (1770-1831) stood out among German classical philosophers of the 19th century. He is an outstanding philosopher of history. Hegel asserted that the world is the result of creating by some kind of object consciousness that exist outside of man – the “absolute idea”, the “universal spirit”, “Everything is the idea and has its truth by virtue of the idea alone.”, Hegel declared. The idea first develops within itself and at certain stage of its phenomena. After that the idea gives rise to human society whose history is a process of this idea. Hegel formulated the fundamental laws of dialectics. This law directs the developments of ideas and thoughts. Although there is an intellectual creation in Hegel philosophy, his view on history is regarded as idealism.

History is the Development of Spirit

Hegelian system has dealt with all the crucial, historical and spiritual events of his era. The cruelties left by the French Revolution were interpreted by Hegel as logical conclusions. For this reason he was labeled as a reactionary and for his often careless presentation, he was also greatly misunderstood.

Hegel was the first to philosophically discuss the ‘great man’ theory, Hegelian hero, like Nietzsche's ‘superman’, was misinterpreted and wrongly labeled as prototype for the subhuman of Fascism and Nazism, a legacy of Hitler. On writing of the ‘great man’ he was thinking of Napoleon as a model. From the aspect of the phenomenon of the world, no one could deny that Napoleon is an historical person. If history is the actualization of the Divine Idea the historical man must be one in whom all the potentialities of time and situation shall be focused on. But he is only a point in the world's great process connected with individual states. “World history is incomprehensible without world government. History is the development of spirit in time just as Nature is the development of the idea in Space.”

To understand Hegel's philosophy of history, it is required to comprehend the above proposition. On the whole Hegel's system is on the great development of vital reality of all aspects of the world. This idea of self consciousness is spirit, the synthesis of Idea and Nature and the development of History. History and Idea are closely related and the history is not the appearance but the reality of God for Hegel. For him it is not nature that is divine, but history.

Hegel took history as a dialectical process – a series of conflicts. Out of the struggle of thesis and antithesis surfaced the synthesis which produces a new and better way of problem of

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history to solve. This dialectical philosophy of history is the most original of Hegel and the most influential and elemental thought of Hegel the antecedent of the dialectical materialism Karl Marx.

The aim of the present discussion is to demonstrate the character of speculative philosophy of history, not to set down full history of the subject. Hegel's theories can easily be served as continuous with those we have just considered. Hegel could well have claimed to have represented the virtues of both antecedents combining the passion and strength of creative appreciated by Kant. It would require some boldness to explain and comment on Hegel's philosophy of history in a few pages, since it necessitates working out a sketch. Hegel suggests to rationally fathom out the general principle behind this activity. Hegel's completed system, the march of history, is exposed as a dialectical process and to comprehend dialectical. "For Hegel, philosophy of history is part of the philosophy of spirit, and the problem which controls its exponent is that of tracing the working of reason in particular empirical spheres." (Walsh, 1963)

This proposition leads us to the differential of philosophical as opposed to empirical or everyday history. To accomplish his job the philosopher has to take consequences of empirical history as facts, though it will not be enough to merely recreate them. He will make effort to explain history by bringing his knowledge of the idea and to raise observed contents to the warmth of necessary truth. It appears a commanding and inspiring agenda, but before we make any attempt we need to properly check Hegel's theories.

Freedom is the Sole Truth of Spirit

In Hegel's view, the reference to history is to be found in the idea of freedom that demonstrates the development of successive realization of that freedom. This citation is competent for abstract logical proof and empirical confirmation. Historical phenomena are manifestations of spirit as opposed to nature. Hegel, however, does disregard the significance of the nature background to men's actions. "It is a result of speculative philosophy that freedom is the sole truth of spirit. Matter possesses gravity in virtue of tendency towards a central point. It is essential composite, consisting of parts which exclude each other. It seeks its unity, and therefore exhibits itself as self-destructive as verging on its opposite. I could attain this it would be matter no longer, it would have perished. It strives after the realization of its idea; for in unity it exists ideally. Spirit may be defined as that which has centre in itself. It has not a unity outside itself, but has already found it, it exists in itself. Matter has its essence out of itself. Spirit is self-contained existence. Now this is freedom exactly.

A look at the real course of historical occurrences proves these abstract considerations. The process has been fulfilled by the Germanic nations of contemporary Europe who have adhered to the Christian principle of the infinite worth of individual men. They have clearly adopted the idea of liberty. This, however, does not mean, as Hegel noted, that they have accomplished it to full effect their institutions.

It remains to conclude in what sense 'freedom' to be realized in this respect; yet, the essential lines of Hegel's attitude are already obvious. Thus, a philosophical approach to history set us in possession (a) of the main motive of the drama of which history consists and (b) of the fact that the drama is divided into distinct acts.

As regards Hegel's philosophy of history there is one more aspect that should not be left: his doctrine of the moving forces in historical change. "Such men may treat other great, even sacred interests inconsiderately; conduct which indeed if obnoxious to moral

reprehension. But so mighty a form must trample down many and innocent flower, crush to pieces many an innocent in its path.”(Walsh, 1963)

It appears that skeptical nature of this judgment, and of the other components of Hegel’s doctrine produced the question whether a philosophy of history conceived on these lines can acclaim itself to moral reason. Hegel was well aware of this fact to prove the rationality of history to provide not only an intellectual clarification of the course of events, but a moral justification of it, too. His major means of tackling with the problem was by exposing that the true ethical unit is not the isolated individually but the ‘moral organism’- the state of society in which he was reared up, and that the assertions of the last-mentioned must take precedence over those of the former.

Conclusion

For Hegel, philosophy of history is a part of the philosophy of spirit. He said that History is the development of the spirit in time just as nature is the development of idea in space. Then, Hegel regarded consciousness of idea as spirit and the synthesis of idea, nature, and development of consciousness is history. In addition, he defined the meaning of freedom as the sole truth of spirit. For this reason, history and idea are so interrelated in his view on history that Hegel’s philosophy of history is idealistic. We can say that Hegel’s view on history is not practical. It is because that Hegel’s view on history is based on idea only, not on “man matter most.”

References

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