

making. Friendship arises only through the common quest for the good life, the life proper to a society or polis. All this becomes invisible under the atomistic conception of the person as owner. A proprietorial relation of the individual to the world is a legal fiction and does not exist by nature. It is maintained only through distorted positive law and is not present at the foundation of human community. It has been maintained by the theory, often repeated by the classical economists, that the socialisation of man came about through isolated individuals gradually coming together to form embryo communities through exchange. But like all primates, man was always a social being, and this theory of the origins of society has been proved to be entirely false and misleading. The individual, on the contrary, arises only through organised society where alone individuation is possible. More than this, as the Stoic philosophers saw, the sense of personhood emerges from the sense of common humanity.

The notion of the proprietorial self has not only shaped economic theory, it has extended into jurisprudence and broken the link between positive law and ethics. Where natural law originally emerged from the communal quest for the common good, positive law grounds itself in the decree of the ruler and replaces the social relations of the person with contractual relations. The true relations between all institutions and the person are distorted by this separation. The 'state' and the 'individual' are consequently seen as in perpetual conflict and as having opposing aims. All this occurs through defining selfhood in terms of claims upon property. It gives birth to a form of economics separate from and at variance with the true nature of society. The enclosures in Britain and this new notion of selfhood arose together, and we observe that the great preoccupation of law in that period was with property. The two notions belong together. It is only through misconceiving human nature that the relation with the land becomes likewise misconceived. This is why the Law of Rent touches a blind spot in modern economic thinking. And it is why economic thinking itself reduces the understanding of society to mere commercial exchange. In a purely commercialised society, founded upon mutual exploitation, the higher institutions, such as education, medicine, jurisprudence, government, the arts, become a 'cost' to the market, rather than the flowering of human potential.

We began with the observation from Karl Jaspers that since earliest times man has always attempted to picture *the whole* and to situate the human species in the cosmic order. This quest continues in our age in the sciences and in philosophy and religion. The concern to understand the truth of things shows itself to be the distinguishing feature of the human species. Man is the being that reflects on the nature of things, with the desire to live according to truth. From this emerges politics in the form of speech, as the deliberation upon what is good and bad, just and unjust. The rational and the ethical manifest simultaneously, as integral thought. The true and the good are two sides of one reality. The quest to understand the truth of things springs from the essence of human nature. It orients humanity towards the world. Yet it ever remains an aspiration, an open-ended quest. Nevertheless, every person knows that to live in accordance with the true and the just is the proper life of the individual and society. It remains to be manifested, like a talent that needs to be nurtured. It is the task calling for fulfilment, the work of the political entity. This aspiration remains, yet is tethered by the prevailing mechanistic and amoral conception of nature, the legalised notion of the self, and the proprietorial notion of the relation of man to the earth. On the other hand, it is precisely through these deep misconceptions that the call to understanding addresses us. Insofar as a society accepts falsehoods and injustice it abdicates from its essential human purpose. The work called for is that of understanding. It is a creative work, natural to the human intelligence, worthy of dedication, and fosters peaceful discourse. A society will only change if its understanding changes, if what it holds to be true changes. I give the last word to Aristotle, "Man's work as Man is accomplished by virtue of Practical Wisdom and Moral Virtue, the latter giving the right aim and direction, the former the right means to its attainment." ■

## HGF BRIEFING NOTES

The Friday Afternoon Study Group has continued with the reading of *Social Problems* by Henry George, and we are continually astonished to find how up-to-date it is, except that, if anything, things are now even worse than then. He anticipates the time of full land enclosure in the States, and the problems following that. We also have lined up a further talk by Alan Roberts on Alexander Pope and Language.

## FRIDAY EVENING PROGRAMME

The series of George's Speeches are continuing. Richard Bolton will continue leading the study of George's Speeches starting with "Moses: Apostle of Freedom" - an address delivered by Henry George before the Young Men's Hebrew Association of San Francisco. "Three great religions place the leader of the Exodus upon the highest plane they allot to humankind. To Christendom and to Islam, as well as to Judaism, Moses is the mouthpiece and lawgiver of the Most High; the medium, clothed with supernatural powers, through which the divine will has spoken. Yet this very exaltation, by raising him above comparison, may prevent the real grandeur of the man from being seen. It is amid his brethren that Saul stands taller and fairer." The next speech to be read will be 'The Study of Political Economy', a lecture delivered before the students of the University of California, the 9th March 1877.

Plato's *Laws*. Joseph Milne will continue to lead this very popular enquiry into Plato's explorations of the art of law-making, the aims of education, the meaning of citizenship, the virtuous life, good regulation of trade and property, and the place of religion in the just and harmonious society. There is much in Plato's *Laws* that challenges the underlying values of modern economic theory.



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