



The Conception of Society as an Organism

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West in general has learned, as New England had to learn two centuries ago, that the only stable prosperity is that of productive home industries, not speculation on the prices that foreign speculators may give; and in the exchange of commodities having intrinsic value, not in dealing in prospects and futures. And, finally, that in the long run nothing is to be gained by weakening or taking lightly that sense of contract which has conjured into existence the industrial civilization of the Occident.

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BOSTON.

THE CONCEPTION OF SOCIETY AS AN ORGANISM.

HEGEL'S tendency to exalt the state, and society generally, at the expense of the individual citizen, is one of the most striking characteristics of his system. It is one, moreover, in which Hegelians, as a rule, have faithfully followed their master.

The exaltation in question is not identical with a desire to largely increase the functions exercised by the state. It involves indeed, almost necessarily, the extension of those functions beyond the limits allowed them by the stricter Individualists. But it would be quite consistent with an amount of individual liberty which would prevent the result from being called Socialistic or even Communistic. And, on the other hand, it is quite possible to propose a system of the most rigid Socialism or Communism, and yet to entirely disagree with Hegel's view of the dignity of the state. This was, to a large extent, the position of the older Socialists, such as Robert Owen.

We may best define Hegel's position by contrasting it with its opposite. That opposite is the theory that the state and society are merely external mechanisms for promoting the individual welfare of the individual citizens. This theory does not, of course, involve that each citizen cares only about his own welfare. But, if he cares about the welfare of the others,

he regards them as an aggregate, each of whom has a welfare of his own, not as a whole, whose welfare is one and the same. Again, this theory does not assert that the state was formed by a compact of individuals who were before isolated, nor that the machinery, which the state and society give, could possibly be dispensed with by the individual. But, in whatever way the union was first formed, and however indispensable it may be, we can only justify its existence on the ground that it is a common means to the separate ends of the citizens. To this view Hegel opposes the assertion that society is more than such a merely external means.

My object in this paper is, without dogmatically maintaining the view that society is a mere means, to argue that there is nothing in Hegelian metaphysics which compels or entitles us to assert that it is anything more. The question of the precise relation of our present society to the individuals who compose it, is, I submit, one upon which philosophy affords us practically no guidance, and which can be settled only by empirical considerations.

The Hegelian view on this subject is generally expressed by saying that the nature of society is organic. This phrase, so far as I know, is not used by Hegel himself. And it does not seem to be very accurate. An organic unity is, in the ordinary meaning of the term, such a unity as binds together the different parts of a living body. And, whatever may be the unity which exists in society, it would seem clear that it cannot, on Hegelian principles, be the same as that of the parts of a body. Self-conscious persons, such as make up society, are far more individual than a hand or a foot. Now, according to Hegel, the greater is the individuality of parts, the closer is the unity which *can* be established between them, and the deeper must we go to establish it. It follows that self-conscious persons will need a deeper and more fundamental principle of union than suffices for the parts of a body, and, if they *are* joined by a principle adequate for the purpose, will form a unity far closer than that of the parts of a body. And to call such a principle organic seems unreasonable. It is true that it comprehends and surpasses the

principle of organic unity. But, if this was a reason for calling it organic, it would be an equally good reason for calling an organic unity mechanical, and for calling a mechanical unity a mathematical aggregate.

The use of the word organic, therefore, seems to me incorrect, and, not improbably, misleading. But since it is used by most of the writers of the present day who follow Hegel in this question, I shall adopt their phraseology while I am considering their views.

Hegel's own position in the matter is expressed in his taking the state (*Der Staat*) as a higher form of society than the civic community (*Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft*). He expresses the distinction between them as follows:

“Were the state to be considered as exchangeable with the civic society, and were its decisive features to be regarded as the security and protection of property and personal freedom, the interests of the individual as such would be the ultimate purpose of the social union. It would then be at one's option to be a member of the state. But the state has a totally different relation to the individual. It is the objective spirit, and he has his truth, real existence, and ethical status only in being a member of it. Union, as such, is itself the true content and end, since the individual is intended to pass a universal life. His particular satisfactions, activities, and way of life have in this authenticated substantive principle their origin and result.”*

Hegel does not, however, make any distinct attempt to prove the superiority of the state to the civic community. He points out that the unity is more close and vital in the state, and there he leaves the matter, the line of thought being, apparently, that, since it has been proved in the *Logic* that true reality is a perfect unity, the closer unity is always the higher form. For a more detailed treatment of the subject we must look to his followers. In particular, Professor Mackenzie, in his “Introduction to Social Philosophy,” maintains the organic nature of society with such force and clearness that our best method of dealing with the subject will be to examine his treatment of it in some detail.

Professor Mackenzie defines an organism by saying that in

* “Philosophie des Rechts.” Section 258. Lecture note. Dyde's translation.

it "the relations of the parts are intrinsic; changes take place by an internal adaptation; and its end forms an essential element in its own nature."* Here are three characteristics. The second does not require special consideration. Its truth, and the sense in which it is to be taken, seem to depend on the truth, and on the precise meaning, of the previous statement that the relations of the parts are intrinsic. The other two points of the definition seem to me to be ambiguous. If they are taken to imply that society is an end to the individuals who compose it, they would form an adequate definition of an organism; but in that sense I do not think that Professor Mackenzie has proved them to be true of society. On the other hand, in the sense in which he has proved them to be true of society, they appear to me to be quite compatible with a theory which should regard society as a merely mechanical unity, and as simply a means to the separate ends of its constituent individuals.

Let us take first the intrinsic relations of the parts to the whole. If this were to mean, as it might possibly be taken to mean, that to be in these relations was the end of the individual who was in them, and that this was his end, not from any further quality of the relations, but simply because they were the relations which united him to society, then, indeed, we should have an organic unity.

But this is not what Professor Mackenzie proves. He appears to be satisfied when he has pointed out that the individual's nature is *determined* in every direction by the society in which he lives, and that there is no part of his nature to which this determination does not extend.† This is unquestionably true. No man, indeed, is *only* the product of society, for it would be impossible to account for the differentiated result, if it did not contain an originally differentiated element. The co-existence of individuals in a whole may modify their differences, but cannot construct them out of nothing. But

* "An Introduction to Social Philosophy," chap. iii. p. 164. My references are to the edition of 1895.

† Op. cit., chap. iii. pp. 166-171.

this, I imagine, would not be denied by Professor Mackenzie, and it is impossible to dispute his assertion that no individual, and no part of any individual's nature, would be what it now is, except for the influence of the society to which that individual belongs.

But what does this come to, when it is admitted? Surely to nothing else than the assertion of the category of complete reciprocal determination, which is involved in organic connection, but is by no means identical with it. As soon as we realize that causal determination is complete and reciprocal, and that the distinction between essence and appearance is illegitimate, we are able to assert about any two things in the universe the relation which Professor Mackenzie has pointed out between the individual and society. No Englishman would, in any respect, be quite what he is now if the Reform Bill had not been carried, or if Dr. Pusey had joined the Roman communion. Granted. And no Englishman would be, in any respect, quite what he is now, if there was one more herring in the Atlantic. The influence in the first case is more important than in the second; but that is not a difference of kind, and will not entitle us to say that society joins individuals in any way which is, *in genere*, different from the way in which everything in the universe is joined to everything else.

What possible theory of the state does this truth exclude? It would exclude, certainly, any theory which said that the individual was not affected at all by living in society. But does any one hold—could any one hold—such a view? It has been asserted that society is the end of the individual. It has been asserted that it is a means to that end. It has even been asserted, by anchorites, that it was simply a hindrance to that end. But has any one ever said that man was exactly the same in society as he would be out of it? It has been asserted, no doubt, that the associated man is only superficially different from the isolated man, and that the two are fundamentally the same. But the difference between superficial and fundamental qualities is one which can only be intelligible when we know the end of the object which possesses them. The assertion

which would be denied by Professor Mackenzie's demonstration of "intrinsic relations" is not that society makes no fundamental difference in the individual, but that it makes no difference in him at all. And when we have disposed of this absurdity, all sane theories of the state are still left to choose from.

The intrinsic relations of individuals would also be incompatible, no doubt, with the theory which Professor Mackenzie calls mechanical. "A mechanical or dualistic view, again," he says, "would regard the individual as partly dependent and partly independent; as to some extent possessing a life of his own, and yet to some extent dependent on his social surroundings."* It is impossible to divide any individual into isolated compartments, and if any part of a man's life is affected by the society of which he is a member, no part of his life can be wholly unaffected by it. But although this view may be fitly called mechanical, it is not the only view which deserves that name. It answers to the category to which Hegel has given the name of Formal Mechanism, but there still remains the higher category which he calls Absolute Mechanism. In Absolute Mechanism, if I interpret the Logic rightly, we discard the supposition that the internal nature of any thing can be independent of the relations into which it enters with other things. We see that the two sides are inseparably connected. On the one hand, the internal nature of anything is meaningless except in connection with its relations to other things, since it is only in those relations that the inner nature can manifest itself. On the other hand, relations to other things are meaningless except in relation to the internal nature of the thing. For a merely passive subject of relations is an impossible and contradictory idea, as the category of Reciprocity has already taught us. If A is *m n*, because it is related to B C, this is not a merely external relation. For it must be ascribed to the nature of A that B C produces upon it the result *m n* rather than the result *o p*.

Now the category of Absolute Mechanism is quite con-

* Op. cit., chap. iii. p. 150.

sistent with the admission of intrinsic relations,—with the admission, that is, that there is nothing whatever in A which is independent of its relations to B, C, etc. But in admitting this, we have by no means passed to the idea of organic unity. No unity, it is clear, can be organic which is a mere means to the separate ends of its constituent individuals. And there is nothing in the category of Absolute Mechanism to hinder this from being the case. Each individual, it is true, is under this category determined throughout by the unity in which it stands with the others in the same system. But ends, means, and hindrances to ends, all exercise causal determination over objects. A man, for example, is causally determined alike by the moral ideal which he holds, by the dinner which he eats, and by the hatreds which he feels. But this need not prevent us from saying that the first of these is an end, good in itself, the second a means, which has value only in so far as it enables us to carry out the end, and the third a hindrance to carrying out the end, and, therefore, positively bad.

Accordingly, we find that those theories of society which carry individualism furthest are quite consistent with the category of Absolute Mechanism, and with the admission of intrinsic relations between the members of society. The hermits of the early Church regarded society as detrimental to man's highest interests, and consequently as an evil to be avoided as far as possible, and to be steadily resisted when unavoidable. A hedonist regards society as only justifiable in so far as it produces, for each of the individuals who compose it, a greater amount of private happiness than he would otherwise have enjoyed. Yet neither the hermit nor the hedonist have advanced anything inconsistent with the intrinsic relations which we have been considering. For each of them would have admitted that some society was indispensable, and each of them would have admitted that man was modified by the society of which he formed a part.

I have endeavored to prove that to say of society that the relation of its parts is intrinsic does not give us any help towards establishing its organic nature, since the proposition would be equally true of any real system, whether organic or

not. We must now consider the third clause of Professor Mackenzie's definition of an organism: "its end forms an essential element in its own nature."

Here, again, there seems to me to be a dangerous ambiguity. If this proposition meant, as it might mean, that the existence of the society as society was its own end, and also the end of the individuals who compose it, then, indeed, the unity in which it would bind those individuals would be so close that it might fairly be called organic, or even more than organic. But when we come to inquire into the precise meaning which Professor Mackenzie attaches to the phrase, we shall find that, in one part at least of his work, he gives it a much narrower meaning, and one which, however true of society, can give us no reason to consider society as an organism.

"That the growth of social conditions has reference to an inner end," he says, "is a point on which we need not here enlarge. That the movements of social development are purposeless, no one supposes; and that the purpose which it subserves lies within itself is equally apparent. What the end is, it may be difficult to determine; but it is easy to perceive that it is some form of human well-being."*

Professor Mackenzie here seems to assume that "some form of human well-being" must lie within society itself. But this, though it may be true, is by no means necessary. All human beings are at present within society, but it is possible that they may cease to be so in the future, and that the human well-being which it is the object of society to promote may be one in which society is broken up, and the individuals isolated. (I am not, of course, arguing that this *is* the case. I am only maintaining that the fact that the present and actual human being is in society does not of itself prove that the future and ideal human being will also be in society.) †

* Op. cit., chap. iii. p. 176.

† Professor Mackenzie appears, in one paragraph at least, to recognize this. For, in the concluding passage of chap. iii. (p. 203) he admits, if I understand him rightly, that before we can properly call society an organism we must inquire whether the ideal human well-being, which is the end of society, is itself social. But since, in the passage quoted above from p. 176, he appears to assert explicitly

The end of a school, for example, is the well-being of the boys, and the boys form the school. Nevertheless, the school is not an end in itself. For boys leave school when they grow up, and the end of the school is their welfare throughout life, when they will certainly have left school, and may easily be completely isolated from all their old school-fellows.

Now what is undoubtedly true of this fraction of society may be, according to some theories, true of society as a whole. Let us take the case of a man who believed that society existed for the promotion of true holiness, as the highest end of man, while at the same time he defined holiness as a relation which existed between God and a particular individual, and which is independent of—even incompatible with—any relations between the individuals themselves. Now any one who believed this—and something very like it has been believed—would quite admit that the end of society was nothing else than human well-being, since he would conceive that the greatest human well-being lay in holiness. But the end of society would not be in itself; on the contrary, it would be something which could only be realized when society itself had ceased to exist.

Again, consider the case of a hedonist who should hold that the one end of society was to make the sum of pleasures felt by its individual members, taken as isolated beings, as large as possible. Such a man would hold that the end of society was a form of human well-being, but he would not regard it as an organic unity, but merely as a means for the respective ends of the various individuals who compose it.

My contention has been, so far, that it is useless and misleading to call any unity organic unless we are prepared to maintain that it (and not merely something at present contained in it) is an end to itself and to its own parts. If we do not do this, we shall include among organic unities systems which exist as bare means for the carrying out of ends which

that human well-being is, *ex vi terminorum*, social, I thought it well to deal with both positions separately. The view stated on p. 203, and developed in chap. iv., will be considered later.

are indifferent, or even hostile, to the unity. To call such systems organic would be improper, in the first place, because that word has always been employed to denote a relatively close unity, while such a use would extend it to all unities whatever. Every aggregate of individuals which were not absolutely isolated from each other, and in which the connection was not reduced to the level of mere *Schein*, would be organic.

And, in the second place, not only would such a definition depart completely from the ordinary usage, but it would render the term useless. When we said that a unity was organic, we should only say that it was a unity. It would be useless, for example, to say that society was organic. For we should only thereby separate ourselves from any one who should assert that the individual, or any part of him, is uninfluenced by being in society. If any person does hold this remarkable view, I am unable to say; but it is certainly not of sufficient weight to render it worth while to appropriate such a convenient phrase as organic to express disbelief in it. Meanwhile, the distinction—of such cardinal importance in modern political theory—between those who admit and those who deny that society is an end in itself would remain without a suitable name.

I should suggest that the most suitable definition of an organic unity for our present purpose might be something like this: "a unity which is the end of its parts." This clearly distinguishes it from a unity which is merely mechanical. It also distinguishes it from a chemical unity, to use Hegel's phrase, in which the parts are regarded as mere means which may be discarded or merged, if that would conduce to the realization of the end. For here the end is the unity of the parts, and the parts therefore are an element in the end, as well as the means to it.

This definition appears to have the merit of coinciding with tolerable exactness with the ordinary use of the word organic, which is an important advantage when it can be gained without sacrifice of accuracy. The common application of organic is to animal and vegetable life. Now, the definition I have

proposed would include animals and vegetables, and would not include anything which did not bear a tolerably close resemblance to biological unity.

Such a definition would mark a division in our present subject-matter which would be worth marking. There are two theories at the present day as to the nature of society, and especially of the state, each of which has considerable practical influence, and for each of which much can be said that must be carefully considered by any student. They differ by the admission or rejection of the idea of society as an end in itself, and it would be convenient to refer to them as the organic and inorganic views of society.

Hegel's example would be on our side. For in the "Logic" he makes scarcely any distinction between the idea of an immanent end and the idea of life. And I imagine that this definition would not be disapproved by Professor Mackenzie.*

Is society the end of man? This is the question which we have now to answer. Let us inquire, in the first place, what general information we possess regarding our supreme end.

If we turn to Hegel, we find that for him the supreme end is another name for Absolute Reality, which, *sub specie æternitatis*, is eternally present, but, *sub specie temporis*, presents itself as an ideal and a goal. Now, Hegel's conception of Absolute Reality is one which might very fitly be called a society. That persons are its constituent parts is, I think, the most probable hypothesis, though the subject is by no means free from obscurity. At any rate, it is clear that Absolute Reality is a differentiated unity, of which the parts are perfectly individual, and which, for that very reason, is a perfect unity. To call such a unity organic would only be incorrect because it was inadequate. And thus Absolute Reality would be the most perfect of societies. Just because the individual was such a complete individual, he would have all his perfection, and all his reality, in nothing else but in his relations to other

* Cf. above, p. 421, note, and the "Introduction to Social Philosophy," chap. iii. p. 203.

individuals. Or, to quote Professor Mackenzie, "no attainment of the ideal of our rational nature is conceivable except by our being able to see the world as a system of intelligent beings who are mutually worlds for each other."*

The end of man, then, is a society. But we are now considering "social philosophy," and not theology, and what we want to know is not our relation to the kingdom of heaven, but our relation to society as it is now around us, and as it may be expected to be in an earthly future. Now it is quite clear that, whatever this ideal society which Hegel makes our end, may be, it is not the society which we have round us today. Absolute Reality, according to Hegel, is eternal, and cannot be fully realized in any state of the world which is still subject to succession in time. Absolute Reality must see and be seen under the highest category only, and is still imperfect while any reality is unconscious of itself, or appears to others under the form of matter. Absolute Reality, finally, is incompatible with pain or imperfection.

This is clearly not the society in which we live, and we are not entitled to argue that the present society is an organic unity, because the ideal society is such a unity. But although they are not identical, the society of the present and the ideal certainly stand in some relation to one another. Can we, by a closer investigation of this relation, find any reason to consider the society of the present organic?

It might seem as if we had made an important step in this direction when we reflected that in a system like society, whose parts are self-conscious individuals, one of the strongest forces towards making the system organic is the conviction that it ought to be so. For it will be an organism if the individuals make it their end. Now it must be admitted that their conviction of what ought to be their end, will not always decide what their end actually is. A man's end may be above or below his theoretical opinion about it. On the one hand, he may acknowledge the higher and yet pursue the lower. On the other hand, he may explicitly acknowledge only the

* Op. cit., chap. iv. p. 260.

lower and yet pursue the higher, moved by some vague impulse, which he can neither justify nor resist. Still, on the whole, the belief that anything is a worthy end has a great influence in making it a real one.

Can we, then, establish the organic nature of present society as an ideal, if not as a fact? Can we say that the society of this world ought to be organic, and that we shall do well in proportion as we make it so by regarding the various relations, natural and civic, which constitute it, as the end of our individual lives? The ultimate end, indeed, it cannot be. Nothing but the heavenly society can be that, and, since anything earthly must be different from absolute reality, our present society, even if improved as far as possible, could never be anything higher than the means to the ultimate end. But, in reference to all the activities and interests of our individual lives, it might be said that present society might rightly be considered as the end, since it is only by working in it and through it that we can progress towards the ultimate ideal which alone can fully satisfy us.

This, if I understand him rightly, is something like the position which Professor Mackenzie adopts. Having said, in the passage quoted above, that "no attainment of the ideal of our rational nature is conceivable, except by our being able to see the world as a system of intelligent beings who are mutually worlds for each other," he continues, "now, how far it is possible to think of the whole world in this way is a question for the Philosophy of Religion to discuss. It is enough for us here to observe that, in so far as we come into relations to other human beings in the world, we are attaining to a partial realization of the ideal which our rational nature sets before us. And there is no other way by which we come to such a realization. In so far as the world is merely material, it remains foreign and unintelligible to us. It is only in the lives of other human beings that we find a world in which we can be at home. Now in this fact we obviously find a much deeper significance for the organic nature of society than any that we have yet reached. For we see that the society of other human beings is not merely a means of bringing our own rational

nature to clearness, but is the only object in relation to which such clearness can be attained.”*

I must confess, however, that I am unable to see that the argument is valid. It is true that the ultimate ideal is a state of society which is organic. It is true, too, that only through our present society can that ideal be reached. For we must begin from where we are, and at present we are in society. It may be granted, too, that it is incredible, almost inconceivable, that a period of absolute social chaos should intervene between us and the goal, and that the progress to that goal may safely be considered as made continuously through society.

Yet it does not follow, I submit, that it would be well to regard our present society as an end. For although our progress to the ideal is through it, that progress is often negatively related to it. Our advance often—to some extent, always—consists in breaking up and rising above relations which, up to that point, had been part of the constitution of society. And so these relations cannot be regarded as an end. The fact that their value is purely derivative should be ever before us,—at least, in so far as we reflect at all. We must express ourselves by them as long as we find them the best expression of the absolute end, or the best road to it, but only under the reservation that we are to throw them aside as worthless when we find a more adequate expression or a more direct road.

The abstract form of society, indeed, remains. In whatever way we work out our destiny, we work it out in one another's company. But if the particular relations which constitute our present society at any moment are to be looked on as means, to be discarded when better ones can be found, this is sufficient to destroy the claims of present society to be considered organic. For the abstract fact that individuals are somehow connected can never be sufficient to unite them in an organic unity. Individuals can never find their end, which must be something concrete, not abstract, in the bare fact

* *Op. cit.*, chap. iv. p. 260.

of their connection with one another. It is only some particular connection that they can accept as their end, and it is only in respect of some particular connection they are organic. And if, as I suggested above, any particular relations which we find in the society of the present day must be looked on as mere means, it will be impossible to regard that society itself as organic.

The correctness of this assertion remains to be considered. My object, as I stated at the beginning of this paper, is not to assert that our present society cannot be regarded as an organism, but only that there is nothing in the Hegelian metaphysics which can be fairly taken as proving or even suggesting the organic nature of present society. It will be for the other side to prove, if they can, that the perfect society of Absolute Reality will be found to be constituted on the same plan as our present society, joining and sundering in heaven those who are joined and sundered on earth.

No attempt has, so far as I know, been made to do this, nor is it easy to see how it could be done. Indeed, there is a strong presumption, to say the least, that the opposite is true. For when we come to consider what determines the actual relations in which men find themselves in society,—the relations of family, of school, of profession, of state, of church,—we find that overwhelming weight is exercised by considerations which we cannot suppose will have overwhelming weight in that ideal society in which all our aspirations would be satisfied. Such accidents as birth of the same parents, birth on one side or the other of a treaty-made frontier, a woman's beauty, a man's desire, a crime which unites A with B in its commission, and C with D in its suppression—such are the causes which often determine, in our present society, what individuals shall be most closely related together. All these things are no doubt real, in some degree, and therefore are to some degree represented in the ideal; but to suppose that they are as important there as they are here, would be to forget that in that ideal we are to find "a world in which we can be at home." No doubt the society of the present is the natural and inevitable introduction to the

society of the future, but it is so only in the same way as everything else is. Of everything which has ever happened in the world,—of anarchy as well as society, of sin as well as virtue, of hatred as well as love,—the fact that it has happened proves that it was a necessary incident in the movement towards the ideal. But this can give it no more than a derivative value. I find myself associated with Smith in a Parish Council. This no doubt is a stage in my progress (and Smith's) towards the ideal society of heaven. But there is no *a priori* reason to regard it as more vitally connected with that goal of all our ambitions than anything else, good or bad, social or isolated, which happens to either of us. Whatever heaven may be like, it cannot closely resemble a Parish Council, since the functions of the latter involve both matter and time. And it is by no means improbable that the results of my joint labors with Smith on earth may be the attainment of a state in which I shall be linked most closely in heaven, not to Smith, but to Jones, who comes from another parish—perhaps even from another county.

The vast majority of the relations which make up our present society are of this kind,—relations which have their origin and meaning only with reference to the conditions of our present imperfect existence, and which would be meaningless in the ideal. It is true, if we pass from kind to degree, that society may provide us with relations both higher and closer than fellowship in a Parish Council. But differences of degree will not help us here. For the difference between the highest and the lowest of the bonds which social life now offers us vanishes into insignificance compared with the difference between every one of them and the perfection expressed in Professor Mackenzie's carefully restrained words, "the attainment of the ideal of our rational nature."

It is possible—the subject is too large to go into now—that we might find, on further consideration of the nature of the Absolute Reality and of our own lives, some elements in the latter which seemed to directly belong to the former,—something which did not merely lead to heaven, but *was* heaven. On this point I do not desire to risk an assertion. But sup-

posing that this were so, and that we found in our present lives some element of absolute value, then it would be more hopeless than ever to regard our present society as an end. For, supposing that such elements exist, they certainly do not get their way in being allowed to arrange the world entirely after their own model. Society, taking it all round, blandly reverses Arnold's sentence, and remarks that "distinctions *they* esteem so grave are nothing in *my* sight,"—or at least very little. And it is perhaps for this reason that the deepest emotions are apt, if they have any effect on society, to have a negative and disintegrating one, at least as far as our present observation will carry us. They may bring peace on earth in the very long run, but they begin with the sword.

Now, surely, nothing could so effectively degrade present society from the position of an end to that of a means, tolerable only as leading on to something else, than such a state of things, if it should prove to be true. If we have, here and now, partial experience of something whose complete realization would give us utter and absolute satisfaction, how can we regard as an end a state of society which refuses us that supreme good? For I presume it will scarcely be denied that utter and absolute satisfaction is not an invariable accompaniment of social life as we at present find it.

To sum up the argument so far. I have endeavored to prove, in the first place, that we gain nothing by calling society an organism unless we are prepared to assert that it is the end of the individuals composing it. And, in the second place, I have endeavored to prove that there is nothing in Hegel's metaphysical conclusions which entitle us to assume that our present society is, or ought to be, an end for its individual citizens. We might, perhaps, go further and say, the true lesson to be derived from the philosophy of Hegel is that society cannot be an end, for any one, at least, who rightly holds that philosophy. For Hegel has defined for us an absolute and ultimate ideal, and this not as a vain aspiration, but as an end to which all reality is moving. This ideal we can understand,—dimly and imperfectly, no doubt, but still understand. And to any one who has entertained such an

ideal, society, as it is, or as it can be made under conditions of time and imperfection, can only be external and mechanical. Each of us is more than the society which unites us, because there is in each of us the longing for a perfection which that society can never realize. The parts of a living body can find their end in that body, though it is imperfect and transitory. But a self-conscious person can dream of perfection, and, having once done so, he will find no end short of perfection. Here he has no abiding city.

I do not think that this view leads either to asceticism or to the cloister. Not to asceticism; for there is nothing in it inconsistent with the great truth, so often neglected, that a limited good is still good, only limited. A bottle of champagne is as truly good as the beatific vision could be. The only reason why we should not take the satisfaction produced by champagne as our end is that it is neither all-inclusive nor eternal, and a self-consciousness which is once awake will not be satisfied with anything less. But the fact that we cannot stop till we get to heaven will not make our champagne on the road less desirable, unless, of course, we should see reason to regard it as a hindrance to the journey.

Nor have we found any reason to suppose that our proper course would be to isolate ourselves from society, even the imperfect society of this world. For if society is only a means, at least it is an indispensable means. If it is not a god to be worshipped, it is none the less a tool which must be used.

But has philosophy any guidance to give us as to the manner in which we shall use such a tool? It might be supposed that it had. "Let us grant," it might be said, "that the fact that the Absolute is an organic society does not prove that our present society is or ought to be organic. Yet our present society will become perfect in so far as it approaches the Absolute. And therefore we have at least an *a priori* criterion of social progress. Whatever makes society more organic is an advance. Whatever makes society less organic is a mistake."

This argument seems to me fallacious. For we must re-

member that, while the Absolute is a perfect unity, it is a perfect unity of perfect individuals. Not only is the bond of union closer than anything which we can now even imagine, but the persons which it unites are each self-conscious, self-centred,* unique, to a degree equally unimaginable. If, on one side, we are defective at present because we are not joined closely enough together, we are defective, on the other side, because we are not sufficiently differentiated apart.

These two defects, and the remedies for them, are not, of course, incompatible. Indeed, Hegel teaches us that they are necessarily connected. None but perfect individuals could unite in a perfect unity. Only in a perfect unity could perfect individuals exist. But Hegel also points out that our advance towards an ideal is never direct. Every ideal can be analyzed into two complementary moments. And in advancing towards it we emphasize, first, one of these, and then, driven on in the dialectic process by the consequent incompleteness and contradiction, we place a corresponding emphasis on the other, and finally gain a higher level by uniting the two.

This is the Hegelian law of progress. To apply it to the present case, it tells us that, in advancing towards an ideal where we shall be both more differentiated and more united than we are now, we shall emphasize first either the differentiation or the union, and then supplement it by the other, reach thus a higher state of equilibrium, from which a fresh start must be made, and so on, through continually repeated oscillations, towards the goal.

It would follow, then, that it would be impossible for us to say that a change in the constitution of society was only good if it drew men more closely together. For an advance in either direction will appear, till the corresponding advance is made in the other, to amount to a positive decrease in the latter, which has become relatively less important. If, in a given state of society, the unity increases while the differentia-

* Self-centred does not, with Hegel, mean isolated. Indeed, the two qualities are incompatible.

tion is as yet unchanged, it will appear to have lost individuality. If, on the other hand, differentiation increases while the unity is unchanged, society will appear to have lost unity. And yet in each case there will be a real advance in the only way in which advance is possible, because the emphasis laid on one side furnishes the possibility—indeed, the necessity—for the eventual advance of the other side, which, for the time, it throws into the background.

Philosophy, then, can afford us no guidance as to the next step to be taken at any time. It can tell us that we are far below the ideal, both in unity and in differentiation. It can tell us that we cannot advance far in one without advancing also in the other. But it also tells us that the steps are to be taken alternately, and it can give us no information as to which, here and now, we have to take next. That must depend on the particular circumstances which surround us at the moment,—our needs, dangers, resources. It can only be decided empirically, and it will be just as often a step which throws the unity into the background as it will be one which brings it forward into increased prominence.

There is no want of historical examples which illustrate this alternate movement of society. The institution of private property, the first establishment of Christianity, and the breaking-up of the feudal system—each involved an increased emphasis on the individual. And each tended to make society, as it was, not more but less of an organism, by giving the individual claims and ideals which could not be satisfied in society as it was, and some of which—such as parts of the Christian ideal—cannot be satisfied on earth at all. Yet they were all steps in a real advance; for on the increased individuality of the parts which they gave there have formed, and are still forming, unities far closer than could have been attained without them. And if the Hegelian conception of the Absolute had been known when any of these changes was working itself out, we can see now that it would have been a mistake to have condemned the change on the ground that it diminished instead of increasing the unity of society.

And so, too, with the present. We are confronted to-day

with schemes both for increasing and diminishing the stringency of social ties. On the one hand, we are invited to nationalize the production of wealth. On the other hand, it is suggested that the relations of husband and wife and of parent and child should be reduced to the minimum which is physiologically necessary. I have no intention of suggesting that the second proposal is right, or—here at least—that the first is wrong. But I maintain that the question is one upon which philosophy throws no light, and which must be decided empirically. The ideal is so enormously distant that the most perfect knowledge of the end we are aiming at helps us very little in the choice of the road by which we may get there. Fortunately, it is an ideal which is not only the absolutely good but the absolutely real, and we can take no road that does not lead to it.

The result seems to be that philosophy can give us very little, if any, guidance in action. Nor can I see why it should be expected to do so. Why should a Hegelian citizen be surprised that his belief as to the organic nature of the Absolute does not help him in deciding how to vote? Would a Hegelian engineer be reasonable in expecting that his belief that all matter is spirit should help him in planning a bridge? And if it be asked of what use, then, is philosophy, and if that should be held a relevant question to ask about the search for truth, I should reply that the use of philosophy lies not in being deeper than science, but in being truer than theology,—not in its bearing on action, but in its bearing on religion. It does not give us guidance. It gives us hope.

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