The Political Ethics of Herbert Spencer

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THE POLITICAL ETHICS OF HERBERT SPENCER.*

It is often said that great thinkers who are allotted a prolonged career begin as revolutionists and end as reactionists. Some such verdict will probably be rendered in the case of Herbert Spencer when history shall have summed up the work of his life. The general law results from the circumstance that while "the world moves" human character is fixed. The influence exerted by this class of men, working in harmony with the general forward tendencies of society, causes a rapid advance in all the active centers of thought, the aggregate of which in half a century is very considerable. On the contrary, the position taken by a young and vigorous mind just entering its productive period is usually as advanced as it will be at any later period, often more so. This fixity is further strengthened by a certain pride of opinion which favors the defence of all earlier expressions of thought, and thus is a double barrier erected to the subsequent modification of views that have once been uttered. The general result is that the moving thought of the age soon overtakes the stationary thought of the man, and, at a certain point in his career, rides past him, leaving him behind in the race. In Mr. Spencer's case, as in most cases, such modifications as have taken place in his views have been in a backward rather than a forward direction, giving to his later utterances a less radical or more conservative character. Such have been his changes of attitude toward the working classes, to a less extent toward women, on religious questions, and on the land question. It is natural that there should be a marked difference between the tone of his early productions, inspired by the warm sympathies of youth, and his mature deliverances, after his ardor had

*"Justice:" Being Part IV of the "Principles of Ethics:" New York, 1891. The "Principles of Ethics:" New York, vol. i. 1892; vol. ii. 1893. "Social Statics, Abridged and Revised;" together with "The Man *versus* the State:" New York, 1892.

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been cooled by time and experience; and these influences alone are sufficient to account for the slight alterations mentioned, while his surrender of the doctrine of a "moral sense," so vigorously contended for at the outset, is creditable to him in showing that he was capable of yielding to the logic of facts.

Of Mr. Spencer's "Synthetic Philosophy," originally planned to consist of ten volumes and thirty-one parts, and often referred to as the most comprehensive cosmological scheme ever conceived by man, nine volumes, containing twenty-nine parts, have actually appeared, and are in the hands of the reading public, so that there only remains one volume containing two parts unpublished, and some of this is doubtless in an advanced state of preparation, if not actually in press. It is, therefore, safe to say that the whole of Mr. Spencer's legion of readers, including those who least agree with him, join in the general hope that life and strength may hold out until the end is reached, and as much longer as may be.

The works of Mr. Spencer are so universally read that there is little occasion for explaining their contents, and, indeed, any proper review of even the latest would probably be a work of supererogation. It will be more profitable, after briefly indicating what parts it is proposed specially to consider, to bring the various topics treated in these parts together into a somewhat logical order, analyze and discuss their general bearings, and set forth such considerations, conclusions, and natural corollaries, as seem to grow out of the *tout ensemble*. In a word, an analytical or critical, rather than an expositional form of treatment seems to be demanded.

The first part of Vol. I of the "Principles of Ethics," occupying somewhat more than half of the volume, has been before the public as the "Data of Ethics" since 1879, and there are few books that are now better known. This part will therefore receive only incidental mention. The

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remainder of the volume (Parts II and III) treats mainly of individual ethics and does not for this reason justify detailed treatment in this sketch. On the other hand "Justice," which forms Part IV of the "Principles of Ethics," or the first part of Vol. II, deals only incidentally with private morals and chiefly with political ethics. It, therefore, notwithstanding its earlier date, calls for a somewhat thorough examination. Part V treats of what he calls "Negative Beneficence," or what ought not to be done, and Part VI of "Positive Beneficence," or what ought to be done, the two together constituting his "Ethics of Social Life." These topics seem to relate to the individual and not to the State, nevertheless, as will be seen, a large amount of political ethics is worked into the treatment, which cannot be wholly ignored.

The remaining volume which it is proposed to bring within the purview of this paper has a different claim. It consists of two entirely distinct treatises, the first, occupying two-thirds of the volume, being his "Social Statics, Abridged and Revised," which is therefore now in such shape that it may be regarded as reflecting his mature views. The other treatise, completing the volume, is a reproduction, unchanged except by the addition of a short note, of the pamphlet entitled "The Man *versus* the State," published by Williams and Norgate in 1884. This pamphlet consists of a series of four articles that appeared in the *Contemporary Review* from February to July of that year, together with a "postscript" of six pages. These articles are entitled respectively: "The New Toryism," "The Coming Slavery," "The Sins of Legislators" and "The Great Political Superstition." They may be regarded as making an application to current political affairs of the principles laid down in his "Ethics" and "Social Statics."*

* All the works above enumerated have been received as they appeared by the writer of this paper, either directly from the author's hand or through his American publishers, a courtesy which is here publicly and thankfully acknowledged.

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That all these works come within the scope of ethics, as Mr. Spencer understands it, is shown by the fact that his "Justice" is to so large an extent a mere revision and repetition in substance of the "Social Statics." In the latter the law of "equal freedom" is laid down as clearly as in the former, and the discussion of its resultant principles as well as its "corollaries" follows the same lines. In fact, the titles of the chapters in the two books are to a large extent the same, often literally identical: Such are the chapters in "Justice" entitled "The Right of Property," "The Rights of Women," "The Rights of Children," "Political Rights—so-called," "The Constitution of the State," "The Duties of the State," and "The Limits of State Duties;" and even where the heads of the chapters differ the subjects discussed are usually the same. These and other similar titles also indicate how largely his ethics relates to public matters and the duties of which he speaks are the duties of the State. The first volume, however, of his "Principles of Ethics," consisting of the "Data of Ethics," the "Inductions of Ethics" and the "Ethics of Individual Life," deals more especially with the general philosophy of duty.

All are of course acquainted with the general character of Mr. Spencer's ethics as set forth in the "Data of Ethics," the doctrine that happiness is the end of action, and the argument that this will ultimately be attained through altruistic action becoming that which yields the greatest happiness, the most egoistic. To the "Data of Ethics," as originally published, is now added a rediscovered chapter in the form of an appendix, entitled, "The Conciliation," although this is also the title of Chapter XIV, which covers much the same ground and may have been an attempt to supply the lost one. This "conciliation" is the reconciliation between egoism and altruism, and it is here extended to society as a collective unit and illustrated by reference to those animals, such as bees, which have acquired social natures and become almost

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perfectly adapted to a social state. Their purely altruistic actions have come to be prompted by instincts, and are therefore the only ones that can satisfy their desires; and he draws the conclusion that human society may one day be so perfect that a purely hedonistic activity will be consistent with the highest good of the community.

Aside from the natural objection, which probably ought not to be raised, but which will be raised, that all this is visionary and utopian, there are two aspects from which it may be instructive to view it. In the first place it is open, along with all altruistic reasoning, to the charge of being self-destructive. Altruism is based on the assumption of the real or possible unhappiness of others, which unhappiness consists entirely in the inability to pursue egoistic ends. A state in which all were able to pursue egoistic ends and only such would leave no room for altruistic action, and would thus rule out the whole domain of ethics from a scheme of philosophy. This is the general objection that lies against Mr. Spencer's classification of the sciences as embodied in his works. It is surprising that a mind so logical could have failed to see that ethics is not an independent science at all, that it relates to a theoretically transient state of society, which, as he himself shows, is to pass away so soon as egoistic and altruistic actions shall have become mutually adjusted, that the "conciliation" is simply the disappearance of altruism with the supremacy of innocent egoism in which happiness alone consists. Ethics, therefore, during this transition period, is merely a department of sociology, and only entitled to a very subordinate place in the sociological scheme, That he should have made it the great end of all his labors, saying of it that "this last part of the task it is, to which I regard all the preceding parts as subsidiary,"* is to be compared in inconsistency with the belief of certain saintly beings whose only happiness in this world is derived from ministering to the afflicted, that they are to be rewarded

* "Data of Ethics," p. 5 (preface to Part I when issued separately).

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by greater happiness in a world where there are no afflicted to minister to.

The other reflection that naturally arises from this view of ethics is that social insects, whose perfect organization society is to imitate, have reached the extreme stage of typical socialism, as pictured by the most unequivocal advocates of that social condition. Individuality is here utterly lost, and all the members of the society are reduced to the dead level of equality, while over the whole swarm the "queen," as the specialized representative of the uniform collective will, reigns supreme without the need of exercising the slightest authority. The social machine is complete and automatic.

In accord with Mr. Spencer's exaggeration of the rank that ethics should take in a scheme of philosophy, is his equal exaggeration of the importance of a "regulative system." The statement in the preface to the "Data of Ethics" that "few things can happen more disastrous than the decay and death of a regulative system no longer fit, before another and fitter regulative system has grown up to replace it," taken in connection with the apprehension just before expressed that his own system of ethics might not appear unless he turned aside and prepared it in advance of its natural place in the scheme, certainly admits of the interpretation that this is the "fitter regulative system" to which he refers. Such confidence can only be compared with that which Comte had in the early acceptance and ultimate supremacy of his moral and religious system.

The truth that ethical systems and codes merely reflect the state of morals prevailing at any given time and place, and do not themselves influence that state, and the kindred truth that a certain standard of morals is a condition to the existence of the social state itself, do not seem to have taken a firm hold of Mr. Spencer's mind, although occasional glimpses of them are apparently caught; as where he says that "the genesis of such codes, and partial conformity to them, have been necessary; since, if not in any degree

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recognized and observed, there must result social dissolution." * It seems remarkable that so strong an advocate of the merely historical or natural history method of studying sociology, which he labels all over with "take care!" and "hands off!" should propose in the case of ethics, which is so obviously a social necessity, and therefore self-adjusting, to "interfere" and "regulate" the conduct of individuals. The surprise is still further heightened at finding him correctly attributing the real moral progress of the world not to the "regulative system," but to "the progress of civilization" † and to "mental evolution." ‡

The "Inductions of Ethics" is a highly instructive treatise, passing in review the conduct of all the nations of the earth, especially of the uncivilized races, with their widely conflicting customs. Its perusal is well calculated to enable the reader to penetrate the conventionalities of his own time and to distinguish, as few persons can do, between conduct which is intrinsically moral or immoral and that which is so only because the prevailing code approves or condemns it. The various ideas that have prevailed in the past, and now prevail, among different peoples relative to justice, generosity, humanity, veracity, obedience, industry, temperance, chastity, etc., are set forth in the clear and orderly manner that characterizes all of Mr. Spencer's writings of this class, and are supported by all the authority that he is able to summon. The unreliability of these sources of information has caused much of his sociological work to be severely criticised, if not entirely rejected, and it is this perhaps that has brought forth in the present case the following disclaimer:

"Not all travelers are to be trusted. Some are bad observers, some are biased by creed or custom, some by personal likings or dislikings; and all have but imperfect opportunities of getting at the truth. Similarly with historians. Very little of what they narrate is from immediate observation. The greater part of it comes through channels

* "Principles of Ethics," vol. i., p. 316.
† *Ibid.*, p. 293.
‡ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

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which color, and obscure, and distort; while everywhere party feeling religious bigotry, and the sentiment of patriotism, cause exaggerations and suppressions. Testimonies concerning moral traits are hence liable to perversion."*

In the "Ethics of Individual Life" are treated the subjects of activity, rest, nutrition, stimulation, culture, amusements, marriage, and parenthood. Trite subjects these, and difficult to raise above the commonplace, yet, conceived as filling each its appropriate niche in a great world scheme, he has succeeded in rendering them quite palatable, while throughout the chapters one finds the spice of originality and breadth of conception lending an unexpected flavor. No better example could be given than is furnished by his treatment of "stimulation," in which he rightly condemns the excesses that are committed in the supposed performance of duty, which society usually approves because the acts are displeasureable, reserving its condemnation for those excesses which are in themselves enjoyable, apparently on the principle that "the damnable thing in the misconduct is the production of pleasure by it."†

Probably the least scientific part of Mr. Spencer's entire system is his treatment of the ethics of social life, or negative and positive beneficence. Negative beneficence consists of restraints of various kinds, as on free competition, free contract, blame, praise, etc. He makes all such restraints to depend upon the principle of altruism to be displayed by those who are to exercise these restraints. He admits that under the operation of free competition and free contract circumstances often give certain individuals an advantage; which with him is as it should be, since he is able to see no other reason for this advantage than the superiority of such individuals, who therefore deserve their advantage; but negative beneficence enjoins all such not to press their advantage to the full extent that justice entitles them to do, but to be

* *Ibid.*, p. 464.
† *Ibid.*, p. 508.

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merciful and not altogether crush and destroy those who are unfortunate because they are unworthy. He says:

"The battle of life as carried on by competition, even within the bounds set by law, may have a mercilessness akin to the battle of life as carried on by violence. And each citizen, while in respect of this competition not to be restrained externally, ought to be restrained internally. Among those who compete with one another in the same occupation, there must in all cases be some who are the more capable and a larger number who are the less capable. In strict equity the more capable are justified in taking full advantage of their greater capabilities."*

Again:

"Anyone who, by command of great capital or superior business capacity, is enabled to beat others who carry on the same business, is enjoined by the principle of Negative Beneficence to restrain his business activities, when his own wants and those of his belongings have been abundantly fulfilled; so that others, occupied as he is, may fulfill their wants also, though in smaller measure."†

Once more:

"Under pressure entailed by a commercial crisis, a trader, while unable to get further credit from his bank, is obliged to meet a bill immediately falling due. One who has capital in reserve is asked for a loan on the security of the trader's stock. He may make either a merciful or a merciless bargain. He may be content with a moderate gain by the transaction, or, taking advantage of the other's necessities, may refuse except on conditions which will involve immense loss, or perhaps eventual bankruptcy. Here, again, there is occasion for the self-restraint which sympathy prompts."‡

These are fair samples of negative beneficence as he understands it. It results entirely from the inherent goodness or sympathy of the agent, and the whole treatment, despite its stately form, is not much above the ordinary moralizing so familiar to all. Sympathy exists and often mitigates hardship, and it will do so more and more as the race advances, but everyone knows that it cannot be depended upon as a business principle. It is only an accidental and occasional

* "Principles of Ethics," vol. ii. p. 277.
† *Ibid.*, pp. 282–83.
‡ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

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element and not a reliable factor in social science. Anyone who should try to persuade the officers of a trust to sell the commodity they control at a price below that which yields them the largest profit would in this country be classed as a "crank."

In his treatment of positive beneficence, Mr. Spencer first deals with the duties of husbands to wives, parents to children, children to parents, and the sound and healthy to the sick and injured, in all of which there is much to approve, although for the most part the conclusions simply follow as a matter of course, and it is almost to be regretted that a regard for completeness should have required such subjects to be treated at all. But when he comes to the question of relief to the poor, which, according to him, naturally belongs here, an opportunity is afforded for the vigorous expression of his well-known views on poor rates and public charities in general. His defence of private charity on the ground of its subjective effect in ennobling the giver has a certain force, much of which, however, is lost when it is remembered from what diverse and often unworthy motives giving proceeds. He justly condemns those forms of charity that tend to create a dependent class, but he fails to prove that this is not as effectually done by private as by public methods. To hear him, one would hardly think that the former ever produce this result. But are the pauper laws of England more pernicious in this direction than is the universal private alms-giving of Italy, for example?

He does not touch the real kernel of the matter, which does not relate to the source of the act, but to the manner of its performance. Beneficence should only be directed toward those who are entitled to it in consequence of the defective social conditions under which they live. It should only go so far as to remedy this social defect. It should be so directed as to ennoble instead of demoralizing the recipient. All this can be done, as close students of the question have proved, and this is scientific charity. The question is then

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narrowed down to ascertaining whether this can best be done by the individual or by society. That it cannot be done by single individuals actuated by a multitude of vague, conflicting, and whimsical motives, all must concede. It can be done to a limited extent by large associations with enlightened officers. The larger such associations are the less personal will be their action, and hence the more successful. The most impersonal of all organizations is the State, and while much even here depends upon the character of the officers, the danger that unworthy or illegitimate influences will control their action is here at its minimum.

In discussing political beneficence, Mr. Spencer is very severe on the officers of government, and says much about "eternal vigilance," etc., attacks Parliament for over-legislation and the law courts for delinquency. "Political beneficence," he says, "will seek removal of these enormous evils more energetically than it will seek constitutional changes or extensions of State management." After enumerating the principal evils which political beneficence is to remove, among which we find "bubble companies," "swindling syndicates," "incorporated bodies," "official organizations," "bank failures," and "company disasters," he adds:

"Political beneficence, then, prompting this 'eternal vigilance,' will, I say, be ever ready to detect possible modes of corruption; ever ready to resist insignificant usurpations of power; ever prepared to challenge transactions which in the smallest ways deviate from the proper order; and ever ready to bear the odium consequent on taking such courses." *

To all this no one should object. The evils enumerated are among the worst that society suffers. The only difficulty is to reconcile Mr. Spencer's sanction of State action in suppressing them with his law of equal freedom as set forth in his political ethics proper, which it is our next task to consider. The acts he condemns clearly result from that law, and there is a manifest inconsistency in his philosophy.

* *Ibid.*, p. 421.

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Passing now from individual to social ethics, as set forth in "Social Statics" and in "Justice," we are confronted at the outset by the "law of equal freedom," which is the pivot upon which Mr. Spencer's entire system turns. It is stated in the earlier work in the following form:

"Every man has freedom to do all that he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man," *

and in the later one:

"Every man is free to do that which he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man;" †

that is, he has seen no reason for making any essential change. Of course the expression "has freedom," or "is free," means: ought to be free, or, is ethically free. It is freedom *de jure*, and not necessarily *de facto*. The *proviso*, however, is ambiguous. To infringe the equal freedom of another may mean to interfere with his freedom either to perform the same act or to resist its performance. Resistance to such performance would not, strictly speaking, be "equal freedom," yet most acts of aggression call for resistance and not for action of the same kind. If one man covets what another has and seeks to obtain it in any other way than by mutual agreement, he would, according to the literal terms of the formula, be ethically free to proceed, so long as this did not interfere with a third party seeking the same object. If equal freedom means the freedom of the party aggressed upon to resist, then the only meaning of the law is that anyone is free to do whatever he wills, provided all countervailing efforts are unmolested. The so-called law of equal freedom is therefore not a rule of human ethics, which would involve a conscious sacrifice. It might be called the rule of animal ethics, if this did not involve a contradiction of terms. The wolf in descending upon the fold does not infringe the equal freedom of any other wolf to do the same,

* "Social Statics, Abridged and Revised," p 55.
† "Justice," p. 46.

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nor of the sheep to resist such an attack. And as "man is a wolf to man" the same is true in his case.

Mr. Spencer's attempts to escape from this complexion, to which his law of equal freedom comes, are unsuccessful. His qualifications, exceptions, admissions and supplements, either neutralize the law entirely or they leave it untouched. To say that no one is free to aggress, is to say the opposite of what the formula says. To say that it refers to a social state in which there is no desire to aggress, is to confess the invalidity of the law in any real case.

The fact is that Mr. Spencer's law of equal freedom was not framed as a law of individual ethics. In laying it down he was not thinking of conduct between men and men as co-ordinate factors in society. He was thinking of the conduct of the *State* toward individuals. "Freedom" in his formula means *civil right*. In plain terms, he means that the State has no right to interfere with the conduct of the individual except where the individual infringes the liberty of another individual. If he does not say this in so many words his whole social and ethical philosophy teaches it, and it is not worth while to dwell upon the "dilemmas" which the narrower view involves. His ethics, therefore, as taught in these two works, in "The Man *versus* the State," and in his other kindred writings, is essentially a political ethics, and deals almost exclusively with the rights of the State.

This leads us to consider, first of all, his conception of the origin, nature, and functions of the State. With his much iterated doctrine that the order of development in society has been from militancy to industrialism, or from a *régime* of *status* to one of contract, we need have little to do, as it belongs more especially to his sociology, and is elaborated in earlier works. It is, however, important to know that students of ethnology deny that government originated in war, and show that it grew naturally out of the family relation, and is based primarily on kinship. It is also impossible that a society should exist for any prolonged period

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in a state of war. And even if there had ever been races that subsisted entirely on the booty acquired in war, their existence would imply that of industrial races from whom these supplies must be taken. And yet, to judge from many of Mr. Spencer's statements, it would be hard to avoid the conclusion that he considered the whole world to have been in a chronic state of war during its early history, and to have been only quite recently transformed into an industrial state. It cannot, however, be denied that the wars that have almost always prevailed between tribes, nations, and races resulted in enforced labor on the part of the masses, which later gradually gave way to what we call free labor, based on such contracts as the laborer is able to make with his employer.

Mr. Spencer early espoused the doctrine of an analogy at least between society and a living organism,* propounded twelve years earlier by Comte † (he disclaims all acquaintance with Comte at that date), and although he has variously qualified it under the spur of criticism, he still adheres to its substance in so far as to treat society as under the absolute dominion of the same class of laws that govern the physiological economy of living creatures. Owing to a preconception, however, he treats the evolution of society as taking place through differentiation alone, whereas biology owes to him the formulation of the important law that organic evolution always consists in the mutual processes of differentiation *and integration*. As the parts become more and more specialized the wholes are more and more generalized, until a perfect organism of the higher types becomes completely integrated and under the dominion of one supreme ganglionic center. Logical consistency would therefore have required him to look upon society, even in its most advanced state, as the analogue of some of the lower types of organisms, in which the degree of integration is far

* 1850. See "Social Statics, Abridged and Revised," p. 267 ff.
† 1838. See "*Philosophie positive*," vol. iv. pp. 285, 311, Paris, 1869.

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from complete, and each individual, like the cells of the *Labyrinthuleæ* and other protists, is to a large extent independent of the general *cœnobium*, or society. He should then have shown how even this state was developed from a lower one of complete individual independence, corresponding to that of the *Amœbæ*. Finally, it would have behooved him to point out that this natural process of organic development was still going on in society as it has gone on in biology, and that a stage would be ultimately reached in which a supreme center of social consciousness, or *social ego*, would exist, having full control of the hierarchy of subordinate centers and of the individual members of society.

Such would have been the logical outcome of the doctrine of a social organism. But instead of this we find him talking in the following fashion :

"Concerning individual organisms and social organisms, nothing is more certain than that advance from lower to higher, is marked by increasing heterogeneity of structures and increasing subdivision of functions. In both cases there is mutual dependence of parts, which becomes greater as the type becomes higher ; and while this implies a progressing limitation of one function to one part, it implies also a progressing fitness of such part for such function."*

Nothing, it will be observed, is here said about the "progressing" subordination of all the parts to the whole, which he above all others has shown to be the characteristic mark of organic progress from lower to higher types of development. The singular thing is that he should introduce this principle in support of the statement made on the same page that with further progress "there may rightly go further relinquishment of functions which the State once discharged," whereas animal organisms progress through the gradual assumption by the supreme authority of the general direction of all the subordinate functions of the body.

Mr. Spencer escaped the consequences of his own doctrine in two ways. First, he early denied the strict analogy between society and an organism, laying special stress upon

* "Justice," p. 229.

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the fact that *society* is a mere abstraction, and not a conscious individual, capable of feeling. In this he is, of course, literally speaking, right, and the corollary he freely draws that there is no object in working for the good of society conceived as a conscious being, but that society exists for the individual and not the individual for society, is eminently sound. Still it cannot be denied that a sort of consciousness can be properly predicated of that body of individuals whom society, by whatever method, appoints to preside over, control, and regulate its operations. In other words, *government*, which as Mr. Spencer admits always rudely represents society, changing with it and corresponding to it in character and quality, may be properly regarded as the supreme center of social consciousness, often feebly integrated, and little capable of directing affairs, but still the homologue of the developing brain of animal organisms. And it is further true that with the progress that has taken place in government, from the more autocratic and despotic to the more democratic and representative forms, the degree of integration has strengthened, so that in the apparently weak and flexible democracies of to-day there is really a far more firm and compact social state than in the stiff autocracies of former ages, when there were, so to speak, no nerve currents permeating society and keeping every part in communication with the great social center. So that the progress in social integration is substantially parallel with that which has gone on in organic life.

In the second place, Mr. Spencer has escaped the consequences of his doctrine by failing, purposely or otherwise, to recognize that the analogy holds good only in its psychic aspects. His comparisons are with purely physiological functions. He repeats his analogies with the organs of nutrition, circulation, respiration, and reproduction, but rarely mentions the nervous system in this connection. It is, however, here and here only that the analogy has force, and when followed out it points strongly toward a progressive

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development of the social consciousness until there shall ultimately be reached a stage in which the supreme social center shall be in such firm and friendly relations with the lower centers and with the individual units of society that it can care for them in somewhat the same way that the sane mind guards the well-being and safety of the sound body. But Mr. Spencer was careful not to be led into any such train of logic as this, which would have been fatal to his early preconceptions as to the functions of the State, and as a consequence he proceeded to elaborate a social science based directly upon the laws of life, quite ignoring the great stage of psychic phenomena which intervenes between life and social action and becomes the chief determining factor of the latter.

As this is a somewhat serious charge it needs to be substantiated. It may be more definitely formulated by saying that Mr. Spencer's sociology and political ethics rest upon *biology* and not upon *psychology*. If we seek a general term to express the fundamental principle that seems to underlie every statement of his works we shall perhaps find it in the word *self-adjustment*. With him everything that takes place properly is automatic. The following passage will serve as a sample of this biological ethics:

"This principle of self-adjustment within each individual, is parallel to that principle of self-adjustment by which the species as a whole keeps itself fitted to its environment. For by the better nutrition and greater power of propagation which come to members of the species that have faculties and consequent activities best adapted to the needs, joined with the lower sustentation of self and offspring which accompany less adapted faculties and activities, there is caused such special growth of the species as most conduces to its survival in face of surrounding conditions. This, then, is the law of sub-human justice, that each individual shall receive the benefits and the evils of its own nature and its consequent conduct."*

Or again:

"Since this connection between conduct and consequence is held to be just, it follows that throughout the animal kingdom what we call

* *Ibid.*, p. 9.

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justice, is the ethical aspect of this biological law in virtue of which life in general has been maintained and has evolved into higher forms; and which therefore possesses the highest possible authority."*

The importance of this aspect of the question will justify one further quotation:

"The prosperity of a species is best subserved when among adults each experiences the good and evil results of his own nature and consequent conduct. In a gregarious species fulfillment of this need implies that the individuals shall not so interfere with one another as to prevent the receipt by each of the benefits which his actions naturally bring to him, or transfer to others the evils which his actions naturally bring. This, which is the ultimate law of species life as qualified by social conditions, it is the business of the social aggregate, or incorporated body of citizens, to maintain."†

In this passage it is made clear that the general self-adjusting law of nature is held to apply to society, and man is duly advised that nature is to be imitated. Other passages, however, put this much stronger:

"The broad fact then, here to be noted, is that Nature's modes of treatment inside the family-group and outside the family-group are diametrically opposed to one another; and that the intrusion of either mode into the sphere of the other, would be destructive either immediately or remotely. Does any one think that the like does not hold of the human species? He cannot deny that within the human family, as within any inferior family, it would be fatal to proportion benefits to merits. Can he assert that outside the family, among adults, there should not be, as throughout the animal world, a proportioning of benefits to merits? Will he contend that no mischief will result if the lowly endowed are enabled to thrive and multiply as much as, or more than, the highly endowed? . . . Society in its corporate capacity, cannot without immediate or remoter disaster interfere with the play of these opposed principles under which every species has reached such fitness for its mode of life as it possesses, and under which it maintains that fitness."‡

It is clear from this that Mr. Spencer is utterly blind to the most conspicuous fact in society, that under an unregulated or "competitive" *régime* there is very little relation

* *Ibid.*, p. 150.
† *Ibid.*, p. 213.
‡ "The Man *versus* the State," p. 361.

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between "benefits" and "merits" or "fitness." It is partially to enforce such a correspondence that the state exists, and the essence of the idea of "justice," in the human sense, is the proportioning of benefits to merits, which "Nature's methods" do not secure. A typical example is the gradual substitution of trial by law for trial by battle, which formerly prevailed. In the complications of modern society "conduct" has little to do with this proportioning, and bad conduct is fully as successful as good. The "accident of position" is a much more potent factor. The State is now at work upon this difficult problem, still striving, as ever it has striven, to proportion benefits to merits, *i. e.*, to enforce justice against nature's methods. But let us hear Mr. Spencer further:

"Pervading all Nature we may see at work a stern discipline which is a little cruel that it may be very kind. That state of universal warfare maintained throughout the lower creation, to the great perplexity of many worthy people, is at bottom the most merciful provision which the circumstances admit of. It is much better that the ruminant animal, when deprived by age of the vigor which made its existence a pleasure, should be killed by some beast of prey, than that it should linger out a life made painful by infirmities, and eventually die of starvation. By the destruction of all such, not only is existence ended before it becomes burdensome, but room is made for a younger generation capable of the fullest enjoyment; and, moreover, out of the very act of substitution happiness is derived for a tribe of predatory creatures."*

No one, of course, objects to this phase of purely animal ethics for animals, but when prescribed for men, as in the following passage, the dose becomes excessive:

"A sad population of imbeciles would our schemers fill the world with, could their plans last. A sorry kind of human constitution would they make for us—a constitution continually going wrong, and needing to be set right again—a constitution ever tending to self-destruction. Why, the whole effort of Nature is to get rid of such—to clear the world of them, and make room for better. Mark how the diseased are dealt with. Consumptive patients, with lungs incompetent to perform the duties of lungs, people with digestive organs

* "Social Statics, Abridged and Revised," p. 149.

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that will not take up enough nutriment, people with defective hearts which break down under effort, people with any constitutional flaw preventing due fulfillment of the conditions of life, are continually dying out, and leaving behind those fit for the climate, food, and habits to which they are born.''*

This last, and much more in the same vein, is said under the head of ''Sanitary Supervision'' by municipalities and other governing agencies, as an argument against it, and against all public acts arising out of sympathy for the unfortunate, which action, he declares, ''defeats its own end. It favors the multiplication of those worst fitted for existence, and, by consequence, hinders the multiplication of those best fitted for existence—leaving, as it does, less room for them.''†

This doctrine, laid down in his ''Social Statics'' in 1850, he retains in the abridgment and reaffirms in his later writings. After quoting extensively from the early work and reapplying the doctrine of natural selection to society, he adds:

''And yet, strange to say, now that this truth is recognized by most cultivated people—now that the beneficent working of the survival of the fittest has been so impressed on them that, much more than people in past times, they might be expected to hesitate before neutralizing its action—now more than ever before in the history of the world, are they doing all they can to further survival of the unfittest!''‡

These citations ought to satisfy the most incredulous that the political ethics of Herbert Spencer, as well as his sociology, rests directly upon biology and completely ignores the influence of both feeling and thought in rendering human conduct and social life a field distinct from that in which the irrational animal acts and lives. He carries his general principle through a great number of departments of social action, applying everywhere his law of equal freedom. He recognizes that society is the theatre of natural laws, but

* *Ibid.*, p. 205.
† *Ibid.*, p. 207.
‡ ''The Man *versus* the State,'' p. 365.

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to him these are only the laws of life, or of the universe in general. He sees that the organic world is governed in much the same way as is the inorganic, the laws of cosmic evolution becoming those of natural selection and the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence. In a word the law of nature is the law of force both above and below the level of vital activities. He sees no other law in society, and seems irritated and annoyed at any attempt on the part of society to "interfere" with this law. Like some religious partisans who declare the absolute indestructibility of their faith, while at the same time manifesting unconcealed concern for its safety, Spencer, while quoting the maxim, *jura naturæ sunt immutabilia*, betrays a lively apprehension lest something be done to change them, and defends them valiantly against the schemes of ignorant "meddlers" (this word with its derivatives probably occurs a hundred times in the two volumes).

The arch offender in this line is, of course, government, which to him is scarcely a natural product. While recognizing it as such in his cooler moments, his *animus* against it is so strong as to make him treat it as something apart from the general scheme of society, a sort of interloper or parasite, that has foisted itself upon society and is using it for its own ends. In his eyes government consists of a group of ill-disposed individuals, "politicians," who have in one way or another worked themselves into power, and whose object is to deprive the people of their liberty, property, or happiness. This is expressed in such passages as this:

"'Thus much of your work shall be devoted, not to your own purposes, but to our purposes,' say the authorities to the citizens; and to whatever extent this is carried, to that extent the citizens become slaves of the government." *

Or, again:

"Public departments, all of them regimented after the militant fashion, all supported by taxes forcibly taken, and severally responsible

* "Justice," p. 223.

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to their heads, mostly appointed for party reasons, are not immediately dependent for their means of living and growing on those whom they are designed to benefit. *

These utterances clearly show that in his mind there is no bond of mutuality between the government and the citizen; that with him the former is an outside power working against the latter and for itself alone, and he declares that:

"Government, begotten of aggression and by aggression, ever continues to betray its original nature by its aggressiveness."†

As already remarked, what seems chiefly to trouble him is the attempt on the part of government to "interfere," "meddle" and "tamper" with the laws of nature, which he variously designates as "the normal working of things," "the constitution of things," "the order of Nature," "causal relations," etc., laying, of course, great stress on the law of supply and demand and the laws of trade and commerce in general. Whenever he speaks of the natural forces of society it is in this sense, for, adhering to the biological point of view, he can, of course, perceive no other social force than the struggle for existence, that is, the mere life-force. The true social forces are psychic and therefore ignored. Indeed, had he recognized them his entire course of reasoning would have been reversed, for they operate directly against the vital force, and tend to defeat the law of nature as manifested in the struggle for existence. He dimly perceives this, it is true, but mistakes the normal operations of the law of mind, antagonizing the law of life, for an abnormal element intruding upon the domain of natural law. If he could rise to a position from which he could see the whole field of both life and mind he would see that society is itself a product of the latter and could not result from the former. The same is true to an increased degree of government. It is the result of the "interference" of the psychic with the vital law. All human institutions are in the same case. Animals

* *Ibid.*, p. 231.
† "The Man *versus* the State," p. 369.

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have no institutions. Looking deeper we perceive that it is this that characterizes all art. Everything artificial is a product of the psychic force and results from interference with "the constitution of things." "The normal working of things" would never produce tools, weapons, clothing, or shelter. It is the essence of invention and artificial construction to "meddle" with "causal relations." But all this is just as "natural" and "normal" as are the purely physical or vital processes. It simply takes place in a different department of natural forces. It is the psychic process, the work of mental agencies.

As has been intimated, Mr. Spencer recognizes the *efficacy* of these interferences with nature, as he is pleased to call them. He is right in denying that there is any power that can take from, or add to, the actual force in the universe. To a great degree, too, the organic force of the world is incapable of increase or diminution, and even that part of it that belongs to society is practically a fixed quantity. Only by commuting it into some other form of force can its volume be changed. But all this is beside the point. The interferences of which he complains are not attempts to create or destroy the forces of society. They are attempts to *direct* them. This is easily done. The arts are all the result of the intelligent direction of natural forces and the properties of substances into ways and shapes that are useful to man. In the domestication of animals and the cultivation of vegetables the same is done for the higher class of forces displayed by living things. Government and all other social institutions apply the same principles to the laws of human action. They are all successful in proportion to the degree of intelligence, *i. e.*, of the understanding of those forces and properties, with which they are conducted. Mr. Spencer would not discourage art, he would not decry agriculture, he does not attack any other human institution except government.

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His reason for this seems to be that many of the acts of government have resulted in failure. This no one denies. But so have a large percentage of all other human schemes been failures. All social operations are primarily empirical. All have been products of multiplied experiments, and have attained success only after failure has taught wisdom. Not to speak of the abortive machines and worthless inventions that flood the patent offices of all countries, we need only to consider the business failures of modern times to see that the method of psychic progress is that of trial and error, at least in the earlier stages of every department of social life. If permitted to go on success is ultimately achieved and progress is made. It has been so in all the lower efforts, and it has been so in that highest effort, that of society to govern itself. Mr. Spencer's sociology, therefore, which would minimize government to the utmost, and even hints at its ultimate elimination, is an essentially destructive, and in no sense a constructive system. His political ethics which denies the right of society to adopt ways and means for its own improvement and advancement, is a censure of the whole course of human history.

A large part of the matter of the works now under consideration consists of enumerations of cases of governmental failure. Most of these cases are drawn from the history of European nations a century or more ago: the laws and ordinances interfering with trade and commerce, class legislation, sumptuary laws and laws fixing prices, wages, etc., mischievous and meddlesome legislation, laws that missed their purpose, produced unexpected effects, or the opposite effect from the one intended, laws that have had to be repealed, etc., etc. He has accumulated a mass of facts of this class that are highly interesting, often amusing, and certainly valuable as historical knowledge if not as guides to future lawmakers. But the fact that there is no longer any such legislation shows that these methods, however successful once, are not valued now and would not be

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tolerated. The failures, in so far as they were such, have taught their lesson and served their purpose in the great school of political experience. His claim that there is danger of reverting to such methods is simply puerile. The cases that he adduces of more modern legislation are of a very different class, and while some of the acts he enumerates are doubtless unwise and short-sighted, and will be repealed, the general body of legislation that he condemns is not only approved but demanded by the moral sense of Europe and America. Such is the anti-child-labor legislation, short-hour legislation, factory legislation, sanitary legislation, appropriations for public works, regulation of railways, public management of the telegraph system, the parcels post, and above all public instruction or national education. All of these and many other measures, some of them long since adopted on the Continent, now popular in England or America or both, he condemns in the most unmeasured terms as mischievous and pernicious, and as contrary to his canon of justice, the law of equal freedom. If anything further were needed to prove that canon unsound this fact would do so: that it stands in the way of the accomplishment of an urgent social demand.

Aside from the one glaring omission of Mr. Spencer's system, already pointed out—the omission of the psychic factor—and aside from many minor ones which cannot be noticed here, there are two other important omissions which call for special mention. The first of these is the failure to perceive that modern governments are all, to a greater or less degree, representative, and that their acts are consequently not wholly those of the individuals that make up the governing body at any given time, but are in a certain correct sense the acts of society. He has himself admitted that all governments, even the rudest, reflect the state of society over which they hold sway. But in an enlightened social state, such as that of England, Western Europe, and the United States, there is a close bond of union between society and

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the government. Whether they call themselves monarchies or republics, they are all in fact impure democracies, and the legislators and principal administrative officers are chosen by the people, or change with the changes in the popular voice. Such governments are controlled, after their selection as much as in their selection, by the wishes of their constituents. They are watched and warned and urged and petitioned, and their continuance depends upon their obedience. Rarely, indeed, do they dare to disobey the known will of the people. This being so, the anathemas of Herbert Spencer upon the *personnel* of government are misdirected. "The sins of legislators" are the sins of voters, and his plea should have been made to the wider tribunal. His counsel of "resistance"* is based on the assumption that the government is doing some great wrong, but those who are advised to resist are themselves the wrong-doers, and are not likely to resist their own acts. His denial of the right of majorities to legislate for minorities might be discussed in this connection, but it scarcely seems worth while to go over such well-beaten ground.

The second of the omissions under consideration is even more serious than the first. It is the failure to observe that the evils from which modern governments are called upon to protect society are of a very different nature from those with which the earlier governments of the world had to contend. A great change in the groundwork of society, due to various obscure causes working together during long periods, is always difficult to perceive, and the new evils thus insidiously introduced are hard to eradicate because they require the application of new and unaccustomed remedies. Such is the present state of society in the most advanced nations. Protection, which is the only governmental function that Mr. Spencer will recognize as legitimate, formerly meant the redress of private wrongs to person and property, chiefly through physical causes. Under autocratic governments

*"Social Statics, Abridged and Revised," p. 184.

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with limited industrial operations these were the chief internal evils of society, except those caused by the rapacity of the governing class. Competition prevailed almost exclusively in all branches of business, causing its share of the individual crime which it was the duty of government to prevent or punish. But a great revolution took place in Western Europe, and the character of governments underwent a complete change, often without change of name. Power passed from the hands of the ruling class into those of the people, and the most intense jealousy of all government interference in private business became general. The laws of trade were respected by the State and were allowed to operate untrammeled. This was an immense relief, and an era of unexampled industrial prosperity ensued. Wealth was rapidly accumulated, but in this reign of natural law in society it was drawn toward the strongest centers of attraction. The only justice respected in the distribution of wealth was the kind that Mr. Spencer alone recognizes. Under this crude form of justice the distribution was correspondingly unequal. Then came the era of machinery and the breaking up of guilds and trades, unsettling the status of the artisan, and turning him adrift to take his chances in the universal competition. These facts are familiar to all economists and students of real history. The industrial condition of the world has completely changed. The evils to be dealt with now are of an entirely different class from those of former industrial epochs. States have recognized this, and whatever differences may exist as to methods, all governments have felt called upon to take some action for the protection of society from these new dangers. The workingman has a voice in government, and its acts are largely his doings. Mr. Spencer, often as he condemns the "great man theory" of history, seems not to have correctly read the real history of his own age. He still thinks that the natural forces of society can be safely left to take care of themselves. And when he sees the State moving steadily

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forward and grappling one by one with these new evils, he sees in it the ghost of bygone despotism, and imagines a return to sumptuary laws, to the corn laws, and the *corvée*. He thinks the world gone mad, and works himself up into something like a frenzy. Because people will have public schools he cries out:

"We have fallen upon evil times, in which it has come to be an accepted doctrine that part of the responsibilities are to be discharged not by parents but by the public—a part which is gradually becoming a larger part and threatens to become the whole. Agitators and legislators have united in spreading a theory which, logically followed out, ends in the monstrous conclusion that it is for parents to beget children and for society to take care of them. The political ethics now in fashion makes the unhesitating assumption that while each man, as parent, is not responsible for the mental culture of his own offspring, he is, as citizen, along with other citizens, responsible for the mental culture of all other men's offspring! And this absurd doctrine has now become so well established that people raise their eyebrows in astonishment if you deny it. A self-evident falsehood has been transformed into a self-evident truth!" *

Because new countries will protect their infant industries, he lectures them in the following style:

"While the one party has habitually ignored, the other party has habitually failed to emphasize, the truth that this so-called protection always involves aggression; and that the name aggressionist ought to be substituted for the name protectionist." †

To the Liberal Party in England, because it has continued the "mischievous legislation" begun by the Tory Party, he applies the name of "The New Toryism," and says:

"The function of Liberalism in the past was that of putting a limit to the powers of kings. The function of true Liberalism in the future will be that of putting a limit to the powers of Parliaments." ‡

In defence of his abstract principle of political ethics he thus arraigns the existing practices of States:

"By those who have been brought up in the reigning school of politics and morals, nothing less than scorn is shown for every doctrine

* "Principles of Ethics," vol. i. p. 545.
† "The Man *versus* the State," p. 369.
‡ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

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which implies restraint on the doings of immediate expediency or what appears to be such. Along with avowed contempt for 'abstract principles' and generalizations, there goes unlimited faith in a motley assemblage of nominees of caucuses, ruled by ignorant and fanatical wire-pullers; and it is thought intolerable that its judgments should be in any way subordinated by deductions from ethical truths." *

Although Mr. Spencer occasionally manifests some faith in the ultimate triumph of what he considers sound principles, his latest works, upon the whole, are pervaded by a tone of despair, and sound more like the wail of a Tacitus over a crumbling empire than the firm voice of a philosopher who is making an epoch. He calls everything that he does not approve of "socialism," at the spread of which he is thoroughly alarmed. In one of the foot-notes to the revised "Social Statics" (p. 209), he says:

"At that time no one dreamed that the advance of Socialism would be so rapid that in forty years municipal governments would make rate-payers pay part of the rents of working-class houses; for this is what is done when by public funds they are supplied with better houses than they would otherwise have."

And in the preface to "The Man *versus* the State," referring to a prediction made in 1860, he indulges in the following jeremiad:

"Reduced to its simplest expression, the thesis maintained was that, unless due precautions were taken, increase of freedom in form would be followed by decrease of freedom in fact. Nothing has occurred to alter the belief I then expressed. The drift of legislation since that time has been of the kind anticipated. Dictatorial measures, rapidly multiplied, have tended continually to narrow the liberties of individuals; and have done this in a double way. Regulations have been made in yearly-growing numbers, restraining the citizen in directions where his actions were previously unchecked, and compelling actions which previously he might perform or not as he liked; and at the same time heavier public burdens, chiefly local, have further restricted his freedom, by lessening that portion of his earnings which he can spend as he pleases, and augmenting the portion taken from him to be spent as public agents please. The causes of these foretold effects, then in operation, continue in operation—are, indeed, likely to be strengthened."

* "Justice," p. 49.

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In his "Coming Slavery" he completes this dire picture in a way that even Edward Bellamy ought to be satisfied with:

"Already exclusive letter-carrier, exclusive transmitter of telegrams, and on the way to become exclusive carrier of parcels, the State will not only be exclusive carrier of passengers, goods, and minerals, but will add to its present various trades many other trades. Even now, besides erecting its naval and military establishments and building harbors, docks, breakwaters, etc., it does the work of ship-builder, cannon-founder, small-arms maker, manufacturer of ammunition, army-clothier and boot-maker; and when the railways have been appropriated 'with or without compensation,' as the Democratic Federationists say, it will have to become locomotive-engine-builder, carriage-maker, tarpaulin and grease manufacturer, passenger-vessel owner, coal-miner, stone-quarrier, omnibus proprietor, etc. Meanwhile its local lieutenants, the municipal governments, already in many places suppliers of water, gas-makers, owners and workers of tramways, proprietors of baths, will doubtless have undertaken various other businesses. And when the State, directly or by proxy, has thus come into possession of, or has established, numerous concerns for wholesale production and for wholesale distribution, there will be good precedents for extending its function to retail distribution: following such an example, say, as is offered by the French Government, which has long been a retail tobacconist."*

Finally, in his "Postscript" to this same work, he abandons hope in the following language:

"'Do I expect this doctrine to meet with any considerable acceptance?' I wish I could say, yes; but unhappily various reasons oblige me to conclude that only here and there a solitary citizen may have his political creed modified."

And no wonder, when we consider what the adoption of his "political creed" would involve. Not only would it involve the repeal of all the humane and industrial legislation to which reference has been made, but it would abolish all public works, including lighthouses and harbors; it would necessitate a return to a private postal system which the whole world has outgrown; would reëstablish the monopoly telegraph in those countries which have replaced it

* "The Man *versus* the State," p. 327.

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by a national telegraph, always found to possess advantages similar to those of a national mail system; the parcels post of England and equivalent systems of the Continent would give way to our express monopolies, which Mr. Spencer extols because he does not understand them; it would turn over cities to private water companies and private fire companies, both types of the "natural monopoly;" there would be a reversion to a system of strictly private, or "wildcat" banking; public schools would be abolished, probably the last thing next to liberty that any enlightened nation would surrender; and all forms of sanitary regulation, including quarantine precautions against great epidemics, would be left to the wisdom of individual citizens. As this last seems to cap the climax of *laissez faire* absurdity, it may be well to listen to his statement of the case, although the reader may require to be assured that the following passage is not intended as a burlesque:

"Respecting sewage there would be no difficulty. Houses might readily be drained on the same mercantile principle that they are now supplied with water. It is probable that in the hands of a private company, the resulting manure would not only pay the cost of collection, but would yield a considerable profit. But if not, the return on the invested capital would be made up by charges to those whose houses were drained: the alternative of having their connections with the main sewer stopped, being as good a security for payment as the analogous ones possessed by water and gas companies."*

According to Mr. Spencer's political ethics the State has no right to prevent the adulteration of food or the deterioration of fabrics, and he says that "the interest of the consumer is not only an efficient guarantee for the goodness of the things consumed, but the best guarantee."†

The process known as "cornering the market" is strongly approved by him as the natural method of regulating the supply. Of it he says:

"There still survives alike amongst rich and poor the belief that the speculations of corn-dealers are injurious to the public. Their anger

* "Social Statics, Abridged and Revised," p. 218.

† *Ibid.*, p. 163.

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blinds them to the fact that were not the price raised immediately after a deficient harvest, by the purchases of these large factors, there would be nothing to prevent the people from consuming food at their ordinary rate; which would end in the inadequate supply being eaten up long before the ripening of the next crop. They do not perceive that this mercantile operation is analogous in its effect to putting the crew of a vessel on diminished rations when the stock of provisions is found insufficient to last out the voyage."*

The person who performs the office of mediator in this operation, and, he forgets to say, also reaps the profits, "is simply one whose function it is to equalize the supply of a commodity by checking unduly rapid consumption."†

He has the most unbounded faith in the "contract," and considers all modern society to rest upon that. Whatever two persons agree to, he considers as *ipso facto* just; but, as a matter of fact, all contracts under a monopolistic *régime* are unequal in varying degrees. Competing labor is everywhere compelled to contract on unequal terms with combining capital, and no power short of that of society itself, *i. e.*, the State, can prevent this condition of things. The strongest argument the socialist has for the State's undertaking industrial enterprises is that it is the only employer that can compete with private capital in compelling just and equitable contracts.

But there is a still more serious charge against the political ethics of Herbert Spencer. "In a popularly governed nation," he says, "the government is simply a committee of management;"‡ yet he denies to that "committee of management" the right to manage the business of society. This would be a singular state of things in any corporate enterprise conducted by business men. And why, forsooth, has not that great corporation, society, the same right to choose its directors and instruct them to manage its business that smaller corporations have?

* *Ibid.*, p. 104.
† "The Man *versus* the State," p. 339.
‡ "*Ibid.*," p. 410.

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In dealing with Mr. Spencer's works on the plan here adopted, a reviewer is necessarily open to the charge that important omissions have been made, and that counter passages might be selected to offset many of those that have been quoted. This is freely admitted, and it is only claimed that such a review correctly represents the general tone and tenor of the treatment by the author. Large subjects are, of course, necessarily left untouched, being beyond its scope, which does not claim to be general. It therefore remains to be confessed that not only is there much in these volumes which is sound, important, and deeply philosophical, but that they also contain many passages, which, singled out, would seem to reverse the general, conclusions at which the author arrives. His numerous admissions of the necessity, value, power and progress of government,* taken in connection with his denunciations of it, amount to a positive inconsistency, and mutually weaken each other, tending to leave the merely inquiring reader in a state of doubt and confusion. But all this is independent of his unintentional admissions of the efficacy of government, involved in his arraignment of legislators for meddling and tampering with the indestructible and unchangeable laws of nature. These are simply cases of bad logic, and may be fittingly called boomerang arguments. The following will serve as an example:

"If the political meddler could be induced to contemplate the essential meaning of his plan, he would be paralyzed by the sense of his own temerity. He proposes to suspend, in some way or degree, that process by which all life has been evolved." †

And he goes on fairly to admit that this great natural process can be suspended by such an unscrupulous person, and to manifest great concern lest it actually be done. But he never asks the question why, if legislative interferences can accomplish such wonders for evil they might not occasionally

* See the "Principles of Ethics," vol. i. p. 294; "Social Statics, Abridged and Revised," pp. 117, 246-47; "The Man *versus* the State," pp. 394, 406, 415.

† "Justice," pp. 259-60.

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accomplish some good. He says that "natural causation has been traversed by artificial hindrances,"* but never mentions the innumerable cases in which artificial causation has "traversed" natural hindrances, as is done every time a river is made navigable by dredging its channel, the "causation" being usually in the form of "an appropriation." His admissions show how he inwardly recognizes that government has accomplished the greatest good by rendering social progress possible. Why not, then, include governments among the things to be "let alone."

But his inconsistencies do not stop here. He goes to the absurd length of maintaining that one of the chief duties of government is to mould and modify character. He says:

"There is indeed one faculty, or rather combination of faculties, for whose short-comings the State, as far as in it lies, may advantageously compensate—that, namely, by which society is made possible. It is clear that any being whose constitution is to be moulded into fitness for new conditions of existence, must be placed under those conditions. This granted, it follows that as man has been, and is still, deficient in those feelings which prevent the recurring antagonisms of individuals and their consequent disunion, some artificial agency is required by which their union may be maintained. Only by the process of adaptation itself, can be produced that character which makes social equilibrium spontaneous. And hence, while this process is going on, an instrumentality must be employed, firstly, to bind men into the social state, and secondly, to check all conduct endangering the existence of that state. Such an instrumentality we have in a government." †

In another place he says that "the end which the statesman should keep in view as higher than all other ends is the formation of character." ‡

And again:

"It should be inferred that among social causes, those initiated by legislation, similarly operating with an average regularity, must not only change men's actions, but, by consequence, change their natures." §

* "The Man *versus* the State," p. 343.
† "Social Statics, Abridged and Revised," pp. 126-27.
‡ "Justice," p. 251.
§ "The Man *versus* the State," pp. 355-56.

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This is claiming far more for legislation than the most sanguine socialist would admit. It may be justly argued, is, in fact, abundantly proved in practice, that a thorough system of public instruction exerts an immense influence upon the character of a people. It may also be regarded as proved that the social effect of protection in new countries with undeveloped resources is civilizing and elevating in diversifying industry and creating centers of population and culture. But these instrumentalities and all others that tend indirectly to modify character, are condemned by Mr. Spencer; yet he seems to think that a race may be morally transformed by government in merely preventing the individual members from cheating and assaulting one another. Such faith far exceeds that of the firmest believer in "the great political superstition."

Along with the growing impatience at the supposed wayward course of mankind, there is also perceptible, in comparing Spencer's earlier with his later writings, a gradual dying out of his warmer and more sympathetic impulses, which at the beginning of his career, made him the friend of all who suffered from the effects of an imperfect social state.* This is especially noticeable in his attitude toward the working classes, often forced out of employment by the agencies above enumerated. Latterly we find him making the common assumption of unthinking optimists that poverty, idleness, etc., are the necessary results of personal defects, and characterizing the unemployed as "simply good-for-nothings."† Trades unions are said to "carry on a kind of industrial war in defence of workers' interests *versus* employers' interests,"‡ and to embrace "a permanent body of tramps, who ramble from union to union."§ His idea of "worth" never rises above the mere animal attribute of fitness to survive, and he defends the law of equal freedom on

* Compare "Social Statics, Abridged and Revised," p. 97 ff.
† "The Man *versus* the State," p. 303.
‡ *Ibid.*, p. 328.
§ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

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the ground that "there is maintained the vital principle of social progress; inasmuch as, under such conditions, the individuals of most worth will prosper and multiply more than those of less worth."* His growing aristocratic leanings are further revealed in allusions to "the not-very-wise representatives of electors who are mostly ignorant,"† and to the rule being exercised "not so much by the collective wisdom as by the collective folly,"‡ and when he says "not only that these unguided judgments are very likely to be wrong, but also that there must exist some guidance by which correct judgments may be reached,"§ it becomes clear that the "guidance" referred to can be none other than the political ethics of Herbert Spencer.

Notwithstanding the vulnerable character of so large a part of Mr. Spencer's reasoning, he argues with such an air of confidence that only critical readers are likely to suspect the *ex parte* nature of his statements. The following example reminds one strongly of the oracular responses from Delphi, and may be commended to him as quite as likely to apply to his own opinions as to the opinions of others:

"Men of the past quite misunderstood the institutions they lived under. They pertinaciously adhered to the most vicious principles, and were bitter in their opposition to right ones, at the dictates of their attachments and antipathies. So difficult is it for man to emancipate himself from the invisible fetters which habit and education cast over his intellect; and so palpable is the consequent incompetency of a people to judge rightly of itself and its deeds or opinions, that the fact has been embodied in the aphorism—'No age can write its own history.' If we act wisely, we shall assume that the reasonings of modern society are subject to the like disturbing influences. We shall conclude that, even now, as in times gone by, opinion is but the counterpart of condition. We shall suspect that many of those convictions which seem the results of dispassionate thinking, have been nurtured in us by circumstances. We shall confess that, as heretofore, fanatical opposition to this doctrine and bigoted adhesion to that, have been no

* *Ibid.*, p. 409.
† "Justice," p. 257.
‡ *Ibid.*, p. 217.
§ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

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tests of the truth or falsity of the said doctrines; so neither is the strength of attachment nor dislike which a nation now exhibits toward certain principles, any proof of their correctness or their fallacy."*

Upon the whole, it may be considered as in the highest degree unfortunate and discouraging that almost the first prominent system of sociology, as distinct from political economy, should proceed from so low and so narrow a standpoint as virtually to constitute a protest against all attempts to deal scientifically with the subject. It is simply a wet blanket on the enthusiasm of all who would follow social science. It throws over it the dismal pall that fell on political economy, and it stamps it with the words: No future! If this is all that Herbert Spencer can make of it, what can lesser lights hope to accomplish?

It is simply astonishing that the great exponent of the law of evolution in all other departments should so signally fail to grasp that law in this highest department. And it furnishes a curious parallel that, just as he failed to perceive the fundamental difference between cosmic and organic evolution, and the coöperation in the latter of the radiant with the gravitant forces † in the production of the phenomena of life, so he has likewise failed to perceive the equally fundamental difference between vital and psychic evolution, in the latter of which the power of feeling under the direction of thought has furnished to the evolutionary process an entirely new dispensation. In seeking to bring all the products of evolution—worlds, plants, animals, man, society—under one uniform law, adequate only to the lowest, and ignoring the new and powerful principles that came forward at the several successive cosmical epochs, he has dwarfed the later of these into relative insignificance, and instead of carrying his system up symmetrically and crowning it with the science of man, he has tapered it off and flattened it out at the summit, degrading that noblest department to the level of political controversy

* "Social Statics Abridged and Revised," pp. 80–81.
† *Popular Science Monthly*, vol. xi., October, 1877.

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and wholesale personal censure. The name of "administrative nihilism," by which Professor Huxley long ago so happily characterized this, is likely to abide, and the extreme *noli tangere* individualism with which the entire social philosophy of Herbert Spencer is permeated, must, in spite of all disclaimers,* impart to it the character of a gospel of inaction.

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Washington.

* "The Man *versus* the State," p. 418.

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