

# Perceptions of History. In Pursuit of the Absolute in Passing Time

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The way human history has been perceived through the ages – by historians, theologians, philosophers, and ordinary mortals – is itself a topic for a historical study. Our attempt will be more modest, as we shall try to analyse some prominent examples of such perception. Our approach will be illuminated by the notions of the *transient* and the *absolute*, as they are attributed, in various ways, to the historical manifestations by historiographers and historiosophers.

On the face of it, it would seem that history, in contrast to the physical science, belongs entirely to the domain of the transient. Whereas science tries to capture the flood of phenomena in the net of predictive and quantifiable laws and is intent on formulating absolute laws which govern nature, nothing of the sort would be applicable to historical events. There can be no Newton in history. The ‘gravitation’ or ‘anti-gravitation’ of nations, or other social entities, eludes the rigours of scientific formulation, and remains, at best, an object of mere speculation.

Any observer, faced with what are usually regarded as historical data, will be bewildered by a chaos of events. An attempt to comprehend them will make him confront interests, ideals, wills, emanating from or expressed by individuals, social classes, nations, religious entities. These interests, ideals, wills – related to various and diverse agents – change, collide, combine, split. While individual events, occasionally even trends, can be related to that interplay of multiple agents, this is only *a posteriori* and no reliable predictions can be made.

Indeed, even the explanation *after* event is not universally accepted, whether by laymen or professional historians. The flux of events antecedent to the occurrence can be combined in diverse ways to suggest a plausible explanation. The flow of events emanating from the flux of possible causes is followed by a chaos of interpretations. Diversity and transiency seem to be the rule.

The upshot of it all is that history is hardly a discipline, let alone a science. History covers the flood of events and considers their possible causal antecedents, but it fails to bring order and comprehension into this deluge. It is merely a delineation and a delimitation of a domain, but in no way a master of it. We can define the events of the past as historical, but this is merely an act of classification, not of comprehension.

Yet, this common-sense conclusion is only one side of the medal. The other side reveals a perception of history which conveys a sense of a real entity, of a concrete though mysterious being. People refer to ‘history’ – sometimes meaning thereby the discipline and sometimes the reality which is covered by study and general awareness – with deference and awe. ‘He will leave a mark on history,’ ‘He wants to be remembered in history,’ ‘How will history judge him?’ – are some of the statements which express and exemplify this

perception. Referring to the student of history, rather than a historical agent, it may be said that 'He fathomed the historical truth,' or 'He uncovered the mysteries of history'.

Such phrasing is not trivial or merely a convenient mode of speech indicating personal ambitions of megalomaniacs, or their admirers, or the achievements of scholars. These statements reveal a concept of history which, in a way, is antithetical to the one expounded before. History is conceived here as a total, independent entity, with its own momentum, essence, life. Paradoxically, history is perceived here as a transhistorical entity. Though it has some indefinite beginning in the past, like the scanty sources of a river which cannot be determined, its ever-increasing flow has no end in sight. The countless events may appear chaotic and transient, but they all combine into an overpowering unity, into an absolute, which is history. To be associated with it, either as a notable actor, or as a profound inquirer and interpreter, is to get hold of the absolute.

These two opposed perceptions of history, as transiency and chaos or as an absolute and even orderly entity, have vied with each other in the history of historiography. Usually the historian or the philosopher of history took into consideration both of these contradictory notions, trying to resolve the contradiction in his own pragmatic or philosophical way. Occasionally the stance became weighed towards one of the extremes. The overall result has been a variety of historical perceptions.

We shall attempt to explore several cardinal approaches in this respect, and, looking at them from our perspective, see how the principles of the absolute and the transient are combined in them. Of course, we shall have also to look into the nature of the absolute in history, and sometimes into the nature of the transient. For in one case the absolute may be a mysterious force and in another God, in still another some regulating law or principle.

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Antiquity exhibits two profoundly different perceptions of history. One dominated the Greek historiography, while the other was expressed in the Hebrew texts and exerted a major influence on the early Christian view of history.

The Greek perception shows a profound awareness of human weakness and transiency in face to the forces that control history, even if no consensus about the nature of such forces is attained. The view is profoundly pessimistic, for it depicts individuals, cities and nations as pawns in the hands of powers which are beyond human control, and, in the opinion of some historians, beyond man's comprehension. Man and society are thus manipulated by some absolute factors with which there is no way of communicating, let alone influencing them.

Herodotus (484–c.425 BC), the so-called father of history, illustrates this somewhat summary conception of the forces which control history with the story of Polycrates, which may be a mixture of a factual account and a parable. Polycrates was an unusually successful ruler of Samos. His unqualified success induced his friend, the king of Egypt, to warn him that it might be a sign of an impending disaster, for it might arouse the envy of gods. When Polycrates, following the king's counsel, throws into the sea a precious ring, in order to mar his happiness, the ring is found in the entails of a fish which he is served. This unusual luck is the portent of a disaster that follows, namely, the death of Polycrates at the hands of a Persian satrap.<sup>1</sup>

What Herodotus conveys in this story is the basic unreliability of historical luck. The continuous and consistent success of a historical figure is in no way an indication of

future success or a happy ending. There are some mysterious forces – whether envy of gods, or fate, or fortune – which put a spoke in the wheel of human success. These forces are implacable and cannot be bought off by a sacrifice. There is no way of understanding them, as there is no way of influencing them. They are absolute and even the tyrant is at their mercy, or rather would be at their mercy if they were endowed with compassion – which evidently they are not. Thus, it would seem, humanity is tossed on the waves of history by powerful winds, with little capacity left for the sailors to steer the desired course, or even to unravel the direction of the winds.

Thucydides (460–400 BC) is a straight historian who refrains from parables and speculations about the metaphysical foundation of human affairs. His approach is purely scholarly or scientific. He presents the facts and he tries to explain them by pointing to human passions and national interests, or assumed interests. In other words, he tries to comprehend the historical events by exploring the naturalistic causal chains, rather than looking for super-natural or metaphysical forces.

This does not mean that his approach to history results in a simple, cohesive, self-contained account. His *History of the Peloponnesian War* is permeated with a sense of tragedy, accentuated by such events as the plague in Athens, Athenian ruthlessness in dealing with Melos, the military catastrophe of the Athenian forces in Syracuse, the civil war in Korkyra. All these events are explicable and explained, either by physical circumstances (the plague), or by the arrogance of power (Melos), or by political ambitions and strategic mistakes (Syracuse), or by unbridled and destructive passions (Korkyra). The sense of tragedy is derived from the contrast between the events with the reasons underlying them, and the sense of censure and commiseration on the part of Thucydides the man. The historian narrates and explains, while the man contemplates the results and deplures. Man, civilized man, applies moral censure to the events of history, but history proceeds on its course independent of such a judgment.<sup>2</sup>

History in the perception of Thucydides is not governed by some absolute mysterious force – whether Fate, or envious deity. It is the outcome of human folly, greed and other uncontrolled passions, it is the result of changing and conflicting forces – a chaotic flux. Vis-à-vis this confusion, the rational man forms his own – one could say, absolute – judgment, based on reason, good sense, consideration of others. But this judgment is ineffectual and apparently cannot change the disastrous avalanche of history. In the last resort, humanity remains the victim of historical forces, even if these forces have to be sought primarily in the perverse nature of man. Essentially, this control of the human condition by the darker side of human nature is not really different from the alleged control by extraneous forces. It only adds an ironic twist to human tragedy, because man himself is the agent of his calamity.

Polybius (204–122 BC) seems to return to the outright metaphysical perception of history and he looks for an extraneous explanation of the gap between human endeavour and human fortunes, as the following statement indicates:

I have watched the workings of Fortune; I know her genius for envious dealing with Mankind; and I also know that her empire is most absolute over just those oases inhuman life in which the victim fancies his sojourn to be most delectable and most secure.<sup>3</sup>

There is a difference between Thucydides and his predecessor and his follower. As already indicated, they relegate the responsibility for human misfortune to superior powers,

while he sees man as the author of his misfortunes. Moreover, Herodotus and Polybius seem to imply that, though the human agent in history may pursue a sensible course, this is without beneficial effect, while Thucydides sees in the faulty action the primary cause of calamitous results. Yet, the three major historians seem to agree that history is not, by and large, the outcome of an intended action, and that in the last resort human action fails to achieve a blissful and peaceful state for humanity. In the historical process, man is presented as a victim of his own folly of mysterious forces. The historian, as an objective and rational man, observes this tragic phenomenon, but cannot do anything to change it. Reason and morality are divorced from historical reality. There is no rhyme and reason, no sense of an absolute salutary principle, in the transiency of historical happening.

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This attitude is diametrically opposed in the ancient Israelite perception of history. There is no separation here between reason and reality. There is no schism between moral judgment and historical events. Right and wrong are not merely concepts of the observer of historical events, which are absent from history. These moral principles govern history itself. Indeed, history is the enactment of morality, it is the meting out of reward and punishment to nations for their right or wrong behaviour.

To effect this connection between the realm of moral judgment and the course of historical events, between the absolute yardstick of right and wrong and the transient fortunes of peoples, the Israelite world-view has recourse to God. God in the biblical perception is not only the creator of nature; He is also the ultimate power behind historical events. He controls history, and, in agreement with His nature, does so according to the principles of morality.

Thus, the absolute power which is behind the transiency of historical events is not some mystifying Fate, or some selfish amoral divinity, but a God whose guiding principle is known and understood by man. The historian need not despair, as Thucydides seems to. He can rejoice, both because he understands the course of events and because this course agrees with his own absolute moral concepts.

The idea of the moral control of history by God is expressed in various passages in the Bible. It is primarily shown in the divine interference in the history of Israel. God designs that Abraham 'become a great and mighty nation,'<sup>4</sup> and consequently He takes the children of Israel out of Egypt and leads them to the Land of Canaan. These acts of God, as many others, are not perceived as arbitrary expressions of divine whim, or mysterious will. They are, as a rule, understood to be motivated by moral considerations. It is Abraham's personal merit that seems to entitle him to become a great nation. The nations inhabiting the Promised Land will be dispossessed as a punishment for their transgression: it is 'for the wickedness of these nations' that the Lord 'doth drive them out.'<sup>5</sup>

There is no simple ascendancy of the powerful over the weak: the historical change occurs because of considerations of justice. Characteristically, the arrogance of the Assyrian king who boasts that his conquests are due to his strength and wisdom – a combination of military might and *Realpolitik*, as we might put it today – is derided. 'Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?'<sup>6</sup> God is the hewer and the Assyrian king a mere axe, and the notion of the sovereign will of the mighty king or nation who can follow their unbridled ambition is fundamentally mistaken.

God rules history and He rules it in accordance with moral principles. Therefore, He will punish the arrogance of the Assyrian king, as He will punish the king of Babylon, so that it will be said about him: 'The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers.'<sup>7</sup> Similarly, relentless divine punishment will be inflicted on Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, in the thundering prophecies of Amos, for the cruelty of these nations or cities to other nations.<sup>8</sup> Inhumanity and atrocities in international conflicts are morally revolting, and consequently lead to divine retribution.

The rule of justice in history is in no way restricted to the gentile nations. Israel must submit to it, too. Indeed, divine judgment, if anything, focuses particularly on the chosen people: 'Only you have I loved of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your sins.'<sup>9</sup> Thus, the book of Judges interprets the successive oppression of the tribes of Israel by various nations as the consequence of Israel's transgressions, as it attributes the tribes' salvation to their turning to God for help.<sup>10</sup> The rulers of Israel are subject to the moral law, and to divine punishment for transgressions, as well. The sin of Saul, the first king of Israel – though we may question whether the censure, as expressed by Samuel, was right – is viewed as the justification for the downfall of his dynasty and the transfer of the rule over Israel to another one.<sup>11</sup> David's unquestionable sin against Uriah the Hittite is punished by the rebellion of Absalom and the attendant disgrace of the king's household.<sup>12</sup> Ahab's sin against Naboth brings about the horrible prophecy of Elijah about the king's downfall and his ignominious death.<sup>13</sup> Above all, the national catastrophe of the kingdom of Israel at the hands of Assyria, Israel's downfall and exile, is given moral justification by the biblical historiographer:

And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria . . . Because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed his covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them.<sup>14</sup>

The downfall and exile of the kingdom of Judah at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, is explained and justified in the same spirit.<sup>15</sup>

If this notion of history seems to submit the course of human events to the mastery of God, acting according to moral yardsticks, it is important to note that man is not regarded as an impotent pawn at the mercy of such absolute powers. For man, man as an agent in history, has the freedom to choose between right and wrong. In this he is sovereign, and his will is not bound by, or subject to, other factors. Only that he must keep in mind that his choice has certain consequences. Of this Israel is reminded, in the biblical story, *a priori*, at the beginning of its history:

And it shall be, because ye will hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the Lord thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the good will . . . And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee . . .<sup>16</sup>

As the right conduct is rewarded with the people's fortunes, so the sinful behaviour entails national punishment:

And it shall be, if thou forget altogether the Lord thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and bow before them, I testify to you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroyeth before thee, so shall ye perish . . .<sup>17</sup>

Thus, it can be said that in the Hebrew notion of history the transiency of events is subject to three absolutes: the absolute will and power of God, the absolute of ethical judgement which is the yardstick of God's action, and the absolute free choice of the nation and its leaders. The combination of these factors provides a meaningful and just interpretation of historical events, as well as guidance for the human agents and participants in the historical process.

Yet, this seemingly perfect conception of history was not without flaws. The adherents to this belief could not ignore the fact that the evidence of history does not always corroborate the optimistic and just scheme of things. They must have observed that sometimes the righteous nation suffered and the wicked one prospered – at least for the time being. Though doubts of this kind about the effective rule of justice are usually expressed in respect of the individual, one can also find them addressed to a collective, national situation, as in the following Psalm:

O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have turned Jerusalem into ruins. The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of thy righteous unto the beasts of the earth . . . How long, O Lord? wilt thou be angry for ever? . . .<sup>18</sup>

To allay such queries and doubts, the belief was formed in an eventual situation which will supersede the drama of history and embody constant peace and prosperity. Apparently, the weakness or the evil impulse, which makes man and nation go astray, will disappear, so that perpetual bliss may be established. The following lines can serve as a terse biblical representation of this future order, which refers to Israel and to other nations:

. . . nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid . . .<sup>19</sup>

The idyllic picture is relegated to the so-called 'last days,' or 'the end of days' to translate the Hebrew wording literally. Such a phrase may imply two connotations. It may mean a time outside history, as the *end* of time suggests. But it may also mean simply some distant future in the sequence of time, and so a fragment of future history. Possibly the ambiguity is intentional. It emphasizes the extraordinary, meta-historical nature of the future bliss, which will put an end to the turbulence of history and enthrone an idyllic situation, an absolute perfection which will not change. But it also conveys the notion that this absolute is not a mere ideal, hope, demand, but a state which will take place in time, which will be realized in the sequence of the flux of history, though putting an end to it. The eschatological expectation when fulfilled will be both a divine act and a historical event – a synthesis which is consistent with the Israelite perception of history.

There is no need, in the present context, to trace the impact of the Israelite perception of history on Christianity, and the changes and modifications which the biblical notions in this regard have undergone. There is, however, one aspect of the Christian attitude, as expressed in the early stages of Christianity, which should be mentioned here.

This element, which is of major philosophical significance, and has had historical repercussions in the attitude of the Church to states and rulers, is the moral judgment of

historical events and deeds. The point is clearly expressed by Augustinus who insists that historical personalities and political entities be judged by moral standards and not by such considerations as supposed 'greatness' or actual influence on social and political reality. He puts it in an epigrammatic statement: *Remota itaque iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia?* ('Justice being taken away, then, what are kingdoms but great robberies?') The abstract point is underlined by quoting the example of Alexander the Great, who is regarded as no more than a robber on a grand scale.<sup>20</sup>

While this stand is clearly implied in Isaiah's censure of the king of Assyria and other biblical passages, the Augustinian formulation in *general* terms, underscored by the example of the much admired Alexander, is a significant and vigorous reaffirmation of the opposition to the respect for force and reality in politics and historical evaluation, an attitude prevalent in any age. It is also a rejection of the notion – based on respect for force and reality – that history and its great men must not be judged by the yardsticks of ordinary morality. Such notions, occasionally elevated to the level of a philosophical principle, as we shall see further, are categorically repudiated. In this respect Augustinus faithfully echoes the biblical stance, of course. It is the moral standard that remains the absolute, and the happenings of history, whatever their dimension, must submit to the judgment of the absolute.<sup>21</sup>

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Modern times witness some novel approaches to history. One is related to the so-called Age of Reason, or Enlightenment, of the eighteenth century, though, as usual in such chronological demarcations, the roots of the new ideas go back to the seventeenth century, and the consequences reach forward to the nineteenth.

One could characterize a major trend on the historical conception of that age as the planning and designing of history, and the designers could be regarded as historical engineers. This may be viewed as a strange and unusual attitude, for, broadly speaking, history has been regarded as a process following its own peculiar ways and resistant to deliberate engineering, comparable, say, to biological process. The closest to the notion of design in the traditional conception of history would be the planning attributed to God, which remains sufficiently mystifying to be able to coexist with the tortuous process of historical evolution. As we have seen, even in the Israelite conception of divine design, it is seen as not always clearly reflected in reality, not always up to the believers' expectations. History remains perplexing enough to be looked at with awe and concern, and consolation is sought in eschatological expectations.

The 'historical engineers,' however, do not seem to be perplexed at all. They look down on history from the lofty range of reason – sometimes with approval, mostly with disdain. In a way, their approach is ahistorical. The transient events and institutions of the past, or the present, have no intrinsic merit or weight by virtue of their existence. They are judged by the enlightened, rational man in an objective manner, and accordingly approved of or disparaged. It is the rational judgment that is the absolute here, and the passing events depend on this unbiassed verdict of the man of reason.

Moreover, man can not only judge, but he can also plan and act. He can 'engineer' history. Therefore, without regard for the past, for the possible momentum of institutions and events, he can build a better future. Future history need not be constrained to past history. The change, if reason so requires, may be radical and revolutionary. The French

Revolution, in disregarding the past – the political institutions, the class privileges, the military organization, even the names of the months – lived up to the perception of the free construction of future history. There is the flow of events on one side, and there is the judgment of reason on the other side – a judgment absolute, atemporal; it is for the reason to shape events, not the other way round.

This division between history and reason could be seen as the re-emergence of the ancient Greek conception of history in which man felt alien to the fate which controlled his affairs, or in which the rational and humane historian confronted the uncontrollable passions that shaped history. There is, however, a crucial difference between antiquity and the Enlightenment in this matter. The Greeks saw the schism between history and reason and despaired. They saw the rational man as impotent in the face of the historical forces – whatever their nature. History was ruled by the absolute which man, despite his good sense – or even absolute reason – could not control. The Enlightenment writers, on the other hand, had confidence in the capacity of man to affect the fortunes of man, to set right the institutions, to control passion and unreason, to put an end to the inertia of the past. They strove to overcome the schism between rational man and irrational history by attempting to shape history to the specifications of reason and humaneness.

While most of the engineers of history were not historians themselves – perhaps because they did not see much sense in exploring the imperfect past – those who did look back did so applying strict value judgment. The following statement of Voltaire (1694–1778), who was also a historian, is a testimony to this moral stance which informs his approach. Having gone through the immense cycle of revolutions that the world has experienced since the time of Charlemagne, he asks himself to what they have all tended, concluding that it is to desolation and the loss of millions of lives! Every great event, he writes, has been a capital misfortune. History has kept no account of times of peace and tranquility; it relates only ravages and disasters.<sup>22</sup>

Voltaire provides an explanation for the tragedy of history:

As nature has placed in the heart of man interest, pride, and all the passions, it is no wonder that, during a period of about six centuries, we meet with almost a continual succession of crimes and disasters. If we go back to earlier ages, we shall find them no better.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, the overall pessimistic view of man and his history does not prevent Voltaire from pointing to salutary manifestations, such as restrictions on arbitrary power, occasional tolerance, and the wisdom of the English form of government.<sup>24</sup> Reason, in its objectivity, sees the bad and the good!

Moreover, and this is the foremost characteristic of the age, Voltaire easily and eagerly embarks on schemes for changing the bad situation, for constructing a new and desirable – indeed, perfect – social order. Here is an example of such an outburst of optimism, strikingly naive and rather astonishing in a man with a caustic view of human nature. In a letter addressed to Frederick the Great, king of Prussia, apparently motivated by the intention of encouraging Enlightenment policies (even if the statement is coloured by flattery); he observes that any prince who loves truth and detests persecution and superstition can ‘bring back the golden age to his dominions’.<sup>25</sup>

The designs for the right kind of future exhibit a considerable variety. They include such relatively moderate recommendations for political reform as the separation of powers, advocated in Montesquieu’s *Esprit des lois* (1748), ardent republicanism in Rousseau’s *Du*



*contrat social* (1762), and communism in Morelly's *La code de la nature* (1755). In the domain of international relations, the long history of conflicts and wars among European nations can be radically and permanently changed by adopting the plans for international arbitration and the establishment of a common force by various nations, as recommended by Abbé de Saint-Pierre.<sup>26</sup> The so-called Utopian Socialists, mostly French but including the English Robert Owen (1771–1858), designed, and occasionally constructed, their perfect communities to set society on what they considered the right path.

The guiding principles in constructing the future were liberty, equality, humane attitude to one's fellow beings. In fact, the revolutionary slogan *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* is a fair, if somewhat abstract, summation of the ideals of the Enlightenment. Liberty could be interpreted as freedom from tyranny, from prejudice, political freedom of participation in government, freedom of speech. Equality could range from political equality to economic communism. Fraternity could encompass any social virtue. Often the moral principles were expressed as the natural, inalienable, absolute rights of man. Thus Diderot referred to man's 'inalienable property, liberty, life, wealth.'<sup>27</sup> This, of course, echoes John Locke's assertion that 'no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions.'<sup>28</sup>

It is outside the scope of the present study to explore the ethical system underlying the Age of Reason, its foundations, and its possible flaws and inconsistencies. What is of interest to us in the present context is the fact that the would-be engineers of history consciously based their solutions and designs on ethical principles which they believed to be right and absolute.

Indeed, in this sense, they followed – probably unwittingly – in the path paved by the Bible. There is the absolutely right way which should guide society and if this is done, the road to bliss and salvation is assured. The basic difference between the old and the new way was, that it was not the Lord's commandments that were the embodiment of the right way, and it was not the Almighty who awarded recompense. In the view of the Enlightenment, the ethical principles and their practical application in political and social life could be found out and formulated by man himself. In the radical words of Holbach (1723–1789):

To discover the true principles of morality, men have no need of theology, of revelation, or of gods; they need only common sense . . . Let us persuade men to be just, beneficent, moderate, sociable, not because the gods demand it, but because it is a pleasure to men . . .<sup>29</sup>

Thus, human history can be set on the right and blissful way not by human *obedience* to God's just commandments, but by human *formulation* of moral laws and the ways in which they are applied. Man is not subject to divine authority; he becomes the authority himself. One could add, in Kantian phrasing, that instead of being subject to a heteronomous principle, man becomes autonomous.

Yet, if one looks at the Bible as the expression of the ancient Israelite civilization, one would see biblical theology as the form in which the fundamental philosophy of the nation was expressed. This philosophy, then, would be seen as fundamentally committed to the ethical way of life, and its creation of a theological framework would be a means to provide a divine sanction for man's right conduct. Thus, in the ultimate sense, the ethical foundation of the civilization would have been established autonomously, even though it

chose to hide its absolute moral conviction behind the concept of another absolute, the omnipotent and just God.

The approach of the historical engineers suggests that, once their designs are realized, society will become flawless. This implies that history would then cease being a series of conflicts and cataclysms. The future would be blissful in a manner comparable to the eschatological visions of an Isaiah or a Micah. To be sure, this perfect state would be achieved not through any miraculous event, nor at the 'end of days;' it would be accomplished by men of good sense and good will convincing others endowed with the same qualities; and it could be done here and now. The change would be effected not by God for men, but by men for men. In this sense, it will not be a transcendent occurrence, but an immanent change.

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Interestingly, there were some philosophies of that age which were not satisfied with the *advocacy* of the establishment of the new perfect world through human effort, but which saw it *develop* in the historical process – i.e. in the sequence of events that had started in the past. For them it was not merely the possibility of reaching the eschatological bliss that was open to man. They saw the development towards perfection as immanent to the historical process itself, even if they may have assumed that human effort remained a significant factor for obtaining the worthy ideal. In short, they believed in progress.

One prominent representative of this school of thought was Condorcet (1743–1794). One essential element of his thesis of historical progress is that the changes in the human condition are not merely the result of incidental actions on the part of historical figures or collective agents. Even though individuals of genius can contribute to the pace of historical advancement, the overall progress of humanity is the outcome of certain laws, in a way comparable to bio-psychological laws as they affect the individual. Indeed, Condorcet suggests here a direct connection between the individual and society. Speaking of social progress, he makes the following statement: 'This progress is subject to the same general laws which can be observed in the individual development of our faculties, because it is the result of this development envisaged at one and the same time in a great number of individuals united in a society.'<sup>30</sup> Building on these somewhat simplistic assumptions, Condorcet proclaims that the perfectibility of man is actually limitless, and that 'the progress of this perfectibility . . . has no limit.'<sup>31</sup>

This approach also implies a definition of the normative aspect of Progress. This concept indicates a change for the better, and, to understand the nature of Progress, one has to know how 'good' or 'better' is determined. While Condorcet does not approach the problem in such a strict systematic manner, it is not difficult to find his yardsticks of good and of improvement. Thus, he sees history as marching 'towards truth and happiness.'<sup>32</sup> These normative principles are broad enough to accommodate under their umbrella the development of material civilization and a sense of security (essential to happiness, one would assume), and the growth of leisure, which facilitates meditation and hence art and science (pursuit of truth). Condorcet also stresses the value of such communication capabilities as writing, the invention of a phonetic alphabet and of printing: all of these, obviously, promoted the acquisition and the spread of knowledge. He also speaks of human relations and political institutions, which broadens his concept of basic values beyond truth and happiness to the realm of social ethics.

With these basic assumptions, Condorcet forms a perspective on human history. He divides it into nine epochs, starting with primitive hunting and fishing hordes, passing through the pastoral stage to an agricultural society, with its greater economic wealth, more leisure, more science. He then proceeds through various historical epochs, starting with the fourth of ancient Greece, to the eighth covering the period 'From the invention of printing to the time when the sciences and philosophy shook off the yoke of authority,'<sup>33</sup> and when such illustrious names as Copernicus, Galileo, Hobbes, Bacon, Corneille provide landmarks of Progress in various fields of intellectual endeavour. The ninth epoch, Condorcet's own, reaches new heights of Progress, primarily in the achievements of political liberty and equality of rights in the American and French revolutions, and in the broad-range development in the sciences. While the latter testifies to the advancement of reason, the former brought about a great step forward in social morality:

Thus, nobody dared any more to divide men into two different species, one of which is destined to rule, the other to obey, one to lie, the other to be cheated; it was necessary to acknowledge that all have an equal right . . .<sup>34</sup>

Condorcet's ardent belief in human progress is somewhat curtailed by the realization of the unsalutary aspects of human history. He has to admit the manifestations of tyranny and despotism, of iniquity and slavery, of prejudice and superstition. It is the overcoming of such deficiencies and evils that mark the advancement of humanity, and their presence proves that such advancement is not a smooth continuous process. Indeed, some epochs are outright repressive, as exemplified in the following characterization of the early middle ages:

In this disastrous epoch we shall see the human spirit rapidly declining . . . and ignorance dragging behind itself, here ferocity, there refined cruelty, everywhere corruption and perfidy . . . Theological reveries, superstitious deceptions, are the only genius of men, religious intolerance their only morality; and Europe, squeezed between priestly tyranny and military despotism, awaits in blood and tears the moment when new lights will permit her to be born again to liberty, to humanity and to virtue.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, in spite of impediments and serious setbacks, which are fully admitted, the overall trend of history remains Progress.

Condorcet does not limit himself to the discovery of progress in the past. Based on the historical experience, he also predicts the steps of progress in the future, in what he defines as the tenth epoch. Here the anticipated achievements are of an overwhelming scope, though Condorcet summarizes them in a brief formula:

Our hopes for the future condition of mankind can be reduced to the following three important points: the destruction of inequality among nations; the progress of equality within a nation; finally, the real improvement of man.<sup>36</sup>

Condorcet anticipates that every nation will attain the level of civilization of the French and the Anglo-Americans of his days, which includes political freedom. He hopes that the social class differences, due to knowledge or riches (characteristics of civilized peoples), will progressively weaken. He also looks forward to the improvement of the human

species by perfecting man's intellectual, moral and physical faculties, as well as through the advancement of science and prosperity.

These high expectations are allegedly inferred from the observation and examination of past progress. It is in the analysis of this past that we find 'the strongest grounds to believe that nature has not put any limits on our hopes.'<sup>37</sup> In fact, Condorcet's position can be reversed and it may be suggested that it is his vision of the future that sheds light and provides meaning for his interpretation of the past. The concept of Progress is essentially rooted in a teleological approach, the *telos*, the end providing the guidance for the normative reading of the past.

It is noteworthy that the future is painted by Condorcet in such beautiful colours. Indeed, the image of the longed for and anticipated future reveals a striking affinity to the eschatological prophecies in the Bible. Despite the Enlightenment's tendency to dissociate itself from religion and even to discredit it, it displays a penchant for the picture of the perfect bliss, which was foreshadowed by the prophets of ancient Israel. They may have proclaimed that 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord,'<sup>38</sup> while Condorcet referred to Reason, but the essential message and tenor are strikingly alike, as the following words show: 'The moment will then arrive when the sun will not shine on earth but on free men who recognize no other master but their reason, when tyrants and slaves, priests and their stupid or hypocritical tools, will no longer exist . . .'<sup>39</sup> The biblical vision of eternal peace also reverberates in Condorcet's image of the future: 'The nations, being more enlightened, will gradually learn to regard war as the most fatal scourge [le fléau le plus funeste], as the greatest of crimes.'<sup>40</sup>

Despite this affinity between the biblical view of the last days and the picture painted by Condorcet, there is a noteworthy difference between them. In the biblical conception the absolutely perfect future appears in a dramatic conflict with the transient and miserable history, while in the case of Condorcet the future bliss emerges from the past, and does so gradually. The rule of reason and liberty can already be discerned in France and some other nations; eventually it will become universal. It is existing institutions that 'will accelerate the progress of that fraternity of nations;' it will not be achieved by the imposition of philosophical solutions,<sup>41</sup> or, we might add, by the messianic or divine realization of prophetic dreams. The future may be viewed as *contrasting* with the past and the present, but it is not in *conflict* with them. On the contrary, it proceeds from them.

If we choose to look at Condorcet's thesis in a teleological perspective, the future sets the absolute standard towards which history gradually advances. History is not a meaningless and senseless process. The absolute is, to some extent, immanent to the chaos of events and is destined eventually to supersede it.

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The notion that the absolute is immanent in history was driven to the extreme in the philosophy of history of Hegel (1770–1831). Here history is conceived as the expression of an absolute entity, to which Hegel refers to, somewhat laxly, as Reason (*Vernunft*), Spirit (*Geist*), World Spirit (*Weltgeist*), Idea, Substance, Might (*Macht*), Divine Providence (*göttliche Vorsehung*).<sup>42</sup> Unlike in the Judeo-Christian approach, which sees God as outside history though interfering with it and controlling it, in Hegel's system the World Spirit unfolds itself in the grand transactions of history. In his own words, 'Reason is immanent to the historical happening, and fulfils itself in it and through it.'<sup>43</sup> Nor should the Hegelian

approach be confused with the immanence of the absolute in Condorcet's philosophy. For there Progress is a lengthy process, full of imperfections, and it also depends on human involvement and participation, that is to say, on human will. Human determination is an essential factor in the advancement of mankind. In the case of Hegel the absolute, though revealing itself in history through human action, is the expression of the will of the Spirit and not of man. The Spirit is sovereign in unfolding itself in history. Whatever happens in history is only the unveiling of the Spirit. One could say that Hegel has a pantheistic concept of history.

The absolute in Hegel's philosophy has some peculiar, if contradictory, characteristics. On the one hand, the enactment of the Spirit in history is rational – as noted, the absolute is also referred to as Reason. Being rational it is also necessary, in the sense that a logical proposition is necessary. Thus, the assertion that world history is 'the rational, necessary march of the World Spirit,'<sup>44</sup> would indicate that one should see history as an enactment of Euclidian geometry, though the rules of logic in the case of history may be different. On the other hand, however, Hegel claims that the Spirit, by its very nature, is free.<sup>45</sup> The apparent reason for this paradoxical position is that Hegel wants to combine the notion of Reason and the concomitant principle of logical necessity with the notion of God who must not be bound by any principle. As this combination, when addressed to pantheistic history, means the coexistence of freedom and necessity, it becomes rather perplexing. Such a contradiction is avoided in the biblical notion of history, where God establishes the absolute and unavoidable rules, while man has the absolute freedom of choosing his behaviour. Two agents can act each on the premise of his own absolute principle without incurring a paradoxical situation. Attributing two contradictory absolutes to one agent leads to a paradox.

The different approaches of the Bible and Hegel are not only of logical interest, but carry consequences for the perception of history. In the case of the Bible the drama of history is enacted between God and humanity, or different sectors of humanity, and, though the divine judgment of reward and punishment is a predictable constant, the free will of men makes the flow of history unpredictable. In Hegelian theory, the Spirit is the only agent that counts, and as he acts in accordance with reason or logic – *pace* his freedom – the course of history can be predicted.

Hegel thought that he could trace the course of the divine self-enactment in history. It is characterized by change (*Veränderung*), which we perceive in the flux of events and the succession of civilizations. This is not a cyclical process, like the phoenix-like rejuvenation in nature, but a spiral of improvement or progress: '[The Spirit's] changes . . . are not merely returns to the same form, but rather its own improvements.'<sup>46</sup> This progress of the World Spirit, unfolded through the succession of civilizations, is not an easy process, but involves the Spirit's 'hard unending fight with itself.'<sup>47</sup> It is being realized in a dialectical manner – the 'dialogue' conducted, as it were, in and through historical reality, in which one dominant nation is replaced by another in a spiral of a monumental struggle towards perfection.

The peculiarity of this conclusion is that Hegel's absolute – whether Spirit or Reason – unlike the God of monotheistic religions or of the Greek philosophers, is evolving. This is a revolutionary concept, for the very idea of God normally assumes perfection beyond which there can be no perfection, and thus no place for improvement. Hegel seems to cling to both, the absolute nature of the Spirit and its dynamic changing nature. Thus he

makes a somewhat mystifying statement: 'The Spirit acts in accordance with its own essence: it turns itself into what it really is.'<sup>48</sup> The reason for this tortuous argument of Hegel is easy to uncover. If the absolute enacts itself in history, and if history is – as is undeniable – a manifestation of change, the absolute must change too. Yet, Spirit, Reason, being the absolute in the first place, cannot but be the author of their own change and improvement. If the Spirit enacts itself in history, history itself becomes absolute. If history is deified, instability and chaos themselves turn into the absolute.

Who, then, remains transient, insignificant? This position is reserved for man. Man is not an independent agent in history. The alleged heroes in history, while believing they follow their own objectives, in fact act in accordance with divine Providence. They merely are, as Hegel puts it, 'the business managers of the World Spirit.'<sup>49</sup>

What about the clash of interests, of conflicting passions, of dangers, afflictions, tragedies, in which history, as seen by ordinary human beings, abounds? What about the actions of men – wars, iniquities, cruelty, inflicted by one nation on another? What is the place of misery and of evil in the pantheistic conception of history? How are they related to the divine presence in history? The answer is that they are of no importance. Hegel, of course, cannot ignore their presence and their relevance to the well-being of individuals and societies. Yet, from the perspective of the god of history, they do not count. Hegel speaks of history as a 'slaughter-bench on which the happiness of nations, the wisdom of states, and the virtues of individuals were sacrificed.'<sup>50</sup> He does not protest against this sacrifice; he accepts it as the order of things, he bows before this enactment of the absolute. Misery and morality, in the ordinary sense of the word, are expendable.

The World Spirit, as we have seen, expresses itself in history. Its vehicle is the nation (*Volk*), or the State (*Staat*), and the Spirit gives dominance to one nation, till it decides to elevate another, which expresses a higher civilization. Thus, while the specific nation or state is a transient manifestation in history, the state as such is a constant entity for the historical revelation of the absolute. In Hegel's words, 'the state is the divine idea, as it is present on earth.'<sup>51</sup> The ascendancy of a major state, such as Rome or the German Empire, is a divine manifestation, which must be accepted as necessary, rational and right.

The implications of Hegel's conception of history are far-reaching. They mean that political reality, the verdict of history, must be accepted as it is. The manifestation of power is not an issue for criticism and controversy, but a phenomenon to which one must submit.

This position is not taken merely as a pragmatic step, or a common-sense conclusion of powerless individuals. It is not the acquiescence with Fate or Fortune, or other uncontrollable powers of an ancient Greek historian – an acquiescence which retains an element of human dissatisfaction, or even despair. The Hegelian acceptance of historical reality is embraced with full approval, for this reality expresses the march of God, of Reason, of absolute ethical principles. Hegel accepts the divine manifestation in history as the Israelites accepted God's moral control of it.

There is, however, a profound difference between the two. In the case of the Israelites, God's control adhered to the principles of morality which had the same meaning for man and for God. In the case of Hegel, the way of God in history has no connection to human morality. God's principles are of an entirely different order and, as we have seen, disregard man's misery and virtue. Indeed, for all practical purpose, the Spirit's way is amoral.

It is amoral, but Hegel says that it is ethical – in a more profound way. It is cruel, yet Hegel asserts that it is the way of God. It inflicts misery, but Hegel maintains that it is

based on Reason. Thus, he provides for historical reality, with all its cruelty and senselessness, the approval of religion, of reason, of superior ethical purpose. He claims the status of the absolute for historical sequences of events, while denigrating morality as we know it to the realm of transiency and relative insignificance.

This is a very radical reversal to the other approaches to history – from the Bible and the ancient Greeks to the Enlightenment. It amounts to the glorification of reality, to the adoration of power for power's sake, to equating might with right. The principle of absolute power is identified with the principle of absolute right. Has this any meaning? Intrinsically, it has not. It simply adds approval to what, in human terms, has no justification. It covers with an aura of monotheistic religion, or quasi-religion, a sphere of reality which is largely antithetical to the conception of God as a just and merciful being.

This, however, is not an innocent mistake. For such glorification of reality, or history with its iniquities and tragedies, only strengthens the ruthless march of events, and undermines any human effort to shape a better world, a brighter future, to modify – let alone engineer – history. Hegel bows in advance to any victorious power and justifies it in allegedly religious-moral-rational terms. He thus tries to disarm all those who may take exception to the ruthless march of force in history on religious, moral, or rational grounds. In taking this stand, Hegel also tramples on the sense of human dignity, on man's claim and aspiration to absolute moral judgment, which Thucydides retained even when he despaired of history. There remains only one absolute – the absolute of power.

Hegel philosophized about the course of history, but was not himself a historian who collects, sifts and analyses the events of the past with care and precision. Nonetheless, his approach had a profound influence on practicing historians, perhaps because it elevated history from the domain of the accidental and chaotic to the realm of the absolute and necessary. The concept of history as the divine march on earth must have had an appeal to historians.

While Hegel's influence on modern historiography cannot be traced here, an example of such influence may well be introduced. We shall try to show how the perception of history as the embodiment of the absolute affected one of the most important and influential scholars in this field, namely the German historian, Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886). Needless to say, no evaluation of Ranke as a historian can be attempted here – that would be outside the scope of this article. Only the Hegelian element in Ranke's approach will be explored.

Ranke is regarded as an objective historian. He declared that he was not 'to sit in judgment on the past, that he only wanted to show "what had really happened."' <sup>52</sup> This, apparently laudable, intent to pursue truth while retaining humility, is founded on a certain religious, or quasi-religious perception of history. History is not merely a conglomeration of events, of things that happened. It is the manifestation of some higher entity. Ranke expressed it as a young man, when he wrote: 'God lives and is observable in the whole of history. Every deed bears witness of him, every moment proclaims his name, but especially do we find it in the connecting line that runs through history.' He was still imbued with this religious awe when, in old age, he wrote in the preface to his *World History*: 'I wish I could as it were extinguish myself.' <sup>53</sup>

We can discern here the Hegelian pseudo-theological perception of history, with the consequent attitude of man prostrating himself before the deified history. This self-efacement of the individual leads to suspension of moral judgment – in Ranke as in

Hegel. Thus, when Ranke contrasts Charles XII of Sweden and Peter the Great, he sees in them the representatives of the Germanic and the Slav worlds and feels to be present at 'an exalted spectacle.' The less exalted aspects of their actions are ignored. When he recounts 'Frederick the Great's attack on Maria Theresa and the conquest of Silesia in 1740, he remarks: "Fortunately it is not the historian's task to pronounce upon the justice of the King's claims."<sup>54</sup> Moral judgment is cast aside when history is on the march. History remains aloof of such human considerations.

The upshot of this attitude is a total respect for authority, as well as a kind of implicit adoration of power, power as it unveils itself in history. The religious wrapping does not diminish this respect for power, only enhances it. Power, as developing in history, is the absolute, while man's judgment and dignity are relatively trivial and transient.

The consequence of this outlook is what has been termed 'historism': 'the abstaining from judgment, the accepting, the acknowledging of no other standards than those supplied by the historical process itself . . . The great personages were seen as the exponents of impersonal forces, driven.'<sup>55</sup> This widespread trend is juxtaposed by an approach of those modern historians who are explicit and emphatic in submitting historical events and acts to moral judgment, who, like Lord Acton, criticize Ranke for talking about 'transactions and occurrences' when he ought to have talked about 'turpitude and crime.'<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, some of them point to the practical danger in this 'sort of political quietism – finding God in history in the hope that He will take blame for anything that goes wrong.'<sup>57</sup>

Significantly, the voices of historians who oppose this trend, who apply moral and human judgment to history, who insist on man's moral responsibility, speak in the idiom of Amos and Augustinus – whether consciously or not. They again elevate man – his moral judgment and his will – to the level of the absolute, and confront him with history which, they hope, may be not more than a flux of events affecting humanity, but not necessarily controlling or determining it.

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A philosophy which forged another conception of history, and has had an impact in its own and following generations – both on historiography and history itself – is Marxism. Karl Marx (1818–83) in some fundamental ways was influenced by Hegel's philosophy of history, yet in another sense he is profoundly opposed to his predecessor, an ambivalent attitude which he himself and his followers have pointed out. He was also affected by some philosophies of the Enlightenment and by biblical ethics and eschatology, the latter point being perhaps ignored by him.

Like Hegel, Marx saw history as a series of events adhering to an inner law. History follows a logical and necessary process, which, following Hegel, Marx calls a dialectic process. History, to relate this to our context, is ruled by an absolute principle, and is not an outcome of accidental events or arbitrary actions. There is a meaning underlying the flux of historical changes: it can be discovered by men, and has been revealed by Marx himself.

However, whereas in the case of Hegel the revelation of the absolute principle governing history led to the World Spirit, the Idea, God, in the case of Marx it produces 'material' factors. Consequently Marx's theory of history is often referred to as Dialectical Materialism. Strictly speaking, the forces which move and shape history, the absolute principle which controls history, is of a material-economic nature. The understanding of



the nature of these concrete, down-to-earth factors is the key to the comprehension of history.

The material-economic forces involve two distinct though interrelated elements: the 'productive forces,' i.e. the technological skills and tools, and the 'relations of production,' i.e. the way in which various sectors of society are agents and beneficiaries of the means of production.<sup>58</sup> This social involvement in the productive system results in class differentiation, as one sector of society appropriates the means and tools and uses them to its advantage. Thus, the materialist interpretation becomes bound with the notion of the crucial function of social classes as the agents of historical change. As in the case of Hegel the state or the nation is the embodiment of the World Spirit, in the case of Marx the social class becomes the concrete manifestation of the principle of Dialectical Materialism. Therefore, in the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.'<sup>59</sup>

As Hegel speaks of successive dominant nations in history, so Marx describes successive social class systems, each reflecting an appropriate technological stage. The era of stone tools was that of primitive communism. The introduction of metal tools led to a division between masters and slaves. Then came the feudal system, corresponding to more advanced implements. This was followed by capitalism, and its social division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, which reflects the emergence and dominance of the machinery of the Industrial Revolution. This was the epoch of Marx himself, and so his reading of the past ends there.

Broadly speaking, the application of theory to history by Marx corresponds to the proto-type of Hegel. To be sure, Dialectical Materialism, by virtue of not being seen as Spirit or God, does not lead to the same adoration as Hegel's prime mover of history. Yet, as already intimated, the Marxian mover, too, is perceived as necessary, logical and absolute, and thus is approved, at least as unavoidable reality.

Marx's approach resembles Hegel's theory also in its implications for human dignity and freedom. Just as Hegel denigrates the importance of individual concerns and accepted morality in face of the monumental historical events, so Marx belittles human endeavours which claim to be the expression of human spirit and independent of the socio-economic conditions, that is to say, of the influence of Dialectical Materialism. Political institutions, religion, art, philosophy are not the expression of sovereign human will and reason. They are the consequences of the socio-economic conditions of the age and they serve, wittingly or unwittingly, the interests of the ruling classes. The notion that man can think freely and reach conclusions and make decisions in matters of public policy or mental endeavour as a sovereign being, the claim that human spirit is an absolute entity – all this is rejected. The only fundamental, the only absolute factor are the socio-economic conditions with the concomitant class structure, while the various endeavours of man which claim independence are merely derivative and secondary – a super-structure (*Überbau*) based and dependent on the socio-economic foundations.

If, thus, Marx's theory conforms to the Hegelian model, except that the Spirit is replaced by Materialism, and man is subject to the socio-economic factors rather than to the omnipotence of the Idea, a difference which matters little to the sense of dignity and freedom, this is only one side of the theory. The other one is, in a way, a total and astonishing reversal. This aspect of Marxism is linked to Marx's concept of future history.

As Marx propounded a philosophical theory of history, he did not stop at his age, but outlined the evolvment of future events – conceived as a necessary evolvment, dictated by the laws of Dialectical Materialism. According to Marxian analysis, capitalism, as it evolves, reaches a stage in which it is bound to collapse by virtue of the inner contradictions of the system. Its final downfall will occur through a proletarian revolution.<sup>60</sup> This dramatic event will mark a turning point in the history of mankind and will lead to a reversal in the human condition, a point which must be elaborated.

The crucial step of the proletarian revolution, which abolishes the capitalist system, is the nationalization of the means of production: 'The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production into state property.'<sup>61</sup> Once the bourgeoisie does not own the factories, nor the ancillary financial and commercial institutions, it is abolished as a class. The collective ownership of the means of production establishes a classless society. Where there are no classes, there can be no class struggle, and so history undergoes a profound change.

The abolition of the ruling class means also the disappearance of the state which, according to Marx, is only a means of coercion in the hands of the ruling class, which uses it to enforce its interests on the subdued classes. Thus, due to the revolution, society and the individual will be emancipated from bondage to authority: 'the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production.'<sup>62</sup>

This newly gained freedom will be accompanied by economic stability and abundance, for rational planning and management will put an end to periodical crises and to waste. The classless society will also put an end to exploitation and unfair division of the fruits of labour. Thus, the new society will be both well-to-do and just. To top it all, the new system will transform the condition of man. Man will be freed from external constraints and from forces which have controlled and ruled him. He will make a transition from the realm of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.

The transition from the kingdom of necessity into that of freedom also corresponds to the transition from Hegelian theory to Enlightenment thought. Whereas the man of the past is subject to the laws of Dialectical Materialism, the man of the future can control them. Suddenly man turns from a pawn in the hands of the absolute into a free being, an absolute himself. He, the emancipated Prometheus, will control the hitherto absolute, will dethrone it.

Moreover, as we have seen, the human condition of man will change also in other respects. Man be subject to no political oppressors and masters, he will have all his needs abundantly supplied, and he will be basically equal to his fellow beings – a perfect state. This new bliss will not apparently be a transient phenomenon, for, with the classes abolished, there will be no more agents of social conflict. In other words, we face here a prospect which has the characteristics of the prophetic 'last days': 'But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid.'

Thus, the rule of history will come to an end and will be superseded by the realization of the static ideal of peace, prosperity, justice, freedom. The deterministic sombre rule of Dialectical Materialism leads to a happy ending. The tragedy and drama of history are eclipsed by an eschatological fulfilment.

Marx juggles with two absolutes – the absolute law dominating history, and the absolute ideal of human cravings. He submits to the first to his interpretation of the past, but he enthrones the second in the foreseeable future. This peculiar synthesis of Hegel

and the Enlightenment plus the Bible may be open to scholarly criticism, but it lent wide appeal to Marxism. For the success of Marxism was largely due to its dual nature – the rational-scientific intent and the prophetic-emotional tenor. It is this duality which allowed it to claim the absolute truth of scientific theory, as well as the assurance of the fulfilment of a perfect prophecy.

As in the case of the biblical perception and the philosophers of the Enlightenment, the Marxian philosophy transcended history as the study of the past and presented it also as the knowledge of the future. Such comprehensive knowledge of human destiny provided a powerful intellectual and emotional support for all those who chose to accept the doctrine as true and became the apostles of the new revelation. Thus, Marxism was not only one theory of history, but also played a part in the very shaping of history.

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## Notes

1. Herodotus, *History*, Book III, Chapters 39–43 & 122–125.
2. See Jacqueline De Romilly, *Thucydide et L'Impérialisme Athénien*, Société D'Édition 'Les Belles Lettres,' Paris 1947, p. 90: 'Everywhere imperialism is considered as a fact. It is against justice, and this is a regrettable situation. If, however, the moral censure is certain, it remains secondary...' (Translated by the present writer.) This judgement emphasizes the qualities of the historian rather than those of the moralist.
3. Polybius, *World History*, Book XXXIX, Chapter 8. Quoted from Arnold Toynbee, *Greek Historical Thought*, New American Library, Mentor Books, 1952, p. 202.
4. Genesis 18:18.
5. Deuteronomy 9:5.
6. Isaiah 10:15.
7. Isaiah 14:5.
8. Amos, Chapters 1 & 2.
9. Amos 3:2. The translation deviates from the King James version.
10. See, for example, Judges 3:7–10.
11. I Samuel, Chapter 16.
12. II Samuel, 12:11–12.
13. I Kings, Chapter 21.
14. II Kings 18:11–12.
15. See II Chronicles, Chapter 36, especially verses 14–20.
16. Deuteronomy 7:12–13. The King James version modified.
17. Deuteronomy 8:19–20. The King James version modified.
18. Psalm 79: 1–2 & 5. The King James version modified.
19. Micah 4:3–4.
20. Aurelius Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei*, Book IV, #4. The English translation by Marcus Dods, Edinburgh 1871.
21. It is such a nexus between the Prophets and Augustinus which justifies the concept of the Judeo-Christian civilization, so often referred to nowadays. Such affinity, to be sure, does not obliterate significant theological differences between the two religious systems.
22. The opening paragraph of the 'Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations,' quoted from *The Portable Voltaire*, edited by Ben Ray Redman, New York: The Viking Press, 1949, p. 547.
23. Quoted from the concluding paragraph of the above essay. *The Portable Voltaire*, p. 555.
24. 'The English Parliament,' *op. cit.*, pp. 512–521.
25. Letter to Frederick the Great of 26th August, 1736, *op. cit.*, p. 439.
26. Abbé Charles Irénée Castel de Saint-Pierre, *Projet pour rendre la paix perpetuelle en Europe*, 3 vols., Utrecht 1713–1717.

27. The French phrasing is: 'des biens inaliénables, la liberté, la vie, la fortune.' *Encyclopédie*, Vol. XI, p. 349, column b. Quoted from John Lough, *The 'Encyclopédie'*, New York: David McKay Company, 1971, p. 295.
28. John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Civil Government* (1690), Chapter II, par. 6.
29. Paul Henri Thiry D'Holbach, 'Common Sense' (1772). Quoted from *Les Philosophes*, edited by Norman L. Torrey, New York: Capricorn Books, 1960, p. 197.
30. Antoine Nicolas de Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, Fourth edition, Paris: Agasse, 1798, p. 3. Translated from the original by the present writer here and in the subsequent quotations. – An English translation available, entitled *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind*, Baltimore 1802.
31. *Op. cit.*, p. 4.
32. *Op. cit.*, pp. 3–4.
33. This is the descriptive title of the eighth epoch. See *op. cit.*, p. 188.
34. *Op. cit.*, pp. 246–247.
35. *Op. cit.*, p. 145.
36. *Op. cit.*, p. 333.
37. *Op. cit.*, p. 336.
38. Isaiah 10:9.
39. Condorcet, *op. cit.*, pp. 343–344.
40. *Op. cit.*, p. 374.
41. *Op. cit.*, pp. 375–376.
42. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (1837), *Sämtliche Werke*, Stuttgart, 1928, Vol. 11, pp. 34–42. (Available in English translation under the title *The Philosophy of History*, New York, 1944.) References here and further are made to the German original. The quotations are translated by the present writer in the text, while the original is reproduced in the footnotes.
43. 'Aber ferner ist diese Vernunft immanent in dem geschichtlichen Deseyn, und vollbringt sich in demselben, und durch dasselbe.' *Op. cit.*, p. 54. 'Daseyn' or 'Dasein' may be translated by 'actuality' or 'presence,' but 'happening' seems to fit the context better.
44. Die Weltgeschichte ist 'der vernunftige, notwendige Gang des Weltgeistes.' *Op. cit.*, p. 36.
45. '... das Wesen des Geistes [ist] die Freiheit.' *Op. cit.*, p. 44.
46. '... dass [des Geistes] Veränderungen nicht bloss ... Rückgänge zu derselben Gestalt sind, sondern vielmehr Verarbeitungen seiner selbst.' *Op. cit.*, p. 113.
47. 'die Entwicklung ... ist im Geist ein harter unendlicher Kampf gegen sich selbst.' *Op. cit.*, p. 90.
48. 'Der Geist handelt wesentlich, er macht sich zu dem, was er an sich ist ...' *Op. cit.*, p. 113.
49. 'die Geschäftsführer des Weltgeistes.' *Op. cit.*, p. 61.
50. 'Schlachtbank ... auf welcher das Glück der Völker, die Weisheit der Staaten, und die Tugend der Individuen zum Opfer gebracht worden.' *Op. cit.*, p. 49.
51. 'Der Staat ist die göttliche Idee, wie sie auf Erden vorhanden ist.' *Op. cit.*, p. 71.
52. Pieter Geyl, *Debates with Historians*, Groningen: J.B. Wolters and The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955, p. 1. The subsequent discussion of Ranke uses the study of Pieter Geyl, though this does not mean that the present evaluation is identical with that of Professor Geyl.
53. *Op. cit.*, p. 7.
54. *Op. cit.*, p. 10.
55. *Op. cit.*, p. 11.
56. *Op. cit.*, pp. 9–10.
57. Quoted by Geyl from *Times Literary Supplement* (1950), *op. cit.*, p. 12.
58. Cf. Eugene Kamenka, *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism*, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962, pp. 132ff.
59. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1955, p. 9.
60. For a brief analysis of the decline and collapse of capitalism, see Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1883), New York: International Publishers, 1935, Chapter III.
61. F. Engels, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
62. F. Engels, *op. cit.*, p. 70.