

point from which to set out. In dealing with the thought of our age, I have been obliged to divide what is in reality connected and coherent; and I am further forced, in examining more closely its different aspects, to select one as the most prominent with which to make a beginning. In reality such a preference does not exist in my plan. I recognise all the aspects of thought as equally important, and I feel that I might begin with any one of the three, and that I should in due course be led on to a consideration of the other two. They are in their actual historical appearance in the course of our period so interwoven that they cannot practically be separated. And it is indeed not difficult to assume various positions in contemplating the whole subject from which either one or the other of the three forms of nineteenth-century thought assumes as it were the ascendancy. Thus it would be undeniable that from a German point of view the great movement of ideas centred in the first third of the century in what I have called philosophy. The number of systems which succeeded each other was astonishing, the influence they had on literature, science, and practical life was without precedent, the enthusiasm with which students from all parts gathered in the lecture-rooms of the great metaphysicians was quite extraordinary, and probably equalled only in the schools of Athens in antiquity, or in the lecture-room of Abelard in the middle ages. From this point of view an account of this great movement—how it grew, flourished, and died away—would no doubt afford a suitable introduction to the history of thought in our century. If after this we were to turn to France and try to fix upon the

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Difficult to
separate the
three as-
pects of
thought.