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[106]

# Herbert Spencer's Philosophy.*)

When a scientific endeavor is called philosophical, there may be two apparently very different characteristics that entitle it to this name. Either it is because it has a decidedly critical character, turns doubtingly and probingly against previously established presuppositions and results, or because it seeks to gather all the results and points of view of knowledge into one fundamental view, and thus by virtue of its systematic character. Yet these qualities do not exclude one another; to a certain degree they are found united in every thinker, only that according to his character and the age in which he lives, either criticism or system will predominate, — and the ideal perfection of philosophy would be a thoroughgoing criticism and an all-embracing system. It is also easy to show that criticism and system point to one another reciprocally. Criticism is distinction, analysis. It cannot rest, then, until it has found all the elements, all the sides in the nature of the objects with which it is occupied. But neither can thought settle down to rest in what is separated and incoherent; the results of criticism and analysis are therefore used in turn as stones
[107] for a new building, which is the firmer and surer the deeper and more thorough the preceding criticism has been. These two different tendencies are for thinking what inhalation and exhalation are for the organism, both equally indispensable, and on their rhythmic alternation the health of thought depends.

In general it will surely be thought that in our time the movement goes predominantly in the critical direction. Our time, uncertain as it is of itself in theory as in practice, a period of doubt and pessimism, seems not favorable to systems and syntheses. And yet there may be, in secret, through contributions from many different sides, a store of stones gathered for a building which some day — however it may go with the provisional sketches — will be able to rise as a mighty temple, an expression of all the ideal strivings of the human mind.

Whoever compares the nineteenth century with its predecessor will not be able to deny that they stand to one another as system to criticism. The history of the eighteenth century is a process of dissolution; the nineteenth strives, in many different forms, after organization. As far as philosophy in particular is concerned, the most

*) In essentials a lecture, delivered at the Students' Association on 13 February 1875.

important attempts in the eighteenth century — Locke, Condillac, and Kant — have a decidedly critical and analytic character, whereas the systematic tendency in our century is likewise represented by the most eminent thinkers among the three principal nations: Hegel, Comte, and Spencer. We find here one and the same fundamental task treated in three different ways.

For Hegel, who takes his stand on the standpoint of a priori speculation, it is the life of thought that pulsates in everything. The stages that thought passes through in order to reach its perfection in the concept are one with those through which all reality unfolds: the two movements coincide. Although Hegel starts from the purely logical, he has nevertheless seized the fruitful point of view of seeing this as *[108]* movement, process, development; thereby it became possible for him to attempt a systematization of the whole content of knowledge. But even if he was right in his conception of the process of thought, he was nevertheless not right in transferring without further ado the laws valid for this process to the real.

Comte sought to free himself from all speculation and took his stand on the standpoint of positive science. He wished to explain man by the world, not the world by man. And yet he is related to Hegel by his decided systematic tendency, his striving for and sense of totality.[*)] He wished to abolish the isolation of the individual sciences by gathering their principles and results in a general classification, in order to show how they finally merge into the one, all-embracing science: the science of humanity. His fault becomes the opposite of Hegel's: with the latter the manifoldness of reality was violently pressed under the unity of thought; with Comte the unity of thought is lost in the manifoldness of reality, for mere classification cannot bring about a real unity.

Spencer's attempt, with which we are here to occupy ourselves more closely, stands in a way midway between Hegel's and Comte's. Philosophy, he says, is knowledge developed into unity and wholeness. We have thus not reached the goal as long as the individual sciences and their content still, as with Comte, form a series; we must find one common law, one principle, in which all that we know finds its expression. But this principle Spencer does not find, like Hegel, immediately in the very nature of thought. He finds it by the way of induction, by comparison of phenomena in all *[109]* the different domains, just as Kepler in his day found his famous laws by observing

[*)] Hegel and Comte expressed mutual sympathy for each other's endeavors, admittedly without exhaustive knowledge of them. See Comte's correspondence with Eichthal in Littré: Auguste Comte et la philosophie positive.

the planet Mars at different points of its orbit. But what thus proves to be a general law, valid for all phenomena, must then also prove to stand in the most intimate connection with the ultimate principles of our knowledge as a whole.

We understand a phenomenon only when we can follow it from its first beginning and through the various stages of its development. Just as knowledge of a people means knowledge of its history, knowledge of a man, knowledge of his family, childhood, youth, and manhood, so we also know a tree or an animal only when we know how they gradually unfold from the invisible germs, and a chemical substance when we know of what elements it is composed. Now it is clear that when a phenomenon arises, this means that elements which before existed in a scattered state are gathered and combined in a peculiar way. Water arises through a certain definite combination of oxygen and hydrogen atoms, the plant and the animal through organic assimilation of certain chemical substances, a man's character through the interaction between his innate and inherited nature and the external conditions, etc. Every phenomenon thus arises through a process of concentration. The individual elements lose their independent and autonomous motion and are brought for a time into equilibrium in a certain definite way. But only for a time. For as every phenomenon passes through a process of evolution, so it also passes through a dissolution. Concentration brings the parts into equilibrium; but this does not last, it is superseded by a scattering of the elements that for a time had combined to form a peculiar whole. The history of every phenomenon consists in a process of evolution and a process of dissolution.

Yet we can characterize these processes somewhat more closely. When evolution is
*[110]* a concentration of previously scattered elements, then it is clear in the first place that it denotes a transition from a less coherent to a more coherent state. According to the Kant-Laplacean hypothesis our solar system has thus evolved by the original nebular mass contracting to form individual globes. The evolution of the earth consists in a condensation. Organic life rests on the close coherence of the elements that are taken up from the surrounding world through nutrition. Human society is at its lowest stage a horde of savages, which not only lacks inner coherence but is also isolated from other societies; the further evolution advances, the more coherence there is within the single people and among all the single peoples mutually.

That which is thus brought into closer coherence in the course of evolution passes over, in the second place, from a homogeneous to a heterogeneous state. In the original nebular mass there were no essential differences; these arise only with the concentration of the individual globes. In the evolution of the earth an opposition

first forms between crust and core, then on the crust itself an opposition between mountains and plains, seas and continents. In the evolution of the organism as well as of society there sets in a division of labor, a thoroughgoing specialization of tasks and functions.

In the third place, evolution consists in a transition from the indefinite to the definite. Order everywhere supersedes chaos; pronounced individual forms take shape: thus the different globes, the different nations, estates, and personalities.

These three laws, different forms of the general law of evolution, are the main points of view to which every consideration of phenomena leads us. They are the general generalizations of all our experience. But the question now arises whether a deeper foundation and derivation of these laws might not be possible, just as the *[111]* Keplerian laws first received their proper foundation when Newton traced them back to the law of gravitation.

Every phenomenon we necessarily refer to some earlier phenomenon; in this consists, as we have seen, the explanation we can attain of phenomena; explanation of a phenomenon is the demonstration of its development. The one link in the infinite series of phenomena illuminates the other. The fundamental activity of consciousness is a constant transition from one sensation or idea to another. But then it is also clear that our consciousness can function only, or in other words, that we can only think, so long as such a transition from one link to another is possible. A phenomenon of such a nature that in its appearance and in its whole being it entirely fails to cohere with or point to anything whatever else, is an impossibility that we cannot even construct for our imagination. The fundamental presupposition of thinking is therefore that there is no absolute beginning or end, — no transition from nothing to something or from something to nothing: such a transition would indeed be self-contradictory, would be a relation with only one term!

If an absolute coming-to-be and passing-away is impossible, then the sum of matter must also always be the same, and motion must be continuous. Matter we know only through the resistance it offers to our movement, and motion only through the change it brings about in our consciousness: the concept of force thus lies at the basis of our concepts of matter and motion, and the persistence of force is therefore the fundamental presupposition on which all knowledge rests. The proposition that force persists is the only one that goes beyond all experience, because it lies at the basis of all experience.

Modern chemistry and physics have indeed proved that the material elements

never become nothing, but at every disappearance of a body merely pass over into
[112] new combinations, and that no force becomes nothing, but through its apparent disappearance is only converted into another force. But the proposition of the persistence of force itself cannot be proved inductively, for the simple reason that every induction presupposes it. Every chemical and physical experiment rests on this proposition: as soon as anything is to be weighed or measured, a unit of force must be laid at the basis; but if this unit of force could change, the result of the experiment would be illusory. All scientific research therefore proceeds from this presupposition.

The deepest foundation, then, that we can obtain for any empirical law consists in tracing it back to the proposition of the persistence of force. Let us then look again at the laws of evolution of phenomena. Originally the elements are scattered in a homogeneous mass. But since the individual parts of this receive different influences from their surroundings, they will gradually themselves also become different. For if different forces acting from outside had the same influence on the homogeneous elements, this would conflict with the persistence of force: the difference of the forces would not manifest itself in a difference in the effect. And when differences thus form within the originally homogeneous mass, then on the other hand the same force will have different effects on the different parts. These two propositions: that different forces exert different influence on homogeneous parts, and that the same force exerts different influence on different parts, — both of which spring from the fundamental principle of the persistence of force, — contain the ground of the process of evolution as a transition from indefinite and incoherent homogeneity to definite, pronounced, and coherent heterogeneity.

The process of evolution does not now last forever. At last a state is reached
[113] in which there is equilibrium between the phenomenon and its surroundings. The forces acting from outside no longer work toward evolution; the individual elements have now lost their independent motion; no further advance can then be made in the direction of concentration. But equilibrium is only the beginning of dissolution: for the external forces do not cease to act, and their influence will now consist in the elements being scattered and passing over again into independent motion. This too follows directly from the persistence of force. When dissolution has then reached its completion, external forces will again be able to act concentratingly — and so on ad infinitum.

The life of the universe in all its parts and forms is thus an infinite succession of evolution and dissolution. This is the most general law to which experience can lead

us, and it finds, as we have seen, its foundation in the fundamental law of our own consciousness.

But Spencer maintains most emphatically that we do not thereby reach beyond the phenomenal and the relative. The Absolute, that which is in and for itself, we can neither imagine nor think: the activity of our consciousness is indeed a transition from one term to another — but the Absolute, that which is complete and closed in itself, admits of no such transition, since it has nothing outside itself. Nevertheless we are compelled to assume an absolute principle: otherwise the relative and conditioned itself would become absolute. There must exist something other than mere limits and conditions. We have moreover seen that beneath all the changing of phenomena, their origin and dissolution, there yet remains something — force in itself, which can neither begin nor cease. The Absolute, that which exists in itself, is the force that stirs in everything, — whose nature we neither know nor can know, but which we must assume as the ultimate ground and presupposition of everything that we can know.

*[114]* As science thus recognizes that, however far it may reach in knowledge of the coherence of phenomena, it will never be able to reach the deep source from which they well forth, while yet we are of necessity led to assume its existence, a union with the religious consciousness becomes possible. The religions too maintain that the core of existence is a mystery to men, — but they at the same time entangle themselves in the contradiction of claiming to be in possession of very exact information about this mystery. The fetish worshipper has the Absolute before him in the block of wood or the stone, which he beats when it will not hear him; at higher stages it is the animal or human shape in which it is clothed; the history of the world is still for many the autobiography of the absolute mind. Against all positive forms of religion Fichte is right when he says that a God we could comprehend would not be a God, but an idol. Through the history of the religions one can also trace a progressing consciousness of this truth. But to this very day the so-called pious, who cling to the traditional finite expressions for the Unconditioned and, in order to maintain these, harden themselves against the results of science, thereby making themselves guilty of the worst unbelief: the fear that truth might be harmful, — are these so-called pious less religious than the investigator, who knows that all such forms are only symbols?

Also on this decisive point Spencer takes a position that lies midway between Hegel and Comte. Hegel finds in the speculative concepts, in which the core of existence is exhaustively known, the truth of positive religion contained as well. Comte, on the other hand, regarded the religious standpoint as completely overcome;

the only religion that could now be in question was, according to his conviction, the Religion of Humanity, which consists in the heartfelt, even mystical devotion to
[115] humanity and its evolution. Spencer maintains against this that the religious feeling will always turn toward an absolute ground of all existence, only that it must give up every attempt to teach us anything about this absolute ground. The universe itself in its richness and in its infinite rhythmic motion is the only revelation of the eternal, unknowable force that stirs in everything.

Although I wish here only to present Spencer's line of thought and not my own position toward it, I cannot withhold the remark that Spencer will hardly be able to keep the concept of evolution wholly apart from all application to the Absolute. When it is a fundamental law of everything that it passes through evolution and dissolution, then the core of existence cannot be entirely foreign to this movement. Without wishing to venture upon new speculative adventures, we can nevertheless, and we seem bound to, assume that the rhythmic movement has significance for the absolute principle itself. It is just as justified to designate this as the principle of evolution as to use the expression force about it; the law of evolution has indeed, according to Spencer, the same universality and necessity as the concept of force. Only under this presupposition does the religious feeling also seem able to see the universe as a real revelation of the Unconditioned; and only under this presupposition can resignation to the laws of the world become a source of new enthusiasm and striving.

Spencer himself has, moreover, given expression to this enthusiasm in the following statement, called forth by the opposition in which the investigator always feels himself to stand toward the adherents of the positive religions, however much he may recognize, or perhaps precisely because he recognizes, the relatively justified element in their faith. "He [the advanced thinker] may, like any other man, rightly regard himself as one of the countless organs through which the unknown cause works, and when the unknown cause produces a certain conviction in him, he is thereby
[116] authorized to express it in speech and action. For — to apply the poet's words in their highest sense —

> Nature, after all, cannot
> be improved by any means that Nature
> has not itself created; and above this art,
> which, as you say, aids Nature,
> there is an art that Nature itself has created.
>
> **(Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale.)**

Therefore the wise man will not regard the conviction that stirs in him as accidental. He will without fear utter the highest truth he can see, because he knows that whatever the consequence may be, he thereby plays the right role in the world, — because he knows that if he *can* bring about the transformation he strives for, well! — if he *cannot*, also well, though not *so* well! (First principles 3d ed. p. 123)." Here Spencer evidently suggests another relation between the absolute principle and the process of evolution than in the determinations given above.

We return to the laws of evolution. It is in the organic and the social domain that it most strikingly shows itself. The periods of evolution are here shorter, the conditions more easily surveyed. It is here that the idea of evolution first dawned on thought, notably by attention being drawn to the development of the sciences and of social conditions through the ages and to the growth of the individual organism. In his first more considerable work, "Social Statics" (1850), Spencer already declared that the same law held for organic and social evolution. It is above all modern embryology, founded by Harvey, Wolff, and v. Baer, that gave him the impulse to one of his most important ideas: evolution as a transition from a homogeneous to a heterogeneous state. Step by step he was then led to apply this law to the universe as a whole.

Spencer was thus fully prepared to enter upon the grand hypothesis that Darwin put forward in his famous work on the origin of species (1859). Darwin also names *[117]* him here as one of his predecessors. But Spencer in this question does not place the chief weight on the same factor as Darwin. The latter regards the distinct species as having arisen, in the struggle for life continued through countless generations, in that in every generation the individuals that are not suited and do not have the strength to maintain their existence in the face of their surroundings succumb, are displaced by the stronger or more fit, and are excluded from reproduction. Since the race thus continually propagates itself through the individuals most fit to live under the given conditions, a form will gradually evolve that is in as good harmony with the conditions as possible. This is what Darwin calls natural selection or the selection of quality. According to Spencer Darwin has laid too much weight on this indirect evolution. He himself takes his starting point from the experience that exercise, function, develops the organ. When a muscle is frequently used, it needs more nourishment; more blood then flows to it than before, and it will thereby increase in size. Now there is indeed in the single individual a definite limit to this increase; a point comes where the blood vessels are not large enough to yield the required increased supply. But it is also a fact that a structure developed by increased function can be inherited

by the descendants. One generation then continues what the preceding has begun, and thus the organization can step by step be developed into such a form as the external conditions require. Function may *in this respect* be said to precede structure. The lowest organisms, e.g. the Rhizopods, are thus examples of life and functioning without real organization[*].

*[118]* Spencer admits that the indirect process of evolution, which consists in the perishing of the imperfect individuals and the propagation of the race through the more perfect, plays a great part, especially the lower the organism stands. But the more developed the organic form is, the more will the direct process of evolution, by which one generation hands over to the next the results of its struggles and experiences, deposited in the organization, take the place of the indirect. This happens in particular when a nervous and muscular system has developed, and with it the capacity to vary actions according to circumstances. When the organism is strong enough, it will be able to adjust itself; only when it is too weak does it perish.

According to Spencer the choice here lies only between the theory of evolution and the theory of creation. Either the species have developed according to natural laws under the interaction of natural conditions, or else each species has been created separately after a fixed type. To leave the whole question open cannot be done in the long run; and when one in one's view of the world at all relies on natural causes, the choice between evolution and creation cannot be difficult. Creation is even in the last instance unthinkable, cannot even be constructed for the imagination: it expresses a transition from nothing to something, — which, as we have already shown, conflicts with the fundamental law of our thought and consciousness. One may therefore say that no one in reality believes in a creation; for in order to believe one must at
*[119]* least really be able to imagine what one is to assume, but that is here impossible. One believes that one believes[*]. And how many particular difficulties the hypothesis of creation would not lead to! The Creator would have had to hold fast to a type, even where it was unsuitable; the seal, e.g., would have been created for its present habitat and yet would have the limbs of a mammal, which under the hypothesis of evolution becomes quite explicable, when one thinks of the seal as a land animal that

[*]It is of course not Spencer's meaning that function can be independent of structure. In that case
*[118]* G. H. *Leves* would be right in his polemic against the proposition that function precedes structure. (Fortnigthtly Review. New Serie, vol. IV p. 69—73). What Spencer means is surely only that function can become the cause of the development of new structural relations, which agrees directly with experience. See his "Principles of biology", I p. 185—199.

[*]Cf. *Feuerbach's* epigram "Potenzirter Glaube": Auf der höchsten Potenz steht jetzt in den Frommen der Glaube; Denn es wird ja sogar selber der Glaube geglaubt.

has gradually accommodated itself to life in the sea. It would, finally, follow directly from the hypothesis of creation that certain species were destined to inflict pain and destruction on others. The hypothesis of evolution, which does not at all enter upon the transcendent cause, sees in the pain and struggle of organic life one of the most important driving wheels that lead forward to greater harmony; it certainly cannot — any more than any other doctrine can — tell us why pain and want are necessary driving wheels in the life of the world; but it relieves us of the belief that they should have been produced by design[**)].

The hypothesis of evolution brings, moreover, as we have already seen, all the *[120]* domains of our knowledge into a magnificent coherence. The history of the solar system, of the globe, of the organism, of language, of science and of human society falls under one and the same general law. Under this general law the phenomena of the life of consciousness also fall. Psychology is only a part of biology, which in turn is a detached part of geology, just as this again is a special part of astronomy. Our distinctions and boundaries are subjective and arbitrary in face of the infinite coherence of the universe. All is in continuity. Thus one can therefore not point out any definite point where the conscious life separates itself from the unconscious. The transition from the physiological to the psychological phenomena takes place through the increasing concentration of the nervous system, whereby the scattered influences are gathered and brought into connection with one another. Hereby a higher stage of the general life-process becomes possible: the impressions can now be compared and appraised, and a more composite and more adequate reaction thereby becomes possible on the part of the organism. The life of consciousness develops step by step from the lowest forms to the highest. In the lowest animals only dim sensation and next to no combination and comparison of the particular sensations is possible. It is,

[**)] On the occasion of the sharp opposition Spencer maintains between evolution and creation, he has had a little polemic with Gladstone. The famous statesman and scholar was willing enough to go along with the general laws and the natural causes, but he reproached science, and especially the hypothesis of evolution, with "entering into strife with Providence"; in particular he expressed the conviction that Providence in due time caused the great men to arise, and denied that this could be explained by natural laws alone. Spencer compares Gladstone's polemic against natural explanation with the Greeks' indignation at the physical conception of the heavenly bodies and their motions. Especially in the domain of social and personal life the natural and the theological conceptions run side by side in our time, without the contradiction being noticed. "We proved our national skill in entertaining ideas that mutually cancel each other, when an unpopular prince suddenly won popularity by passing through certain morbid changes in his blood, and when on the occasion of his recovery we *[120]* at one and the same time acknowledged the help of Providence and the working of natural causes by a thanksgiving to God and a baronetcy for the physician." *Spencer*: The study of sociology. p. 392—394; 423—426.

accordingly, only very one-sided and limited relations of interaction with the external world that can here take place. Think, e.g., of the life of consciousness in an intestinal worm or an oyster. The richer the organization becomes, the more exact, many-sided
*[121]* and comprehensive becomes the interaction. The human mind penetrates the globe and the universe and has besides in itself a rich and manifold world. Compare the consciousness of that intestinal worm with Newton's, who propounds the laws of the universe, or with Shakespeare's, who probes the soul's deepest drives and thoughts. And yet the psychology of animals and of man shows us a continuous series of intermediate stages between these opposites.

It is the same within the human mind itself. The various so-called faculties — instinct, reason, observation, the concepts, memory etc. — designate only different degrees or forms of one and the same process. From the simplest combination of sensations or presentations up to the most abstract and intricate scientific reasoning it is one and the same fundamental activity that manifests itself: namely, observation of likeness and unlikeness between impressions or ideas. All thinking is a classification, and the development of mental life depends on how comprehensive, composite and exact this classification is. The highest form of thought, the quantitative or mathematical, owes its advantages over the other forms to the circumstance that it presupposes homogeneity in its objects and investigates only the relation between their magnitudes; but it consists in itself just as well in an observation of likeness and unlikeness as the most elementary sense-perception.

The prevailing tendency within English philosophy, which in our day has had an outstanding representative in John Stuart Mill, was decidedly empiricism, i.e. it derived all knowledge from experience and conceived consciousness as a blank slate (tabula rasa), which was gradually written upon by impressions, which in turn were combined into ideas and concepts. Against this conception Spencer declares himself.
*[122]* If the mind, he says, prior to all experience is a tabula rasa, where does the capacity to organize and work up the experiences come from? and whence come the differences we find in this respect among different races and individuals? Why is a nervous system needed at all? But the most important point is that thoroughgoing empiricism would abolish the coherence and necessity of knowledge. If it is to be possible at all to learn from experience, we must have a principle, a criterion, by which we can measure it, and by virtue of which every progress in knowledge is made. This last criterion Spencer finds in the impossibility of the opposite. What we cannot think, what contains a self-contradiction, we cannot accept as true either. This is the test

to which we are referred back in every debate, and without which empiricism itself could not prove a single one of its propositions.

Although Spencer thus grants Leibniz and Kant that they are right in their polemic against empiricism, he considers it just as impossible to regard the forms of knowledge as fixed, implanted without influence from the surrounding world. The error of empiricism is that it will derive everything from *individual* experience. The insufficiency of this points us beyond the individual to the race. The single individual does not begin absolutely from the start; it has in its innate organization the results of the experiences of all earlier generations, in so far as they have passed into the structure. The universal and pervading forms in things must gradually produce corresponding forms in the organisms that in infinite series of ages have been subjected to their influence. The original forms of knowledge or the accumulated and transmitted structural modifications that are produced by experience, lie hidden in every newborn individual, stir in an indeterminate way at the first individual experiences and become gradually more determinately marked as such individual experiences are multiplied.

Spencer thus arrives at the result: a posteriori for the race, but a priori for the *[123]* individual; what is originally experience becomes, through the organization, principle. In this way he seeks to get beyond the opposition between the two main philosophical tendencies in modern times, beyond the strife between Locke and Kant.

Yet he still counts himself among Locke's school, because according to the hypothesis of evolution all knowledge stems from experience, only that it is the experience of the race, not of the individual. To this I must remark that Spencer's criticism of empiricism holds just as well when it is a question of the experience of the race as when it is a question of the individual's. In order that the race may have experiences, it must have an organization. Here an essential relation is in question, which is the same at every stage. Moreover both Kant and Locke treated the question exclusively from the standpoint of the individual. When Spencer here grants Kant that he is right, he stands evidently, with regard to the problem as a whole, nearer to the German philosopher than he stands to his English predecessors. Kant, after all, also teaches expressly that all our knowledge begins with experience; he denies only that it wholly and entirely arises from experience[*)]. Spencer introduces a wholly new standpoint in

[*)] In my more detailed exposition of Spencer's doctrine in the work "Den engelske Filosofi i vor Tid" I have already pointed out that Spencer, despite his own declaration, must be said to stand nearer to Kant than to Locke (p. 170 f.). From the later published 3rd volume of Spencer's "Essays" I see that *Max Müller* has made a similar remark. (p. 275: "In admitting that there is something in our mind, which is not the result of *our own* à posteriori experience, Mr. Spencer is a thorough Kantian").

the treatment of the problem of knowledge; therefore it is difficult or impossible to refer him to any of the tendencies into which earlier thought has split in the debate on
[124] this problem. I cannot see otherwise than that by this new standpoint he has brought the whole question a considerable step forward*).

If it thus holds of man's knowledge that it becomes intelligible only when one goes beyond the single individual and sees him in his intimate connection with the whole race, it nevertheless finds application in still higher degree when it is a question of drive, feeling and will. Drive and feeling stir in the individual before he has made any experience that could produce them; this holds in particular of the strongest of all drives, the sexual drive. The ultimate motives of human action must be sought in the fundamental drives that the race has acquired in the course of its development. No insight, however clear, compels action except by calling forth a sufficiently strong and lasting feeling. It is thus not true that ideas rule the world. Ideas serve only as leaders; it is the individual and national character that determines whether the leader is followed. Ideas come into being mainly through the work of individuals and therefore cannot directly overcome the deep and mighty impulses that propagate themselves down through the race. It follows also of itself that no ideas can arise that stand in complete opposition to the prevailing character. When higher ideas have developed, they certainly contribute to further development and advance. But the most important factor is and remains the very adjustment to the natural and social conditions that every generation must attempt. Character is developed only by action, and action is called forth by the real conditions. True education — within the family
[125] as within the nation as a whole — must therefore consist in this, that individuals are kept in interaction with the actual conditions.

But this insight is, according to Spencer, very far from being general. Of all the prejudices that hinder sound thinking in the domain of education and social life, none is more widespread and more harmful than the one that parents and governments can accomplish something positive. By interfering directly they only hinder the natural interaction between individuals and their surroundings. They have only to see to it that the necessary conditions are present for the individual's existence and development. The presupposition from which one generally proceeds is that the virtues are found in the rulers, the vices in the ruled. One looks solely to the *ordering*

*)From an interesting letter from *Stuart Mill* of 29 January 1872 to the physiologist *Carpenter*, which is quoted in the latter's "Mental Fysiology" p. 486, one sees that the greatest representative of pure empiricism in our time, toward the end of his life, approached a view similar to Spencer's.

force and forgets that what is essential must nevertheless always be the very thing that is *ordered*.

The modern reformers, who think they can save humanity by their systems of instruction or constitutions of the state, are entangled in no less error than the conservatives and reactionaries; both parties have this in common, that they would bring individuals under tutelage. It is a sort of fetish worship of the governing power that has developed, and with which radicals and Tories are equally infected. Men cannot, after all, produce new forces; they must work with the means that Nature gives. The character of society rests on the character of the individuals by whose union it exists. But this character is not changed all at once by being trained in certain intellectual skills[*)] or by being brought into a certain system fetched from outside. *[126]* Just as little as one can escape the influence of gravity by placing one's limbs in a certain definite position, just as little can men hope to escape the wickedness that weighs them down by arranging themselves according to this or that political pattern. One constantly overlooks the hidden forces working in the depths and stares at the forms and factors that move on the surface.

Primitive man had to have wild and egoistic instincts in order to be able to survive in the hard struggle against Nature, the animals and his equals. When a society began to form, — an important means for carrying on this same struggle, — certain bonds were imposed on individuals that were necessary if society as a whole was to exist. That society and those individuals advanced furthest and survived best in the struggle among whom the adjustment to the demands of social life proceeded furthest. The egoistic instincts therefore did not long remain sole rulers; the sympathetic drives, which even from the first have so deep a ground in the relation of the sexes and in the relation between parents and children, had to increase more and more in strength and extent. The one respects the right of the other and perhaps even works unselfishly for his welfare. Egoism thus passes over into altruism, to use Comte's apt expression, and the ideal of social development, which also contains the ethical ideal, is a condition in which all work together, each according to his individuality and with as much freedom as can exist with the freedom of all others.

But this is a condition to which only natural development can lead. The govern-

[*)] "Ignorance and crime are not cause and effect, but effects of one and the same cause. To be *wholly* without knowledge means to have lived among people who have the strongest impulses to crime; to have received *some* instruction means to belong to a class that is subject to less strong temptations; to be *well* instructed means to have lived under conditions where the usual motives to crime hardly stir." *[126]* *Spencer*: Social Statics. p. 379 f.

ment is to see only to security and justice, the fundamental conditions for development to be able to proceed. Certainly in society as in every organism a certain organization,
[127] a certain structure is necessary. But the less this proceeds from the very nature and interaction of the elements, the more artificial and imposed from above it is, the greater the obstacle that progressive development will have to overcome through it. The development of language and economic development, the producing, exchanging and distributing processes, are examples of results that have been reached by a natural route, where each individual, working under the given conditions and according to natural ends, produced results that lay far beyond the individual horizon both in extent and in significance. As the egoistic instincts are pushed back, unselfish endeavors on the part of individuals, or free associations of individuals, will also throw their weight into the scale and accomplish what the former could not. The state, which cannot even manage its principal task, an impartial and energetic upholding of right and security, can still less accomplish anything in other domains and will in any case do more harm than good. Humanity is in a state of transition; it is to lay aside its original robber nature and become fitted for perfect social life. And this state of transition must necessarily be unhappy: all unhappiness consists in disagreement between the inner organization and the external conditions. But the sufferings must be gone through. They can be alleviated by sympathy, by the love that helps others to help themselves; but a certain measure of suffering is unavoidable. To intervene violently would precisely increase and prolong the suffering. There are larvae that live in the water and breathe by gills, but in which lungs are already developing here for use in a later period of the animal's life. Before the lungs are fully developed, the animal cannot do without the gills; one would kill it, if one suddenly wished to put an end to the inconsistency of having lungs and gills at once. And so it goes also in
[128] the development of social life; we can retard it by directly intervening, but we cannot hasten it in any other way than by asserting the influence of the natural conditions. And even in the sufferings that thereby necessarily set in, he who fixes his gaze on development and its goal as a whole will recognize a fighting love.

Spencer's ethical and sociological views are not yet available in worked-out form. Of his philosophical system, which is to comprise 10 volumes, exactly half remains, which is to contain the principles of sociology and ethics[*)]. But the general character and direction are clearly apparent from what we know. The first point I will emphasize

[*)] The first five volumes are: First Principles, Principles of Biology (2 vols.) and Principles af Psychology (2 vols.).

is that Spencer aims at an altogether objective, strictly causal conception of human social life. He is not, as Stuart Mill is in all his social and political essays, at the same time a reformer. This must be kept well in view. He has been accused of fatalism, because he lays so much weight on the fact that human development is a natural development, and recently a disciple of Stuart Mill has cited against him the following words of the latter: "Political institutions are the work of men, owe their origin and their whole existence to human will. Men do not wake up one fine morning and find them grown up[**)]." But the question is, according to Spencer, precisely whether men do not in their very willing and acting obey a law of nature of which they are not conscious. He wishes here again to cite Shakespeare's words, that the art which is said to help Nature has its ground in an art that Nature herself has produced. And one will be forced to admit this, unless one will assert a concept of freedom of the will that bursts all lawfulness and coherence in the psychological and social domain.

Spencer's doctrine will not push back conscious striving and action either; it is *[129]* only the way and direction of this striving that the disagreement concerns. According to his conviction the true and full development of man's personal powers can take place only if one does not prevent the individual from coming face to face with the real conditions and taking up the struggle for existence under the real and actual circumstances. The task of the power of the state consists then for him, as for Wilhelm v. Humboldt, in an emancipation of individual freedom. On account of the conditions of development that are required for the social life-process as for every life-process, it is according to his conviction an illusion to expect considerable results in short periods[*)].

But it cannot be denied that Spencer overlooks the positive significance that the intervention of the power of the state may have for the attainment of the end toward which social development strives. Certainly he would hardly grant Buckle that "it would be to mock all sound reason, if one ascribed to legislation any share in progress *[130]*

[**)] *Cairnes*: Fortnightly Review. January 1875.

[*)] The famous embryologist *Ernst* v. *Baer*, from whom Spencer has learned so much, has come to a similar result by comparing social development with the organic. "Es prägte sich mir tief die Ueberzeugung ein, dass die socialen Entwickelungen nicht anders vor sich gehen können als die organischen, nämlich allmählich, und nur dann gesunde Gestalt gewinnen, wenn die Bedingungen dazu vorher vollständig gegeben waren und längere Zeit bestanden hätten … Die Männer, welcke vorwärts wollen, — und rückwärts zu wollen ist überhaupt gegen die Natur, — würden gut thun, ihre Gedanken recht viel an die Beachtung der organischen Entwickelungen zu gewöhnen." Nachricht über Leben und Schriften K. E. v. Baer's, mitgetheilt von ihm selbst. St. Petersburg 1865. p. 52. — In his latest work "The study of sociology" Spencer demands as a necessary preparation for occupation with the science of society the study of the exact sciences, of biology and psychology.

or expected from future legislators any other benefaction than the repeal of their predecessors' work;" — certainly he declares (in the preface to the second edition of "Social Statics") that he would now more than before stress the relative value of political institutions; — but one nevertheless misses in him the clear recognition of the educative significance of society. "There is," as I have expressed this in another place[*)], "still a long way to go before the truly natural development can set in. The state, by whose help man was led out of the animal state of nature, cannot let go of him before it has led him to the human state of nature." It is on this that the relative justification of the socialist ideas is grounded. Here too the solution of the oppositions lies in the idea of evolution; the opposition between individualism and socialism, which according to Stuart Mill's statement[**)] is diametrical, can be overcome only by both tendencies being conceived as mutually conditioning each other. But from such a solution we are still far away. Spencer's sociology, which moves predominantly in the theoretical domain, leads to a salutary skepticism toward all provisional attempts at solution, while it energetically points toward the most deeply working forces and the one essential goal.

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[*)] Den engelske Filosofi i vor Tid, p. 65.

[**)] John Stuart Mills Levnet fortalt af ham selv. Oversat af V. Arntzen, p. 259.