

1. CRITICAL REMARKS ON THE THEORIES OF HISTORY OF HEGEL AND MARX

Hegel

I

Any investigation in the social sciences, however modest its goal and however limited its scope, may raise the gravest and most deep-reaching problems of general scientific method. This is certainly true of historical studies. It has often been stressed that historiography, dealing as it does with the total and unique process of human evolution in the time dimension, occupies a very special position. Indeed, the interpretation of history differs considerably from the methods and findings of the exact sciences that are based upon the assumption of an endless repetition of the processes of nature. In contrast to the all-pervading impersonality and objectivity of the natural sciences the work of the historian is perforce affected - more or less, to be sure - by his "personal equation", thus taking on some of the qualities of artistic creation.

As early as 1828 Macaulay intimated this peculiarity of history "on the confines of the two distinct territories", "falling alternately under the sole and absolute dominion of Reason or of Imagination." "It is sometimes fiction. It is sometimes history"¹. Macaulay went on to suggest that "history, at least in its state of ideal perfection, is a compound of poetry and philosophy." "The two hostile elements of which it consists" have finally "been completely and professedly separated". "... We have good historical romances and good historical essays"². In our century this gulf has been widened still further: Only compare Emil Ludwig's or André Maurois's romantic biographies with Spengler's or Toynbee's grand designs of universal history.

Typical Whig that he was, Macaulay probably never fully realized the difficulties arising from this delimitation and contrast. After all, what is "Reason"? What does "Theory" mean? Is there any one universally accepted Philosophy? The generation following Macaulay believed that it knew the answer. Rejecting traditional metaphysics a man like Thomas Buckle founded a naturalistic school of historiography that was to raise history to the rank of an exact science so that it would enjoy universal acceptance and live up to the ideal of an age that had come under the influence of Comte's positivism as well as of triumphant science.

1) T. B. Macaulay, "History", *Critical, Historical and Miscellaneous Essays and Poems*, Vol. I, New York 1890, p. 270.

2) T. B. Macaulay, "Hallam", *Ibid.*, p. 310.