

Natural Law and Social Justice

By Walter G. Stewart

“Liberty means Justice, and Justice is the natural law.” “All consideration of (the) distribution (of wealth) involves the ethical principle; is necessarily a consideration of ought or duty—a consideration in which the idea of right or justice is from the very first involved.” “The natural laws of production are physical laws, and the natural laws of distribution are moral laws.”—

Henry George

“The sentiment of Justice is so natural, and so universally acquired by all mankind that it seems to be independent of all law, all party, all religion.”—Voltaire.

The “Applied Sciences” of this Scientific Age are notoriously limited to those which relate to lifeless matter. The “will-controlled” reactions of thinking human beings to the fixed natural laws of Social Science which particularly concern them, obviously make harmonious application of these laws especially difficult, for thinking beings can either conform their actions to them, or if not, suffer the personal consequences; and the decision involves a fight between human weaknesses and human endowment of a “sense-of-Justice” such as is not involved in the practical application of the physical sciences.

The science of political economy rests solely upon natural law. The production of wealth involves physical laws, as do physics and chemistry, while the distribution of wealth deals with moral laws, the which are as truly natural laws as are the physical laws of nature. Thus must mankind’s “sense of duty be appealed to in order to solve social problems and carry civilization onward.” We must realize that political economy, unlike physics and chemistry and the

other physical sciences, deals with thinking, rational beings whose conscious doings must be brought into willing accord with its natural laws,—deals with prejudiced human beings whose endowment of common sense and the sense of Justice must be depended upon to make it an “applied science.”

That right thinking must dominate human weakness before accord with these natural laws can be secured seems clear. And notwithstanding that this science deals much with natural physical laws, appeal for the practical acceptance of the moral as well as the physical laws must recognize that the immutability of law cannot bring man to a harmonious acceptance of them unless they appeal to his sense of Justice.

Certainly these laws are Just as well as immutable, and the inviolability of all these laws must be made known to “carry civilization onward.” We must recognize the important fact that this science, unlike physics and chemistry, deals with human beings who must with conscious thought act in accord with its laws or suffer the penalties of disobedience; and that this required thinking about social relations peculiarly involves the human Sense-of-Justice.

The fact that this sense of Justice is commonly warped by human weakness is a real handicap to the application of this science of political economy; but its natural laws are very obvious to the unprejudiced thinker. Though personal morality has nothing to do with physical science, only knowledge that Social Justice is fundamental natural law, is moral law, is “right,” as one would say, can bring human beings to practical recognition of this Social Science which has been so sadly ignored. Knowledge of “moral right” and “Justice,” therefore, must go hand in hand with knowledge of physical natural laws. The providential simplicity and obviousness of politico-economic laws are hidden by human prejudices and narrow point of view, or selfishness, and only an enlightened “sense-of-Justice” can overcome this special handicap to their practical application. Even mere prejudice as to the Justice of Social doings largely dominates common sense, and considerate appeal to this “sense of duty” is vitally essential to establishing Political Economy as an “Applied Science,” for correcting the social evils of low wages, involuntary poverty and unemployment.