PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Between the Indian summer of the *ancien régime* and the evanescent 'restoration' of post-Revolutionary continental Europe perceptions of the upwardly mobile intellectual classes took a decisive turn from nostalgia to anticipation, from criticism to intimations of dynamism. When Boulanger wrote in the *Encyclopedia* that 'the mind of men living in civilized states has been more or less the same throughout the ages; the difference lies only in the way it is used',[1] he was reflecting the Enlightenment's confidence in fixed nature, man's place in the world, and the causal reliability of the universe. But not half a century later, beyond the Revolution, that natural posture of harmony is shattered; a Romantic like Novalis can write of recent events as the 'stirrings of a puberty crisis'.[2]

There are many ways of tracing this development. An obvious one is through the impact of the events themselves: the traditional province of the historian. Another way is to keep events on the margin while dwelling chiefly on their relation to what may be called the historical consciousness, and by determining how conceptions of world history govern the interpretation of these events. By 'historical consciousness' I mean a sequential explanation of human and natural purpose, oriented toward collective human need and design, and bridging with its implicit time-span the gap between cosmological and logical visions of man's destiny. The work that follows is an attempt of the latter sort. Because it is not itself intended as an essay in philosophical history, but rather as an empirical treatment of the range and development of a number of basic themes, the arguments and methods should be made as clear as possible at the outset. That is the task of this introduction, taken at the risk of assuming the results of some of the investigations that follow.

[1] Article 'Prodige', *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des arts, des sciences et des métiers* (17 vols., Paris, 1751–65), XIII, 423.
[2] Novalis, *Blütenstaübe*, no. 105, in C. Seelig (ed.), *Gesammelte Werke* (5 vols., Herrliberg-Zurich, 1943), II, 36.

Introduction

In the first instance, we might ask how the pursuit of an idealist tradition centres upon our problem, and how that tradition should be designated. Idealism has a multitude of shifty meanings and some precise philosophical ones. In the course of this essay it will be evident that the question is not one of demolishing or establishing idealism as a philosophical position, but of relating the consequences of the position to political tensions at the turn of the nineteenth century. The interest here, most especially, is in the political consequences of idealist systems as they came to be manifested in this period in Germany. Three of the four figures I treat are, by accepted definition, philosophical idealists; the fourth, Rousseau, is not. Yet Rousseau is both a foil and a groundwork for subsequent idealist systems, both in the ethical and political spheres. He is, by common consent of intellectual historians and by virtue of his later resonances, a pathbreaker of idealism as well as of romanticism, though his connection with either of these positions is at best ambiguous.

The way in which Rousseau—as much by his pedagogical doctrines as by his political theory of the 'general will' and 'social contract'—challenged the ingenuity of German political thought is well known and need not be rehearsed at this point. Rousseau is the first great modern philosopher of 'will' and 'community'.

My use of the notion 'idealism' is fairly restrictive and is not to be confused with common terminology. I am not speaking of brave efforts to bring better worlds into being. I am concerned specifically with the following ideas: (1) the explicit belief that man experiences and is composed of material and spiritual natures and that his awareness of the latter *should*, *might* and *does* progressively fashion his experience in the world; (2) the philosophical notion that the proof of the reality of the world demands recognition of this fact; (3) the relation of man, thus conceived, to a state or political society predicated on the fact that the vocations of both relate to this higher urgency; (4) the character and role of anticipatory norms or 'ideas' that cannot simply be fashioned out of empirical concepts as the epistemological form of these proceedings; (5) the belief that the concepts of time and space which extend and bound man's image of his endeavours are supplied by the human consciousness and not by

the objective reality of things; (6) the form of the political community that incorporates the truth of these notions. Other ramifications must await their place in the subsequent exposition.

This general, and, one can say in anticipation, most complex evolution, fascinating in itself, is useful also for tracing a predominant current in European culture. Idealism creates a tension not felt in other traditions of European thought. In oversimplified terms, if one imagines a magnet of the ideal and a magnetized object of the real, it is not difficult to see how both a tension and a history are possible. Realist theories confine historical propulsion to the natural tendencies of the object. In idealism, the theories to be explored set moral goals against present deficiency, constructing a motor of history, and incidentally a purposive pattern of political life, from this tension. Having conceived a deep division between nature, sense and impulse, and spirit, wisdom and moral aptitude, idealism regards the problem of harmony and its recovery with particular urgency. In this perspective, a history of mind or spirit is gradually developed to parallel, or, better, express the inner reality of events.[1] Realist theories, even evolutionary ones, do not meet this issue so frontally.

A second point concerns the relation of this examination to the traditional issues of political philosophy. There are libraries of books and monographs, many of them excellent, that deal systematically with the theories of the state of Rousseau, Kant, Fichte and Hegel, or with their particular views on obligation, consent, authority, legitimacy and so forth. Without in any way deprecating that kind of inquiry, I have conceived my task differently. The customary form of political analysis is not eschewed where it casts light on how notions of historical genesis and the analytical substance of political issues meet. But the reader should not expect an encyclopedia of political *explications de texte*. Rather, I am anxious to establish a contextual basis, partly indebted to surrounding event and partly to permanent philosophical issues, for the understanding of idealist political theory.

[1] This essay will not, however, contribute to the polemic waged over the word 'progress'; for career and ramifications, see W. Warren Wagar, 'Modern Views on the Origins of Progress', *Journal of the History of Ideas* (Jan.–Mar. 1967), pp. 55–70.

The usefulness of such a context should not be in dispute. When the intellectual milieu of these thinkers is ignored, when alien situations are read back upon them, or when the political parts of their *Weltanschauungen* are abruptly extracted from the whole, interpretations arise that are in wilful discord with each other over issues that might have been settled by an appeal to the intellectual concerns and strategies of the period. My prejudice here is to see political philosophy as a point of convergence and not as a settled domain of its own. Thus I shall not hesitate to trespass in a wider field in the hope of furnishing more valid political readings. In serving this goal, I have tried consciously to keep the discourse midway between the unmanageable richness of particular fact and the abstract realm of timeless political problems.

This search for a context should not be confused with any claim to have furnished *the* context. Approaches to such an 'open' topic are numberless; some are highly valid. This study is neither *Ideengeschichte* in the grand manner nor an expression of the radical truth stripped of accident. However, I would not have chosen particular themes and methods if I did not believe in their capacity to illuminate that world cleaved temporally by the French Revolution and spatially by the Rhine.

Thirdly, then, we must comment on the political significance of the development of the historical consciousness. I do not personally believe in attaching progressive connotations to this nettlesome phrase. But my own philosophical views are not at issue here, except in the sense that they may unobtrusively clarify the issues raised. The critical question might be phrased differently: to what extent is politics carried away by history—not just by history as experienced, but by formulas of history? Now it is fairly evident that collective beliefs in human destiny—whether they are mystic, eschatological, or secular—and the structures and habits of political communities react on one another. How could we decisively say that political forms inspire historical visions, or vice-versa? Unhappily, even if the question is insoluble, the subject is unavoidable. On the anthropological level, we see forms and functions generating ideas. However, when we remove the issue to the level of philosophical speculation, we cannot be so sure that a sense of destiny does not

sometimes govern function, producing at the same time political change and expansion of consciousness. In other words, we may envisage models where truth draws life in its wake—for the purpose of either justifying, guiding, changing or repugning the latter. The modern philosophies of Europe are characteristically secular. This means they do not 'repugn' life, but that they adopt one of the three other strategies. If this is true, it means that they must grapple with life, implying, at the greatest circumference, the largest organized and self-aware sphere of life, which is the political community. We shall see how idealism grasps this problem in a particular way.

If we take history to mean some intelligible pattern of human achievement over time, we shall discern that as philosophy reflects on political existence it must also cultivate an attitude toward history.[1] In ancient philosophy, the notion of recurrent cycles was at least tacitly adopted (or some similar metaphor of flux and reflux); in Christian philosophy, the idea of Providence provided for both the instrumentalism and the transience of secular politics; in geometric and strict rationalism—if there ever was such a thing—the temporality of the historical dimension was generally foreclosed by the timeless clarity of deduction; in empiricism, the cumulative weight of conventional experience as a guide to politics was emphasized; and, finally, in modern idealism, the notion of history as an immanent teleology came to the fore with important consequences for the role of the political community as a special participant in the stream of time.

The last of these aspects of historical consciousness, its genesis and development, and its implications for the understanding of political life will be our special concern. Of course, the destiny of history no more rules life than does the foreknowledge of death rule the motions of the human body. Even in abstruse formulations of philosophy, as we shall see amply, there is prodigious feedback from actuality to the structures of logical truth. I should be prepared to say that the post-Enlightenment civilization of the West records,

[1] It may be, as Frank Manuel ingeniously argues, in *Shapes of Philosophical History* (Stanford, 1965), that all historical perceptions are more or less intricately related to those two basic spatial symbols of time, the straight line and the circle. However, this is not an adequate *point de départ* for our present subject.

for better or worse, a growing conquest of destiny by actuality, a sacrifice, as Pitirim Sorokin would put it, of the *aevum* to the *tempus*.[1]

Nevertheless, in the climate of idealist philosophy, which arose, as is well known, out of an extremely disembodied and unsatisfying political culture,[2] there is considerable justification for tracing the pattern of political thought from destiny toward life, for interpreting the theory of the political community in the light of a hypothetical development which the grasp of history must provide. As a result, the 'context' I am establishing contains this presumption, not as a dogmatic *a priori* but as a guide: by working out these implications I attempt to explain the political problems the philosophers themselves faced. To put it more simply: given such-and-such a vision of history (and there is the necessity of first showing how the vision was constructed), what are the political consequences that follow from this total picture of man-in-the-world?

I am not uncritical of the notion just proposed, and shall be questioning it as well as exploring it. I adopt this method because of its utility for this special set of problems, not because I am committed to it philosophically or necessarily regard it as fruitful for explaining intellectual history in general. There are no hidden assumptions about the meaning of history or the structure of knowledge in this essay. Although an empiricist by conviction, I have tried to give the idealist position a sympathetic presentation. Mainly I have tried to allow the philosophers to speak for themselves and criticize each other in terms of the world they experienced.

If it strikes one at first glance that my interpretation collides with the familiar 'ideological' (the notion that ideas are determined by social environment) explanation of bourgeois political philosophy, the conflict is in some ways more apparent than real.[3] It seems to me beyond dispute that each of my four subjects was determined by his 'situation', though not necessarily by his class—there are many gaps in our understanding of pre-industrial vocations or classes—as much

[1] Pitirim Sorokin, *Sociocultural Space, Time, Causality* (Durham, 1943), p. 215.
[2] See ahead, especially Part III, Chapter 1.
[3] It is quite conceivable to interpret a situation 'ideologically' and still to grant transcendence to major components or themes of the situation, thus avoiding extremes of 'historicism' and *sub specie aeternitatis* dogmatism.

as by temperament and profession (or lack of it). But a major constituent of that milieu was a tradition of ideas, an inheritance of higher forms of discourse and argument and the urge to deploy them systematically. On the whole, psychology may be the best matrix for reconciling these two positions. Perhaps when we understand much more about how to apply what psychological research in time-perception can show us concerning class and professional attitudes and the transmission of philosophical ideas in historical situations, this will be a feasible and illuminating undertaking. For the present, it remains chiefly in the realm of literature and folklore.

Fourthly, it should be clearly understood that I do not claim to have treated Hegel except in the context of the issues raised in the preceding parts of the essay. One cannot lay this kind of groundwork and still have space to do Hegel justice. Of course Hegel terminates this flowering of the idealist tradition, and gives rise to many problems outside my present scope. And so it is the 'near side' of Hegel, or Hegel in relation to his predecessors, that will occupy our attention. This study suggests that any reinterpretation of Hegel should take its perspectives into serious account; but that labour is not attempted here in depth. However, one need not make Hegel teleological to guarantee his importance and enduring fascination.

I shall now proceed to further clarifications of method and theme:

1. *The perspective*. I have attempted to develop my explanations from a perspective of the period covered. Of course, I have benefited from secondary source material, but I have made conscious efforts not to recharge idealist political thought for posterior purposes and have, in some instances, pointed out where this was done. The creative re-creation of political philosophy is undeniably an important undertaking, but it is outside the limits of this essay.

2. *The relation of metaphysics and politics*. Where a political theorist is also a complete philosopher (like Hobbes or Hume), his branches of inquiry energize each other, in many ways explain each other, and should not be abruptly lifted out of context. However, among realist philosophers in general, where a close connection between human nature and the proper organization of life in common is conceded from the outset, the extraction of political philosophy from the comprehensive thought structure need

not lead to grave distortion. In the case of the present study, the question is more serious. Here politics not only accords with the system, but has a strategic place in it. Without sound notions of Kant's epistemology or Hegel's ontology one may discover their political formulations to be impenetrable. Consequently, it is impossible to evade the major issues of being and knowledge when we approach idealist politics. I have also explored Rousseau, who quite properly denied being a philosopher, in these terms, in order to exhibit the continuities and discontinuities of the philosophical assumptions underlying his political speculation and to establish more precisely Rousseau's own tradition and what he brought to the development of idealism.

There are also two general relationships between metaphysics and politics that should be distinguished. The first is the notion of government (or law or political theory) as occupying a particular and necessary place in the idealist cathedral of knowledge (the systemic aspect). The second is the notion that within a historical teleology (however generated), the Idea of political forms or of a community develops according to a postulated (moral or practical) necessity. Hegel's general contribution was to assimilate these two patterns of discourse to each other.

3. *A lacuna: international relations.* The implications of the idealist tradition for international relations theory have attracted repeated and concentrated attention, especially in connection with the rise of modern European nationalism. While the subject is far too important to exclude from the present work, I have kept it on the periphery of the argument both for lack of space and because, generally, its structure can be derived from the problems of community that are analysed here. I am not entirely sanguine about this omission.

4. *The cultural variable.* Having raised transcultural problems by inaugurating a chiefly German study with an essay on Rousseau, I am obliged to state my attitude toward this tricky matter. First of all it is important to know that Rousseau was Swiss and not French, that Geneva, as Spink and others have shown,[1] informed his perception of political culture even if in a highly idealized and

[1] See especially, John Stephenson Spink, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et Genève* (Paris, 1934).

distorted way, and that 'political' France interested Rousseau very marginally except on the occasions when it interfered with his life. Secondly, it is equally important that Rousseau was a rather complete child of French culture, in whose stream he was such a deviant and revitalizing influence; consequently, it is the French intellectual setting alone which gives meaning to Rousseau's quarrel with the world. Thirdly, there is the matter of the complicated German adoption of Rousseau—especially by the turbulent but apolitical *Sturm und Drang*—as an ally against courtliness, rococo, absolutism and the bare rationalism of the Enlightenment. Fourthly, and in a way difficult to separate from the third point, there is the assimilation by the idealist philosophers of certain aspects of Rousseau's political voluntarism and attack on 'dogmatism'. I shall try to explain these things in the proper place.

Here, we can say the following. The Germans perceived Rousseau as Swiss, not as French, i.e. as the citizen of a *Kleinstaat*. Paradoxically, the Germans appreciated Rousseau for his 'Gothic' values, rather than his 'classic' ones, which are a good deal more evident to the student of politics. Conversely, Rousseau cannot be understood *ex post facto* in the light of an idealist philosophy that he helped inspire, since his own frame of reference was quite different. Yet the German reaction to Franco-cosmopolitan value structure of the eighteenth century—in its manifold variations—was made in part under the standard of the man who had had the temerity to call the French 'eux'.[1] It is against this larger picture that Rousseau's contributions to German political philosophy must be measured.

The study of idealism as a phenomenon *per se* will not have to deal so much with the problem of cultural transmission across the Rhine as with the reaction of the German (especially literary) consciousness. Indeed, when we come to put the whole problem of historical teleology in perspective, we shall discern a striking and profound difference between Rousseau and the idealists. And this discrepancy is to be explained partly by a persisting German tradition with mystical and religious attachments, partly by the 'spirit of the time' itself.

[1] See L. Reynaud, *Histoire générale de l'influence française en Allemagne* (Paris, 1915), p. 401.