

Georgeism, Thomism, And The Catholic Question

By ROBERT C. LUDLOW

(An article on "Georgeism and Thomism" by Mr. Ludlow appeared in the March-April 1940 issue of LAND AND FREEDOM. In that article, the author discussed the possibility of a mutual assimilation of the doctrines of the followers of Henry George and those of Thomas Aquinas. In the present treatment, Mr. Ludlow elaborates his ideas.—Ed.)

THERE is nothing novel in suggesting Thomistic borrowing from another philosophic system. For, after all, the Thomist is an eclectic—he has borrowed much, and that from divergent and often strange sources. The founder of his system preferred Aristotle to the Christian Augustine — not, it is true, Aristotle in synthesis — but Aristotle as laying the rational foundation upon which a true synthesis could be based. And I say a true synthesis could only then come because Aristotle lacked knowledge of revelation—a corrective that must be taken into account if any really full and vital outlook (other than the mediocrity of a "golden mean") is to be reached. Aristotle, as it were, waited for Thomas Aquinas to crown and enlarge and correct his philosophical system. And this was done within the framework of Catholicism. For with the transformation of the nationalist Judaic revelation into the universal message of Christianity it was seemly that a philosophical system admitting the objective and universal should be utilized as the rational foundation from which one could then proceed to higher things. Nor is it strange that the Christian Aquinas leaned toward the pagan Stagirite—it was to be expected that a revelation bursting the bonds of Judaism should assimilate the Gentile as well as the Jewish outlook. The Roman Church has always been the great assimilator. At the risk of scandalizing some she has not hesitated to use what was true and beautiful in the pagan creeds, while at the same time keeping the riches of Israel in her bosom. I have heard it said—why does the Roman Church approve of Aristotle and not Plato? And the answer is, of course, that she sanctions what is true in both Aristotle and Plato, but that most of her children feel that Aristotle laid the more solid foundation upon which the "higher things" might rest.

Because the Thomist is an eclectic, his system is not yet complete. Or rather, let us say he has the framework—part of it is filled in and a great deal more remains to be filled. It may take years or even centuries of dispute before this or that is dropped into its proper niche within this framework. There is no need to despair entirely if there seems to be no indication of any great understanding between Georgeists and Thomists. For the Thomist is slow to enthusiasm, holds emotional response in distrust and, because he has a long memory, looks upon no economic

system as fully proved. For those whose outlook stops at the borders of reason there will be more trust in a professed cure here and now than for those looking "sub specie aeternitatis." The combination of these elements in Catholicism works unrest in many a soul. The mentally healthy will try to hit the right balance, but many there are who will not be able to do this and to whom the Church extends an uneasy indulgence.

Catholicism and Thomism are not synonymous terms—allegiance to one is no guarantee of allegiance to the other—nevertheless it is within the larger framework of Catholicism that the Thomist philosophy works itself out. So it is that the acts of ecclesiastical authority will have bearing on the question of assimilation. And that, of course, brings up the McGlynn affair. In Catholic circles (particularly in Jesuit circles) we hear much of Dr. McGlynn's excommunication and small mention of his eventual vindication, and to these we can only extend the reminder of the excommunication of Thomas Aquinas and his eventual vindication — sometimes the Church has wrestled with angels. But, after all, there is a contradiction (or apparently one) between the usual school of Catholic thought and that of the Georgeists. And that does not lie in the land doctrine—rather does it lie in the question of what economics is and whether man *makes* his economic laws or *discovers* them.

Thomas Aquinas did not regard either politics or economics as physical sciences—but rather as branches of ethics—treating them as subdivisions of moral theology. He held that they dealt with human actions and were therefore susceptible of moral judgment and so did not admit of treatment as given to laws of medicine or chemistry. Henry George felt quite otherwise. He contended that there was indeed a science of political economy and that it was a natural science and that its laws were discovered, not made, and that therefore they were to be treated as one would treat the laws of mechanics and physics. This does not mean that George ruled ethics out of economics—far from it. But ethical considerations, with him, did not enter into economic law *as such*. Rather, these laws worked out automatically and inevitably, like the law of gravitation. Ethical judgment concerned itself with how man *used* these laws. George held that natural economic law tended to the common good if left untouched and he judged unethical the attempt to interfere with these laws—be it the socialist attempt at planning or the attempt to manipulate economic law to benefit the few. In this, his viewpoint differs sharply from that of the Malthusian-minded economists. For these latter also, economics was a physical

science, but a science whose working out tended, not as George held, to the common good, but rather to the benefit of the few at the top. For them there was no ethical judgment, either in relation to economics in itself or in man's actions. For George there was no ethical judgment in relation to economics in itself (as there is no ethical judgment of the law of gravitation) but there was ethical judgment in regard to man's manipulation of these laws. For the Thomist, ethical judgment enters both fields—that of personal action and that of economics proper, since for them man *makes* his economic system.

This, then, and not the land dispute, is the question that offers the more fundamental difficulty—does man *make* or *discover* the economic law? And if the question cannot be dissolved, can there still be made a working agreement among Thomists who assert the former and Georgeists who teach the latter?

Another disagreement more fundamental than that of the land question is that concerning freedom. Regulation is never desirable in itself—if we must have it, then let it be because it leads to a truer freedom than otherwise. And so one approaches the Georgean concept of freedom in economic life and intellectual life with favorable bias. This preparation of mind is a necessary preliminary to any investigation. It is sheerest fiction to say that we can approach problems disinterestedly. Time spent on the question of disinterested versus interested investigation would be as wasted as that spent on the question of motivated versus unmotivated actions. If nothing else prevents a disinterested investigation, our very physical make-up does so. A man disapproves of many things from a sour stomach or he is "intellectually" convinced of the absurdity of ethical standards, because he prefers unlawful sensual pleasure. Once, a young man came to the Cure d'Arts to argue against the Faith. He was advised the confessional, after which he could no longer remember what his "intellectual difficulties" had been. A man does not approach the problem of immortality, or of the existence of God, or the permanence of the marriage bond, in a disinterested way—he hopes for one answer rather than another. This is no necessary hindrance to discovering truth—because the very idea of truth must contain the psychological make-up of man in it and, if we can emancipate ourselves from mere prejudice as distinguished from a natural and legitimate "interestedness" we need feel no hesitancy but that man is capable of finding truth.

The Thomist is predisposed to admit the necessity of limited freedom—the Georgeist at times talks of "unlimited" freedom, but a second thought usually shows him the fallacy of this, especially when it's a question of "unlimited" freedom for the landlord. But the idea of freedom as an end in itself towards which the economic system should

aim persists in Georgean literature. And there is the truth in it that if the common good is best served by a free economy then we need the free economy. But the end is the common good, not freedom. The most perfect physical pleasure of which we are capable here is the act of coition in which body and soul are surrendered to another, so that volitional freedom itself is inoperative during the unitive act. And in that parallel act which is the perfect consummation of eternal happiness—the coitional surrender to God which is the Beatific Vision—freedom has found its object and is assimilated. So that neither the performance of the earthly act of union or its divine counterpart count on freedom as an *end*; rather it is the means making possible the end and becomes inoperative with the attainment of that end.

This holds true of the economic life also. If there is any purpose in having a free system, it is to serve the common good. Georgeism remains little more than a nicely worked out plan or an exercise in logic unless it can demonstrate its worth and be considered both as a practical system and a system conducive to the physical and spiritual good of the community. Freedom is always desirable and preferable as a means to any end. If the end be temporal it must foster freedom (forced coitional union is rape); if it be eternal it must postulate freedom as a condition to that end (one attains the Beatific Vision voluntarily or not at all).

These two problems, then—the nature of economics and the nature of freedom — form the basis for discussing Georgeism, Thomism and the Catholic Question. Let us hope they will be thrashed out by competent Thomists and Georgists, and not remain just material for a short article to gather dust in Limbo.

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Poverty

By THEOGNIS

(Greek—Sixth Century B. C.)

FOR noble minds, the worst of miseries,
 Worse than old age, or wearisome disease,
 Is Poverty. From Poverty to flee
 From some tall precipice into the sea,
 It were a fair escape to leap below!
 In Poverty, dear Kyrnus, we forego
 Freedom in word and deed, body and mind;
 Action and thought are fetter'd and confin'd.
 Let me then fly, dear Kyrnus, once again!
 Wide as the limits of the land and main,
 From these entanglements; with these in view,
 Death is the lighter evil of the two.