Death On The Grand Scale

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There are some philosophers who see their task as guarding us from myth, superstition and error, who suppose that we are all inclined to credulity, and that we need the discipline of criticism and analysis which they will supply. But there are others who make a different appraisal of our everyday life, and who take a different view of the task of philosophy. According to them, we are always being tempted by narrowness and smallness, and by what is near at hand. So what we need above all is to have our minds raised to the things that are the highest and greatest of all. I surely place in the latter group such authors as Plato and Heidegger. And I should like to see Hegel in that group too, even though he hated being pigeon-holed, and even though he insisted that nobody was ever as critical and as analytical as he, nobody more vigilant against superstition and error. I need not quarrel with Hegel's own self-estimation, however, because it is clear that he did campaign against the narrowing of Ideas into mere Concepts -- on this point, he is like other philosophers who have pointed us beyond restrictiveness. When we turn our minds to topics such as Right, Actuality, Spirit and Life, according to Hegel, we must never restrict their application, or domesticate them to just one particular role. On the matter of life, Hegel is like many other philosophers -- seeing its universal character. For him, and for most philosophers, it is an error to suppose that life is manifested especially in living creatures, animal, plant or human, beings endowed with organs, an error to suppose that observation and experiment with such creatures would provide us with a concept of life. In fact, the idea of life is only partly realized in the organic domain. Life is expressed even more fully in spiritual activity, in art, in political action, and in history. Here Hegel is at one not only with Plato and Heidegger, but with almost all authors in the great philosophical tradition.

One thing that may be distinctive of Hegel, however, in view of his dialectical prowess, is to treat this universal scope of life in connection with an equivalent universal scope of death. There is no reason to suppose that death is, primarily, an organic phenomenon studied by biologists, and that we could grasp it through an empirical concept. Since life is a topic to be treated by general Logic, as well as by the Philosophy of Nature, the Philosophy of Spirit, the Philosophy of Right, and the Philosophy of History, it is no surprise that death too re-appears in all these domains. So I want to examine the phenomenon of death in Hegel, not only in the limited experience of a single organism, but on the greatest possible scale, in the life of nature as a whole and history as a whole.

First, then, what about the place of death in Hegel's logic?
The Logic of Life and Death

In the Science of Logic\(^1\) we follow the dialectic of the concept through the subjective concept and the objective concept to their unity, the Idea, and the first glimpse we get of this Idea is life. Life is the first immediacy of the Idea. That means, among other things, that the Idea of life is the immediate predecessor of the Idea of knowledge and the immediate substratum of it: only a living subject can be a cognitive subject; knowing is one kind of living; knowing is never to be attributed to the inert or to the lifeless. This is a modern echo of the ancient teaching of philosophy that cognitive nous belongs to the living psyche as one of its powers, but in Hegel it has the further meaning that, while knowledge always mediates the objective with the subjective, it depends upon the prior and more immediate unity of the two, the immediate unity accomplished in life. The living, organic, moving, growing and self-organizing body bears in itself the primary imprint of the concept, the Begriff. Being imprinted in this immediate way with the concept, the living being will be in a position to entertain a cognitive representation of the concept. So this is the logical Idea of life, though Hegel makes it clear at once (WL, Vol. II, p. 415; SL, pp. 762 - 763) that life will also appear as a theme in the Philosophy of Nature and the Philosophy of Spirit.

In the purely logical treatment of life, there is only one differentiation that is at work: that between the universal genus and the living individual. It is introduced at the point where the scrutiny of life begins (WL, Vol. II, pp. 412 - 413; SL, p. 760). The genus plays the principal role in the logic of life, with the living individual being relatively inessential, vanishing, expendable. That is to say that life realizes itself as the genus perpetuating itself through reproduction, on the one hand, and the death of individuals, on the other hand (WL, Vol. II, p. 417; SL, p. 764). Let me add here that the Science of Logic does not differentiate genus from species -- either of these can serve as the universal factor over against the individual -- although the Philosophy of Nature, Sections 367 - 368, will show in detail how the genus particularizes itself into a number of species. Our present point is that the Idea of life includes the Idea of death. An eternal life of the individual is ruled out by Hegel on logical grounds. No mere accident of nature, death belongs to the constitutive dichotomy of genus and individual.

In the genus process, the separated individualities of individual life perish; the negative identity in which the genus returns into itself, while it is on the one hand the process of generating individuality, is on the other hand the sublating of it, and is thus the genus coming together with itself, the universality of the Idea in process of becoming for itself. In copulation the immediacy of the living individuality perishes; the death of this life is the procession of spirit (WL, Vol II, pp. 428 - 429; SL, p. 774).

The individual's death has a necessary ground, because the individual stands over against the universal genus, and simply cannot claim to be the true subject of life. The truth of

\(^1\) My page references will be, first, to the German text, Wissenschaft der Logik (WL), ed. G. Lasson, 2 volumes (Hamburg: Meiners Philosophische Bibliothek, 1951); and, in the second place, to the Science of Logic (SL), translated by A. V. Miller (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1969).
the Idea is not confined to the living individual, but is found in what is universal. We can see here a certain echo of "The Doctrine of Essence" from the Science of Logic, Book Two, but also a difference. The genus stands over against the living individual in a manner that can recall the differentiation that belongs to Essence, in which the universal essence or form stands over against the manifold of singular things that are its instantiations. But we see that in the structure of life we are dealing with something more than that. Living individuals are not composed of mere parts, as beds are, for example, but are articulated into living members that are teleologically organized. Such individuals will not merely exemplify the universal -- they have the positive drive to perpetuate it through reproduction. The living genus is the kind of universal that must reside within the mutual relations of the living individuals, e. g., in their sexuality.

The death of the individual is the point at which the Idea of life passes over into the Idea of knowledge, i. e., the point at which spirit arises out of death (WL, Vol. II, p. 429; SL, p. 774). This transition will be replicated at the very end of the Philosophy of Nature, Sec. 376: here too, the death of the natural individual is the point of the emergence of spirit.

Life And Death In Nature

The living genus is the kind of universal that can never have an adequate realization in one individual. In this, it is unlike the angelic order as conceived by the scholastics, every one of whose individual members was in itself a genus. Moreover, the living genus is the kind of universal that is in need of successive generations through time. When we introduce time, we are moving out of Logic onto the terrain of Nature.

The Philosophy of Nature, in Sections 374 - 376,² shows that the death of the individual is doubly fore-ordained. Death is, first of all, the outcome of the inborn germ of death, an inherent and logical necessity. As was established in the Science of Logic, the individual is inadequate, by comparison to the genus, to be the primary subject of life. But secondly, there is external necessity added to that: the finite individual occupies a world filled with other individuals, so that there are many outer powers that impose upon it death by violence or death by disease. The living individual is inherently vulnerable.

The philosophical meditation on nature not only seeks to comprehend and explain the death of the individual, but to show its justification. And I should like to argue on Hegel's behalf on this point. Within the domain of nature, individuals ought to pass away, just as they ought to come into being. It is the genus, not the individual, that has the primary claim to embody the Idea of Life. The individual wears out, and must do so. The singular animal can be a living singularity only through being united with the universal, the genus (Sec. 367). But this is never a mere co-inciding of the two, an immediate

oneness. It is a mediated unity. Just as birth precipitated a singular animal of such-and-
such a species, so death must "sublate" this union, demonstrate that the oneness of
universal and singular is not immediate. The Idea of life appears in an impressive form in
the case of those animals who die at the moment of copulation (Sec. 370 of the 1830
Encyclopedia).

That the genus, not the individual, expresses and represents life is also the teaching
of the Bible. In both accounts of creation, in Genesis 1 and in Genesis 2 - 3, it is clear that
God is creating species or genera, not merely individuals, though in Hegel's view (unlike
the view of Philo Judaeus and Origen) there is no creation of genera in advance of the
creation of individuals. When the genus is created it is by way of, and together with, the
creation of individual prototypes.

The living individual is the subject of death in Hegel's Philosophy of Nature. I do not
believe he refers, at least not directly, to the death of genera and species themselves, i. e.,
their becoming extinct. And yet we know today that species and genera are disappearing
from the earth at an alarming rate. Hegel is equally silent, I believe, on the mirror-
question of the creation or evolution of new species, and seems to regard that hypothesis
as unphilosophical (See Sections 248 - 251). Both these points suggest a need to revise
Hegel, to show that, even if we confine ourselves to the terrain of nature, death and birth
take place on a grander scale than he had mentioned in his book. From a logical point of
view, this is the issue of the birth and the death of something universal, the genus or
species itself. There is surely no need to attribute to Hegel the Aristotelian doctrine of the
eternity of species, or the Platonic doctrine of the imperishability of the forms. We shall
be looking at a parallel case in the Philosophy of Spirit, where we shall see that Hegel is
fully aware, both of the death of the individual, the singular self, treated in the account of
Subjective Spirit, and of the death of states and civilizations, formations of the Objective
Spirit. These formations are universal relative to the singular individual, but they too are
capable of death.

The Death Of The Subject

Since we too belong to nature, our death is necessary for the sake of our genus,
humanity, and has the same justification as that of other creatures. Yet, as spirit, we also
transcend our natural destiny, and so the death of the spiritual individual has a meaning
that goes beyond that of natural death, and is in need of further comprehension, and
further justification, going beyond the study of death in the animal kingdom. Yet the
theme of death is surprisingly muted in the Encyclopedia studies of subjective spirit (or
subjective mind, Geist). The only clear reference to it that I have found is in the sub-
section "Self-Consciousness", Sections 430 - 433, where Hegel treats the problem of
mutual recognition. He marginalizes the issue of death here by comparison to his earlier

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3 As with the Philosophy of Nature, my references will be to paragraphs of the text, drawn this time from
Part Three of the 1830 Encyclopedia; and from Philosophy of Mind, translated by A. V. Miller (Oxford:
work. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the famous pages on "Self-consciousness" had argued that mutual recognition would never have arisen if there had not been, at a more primordial stage of history, and at a more primordial level of spiritual self-consciousness, a battle to the death between two self-conscious subjects. In the *Phenomenology*, that struggle had come to precipitate the estates of lordship and bondage, the first and inadequate form of mutual recognition. But in the 1830 *Philosophy of Mind [Spirit]*, he expressly relegates that old battle-to-the-death to the primitive state of nature, claiming that in modern civil society there is no need to fight those old battles over and over again; mutual recognition can be achieved without them; struggle to the death is not a universal need of self-consciousness.

I would not take issue with this particular political view of the mature Hegel. I am, however, perplexed that he found no other locus in the *Philosophy of Mind [Spirit]* for a treatment of death as a phenomenon central to subjective spirit. In our own times, we have been instructed by Heidegger who showed that our "being-towards-death" is one of the defining elements in human existence. The anticipation of death as our possibility -- indeed, as "the possibility of being impossible" -- can be seen to constitute the very sense of the finitude and the seriousness of human life. Quite apart from the broader implications of this theme in Heidegger, touching on the human awareness of futural time, and on the human "understanding of being", it does appear strange that Hegel took so little notice of it in his *Encyclopedia*.

But there are copious references to the death of the individual subject in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, and it is quite clear that in these passages, Hegel is by no means regarding death as a natural phenomenon or occurrence. Death appears here in its spiritual significance. There are three main contexts in which it is treated: in the criminal law regarding murder (Sections 96 and 119), in the discussion of the death penalty (Sections 99, 100, 101 with Additions), and in the treatment of war, in which the state expects its citizen soldiers to offer up their lives for their country (Sections 323 - 328). Here it is the individual or singular self that is confronting the universal, but it is a self-conscious and spiritual individual, and it is a spiritual universal, the state, not a genus or a natural species, that he confronts. Each state is an individual with its own organs of decision, so that the spiritual death of a human being is the outcome of policy, whether that be the policy of punishment or a policy of war. The individual is, of course, supposed to participate in the government of the state, through whatever organs of representation are available to him. This spiritual universal is not kept in being through mere reproduction of the species, but through free action. This, however, does not mean that the state should be viewed as having originated in a social contract, nor does it imply that the individual has the right to withdraw from its jurisdiction. The state has the absolute right to make its policies, and their impact on the individual can be severe.

The might and the right of the universal, the state, can justify both capital punishment and the recruitment of its citizens for war. Hegel does not himself advocate particular legal measures in this philosophical book, such as the claim that capital

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4 References to *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1955) are to sections. English translation by T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1942)
punishment is appropriate for this crime or that, or the claim that it is never appropriate. His intent is to rebut those who have argued on one ground or another that capital punishment is absolutely wrong and always wrong. The arguments he considers in Sections 100 and 101 are either utilitarian in character, or based on social-contract theories. His reply is to invoke the state as "the higher entity which even lays claim to this very life and property and demands its sacrifice" (Sec. 100). It is the same fundamental line of argument that grants, for certain occasions, the appropriateness of a policy of war (Sections 323 and 324) and the right of the state to demand the sacrifice of individual life: "Sacrifice of behalf of the individuality of the state is the substantial tie between the state and all its members and so is a universal duty" (Sec. 325).

The Death of States and Civilizations

Now we turn to the Philosophy of History, where the individuals under discussion are already universals themselves, concrete universals: states, peoples, civilizations. They are not instantiations of a genus-or-species universal, and yet they do die. The Philosophy of History shows how the vast process of world history -- particularly war -- brings death to nations. Where the nation dies, it is survived, not by a genus or a species, but by the process of spirit itself which Hegel also calls world history. Hegel uses the term "death" from time to time for the end of a state or a civilization, but he also uses many other terms for it: corruption, ruin, decay, being smashed, and so on. I bring all these concepts under the concept of death, for the important point in all cases is that the continuity of history is decisively broken. It is a case of something coming to an end and something new beginning, far more comparable to the death of a parent and the birth of a child than to a metamorphosis such as we may observe in nature (caterpillar to butterfly) or in human growth (adolescence to maturity). Terms like "decline" and "collapse" also bring before us this picture of a punctuated world history.

The Philosophy of History presents us with the spectacle of the wreckage of the greatest human projects no less than their rise and their glory. We can infer from our logical starting point that every state and every civilization has died or will die, and this of course includes our own. In the Introduction to the Philosophy of History, Hegel gives voice to the melancholy that must accompany that thought.

When we look at this drama of human passions, and observe the consequences of their violence and of the unreason that is linked not only to them but also (and especially) to good intentions and rightful aims; when we see arising from them all the evil, the wickedness, the decline of

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5 My page references are, first, to the German text of the Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte (PG), published as Volume 12 of Hegel's Werke in Zwanzig Bänden, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), and, in the second place, to English translations. The translations are drawn from two sources. Quotations from the Introduction to the Philosophy of History (IPH), were translated by L. Rauch (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1988). Quotations from the main body of the text are drawn from the edition of Carl J. Friedrich in The Philosophy of Hegel (PH) (New York: Modern Library, 1953).
the most flourishing nations mankind has produced, we can only be filled with grief for all that has come to nothing. As we contemplate history as this slaughter-bench, upon which the happiness of nations, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals were sacrificed, the question necessarily comes to mind: What was the ultimate goal for which these monstrous sacrifices were made? (PG, p. 34; IPH, pp. 23-24)

Yet for Hegel, while melancholy is one genuine response, one tonality of a spirit that contemplates the world, it cannot be the pre-eminent and governing tone of the spirit, for it shows its special fondness for particular things that have passed away. The alert spirit contains and subdues its own melancholy by the discipline of studying the whole of history. And just as melancholy is contained and sublimated in the totality of the spirit, so too the deaths and sufferings which the melancholy spirit contemplates are contained and ordered within the whole of the progressive march of world history itself.

The insight to which philosophy ought to lead, therefore...is that the real world is as it ought to be, that the truly good, the universal divine Reason is also the power capable of actualizing itself. This good, this Reason -- in its most concrete representation -- is God. God governs the world: the content of His governance, the fulfillment of His plan, is world history. Philosophy seeks to understand this plan. (PG, p. 53; IPH, p. 39)

Hegel will seek to see the immanent wisdom and providence of God in the working out of the spirit's long historical march to freedom; he will also seek to raise our sights to the true transcendent God beyond history: "...whatever can claim to be noble and grand in the world still has something higher above it" (PG, p. 54; IPH, p. 40). Hegel will justify the death of states and civilizations too.

The main text of the Philosophy of History organizes its material in four divisions: the oriental world, then the Greek, the Roman, and the Germanic worlds. I'll focus on the second section, seeking to see in what way Hegel treats the death of Greece. We have in this case both the deaths of the particular Greek states (Athens and Sparta get particular attention), and in addition the death of the entire civilization of Hellas. I shall show that the death of Greece exhibits structural features that are common to all cases of death. First of all, as with natural death and subjective death, the death of Greece involves both an internal cause, the inborn germ of death, and an external cause, violence. Secondly, this death also puts this living individual (Greece, the concrete, individual universal) over against the universal power which steps in here in the role that was held earlier by the universal genus, or by the state. This power is what Hegel calls either World History or the World Spirit. Its onward march after the death of Greece is what shows the death to be not merely necessary but justified.

The Greek civilization was framed by the oriental world on the one side, and by the Roman world on the other. The latter will make its appearance dramatically at the end of Hegel's narrative about Greece. We'll begin by juxtaposing Hellas with the oriental world, where Hegel highlights its contrast with despotism and monotheism. Hegel
recounts the athletic, the sculptural, the military and the poetic celebration of individuality in Greece, a beautiful individuality, as he calls it, manifest not only in the human but in the divine sphere. The Greek genius is manifest in their gods. The beautiful individuality of the gods is that immediate victory of spirit over nature that still remains in continuity with nature.

The divine beings of the Greeks are not yet the absolutely free spirit, but spirit in a particular mode, fettered by the limitations of humanity, still dependent as a determinate individuality on external conditions. The gods of the Greeks are objectively beautiful individualities. (PG, p.299; PH, p. 56)

In such a world, Hegel tells us, the human individual will also feel his or her own freedom with an immediate confidence, certain that it is in accord both with the gods and with the needs of the state.

At the Greek level of freedom the individual will is unfettered in the entire range of its vitality, and embodies the substantial being [the state] according to its particular nature....We may assert that the Greeks, living in the first and genuine form of their freedom, had no conscience....Their end was their living fatherland, this actual Athens, this Sparta, these temples, these altars, this form of social life, this group of fellow citizens, these mores and habits. (PG, pp. 306 - 307; PH, pp. 61, 63)

But what happens in Greece is that such a freedom is bound to be led from its first immediacy to an inward reflection, led, as Hegel says, into inwardness itself. The purely immediate and natural confidence that we are doing the right thing is suspended; we need to find a way of proving that we are right. It was the Sophists who introduced this inwardness.

Inwardness was akin to the Greek spirit, and it was to reach it soon, but it plunged the Greek world into ruin....It was the Sophists, the teachers of wisdom, who first introduced subjective reflection and the new doctrine that each man should act according to his own conviction. Once reflection comes into play, each man has his own opinion and inquires as to whether the principles of right and law cannot be improved. (PG, pp. 309 - 310; PH, p. 63)

Thus the leaders of the state are not automatically right, and intellectuals of all descriptions raise their claims in a manner that the youth cannot resist. Hegel comments that this development was noticed by Thucydides, "when he speaks of everyone's thinking that things are going badly when he is not present" (ibid.), but nothing is clearer than the representation of this state of affairs in the writings of Plato too.

In the case of the Greeks, Hegel says that the spirit was not yet sufficiently withdrawn from nature and immediacy to be able to rely upon its own autonomy and
freedom; indeed, only an *infinite* withdrawal of spirit from nature would prepare the spirit for the task of guiding itself in complete autonomy. In Greece, the spirit had not yet strengthened itself to the point of being able to accommodate the freedom and the inward reflection which the intellectuals proclaimed. It is for that reason that, in Greece, inwardness and freedom now took on the form of crime and debauchery.

Further advance, as well as corruption, started from subjective, inward morality, individual reflection and an inner life generally....The principle of [subjective] morality which was bound to enter became the germ of corruption which, however, showed itself in a different form in Athens from that which it assumed in Sparta. In Athens it was evident levity, in Sparta, private deprivation of morals. In their fall the Athenians showed themselves not only amiable, but great and noble, in a way which makes us lament their passing away. Among the Spartans, on the contrary, the principle of subjectivity progresses into vulgar greed and issues in vulgar ruin. (*PG*, p.323 - 324; *PH*, p. 73)

This corruption shows itself in the fault, the rift, where the entire civilization of Hellas was consumed with the war between the two greatest city-states, the external sign of the flaw. It also showed itself in the way in which these two powers conducted themselves during the war (Athens especially earning the severe condemnation of Thucydides), as well as a general corruption of the spirit manifest throughout every sector of life. The corruption has a meaning: it is a certain kind of inwardness.

We may note the principle of that corruption as inwardness becoming free in and by itself. We see this inwardness arising in various ways. Thought, the inward and general, menaces the beautiful Greek religion, while the passions and caprice of individuals menace the political constitution and laws. Subjectivity, comprehending and manifesting itself in everything, threatens the entire, immediate, existing state of things. Thought therefore appears here as the principle of decay, the decay of substantial ethics. (*PG*, p. 326; *PH*, p. 74)

These developments constitute some of the inborn germ of death that brought about the end of Greece. Yet, as with nature, Hegel never isolates a single formation of spirit from the world, the totality. And thus as Greece weakens itself, the world has prepared that external force that will administer its violent end, and that, at the same time, will be the successor to Greece in the march of world history.

In deadly juxtaposition to the multiform variety of passion which Greece presents, that distracted condition which mixes good and evil in one common ruin, there stands, like a blind fate, an iron power ready to reveal that degraded condition in all its weakness, and to smash it to pieces in miserable ruin; for cure, amendment and consolation are impossible. This crushing fate is the Romans. (*PG*, p. 338; *PH*, p. 79)
In a sort of epitaph on the next page, Hegel observes that the Roman world "was chosen for the very purpose of casting the ethical individual into bonds,...The world sank into sorrow and grief...the heart of the world was broken...yet the supersensuous free spirit of Christianity could arise only from that feeling." (PG, p.339; PH, p. 80)

Greece had to die because, while the beauty of its earlier period was a liberation, it brought an experience of freedom that had to extend itself further and further, but, in the event, this freedom could not govern itself. It fell into self-indulgence, egoism, jealousy and division. This liberty gone rotten had to be completely extinguished by an alien power that put iron discipline in its place. We need not trace Hegel's thought on Rome any further. My point has been to show, first, how the inner principle of the Greek beginning -- beautiful freedom -- showed its weakness as Greece developed, the finitude that led to its corruption; second, how it died by the external violence of a state that utterly lacked beautiful freedom. Rome begins instead with law and personality, and those two, when taken to their limit, will bring death in turn to Rome. The Germans will kill Rome.

North America

I'll conclude by referring to our own state, Canada, and our own civilization, the North American, and ask whether we have any evidence, yet, of their coming death. The view that history should conclude with one finite civilization lasting on forever, an everlasting democratic capitalism, is absurd and un-Hegelian. The end, however, can never be clearly foreseen any more than it can be prevented by action or by thought. We can only work by guesswork in this territory. And in this paper, I'll leave our Canadian state to one side and look at the general civilization of North America.

It is based on freedom as surely as the Greek civilization was, though not the beautiful freedom that was just emerging out of nature. It is a freedom constituted by negativity, in that it rejected the class civilization of old Europe, and the religious establishments of Europe, and embarked on self-discovery in the new land. Also negative was its drive towards the conquest of nature, for, as in all settled states, we encountered this continent after we had been civilized, for we came with European languages, sciences, arts, technologies and religions, and we imposed our will. Our freedom was not expressed in beautiful sculptures and temples, as with the Greeks, but in mechanical contrivances. First of all, we used them to conquer our continent. Ours is the freedom of inventiveness, and an inventor such as Thomas Edison expresses our kind of freedom perfectly -- the Tinkerer, the Fixer. The U. S. Civil War was the most inventive in weaponry. Now we have gone on from machinery to spacecraft, but in addition we have also applied our tinkering freedom to the social systems that our ancestors bequeathed to us, so that education becomes totally transformed with every decade, and new churches are invented in the hundreds. We have revolutionized banking, commerce, production, communications, and transport, again and again, so that now the whole world waits upon our initiatives in this line. Moving from the conquest of the continent to a conquest of
social structures, we then come to understand each individual life as the ongoing process of self-transformation, as we cultivate the best opinions, the best therapy, and, with constant application, the correct bodily appearance. We understand the fine arts such as painting on the analogy of the inventor, for the great artist is the one who can invent something new and great, like Jackson Pollock. The great academic with a great paper or a great book discovers something new and great. Such, I think, is American freedom.

One sign of the coming death of our civilization would be an infinite circulation of inventiveness, and perpetual transformation, with less and less available material to transform: such may be appearing now in the arts, academia and the media. Another sign would be the collapse of every vestige of an older culture, such as the nuclear family, the Christian church, and traditional content in education. Our inventive freedom in its extreme form would be unable to cohabit with anything old at all. At times I seem to see our coming death in the ever-increasing hegemony of the inventor. This underlies Heidegger's vision of the world of technology. And yet we are discussing Hegel here. I think he might have had a less horrifying vision of American freedom, and perhaps he might have held out the hope for another century or two for this civilization. But he would surely agree that we would need to set limits to the inventor.

Another speculation of my own is that the brutal force that will put an end to the life of our tinkering civilization will come some day from a renewed and united Europe.