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Retrieved 02/27/2023 from libertarian-labyrinth.org
Published in *Egoism* 1 no. 2 (June 1890), p.5.

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By the law of the Three Stages, so elaborately set forth by Auguste Comte, we are told that every science, each branch of knowledge, passes through three different theoretical conditions; the theological, or mythical; the metaphysical, or speculative; and the positive or scientific. "Hence," said Comte, "arises three philosophies, or general systems of conceptions on the aggregate of phenomena, each of which excludes the other. The first is the necessary point of departure of the human understanding; and the third is its fixed, or definite, state; the second is merely a state of transition."

This generalization is strikingly illustrated in the metaphysical character of current discussions of social problems, which are everywhere in the crucible of analysis. Every passage from one social system to another is accompanied by a transitional stage wherein scientific convictions are not yet reached and the old figments of the imaginative stage still survive to figure as metaphysical entities supposed in some way to control phenomena and determine events.

An illustration may be cited. The imaginative conception of the Nile and the Ganges as deities gave place later to more abstract conceptions. In the metaphysical stage this passed through a still further abstraction and became the Aqueous Principle. Thus in the middle age, the properties of water, such as being wet, were deemed fully accounted for by stating that its cause was the nature of Aquosity. Words were taken for events and endowed with generative causation. In the historical field this method has had full play, and to it we are indebted in no small degree for the incoherence distinguishing the political and social world.

The philosophy of history in its highest conception embraces not only the study of civilization and the underlying ideas which determine and interpret its course, but the search for its ultimate end, the true theory of order and progress, and a synthetic grouping of the phenomena of social life. Has human history any comprehensive significance? What is the law of progress? Is the evolution of social life interpretable by reason? In these great questions, it will at once be seen, exists the opportunity for the freest display of speculative inquiry. The first and most obvious interpretation of the phenomena of social life, was that of a direct guidance by divine providence in human affairs, watching over and determining all human actions; and even today the press groans beneath the works unceasingly turned out by

> "Those pseudo Privy-Councillors of God
>
> Who write down judgments with a pen hard-nibbed,"

by whom the workings of the almighty mind are as familiarly understood as the fluctuations on 'Change.

Later, we metaphysically personalized Nature and glibly talked of natural laws, natural rights, etc. Though the nasal

accent had been dropped, the words had not even the significance of the old myth, for Nature remained but a word to represent the unceasing flux of events, without will or power save as human thought subjectively created it. They fail to realize that the correlations existing in logic are not necessarily real, objective, the subjective requirements of thought not carrying with them absolute existence outside of and beyond relations.

On the one hand science analyzes the feelings and sentiments, and subjects them to a microscopic study, submitting them to the law of averages, considering them as relations and reducing them to their phenomenal manifestations. On the other hand dogmatic theology and its progeny, metaphysics, searching after final causes turns its back on present needs of social existence. The one uses the microscope for increasing our knowledge of specialties; the other a speculative telescope for extra-mundane life. Science in freeing itself from the finite speculations of relative minds that law is an expression of will, rather than a generalization describing mode of action, in short, as an objective causative will acting in phenomena, instead of being merely an ideal conception of the phenomena themselves classified according to their resemblance to other phenomena, has been slow in extending its sway into the field of sociology.

The positive, or scientific method consists in three phases: first, observations of *facts;* second, their classification into generalizations, or *laws;* third, *verification.*

Turning from the historical to the social sphere, nowhere do we find greater the prevalence of incoherence than in political-economical questions. The same metaphysical conception of laws as an active force or creative energy in the renovation of society prevails today as in the time of the French economists of the last century. It forms but a part of the characteristic discord of the present regime, wherein the thousand and one

quack remedies submitted for the redress of social ills attest the inability of prevalent methods to grapple with the problems.

The age is teeming with schemes, as before the French revolution, to secure the natural rights of those who feel their equal freedom abridged. Read the French economists, the debates in the parliaments, in the National Convention, and we find the remedy in–organizing liberty! By this mysterious and undefined principle, undefined save in metaphysical terms, all wrongs were to be righted, all ills redressed. Does the tenure of land cripple agricultural development? Does the industrial policy restrict manufactures? Does monopoly over capital limit exchange? In reply they set up abstract man, the isolated individual, without historical connection with the past or social ties with his fellows, and demanded for him metaphysical "natural rights."

The modern, or scientific method starting with facts explores the world for past and present social relations. From their collaboration we rise to the generalization that society is more equitable precisely as social relations are unhampered by interference. As generalization from facts constitutes scientific "law," we are led to posit the "law of equal freedom" as the true basis for social activity. Verification of this is unceasingly being developed, hence in sociology all rights are equal, all laws social; evolved, not conferred. To assert a "right" is but the negative form of stating that equal privilege is demanded because denied. In short equality of rights, of privilege, eliminates rights. The law of equal freedom being the product of social evolution, each age determines for itself its application. Regarded from the ethical standpoint truth is no longer spelled with a capital initial T, but becomes adaptation to environment; like all else, relative.

While we are social beings, the product of an evolved social environment, our moral sense the growing conception of an external self, still the basis of all social relations, rights, truth, ethics, becomes in the last analysis primarily the assertion of

the individual within the lines of equal freedom, asserting for each equal right for unequal capacity, which necessarily carries with it respect for and the same assertion of the equal right of others. Mutual interests are thus seen to be not only based but furthered by self-interest, and both God and Nature relegated to the limbo of past personalizations, survivals of a more childish form of thought.

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