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LECTURES ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY
COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED
NEWLY TRANSLATED
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BASED ON THE 1857 TRANSLATION BY JOHN SIBREE
Introduction

Classification of Historical Data

In the geographical survey, the course of world history has been marked out in its general features. The sun—the light—rises in the East. Light is however the simple relation upon itself; light, which is general in itself, in the sun is likewise as subject. The scene has often been depicted of the emotions of a blind man suddenly becoming possessed of sight, beholding the bright glimmering of the dawn, the growing light, and the flaming glory of the ascending sun. The boundless forgetfulness of his individuality in this pure splendor is his first feeling—utter astonishment. But when the sun is risen, this astonishment is diminished; objects around are perceived, and from them the individual proceeds to the contemplation of his own inner being, and thereby the advance is made to the perception of the relation between the two. Then inactive contemplation is quitted for activity; by the close of day, man has erected a building constructed from his own inner sun; and when in the evening he contemplates this, he esteems it more highly than the original external sun. For now he stands in a relation to his spirit, and therefore in a free relation. If we hold this image fast in mind, we shall find it symbolizing the course of history, the great day’s work of spirit.

World history travels from East to West, for Europe is quite the end of history, Asia the beginning. For world history, an East και Ἑλλάς [par excellence] presents itself, in that for itself the East is entirely relative; for although the Earth forms a sphere, history circumscribes no circle round it, but has on the contrary a determinate East, viz., Asia. Here rises the outward physical sun, and in the West it sinks down: in its place, though, rises the sun of self-consciousness, which diffuses a nobler brilliance. World history is the discipline of the wildness of the natural will to that which is general and to subjective freedom. The East knew, and to the present day knows only, that one is free; the Greek and Roman world, that some are free; the Germanic world knows that all are free. The first political form therefore which we observe in history, is despotism, the second democracy and aristocracy, the third monarchy.

In order to understand this division, it should be noted, since the state is the general spiritual life to which individuals, by birth, relate with trust and
by habit, and in which they have their essence and reality, that it is crucial, firstly, whether their actual life is an unreflecting habit and usage of this unity, or whether its constituent individuals are reflective and personal beings, subjects existing for themselves. It is in this connection that substantial freedom must be distinguished from subjective freedom. Substantial freedom is the reason of the will existing for itself, which then develops itself in the state. But in this phase of reason there is still wanting personal insight and will, that is, subjective freedom, which first determines itself in the individual, and which constitutes the reflection of the individual in his conscience. Where there is merely substantial freedom, commands and laws are fixed in and of themselves, to which the subject relates in terms of absolute servitude. These laws need not concur with the desire of the individual, and the subjects are consequently like children, who obey their parents without will or insight of their own. But as subjective freedom arises, and man descends from the contemplation of external reality into his own spirit, the opposition of reflection arises, which in itself contains the negation of reality. The drawing back from the present already in itself forms an opposition, of which one side is the absolute being, the divine, the other the subject as particular. In that immediate, unreflected consciousness which characterizes the East, these two are not yet distinguished. The substantial world is distinct from the individual, but the opposition has not yet been put into the spirit.

The first thing with which we begin, then, is the East. Immediate consciousness, substantial spirituality, forms the basis of this world, to which the subjective will first sustains a relation in the form of faith, confidence, obedience. In the state life of the East we find a realized rational freedom, developing itself without advancing to subjective freedom. It is the childhood of history. Substantial figurations constitute the gorgeous edifices of Oriental empires, in which we find all rational ordnances and arrangements, but in such a way that individuals remain as mere accidents. These revolve round a center, round the ruler, who, as patriarch — not as despot in the sense of the Roman imperial constitution — stands at the head. For he has to assert the ethical and substantial: he has to uphold those essential ordnances which are already established; so that what among us belongs entirely to subjective freedom, here proceeds from the whole and the general. The splendor of the Oriental view is the one individual as substance, to which all belongs, so that
no other subject has a separate existence and mirrors himself in his subjective freedom. All the riches of imagination and nature are appropriated to that dominant existence, in which subjective freedom is essentially sunk, and has its honor not in itself but in that absolute object. All the aspects of the state – even subjectivity – may be found there, but not yet reconciled with the substance. For outside the one power, before which nothing independent can take shape, there is only revolting caprice, which, beyond the limits of the central power, roves at will without purpose or result. Accordingly, we find the wild hordes breaking out from the highland, falling upon the countries in question and laying them waste, or settling down in them, and giving up their wild life, but generally without yielding a result, gathering dust in the substance. This determination of substantiality, since it has not taken up its antithesis into itself and overcome it, directly splits into two aspects. On the one side we see duration, stability – empires belonging to mere space, as it were (as distinguished from time) – unhistorical history, as for example in China, the state based on the family relation; a paternal government, which holds together the constitution by its provident care, its admonitions, retributive or rather disciplinary inflections; a prosaic empire, because the antithesis of form, viz., infinity, ideality, has not yet arisen. On the other side, the form of time stands contrasted with this spatial duration. The states in question, without undergoing any change in themselves, or in their principle, are constantly changing their position towards each other. They are in ceaseless conflict, which brings rapid destruction upon themselves. In this orientation outwards, of conflict and struggle, the chastisement of the individual principle enters in, but it is itself as yet only unconscious, merely natural generality – light, which is not yet the light of the personal soul. This history too is for the most part yet history-less, for it is only the repetition of the same majestic ruin. The new element, which in the shape of bravery, prowess, magnanimity, occupies the place of the previous despotic pomp, goes through the same circle of decline and subsidence. This subsidence is therefore not really such, for through all this restless change no advance is made. History passes at this point – and only outwardly, i.e., without connection with the previous phase – to Central Asia. Continuing the comparison with the ages of the individual man, this would be the boyhood of history, no longer manifesting the repose and trustiness of the child, but boisterous and turbulent.
The Greek world may then be compared with the period of adolescence, for here we have individualities forming themselves. This is the main principle in world history. The ethical is, as in Asia, a principle; but it is ethical life imbued with individuality, and consequently denoting the free volition of individuals. Here, then, is the union of the ethical with the subjective will, or the kingdom of beautiful freedom, for the idea is united with a plastic form. It is not yet regarded abstractedly, but immediately bound up with the real, as in a beautiful work of art; the sensuous bears the stamp and expression of the spiritual. This kingdom is consequently true harmony; the world of the most graceful, but perishable or quickly passing bloom: it is the naive ethical life, not yet morality, but rather the individual will of the subject within the immediate mores and custom of rights and laws. The individual is therefore in unconscious unity with the general goal. That which in the East is divided into two extremes – the substantial as such, and individuality atomizing over against it – here comes together. But these distinct principles are only immediately in unity, and consequently the most extreme contradiction to themselves; for this beautiful ethics has not yet passed through the struggle of subjective freedom, which would be born again; it is not yet purified to the standard of the free subjectivity of ethical life.

The third phase is the realm of abstract generality: it is the Roman empire, the hard labor of the manhood of history. For true manhood acts neither in accordance with the caprice of a despot, nor in obedience to a graceful caprice of its own; but serves the general aim, in which the individual is submerged and attains his own private goal only in that general goal. The state begins abstractly to stand out and to develop toward a goal, in accomplishing which its members have indeed a share, but not a continuous and concrete one. Free individuals in fact are sacrificed to the severity of the goal, to which they must devote themselves in this service for the abstract universal itself. The Roman empire is no longer an empire of individuals as was the city of Athens. The geniality and joy of soul that existed there have given place to harsh and rigorous toil. The interest is detached from individuals, but these gain for themselves abstract, formal generality. The general subjugates the individuals; they have to merge themselves in it; but in return they receive the generality of themselves – that is to say, their personality: as private, they become legal, persons. In the same sense that individuals may be said to be incorporated in the abstract idea of person,
national individualities have to undergo this fate; in this form of generality their concrete shapes are crushed, and incorporated with it as a homogeneous and indifferent mass. Rome becomes a pantheon of all deities, and of all that is spiritual, but these divinities and this spirit do not retain their peculiar vitality.

The development of this empire proceeds in two directions. On the one hand, as based on reflection — abstract generality — it has the express outspoken antithesis in itself; it therefore essentially involves in itself the struggle of that antithesis, with the necessary issue that arbitrary individuality — the purely contingent and thoroughly worldly power of a ruler — gets the better of that abstract generality. At the very outset we have the antithesis between the goal of the state as the abstract generality on the one hand, and the abstract person on the other; but when subsequently, in the course of history, personality gains the ascendant, its breakup into atoms can only be held together externally; then the subjective power of rule comes forward as if summoned to fulfil this task. For abstract legality is this: not to be concrete from within, not to have organization from within; and this, having come to power, has only an arbitrary power as contingent subjectivity as what moves it, as what rules it; and the individual seeks in the developed private law solace for his lost freedom. This is the purely secular reconciliation of the antithesis. But now the pain from despotism begins to be felt, and spirit driven back into its utmost depths, leaves the godless world, seeks reconciliation within itself, and now begins the life of its inwardness, a fulfilled concrete inwardness, which at the same time possesses a substantiality not grounded only in external existence. Within the soul therefore arises the spiritual reconciliation, namely through the individual personality being purified and transfigured into generality, to general subjectivity in and for itself, to divine personality. To that merely secular empire is now opposed the spiritual one, the empire of the self-knowing, and indeed self-knowing subjectivity in its essence, the actual spirit.

The Germanic world appears at this point of development — the fourth phase of world history. This would answer in the comparison with the periods of human life to its old age. The old age of nature is weakness; but that of spirit is its perfect maturity, in which it returns to unity, but as spirit.

This fourth phase begins with the reconciliation presented in Christianity, but only in principle [an sich], without national or political
development. We must therefore regard it as commencing rather with the enormous contrast between the spiritual, religious principle, and the barbarian reality. For spirit as the consciousness of an inner world is, at the commencement, itself still in an abstract form, and the secular is consequently given over to rudeness and caprice. The Mohammedan principle – the transfiguration of the Oriental world – was the first to oppose this rudeness and caprice. It developed later and more rapidly than Christianity; for the latter needed eight centuries to grow up into a world figure. But that principle of the Germanic world which we are now discussing attained concrete reality only in the history of the Germanic nations. The contrast of the spiritual principle in the spiritual kingdom with the rough and wild barbarism in the secular kingdom is here likewise present. The seculum should, but only should, be in harmony with the spiritual principle: the secular power forsaken by the spirit must in the first instance vanish before the spiritual power; but this latter, by sinking to mere secularity, loses its power with the loss of its purpose [Bestimmung]. This corruption of the spiritual side – that is, of the church – produces the higher form of rational thought: spirit once more driven back upon itself, produces its work in shape of thought, and becomes capable of realizing the rational from the secular principle alone. Thus it happens that through the activity of general determinations having as their basis the principle of spirit, the empire of thought is brought into reality. The antithesis of church and state vanishes; the spirit finds itself in secularity and develops this latter as an existence organic in itself. The state no longer comes after the church, and is no longer subordinate to it; the latter asserts no prerogative, and the spiritual is no longer foreign to the state. Freedom has found the means of realizing its concept and its truth. This is the goal of world history, and we have to traverse in detail the long track which has been thus cursorily traced out. Yet length of time is something entirely relative, and eternity belongs to the spirit: actual duration does not exist for it.
The negative is here, too, the merely natural; but as the death of a god, it is not a limitation attaching to an individual object, but is pure negativity itself. And this point is important, because the generic conception that has to be formed of deity is spirit; which involves its being concrete, and having in it the element of negativity. The qualities of wisdom and power are also concrete qualities, but only as predicates; so that God remains abstract substantial unity, in which differences themselves vanish, and do not become aspects of this unity. But here the negative itself is an aspect of deity, the natural, death, the worship appropriate to which is grief. It is in the celebration of the death of Adonis, and of his resurrection, that the concrete is made conscious. Adonis is a youth, who is torn from his parents by a too early death. In China, in the worship of ancestors, these latter enjoy divine honor. But parents in their decease only pay the debt of nature. When a youth is snatched away by death, the occurrence is regarded as contrary to the proper order of things: and while grief at the death of parents is no just grief, in the case of youth death is a contradiction. And this is the depth, that in God negativity, contradiction, is manifested; and that the worship rendered to him involves both aspects, the pain felt for the god snatched away, and the joy occasioned by his being found again.

Judea

The next people belonging to the Persian empire, in that wide circle of nationalities which it comprises, is the Jewish. We find here, too, a canonical book, the Old Testament, in which the views of this people, whose principle is the exact opposite of the one just described, are exhibited. While among the Phoenician people the spiritual was still limited by nature, in the case of the Jews we find it entirely purified; the pure product of thought, self-thought, comes to consciousness, and the spiritual develops itself in sharp contrast to nature and to union with it. It is true that we observed at an earlier stage the pure Brahm, but only as the universal being of nature; and with this limitation, that Brahm is not himself an object of consciousness. Among the Persians we saw this abstract being become an object for consciousness, but it was that of sensorial contemplation – as light. But light is henceforth Jehovah – the purely One. This is the reason for the break between East and West; spirit descends into the depths of its own being, and recognizes the abstract fundamental principle as the spiritual. Nature – which
in the East is the primary, the foundation — is now pushed down to the condition of a mere creature; and spirit now occupies the first place. God is known as the Creator of all men, as He is of all nature, and as absolute causality generally. But this great principle, however, is, in its broader determination, excluding unity. This religion must necessarily possess the element of exclusiveness, which consists essentially in this, that only the one people recognizes the One God, and is acknowledged by Him. The God of the Jewish people is the God only of Abraham and of his seed: national individuality and a particular local worship are involved in such a conception. Before Him all other gods are false; moreover, the distinction between “true” and “false” is quite abstract; for as regards the false gods, not a ray of the divine is recognized as shining into them. But every form of spiritual activity, and the more so every religion, is of such a nature, that whatever be its peculiar character, an affirmative element is necessarily contained in it. However erroneous a religion may be, it possesses truth, although in a mutilated phase. In every religion there is a divine presence, a divine relation; and a philosophy of history has to seek out the spiritual element even in the most imperfect forms. But it does not follow that because it is a religion, it is therefore good. We must not fall into the lax conception whereby only the form, and not the content, is of importance. This loose soft-heartedness the Jewish religion does not admit, it being absolutely exclusive.

The spiritual tells itself here that it is absolutely free of the sensorial, and nature is reduced to something merely external and ungodly. This is actually the truth about nature, for only later can the idea attain reconciliation in this its externality. Its first utterances will be in opposition to nature; for spirit, which had been hitherto dishonored, now first attains its due dignity, while nature resumes its proper position. Nature is itself external, it is that which is the posited [das Gesetzte], it is created; and this notion that God is the Lord and Creator of nature, leads men to regard God as the exalted one, while the whole of nature is only His robe of glory, and is applied to His service. In contrast with this kind of exaltation, that which the Indian religion presents is only that of boundlessness [Maßlosen]. Through spirituality in general, the sensuous and immoral are no longer privileged, but disparaged as ungodliness. Only the one, spirit, the non-sensuous, is the truth; thought exists freely for itself, and true morality and lawfulness [Rechtlichkeit] can now make their appearance; for God is honored by lawfulness, and right-
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doing is "walking in the way of the Lord." With this is conjoined happiness, life, and temporal prosperity as its reward; for it is said: "that thou mayest live long in the land." Here too we have the possibility of a historical view; for the understanding has become prosaic; putting the limited and circumscribed in its proper place, and comprehending it as the form proper to finite existence: men are regarded as individuals, not as incarnations of God; sun as sun, mountains as mountains, not as if possessing spirit and will.

We observe among this people a hard service as relation to pure thought. The individual as concrete does not become free because the absolute itself is not comprehended as concrete spirit, because spirit still appears to be posited as spiritless. It is true that inwardness is manifest - the pure heart, repentance, prayer; but the particular concrete subject has not become objective to itself in the absolute. It therefore remains closely bound to the observance of ceremonies and of the law, the basis of which latter is pure freedom in its abstract form. The Jews possess that which makes them what they are, through the One consequently the subject has no freedom for himself. Spinoza regards the code of Moses as having been given by God to the Jews for a punishment - a rod of correction. The subject never comes to the consciousness of his independence; on that account we do not find among the Jews any belief in the immortality of the soul; for the subject does not exist in and for itself. But though in Judaism the subject has no value, the family is self-reliant, for the worship of Jehovah, and thus the substantial, is attached to the family. But the state is an institution which is not consistent with the Judaistic principle, and it is alien to the legislation of Moses. In the idea of the Jews, Jehovah is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who commanded them to depart out of Egypt, and gave them the land of Canaan. The accounts of the patriarchs attract our interest. We see in this history the transition from the patriarchal nomad condition to agriculture. On the whole, the Jewish history exhibits grand features of character; but it is disfigured by an exclusive bearing (sanctioned in its religion) towards the genius of other nations (the destruction of the inhabitants of Canaan being even commanded), by want of culture generally, and by the superstition arising from the idea of the high value of their peculiar nationality. Miracles, too, form a disturbing feature in this history as history; for as far as concrete consciousness is not free, concrete perception is also not free; nature is de-divinized but not yet understood.