The subject of these lectures is the philosophy of world history. This means that we are not concerned with general deductions drawn from history, illustrated by particular examples from it, but with the nature of history itself. What we mean by history will become clear if we begin by discussing the other methods of dealing with it. There are, in all, three methods of treating history:

1. Original History
2. Reflective History
3. Philosophical History

1. We shall get an immediate and definite picture of the first kind by mentioning a few names. Take, for example, the histories of Herodotus, Thucydides, and similar historians. They primarily described the actions, events, and conditions which they had before their own eyes and whose spirit they shared. . . .

Original historians, then, transform the events, actions, and situations present to them into a work of representative thought. Hence, the content of such history cannot be of large external scope . . . He describes what he has, more or less, experienced, or at least witnessed as a contemporary. He deals with short periods of time, individual presentations of men and events. Out of individual, unreflected features he composes his portrait in order to bring it before posterity as distinctly as he experienced it in person or in the personal
accounts of others. He is not concerned with reflections about the events. He lives the spirit of the events; he does not yet transcend them.

2. The second method of history may be called the reflective. It is that kind of history which transcends the present—not in time but in spirit. Here we must distinguish several kinds:

(a) The first is universal history, that is, the survey of the entire history of a people, a country, or the world. Here the main thing is the elaboration of the historical material. The historian achieves this with his own spirit, which is different from the spirit of the material. What is important here is, on the one hand, the principle with which the author approaches the content and meaning of the actions and events he describes, and, on the other hand, his own method of writing history. . . .

This first kind of reflective history connects with original history if it has no other purpose than to present the totality of a country’s history. . . . But the individuality of spirit which must characterize a writer who belongs to a certain cultural period is frequently not in accord with the spirit that runs through the period he writes about. The spirit that speaks out of the writer is quite different from that of the times he describes. . . .

A history of this kind, which endeavors to survey long periods or the whole of world history, must give up the individual presentation of reality and abridge itself by means of abstractions, not only in the sense of leaving out events and actions, but also in the sense of making thought itself the mightiest epitomist. A battle, a great victory, a siege are no longer themselves; they are concentrated in simple statements. . . .

(b) A second kind of reflective history is the pragmatic. In dealing with the past and occupying ourselves with a remote world, there opens up for the mind an actuality which arises out of its own activity and as reward for its labor. The events are many, but their universal idea and their inner connection are one. This nullifies the past and makes the event present. Pragmatic reflections, no matter how abstract, belong indeed to the present, and the stories of the past are quickened into present-day life. Whether such reflections are really interesting and full of life depends on the spirit of the writer. Here belong, in particular, moral reflections and the moral enlightenment to be derived from history, for the sake of which history has often been written. . . .

One often advises rulers, statesmen, and peoples to learn from the experiences of history. But what experience and history teach is that peoples and governments have never yet learned from history, let alone acted according
to its lessons. Every age has conditions of its own and is an individual situation; decisions must and can be made only within, and in accordance with, the age itself. In the turmoil of world affairs no universal principle, no memory of similar conditions in the past can help us—a vague memory has no power against the vitality and freedom of the present. . . . One reflective history, therefore, supersedes another. Each writer has access to the materials; each can think himself able to arrange and elaborate them and inject his spirit into them as the spirit of the ages. Weary of such reflective histories, one has frequently taken recourse to presenting events from all possible angles. Such histories are, it is true, of some value, but they offer mostly raw material. . . .

(c) The third kind of reflective history is the critical. . . . It is not history itself which is presented here, but rather history of historiography: evaluation of historical narratives and examination of their truth and trustworthiness. The outstanding feature of this method, in point of fact and of intention, consists in the acuteness of the author who wrests results from narrations rather than from events. . . . This higher criticism has then served to justify the introduction of all kinds of unhistorical monstrosities of pure imagination. Here we have another method of gaining actuality from history: replacing historical data by subjective fancies—fancies which are held to be the more excellent, the bolder they are, that is, the smaller their factual basis and the larger their contradiction with the most definite facts of history.

(d) The last kind of reflective history is that which presents itself openly as fragmentary. It is abstractive but, in adopting universal points of view—for example the history of art, of law, of religion—it forms a transition to philosophical world history. In our time this kind of conceptual history has been particularly developed and emphasized. Such branches of history refer to the whole of a people’s history; the question is only whether this total context is made evident or merely shown in external relations. In the latter case they appear as purely accidental peculiarities of a people. But if such reflective history succeeds in presenting general points of view and if these points of view are true, it must be conceded that such histories are more than the merely external thread and order of events and actions, that they are indeed their internal, guiding soul. . . .

3. The third method of history, the philosophical. There was little in the two preceding methods that had to be clarified; their concept was self-explanatory. But it is different with this last one, which indeed seems to require some commentary or justification. The most universal definition would be that philosophy of history is nothing but the thoughtful contemplation of history. To think is one of those things we cannot help doing; in this
we differ from the animals. In our sensation, cognition, and intellection, in our instincts and volitions, in as far as they are human, there is an element of thinking. But reference to thinking may here appear inadequate. In history, thinking is subordinate to the data of reality, which latter serve as guide and basis for historians. Philosophy, on the other hand, allegedly produces its own ideas out of speculation, without regard to given data. If philosophy approached history with such ideas, it may be held, it would treat history as its raw material and not leave it as it is, but shape it in accordance with these ideas, and hence construct it, so to speak, a priori. But since history is supposed to understand events and actions merely for what they are and have been, and is the truer, the more factual it is, it seems that the method of philosophy would be in contradiction to the function of history. This contradiction and the charge consequently brought against philosophy shall here be explained and refuted. . . .

The sole thought which philosophy brings to the treatment of history is the simple concept of Reason: that Reason is the law of the world and that, therefore, in world history, things have come about rationally. This conviction and insight is a presupposition of history as such; in philosophy itself it is not presupposed. Through its speculative reflection philosophy has demonstrated that Reason . . . is both substance and infinite power; in itself the infinite material of all natural and spiritual life as well as the infinite form, the actualization of itself as content. It is substance, that is to say, that by which and in which all reality has its being and subsistence. It is infinite power, for Reason is not so impotent as to bring about only the ideal, the ought, and to remain in an existence outside of reality—who knows where—as something peculiar in the heads of a few people. It is the infinite content of all essence and truth, for it does not require, as does finite activity, the condition of external materials, of given data from which to draw nourishment and objects of its activity; it supplies its own nourishment and is its own reference. And it is infinite form, for only in its image and by its fiat do phenomena arise and begin to live. It is its own exclusive presupposition and absolutely final purpose, and itself works out this purpose from potentiality into actuality, from inward source to outward appearance, not only in the natural but also in the spiritual universe, in world history. That this Idea or Reason is the True, the Eternal, the Absolute Power and that it and nothing but it, its glory and majesty, manifests itself in the world—this, as we said before, has been proved in philosophy and is being presupposed here as proved. . . .

What I have said here provisionally, and shall have to say later on, must, even in our branch of science, be taken as a summary view of the whole. It
is not a presupposition of study; it is a result which happens to be known to myself because I already know the whole. Therefore, only the study of world history itself can show that it has proceeded rationally, that it represents the rationally necessary course of the World Spirit, the Spirit whose nature is indeed always one and the same, but whose one nature unfolds in the course of the world. This, as I said, must be the result of history. History itself must be taken as it is; we have to proceed historically, empirically. . . . As our first condition we must therefore state that we apprehend the historical faithfully. In such general terms, however, as “faithfully” and “apprehend” lies an ambiguity. Even the average and mediocre historian, who perhaps believes and pretends that he is merely receptive, merely surrendering himself to the data, is not passive in his thinking. He brings his categories with him and sees the data through them. In everything that is supposed to be scientific, Reason must be awake and reflection applied. To him who looks at the world rationally the world looks rationally back. . . . The relation is mutual.

Only two aspects of the general conviction that Reason has ruled in the world and in world history may be called to your attention. They will give us an immediate opportunity to examine our most difficult question and to point ahead to the main theme.

1. The first is the historical fact of the Greek, Anaxagoras, who was the first to point out that nous, understanding in general or Reason, rules the world—but not an intelligence in the sense of an individual consciousness, not a spirit as such. These two must be carefully distinguished. The motion of the solar system proceeds according to immutable laws; these laws are its reason. But neither the sun nor the planets, which according to these laws rotate around it, have any consciousness of it. Thus, the thought that there is Reason in nature, that nature is ruled by universal, unchangeable laws, does not surprise us; we are used to it and make very little of it. . . .

2. The second point is the historical connection of the thought that Reason rules the world with another form of it, well known to us—that of religious truth: that the world is not abandoned to chance and external accident but controlled by Providence. . . . The truth that a Providence, that is to say, a divine Providence, presides over the events of the world corresponds to our principle; for divine Providence is wisdom endowed with infinite power which realizes its own aim, that is, the absolute, rational, final purpose of the world. Reason is Thought determining itself in absolute freedom.

On the other hand, a difference, indeed an opposition, now appears between this faith and our principle. . . . For this faith is also indefinite, it is what is called faith in Providence in general; it is not followed up in definite
application to the whole, the comprehensive course of world history. To explain history means to reveal the passions of men, their genius, their active powers. This definiteness of Providence is usually called its plan. Yet this very plan is supposed to be hidden from our view; indeed, the wish to recognize it is deemed presumption. ... We cannot, therefore, be satisfied with what we may call this ... view of faith in Providence, nor with the merely abstract, undetermined faith in the universal statement that there is a Providence, without determining its definite acts. On the contrary, we must seriously try to recognize the ways of Providence, its means and manifestations in history, and their relation to our universal principle. ...

I wanted to discuss the connection of our thesis—that Reason governs and has governed the world—with the question of the possible knowledge of God, chiefly in order to mention the accusation that philosophy avoids, or must avoid, the discussion of religious truths because it has, so to speak, a bad conscience about them. On the contrary, the fact is that in recent times philosophy has had to take over the defense of religious truths against many a theological system. In the Christian religion God has revealed Himself, which means He has given man to understand what He is, and thus is no longer concealed and secret. With this possibility of knowing God the obligation to know Him is imposed upon us. God wishes no narrow souls and empty heads for his children; He wishes our spirit, of itself indeed poor, rich in the knowledge of Him and holding this knowledge to be of supreme value. The development of the thinking spirit only began with this revelation of divine essence. It must now advance to the intellectual comprehension of that which originally was present only to the feeling and imagining spirit.

... Our intellectual striving aims at recognizing that what eternal wisdom intended it has actually accomplished, dynamically active in the world, both in the realm of nature and that of the spirit. In this respect our method is a theodicy, a justification of God. ... Thus the evil in the world was to be comprehended and the thinking mind reconciled with it. Nowhere, actually, exists a larger challenge to such reconciliation than in world history. This reconciliation can only be attained through the recognition of the positive elements in which that negative element disappears as something subordinate and vanquished. This is possible through the consciousness, on the one hand, of the true ultimate purpose of the world and, on the other hand, of the fact that this purpose has been actualized in the world and that the evil cannot ultimately prevail beside it. But for this end the mere belief in nous and providence is
not sufficient. “Reason,” which is said to govern the world, is as indefinite a
term as “Providence.” One always speaks of Reason without being able to
indicate its definition, its content, which alone would enable us to judge
whether something is rational or irrational. What we need is an adequate def-
ition of Reason. Without such definition we can get no further than mere
words. With this let us proceed to the second point that we want to consider
in this introduction.

The question of how Reason is determined in itself and what its relation
is to the world coincides with the question, What is the ultimate purpose of
the world? This question implies that the purpose is to be actualized and real-
ized. Two things, then, must be considered: first, the content of this ultimate
purpose, the determination as such, and, secondly, its realization.

To begin with, we must note that world history goes on within the realm
of Spirit. The term “world” includes both physical and psychical nature.
Physical nature does play a part in world history, and from the very begin-
nning we shall draw attention to the fundamental natural relations thus
involved. But Spirit, and the course of its development, is the substance of
history. We must not contemplate nature as a rational system in itself, in its
own particular domain, but only in its relation to Spirit.

... Spirit, on the stage on which we observe it, that of world history, is in its
most concrete reality. But nevertheless—or rather in order to understand also
the general idea of this concrete existence of Spirit—we must set forth, first,
some general definition of the nature of Spirit. But this can only be done here
as a mere assertion; this is not the place to develop the idea of Spirit through
philosophical speculation. As was mentioned above, what can be said in an
introduction can be taken only historically—as an assumption to be explained
and proved elsewhere or to be verified by the science of history itself.

We have therefore to indicate here:

(1) The abstract characteristics of the nature of Spirit.
(2) The means Spirit uses in order to realize its Idea.
(3) The form which the complete realization of Spirit assumes in
existence—the State.

The nature of Spirit may be understood by a glance at its direct oppo-
site—Matter. The essence of matter is gravity, the essence of Spirit—its sub-
stance—is Freedom. It is immediately plausible to everyone that, among
other properties, Spirit also possesses Freedom. But philosophy teaches us that all the properties of Spirit exist only through Freedom. All are but means of attaining Freedom; all seek and produce this and this alone. It is an insight of speculative philosophy that Freedom is the sole truth of Spirit. Matter possesses gravity by virtue of its tendency toward a central point; it is essentially composite, consisting of parts that exclude each other. It seeks its unity and thereby its own abolition; it seeks its opposite. If it would attain this it would be matter no longer, but would have perished. It strives toward ideality, for in unity it exists ideally. Spirit, on the contrary, is that which has its center in itself. It does not have unity outside of itself but has found it; it is in itself and with itself. Matter has its substance outside of itself; Spirit is Being-within-itself (self-contained existence). But this, precisely, is Freedom. For when I am dependent, I refer myself to something else which I am not; I cannot exist independently of something external. I am free when I am within myself. This self-contained existence of Spirit is self-consciousness, consciousness of self.

Two things must be distinguished in consciousness, first, that I know and, secondly, what I know. In self-consciousness the two coincide, for Spirit knows itself. It is the judgment of its own nature and, at the same time, the operation of coming to itself, to produce itself, to make itself (actually) into that which it is in itself (potentially). Following this abstract definition it may be said that world history is the exhibition of spirit striving to attain knowledge of its own nature. As the germ bears in itself the whole nature of the tree, the taste and shape of its fruit, so also the first traces of Spirit virtually contain the whole of history. . . . Only the Germanic peoples came, through Christianity, to realize that man as man is free and that freedom of Spirit is the very essence of man’s nature. . . . World history is the progress of the consciousness of freedom—a progress whose necessity we have to investigate.

The . . . statement . . . of the various grades in the consciousness of freedom—that the Orientals knew only that one is free, the Greeks and Romans that some are free, while we know that all men absolutely, that is, as men, are free—is at the same time the natural division of world history and the manner in which we shall treat it. . . .

We have established Spirit’s consciousness of its freedom, and thereby the actualization of this Freedom as the final purpose of the world. For the spiritual world is the substance of reality, and the physical world remains subordinate to it, or, in terms of speculative philosophy, has no truth compared with the former. . . . At the same time, it is Freedom in itself that comprises within itself the infinite necessity of bringing itself to consciousness.
and thereby, since knowledge about itself is its very nature, to reality. Freedom is itself its own object of attainment and the sole purpose of Spirit. It is the ultimate purpose toward which all world history has continually aimed. To this end all the sacrifices have been offered on the vast altar of the earth throughout the long lapse of ages. Freedom alone is the purpose which realizes and fulfills itself, the only enduring pole in the change of events and conditions, the only truly efficient principle that pervades the whole. This final aim is God’s purpose with the world. But God is the absolutely perfect Being and can, therefore, will nothing but Himself, His own will. The nature of His own will, His own nature, is what we here call the Idea of freedom. Thus we translate the language of religion into that of philosophy. Our next question then is: What are the means the Idea uses for its realization? This is the second point that we have to consider.

The question of the means whereby Freedom develops itself into a world leads us directly to the phenomenon of history. Although Freedom as such is primarily an internal idea, the means it uses are the external phenomena which in history present themselves directly before our eyes. The first glance at history convinces us that the actions of men spring from their needs, their passions, their interests, their characters, and their talents. Indeed, it appears as if in this drama of activities these needs, passions, and interests are the sole springs of action and the main efficient cause. . . .

When we contemplate this display of passions and the consequences of their violence, the unreason which is associated not only with them, but even—rather we might say especially—with good designs and righteous aims; when we see arising therefrom the evil, the vice, the ruin that has befallen the most flourishing kingdoms which the mind of man ever created, we can hardly avoid being filled with sorrow at this universal taint of corruption. And since this decay is not the work of mere nature, but of human will, our reflections may well lead us to a moral sadness. . . .

But in contemplating history as the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals have been sacrificed, a question necessarily arises: To what principle, to what final purpose, have these monstrous sacrifices been offered?

From here one usually proceeds to the starting point of our investigation: The events which make up this picture of gloomy emotion and thoughtful reflection are only the means for realizing the essential destiny, the absolute and final purpose, or, what amounts to the same thing, the true result of world history. We have all along purposely eschewed that method of reflection which ascends from this scene of particulars to general principles. Besides,
it is not in the interest of such sentimental reflections really to rise above these depressing emotions and to solve the mysteries of Providence presented in such contemplations. It is rather their nature to dwell melancholically on the empty and fruitless sublimities of their negative result. For this reason we return to our original point of view. What we shall have to say about it will also answer the questions put to us by this panorama of history.

The first thing we notice . . . is the merely general and abstract nature of what we call principle, final purpose, destiny, or the nature and concept of Spirit. A principle, a law is something implicit, which as such, however true in itself, is not completely real (actual). Purposes, principles, and the like, are at first in our thoughts, our inner intention. They are not yet in reality. That which is in itself is a possibility, a faculty. It has not yet emerged out of its implicitness into existence. A second element must be added for it to become reality, namely, activity, actualization. The principle of this is the will, man’s activity in general. It is only through this activity that the concept and its implicit (“being-in-themselves”) determinations can be realized, actualized; for of themselves they have no immediate efficacy. The activity which puts them in operation and in existence is the need, the instinct, the inclination, and passion of man. When I have an idea I am greatly interested in transforming it into action, into actuality. In its realization through my participation I want to find my own satisfaction. A purpose for which I shall be active must in some way be my purpose; I must thereby satisfy my own desires, even though it may have ever so many aspects which do not concern me. This is the infinite right of the individual to find itself satisfied in its activity and labor. If men are to be interested in anything they must have “their heart” in it. Their feelings of self-importance must be satisfied. . . . Nothing therefore happens, nothing is accomplished, unless those concerned with an issue find their own satisfaction in it. They are particular individuals; they have their special needs, instincts, and interests. They have their own particular desires and volitions, their own insight and conviction, or at least their own attitude and opinion, once the aspirations to reflect, understand, and reason have been awakened. Therefore people demand that a cause for which they should be active accord with their ideas. And they expect their opinion—concerning its goodness, justice, advantage, profit—to be taken into account. . . .

Two elements therefore enter into our investigation: first, the Idea, secondly, the complex of human passions; the one the warp, the other the woof of the vast tapestry of world history. Their contact and concrete union constitutes moral liberty in the state. We have already spoken of the Idea of free-
dom as the essence of Spirit and absolutely final purpose of history. Passion is regarded as something wrong, something more or less evil; man is not supposed to have passions. . . . Passion is . . . the subjective and therefore the formal aspect of energy, will, and activity, whose content and aim are at this point still undetermined. . . .

From this comment on the second essential element in the historical embodiment of an aim, we infer . . . that a state is then well constituted and internally vigorous when the private interest of its citizens is one with the common interest of the state, and the one finds gratification and realization in the other—a most important proposition. But in a state many institutions are necessary—inventions, appropriate arrangements, accompanied by long intellectual struggles in order to find out what is really appropriate, as well as struggles with private interests and passions, which must be harmonized in difficult and tedious discipline. When a state reaches this harmony, it has reached the period of its bloom, its excellence, its power and prosperity. But world history does not begin with any conscious aim, as do the particular circles of men. Already the simple instinct of living together contains the conscious purpose of securing life and property; once this primal society has been established, the purpose expands. But world history begins its general aim—to realize the idea of Spirit—only in an implicit form (an sich), namely, as Nature—as an innermost, unconscious instinct. And the whole business of history, as already observed, is to bring it into consciousness. Thus, appearing in the form of nature, of natural will, what we have called the subjective side is immediate, actual existence (für sich): need, instinct, passion, private interest, even opinion and subjective representation. These vast congeries of volitions, interests, and activities constitute the tools and means of the World Spirit for attaining its purpose, bringing it to consciousness, and realizing it. And this purpose is none other than finding itself—coming to itself—and contemplating itself in concrete actuality. . . .
Reason governs the world and has consequently governed its history. In relation to this Reason, which is universal and substantial, in and for itself, all else is subordinate, subservient, and the means for its actualization. Moreover, this Reason is immanent in historical existence and reaches its own perfection in and through this existence. The union of the abstract universal, existing in and for itself, with the particular or subjective, and the fact that this union alone constitutes truth are a matter of speculative philosophy which, in this general form, is treated in logic. But in its historical development . . . the abstract final aim of history, the idea of Spirit, for it is
then itself in process and incomplete. The idea of Spirit is not yet its distinct object of desire and interest. Thus desire is still unconscious of its purpose; yet it already exists in the particular purposes and realizes itself through them. The problem concerning the union of the general and the subjective may also be raised under the form of the union of freedom and necessity. We consider the immanent development of the Spirit, existing in and for itself, as necessary, while we refer to freedom the interests contained in men’s conscious volitions.

The building of a house is, in the first instance, a subjective aim and design. On the other hand we have, as means, the several substances required for the work—iron, wood, stones. The elements are used in preparing this material: fire to melt the iron, wind to blow the fire, water to set wheels in motion in order to cut the wood, etc. The result is that the wind, which has helped to build the house, is shut out by the house; so also are the violence of rains and floods and the destructive powers of fire, so far as the house is made fireproof. The stones and beams obey the law of gravity and press downwards so that the high walls are held up. Thus the elements are made use of in accordance with their nature and cooperate for a product by which they become constrained. In a similar way the passions of men satisfy themselves; they develop themselves and their purposes in accordance with their natural destination and produce the edifice of human society. Thus they fortify a structure for law and order against themselves.

This connection implies that human actions in history produce additional results, beyond their immediate purpose and attainment, beyond their immediate knowledge and desire. They gratify their own interests; but something more is thereby accomplished, which is latent in the action though not present in their consciousness and not included in their design.

This union of the two extremes—the embodiment of a general idea in immediate actuality and the elevation of a particularity into universal truth—comes about under the condition of the diversity and mutual indifference of the two extremes. The human agents have before them limited aims, special interests. But they are also intelligent, thinking beings. Their purposes are interwoven with general and essential considerations of law, the good, duty, etc. For mere desire, volition in its raw and savage form, falls outside the scene and sphere of world history. These general considerations, which at the same time form norms for directing purposes and actions, have a definite content. For such empty abstractions as “good for its own sake” have no
place in living actuality. If men are to act, they must not only intend the good but must know whether this or that particular course is good. What special course of action is good or not, right or wrong, is determined, for the ordinary circumstances of private life, by the laws and customs of a state.

It is at this point that appear those momentous collisions between existing, acknowledged duties, laws, and rights and those possibilities which are adverse to this system, violate it, and even destroy its foundations and existence. Their tenor may nevertheless seem good, on the whole advantageous—yes, even indispensable and necessary. These possibilities now become historical fact; they involve a universal of an order different from that upon which depends the permanence of a people or a state. This universal is an essential phase in the development of the creating Idea, of truth striving and urging toward itself. The historical men, world-historical individuals, are those who grasp just such a higher universal, make it their own purpose, and realize this purpose in accordance with the higher law of the spirit.

Caesar was such a man. Before reaching his position of superiority he was in danger of losing his place of equality with the other leaders of Rome. He was about to succumb to those who were just becoming his enemies. These enemies, who at the same time pursued their own personal interests, had on their side the formal constitution of Rome and the power of legal appearance. Caesar fought to keep his position, honor, and safety. But victory over his enemies, who held the power over all the Roman provinces, became at the same time conquest of the entire empire. Thus Caesar, without changing the form of the constitution, became the sole ruler of the state. In accomplishing his originally negative purpose—the autocracy over Rome—he at the same time fulfilled the necessary historical destiny of Rome and the world. Thus he was motivated not only by his own private interest, but acted instinctively to bring to pass that which the times required.

Such individuals have no consciousness of the Idea as such. They are practical and political men. But at the same time they are thinkers with insight into what is needed and timely. They see the very truth of their age and their world, the next genus, so to speak, which is already formed in the womb of time. It is theirs to know this new universal, the necessary next stage of their world, to make it their own aim and put all their energy into it. The world-historical persons, the heroes of their age, must therefore be recognized as its seers—their words and deeds are the best of the age. For Spirit, in taking this new historical step, is the innermost soul of all individuals—but in a state
of unconsciousness, which the great men arouse to consciousness. For this reason their fellow men follow these soul-leaders, . . . For they feel the irresistible power of their own spirit in them.

The special interest of passion is thus inseparable from the actualization of the universal; for the universal results from the particular and definite and its negation. . . . It is the particular which exhausts itself in the struggle and part of which is destroyed. . . . It is not the general Idea that involves itself in opposition and combat and exposes itself to danger; it remains in the background, untouched and uninjured. This may be called the cunning of Reason—that it sets the passions to work for itself, while that through which it develops itself pays the penalty and suffers the loss. For it is the phenomenal which in part is negative, in part positive. The particular in most cases is too trifling as compared with the universal; the individuals are sacrificed and abandoned. The Idea pays the tribute of existence and transience, not out of its own funds but with the passions of the individuals. . . .

In speaking of means we imagine, first of all, something external to the end which has no share in it. But actually even merely natural things, the most common lifeless objects used as means, must somehow be adapted to their purpose; they must have something in common with it. This bare external relation of mere means is the least relation human beings have to the rational purpose. In the very act of realizing it they make it the occasion of satisfying their personal desires, whose import is different from that purpose. Moreover, they share in the rational purpose itself and for that very reason are ends in themselves—not merely formally, as is the world of other living beings, whose individual life is essentially subordinate to that of man and is properly used up as an instrument. Men, on the contrary, are ends in themselves in regard to the content of the end. This defines those elements which we demand to be exempt from the category of means: morality, ethics, religion.

Man is an end in himself only by virtue of the divine in him—that which we designated at the outset as Reason, or, insofar as it has activity and power of self-determination, as Freedom. And we say . . . that religiosity, morality, etc., have their foundation and source in it and are thus essentially exempt from external necessity and chance. . . . This is the seal of the absolute and sublime destiny of man, that he knows what is good and what is evil, and that his destiny is his very ability to will either good or evil. In one word, he can be guilty—guilty not only of evil but of good, and not only concerning this or that particular matter and all that happens in and around him (Sittlichkeit),
but also the good and evil attaching to his individual freedom (Moralität). The animal alone is truly innocent.

As was said earlier, nothing is now more common than the complaint that the ideals which imagination sets up are not actualized, that these glorious dreams are destroyed by cold actuality.

The insight then to which—in opposition to these ideals—philosophy should lead us is that the actual world is as it ought to be, that the truly good, the universal divine Reason is the power capable of actualizing itself. This good, this Reason, in its most concrete representation, is God. God governs the world. The actual working of His government, the carrying out of His plan is the history of the world. Philosophy strives to comprehend this plan, for only that which has been carried out according to it has reality; whatever does not accord with it is but worthless existence. Before the pure light of this divine Idea, which is no mere ideal, the illusion disappears as though the world were a crazy, inane process. Philosophy wishes to recognize the content, the reality.

The third point, then, concerns the end to be attained by these means, that is, the form it assumes in the realm of the actual. We have spoken of means; but the carrying out of a subjective, limited aim also requires a material element, either already present or to be procured or to serve this actualization. Thus the question would arise: What is the material in which the final end of Reason is to be realized? It is first of all the subjective agent itself, human desires, subjectivity in general. In human knowledge and volition, as its material basis, the rational attains existence. We have considered subjective volition with its purpose, namely, the truth of reality, insofar as moved by a great world-historical passion. As a subjective will in limited passions it is dependent; it can gratify its particular desires only within this dependence. But the subjective will has also a substantial life, a reality where it moves in the region of essential being and has the essential itself as the object of its existence. This essential being is the union of the subjective with the rational will; it is the moral whole, the State. It is that actuality in which the individual has and enjoys his freedom, but only as knowing, believing, and willing the universal.

The subjective will, passion, is the force which actualizes and realizes. The Idea is the interior; the State is the externally existing, genuinely moral
life. It is the union of the universal and essential with the subjective will, and as such it is Morality. The individual who lives in this unity has a moral life, a value which consists in this substantiality alone. . . . The laws of ethics are not accidental, but are rationality itself. It is the end of the State to make the substantial prevail and maintain itself in the actual doings of men and in their convictions. It is the absolute interest of Reason that this moral whole exist; and herein lies the justification and merit of heroes who have founded states, no matter how crude.

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All the value man has, all spiritual reality, he has only through the state. For his spiritual reality is the knowing presence to him of his own essence, of rationality, of its objective, immediate actuality present in and for him. Only thus is he truly a consciousness, only thus does he partake in morality, in the legal and moral life of the state. For the True is the unity of the universal and particular will. And the universal in the state is in its laws, its universal and rational provisions. The state is the divine Idea as it exists on earth.

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We have discussed two aspects of freedom, the objective and the subjective. If freedom implies the consent of each individual, then of course only the subjective aspect is meant. From this principle follows as a matter of course that no law is valid except by agreement of all. This implies that the majority decides; hence the minority must yield to the majority. But already Rousseau has remarked that this means the absence of freedom, for the will of the minority is disregarded. . . . Moreover, it is a dangerous and false presupposition that the people alone has reason and insight and knows what is right; for each popular faction can set itself up as the People. What constitutes the state is a matter of trained intelligence, not a matter of “the people.”

If the principle of individual will and consent of all is laid down as the only basis of constitutional freedom, then actually there is no Constitution. . . . Only in the constitution does the abstract entity of the state assume life and reality; but this involves a distinction between those who command and those who obey. Yet, it does not seem to be in accordance with freedom to obey, and those who command seem to act in opposition to the concept of freedom, the very basis of the state.

Thus the distinction between commanding and obeying seems necessary for the very function of the state. Hence one recommends—as a matter of
purely external necessity, which is in opposition to the nature of freedom in its abstract aspect—that the constitution should at least be so framed that the citizens have to obey as little as possible and the authorities are allowed to command as little as possible. The nature and degree of whatever authority is necessary should be determined and decided in large measure by the people, that is to say, by the will of the majority; yet, at the same time the state, as reality, as individual unit, should have power and strength.

The primary distinction to be made is, then, between the governing and the governed. Constitutions have rightly been classified as monarchic, aristocratic, and democratic. . . . The problem . . . is to determine the best constitution, namely, that institution, organization, or mechanism of government which most securely guarantees the purpose of the state.

A constitution is therefore not a matter of choice but depends on the stage of the people’s spiritual development.

What is important in a constitution is the internal development of the rational, that is, the political condition, the setting free of the successive moments of the concept. The particular powers must become distinct, each one completing itself, but at the same time they must freely cooperate for one purpose and be held together by it, thus forming an organic whole. Thus the State is rational and self-conscious freedom, objectively knowing itself. For its objectivity resides precisely in the fact that its moments are not merely ideally present but actualized in their particularity; that they pass over from their own self-related activity into that activity from which results the whole, the soul, the individual unity.

The State is the idea of Spirit in the externality of human will and its freedom. It therefore is essentially the medium of historical change, and the stages of the Idea represent in it various principles. . . . A free constitution is for us dependent upon the idea of representative government, and this has become a firm prejudice. Thus people and government are separated. But there is something malicious in this opposition, a trick of bad will, as if the people were the whole. Also, at the bottom of this idea lies the principle of individuality, the absoluteness of the subjective will of which we spoke above. The main thing is that freedom, as it is determined by the concept, is not based on the subjective will and caprice but on the understanding of the general will, and that the system of freedom is the free development of its stages. The subjective will is a purely formal concept which does not say at all what it wills. Only the rational will is the universal which determines and
develops itself in itself and unfolds its successive moments in an organic manner.

The State, thus, is the foundation and center of the other concrete aspects of national life, of art, law, morality, religion, science. All spiritual activity, then, has the aim of becoming conscious of this union, that is, of its freedom. Among the forms of these conscious unions religion is the highest. In it the spirit existing in the world becomes conscious of absolute Spirit. In this consciousness of actualized ("being-in-and-for-itself") essence the will of man renounces particular interest; it puts it aside in devotion in which he is not concerned any more with particulars. Through sacrifice man expresses his renunciation of property, his will, his private feelings. The religious concentration of the mind appears as emotion, but passes also into contemplation; ritual is an expression of contemplation. The second form of the spiritual union between the objective and the subjective is Art: It appears more in sensible reality than does religion; in its most noble attitude it has to represent, not indeed the spirit of God but the form of the God—and then the divine, the spiritual in general. It renders the divine visible to imagination and the senses. The True, however, not only achieves representation and feeling, as in religion, and for the senses, as in art, but also for the thinking spirit; this leads to the third form of the union, Philosophy. It is in this respect the highest, freest, and wisest product.

The universal which appears and becomes known in the state, the form into which is cast all reality, constitutes what is generally called the culture of a nation. The definite content, however, which receives the form of universality and is contained in the concrete reality of the State, is the spirit of the people. The true State is animated by this spirit in all its affairs, wars, institutions, etc. But man must himself know of this—his own—spirit and essence and give himself the consciousness of his original union with it. For we said that all morality is the unity of subjective and general will. The spirit, then, must give itself an express consciousness of this unity, and the center of this knowledge is religion. Art and science are only different aspects of this very same content.

Historical change, seen abstractly, has long been understood generally as involving a progress toward the better, the more perfect. This characteristic of Spirit suggested to man a feature entirely different from that of nature—the desire toward perfectibility.
The principle of development implies further that it is based on an inner principle, a presupposed potentiality, which brings itself into existence. This formal determination is essentially the Spirit whose scene, property, and sphere of realization is world history. It does not flounder about in the external play of accidents. On the contrary, it is absolutely determined and firm against them. It uses them for its own purposes and dominates them. But development is also a property of organic natural objects. Their existence is not merely dependent, subject to external influences. It proceeds from an inner immutable principle, a simple essence, which first exists as germ. From this simple existence it brings forth out of itself differentiations which connect it with other things. Thus it lives a life of continuous transformation. . . . The transition of its potentiality into actuality is mediated through consciousness and will. These are themselves first immersed in their immediate organic life; their first object and purpose is this natural existence as such. But the latter, through its animation by Spirit, becomes itself infinitely demanding, rich, and strong. Thus Spirit is at war with itself. It must overcome itself as its own enemy and formidable obstacle. Development, which in nature is a quiet unfolding, is in Spirit a hard, infinite struggle against itself. What Spirit wants is to attain its own concept. But it hides it from itself and is proud and full of enjoyment in this alienation from itself.

Historical development, therefore, is not the harmless and unopposed simple growth of organic life but hard, unwilling labor against itself.