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The Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism

... an *Ethics*.¹ Since the whole of metaphysics falls for the future within *moral theory* – of which Kant with his pair of practical postulates has given only an *example*, and not *exhausted* it, this *Ethics* will be nothing less than a complete system of all Ideas [*Ideen*] or of all practical postulates (which is the same thing). The first Idea is, of course, the presentation [*Vorstellung*] of *my* self as an absolutely free entity [*Wesen*]. Along with the free, self-conscious essence there stands forth – out of nothing – an entire *world* – the one true and thinkable creation out of nothing. – Here I shall descend into the realms of physics; the question is this: how must a world be constituted for a moral entity? I would like to give wings once more to our backward physics, that advances laboriously by experiments.

Thus – if philosophy supplies the Ideas, and experience the data, we may at last come to have in essentials the physics that I look forward to for later times. It does not appear that our present-day physics can satisfy a creative spirit such as ours is or ought to be.

From nature I come to the *work of man*. The Idea of mankind [being] premised – I shall prove that it gives us no Idea of the *State*, since the State is a mechanical thing, any more than it gives us an Idea of a *machine*. Only something that is an objective [*Gegenstand*] of *freedom* is called an *Idea*. So we must go even beyond the State! – for every State must treat free men as cogs in a machine; and this it ought not to do; so it must *stop*. It is self-evident that in this sphere all the Ideas, of perpetual peace etc., are only *subordinate* Ideas under a higher one. At the same time I shall here lay down the principles for a *history of mankind*, and strip the whole wretched human work of State, constitution, government, legal system – naked to the skin. Finally come the Ideas of a moral world, divinity, immortality – uprooting of all superstition, the prosecution of the priesthood which of late poses as rational, at the bar of Reason itself. – Absolute freedom of all spirits who bear the intellectual world in themselves, and cannot seek either God or immortality outside themselves.

Last of all the Idea that unites all the rest, the Idea of *beauty* taking the word in its higher Platonic sense. I am now convinced that the highest act of Reason, the one through which it encompasses all Ideas, is an aesthetic act, and that *truth and goodness only become sisters in beauty* – the philosopher must possess just as much aesthetic power as the poet. Men without aesthetic sense is what the philosophers-of-the-letter of our times [*unsre Buchstaben-philosophen*] are. The philosophy of the spirit is an aesthetic philosophy. One cannot be creative [*geistreich*] in any way, even about history one cannot argue creatively – without aesthetic sense. Here it ought to become clear what it is that men lack, who understand no ideas – and who confess honestly enough that they find everything obscure as soon as it goes beyond the table of contents and the index.

Poetry gains thereby a higher dignity, she becomes at the end once more, what she was in the beginning – the *teacher of mankind*; for there is no philosophy, no history left, the maker's art alone will survive all other sciences and arts.

At the same time we are told so often that the great mob must have a *religion of the senses*. But not only does the great mob need it, the philosopher needs it too. Monotheism of Reason and heart, polytheism of the imagination and of art, this is what we need.

Here I shall discuss particularly an idea which, as far as I know, has never occurred to anyone else – we must have a new mythology, but this mythology must be in the service of the Ideas, it must be a mythology of *Reason*.

Until we express the Ideas aesthetically, i.e. mythologically, they have no interest for the *people*, and conversely until mythology is rational the philosopher must be ashamed of it. Thus in the end enlightened and unenlightened must clasp hands, mythology must become philosophical in order to make the people rational, and philosophy must become mythological in order to make the philosophers sensible [*sinnlich*]. Then reigns eternal unity among us. No more the look of scorn [of the enlightened philosopher looking down on the mob], no more the blind trembling of the people before its wise men and priests. Then first awaits us *equal* development of *all* powers, of what is peculiar to each and what is common to all. No power shall any longer be suppressed for universal freedom and equality of spirits will reign! – A higher spirit sent from heaven must found this new religion among us, it will be the last and greatest work of mankind.

Notes

- 1 The first sentence is fragmentary in Hegel's manuscript. Occasional words and phrases in square brackets in this passage have been added by the translator, H. S. Harris. [S.H.]