

CHAPTER X

GEORGE'S ETHICAL SOLUTION

GEORGE'S concern with poverty did not lie within the realm of pity or of charity, as is the case with many of our practical sociologists; that is, his concern was not an æsthetic one. Neither did his interest in economics have a detached, "scientific" character. And if it be said that this concern of his was "ethical," that word must be understood as implying nothing of the nature of pious exhortation. By an ethical interest in the phenomenon of poverty and in the processes of economic life, there is meant the frank realization that human life, with all its ideals and hopes, all its "values," is conditioned by the social setting in which it finds itself. Morality, if it means anything, is an effort to enlarge and enrich the dimension of human personality, to integrate the individual so that his status as a social organism will become more intelligible, more self-conscious. The ethical concepts are concepts of expansion, attempts to widen the boundaries of individual personality, to socialize that personality—to personalize social forces. These ethical values, then, these judgments that seek to develop and to direct personality, can they be operative without a definite social orientation?

Must it not be clear, that is, that the individual, with whom ethics busies itself, is not something complete in himself? Is not individuality rather a potentiality, a capacity for de-

velopment, and does it not "develop into shape and form only through interaction with actual conditions"?¹ To continue with Professor Dewey's analogy: Individuality is no fenced garden that is to be cultivated in isolation. "Our garden is the world, at the angle in which it touches our own manner of being." Now, does not one angle of that contact point in the direction of economic phenomena? Is not one of those "actual conditions" which have a developmental function in moulding the form of individuality that economic paradox which aroused Henry George? The economic spectacle of poverty, of poverty surrounding wealth, was of ethical import solely because it distorted that development of society within which personality must develop and moral judgments arise. The consequences of economic operations were moral ones; that is why George made economics a branch of ethics. The consequences of poverty were the distortion of all values; that is why George must solve the problem of poverty before he can explore the vistas of ethics.

Whether or not it shocks our "intrinsic" values, the fact that the background of human activity is essentially and characteristically dominated by the spectre of "making a living" cannot be put aside. That spectre, for some, may be tenuous and subtle, nothing but an evanescent myth, yet for too many others it expands into the terrifying proportions of some Brocken-shadow. A precarious, predatory setting cannot be disregarded in any catholic approach to social ethics. It may be that "pure" philosophy can cavalierly dismiss such mundane considerations and withdraw itself tranquilly into some higher sphere of essences. Such philosophy is singularly fortunate; it is to be envied. Metaphysics and logic and

¹ Professor Dewey in *The New Republic*, "Individualism in Our Day" (April 2, 1930, Vol. LXII, No. 800, p. 187). This series of articles on "Individualism, Old and New" (starting in *The New Republic* of January 22, 1930) is perhaps the clearest and most recent expression of the thought that is intended in these paragraphs. (These articles have since appeared in separate form.)

epistemology perhaps need no "economic interpretation," but they must not attempt to draw ethical or political theory up with them. Any divorce of the social philosophies from their evident, if unwelcome, "sordid" surroundings is productive of just that empty formalism that has been so typical of ethics and politics. Ethics and politics, however, are not formal; they are vital, instrumental. The conditions which they handle are menacingly vital, destructively instrumental, since, in our present order of things, those conditions point to economic insecurity. "The most marked feature of present civilization is insecurity . . . In spite of all that is written about unemployment, its emotional and mental effect does not seem to me to have begun to receive the attention it deserves. It is hopeless to look for mental stability and integration when the economic bases of life are unsettled."² Mental stability and integration—that is what is sought by ethical values.

Therefore, to preface a discussion of what George confidently expected would be the ethical end results of his solution of the economic problem, there must first be very briefly presented another excursion into the dimension of economics, one concerned with the economic effects of the socialization of rent.

It has been noted before that the solution of the economic problem must be most significantly located in the realm of the distribution rather than in that of the production of wealth. But, asks George, consider first the effect of his taxation proposal upon the production of wealth. Our present system of taxation penalizes production and offers a premium to idleness. It fines the man who builds, who improves, who

² Professor Dewey in "The Lost Individual" (No. II of *The New Republic* articles; February 5, 1930, Vol. LXI, No. 792, p. 294). He adds that the pathological accompaniments of such economic insecurity cannot "be got rid of by hortatory moral appeal."

increases wealth; it exempts the man who does not. Would not a shift of the burden of taxation away from productive enterprise (George's first "canon of taxation"), the lifting of the enormous weight of taxation from industry, act as an unparalleled stimulus upon the production of wealth?⁸ George's plan calls for the redirection of the incidence of taxation from production to a source that is the result of no industry or labor, one that automatically presents itself as the by-product of social organization. Here in land values was a source for taxation that seemed so neatly provided that, for George, its presence could be nothing else but the manifestation of a "natural law" of taxation. Devote this fund of revenue to defraying the expenses of social organization, and the production of wealth will proceed unhampered.

Consider further, George urges, the new opportunities that would be opened to production. Land would be forced into use—and by land is meant building land as well as agricultural land, factory sites as well as mines, transportation opportunities as well as all natural resources. Land could not be held out of use for speculative purposes or because of inability or unwillingness to improve it. No one could keep land unemployed and still pay its ground rent to the State in taxation; the man who improved his land would be penalized no more than the owner who kept his land idle—just the reverse of the strange operations of our existing system. What could be the only effect upon the production of wealth of this opening up to production the opportunities of

⁸ "Instead of saying to the producer, as it does now, 'The more you add to the general wealth the more shall you be taxed,' the State would say to the producer, 'Be as industrious, as thrifty, as enterprising, as you choose, you shall have your full reward! You shall not be fined for making two blades of grass grow where one grew before; you shall not be taxed for adding to the aggregate wealth.' And will not the community gain by thus refusing to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs; by thus refraining from muzzling the ox that treadeth out the corn; by thus leaving to industry, and thrift, and skill, their natural reward, full and unimpaired?" (*Progress and Poverty*, p. 433.) As for that rather amusing contemporary spectre of general overproduction, see *supra*, pp. 123-124.

land that is now not used to its full capacity and the land that is not used at all? Increased production of wealth, as George has pointed out before, creates an increased demand for land. When rent is socialized, that increased demand will be met by further land being forced into use, whereas now that increased demand merely swells the rent accruing to the owner of land.

Now, to make the transition from production, how would this disposition of rent and of land monopoly⁴ affect the channels through which wealth was distributed? The pattern of distribution that George has elaborated must be recalled, for the effects of his solution lie characteristically in its redirection of the flow of wealth. In fact, it can be only as corollaries that such economic effects can be presented, since they are implicit in his treatment of the distributive process. That is, the part that rent plays in George's approach to the distribution of wealth is crucial; it is the focus of the problem, of the solution, and of the economic consequences of that solution. Wages and interest, he has held, have been fixed by the marginal line of rent, and rent has been paid out of the legitimate return to wages and interest. With rent socialized, however, wages and interest would receive their full return.

Labor and capital would then receive the whole produce, minus that portion taken by the State in the taxation of land values, which, being applied to public purposes, would be equally distributed in public benefits. That is to say, the wealth produced in every community would be divided into two portions. One part would be distributed in wages and interest between individual producers, according to the part each had taken in the work of production; the other part would go to the community as a whole, to be distributed in public benefits to all its members.⁵

⁴ George does not have to convince us that the socialization of rent would break land monopoly. But with the fall of that monopoly, all monopoly, he felt, would be undermined. (See *supra*, p. 260, n. 61.)

⁵ *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 438-439.

Rent would no longer retain its privileged position that enabled it to prey upon the other factors of distribution. The importance for George's concepts of his synthesis of the laws of distribution becomes apparent. Rent has distorted the "natural" process of distribution. Make rent public property, and wages and interest must rise. Make rent public property, and the expenses of social organization need not be paid out of the return to labor or capital. That is the logical neatness of George's laws of rent, wages, and interest.

Wages and interest thus will rise, he argues, because the negative force of rent will have been removed. But, from a positive approach, consider, asks George, the effect of increased production of wealth and the redirected distribution of wealth specifically upon labor. Obviously demand for labor, for all types of labor, would grow. Were land values to remain private property, however, that demand for labor could not materially raise wages, since, in terms of George's argument, whatever increase might take place within wages would be met and overtaken by an increase in rent. (The same would happen to interest.) But with land values a public fund, with therefore no encroachment of rent upon the other factors of distribution, that pressing demand for labor would not only necessarily increase wages—real, not merely money, wages—but also remove unemployment. Furthermore, to complement higher wages would be the increased supply—resulting from land being forced into use and increased production—of all consumable goods, from food to houses; and prices, building rent—"the cost of living"—would fall.

It may be objected perhaps that this is becoming too humble and homely even for what is frankly a discussion of economic effects. "Wages," "unemployment," "cost of living"—unfortunately they are far from ideational; they are crude, crass, practical. But upon them depends economic se-

curity, and upon economic security depends the healthy development of the individual, and ultimately the judgments and values of ethics. George is here proposing a system of distribution—to attempt what is possibly a more gracious phrasing—which would seek to alter that most vicious of relationships between increasing economic activity and increasing economic insecurity. That marriage between progress and poverty, in the light of his examination of the economic structure, is cemented by rent being diverted into private possession. Rent rises as economic activity grows, and falls as economic activity diminishes or ceases; thus rent is not only the creature of communal activity, but seems to be the life-blood of the community. Any force or instrumentality that deprives the community of this life-blood—rent—acts as a parasite upon the forces engaged in the production of wealth. This was George's argument, and therefore the effects of a solution that, at one blow, would transform rent from a negative to a positive factor could, for him, be nothing short of the removal of economic insecurity.

But this new equilibrium established, further advances in productive power, and the tendency in this direction would be greatly accelerated, would result, in still increasing rent, not at the expense of wages and interest, but by new gains in production, which, as rent would be taken by the community for public uses, would accrue to the advantage of every member of the community. Thus, as material progress went on, the condition of the masses would constantly improve . . . For the increasing power of production, which comes with increasing population, with every new discovery in the productive arts, with every labor-saving invention, with every extension and facilitation of exchanges, could be monopolized by none. That part of the benefit which did not go directly to increase the reward of labor and capital would go to the State—that is to say, to the whole community.⁶

⁶ *Progress and Poverty*, p. 440.

The working out of that type of equilibrium would necessarily be in terms of wages, employment, cost of living, and if to some these terms are aesthetically "materialistic," let us say, as did George, that the effects of the socialization of rent would make progress and poverty enemies, logical contradictories, instead of the boon companions that they are at present.

It may be objected more vigorously that there is no guarantee that these predicted economic consequences would follow the socialization of rent, that, after all, they might exist only in the dimension of George's logic of distribution. That is an objection that by its very nature, of course, is unanswerable except in terms of George's logic. Rent, that is, has not been socialized, and thus the effects that George and his followers have demonstrated would be the consequences of their approach to the distribution of wealth, must still lie within the realm of controversy. But whether the logic of distribution that he has worked out, the "natural" economic process, rather, that he felt he had "discovered," would be justified by economic experimentation depends clearly upon the introduction of the experiment.

There is, however, another approach that may be made to this whole matter of the ethical consequences of the socialization of rent, an approach that introduces perhaps the most fundamental question proposed by George. It is the problem that he raised regarding "the law of human progress" and his discussion,⁷ in many points, has almost the flavor of a German philosophy of history. George opens his ambitious argument⁸ by questioning the current theory of human

⁷ Book X of *Progress and Poverty*.

⁸ George wrote to a friend, Charles Nordhoff, editorial writer of the *New York Herald*, that "the chapters relating to the development of civilization are but a bare skeleton of what I would like to say, and do not begin to

progress. That theory was one of hopeful fatalism, i. e., the evolutionary concept of Herbert Spencer.

This I take to be the current view of civilization: That it is the result of forces . . . which slowly change the character, and improve and elevate the powers of man; that the difference between civilized man and savage is of a long race education, which has become permanently fixed in mental organization; and that this improvement tends to go on increasingly, to a higher and higher civilization. We have reached such a point that progress seems to be natural with us, and we look forward confidently to the greater achievements of the coming race—some even holding that the progress of science will finally give men immortality and enable them to make bodily the tour not only of the planets but of the fixed stars, and at length to manufacture suns and systems for themselves . . . In this view, progress is the result of forces which work slowly, steadily, and remorselessly, for the elevation of man. War, slavery, tyranny, superstition, famine and pestilence, the want and misery which fester in modern civilization, are the impelling causes which drive man on, by eliminating poorer types and extending the higher; and hereditary transmission is the power by which advances are fixed, and past advances made the footing for new advances.⁹

Civilization is a slow upward climb, as is everything else, from the suitably qualified homogeneity to the converse heterogeneity, and the pauses that history presents are simply pauses—explicable perhaps in terms such as those of arrested mobility due to a thickening of the “cake” of custom.¹⁰

To George, however, the evidence of history pointed not to temporary pauses but to cycles, each with its birth, growth, and final “Untergang.”

It is not merely these arrested civilizations that the current theory of development fails to account for. It is not merely that men present the argument as strongly as I feel it.” (December 21, 1879, San Francisco.)

⁹ *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 479, 487.

¹⁰ Compare, for example, Bagehot's *Physics and Politics*.

have gone so far on the path of progress and then stopped; it is that men have gone far on the path of progress and then gone back. It is not merely an isolated case that thus confronts the theory—it is *the universal rule*. Every civilization that the world has yet seen has had its period of vigorous growth, of arrest and stagnation; its decline and fall. Of all the civilizations that have arisen and flourished, there remain to-day but those that have been arrested, and our own, which is not yet as old as were the pyramids when Abraham looked upon them—while behind the pyramids were twenty centuries of recorded history. . . . If progress operated to fix an improvement in man's nature and thus to produce further progress, though there might be occasional interruption, yet the general rule would be that progress would be continuous—that advance would lead to advance, and civilization develop into higher civilization. Not merely the general rule, but *the universal rule*, is the reverse of this. The earth is the tomb of the dead empires, no less than of dead men. Instead of progress fitting men for greater progress, every civilization that was in its own time as vigorous and advancing as ours is now, has of itself come to a stop. Over and over again, art has declined, learning sunk, power waned, population become sparse, until the people who had built great temples and mighty cities, turned rivers and pierced mountains, cultivated the earth like a garden and introduced the utmost refinement into the minute affairs of life, remained but in a remnant of squalid barbarians, who had lost even the memory of what their ancestors had done, and regarded the surviving fragments of their grandeur as the work of genii, or of the mighty race before the flood.¹¹

This was the universal rule of civilization, not a continued progress upward, but a cyclic arrangement of bloom and decay. But this present civilization, this thing of steel and concrete, of printed books and art and learning, but yet of steel and concrete—surely this will not decay! However, George is a veritable Jeremiah. The signs of ruin are becoming apparent. Political liberty and legal equality, for example, upon which the social ideals of present civilization are supposed to rest, are fast becoming empty names. They

¹¹ *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 482-483.

are forms, he points out, and forms without life are more deadly than an absence of forms.¹² The dimensions of law and politics are, and must be by their very nature, subordinate to that of economics,¹³ and, given an unbalanced order,

¹² "But forms are nothing when substance has gone; and the forms of popular government are those from which the substance of freedom may most easily go. Extremes meet, and a government of universal suffrage and theoretical equality may, under conditions which impel the change, most readily become a despotism. For there despotism advances in the name and with the might of the people. The single source of power once secured, everything is secured. There is no unfranchised class to whom appeal may be made, no privileged orders who in defending their own rights may defend those of all. No bulwark remains to stay the flood, no eminence to rise above it. They were belted barons led by a mitred archbishop who curbed the Plantagenet with Magna Charta; it was the middle classes who broke the pride of the Stuarts; but a mere aristocracy of wealth will never struggle while it can hope to bribe a tyrant." (*Progress and Poverty*, pp. 527-528.)

¹³ This economic determination of the social order is presented perhaps most interestingly by George in *The Science of Political Economy* (Book I, especially Chaps. III-IV) in a discussion of what he designates as the Greater Leviathan. The Leviathan of Hobbes, that artificial political man, can be supplemented, according to George, by a Greater Leviathan which is formed by the economic integration of men. "This Greater Leviathan is to the political structure or conscious commonwealth what the unconscious functions of the body are to the conscious activities. . . . Now, as the relations of the citizen proceed essentially from the relation of each citizen to a whole—the body politic, or Leviathan, of which he is a part—is it not clear, when we consider it, that the relations of the civilized man proceed from his relations to what I have called the body economic, or Greater Leviathan? It is this body economic, or body industrial, which grows up in the coöperation of men to supply their wants and satisfy their desires, that is the real thing constituting what we call civilization. Of this the qualities by which we try to distinguish what we mean by civilization are the attributes. It does indeed, I think, best present itself to our apprehension in the likeness of a larger and greater man, arising out of and from the coöperation of individual men to satisfy their desires, and constituting, after the evolution which finds its crown in the appearance of man himself, a new and seemingly illimitable field of progress. This body economic, or Greater Leviathan, always precedes and always underlies the body politic or Leviathan. The body politic or State is really an outgrowth of the body economic, in fact one of its organs, the need for which and appearance of which arises from and with its own appearance and growth. And from this relation of dependence upon the body economic, the body politic can never become exempt." (Pp. 22-23; 27.)

George vigorously attacks the Spencerian concept of the priority of biological and hereditary factors in determining social evolution, and in *Progress and Poverty* (Book X, Chap. II) he makes a striking plea for a recognition of the dominance of social conditions. In his concluding passage of the argument he states: ". . . In short, I take the explanation of the differences which distinguish communities to be this: That each society,

nothing in civilization can remain healthy. This is how modern civilization may decline:

. . . A corrupt democratic government must finally corrupt the people, and when a people become corrupt there is no resurrection. The life is gone, only the carcass remains; and it is left but for the plowshares of fate to bury it out of sight.

Now this transformation of popular government into despotism of the vilest and most degrading kind, which must inevitably result from the unequal distribution of wealth, is not a thing of the far future. It has already begun in the United States, and is rapidly going on under our eyes. That our legislative bodies are steadily deteriorating in standard; that men of the highest ability and character are compelled to eschew politics, and the arts of the jobber count for more than the reputation of the statesman; that voting is done more recklessly and the power of money is increasing; that it is harder to arouse the people to the necessity of reforms and more difficult to carry them out; that political differences are ceasing to be differences of principle, and abstract ideas are losing their power; that parties are passing into the control of what in general government would be oligarchies and dictatorships; all are evidences of political decline.¹⁴

Political decline is portentous because it is a symptom of general decay. It would be gratuitous to supplement the evidence that George saw in 1879 with a catalogue of present-day conditions. It would be almost an act of unfairness to an already overharassed social organization to make a parade of the menacing economic unrest, the political anarchy, the moral apathy or smug hypocrisy of the times. "When a

small or great, necessarily weaves for itself a web of knowledge, beliefs, customs, language, tastes, institutions, and laws. Into this web, woven by each society . . . the individual is received at birth and continues until his death. This is the matrix in which mind unfolds and from which it takes its stamp." (P. 502.) George realizes that hope for a civilization that is to display a continuous and upward progress cannot be found in biology. The changes effected within the individual will not accelerate and draw on with them civilization as long as conditions in society act as a brake upon further individual development. Alteration in society must be focussed upon the forces which conditions the individual. (For a fuller discussion of this matter, see *infra*, pp. 536-542.)

¹⁴ *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 529-530.

people become corrupt there is no resurrection." Is that day of cynical disillusionment far off—not merely political disenchantment but economic and ethic as well? "There is no mistaking it—the very foundations of society are being sapped before our eyes, while we ask, *how* is it possible that such a civilization as this . . . should ever be destroyed?"

It is hardly profitable, however, to dwell upon the promised decay of western civilization or to comment upon our "detached" study of the monuments of past cultures. George is only one of many prophets who have announced thus: "Whence shall come the new barbarians? Go through the squalid quarters of great cities, and you may see, even now, their gathering hordes! How shall learning perish? Men will cease to read, and books will kindle fires and be turned into cartridges."¹⁶ It is of more instrumental significance to trace George's theory of the cause of these ever-recurring cycles of growth and decay. This will lead back to the economic concern that is at the root of his excursion into a philosophy of history. For him the cause of this decay was not an organic cause; that is, George did not accept that most dismal of interpretations, i. e., that civilization and culture must grow old and perish just as do individuals. The cause is a less hopeless one than that product of a poor analogy; it is less hopeless because it is an economic cause, and therefore susceptible to control. To preface that economic presentation, however, there must first be understood what, for George, was the very law of human progress itself.

What is meant, first, by human progress? That progress, for George, could lie only in one dimension, the dimension of mental power which was both the instrument by which man advanced and the measure of that advance. It is the instrument by which man advances, for it makes possible "the extension of knowledge, the improvement of methods, and the

¹⁶ *Progress and Poverty*, p. 532.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 535.

betterment of social conditions." It is the measure of that advance, for it is in the degree that the extension of knowledge and the betterment of social conditions make possible the satisfaction of man's insatiable desire "to be, to know, and to do" that progress becomes significant. That is to say, by human progress George means, in the social realm, the extension of human knowledge, and, in the individual realm, the satisfaction of man's "higher" wants—intellectual, aesthetic, moral. Human progress is not material progress.

However, does not this statement appear to contradict an earlier contention, namely, that George's interpretation of the social problem is one that keeps clear of the traditional dualism between the "material" and the "ideal"? But consider further. There are, in addition, what George calls "non-progressive" activities. The nonprogressive activities may be classified as those of maintenance and conflict; "by maintenance I mean, not only the support of existence, but the keeping up of the social condition and the holding of advances already gained. By conflict I mean not merely warfare and preparation for warfare, but all expenditure of mental power in seeking the gratification of desire at the expense of others, and in resistance to such aggression."¹⁷

To compare society to a boat. Her progress through the water will not depend upon the exertion of her crew, but upon the exertion devoted to propelling her. This will be lessened by any expenditure of force required for bailing, or any expenditure of force in fighting among themselves, or in pulling in different directions.¹⁸

Neither bailing (maintenance) nor dissension (conflict) is a "progressive" activity. The progressive activity in this case is the propelling of the boat through the water. Neither the mere support of existence nor the resistance to aggression are "progressive" activities in the case of human progress.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 504-505.

The progressive activity here is the satisfaction of the desire for knowledge.

The connection, then, between "higher" and "lower" activities, between progressive and nonprogressive ones, may perhaps become clearer. Progressive activity is definitely dependent upon the variable of nonprogressive activity. Mental power can function in progressive lines only after its nonprogressive tasks, chiefly those of sustaining life, have been accomplished; those tasks act as a limiting factor. In other words, human progress is essentially a surplus. It is the mental power that can be devoted to satisfying the "ideal," "higher" wants of man once his "material," "lower" needs have been taken care of. There is indeed no insulation between the two realms, but a direct functional connection.

But what is the law of human progress? That law George locates in the phenomenon of association, of social gregariousness. Man, the social animal, is presented with only one way of efficiently solving the problem of "nonprogressive" activity; that is, by a continuing and everincreasing utilization of communal forces. As the power of social coöperation rises, the less compelling should become the demands of maintenance, and the greater should become the degree of mental power that can be expended in "progress," whereas when the integration of social powers is at a low level the maintenance of life absorbs more and more of the activity of man.

Now, as in a separated state the whole powers of man are required to maintain existence, and mental power is set free for higher uses only by the association of men in communities, which permits the division of labor and all the economies which come with the coöperation of increased numbers, association is the first essential of progress. Improvement becomes possible as men come together in peaceful association, and the wider and closer the association, the greater the possibilities of improvement.¹⁹

¹⁹ *Progress and Poverty*, p. 505.

Association is not merely the natural condition of man; it is the hope of progress as well, since it sets free the powers that are required for development.

Yet this is only half of the "law of progress." It will be recalled that George's "nonprogressive" activities are divided into those of maintenance and conflict. The first is included within the operations of association, but what is the negative significance of the second? Here the synthesis of George's economic system and his philosophy of history will begin to manifest itself. Just as association, by setting free from nonprogressive activity human powers that can be turned to the further development of man, acts as an upward force, so there is what George terms an "internal resistance" or "counter force" which arises as that association is achieved and as civilization becomes more organized. That resistance must be comprehended if the cycle of civilization is to be explained. It is the resistance, the conflict that arises because of the growth of inequality among the members of civilized society. That inequality, for George, cannot be explained in terms of biology; it is instead the very creature of existing civilizations.

Now, this process of integration, of the specialization of functions and powers, as it goes on in society, is . . . accompanied by a constant liability to inequality. I do not mean that inequality is the necessary result of social growth, but that it is the constant tendency of social growth if unaccompanied by changes in social adjustments. . . . I mean, so to speak, that the garment of laws, customs, and political institutions, which each society weaves for itself, is constantly tending to become too tight as the society develops. I mean, so to speak, that man, as he advances, threads a labyrinth, in which, if he keeps straight ahead, he will infallibly lose his way, and through which reason and justice can alone keep him continuously in an ascending path.

For, while the integration which accompanies growth tends in itself to set free mental power to work improvement, there is, both with increase of numbers and with increase in complexity of the

social organization, a counter tendency set up by the production of a state of inequality, which wastes mental power, and, as it increases, brings improvement to a halt. . . .

I am merely attempting to set forth the general fact that as a social development goes on, inequality tends to establish itself, and not to point out the particular sequence, which must necessarily vary with different conditions. But this main fact makes intelligible all the phenomena of petrification and retrogression. The unequal distribution of the power and wealth gained by the integration of men in society tends to check, and finally to counterbalance, the force by which improvements are made and society advances. On the one side, the masses of the community are compelled to expend their mental powers in merely maintaining existence. On the other side, mental power is expended in keeping up and intensifying the system of inequality, in ostentation, luxury, and warfare.²⁰

The power of association that releases mental power is overweighed by the inequality which, with the great mass of mankind, again reclaims that mental power for non-progressive activities. Thus, the "law of progress," that of association, must be supplemented:

As the wasteful expenditure of mental power in conflict becomes greater or less as the moral law which accords to each an equality of rights is ignored or is recognized, equality (or justice) is the second essential of progress.

Thus association in equality is the law of progress. Association frees mental power for expenditure in improvement, and equality, or justice, or freedom—for the terms here signify the same thing, the recognition of the moral law—prevents the dissipation of this power in fruitless struggles.

Here is the law of progress, which will explain all diversities, all advances, all halts, and retrogressions. Men tend to progress just as they come closer together, and by coöperation with each other increase the mental power that may be devoted to improvement, but just as conflict is provoked, or association develops in-

²⁰ *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 511; 515.

equality of condition and power, this tendency to progression is lessened, checked, and finally reversed.²¹

The focus of George's "economic interpretation of history," therefore, must be directed upon this "inequality" that arises as civilization develops and that brings about ultimately the decay of that civilization by raising "nonprogressive" activity to a crucial position. That inequality is, of course, an inequality in economic status, one which lies at the foundation of all varieties of inequality. It is, in other words, nothing less than the central problem of progress and poverty placed now against a background of civilization's rise and fall. That problem was always the great problem for Henry George. Its ramifications were infinite. Economic insecurity was the center from which radiated all the roads of social unhealthiness. In terms of George's brief but ambitious presentation of a theory of human development, it was now the very cause of man's failure to make permanent the progress that association had won for him.

Still further does George press his economic interpretation, and relentlessly, without any sign of diffidence, does he now correlate specifically the fall of civilization with the private ownership of land! Not indirectly does he make that, for him, triumphant correlation; that is, he does not rely upon a circuitous approach by referring back to his previous argument that the economic cause of poverty can be traced to the private appropriation of rent. Instead he appeals directly to his "law of human progress." That law postulated the growth of communal association as essential to the development of progressive activity, since such association tended to remove the onus of nonprogressive activity from the individual. Association developed a collective power that was

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 505. (Italics mine.)

more than the sum of individual efforts, and distinguishable from them. That collective power, that surplus of power, should make possible, therefore, the increasing sloughing off, on the part of the individual, of the concern with non-progressive enterprises.

Now, what is the correlation between this surplus of power that arises from association and George's economic postulates? The connection must be clear. That phenomenon of association creates a communal value which is in no way dependent upon individual efforts. Such communal value is directly and accurately expressed in the economic concept of rent. Land value is association value. It is a value that swells as association becomes more organized, and collapses as that social organization disappears or loses its efficiency. In a literal sense, then, land value is the economic measure of human progress. For George, it is the attendant of association, and association is the foundation of progress. Rent is not merely one of the channels in the distribution of wealth; it is not a rationalization of an economic state and it is more than the formula of an economic process. It is the tangible manifestation of the intangible power of association, the "material" measure of the imponderable elements of human gregariousness. Rent, finally, for George, is the exchange rate of man's development.

Land, however, has been privately owned in all our civilizations. The first occasional primitive insight that land was common property gave way to the psychological and sociological forces that have made for all manner of private property, and land was added to that category. Thus, the value that has been created by the press of men coming together has been gathered by the fortunate few into whose hands, in the course of history, the earth has passed. A social product has become an individual gain. Here, then, is the source of that inequality which, for George, has been the brake upon

all cultures. The reason why the natural progress of civilization reaches a climax, decays, and finally collapses, can be traced to the inequality that results from the passing of community value into the sphere of private property. This transfer of value is the most vicious of economic maladjustments, for George realizes that the inequality it produces is a cumulative one. The greater the integration of social forces, the greater is the value of land, and therefore under the economic systems of all civilizations the greater has been the tribute that must be paid by mankind for the very process that draws it together. That tribute has taken different expressions under the different forms of social organization, but the principle of exploitation has remained the same—the diverting of a social fund from its legitimate social function.

There could be no more tragic circle than this continual self-annihilation of progress. Human development, as George saw it, carried along with itself the very instrument that proved its destruction; civilization suffered from auto-intoxication. That instrument could be the very one which, in a saner economic system, might bring about a still further advance in progress, a development which would be boundless, but now that instrument, the social increment of land value, acted as the creature of Frankenstein.

George was asking, in other words, whether human progress itself could continue under a system of economic instability. Economic insecurity, the deadly inequality within the economic status of man, overthrew his "law of human progress." That progress depended upon "association in equality." It depended upon association taking care of the "nonprogressive" activities of maintenance. But what instead has been the effect of that association which was to release man's powers? It has throttled human progress by having been transformed into an "association in inequality." That inequality (for George the result of private property in land)

has raised to a position of dominance the satisfaction of "non-progressive" wants. It has diverted mental power, the instrument of *bona fide* progress, into the path of menial pursuits. It has robbed human progress of all that is progressive.

This, then, is an approach to the socialization of rent by which George soars beyond the categories of economics into the very dimension of the rise and fall of civilization. He has attempted to trace the law of human progress itself, but has found that it cannot be severed from the prosaic requirements imposed by economic concepts. The development of culture, he has become convinced, is a function of rent.

Here, then, is George's most fundamental approach to the relation between economics (means) and ethics (ends). Man's moral and social progress is inevitably conditioned by an economic background. He can develop upward only when economic problems have been solved. And the great economic problem is that of the land.

Such a statement, however, conjures up a difficulty that cannot be easily neglected, and cannot be thoroughly handled. It is the problem found upon the scarred and torn battlefield stretching between the warring lines of "environment" and "heredity." The field, it is true, has been plowed anew in recent years by a whole corps of workers; the old war-cries, to vary the metaphor, have been reworded in terms of sociology and social psychology, of biology and anthropology, of intelligence tests, statistical surveys, and the rest, but the basic approach to the problem presented by the conflicting claims of man's racial and family heritage on the one hand, and of his social and economic surroundings on the other, has remained a familiar one. The difficulty that has faced all social reformers still persists: Are the evils that such reformers have attacked, be they termed poverty, crime, injustice, ignorance, or just social maladjustment and in-

efficiency, a product of man's inherent inability to live sanely with his fellows? Or are they to be located in a social milieu that is amenable to human direction? In other words, are social evils a branch of the etiology of man's moral ills, or are they the symptoms of an ethnic disease?

There is, for example, the approach of George that, basing itself upon the conviction that poverty directly affects the very springs of human action, seeks to launch an immediate attack upon it largely through economic weapons. His own words, quoted a few pages back, present this concept of the functional control of the individual by society: ". . . Each society, small or great, necessarily weaves for itself a web of knowledge, beliefs, customs, language, tastes, institutions, and laws. Into this web, woven by each society . . . the individual is received at birth and continues until his death. This is the matrix in which mind unfolds and from which it takes its stamp." And, on the other hand, there is the attitude that is convinced that, since social and political evils are the indication of some deeply rooted racial deficiency, the remedy must be pointed to the securing of fundamental biologic changes, of direct changes. It is an attitude that challenges the belief that social disease is a fit matter for an immediate attack, and questions whether such disease is really curable in terms of the economic, educational and political programs that have been proffered.

To be more specific: The suggestions that are brought forward by what might be termed the biologico-heredity school of contemporary social psychology constitute an attempt to realize, by means of practical and tangible techniques, the more abstract contentions of doctrinaire hereditarians. Taking as fundamental the dominance of race and family heritage over environmental conditions, of "nature" over "nurture," such an approach holds that permanent improvement of social conditions can be achieved only through methods

that are directed to the selection and propagation of superior biologic strains. To remedy the evils of the social world man himself must first be moulded "nearer to the heart's desire." Man makes conditions, the argument runs, and while it is of course not denied that conditions in turn affect man, this latter relation is largely incidental, a relation that has the function of limitation or elimination perhaps, but certainly not of creation or re-forming. Environment may "set off" characteristic and hereditary behavior; it can act as a trigger, but whatever action may result is entirely dependent upon the potentialities of the organism. Factors that are inherent may be drawn forth, produced, or inhibited by conditions, but they cannot be induced.

The sociological implications of such a biologic approach are apparent. Social change must originate *via* individual change, and individual change is a question of direct eugenic control. Man's character cannot be vitally transformed by the social world; to improve men means to handle them as Gregor Mendel handled garden peas. Not economic or political reform, but measures of "positive" and "negative" eugenics are required to abolish the misery and wretchedness of society.²² For such an approach, class stratification, that veritable caste system of the existing economic order, is fundamentally a matter of heredity.²³ All attempts, then, to transform per-

²² It is such an approach that leads Professor F. H. Hankins, for example, to conclude his stimulating book with the conviction that social improvement "is solely a question of encouraging or maintaining the multiplication of the more able, regardless of race, and of discouraging the multiplication of the less able. Measures of positive eugenics are difficult to introduce, but widespread education and free discussion will do much. Information is all that the intelligent need. For the less intelligent there should be devised and universalized some effective means of birth control. This would help restore the disparity between the birth rates at the upper and lower social levels. There might also be a gradual extension of the present policies of segregation and sterilization . . . The wisest statesmanship would begin at once the discovery of the gifted strains and seek to introduce social conditions favorable to their preservation and multiplication." (*The Racial Basis of Civilization*; New York, Knopf, 1926, p. 375.)

²³ "It appears to us that since the first work of Francis Galton the steady accumulation of evidence favors the view that social stratification

manently the status of man as a social being through the medium of social reorganization and readjustment must remain of a piece with those quaint efforts of man to elevate himself by tugging at his boot-straps.

The type of problem that presents itself here, however, is not one of eugenics *qua* eugenics. That is, it cannot be directed to a discussion of the peculiar difficulties of such a science, or to what is perhaps even more important, the question of its good faith.²⁴ This digression is constantly and intentionally limiting the contrast between the eugenic and economic programs to those of approach, to the opposite attitudes of mind that each represents, to difficulties not so much of technique as of temper; and therefore the only difficulty presented by the biologic thesis that will be noticed here is its seeming failure to recognize explicitly that a breeding program is the definite product and peculiar creation of a social system, that it is thus as much dependent for its application upon an economic and political structure as is any other social proposal.

Such a recognition, it is true, is implicit in a paragraph like that quoted above. ". . . Measures of positive eugenics are difficult to introduce, but widespread education and free discussion will do much. Information is all that the intelligent need. For the less intelligent there should be devised

in a democratic society is explained more fully by the variation of inherent qualities than by any other factor." (*Ibid.*, p. 369.) It is a bit difficult to understand what Professor Hankins means by a "democratic society." He cannot seriously mean that political democracy has any significance in an economically unbalanced social order.

²⁴ What is meant here by a question of "good faith" is one that wonders about the goal toward which eugenic processes aim. Granting that the end of the science is that of the development of a certain type of human being, the question must arise: What type will be instrumental in increasing the welfare and happiness of the race, and who shall determine the type? This point of good faith is introduced, briefly but very acutely, by Bertrand Russell in his essay *Icarus* in the interesting Dutton series. Such a question is, of course, part of that more general challenge to science, the inquiry into the ends which scientific knowledge is intended to serve, that everpresent question as to normative values.

and universalized some effective means of birth control." These sentences, it seems, represent an attitude that fails, or perhaps is unwilling, to grasp the fact that social proposals (even in the realm of biology) are functions of a social environment. "Widespread education," "free discussion," "information," "there should be devised and universalized some effective [social] means"—are these not the very things the environmentalist is trying to manipulate? To assume them as necessary for the functioning of a eugenic solution of society's ills is, if we are endeavoring at all to reach fundamentals, surely circular logic. The very fact that such vital and characteristically social agencies are introduced by the eugenic approach only incidentally seems to give evidence of a genuine difficulty in this concentration upon the suggestions of biology.

This is not intended to be the truistic recognition that every human proposal is in some degree a socially determined variable, for that could hardly be designated as a criticism of any one proposal, but it is a sincere conviction that the eugenic approach is short-sighted in its discussion of means. The legitimate end of the science is, of course, the end that is motivating every attempt, sociological or biological, to change this life of ours, to create a nobler and more characteristically human being. But—at the risk of becoming increasingly bromidic—individuals can't be reached, even for the purpose of introducing direct measures of positive and negative eugenics, except through social agencies. Granted that the question of ends in this whole discussion is the improvement of the individual, the means, because of the obvious fact that man functions only in some form of social organization, must be social; this criticism of the biologic approach, therefore, is again one that is based upon the instrumentalist emphasis upon means. The very means of eugenics must themselves be the product of prior social means. When

it is stated, for example, that "widespread education and free discussion" will be necessary before the difficulties of introducing eugenic measures are overcome, it is implicitly recognized that such eugenic programs are, in fact, themselves the end of other more fundamental processes. But that recognition is made too casually; it appears to ignore the fact that questions of means and instruments are all-important, and that the means to eugenic ends must be of a social character.

The thought that is trying to become articulate here is simply a plea for the recognition of the priority of social factors in any platform of social betterment. Biology's contribution to the social problem cannot be underestimated, or in any way disparaged, but it is felt that it does not afford a short cut to the direct manipulation of the individual. Eugenics must work through the medium of a social structure, and therefore it appears that the more fundamental problem of directly attacking that social structure—the problem that the environmentalist is trying to handle—must remain the characteristic approach of the social reformer.²⁵

It is true that the biologist may still introduce the whole psychological problem of motivation, and point out that the social structure itself can be changed only by the action of motivated individuals. Yet, in this connection it seems only necessary to appeal to the fact that the social environment has been and is being changed, that there do appear individuals who are motivated and inspired, and whose efforts have produced definite transformations in society. Were that not so, then indeed would we be revolving in the most vicious of

²⁵ The words of Graham Wallas may be significant here: "Social psychology can never lead men to wise practical conclusions unless it keeps in view its relation to that science of human breeding which Sir Francis Galton named Eugenics . . . On the other hand . . . one finds one's self wondering whether . . . eugenic science will progress, or eugenic motives and methods be effective in a society unhygienic, uneducated, and unorganized." (*The Great Society*; New York, Macmillan, 1914, pp. 55-56.)

circles, and an attitude of bland resignation would be all that would be left for us.

And so to conclude this digression: Has it not yet been demonstrated, psychologically and sociologically, that the individual (at least so far as the qualities that make him a functioning social organism are concerned) is a product of his environment? Is it not a logical, if not yet a "scientific," postulate to assume that conditions must in some way be altered before any permanent change can be registered upon the individual? Can biology, *via* eugenics, function—or even be applied—in a social order in which the much simpler and less sophisticated problems of providing enough food and shelter for its members have not yet been solved? These are just leading questions. It is unfortunate that they cannot be made definitive statements. Let us end here with that most wise passage from the *Republic*, one not so spectacular as the more familiar Platonic breeding program, but one perhaps more quietly significant:

The regulations which we are prescribing . . . are not, as might be supposed, a number of great principles, but trifles all, if care be taken, as the saying is, of the one great thing . . . education and nurture: If our citizens are well educated and grow into sensible men, they will easily see their way through all these. . . . The State, if once started well, moves with accumulating force like a wheel. For good nurture and education implant good constitutions, and these good constitutions taking root in a good education improve more and more, and this improvement affects the breed in man as in other animals.²⁶

The present chapter is devoted to a discussion of what might be termed the ethical effects of Henry George's economic solution. Any elaborate presentation of the economic effects of such a solution is not being essayed for reasons that already have been suggested. For one thing, the exposition of George's solution, which has been attempted, must con-

²⁶ Chap. IV, pp. 423-424. (Jowett translation.)

tain within it an implicit exposition of its economic consequences. That is, the socialization of rent, according to George's outline of the economic process, must remove the mischievous tangle in the distribution of wealth whereby rent advances at the expense of wages and interest. Land value was to be transformed from a social liability into a social asset, and only thus could an advancing civilization lead to economic stability. Such effects were clearly the logical conclusions of his premises. The presentation of his economic indictment was at the same time the promise of his solution. But perhaps a more important reason for not offering an ambitious exposition of such economic effects is one that also has been noted before: Prediction in the realm of economics is always a quite dangerous undertaking; at least, predictions must remain predictions until they are subject to empirical verification. And therefore a cataloguing of economic consequences must either wait upon such verification or else imply a much more expert handling of economic detail than this essay can venture.

It is rather what George felt would be the ethical effects of his solution that must interest us here. Now, to make such a transition from economics to ethics, and to follow George's argument, there must first be granted certain assumptions. That is to say, let it be assumed, for the sake of that argument, that the economic consequences of George's solution would be as he had pictured them. Let the imagination, in other words, wander over the prospect of an economic order in which poverty and want and misery—economic insecurity, to be less rhetorical—had disappeared, a social scheme in which increasing economic activity tended to distribute instead of to concentrate wealth. And let that exercise of the imagination expand even to Utopian proportions; let it add a word to that great magic literature of perfect cities. Such an addition would not be in the economic terms of wages, rent,

cost of living; it would be in the ethical language of beauty, justice, noble men and women, and splendid, wise States. In that it would be little different from those charmed lands of nowhere that philosophers have always sought to discover—to invent. And the Utopia of Henry George, if one glances at it hastily, appears as but one more of those poems of man's hope in man. George's hope, however, is not that of the hortatory moralist, and neither is it that of the scientific eugenicist. It is the hope of the economist, and as such it bears a slightly different tinge from those other hopes.

What is meant by this is simply a recognition of a more realistic note in the Utopian hopes of George. That realism is centered in the location of the social ideals and the ethical values to be found in visions within an economic milieu in which alone they would be able to survive. The origin of the ideals and values that are found in social Utopias is not difficult to ascertain. It is an ideational origin, one springing from the dreams of great dreamers, and one therefore that makes those ideals and goals vital as an inspiration and as a directing program. George also dreamed, but of more moment to him than were the ideals he dreamed was the background against which they might flourish. The Utopian visions of the moralist and of the biologist are essentially transcendental; the one by pleas and the other by breeding seek to rise above the conditioning factors that are found in man's immediate surroundings. George instead sought to found his ideal society upon a redirection of those surroundings and not upon an effort to escape them. His—to risk the accusation of a pun—was an immanent Utopia. That is why his perfect state, placed as it was within the realm of economics, appears to offer a hope with a more realistic promise.

Utopias have resided always in the land of ethics, and ethics has characteristically implied a place of hope and

good wishes. The divorce of the realm of ethics from the "lower" sphere of the instrumental is, of course, one against which familiar criticism has been attempted throughout this entire discussion of Henry George. The dualism between a moral order and an economic order (by economic order is intended the dimension of man's material wants), between ends and means, is a fatal one for ethical advance. It is a dualism that forces ethics to seek its solutions aided only by those "higher" ideal wants with which ethical theorists have forever been concerned. It limits the field of moral inquiry and excludes the very conditioning factors that make real and vital the whole meaning of morals. That is why the instrumentalist has always been suspicious of the select associates of much of ethical theory. Its very exclusiveness has robbed it of the richness and the material that must be sought in the problems of man's "lower" wants.

But of greater significance, that type of separation has robbed ethics of a comprehension of what may be implied by values themselves. There can be no legitimate cleavage between the values of ethics and the less exalted values of economics. The search for values, as Hobson points out,²⁷ must begin not in philosophic abstraction but with a consideration of "the instincts, appetites, and behavior of the animal man." The whole concept of a standard of values and of ethical welfare cannot be cut off from the psycho-physical organism or from the social community in which that organism functions.²⁸ Ethical values are judgments concerning the consequences of action, of action that occurs at the

²⁷ *Economics and Ethics*; see especially Chap. II.

²⁸ "In working out the basic theory of Welfare in Human Values, I incline to adhere closely to the conception of man as a psychophysical organism, welfare emerging in an organic harmonious coöperation of interrelated physical and mental activities." (*Ibid.*, p. 21.) Hobson goes on to state that physical health, mental development, and a coördination between the two make up this harmonious relation. Welfare in its relations to the community is discussed by him in Chapter III.

level of "the instincts, appetites, and behavior of the animal man." The meaning of these judgments is therefore not something absolute or self-sufficient; it must refer back to the material which is judged, and that reference is in fact the sole justification of ethical values. Just as in a previous connection it has been insisted that, because the material of economics involves consequences which are judged and so pass into the field of ethics, economics cannot cut itself off from ethics, so here that same insistence may be applied to ethics. The material that it judges is "economic"—using that term in a broad, figurative sense—and so the significance of ethics, as that of economics, is no self-contained, autonomous, privileged "value." The values of each are instrumental, inter-operating. It is once more the recognition that ends (ethic) and means (economic) must function as but different stages of one process.

The suggestion has been made before that ethics has a dual function in that it attempts both to socialize personality and to personalize social forces. This double function presents ethics likewise with a dual responsibility. "Morality implies responsibility, not merely for one's own soul, but for the continued good health of the social order."²⁹ The moral concepts are those of integration, and that integration involves, in addition to the adapting of the individual personality to the social demands, the refashioning of the social order so that its workings may not be too unintelligible and contradictory to man's comprehensions. Now, the question is whether it is possible for ethics to accept any kind of divorce between itself and a discipline such as economics, whose chief contribution is the understanding of the most vital opera-

²⁹ Professor Ayres in *The Nature of the Relationship between Ethics and Economics*, Philosophic Studies of the University of Chicago, No. 8, November 1918; p. 55. He continues: ". . . Moral insight is insight into the whole structure of society; the moral interest is an interest that includes the fortunes of institutions as well as of individuals."

tions of that social order.⁸⁰ If the intelligent integration of the individual with society is the goal of that which is of greatest worth in ethics, then ethical theory cannot be oblivious to the economic distortion in that society. If economics is to aid society in managing its affairs, if it "represents one phase of the general moral problem," then ethics cannot continue to ignore that phase.

"Moral insight is insight into the whole structure of society." That is perhaps an ambitious definition of this integrative function of ethics, but it is surely more significant than one that confines the boundaries of morals within the limits of ideals and visions, to the exclusion of the real and the visual. The insight of ethics has so often been directed into the exhortations of theology or the demonstrations of logic. Perhaps that is why ethical theory has failed to concern itself as much with evil as it has with a problem of evil. Poverty and economic insecurity, for example, have been given scant attention by ethics. Is it because they do not rightfully belong in that field, or is it because the ethical insight has not been into the whole structure of society?

This may be straying a bit from the work of Henry George, but it is felt that these thoughts are not entirely gratuitous, since it is in such terms that his economics becomes ethically significant. It may be recalled that this mention—a repeated mention—of the connection between ethics and economics was suggested by a more realistic, because economic, flavor that might be found in George's ethical visions. Specifically, that measure of realism was his conviction that ideals and Utopian hopes could have little longevity unless the matrix in which they took form was a favorable one. In other words,

⁸⁰ " . . . The one important effect of increased understanding of economic institutions is an increased capacity on the part of society at large to manage its affairs. In this sense the problem of economics is to contribute its study of industrial society to the solution of the problem of living. It represents one phase of the general moral problem." (*Ibid.*, p. 57.)

ethical Utopias, whether the product of the poet, the moralist, or the biologist and scientist, must remain lands of nowhere so long as they refused to consider conditions of settlement. Those conditions were primarily economic in character. Any social order that strove to realize the goals of ethical dreams must first busy itself with the more prosaic matters of economic adjustment. And that is why the bulk of George's work was not in ethical theory but in an examination of the processes of economics. "Thrift and virtue and wisdom and temperance are not the fruits of poverty." Let us turn back then to an assumption made a few pages back, the assumption that the economic results of George's solution would be as he had pictured them. Let a contrast be made between a civilization in which economic security has been attained and that one with which we are more familiar. Would that economic contrast throw any light upon a possible ethical dissimilarity between those two social orders?

Perhaps the most disconcerting spectacle that confronts the searcher for Utopia is that mad scramble of man to satisfy his material wants. That scramble seems an unæsthetic, brutish thing for the dreamer of perfect cities, and so the dreamer becomes ethically aristocratic. That is to say, he either relegates the satisfaction of these "lower" wants to a great third estate which can never achieve the status of philosopher-king (that is actually a bit of realism), or by exhortation he endeavors to chasten these wants, to will them away, or to transmute them by means of maxims. To employ George's terminology, the seeker after a social order that is to embody some of the aspirations of men is concerned particularly with magnifying "progressive activity." He is distressed at the exaggerated emphasis that society places upon "nonprogressive activities." A familiar conclusion, then, of the moralist is to concentrate upon an elaboration of these "higher" wants of man (progressive activity), reserving for

the satisfaction of the "lower" desires (nonprogressive activity) a technique of suppression and inhibition. Thus, there enters again that characteristic dualism. The "higher" order is that which is concentrated upon, and the "lower" is neglected; so Utopias remain Utopias. That spectacle of civilization being dominated by a mad, ugly, stupid scramble, however, is amenable not to the well wishes of the traditional moralistic approach but to an examination of psychological motivation in terms of its social background.

"The mental power which can be devoted to progress is only what is left after what is required for nonprogressive purposes." In this way does George phrase that dominance of "materialism" which is the bane of all ethicists. It is economic insecurity, the fact that the "nonprogressive" activities of maintenance demand the major share of mankind's attention, that makes crucial this concern with the "lower" wants. Man becomes a predatory animal because he is conditioned by a ruthless economic order.

Did you ever see a pail of swill given to a pen of hungry hogs? That is human society as it is . . . "Devil catch the hindmost" is the motto of our so-called civilized society to-day . . . We learn early to grasp from others that we may not want ourselves . . .

The greed of wealth, which makes it a business motto that every man is to be treated as though he were a rascal, and induces despair of getting in places of public trust men who will not abuse them for selfish ends, is but the reflection of the fear of want. Men trample over each other from the frantic dread of being trampled upon, and the admiration with which even the unscrupulous money-getter is regarded springs from habits of thought engendered by the fierce struggle for existence to which the most of us are obliged to give up our best energies . . . He must have eyes only for the mean and vile, who has mixed with men without realizing that selfishness and greed and vice and crime are largely the result of social conditions which bring out the bad qualities of human nature and stunt the good; without realizing that there is even now among men patriotism and virtue enough to secure

us the best possible management of public affairs if our social and political adjustments enabled us to utilize those qualities.³¹

Whence springs this lust for gain, to gratify which men tread everything pure and noble under their feet, to which they sacrifice all the higher possibilities of life; which converts civility into a hollow pretense, patriotism into a sham, and religion into hypocrisy; which makes so much of civilized existence an Ishmaelitic warfare, of which the weapons are cunning and fraud? Does it not spring from the existence of want?³²

These are the ethical consequences of a society in which the problems of economic adjustment are still unsolved. It is not simply the overt manifestations of poverty and crime and vice, but the insidious, pervasive atmosphere of the philistine that furnish the indictment of economic insecurity. Man's habits, those habits of reaction that are judged by ethical values, are formed in a mould of materialism. Economic precariousness sets that mould. The complaints of the ethical theorist, of the theologian, directed against the grasping, selfish character of human society—can they be sympathetically received if such complaints are unaccompanied by any interest in the economic health of that society?

Moral philosophy essays a very ambitious undertaking when it seeks to handle by an *ad hoc* technique this "acquisitiveness" in human nature that spells the doom of so many ethical visions. That taint of greed which corrupts everything it touches is not something that can be exorcised by means of categorical imperatives or by an abacus of hedonism. And, unless one refuses to accept the concept that human nature is a function of conditioning factors, neither is it some primal, indelible mark of Adam. To solve a problem such as this, a problem which is at the root of most of the anomalies that ethics and religion are called upon to face,

³¹ George in *Social Problems, Works*, Vol. II, pp. 71; 212-213.

³² *Progress and Poverty*, p. 455.

philosophy must be supplemented by the social sciences; moral problems must be translated into the vocabulary of social problems. Ethics so often has approached its material as if the evils it endeavors to transcend were absolute or logical in character, and that therefore they must be attacked by means of some weapon of demonstration. Ethical problems have been regarded as independent, self-operating, and their solutions have been held to lie in the same dimensions. But the evils that worry ethics are not parthenogenetic. They spring from a fertile origin, a social, economic origin, and any elaboration of moral philosophy must first achieve a comprehension of that pathological source. This is still the plea for a secure economic foundation underneath the structure of ethics.

To return, then, to the possible ethical contrast between two social orders, one of which has and the other has not arrived at a state of economic security, what would be the effect of that security upon "materialism"? That word, of course, just as the word "poverty," must bear a heavy burden in this discussion. By it is connoted that whole shift away from all the values that ethics and æsthetics have ranged in their pantheons. By it is meant the emphasizing of those "non-progressive" activities of maintenance, the loss of all the power that could be directed to the enrichment and expansion of human life, and to the satisfaction of the "higher" ideal wants that still float before the eyes of men. Materialism here signifies not some petty characteristic of man or of an age; it becomes a symbol of the forces that have made man a rather clever animal instead of the son of the gods of whom the philosopher-poets have sung. It is the very hypostasis of the backward drag in human development. And it is this "materialism" which is itself the product of economic conditions, and which acts, in turn, as the source of most of the paradoxes between the real and the ideal that confront the

ethical theorist, that is to be acted upon by the removal of economic insecurity. It has been assumed that George's solution would effect such a removal. Let him then go on to paint his Utopia:

Shortsighted is the philosophy which counts on selfishness as the master motive of human action. It is blind to facts of which the world is full . . . It is not selfishness that enriches the annals of every people with heroes and saints. It is not selfishness that on every page of the world's history bursts out in sudden splendor of noble deeds or sheds the soft radiance of benignant lives . . . there is a force which overcomes and drives out selfishness; a force which is the electricity of the moral universe; a force beside which all others are weak . . . To be pitied is the man who has never seen and never felt it . . . He who has not seen it has walked with shut eyes. He who looks may see, as says Plutarch, that "the soul has a principle of kindness in itself, and is born to love, as well as to perceive, think, or remember."

And this force of forces—that now goes to waste or assumes perverted forms—we may use for the strengthening, and building up, and ennobling of society, if we but will, just as we now use physical forces that once seemed but powers of destruction. All we have to do is but to give it freedom and scope. The wrong that produces inequality; the wrong that in the midst of abundance tortures men with want or harries them with the fear of want; that stunts them physically, degrades them intellectually, and distorts them morally, is what alone prevents harmonious social development. For "all that is from the gods is full of providence. We are made for coöperation—like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of the upper and lower teeth."

There are people into whose heads it never enters to conceive of any better state of society than that which now exists—who imagine that the idea that there could be a state of society in which greed would be banished, prisons stand empty, individual interest be subordinated to general interests, and no one seek to rob or to oppress his neighbor, is but the dream of impracticable dreamers, for whom these practical level-headed men, who pride themselves on recognizing facts as they are, have a hearty contempt. But

such men—though some of them write books, and some of them occupy the chairs of universities, and some of them stand in pulpits—do not think.

If they were accustomed to dine in such eating houses as are to be found in the lower quarters of London and Paris, where the knives and forks are chained to the table, they would deem it the natural, ineradicable disposition of man to carry off the knife and fork with which he has eaten . . . Consider this existing fact of a cultivated and refined society, in which all the coarser passions are held in check, not by force, not by law, but by common opinion and the mutual desire of pleasing. If this is possible for a part of the community, it is possible for a whole community. There are states of society in which every one has to go armed—in which every one has to hold himself in readiness to defend person and property with the strong hand. If we have progressed beyond that, we may progress still further.⁸³

Give labor a free field and its full earnings; take for the benefit of the whole community that fund which the growth of the community creates, and want and the fear of want would be gone . . . Men would no more worry about finding employment than they worry about finding air to breathe; they need have no more care about physical necessities than do the lilies of the field. The progress of science, the march of invention, the diffusion of knowledge, would bring their benefits to all . . . There would result, not only the utilization of productive forces now going to waste; not only would our present knowledge, now so imperfectly applied, be fully used; but from the mobility of labor and the mental activity which would be generated, there would result advances in the methods of production that we now cannot imagine.

For, greatest of all the enormous wastes which the present constitution of society involves, is that of mental power. How infinitesimal are the forces that concur to the advance of civilization, as compared to the forces that lie latent! How few are the thinkers,

⁸³ *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 460–464. In contrast to his picture in *Social Problems* of the pail of swill and the hungry hogs as an example of the society that is, George continues in the same place (p. 71): “Did you ever see a company of well-bred men and women sitting down to a good dinner, without scrambling, or jostling, or gluttony, each knowing that his own appetite will be satisfied, deferring to and helping the others? That is human society as it might be.”

the discoverers, the inventors, the organizers, as compared with the great mass of the people! Yet such men are born in plenty; it is the conditions that permit so few to develop . . . Had Cæsar come of a proletarian family; had Napoleon entered the world a few years earlier; had Columbus gone into the Church instead of going to sea; had Shakespeare been apprenticed to a cobbler or chimney-sweep; had Sir Isaac Newton been assigned by fate the education and the toil of an agricultural laborer; had Dr. Adam Smith been born in the coal hews, or Herbert Spencer forced to get his living as a factory operative, what would their talents have availed? But there would have been, it will be said, other Cæsars or Napoleons, Columbuses or Shakespeares, Newtons, Smiths or Spencers. This is true. And it shows how prolific is our human nature. As the common worker is on need transformed into a queen bee, so, when circumstances favor his development, what might otherwise pass for a common man rises into a hero or leader, discoverer or teacher, sage or saint. So widely has the sower scattered his seed, so strong is the germinative force that bids it bud and blossom. But, alas, for the stony ground, and the birds and the tares! For one who attains his full stature, how many are stunted and deformed . . .

To remove want and the fear of want, to give to all classes leisure, and comfort, and independence, the decencies and refinements of life, the opportunities of mental and moral development, would be like turning water into a desert. The sterile waste would clothe itself with verdure, and the barren places where life seemed banned would ere long be dappled with the shade of trees and musical with the song of birds. Talents now hidden, virtues unsuspected, would come forth to make human life richer, fuller, happier, nobler. For in these round men who are stuck into three-cornered holes, and three-cornered men who are jammed into round holes; in these men who are wasting their energies in the scramble to be rich; in these who in factories are turned into machines, or are chained by necessity to bench or plow; in these children who are growing up in squalor, and vice, and ignorance, are powers of the highest order, talents the most splendid. They need but the opportunity to bring them forth.

Consider the possibilities of a state of society that gave that opportunity to all. Let imagination fill out the picture; its colors grow too bright for words to paint. Consider the moral elevation,

the intellectual activity, the social life. Consider how by a thousand actions and interactions the members of every community are linked together, and how in the present condition of things even the fortunate few who stand upon the apex of the social pyramid must suffer, though they know it not, from the want, ignorance, and degradation that are underneath . . .³⁴

Here, then, is the direction to which George points for a glimpse of the perfect state. Man sets foot upon the steps of an infinite progression and seeks to satisfy those higher wants, to reach for ideal values, only when he can put behind him the concern with "nonprogressive" wants. For him to live well, he must first live; before ideals can be realized there are wants that must be attended. But, with that concern over living put behind him, the potentialities that are dormant in man must develop. Those potentialities have displayed themselves when conditions have permitted. George is confident that they will raise man to a new splendor when they are given a free rein—and economic security must free the rein.³⁵

Economic security, for George, is but another name for

³⁴ *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 459, 466-469.

³⁵ Bertrand Russell phrases one of the most acute objections that may be made at this point. This objection, i. e., that direction and supervision is required in both "nonprogressive" and "progressive" endeavors, that leisure must be organized, seems to be one of the advantages of a "socialistic" over an "individualistic" approach such as that of George to the problem of human development. "Socialism as a panacea seems to me to be mistaken in this way, since it is too ready to suppose that better economic conditions will of themselves make men happy. It is not only more material goods that men need, but more freedom, more self-direction, more outlet for creativeness, more opportunity for the joy of life, more voluntary coöperation, and less involuntary subservience to purposes not their own. . . . Social reformers, like inventors of Utopias, are apt to forget this very obvious fact of human nature. They aim rather at securing more leisure, and more opportunity for enjoying it, than at making work itself more satisfactory, more consonant with impulse, and a better outlet for creativeness and the desire to employ one's faculties. Work, in the modern world, is, to almost all who depend on earnings, mere work, not an embodiment of the desire for activity." (*Why Men Fight*, New York, Century, 1917, pp. 41, 98.) George did not handle this type of question, but undoubtedly would have considered it one of the adjustments that would follow the attainment of economic security.

liberty and justice, and the Utopia that he is drawing turns into a pæan in praise of them:³⁶

The poverty which in the midst of abundance pinches and imprudes men, and all the manifold evils which flow from it, spring from a denial of justice. In permitting the monopolization of the opportunities which nature freely offers to all, we have ignored the fundamental law of justice—for, so far as we can see, when we view things upon a large scale, justice seems to be the supreme law of the universe. But by sweeping away this injustice and asserting the rights of all men to natural opportunities, we shall conform ourselves to the law—we shall remove the great cause of unnatural inequality in the distribution of wealth and power; we shall abolish poverty; tame the ruthless passions of greed; dry up the springs of vice and misery; light in dark places the lamp of knowledge; give new vigor to invention and a fresh impulse to discovery; substitute political strength for political weakness; and make tyranny and anarchy impossible . . .

Our primary social adjustment is a denial of justice. In allowing one man to own the land on which and from which other men must live, we have made them his bondsmen in a degree which increases as material progress goes on. This is the subtle alchemy that in ways they do not realize is extracting from the masses in every civilized country the fruits of their weary toil; that is instituting a harder and more hopeless slavery in place of that which has been destroyed; that is bringing political despotism out of political freedom, and must soon transmute democratic institutions into anarchy.

Civilization so based cannot continue. The eternal laws of the universe forbid it. Ruins of dead empires testify, and the witness that is in every soul answers, that it cannot be. It is something grander than Benevolence, something more august than Charity—it is Justice herself that demands of us to right this wrong. Justice that will not be denied; that cannot be put off—Justice that with the scales carries the sword. Shall we ward the stroke with liturgies and prayers? Shall we avert the decrees of immutable law by

³⁶ Chap. V of Book X of *Progress and Poverty*, "The Central Truth." The passage on pages 543-545, George's "ode to liberty," is one of the most eloquent in his book, and has been quoted many times in prose anthologies. It is too long to be given here in full.

raising churches when hungry infants moan and weary mothers weep? . . .

In our time, as in times before, creep on the insidious forces that, producing inequality, destroy Liberty. On the horizon the clouds begin to lower. Liberty calls to us again. We must follow her further, we must trust her fully. Either we must wholly accept her or she will not stay. It is not enough that men should vote; it is not enough that they should be theoretically equal before the law. They must have liberty to avail themselves of the opportunities and means of life; they must stand on equal terms with reference to the bounty of nature. Either this, or Liberty withdraws her light! Either this, or darkness comes on, and the very forces that progress has evolved turn to powers that work destruction. This is the universal law. This is the lesson of the centuries. Unless its foundations be laid in justice, the social structure cannot stand . . .

But if, while there is yet time, we turn to Justice and obey her, if we trust Liberty and follow her, the dangers that now threaten must disappear, the forces that now menace will turn to agencies of elevation. Think of the powers now wasted; of the infinite fields of knowledge yet to be explored; of the possibilities of which the wondrous inventions of this century give us but a hint. With want destroyed; with greed changed to noble passions; with the fraternity that is born of equality taking the place of the jealousy and fear that now array men against each other; with mental power loosed by conditions that give to the humblest comfort and leisure; and who shall measure the heights to which our civilization may soar? Words fail the thought! It is the Golden Age of which poets have sung and high-raised seers have told in metaphor! It is the glorious vision which has always haunted man with gleams of fitful splendor. It is what he saw whose eyes at Patmos were closed in a trance. It is the culmination of Christianity—the City of God on earth, with its walls of jasper and its gates of pearl! It is the reign of the Prince of Peace!"³⁷

³⁷ *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 541-542, 546, 545, 549.

George's almost metaphysical concept of liberty may evoke little sympathy in this day of cynicism, yet even that Nietzschean, H. L. Mencken, can write: "Liberty in itself cannot bring in the millennium. It cannot abolish the inherent weaknesses of man—an animal but lately escaped from the jungle. It cannot take the place of intelligence, courage, honor. But the free man is at least able to be intelligent, courageous and honorable if the makings are in him. Nothing stands in the way of his highest functioning. Free, he may still be dull, timorous, untrustworthy. He may be shift-

It is well realized that all Utopias are suspect. Perfect social orders have appeared as but an exercise of poetic license, and their attainment has been smiled at as the dream of a philosopher. Yet it may be well to consider briefly whether this perennial search for perfection in human society is simply a soaring of the imagination.

There is no particular difficulty involved, of course, in the raising of a sneer at the efforts of the founder of ideal cities. It is just as easy, however, to scoff at that "realism" upon which they who ridicule the Utopian dreamer pride themselves. That is, "realism" in comprehending our social adjustments becomes a ludicrous thing when, instead of including, it is transformed into a substitute for values. Too often, as in literature, realism signifies the portrayal of the ugly; the ugly is the realistic, and beauty must reside only with the romanticist. If that connotation is accepted, then, of course, the realist is he who revels in the sordid record of things as they are. But if a more intelligible interpretation of realism is chosen, then, no matter how callous the realist, he must admit into his "reality" the presence of values. These values (whether they are objective or subjective does not concern us here), these social ideals of beauty, happiness, justice, equality, are as "real" as the most tangible bit of ugly-

less and worthless. But it will not be against his will; it will not be in spite of himself. Free, he will be able to make the most of every virtue that is actually in him, and he will live and die under the kind of government that he wants and deserves." (In the *New York World*, January 30, 1927.) And Bertrand Russell can write, with an absence of cynicism, that: "I do not say freedom is the greatest of all goods; the best things come from within—they are such things as creative art, and love, and thought. Such things can be helped or hindered by political conditions, but not actually produced by them; and freedom is, both in itself and in its relations to these other goods, the best thing that political and economic conditions can secure." (*Proposed Roads to Freedom*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1918, p. 111, n.)

George, when told by William Lloyd Garrison (the younger) that he did not believe the single tax to be a panacea, replied: "Neither do I; but I believe that freedom is, and the single tax is but the tap-root of freedom." (Quoted by Louis F. Post in *The Taxation of Land Values*, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1915, p. 54.)

ness with which the realist is concerned. (Of course "ugliness" is itself a value judgment, but, with certain exceptions in the realm of æsthetics, it is not elevated as a standard to be attained. The realist insists that he is simply picturing ugliness and not judging it one way or the other.) And just as real, and far more crucial, are the judgments made in this realm of values. "Things as they are" include as a supplement things as they might be, things that ought to be. When the realist testifies that all attempts to change social conditions or to redirect the forces within human nature must be vain ones, the "reality" that he is invoking is the worship of ugliness. It is obvious that that ugliness must be comprehended by the most poetic of dreamers, but that it must be grasped and clung to, that its presence must blind man to the possibility of transcending it—such a procedure is not realism but stubbornness.

A skeptical approach to the prophecies that have been drawn by the painters of perfect states may not rightly be quarreled with, but surely a challenge can be made against that attitude of bland complacency that is affected by the "realist." It is not merely that he is implying that values are unreal things, the stuff of dreams, but of more "realistic" importance, he is blocking whatever possible road there may be that leads to social improvement. By refusing to admit the possibility of any type of change he is most effectively precluding any change. It may be that all of the hopes that have been expressed in the literature of Utopia cannot be realized; it may even be that few of them can be reached; but the striving toward the goal that they set up must act as the only vital stimulus for any type of progressive step. Values and ideals do not function in any esoteric sense. They point out directions and raise standards of measurement. They pass judgment and provoke criticism. They are instrumental, not decorative. It is in this way that values become

operative, that "ideals"—to risk a professional pun—enter into the sphere of "critical realism." And this is why the sneer of the "realist" at the fervent hopes of the makers of splendid ideals seems such a futile thing.

It is perhaps not so much futile as it is dangerous. There is an increasing familiarity, and hence an increasing neglect, that result from the realist's insistence upon handling "things as they are." The continual commerce with the ugly, the refusal to look beyond and above, can have the effect only of blunting the sensitivity. Social maladjustment, economic distortion, all the bitterness of a twisted society, seem less acute and of little menace when they are handled casually as the "real." It is not in place here to add one more warning of the dangers present in this cavalier acceptance of a pathological condition as the normal, but it does seem necessary to suggest that some type of standard must be sought if there is to be a critical appreciation of the social order that conditions man. That standard is to be found implicit in the models that social philosophers have constructed. Much of the structure they have erected may have to be cut away or refitted, but it is in the path down which they point that even the "realist"—unless his realism is nothing more than the morbid concern with the ugly—must look.

There is no contradiction in this directive function of ideal values provided, as has been insisted again and again, that such "ideals" are not elaborated in total independence of the means by which alone they may be realized. If this is all that is meant by "realism" in its approach to social problems, then its conception would be the only acceptable one. But, characteristically, the "realist" has erred, in the same degree as has the "idealist," by insulating the universe of discourse with which he operates. The Utopian has lived in the light of a rosy future, and the realist has refused to look beyond the day. One has divorced ends from means, while

the other has denied the authority of ends. It would appear as almost too obvious to advocate that a compromise between these two extremes must be achieved before an intelligible solution to economic and political problems can be realized. That compromise, it need not be added, is the work of social instrumentalism.

There will be no insistence here that the work of Henry George presents a completely acceptable compromise, but it is felt that his approach does point to the most sane method of handling the social problem. Irrespective, that is, of his particular economic program, there is in George's writings that merging of visions and facts, of ethics and economics, of ideals and reals—a union that appears to offer the most fruitful technique for the social philosopher. His fusion of psychology with the social sciences, i. e., his interpretation of human nature as a social variable, as a potentiality completely subject to the direction and conditioning of external forces; his founding of politics upon economics; his "economic interpretation of history"—the bold correlation of the rise and fall of civilization itself with an economic process; in fact, the whole synthesis that George essayed must be recognized as a thorough attempt to analyze, to value, and to reshape.

George contented himself neither with that indictment of the existing social order which roused him to his work nor with filling in the sketchy glimpse of that nobler society which was his inspiration. He added a comprehensive explanation and a carefully elaborated solution. Whether or not that solution and its promised effects find acceptance, there can be little question that his approach is an instrumental one. He sought that fertile marriage of hopes and methods. In his sweeping gesture of locating the problem, tracing the solution, and cataloguing the results, there is found a realistic confidence and a fervent ideality that cannot fail to capture

the imagination and the respect of all who are sensitive to the problems of our social structure. That is why, perhaps, an instrumentalist such as Professor Dewey can feel that "there have been economists of great repute who in their pretension to be scientific have ignored the most significant elements in human nature. There have been others who were emotionally stirred by social ills and who proposed glowing schemes of betterment, but who passed lightly over facts. It is the thorough fusion of insight into actual facts and forces, with recognition of their bearing upon what makes human life worth living, that constitutes Henry George one of the world's great social philosophers."⁸⁸

⁸⁸From "An Appreciation of Henry George," preface to *Significant Paragraphs from Progress and Poverty*, edited by Professor Harry Gunnison Brown (New York, Doubleday, Doran, 1928). In the same place Professor Dewey writes: "I do not say these things in order to vaunt his [George's] place as a thinker in contrast with the merits of his proposals for a change in methods of distributing the burdens of taxation. To my mind the two things go together. His clear intellectual insight into social conditions, his passionate feeling for the remediable ills from which humanity suffers, find their logical conclusion in his plan for liberating labor and capital from the shackles which now bind them."