

## Chapter II— The Place Of *JUSTICE* In The Synthetic Philosophy

*JUSTICE*, to which we are to look for Mr. Spencer's present opinions on the land question, is esteemed by its author his most important book. This volume, the full title of which is, *The Ethics of Social Life—Justice*, is also entitled *Part IV of Ethics*. It is the tenth of the ponderous volumes already published, which are advertised as "Spencer's Synthetic Philosophy." The grand divisions of this Synthetic Philosophy, as now advertised, are: *First Principles*, *The Principles of Biology*, *The Principles of Psychology*, *Principles of Sociology*, and *Principles of Morality*. Of these five grand divisions, the *Principles of Morality*, as it is styled in the advertisements, or *Principles of Ethics*, as it is styled in the title-page of the book itself, is the grand division to which *Justice* belongs in the Spencerian scheme. The first volume of this grand division, *The Data of Ethics*, has been already published. Volume II, *The Inductions of Ethics*, and Volume III, *The Ethics of Individual Life*, have not yet appeared,<sup>12</sup> Mr. Spencer, as he states in the preface to *Justice*, preferring to hasten this volume, as most important. After these two deferred volumes have been completed, there are, as he also tells us, two more volumes, *The Ethics of Social Life—Negative Benevolence*, and *The Ethics of Social Life—Positive Benevolence*, to which he will turn his attention, thus completing his full philosophical scheme.

This scheme of "Synthetic Philosophy" is the most pretentious that ever mortal man undertook, since it embraces no less than an explanation to mankind, without recourse to the hypothesis of Originating Intelligence, of how the world and all that is in it contained, including we ourselves, our motives, feelings, powers, instincts, habits and customs, came to be. Of this large scheme, the ethical part is the most important, being, as Mr. Spencer tells us, "that to which I regard all the preceding parts as subsidiary." And of this most important part, he also tells us that this volume, *The Ethics of Social Life—Justice*, is the most important.

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<sup>12</sup> They have been published since this was put in plate.

Thus *Justice*, which so far as it treats of the land question we are about to consider, is by its author deemed the very summit and capstone of his whole philosophy.

And that, indeed, it must be, follows from the supreme importance of its subject matter. For it treats of right and wrong, of what should and what should not be, in those social relations of men from which spring the most fiercely debated practical questions of our time—questions that involve the happiness or misery, the physical, mental and moral development of vast populations, the advance of civilization or its retrogression. As to the principles of right and wrong in individual relations there is little if any dispute; and not merely through Christendom, but "from Paris to Peking" mankind are substantially agreed as to what constitutes good or bad. It is when we come to the social relations of men—to those social adjustments which prescribe and control rights of ownership, which affect the production, distribution, accumulation and enjoyment of wealth, which are the main ground of legislation, and which over and above the injunctions of individual morality throw around men a perfect network of shalls and shall nots, that we reach the befogged and debatable land—the region of burning questions.

It is where the philosopher thus passes from the region of mere curious speculation into the arena where, for men living and men yet to come, the issues of want or plenty, of ignorance or enlightenment, of slavery or freedom, must be decided, that the ordinary apprehension may best apply to his teachings the tests of usefulness and sincerity. That the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and that the tree is best known by its fruit, are maxims not to be disregarded in philosophy. What matters the teaching of any philosophy as to the origin of things, compared with its teaching on matters that affect the fullness, happiness and nobleness of life? And how shall we tell whether the philosopher be an earnest man or a mere prater, so readily and so clearly as by noting whether he takes the side of wronger or of wronged, the undeservedly rich or the undeservedly poor? Thus, *Justice* is not merely the roof and crown of the Spencerian Synthetic Philosophy; it is its touchstone as well.