For Idea and Reality.

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The Natural Laws of Society.

[289] History has its laws just as fully as nature; but it is more difficult to point out the strict laws in history, since they do not pass directly into necessity, but are laws of the spirit, laws of freedom conditioned in manifold ways.

If we hold to what is common to all humanity, then the historical movements always proceed from existing conditions of society that are bound to certain natural conditions. That society, although a product of the spirit — the family spirit, the patriarchal spirit, and so on — is subject to a natural necessity, follows directly from the fact that the human spirit in all its particular manifestations has its ground in human nature. Man's higher nature is, despite the Fall and crimes, a spiritual nature; the spiritual nature is the nobility of the race. The forefathers, the heroes of legend, the great mythical figures who open the gates of history and set the driving wheels of events in motion, are, in the midst of the shimmering photosphere, the strong radiance of the supernatural with which a divining, wondering imagination has surrounded them, nevertheless in a spiritually real sense models for their descendants; they are
[290] so precisely in that the spiritual in their deed and being is so natural, and the natural in turn so spiritual.

According to natural right, that is: nature's own factual right, the principle holds that everything possible is permitted, and only the impossible forbidden. Understood in this way the principle cannot be applied to historical social development. In society it is precisely the possible that is forbidden; for to forbid the impossible is superfluous. Here, in relation to the demands of right, there is much that happens that ought not to happen, and much that ought to happen that does not happen; in human society there is, what there is not in blind nature, difference and strife between right and wrong.

None the less the strife everywhere points back to a spiritual ground in nature, and, when the fundamental forces are stirred, transforms itself into a palpable, tangible difference between the natural and the unnatural. To be sure, a state of nature is by no means a state of right; but in the decisive sense the demand of right must nevertheless rest on an original claim, an inner, irrefutable natural need. The just is in the last instance the natural, and the unjust the unnatural; right is natural, wrong unnatural; it is these simple fundamental determinations on which everything depends when we speak of *the natural laws of society.*

If matters stood in such a way that the fundamental demands that arise from the nature of society could involuntarily be felt and perceived by all as demands that were natural to individuals and immediately satisfied each one's need: then the transition from society in its natural state to a developed state of right would proceed harmoniously, and the historical movements would be like the tones of a symphony. *[291]* But now there is, as is well known, a disquieting opposition between what essentially accords with the nature of society and the immediate, highly various demands of individuals. Hence upheavals, discords, shrieking dissonances that are not resolved. Instead of a spiritual development grounded in nature there now arises a cutting opposition between the natural and the artificial, and the artificial becomes in many ways unnatural. To clarify the natural laws of society it is necessary to consider the tension just indicated.

Society has, by virtue of its nature, manifold demands, both strong and valid; but because of the still greater manifoldness of individual claims, these social natural demands come at every moment into conflict with one another. It is a fundamental demand that there shall be order in society; but it is also a fundamental demand that individuals, precisely by virtue of this order, shall enjoy a certain limited freedom. For the maintenance of good order the powers that be may apply many kinds of compulsion and pressure; individuals put up with it and find it natural for the sake of order. All the well-disposed feel that there is a consideration that puts the private interests of individuals in the shade, and that this is the consideration of public, civic order.

But when this consideration has for a long time asserted itself one-sidedly, then the machinery of state becomes more and more artificial, the application of pressure and compulsion more and more arbitrary, and the condition in the end wholly unnatural. Society approaches a turning point, when millions must suffer so that a few favored ones may enjoy; and when this turning point has arrived, when it has really become *[292]* palpable and manifest to the crowd how unnatural the condition is: then one can predict with the same certainty that the existing order will be burst asunder, as one can predict that an explosion will occur when fire gets into gunpowder. To be sure, the necessity with which an oppressed, maltreated mass of people surges up and overthrows a throne is unlike the necessity with which gunpowder explodes, but the unlikeness is not absolute; the only sufficient ground for a revolution is an immediate necessity corresponding to irrefutable conditions of life, a social natural necessity.

The demand of freedom breaks through with necessity and thereby announces

itself as an original demand of society. But when this fundamental demand, however natural it may be, is asserted one-sidedly, the unnatural again emerges. It is the crowd that demands freedom and demands it with passion, but crowd and passion share the innate weakness that they are unable to limit themselves: a rational self-limitation is as foreign to the wild mob as to inflamed passion; the natural determination in which they both, mob and passion, agree is unbridledness. But for society unbridledness is the most unnatural of all; unbridledness is the dissolution of society. It is rational mechanics. The greater the pressure that awoke the uprising, the more terrible is the raging of the crowd; but the wilder the crowd rages, the more quickly the reversal sets in again. All chains are broken, all bonds loosed; the abyss yawns, and the
[293] abomination of desolation appears on every side. But when all is chaos, confusion and horror, when the underworld opens its maw, and the brazen walls of Tartarus are burst, what wonder that anguish runs through the crowd, that terror paralyzes even the foolhardy, that from every corner people look out expectantly for a Jupiter with the thunderbolt. So there must be given a governing power, a power that brings order — order at any price! The ordering power comes from without, yes, from above; but it does not fall directly down from heaven; it has in the condition itself its omens and prohibitions. Despotism on such terms gets the natural law on its side; the fire of freedom consumed itself: a strong despot begins the exercise of power all over again.

If there were now nothing else to discover in the development of society than such divergent extremes, history would, despite the changes in the outward, be only a repetition of monotonous cycles, in which the expert, sharp-witted observer would for the most part have to be able to determine the periods, as one determines the seasons. But just as the spiritual in man is conditioned by the natural, so in turn the natural is conditioned by the spiritual. What the race can find natural at one stage of society, it can find unnatural at another.

Men's natural feelings and natural demands rest on an original conception of what man essentially is, what worth he has, and what goal has been set for him in the world; from the interaction between the ideal conception and the natural self-esteem in the form of instinct and impulse there arises the restless striving, the
[294] never-resting longing toward a distant, perhaps unattainable goal; here is the cause of the movement, the fundamental condition of all historical progress.

It is not simply either the refinement of morals or the purification of the mind or the subjugation of the passions that forms the boundary between the pre-Christian and Christian periods in the history of the world. To be sure, the so-called Christian

civilization stands in many and essential respects high above the pre-Christian, but these advantages cannot be taken singly to its credit. It is notorious that the Christian virtues have as their companions a train of peculiar vices, vices that heathen antiquity was not in a position to breed from such a depth of corruption, because its consciousness did not reach so far; it is notorious that ecclesiastical faith has not merely provoked unbelief, but has even, through human guilt, conditioned a superstition so dark and abominable that the unnaturalness of heathendom in comparison with it takes on a tinge of involuntary blindness and excusable coarseness; it is notorious that crimes of the spirit in every direction grow with the growing consciousness of spirit and for that reason — be it said, if one will, to the honor of Christian civilization — have never taken deeper root or extended farther or risen higher than precisely in the present age.

The natural conception of what it is to be a human being was in heathen antiquity quite different from what it later became through the influence of Christianity; it is the difference in this natural, mark well, *natural* conception of man's self-worth that marks the historical line of demarcation. However prominent the opposition between Oriental despotism and Greek freedom, it nevertheless finds on closer consideration *[295]* its resolution in a common foundation. A trait from the story of Cambyses can make the matter clear. The king asks once, in an exuberant mood, his friend and counselor Prexaspes: What do the Persians say of me? — Otherwise, lord, answered Prexaspes, they praise you in everything; only they think that you are too much given to wine. — Now you shall judge for yourself, answered the king, whether the Persians speak truly, or whether they themselves are out of their minds, when they say such things. If I hit your son, who stands there in the vestibule, in the middle of the heart, then it is evident that the Persians speak untruly, and that I am in my right mind. — In the same instant he drew the bow and shot at the boy, and when he fell, he had him cut open, showed his father that the arrow stuck right in the heart, and said, quite self-satisfied, to Prexaspes: So it is evident, then, that it is the Persians who are out of their minds, and not I; have you ever seen in the whole world a better marksman? — Prexaspes answered: A god himself could not shoot better.

At our present stage of society there is certainly no one, however coarse and uncultivated he may otherwise be, who would not find this action in the highest degree revolting and unnatural. One is revolted not merely at Cambyses's ruthless cruelty; one is revolted if possible still more at the slavish resignation with which the father, to escape the son's fate, bows under arbitrariness and flatters the despot's

omnipotence. But the Persians of that time, with their social consciousness, did not find such a royal action so revolting or unnatural. On the contrary! The cultivated — Prexaspes belonged after all to the cultivated — had to find on the whole that such a
[296] thing was in order. Without an unlimited ruler society could simply not exist, and what was then more natural than that the Mighty One should act on whim and at every moment do what he had a mind to.

That this, however many exceptions there may be in particulars, must have been the prevailing way of looking at things is also evident from the remarkable fact that Cambyses's entourage expressed a deep sympathy for himself at the last. Just as he had armed himself for battle against the false Smerdis, he received by an accident a wound that threw him on his deathbed. He now summoned the foremost Persians, and in order to convince them that the rebel was a wretched liar, he revealed to them what had hitherto been kept secret, that he had really murdered his own brother. Far from repenting, he only lamented himself and bewailed his sorrowful fate. The bystanders found it quite natural: "when the Persians saw their king weep, they tore their clothes and wept loudly with him."

That such a way of thinking was revolting to the free Greek is certain; but that Greek society could, though in another way and in another form, permit itself against outstanding individualities actions that were at bottom just as revolting as those that distinguish Cambyses, is also certain. The fact is that the Greeks, despite all their sense for the free, harmonious development of individuality, yet, when it came to the point, had as little as the Persians any decisive respect for personality, any immediate, pervasive impression of man's original self-worth. The popular religion, the mythical foundation upon which the whole culture-edifice shining in beauty,
[297] that adorned Hellas so wondrously, was erected, contains a misapprehension of the eternal self of the individual, a denial of man's personal being. The gods in Homer constitute, as is well known, a society of immortals by themselves, exalted above, and separated by an insurmountable gulf from "the mortal generations." — "Brave son of Tydeus, why do you ask me of my descent? Like the leaves of the trees, so are the generations of men: the wind scatters the leaves on the ground, but when the forests turn green, fresh ones shoot forth from the branches at the return of spring. So the generations of men, one is born, another passes away." These words of Glaucus to Diomedes are more than an involuntary outburst of a momentary mood; they express a fundamental view pervading the whole of Greek culture, a presupposition beyond which the natural self-esteem could never reach. This misapprehension of the self,

this barrier of consciousness, none of the philosophers was in a position to remove; the only one who seriously tried it was sentenced to death.

Only with Christianity as a world-historical power does personal self-esteem gain entrance into society. It is not the relation to God in its inwardness and purity that is aimed at here; for the effects of this are not directly outward-going and visible, but inward-going, invisible. No, it is the higher conception of man's vocation as a whole and the feeling of human dignity and human right grounded upon it that is spoken of. The Gospel's word of man as created in God's image, when it sounds in a sensuous ear, has something highly flattering to self-love; this word has worked as a leaven in the masses; it has set personal right in an ever clearer light; it has brought the object *[298]* of self-contemplation near to the eye and enlarged the visual image.

By mixing the eternal with the temporal, letting the suprasensible step forth in sensible tangibility, and taking human passions into service, as much for enthusiasm and action as for repentance and suffering, the Church in the Middle Ages was able to make itself the supreme majesty governing state and people. In comparison with the lower powers of the world it had originally right on its side and knew how to make its right valid. For an understanding of its rise, culmination and decline it is necessary to make a sharp distinction between the Church as a religious institution with the means of salvation in its keeping and the Church as a phenomenon of cultural history, as an encroaching world power. That Catholicism in the first respect has unfolded ideal forces and in its way developed strong religious characters shall never be denied; but nonetheless it stands firm that its high self-esteem as a world power was of a selfish nature; the fire in its blood, the marrow in its bones, the driving force in its head and limbs was, even when it most clothed itself in the semblance of piety and holiness, insatiable covetousness, unconquerable lust for power, incarnate egoism. It is this egoism that holds the papal church bound under the natural law and marks out its course. It rose like the sun, and it had to rise. it had rays that dispelled the darkness; it had a saving, liberating word; it pointed to an exalted goal; it spoke in its language the cause of humanity, and its word penetrated into souls. But by selfishly worldly means to further a supra-worldly goal, to serve heaven by ruling on earth and to take honor from men in order to spread God's honor, this fundamental endeavor *[299]* contained in its germ a corruption that necessarily had to lead the development from the first natural over into the unnatural. Early the hierarchical pretensions of bishops and archbishops began to be a burden to the newly formed states; early began the scandals at the Roman court. And yet it was the clergy who took up the cause of the

oppressed, supported woman and freed the thrall; it was the clergy who in the name of right and morality stepped forth against brutal power and set barriers to barbarous arbitrariness; it was, in one word, the clergy who in the age of the law of the fist brought order, and the wildly fermenting society needed order.

It is now easy to see that the same conditions that from the first brought about the rise of the hierarchy had to bring about its decline in their consequences. If the domineering, selfish nature had lain merely in the individuals, not in the Church itself, then the corruption breaking in, however widely ramified it might for a time have been, could still always be regarded as something accidental and transitory; no one could then determine with certainty whether the papal church might not allow itself to be purified and reformed to the extent that it once more took hold of the reins of government, once more attained its old medieval authority over people and princes. But the matter stands otherwise. The egoism of the hierarchs and of the hierarchy is the Catholic church-nature's own inherent egoism. By this, precisely by this egoism, it won its world dominion, and by this, precisely by this egoism, it lost it again; the shadow is inseparable from the light. It is remarkable to see how
[300] the divine governance has kept this power going. The Church seized the Most Holy, set it up as a goal, but in reality used it as a means. To use the Most Holy as a means to the attainment of worldly ends is crime, a crime of the spirit on the greatest scale. Those who believe in Providence's immediate, direct intervention in the course of world events must, when they fix their gaze on the most audacious among the popes of the Middle Ages, involuntarily pause and ask: "How is it possible that God could keep silent and thus let himself be mocked; how is it possible that the Transfigured One could sit so calmly at the Father's right hand and look on while his image and his work were distorted, while the lust for power robbed the keys of heaven and sold forgiveness of sins for money?" — It is justice, but a historical justice that does not strike the eye. The Highest has been put in; men have freedom to use it; they also have freedom to misuse it and to take what follows. Should he who sits at the Father's right hand and follows with his eye the course of the world have impatiently shattered the papacy with a stroke of lightning, then he would already in his own time have had to begin by shattering Caiaphas and annihilating Pilate.

The historical justice shows itself in this, that the divine governance, without giving up its right at any point, leaves to the human race the free use of all the forces and means that are at its disposal; it is a sign of the immutability of the eternal decrees and of the infinite superiority of divine wisdom that the tasks are solved and that

everything nevertheless proceeds naturally.

There is in history just as little trace of any divine preferential love for Popery as for Muhammadanism: the reason why the former came to stand higher than the *[301]* latter must be sought in this, that the capital of life with which it traded was richer, more fruitful, nobler.

For the development of society on the large scale the principle holds without circumlocution that *right is might*, and might right. — "And yet we are to believe in a Providence?" Yes, precisely for that reason we can believe in a fatherly Providence; for a stronger proof of Providence's just governance cannot be given. Let one take good note of what it is that is dealt with here. Here we are not dealing with society's justice toward individuals in particulars, but only with the historical right by which a social order at a given time forms itself and asserts its continuance. The legal proposition has two members, of which the one clarifies the other. Here it is not said that might is without further ado right; here it is said that might is right, and why? Because *right* is *might*. In this lies that it is right that makes might into might; and if this determination alone held, the goal of perfection would be attained; it would then be impossible for the holders of power to misuse power. But history is in the temporal, and the temporal is the imperfect; so the opposite determination also holds, the expression of imperfection: *might is right*. The conflict between the two fundamental determinations has been illustrated in the most grandiose manner in the history of the papacy.

Here the beginning is made immediately from the presupposition that right is might. All the human, natural right with which the Church from the beginning sat, so to speak, in possession, it had in the course of time ample occasion to unfold. It is as if the spirit of history blew upon it and drove it forward, so that it, for the sake of heaven, had to do all that it was able to for the education of the human race, for the *[302]* ordering of society, for the advancement of morality and culture. This is its speed, its historical fair wind; the hierarchy has the current with it: forward, forward! in wind and storm, between breakers and reefs the Church's ship goes under full sail and cleaves the waves of time.

But when the goal was then attained, when all the papal commands of right — non obstante qvocunque — had become commands of might, what then? Well, then the converse proposition began, the proposition of temporality: *might is right*, to press unrestrainedly forward into the foreground of events. "It was a pity," people say, "that the church government should thus degenerate, that the hierarchy did not

keep to the old, venerable, awe-inspiring track." An empty sigh of the heart; there is nothing here to sigh over. The hierarchy degenerated because it had to degenerate, it could not do otherwise, it was legitimately excused. As a stone thrown into the air rises, but with steadily decreasing velocity, until it reaches a point where it so to speak turns around and begins to fall with increasing velocity, so it has gone — on the way of the spirit — with the rise and decline of the hierarchy. What gravity is for the stone, egoism is for the hierarchy. First the higher has preponderance over the lower; right is might: the movement goes upward; but little by little the lower gains preponderance over the higher; might is right: the movement goes downward. And just as the stone hovering in the air has, when extraneous influences are left out of account, an equally long path to run through downward as it has run through upward, so the fall of the hierarchy in history has described a path which, in the sections and length of its curvatures, gives an inverted image of its rise. It did not come about that
[303] the hierarchy had a lesser power as long as it on the whole made might dependent on right, and afterwards got an immense power when it really began to defy all considerations of justice and make right dependent on might. On the contrary! the last turn, proceeding from the culminating point, is accurately designated by history as the beginning self-destruction of might.

To a superficial view it looks as if the papacy succumbed merely because of the many and various kinds of outward blows and resistance that it gradually met. That is a one-sided conception; the essential ground lay in the papacy itself. In order that this power might be broken, it had to pass step by step through all the intermediate stages of self-demolition. It was not enough that the fire of enthusiasm that had inflamed the Crusaders was extinguished; the papacy got a substitute: from the embers of faith superstition blazed up more fiercely, and superstition was quite as serviceable as faith. It was not enough that the pope, after having felled the medieval emperor and thereby given the Middle Ages themselves the first dagger-stab, came into political dependence on France, for the dependence was paid for only with honor: the real profit the pope kept for himself: the Babylonian captivity was truly lucrative. At Avignon the papal court could put up all church offices and ecclesiastical dignities publicly for auction; naturally high bids were made at the auctions. One would have thought that the last hour of the papacy had struck, when, since there were now two papal chairs, one at Avignon and one at Rome, one got at once two, then three and more popes, who mutually condemned and excommunicated one another, for when the pope condemns the pope, the papacy has surely condemned itself, and

the self-contradiction is evident. But no! This blow, too, could be cushioned. To *[304]* put an end to the scandal, the free councils — at Pisa, Constance and Basel — tried, by a supreme effort, to place the Pope under a constitutional guardianship and to bring about a real reformation in the head and members of the Church. But this step, which furnished a striking proof of the impossibility that the hierarchically organized system should ever be able to reform itself in an evangelical spirit, turned out precisely to the Pope's advantage. It was therefore not this or that single thing, but the many-sided, consistent unfolding of the distortion of the rule of the mighty that gave the ecclesiastical Babylonian tower-building its foundational shock. Just because power, blind power, had become right, the pressure was felt in all relations everywhere and from all sides; states, classes of society, individuals, lay and learned, found the condition revolting, intolerable, unnatural. The heavens were overcast, the air close and the horizon dark; Luther's word was the lightning in the cloud.

As the papal-theocratic universal monarchy fell apart and sank, the powers of the states in the various countries of Europe began to gather their strength and to prepare themselves for a great future. Under the guardianship of the Church the state could not come to full clarity about its real right and significance. As papal vassals the princes were obliged, in all great, decisive matters, to obey the Pope's orders; a practical, natural conception and carrying out of real, present state interests was under these conditions impossible. The tasks were worldly, human, altogether natural, but the Church always knew how to substitute something over-worldly, over-human, supernatural. Under the pretext of ennobling the earthly by an admixture of the *[305]* heavenly, it made the heavenly itself into something earthly, and its interference in everything became intolerable.

When the thunderstorm of the Reformation had cleansed the air, the state's breathing became freer, not only in the Protestant but also in the Catholic countries. The state became, as the phrase goes, conscious of its autonomy (self-legislation). At first glance this progress seems to be a great retrogression; for in classical antiquity — among the Greeks and the Romans — the state was already recognized as the highest real expression of the divine authority on earth: the state protected by the gods was in reality the deity itself present. It must not be forgotten, however, that the state which gathered itself together out of the ferments of the Middle Ages, the state that took over the power by inheritance from the Church, came to stand on another and higher foundation than the ancient one; the modern state may, in a natural and yet ideal sense, be called the reborn state.

To be sure, politics itself, in spite of the devout mask and the purple rags of edifying phrases with which in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it so gladly adorned its Machiavellianism, did not become more Christian than it had already been in the age of Alexander the Great and Emperor Augustus; but in its mechanical systems of equilibrium and motion it acquired new masses, new forces and new conditions to operate with. Despite all its sins against the humane, the old Church had in the course of the ages little by little built up so large a capital, invested, if we may say so,
[306] in the supreme guardianship of humanity, that even the most autocratic authority could no longer withhold with impunity their right from the wards.

The state neither could nor would thrust the Church from itself; nor would it, in the manner of antiquity, put itself in the Church's place. In officially and solemnly recognizing the Church as a religious, relatively independent institution, subject to the authority of the state only in everything worldly, it recognized at the same time the fundamental conception of human life, with the high ideal representations to which the Church in dogmas, ceremonies and images gave vital force and sensuous presence. So the state was compelled to recognize that in every human individual there dwells an eternal, personal self; it was compelled to recognize that, besides the earthly and temporal aims, an eternal aim is set for the whole race; that after death there is a judgment; that all, high and low, mighty and humble, the crowned prince as much as the most wretched beggar, shall one day appear before the one just Judge, and each receive according to his deeds. Here is a firm, unshakable foundation. On this foundation the rule of the mighty, with its political intrigues, oppressions and acts of violence, might play its game as freely as it would: a dam had been set against arbitrariness. Even if the movements went like a rushing stream, a roaring, swelling river whose waves here and there flooded the lower banks, drowned the seed and swept away many a flower and noble plant: there was nevertheless on both sides a barrier of rock; here was a spiritual natural barrier. To be sure, the masses in the darkest spots of society could still with a certain right be said to be in a condition of rudeness, ignorance and superstition that yielded nothing to the old heathenism;
[307] but, however strange it may sound, the rudeness itself was nevertheless of a higher and nobler kind. It was a Christian rudeness, a Christian ignorance, a Christian superstition. But — one says — rudeness, ignorance and superstition are surely precisely the un-Christian! Quite so. And yet we call this new barbarism Christian, because it could not possibly have come forth except on Christian conditions: it could only come forth in Christendom. It was this un-Christian element in Christendom

that fermented in the masses and set the peoples in unrest. This un-Christian element in Christendom became a new driving force, which gave the movements on the large scale a peculiar direction and impressed its distinctive stamp on the feeling of the tolerable and the intolerable, of the *natural and the unnatural*.

The gigantic force with which the Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century broke forth and swept everything along with it will, from this point of view, prove to be grounded in a historical natural necessity.

The absolute monarchy, in which the state as state sought to realize its ideal, was indeed able to hold the mutually conflicting elements in a certain equilibrium, to subdue dissension and to simplify the machinery of government by gathering all the threads of administration in one hand; but it was not able to recognize the relative independence of the particular institutions, not able to reconcile the power of the state with civil liberties and universal human rights. In the person of the absolute king the state itself became in a way personal; but instead of reconciling the legal with the personal, it let the decisions in the highest instance rest on grace and disgrace; even when it meant it for the very best, it gave arbitrariness free play in sympathy and antipathy and set respect of persons above the law. Standing on worldly ground, *[308]* it passed itself off, after the model of the hierarchy, as an order instituted immediately by God himself: it was a royal theocracy that took the place of the papal. Issuing from the Middle Ages, in which every single estate had borne its own banner as high as it could, the estates of society now were, nobility, clergy, burghers and rural common people — it was scarcely possible to call the peasantry an estate — all without exception equal before the throne; but they were for all that far from being equal before the law. It was not enough that the individuals personally submitted; each estate, even the nobility, the first, was in relation to the monarch's most exalted person a subject, deeply bowing, most humbly submissive personality. There is a self-drive in this personal element that first glorifies and then kills the monarchy.

The absolute monarchy was as little a repetition of Roman Caesarism as of Oriental despotism — scenes like that with Prexaspes and Cambyses are once and for all relegated to the unnatural — the submission, organized according to principles of right, of the distinct, stepwise ascending personalities was surely meant precisely to satisfy society's rational demands upon a well-ordered state. But in such a system of personal regard for rights the distinct rights, favors, privileges and prerogatives were bound to undermine right as right, universal right. Precedence for the few was wrong against the many; and on what, in the end, did all precedence have its

support, its proper center of gravity? In the monarch's personal grace: right was grace, and grace was right; therein right was dissolved. It is, seen a little more deeply, not the arbitrariness of those who govern that misuses the demonstrations of grace
[309] and thereby makes grace arbitrary. The matter stands the other way round; grace as a source of right is arbitrariness itself: it is the absolutely ruling grace that from first to last, from the highest to the lowest, made the government arbitrary. It was no accident that the absolute kings misused grace; no, it was a spiritual natural necessity; if grace is in itself a misuse of right, how could it be used without being misused? It was, strictly speaking, not the monarchs' fault that the absolute monarchy fell; it fell — by royal grace, according to the law of nature: the germ of death lay from conception in its organism.

It was the inner, revolting discord between right as grace and right as right that, through countless excesses, crimes and blunders, brought on the catastrophe in France. The Revolution of 1789 became an overthrow of the state in the most radical sense; it led literally to a bursting of the state as state. When the National Convention abolished the royal dignity and the Reign of Terror began, the mass of the people had simply abolished the state and put its creatures in the state's place; for a Robespierre is no statesman, a Robespierre cannot govern; he can only terrorize. In contemplating such a natural phenomenon it is not sufficient to dwell on the outer sides, on the multiplicity of the horrors, on the sea of flames of the passions or merely on the different eruption craters of the lava streams; one must go down into the great abyss, down into the inner life, inquire and ask: whence came all this? What was that depth of glowing hatred out of which the destruction arose? It was — a Christian revolution,
[310] a revolution that was possible only in the midst of Christendom. — That the masses, when the outer pressure becomes too great and the authorities of the state themselves, in the unrest, act gropingly and, divided, betray one another, can in any age whatever be incited to level all distinction of estates and to intoxicate themselves with fancies of freedom, equality and brotherhood, shall never be denied. Such a thing is possible just as well under heathen as under Christian presuppositions. But the strength of self-feeling, the certainty of instinct, the clarity of thought and the resoluteness of will with which the French Revolution laid down the great fundamental law of the "rights of man"[1)] cannot be explained without presupposing Christianity.

[1)] "It is a characteristic trait that when the constituent assembly in Paris (1789) discussed the rights, and Mirabeau, impatient that the discussions took too philosophical a turn and dragged on, exclaimed: N'employez pas le mot de droits, mais dites: Dans l'intérêt de tous, il a été déclaré… the assembly held fast, with the certainty of instinct, to the point that it was precisely rights, that is, express demands of

The men of the Revolution raged against the Church and positive religion as against all historical traditions in general; they wanted to burn off the past, clear the burnt sites and begin afresh with new men, new gods and a new reckoning of time. But this revolutionary raging against Christianity is just an eloquent proof of how deeply that mighty spirit of the age, though in a selfish, negative, demonic manner, had absorbed and appropriated the first humane demands of Christianity.

The Revolution's "freedom and equality" is a distortion of the Gospel's freedom and equality; but by this distortion no historical step has been taken at all toward the *[311]* abolition of Christianity; rather an unavoidable demand has been set for a deeper understanding and more inward appropriation of the essence of Christianity, a demand that applies just as fully to society as to the individual.

The contradiction between "the Christianity of the New Testament" and "the Christianity of Christendom," a contradiction that S. Kierkegaard has presented in such eloquent, striking features that his presentation will undoubtedly one day go round the world, this cutting, spirit-consuming contradiction demands a twofold resolution, an ethical-historical one in the human society and one, conditioned by the life of the congregation, a religious one in the consciences. The latter shall not be treated in this connection; here we speak only of the first.

What S. Kierkegaard has called "the Christianity of Christendom" is not the Gospel unto salvation, in that he is entirely right; but when he simply regards it as a loathsome monster, a nonentity, that ought to be abolished the sooner the better, he is obviously wrong. The Christianity of Christendom is, in spite of all distortions, an irresistible historical factor, a world power, an element in the divine governance; it does not beg for the approval of the powers that be, it pays no heed to the arbitrariness of individuals; it goes, as the stars go, the way of necessity, its effects are spiritual natural effects. It accompanies the generations; it submits itself to the spirits of the age; it leads them, even against their will, sets them their tasks and shows them the ideals of the future as in a magic mirror. What sides the tasks set present each time to reality, and how the visions in the mirror waver depends, according to the occasion *[312]* of the times, on the faculty that acts and on the eye that sees. The generation, the society that with energy and a sense of freedom walks the way of self-limitation and moderation receives from the Christianity of Christendom spiritual help, manifold instruction and a rich blessing. Where, on the other hand, the thought of Christendom

principle, that were to be carried through." On Obstacles to and Conditions for Spiritual Life in the Present Age. P. 34.

does not purify and ennoble the disposition, it incites it and strengthens the selfish fancies; where it cannot act as a blessing, it acts as a curse; where it cannot be a remedy, it becomes a poison.

The law according to which the formation of the poison proceeds can be clearly pointed out. From a revolutionary negative standpoint criticism hurls at Christianity the accusation that, by preaching humility and blind submission to — grace, it enervates the race and steals its best powers. Such assaults of thought always borrow their direction and speed from that which is attacked. The restless mind unceasingly plagues the understanding to put, after all, something other and better in the place of that which it tears down. So self-feeling shoots upward, the individuals of the masses rise in price, and the multitude's equal entitlement to all the goods of life sounds ever louder. It is the despised, repressed and denied thought of Christendom that reacts; like a subterranean fire it goes on heaving the social soil and screwing the demands upon life up into mountains of presumption. What went on in ancient heathen Rome on the Mons sacer was only child's play in comparison with what at the present moment is seen to go on at Montmartre.

[313] It was ingenious of Herodotus to make Mnemosyne's daughters the Muses of his History, for Mnemosyne means remembrance, and history is essentially remembrance. But the historical remembrance is of different kinds. To bring out the natural side we shall here look away from the recollection of the deeds of the past which historiography secures, and consider merely the physiological-psychical remembrance, the unconscious, half-conscious propagation by which the fathers' dispositions to vices and virtues are inherited by the children.

History is a chain of connected links; even if an immediately following one stands in ever so sharp opposition to its predecessor, there is nevertheless in the very break a mark that shows how strong the connective tissue is. The New is born, and the Old dies, it goes to the ground. But that the Old has gone to the ground means that it has become the ground from which the New has arisen. What follows has thus what is past in its ground; but what it thus has in its ground it has in an inward manner in its essence, in its inner life, in natural remembrance. In individual human life youth is a remembrance of childhood, manhood of youth, old age of manhood. In history the same shows itself. Thus Protestantism is a remembrance of Catholicism, the Revolution a remembrance of monarchical absolutism; thus the nineteenth century in way of thinking, morals and conditions is — not a repetition, no, on the contrary — a remembrance of the eighteenth. Only when one has convinced oneself that in

history there is given an unconscious, naturally necessary remembrance, and that this remembrance is the inner, invisible bond between generations and ages, will one recognize that the course of mankind's life, in spite of all apparent halts, repetitions *[314]* and retrogressions, is an unceasing stream, a forward-advancing movement toward a final goal. It will then be possible to understand that not only the cultivated, who have knowledge and overview, calculate on a future for themselves, but that the masses too, in all their rudeness and ignorance, have historical instincts.

To be sure, an historical earthquake must make the eyes swim, when the foundation of society suddenly cracks, and old, long-buried powers are seen to raise their heads and begin anew; one despairs of right and reason; one grows dizzy in the circuit and says with the Preacher: "What has been, that shall be; what has happened, that shall happen, and there is nothing new under the sun." This is once more the worn-out history, with the rising of kingdoms and the fall of kingdoms, with the victory of the one and the defeat of the other, with the patrician barbarism of orders and the plebeian barbarism of freedom; where is the progress? When the medieval-Roman god of the Church and the ancient-Roman god of the state make common cause, when canon law and the law of the cannon agree that might is right: what wonder that it falls upon the powerless!

In order to be able to keep upright in the earthquake and, under the great general eclipse, to distinguish ghosts from beings of flesh and blood, it is necessary to lean on the laws of development and to try to make clear to oneself the historical remembrance. Papal absolutism is condemned to death, condemned by the spirit of history. Its time is past; it is a funerary monument, an image, a shadow of remembrance: if it comes again, it is only as a revenant. Royal-imperial absolutism is condemned to death, *[315]* condemned by history itself; it can rise up, but not stride forward: it is weighed down by the fetters of the past. If the phantom returns from its realm of shadows, it is as a skeleton with a battle-sword for a scythe and a death's-head under the helmet: the Knight of the Black Eagle comes not to sow, but to reap. Democratic-revolutionary absolutism is condemned to death, and already belongs to the realm of the dead. "The Red Specter" on the barricades has no blood in its veins, no breath in its lungs, it has not the life of presence: seen in the dark it is a dreadful, blood-dripping phantom, but it is only a phantom.

To determine the orbits of the heavenly bodies one must calculate the perturbations. The real orbits are surely very divergent from those that correspond to the abstract-universal laws; but these divergences are so far from casting doubt on the

validity of the fundamental laws that they in reality confirm their fulfillment. The perturbations to which the phenomena of the great laws of society and the historical orbits are subject cannot, to be sure, be calculated mathematically in this way; but it is nonetheless true that they all work out in the fulfillment of the laws. If there are many unknown quantities here, there are also many equations here. The final equation is originally determined by human nature, constant in its ground, and by the thought of Christ, unchangeable under all changes.

R. *Nielsen.*