

The earlier philosophies of the century recognised this, and attempted in various ways to supply the want. Considering the prominent part which abstract theories had played at the time, both in the departments of the exact and the historical sciences, and the great change which had thus come over men's opinions, especially on the Continent, it was natural that thought itself, or as it was termed "the Idea," should be considered as a definite factor and propelling force in the world, and that the system in which this conception was carried out, the Hegelian system, should attract much attention and appreciation. It was owing to three distinct causes, to which I have already had occasion to refer, that this attempt was discredited, and that it lost favour in the eyes of thinkers of various degrees and opinions. The first of these causes was the difficulty of defining more clearly the different stages through and in which Thought or "the Idea" operated in nature and in history, and the arbitrariness which was thus introduced into philosophical reasoning. The second cause was the return to the purely critical position of Kant, according to which thought plays only a formal and regulative and not a creative part in mental progress. The third, and probably the most important, cause, however, was the fact that the ideals and aspirations which filled the minds of people during and after the epoch of the Revolution, and which were then living forces, faded gradually away before a great multitude of practical and detailed tasks which had to be performed and of obstacles which had to be overcome, and which brought in the wake of them much doubt and discouragement.