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THE CONCEPT OF EVOLUTIONARY PROGRESS IN SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

THE wisdom of social philosophy strives to comprehend the problems of human society, and in its systems of thought is the mentor of political science. It springs, like the interpretation of history, within the watershed of general philosophy and is inspired and informed by a common affinity with both. Evolutionary concepts entered social philosophy through the door that admitted them into general philosophy and history. Natural science was not the door. Emil Brunner in his Gifford Lectures exposes the origins of evolutionary theory: it was not Darwin and Laplace but Rousseau, Lessing, Herder and Hegel who were the fathers of the theory—the optimists of the Enlightenment.

This is the key to the situation. The genius of the Enlightenment was undoubtedly the glorification of man and inspired Swinburne later to acclaim: "Glory to man in the highest, for man is the master of things." Human reason became the supreme source of wisdom and arbiter of truth. But many of the thought-forms of the Age of Faith were allowed by the rationalists, unwittingly perhaps, to flow over into the Age of Reason and with them came the Christian view of a goal, a consummation or the finale of history. This view of history, unmoored from Christian verities, became lodged in the coasts of man's new glory-land and vegetated there. The crop of new philosophies had the congruity of a genus and in one form or another man was caught up in a caravan of time, ever moving onwards, progressing, evolving; either he was captain of the caravan, or the involuntary victim of an impersonal evolutionary urge forward. From these sources the idea of evolution entered and developed in social philosophy.

The difference between evolving and developing is fundamental. Evolution, in scientific and philosophical parlance, is used in the sense of a self-contained, self-explanatory process, while development is dependent and derivative—admittedly it may be conceived as dependent upon, and the expression of, an evolutionary movement, but with equal validity developments may be the outworking of a personal creative will, human or divine.

The evolutionary hypothesis in social philosophy is a symptom of man's universal and timeless lust to be master of heaven and

earth, to be undisputed lord of the garden in which God has set him—it is, in short, the outworking of sin. The evolutionary hypothesis enters into every major social doctrine known and practised by civilized man in this generation, with the exception of the Catholic. In greater or lesser degree it is the undercurrent of Liberal Democracy, Socialism, Communism, Fascism and National Socialism, and has largely ousted Christian thought and ethics from human affairs. Justice cannot be done to this general statement in a few words but it is possible to give an outline sufficiently substantial to support it.

Liberalism or representative democracy knows many forms and presentations, but its essential and unifying genius is the championing of the individual against monarchical authority and the vesting of sovereignty in the governed, the people of the state. J. Stuart Mill and other exponents of liberal doctrine conceived a goal to which emancipated man, democratic man, was to advance, a goal which for Mill was universal happiness, for others social freedom, but essentially it was the conception of progress that impelled and drove—human society continuously moving towards perfection. Mill, in his essay on *Liberty*, gave expression to the idea in the following words:—

The existing generation is master both of the training and the entire circumstances of the generation to come; it cannot indeed make them perfectly wise and good, because it is itself so lamentably deficient in goodness and wisdom; and its best efforts are not always, in individual cases, its most successful ones; but it is perfectly well able to make the rising generation, as a whole, as good as, and a little better than, itself.

And T. H. Green, who saw the goal of human progress as freedom, echoed Mill:

When we measure the progress of a society by its growth in freedom, we measure it by the increasing development and exercise on the whole of those powers of contributing to social good with which we believe the members of the society to be endowed.

But among the votaries of liberalism it was Herbert Spencer who argued for the freedom of the individual on the ground that the touch of governmental authority must be slight so as to allow healthy competition between men and social groups to flourish and human society to progress towards a more beneficent way of life by natural selection.

The well-being of existing humanity [he wrote] and the unfolding of it into . . . ultimate perfection, are both served by that same beneficent, though severe discipline, to which the animate creation at large is subject: a discipline which is pitiless in the working out of good: a felicity-pursuing law which never swerves for the avoidance of partial and temporary suffering. The poverty of the incapable, the distresses that come upon the imprudent, the starvation of the idle, and those shoulderings aside of the weak by the strong, which leave so many "in shallows and in miseries" are the devices of a large, far-seeing benevolence.

Socialism, in its manifold fashions, came to oppose the liberalism of the nineteenth century, but it took over from the liberal philosophers the optimistic ideas of man and social progress, or evolution. Liberalism had allowed vast wealth to accumulate in the private hands of the few and relegated the majority to various stages of poverty. Socialists preached social progress as the outcome of switching economic power, in the form of the agents of production, from private hands to the neutral, rationalistic, omnipotent heads and hands of government. Although the economic structure of society is radically different, the basic concept of their social philosophy is the same. The socialist movements are all "progressive" movements, for man progresses towards freedom just so far as his economic processes become rationalized.

The extreme of socialism is communism, and to the communistic philosophy of Marx, Engels and Lenin and the multitude of their disciples, the influence of evolutionary theory is paramount. Marx, informed by the hypothesis of evolution in natural science, conceived an evolutionary process in all material phenomena and appropriated the dialectical growth of the "Idea", as Hegel expressed it, to explain the meaning of history in terms of an absolute materialism. For the Marxist history, and above all the growth of human society, is the working out of the dialectical principle in the material order—a dialectical materialism. Society will move forward by the motive power of antagonistic forces opposing and annihilating one another and from the encounter of thesis and antithesis a new synthesis will evolve. Only by working themselves out in the evolutionary process will antagonisms be eradicated from the social order and a harmonious, happy and class-free society come into being. The process is inevitable and so capitalist must oppose proletarian and vice versa until a new humanity buds and blossoms from the blood-soaked ground.

Commenting on the Communist Manifesto, Engels wrote:

Ever since the dissolution of the primeval communal ownership of land, all history has been a history of class struggles, of struggles between exploited and exploiting, between dominated and dominating classes at various stages of social evolution . . . this struggle, however, has now reached a stage where the exploited and oppressed class (the proletariat) can no longer emancipate itself from the class which exploits and oppresses it (the bourgeoisie) without at the same time forever freeing the whole of society from exploitation, oppression and class struggles.

The ideal of communism is not the totalitarian state but rather a stateless society where each individual member is so in harmony with his neighbour and society at large that no sovereign State power is necessary—the totalitarian dictator-state is but a phase through which society must pass to the classless and state-less order. Over against this conception stands Fascism. Fascism has no corpus of philosophy, but above a conglomeration of social and political ideas the State towers as a phoenix. Within its view human history has reached the point where the only social institution which is still evolving and growing is the State and the only progressive nation and society is, therefore, one which accepts the State as the absolute conditioner, educationalist and life-giver of its subject people. As a person submits his will to the supremacy of the State, so he fulfils his destiny and enters into harmony with the essential social environment. It is the State that is evolving and carrying humanity forward in the process. So wrote Mussolini in *La Dottrina del Fascismo*:

It is the State which carries men from the elementary life of the tribe to the highest human expression of power which is Empire. . . . From 1929 up to the present day these doctrinal positions have been strengthened by the whole economico-political evolution of the world. It is the State alone that grows in size and power. . . . The nation as the State is an ethical reality which exists and lives, in so far as it develops. To arrest its development is to kill it.

And again, in the Preamble to the Statuto of 20 December, 1929:

Fascism lives to-day in terms of the future, and regards the new generation as forces destined to achieve the ends appointed by our will.

Basically, therefore, Fascism stands upon a conception of evolution, the evolution of the modern State transporting humanity to ever higher stages of integrated and disciplined life.

What the State is to Fascism, the race, and above all the Aryan race, is to National Socialism. Mr. Oakeshott,¹ interpreting the doctrines of *Mein Kampf*, writes:

Since the social existence of man is the only end valuable for its own sake, it follows that the social and political organization of a community is a means to this end and not something of intrinsic worth. It is impossible to enjoy the highest life without such social and political organization, without the State.

The dominance of the race pattern as the talisman of contented, human society derives from the evolutionary view of nature. Following Oakeshott again in interpreting Hitler, this principle is made abundantly plain:

Nature's will is the continuous improvement of all life, and consequently her law is the continuous victory of the stronger species over the weaker species, the stronger elements of a stock over the weaker, the stronger race over the weaker race. . . . Consequently, a human society must be considered well organized only in so far as it is, in this matter, on the side of Nature, only in so far as it gives to the creative, inventive individual the scope that he needs, only in so far as it assists the emergence of creative individuals from the mass of men. Indeed, society is in its essence the incorporation of the endeavour to set the individual above the mass and to organize the mass in subordination to the individual. . . . The relentless struggle for life itself is the principal agent for the selection of individuals who are specially valuable.

Social systems deduced from an evolutionary *a priori* lead to a relative "horizontal" ethic. The good becomes that which accords with the purpose and pursuit of the evolutionary movement and the cup of woe and horror held now to the lips of twentieth-century society in the name of human progress is the inescapable consequence of this debased morality. All the atrocities of the Nazi concentration camps are good and righteous if the evolutionary race theory of National Socialism is valid and true, and so it is with other social concepts closely approximating to an evolutionary view of man and history. The moral landslides of our day in domestic and international conditions are to be expected. Men have created theories of human progress which enable them either to imagine they handle the reins of history or to feel a completeness and independence untroubled by thoughts of a transcendent ethic and living God. But this is nothing new; it is no more than what has always been done ever since man created idols to worship—evolutionary

¹ M. Oakeshott, *Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe*.

concepts of man in society are idolatries written large in modern type. It is written of the men of old who did such things and who "did not like to retain God in their knowledge" that He "gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient: being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, unsociable, implacable, unmerciful" (Rom. i. 28-31). And what God did of old He does to-day. The evils of modern society are the symptoms of social orders under judgment. God may be replaced in the thought of men by an evolutionary concept but He cannot be mocked.

Tragedy develops when Christians, through ignorance, ally themselves to one or another of the materialistic or pantheistic conceptions of society and do not concern themselves to discover the Biblical view of man in society. The need is urgent for Christian sociologists to rediscover the great Biblical principles of social conduct and to teach and preach them—if the world will not heed, the failure lies then with the world.

The Scriptures are not a text-book setting out in neat, precise paragraphs the social principles of the true life; they have to be elucidated by patient study, but of prime and monumental significance is the fact of a transcendent, "vertical," absolute ethic—God's revealed law. The law addresses society either as a divine code expressly and explicitly given in written revelation or as a common fundamental ethic made known to the Gentile heart and conscience (cf. Rom. ii. 14). When the prophet of old cried: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah vi. 8), he was appealing to a common cognition of eternal, moral imperatives. Justice is not a relative thing, It shines, like mercy, like godliness, in its own light. It belongs to the given-ness of things. One of the ghastly experiences of men under régimes enforcing an extreme evolutionary social order (such as communism) is the process of "conditioning" the minds of men, of warping and twisting the faculties so that the innate sense of a transcendent justice is effaced and eradicated.

The Christian view of society divides about the church and the world. The church, in Christ, is the light of the world and

must in the power of the Holy Spirit reprove the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. There is no promise of the world heeding universally, no promise of a world-wide repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ, but there is a promise, to be fulfilled when the Gospel of Christ's love and redemption has been proclaimed among all nations, of a coming in power of the God-Man to judge and rule the nations of the world, and history moves to that consummation. But the hand of God the Creator and Redeemer of men controls the movement and determines the end—it is not a blind evolutionary process.

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