

Herbert Spencer

INTELLECT IN THE RAW

"No man is equal to his book . . . All the best products of his mental activity he puts into his book, where they are separated from the mass of inferior products with which they are mingled in his daily talk."

FROM AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

HE WAS sitting in his solitary house, his cold mind lost in thought. Once upon a time, the name of Herbert Spencer resounded so gloriously throughout the world; to-day, in 1903, he seemed a failure. Socialists derided him as a Tory; Tories called him an anarchist; clergymen labeled him an atheist; scientists mocked his evolutionary theory; single-taxers proclaimed him an apostate; women resented his celibacy; the masses ridiculed his eccentricities. He was despised; he was forgotten; he was alone.

Would that some day a voice of the future might come to his defense, to cry out to the world, "The works of Spencer were not in vain! He gave his years to prove the unity of all knowledge!" The invalid philosopher's thin lips were bitter. "Of literary distinction . . . it may be truly said that the game is not worth the candle."

He was so old, so old! People were asking each other, "Is he still alive? The man must be a hundred." Decades ago, they had discussed these theories of his, which were now so contemptuously discarded. How ironic! Only recently he had completed the eighteenth volume of his lifetime task! In youth, he had contemplated the prospect of

his completed masterpiece, he had anticipated tumultuous ovation, thunderous applause. Even in his forties, he had been known as the greatest philosopher of the nineteenth century. Surely, in his eighties, he should have been revered and deified. The swine! The unappreciative swine!

He closed his weary eyes. Once, there was a woman. No one would believe that Herbert Spencer, with ice in his veins, could have had an affair. But he had! "We had been for some time past on very intimate terms." The whole world acclaimed her now as one of England's great women novelists, but to him she would always be his Marian Evans.

Was it a trace of affection that crept across his heart? He shrugged it off. "There were reports that I was in love with her, and that we were about ready to be married. But neither of these reports was true."

Other hearts may beat in romantic cadence at the recollection of their loves. Not for him such foolishness! The trembling hand sketched on paper his characteristic remembrance of George Eliot: "Usually heads have, here and there, either flat places or slight hollows; but her head was everywhere convex."

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How long ago it seemed from the time he first set out to weave all knowledge into an integral whole! His *Synthetic Philosophy* was a drama of the universe; but his star attraction was Man the Individualist!

All preconceptions, fables, religious fantasies, legends, dreams—all were swept aside impatiently in the story of the *real* evolution. . . .

Out of the darkness, the chaos, the homogeneity of atoms, comes restlessness and motion, restlessness and motion. The atoms move, they clash, they rebound, they combine. A new class of heterogeneous objects appears in the universe, each with its materialistic "purpose." A "division of labor" is created; the world as we know it has come into being.

Clashing motion! Thunder and light! And out of the new world, life arises, constantly reforming itself in a determined drive toward perfection. Lo and behold! here is Man! The universe pauses

momentarily to admire its masterpiece. Animate and inanimate objects bow reverently to Man the Unique. To him belong the Pleiades and the tides of the moon! He is a thinking animal; through him will the heights of progress be achieved.

Man, Man, listen to your destiny! Let your eyes sparkle in the anticipation of Heaven on Earth; enjoy the prophecy of the greatest spectacle of the universe, the eventual brotherhood of all your kind! And then, bend your head sorrowfully, and pause in a momentary requiem for the doom of the future. Your Utopia shall become a shambles. As the earth cools, as the excited race slows down to a mere crawl, as the energy, the drive, and the purpose reach their culmination, life will cease throbbing. Old age will come to the universe, to the stars, to the planets, to the earth, to animal life, to Man's organizations, to his governments, and finally—to Man himself! Atoms to atoms, dark to dark!

Not yet has Man reached the pinnacle of progress. There are obstacles and retrogressions ahead. Only when a cooperative super-government—a true United Nations—replaces the tyrannies of the several States, will Individualism triumph. Nor, as will be shown, is the latter inconsistent with such super-government.

To begin with, since nature drives on relentlessly to perfection, what better lesson to Man than to harmonize his life with universal precepts?

The prime interest of each individual is the individual himself. Nature designed him as a sole unit. If every person would seek to satisfy his personal desires without infringing on the rights of others it is axiomatic that everybody would benefit. "The pursuit of individual happiness within the limits prescribed by social conditions is the first requisite to the attainment of the greatest happiness."

How can each person attain the greatest amount of such happiness? Only by cooperating *voluntarily* with every other person. Through exchange of ideas and goods, each individual will advance further on the road to progress. A contractual society is the best guaranty of the freedom of all the people. And the best society is that of *all* the peoples of the world.

Competition, far from being destructive, is an integral part of the

cooperative society. ". . . the many who revile competition strangely ignore the enormous benefits resulting from it . . . they forget that most of the appliances and products distinguishing civilization from savagery, and making possible the maintenance of a large population on a small area, have been developed by the struggle for existence . . . they disregard the fact that while every man, as producer, suffers from the underbidding of competitors, yet, as the consumer, he is immensely advantaged by the cheapening of all he has to buy."

Charity is a mistaken and misplaced emotion, since it causes the individual to tamper with nature's normal retribution. Each act carries with it its own consequence. Let no person presume to establish his institutions in violation of the natural *inequality* of humans. Nature's opportunities are (or should be) equal. From that starting point, each is on his own. The better specimens will reach the top; the inferior ones will perish.

The only thing required then is that each person be given the same starting place in the Race of Life. What is necessary to maintain existence? Land.

"Given a race of beings having like claims to pursue the objects of their desires . . . it unavoidably follows that they have equal rights to the use of this world. For if each of them 'has freedom to do all that he wills provided he infringes not the equal freedom of the other,' then each of them is free to use the earth for the satisfaction of his wants, provided he allows all others the same liberty . . . Equity, therefore, does not permit property in land."

Conquest has resulted in the private ownership of the earth. All present owners derive title through force only. "Does sale or bequest generate a right where it did not previously exist? . . . How long does it take for what was originally a *wrong* to grow into a *right*? At what rate per annum do invalid claims become valid?"

Such meddling with natural laws causes terrible hardships for *all* humanity. Injustice is born; and is perpetuated through the institution of the State.

The State is a tyrannical institution whose sole object is to subjugate Man, and to substitute *compulsory* cooperation—which is nothing but obedience—for freedom. It acts in direct opposition to the laws

of nature. It is nourished by taxation, war, legislation, and more and more centralization of power in fewer and fewer hands. The State functions through officialdom, which is slow, stupid, extravagant, unadaptable, corrupt, unchanging, and obstructive.

There is a legend current concerning the benevolence of, and the need for, greater control by the State. "It takes for granted, first, that all suffering ought to be prevented, which is not true: much of the suffering is curative, and prevention of it is prevention of a remedy. In the second place, it takes for granted that every evil can be removed: the truth being that, with the existing defects of human nature, many evils can only be thrust out of one place or form into another place or form—often being increased by change. . . . There does not occur the inquiry whether there are at work other agencies capable of dealing with evils, and whether the evils in question may not be among those which are best dealt with by these other agencies. And obviously, the more numerous governmental interventions become, the more confirmed does this habit of thought grow, and the more loud and perpetual the demands for intervention."

One thing leads to another. Once people become inured to subservience, their revolts—if any—are blind, and take the form of similar tyranny. If the State is too harsh, they rebel, by trying to establish a "better" State, a kinder master. The latest of such attempts is called Socialism.

Under Socialism, the laborer receives from society only such wages as society chooses to give him. "Under such conditions, there must arise a new aristocracy, for the support of which the masses would toil; and which, being consolidated, would wield a power far beyond that of any past aristocracy. . . . Socialistic arrangements necessitate an enslavement of this kind; and towards such an enslavement many recent measures, and still more, the measures advocated, are carrying us."

Neither Socialism, nor any other kind of Statism, can bring about reform of the people from the top. "There seems no getting people to accept the truth, which, nevertheless, is conspicuous enough, that the welfare of a society and the justice of its arrangements are at bottom dependent on the character of its members. . . . The belief

. . . is that by due skill, an ill-working humanity may be framed into well-working institutions. It is a delusion. The defective natures of citizens will show themselves in the bad acting of whatever social structure they are arranged into. There is no political alchemy by which you can get golden conduct out of leaden instincts."

The State and its concomitant variations (socialism, monopoly, militarism) are obstacles which, though eventually doomed, are bound to prevent the arrival of the millennium for countless ages. It is, therefore, the purpose of the philosopher to point the way to true progress.

Eventually, the pinnacle will be attained. For a short space of several aeons Man will be happy. His superior specimens will survive and propagate; his image will rule the earth. The torches of freedom will keep off, for that brief vibration of eternity, the approaching hosts of Darkness and Death. . . .

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Now came terrible days in the life of the aging sage. (He recalled distastefully this critical period.)

He had previously struck vigorously against private ownership of land; and had advocated the collection of rent by the community. Now a dilemma knitted his intellectual brows.

True Individualism cannot come into being unless all humanity has free access to every inch of land, now usurped by private ownership. Yet wouldn't confiscation of land titles, and substitution therefor of community ownership, mean socialism? He was torn between two emotions. Spencer, who once had said, "I am never puzzled," was bewildered. He began to waver.

His letters to the press announced his hesitating retreat. There is, he wrote, a difference between *absolute* ethics and *relative* ethics. Under *absolute* ethics, it was clear that land—the universe—could not be owned privately; humanity needed it totally for future progress. Yet, under *relative* ethics, one could not demand so barbarous a thing as the abolition of landlordism. After all, the landowners were not responsible for the original theft of the land by their ancestors or the vendors through whom they have acquired title. Therefore, their tenure must be undisturbed. Someday—someday, perhaps—

in some indefinite, vague future, maybe . . .

A blast of denunciation shook the world. He was attacked by all factions. Was he, or was he not, against private property in land? Even his own friend—the celebrated scientist, Thomas Huxley—sarcastically remarked, “In England . . . the theorems of ‘absolute political ethics’ are in danger of being employed to make this generation of landowners responsible for the misdeeds of William the Conqueror and his followers.”

The famed economist, Henry George, labeled Spencer the “perplexed philosopher,” proclaiming bitterly: “When the Justice that in the academic cloister he had so boldly invoked came forth into the streets and market places, to raise her standard and call her lovers, Mr. Spencer, instead of hastening to greet her, did his best to get out of the way.”

The great sociologist, Lester Ward, took advantage of the gathering storm to attack Spencer independently of the momentary argument. He criticized Spencer’s “eventual-doom-and-death” evolution prophecy. A society, he argued, need never die.

In the enveloping fog, Spencer himself, with the hardening of his intellectual arteries, failed to see anything wrong. Criticized by a Socialist for his change of policy, he noted calmly: “I am quite unconscious of any such change as he alleges.”

The chorus of boos continued. Dismayed, hounded, thoroughly shaken, the man who had boasted of being rigidly uncompromising, made an about-face. His earlier book was thoroughly revamped, and all mention of land—the very crux of the problem—was completely dropped. Spencer the philosopher turned coward.

He was now the center of an intellectual scandal. Tongues wagged; fingers pointed out his shame. Furiously, he fought back. His letters became petty, vengeful, personal. His star fell. He sank into oblivion.

Yet his lifetime work continued. His philosophy of synthesis could not be interrupted. He had to go on, and on, and on. . . .

Yes, yes . . . Man was the inevitable blunderer. He did not trust nature. Yet nature, in spite of him, worked its own destiny—and his. Someday—perhaps in the age of *absolute* ethics—the new era would

arrive. Spencer would probably be a forgotten shadow—yet time would clamp the lid on the intellectual chest of his convictions. Someday, some one might stumble across one of his books, might realize that here was a genius and a prophet—and might even say (how strange! how strange!): "This man must have loved humanity, for he fashioned the universe in Man's own image!"

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The newspaper boys were shouting the headline news to the hurrying throngs of London. Two men paused to listen.

"Say, Jim," inquired one. "Isn't it Herbert Spencer whose death they are announcing?"

"Yes," replied the other wonderingly. "Funny, and I thought he died ages ago. He must have been a hundred!"