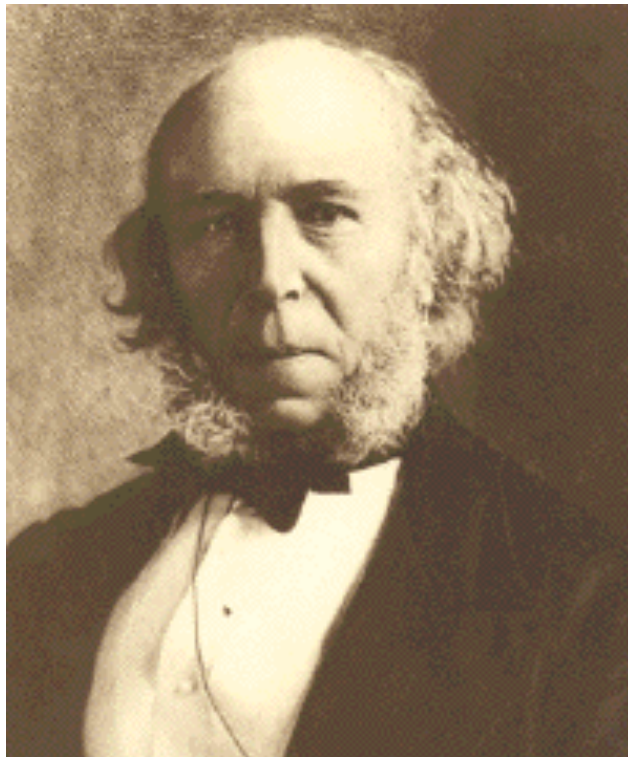


THE BEST OF THE OLL #55

Herbert Spencer, “Political Retrospect and Prospect” (1882)
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“Hence as fast as the régime of voluntary cooperation with its appropriate ideas, sentiments, and usages, pervades the whole society—as fast as there disappear all those arrangements which in any way trench upon the equal freedom of these or those citizens, party warfare must practically die away.”



Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)

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[September, 2013]

Editor's Introduction

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) was one of the leading 19th century English radical individualists. He began working as a journalist for the laissez-faire magazine *The Economist* in the 1850s. Much of the rest of his life was spent working on an all-encompassing theory of human development based upon the ideas of individualism, social and biological evolution, limited government, and laissez-faire economics. His works include *Social Statics* (1851) which is perhaps the first one volume account of the classical liberal perspective, *The Man versus the State* (1884) a critique of the growing statism of his age, *The Principles of Sociology* (1874-96) in which he develops his theory of the militant and the industrial types of society, and *The Principles of Ethics* (1897) his major work on the theory of individualist moral theory.

In this extract, after having developed his theory of the two different forms into which societies could develop, the militant or the industrial types of society (one based primarily on coercion and the other on voluntary transactions), Spencer turns to applying his theory to predict how the society in which he lived would develop in the near future. In the late 1870s and early 1880s when he was writing it seemed that European societies were tending away from war and the coercive "militant" types of political and economic structures which were its product, and were turning increasingly to more voluntary market-based or "industrial" types of societies. If this trend continued, he predicted that more and more activities which had been undertaken by the state would be supplied voluntarily by local communities or by the free market. If this trend were halted by the outbreak of another war or if people chose to align themselves with coercive trade unions or political parties then European societies would be regimented and subject to what he called "State-dictation" with the loss of prosperity and innovation which this entailed. He saw the dangers to liberty coming from a different direction in the United States, where he saw republican institutions increasingly coming under the control of corrupt "wirepulling politicians" would would wield real power in the name of the people.

Given the presence of both these forces at work in modern society, the industrial and the militant, Spencer believed that the only thing the advocate of liberty

could do was "to facilitate the action of forces tending to cause advance" and attempt to prevent "misdirection of them" tending to increase the power of the state.

"On the one hand, in the present state of armed preparation throughout Europe, an untoward accident may bring about wars which, lasting perhaps for a generation, will re-develop the coercive forms of political control. On the other hand, a long peace is likely to be accompanied by so vast an increase of manufacturing and commercial activity, with accompanying growth of the appropriate political structures within each nation, and strengthening of those ties between nations which mutual dependence generates, that hostilities will be more and more resisted and the organization adapted for the carrying them on will decay."

Chap. XIX.: Political Retrospect and Prospect (1882)¹

§ 576. In the foregoing chapters little has been said concerning the doctrine of Evolution at large, as re-illustrated by political evolution; though doubtless the observant reader has occasionally noted how the transformations described conform to the general law of transformation. Here, in summing up, it will be convenient briefly to indicate their conformity. Already in Part II, when treating of Social Growth, Social Structures, and Social Functions, the outlines of this correspondence were exhibited; but the materials for exemplifying it in a more special way, which have been brought together in this Part, may fitly be utilized to emphasize afresh a truth not yet commonly admitted.

“the loose aggregation of savages passes into the coherent connexion of citizens; at one stage coercively bound to one another and to their localities by family-ties and class-ties, and at a later stage voluntarily bound together by their mutually-dependent occupations. Once more, there is that merging of individual wills in a governmental will, which reduces a society, as it reduces an army, to a consolidated body.”

That under its primary aspect political development is a process of integration, is clear. By it individuals originally separate are united into a whole; and the union of them into a whole is variously shown. In the earliest stages the groups of men are small, they are loose, they are not unified by subordination to a centre. But with political progress comes the compounding, re-compounding, and re-re-compounding of groups until great nations are

produced. Moreover, with that settled life and agricultural development accompanying political progress, there is not only a formation of societies covering wider areas, but an increasing density of their populations. Further, the loose aggregation of savages passes into the coherent connexion of citizens; at one stage coercively bound to one another and to their localities by family-ties and class-ties, and at a later stage voluntarily bound together by their mutually-dependent occupations. Once more, there is that merging of individual wills in a governmental will, which reduces a society, as it reduces an army, to a consolidated body.

An increase of heterogeneity at the same time goes on in many ways. Everywhere the horde, when its members cooperate for defence or offence, begins to differentiate into a predominant man, a superior few, and an inferior many. With that massing of groups which war effects, there grow out of these, head chief, subordinate chiefs, and warriors; and at higher stages of integration, kings, nobles, and people: each of the two great social strata presently becoming differentiated within itself. When small societies have been united, the respective triune governing agencies of them grow unlike: the local political assemblies falling into subordination to a central political assembly. Though, for a time, the central one continues to be constituted after the same manner as the local ones, it gradually diverges in character by loss of its popular element. While these local and central bodies are becoming contrasted in their powers and structures, they are severally becoming differentiated in another way. Originally each is at once military, political, and judicial; but by and by the assembly for judicial business, no longer armed, ceases to be like the politico-military assembly; and the politico-military assembly eventually gives origin to a consultative body, the members of which, when meeting for political deliberation, come unarmed. Within each of these divisions, again, kindred changes subsequently occur. While themselves assuming more specialized forms, local judicial agencies fall under the control of a central judicial agency; and the central judicial agency, which has separated from the original consultative body, subdivides into parts or courts which take unlike kinds of business. The central political body, too, where

¹ Herbert Spencer, *Political Institutions, being Part V of the Principles of Sociology (The Concluding Portion of Vol. II)* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882). CHAPTER XIX.: Political Retrospect and Prospect. <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/1336/54835>>.

its powers do not disappear by absorption in those of the supreme head, tends to complicate; as in our own case by the differentiation of a privy council from the original consultative body, and again by the differentiation of a cabinet from the privy council: accompanied, in the other direction, by division of the consultative body into elective and non-elective parts. While these metamorphoses are going on, the separation of the three organizations, legislative, judicial, and executive, progresses. Moreover, with progress in these major political changes goes that progress in minor political changes which, out of family-governments and clan-governments, evolves such governments as those of the tything, the gild, and the municipality. Thus in all directions from primitive simplicity there is produced ultimate complexity, through modifications upon modifications.

With this advance from small incoherent social aggregates to great coherent ones, which, while becoming integrated pass from uniformity to multiformity, there goes an advance from indefiniteness of political organization to definiteness of political organization. Save inherited ideas and usages, nothing is fixed in the primitive horde. But the differentiations above described, severally beginning vaguely, grow in their turns gradually more marked. Class-divisions, absent at first and afterwards undecided, eventually acquire great distinctness: slaves, serfs, freemen, nobles, king, become separated often by impassable barriers, and their positions shown by mutilations, badges, dresses, &c. Powers and obligations which were once diffused are parted off and rigorously maintained. The various parts of the political machinery come to be severally more and more restricted in their ranges of duties; and usage, age by age accumulating precedents, brings every kind of official action within prescribed bounds. This increase of definiteness is everywhere well shown by the development of laws. Beginning as inherited sacred injunctions briefly expressed, these have to be applied after some prescribed method, and their meanings in relation to particular cases made clear. Rules of procedure become step by step detailed and formal, while interpretations change the general command into specialized commands to meet incidental circumstances; and gradually there grows up a legal system everywhere precise and fixed. How pronounced is this tendency is interestingly shown in our system of Equity, which, arising to qualify the unduly defined and rigid applications of Law, itself

slowly multiplied its technicalities until it grew equally defined and rigid.

“when joint action of the society against other societies decreases, the traits of the structure developed for carrying it on begin to fade; while the traits of the structure for carrying on production and distribution become more decided: the increasing cohesion, heterogeneity, and definiteness, begin now to be shown throughout the industrial organization. Hence the phenomena become complicated by a simultaneous evolution of one part of the social organization and dissolution of another part—a mingling of changes well illustrated in our own society.”

To meet an obvious criticism it must be added that these changes from societies which are small, loose, uniform, and vague in structure, to societies which are large, compact, multiform, and distinct in structure, present varieties of characters under varieties of conditions, and alter as the conditions alter. Different parts of a society display the transformation, according as the society's activities are of one or other kind. Chronic war generates a compulsory cohesion, and produces an ever-greater heterogeneity and definiteness in that controlling organization by which unity of action is secured; while that part of the organization which carries on production and distribution, exhibits these traits of evolution in a relatively small degree. Conversely, when joint action of the society against other societies decreases, the traits of the structure developed for carrying it on begin to fade; while the traits of the structure for carrying on production and distribution become more decided: the increasing cohesion, heterogeneity, and definiteness, begin now to be shown throughout the industrial organization.

Hence the phenomena become complicated by a simultaneous evolution of one part of the social organization and dissolution of another part—a mingling of changes well illustrated in our own society.

§ 577. With this general conception before us, which, without more detailed recapitulation of the conclusions reached, will sufficiently recall them, we may turn from retrospect to prospect; and ask through what phases political evolution is likely hereafter to pass.

Such speculations concerning higher political types as we may allow ourselves, must be taken with the understanding that such types are not likely to become universal. As in the past so in the future, local circumstances must be influential in determining governmental arrangements; since these depend in large measure on the modes of life which the climate, soil, flora, and fauna, necessitate. In regions like those of Central Asia, incapable of supporting considerable populations, there are likely to survive wandering hordes under simple forms of control. Large areas such as parts of Africa present, which prove fatal to the higher races of men, and the steaming atmospheres of which cause enervation, may continue to be inhabited by lower races of men, subject to political arrangements adapted to them. And in conditions such as those furnished by small Pacific Islands, mere deficiency of numbers must negative the forms of government which become alike needful and possible in large nations. Recognizing the fact that with social organisms as with individual organisms, the evolution of superior types does not entail the extinction of all inferior ones, but leaves many of these to survive in habitats not available by the superior; we may here restrict ourselves to the inquiry—What are likely to be the forms of political organization and action in societies that are favourably circumstanced for carrying social evolution to its highest stage?

Of course deductions respecting the future must be drawn from inductions furnished by the past. We must assume that hereafter social evolution will conform to the same principles as heretofore. Causes which have everywhere produced certain effects must, if they continue at work, be expected to produce further effects of like kinds. If we see that political transformations which have arisen under certain conditions, admit of being carried further in the same directions, we must conclude that they will be carried further if the conditions are maintained; and that they

will go on until they reach limits beyond which there is no scope for them.

Not indeed that any trustworthy forecast can be made concerning proximate changes. All that has gone before unites to prove that political institutions, fundamentally determined in their forms by the predominance of one or other of the antagonist modes of social action, the militant and the industrial, will be moulded in this way or in that way according as there is frequent war or habitual peace. Hence we must infer that throughout approaching periods, everything will depend on the courses which societies happen to take in their behaviour to one another—courses which cannot be predicted. On the one hand, in the present state of armed preparation throughout Europe, an untoward accident may bring about wars which, lasting perhaps for a generation, will re-develop the coercive forms of political control. On the other hand, a long peace is likely to be accompanied by so vast an increase of manufacturing and commercial activity, with accompanying growth of the appropriate political structures within each nation, and strengthening of those ties between nations which mutual dependence generates, that hostilities will be more and more resisted and the organization adapted for the carrying them on will decay.

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Leaving, however, the question—What are likely to be the proximate political changes in the most

advanced nations? and inferring from the changes which civilization has thus far wrought out, that at some time, more or less distant, the industrial type will become permanently established, let us now ask—What is to be the ultimate political *régime*?

§ 578. Having so recently contemplated at length the political traits of the industrial type as inferable *à priori*, and as partially exemplified *à posteriori* in societies most favourably circumstanced for evolving them, there remains only to present these under a united and more concrete form, with some dependent ones which have not been indicated. We will glance first at the implied political structures, and next at the implied political functions.

What forms of governmental organization must be the outcome of voluntary cooperation carried to its limit? We have already seen that in the absence of those appliances for coercion which accompany the militant type, whatever legislative and administrative structures exist, must be, in general and in detail, of directly or indirectly representative origin. The presence in them of functionaries not deriving their powers from the aggregate will, and not changeable by the aggregate will, would imply partial continuance of that *régime* of status which the *régime* of contract has, by the hypothesis, entirely replaced. But assuming the exclusion of all irresponsible agents, what particular structures will best serve to manifest and execute the aggregate will? This is a question to which only approximate answers can be given. There are various possible organizations through which the general *consensus* of feeling and opinion may display itself and issue in action; and it is very much a question of convenience, rather than of principle, which of these shall be adopted. Let us consider some of their varieties.

The representatives constituting the central legislature may form one body or they may form two. If there is but one, it may consist of men directly elected by all qualified citizens; or its members may be elected by local bodies which have themselves arisen by direct election; or it may include members some of whom are elected in the one way and some in the other. If there are two chambers, the lower one may arise in the first of the three ways named; while the second arises in one of several ways. It may consist of members chosen by local representative bodies; or it may be chosen by the lower chamber out of its own number. Its members may either have no test of

eligibility, or they may be required to have special qualifications: experience in administration, for example. Then besides these various forms of the legislature, there are the various modes in which it may be partially or wholly replaced. Entire dissolution and re-election of one body or of both bodies may occur at intervals, either the same for the two or different for the two, and either simultaneously or otherwise; or the higher body, though representative, may be permanent, while the lower is changeable; or the changing of one or both, at given intervals, may be partial instead of complete—a third or a fourth may vacate their seats annually or biennially, and may or may not be eligible for re-election. So, too, there are various modes by which the executive may originate consistently with the representative principle. It may be simple or it may be compound; and if compound, the members of it may be changeable separately or altogether. The political head may be elected directly by the whole community, or by its local governing bodies, or by one or by both of its central representative bodies; and may be so elected for a term or for life. His assistants or ministers may be chosen by himself; or he may choose one who chooses the rest; or they may be chosen separately or bodily by one or other legislature, or by the two united. And the members of the ministry may compose a group apart from both chambers, or may be members of one or the other.

Concerning these, and many other possible arrangements which may be conceived as arising by modification and complication of them (all apparently congruous with the requirement that the making and administration of laws shall conform to public opinion) the choice is to be guided mainly by regard for simplicity and facility of working. But it seems likely that hereafter, as heretofore, the details of constitutional forms in each society, will not be determined on *à priori* grounds, or will be but partially so determined. We may conclude that they will be determined in large measure by the antecedents of the society; and that between societies of the industrial type, there will be differences of political organization consequent on genealogical differences. Recognizing the analogies furnished by individual organizations, which everywhere show us that structures evolved during the earlier stages of a type for functions then requisite, usually do not disappear at later stages, but become remoulded in adaptation to functions more or less different; we may suspect that the political

institutions appropriate to the industrial type, will, in each society, continue to bear traces of the earlier political institutions evolved for other purposes; as we see that even now the new societies growing up in colonies, tend thus to preserve marks of earlier stages passed through by ancestral societies. Hence we may infer that societies which, in the future, have alike become completely industrial, will not present identical political forms; but that to the various possible forms appropriate to the type, they will present approximations determined partly by their own structures in the past and partly by the structures of the societies from which they have been derived. Recognizing this probability, let us now ask by what changes our own political constitution may be brought into congruity with the requirements.

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Though there are some who contend that a single body of representatives is sufficient for the legislative needs of a free nation, yet the reasons above given warrant the suspicion that the habitual duality of legislatures, of which the rudiments are traceable in the earliest political differentiation, is not likely to be entirely lost in the future. That spontaneous division of the primitive group into the distinguished few and the undistinguished many, both of which take part in determining the actions of the group—that division which, with reviving power of the undistinguished many, reappears when there is formed a body representing it, which cooperates with the body formed of the distinguished few in deciding on national affairs, appears likely to continue. Assuming that as a matter of

course two legislative bodies, if they exist hereafter, must both arise by representation, direct or indirect, it seems probable that an upper and a lower chamber may continue to display a contrast in some degree analogous to that which they have displayed thus far. For however great the degree of evolution reached by an industrial society, it cannot abolish the distinction between the superior and the inferior—the regulators and the regulated. Whatever arrangements for carrying on industry may in times to come be established, must leave outstanding the difference between those whose characters and abilities raise them to the higher positions, and those who remain in the lower. Even should all kinds of production and distribution be eventually carried on by bodies of cooperators, as a few are now to some extent, such bodies must still have their appointed heads and committees of managers. Either from an electorate constituted not, of course, of a permanently-privileged class, but of a class including all heads of industrial organizations, or from an electorate otherwise composed of all persons occupied in administration, a senate may perhaps eventually be formed consisting of representatives of directing persons as distinguished from the representatives of persons directed. Of course in the general government, as in the government of each industrial body, the representatives of the class regulated must be ultimately supreme; but there is reason for thinking that the representatives of the regulating class might with advantage exercise a restraining power. Evidently the aspect of any law differs according as it is looked at from above or from below—by those accustomed to rule or by those accustomed to be ruled. The two aspects require to be coordinated. Without assuming that differences between the interests of these bodies will, to the last, make needful different representations of them, it may reasonably be concluded that the higher, experienced in administration, may with advantage bring its judgments to bear in qualifying the judgments of the lower, less conversant with affairs; and that social needs are likely to be most effectually met by laws issuing from their joint deliberations. Far from suggesting an ultimate unification of the two legislative bodies, the facts of evolution, everywhere showing advance in specialization, suggest rather that one or both of such two bodies, now characterizing developed political organizations, will further differentiate. Indeed we have at the present moment indications that such a change is likely to take place in

our own House of Commons. To the objection that the duality of a legislative body impedes the making of laws, the reply is that a considerable amount of hindrance to change is desirable. Even as it is now among ourselves, immense mischiefs are done by ill-considered legislation; and any change which should further facilitate legislation would increase such mischiefs.

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Concerning the ultimate executive agency, it appears to be an unavoidable inference that it must become, in some way or other, elective; since hereditary political headship is a trait of the developed militant type, and forms a part of that *régime* of status which is excluded by the hypothesis. Guided by such evidence as existing advanced societies afford us, we may infer that the highest State-office, in whatever way filled, will continue to decline in importance; and that the functions to be discharged by its occupant will become more and more automatic. There requires an instrumentality having certain traits which we see in our own executive, joined with certain traits which we see in the executive of the United States. On the one hand, it is needful that the men who have to carry out the will of the majority as expressed through the legislature, should be removable at pleasure; so that there may be maintained the needful subordination of their policy to public opinion. On the other hand, it is needful that displacement of them shall leave intact all that part of the executive organization required for current administrative purposes. In our own case these requirements, fulfilled to a considerable extent, fall short of complete fulfilment in the respect that the political head is not elective, and still exercises, especially over the foreign policy of the nation, a

considerable amount of power. In the United States, while these requirements are fulfilled in the respect that the political head is elective, and cannot compromise the nation in its actions towards other nations, they are not fulfilled in the respect that far from being an automatic centre, having actions restrained by a ministry responsive to public opinion, he exercises, during his term of office, much independent control. Possibly in the future, the benefits of these two systems may be united and their evils avoided. The strong party antagonisms which accompany our state of transition having died away, and the place of supreme State-officer having become one of honour rather than one of power, it may happen that appointment to this place, made during the closing years of a great career to mark the nation's approbation, will be made without any social perturbation, because without any effect on policy; and that, meanwhile, such changes in the executive agency as are needful to harmonize its actions with public opinion, will be, as at present among ourselves, changes of ministries.

Rightly to conceive the natures and workings of the central political institutions appropriate to the industrial type, we must assume that along with the establishment of them there has gone that change just named in passing—the decline of party antagonisms. Looked at broadly, political parties are seen to arise directly or indirectly out of the conflict between militancy and industrialism. Either they stand respectively for the coercive government of the one and the free government of the other, or for particular institutions and laws belonging to the one or the other, or for religious opinions and organizations congruous with the one or the other, or for principles and practices that have been bequeathed by the one or the other, and survived under alien conditions. Habitually if we trace party feeling to its sources, we find on the one side maintenance of, and on the other opposition to, some form of inequity. Wrong is habitually alleged by this side against that; and there must be injustice either in the thing done or in the allegation concerning it. Hence as fast as the *régime* of voluntary cooperation with its appropriate ideas, sentiments, and usages, pervades the whole society—as fast as there disappear all those arrangements which in any way trench upon the equal freedom of these or those citizens, party warfare must practically die away. Such differences of opinion only can remain as concern matters of detail and minor questions of administration. Evidently there

is approach to such a state in proportion as the graver injustices descending from the militant type disappear. Evidently, too, one concomitant is that increasing subdivision of parties commonly lamented, which promises to bring about the result that no course can be taken at the dictation of any one moiety in power; but every course taken, having the assent of the average of parties, will be thereby proved in harmony with the aggregate will of the community. And clearly, with this breaking up of parties consequent on growing individuality of nature, all such party-antagonisms as we now know must cease.

“Hence as fast as the régime of voluntary cooperation with its appropriate ideas, sentiments, and usages, pervades the whole society—as fast as there disappear all those arrangements which in any way trench upon the equal freedom of these or those citizens, party warfare must practically die away.”

Concerning local government we may conclude that as centralization is an essential trait of the militant type, decentralization is an essential trait of the industrial type. With that independence which the *régime* of voluntary cooperation generates, there arises resistance not only to dictation by one man, and to dictation by a class, but even to dictation by a majority, when it restrains individual action in ways not necessary for maintaining harmonious social relations. One result must be that the inhabitants of each locality will object to be controlled by the inhabitants of other localities, in matters of purely local concern. In respect of such laws as equally apply to all individuals, and such laws as affect the inhabitants of each locality in their intercourse with those of other localities, the will of the majority of the community will be recognized as authoritative; but in respect of arrangements not affecting the community at large, but affecting only the members forming one part, we may infer that there will arise such tendency to resist dictation by members

of other parts, as will involve the carrying of local rule to the greatest practicable limit. Municipal and kindred governments may be expected to exercise legislative and administrative powers, subject to no greater control by the central government than is needful for the concord of the whole community.

“in respect of arrangements not affecting the community at large, but affecting only the members forming one part, we may infer that there will arise such tendency to resist dictation by members of other parts, as will involve the carrying of local rule to the greatest practicable limit.”

Neither these nor any other speculations concerning ultimate political forms can, however, be regarded as anything more than tentative. They are ventured here simply as foreshadowing the general nature of the changes to be anticipated; and in so far as they are specific, can be at the best but partially right. We may be sure that the future will bring unforeseen political arrangements along with many other unforeseen things. As already implied, there will probably be considerable variety in the special forms of the political institutions of industrial societies: all of them bearing traces of past institutions which have been brought into congruity with the representative principle. And here I may add that little stress need be laid on one or other speciality of form; since, given citizens having the presupposed appropriate natures, and but small differences in the ultimate effects will result from differences in the machinery used.

§ 579. Somewhat more definitely, and with somewhat greater positiveness, may we, I think, infer the political functions carried on by those political structures proper to the developed industrial type. Already these have been generally indicated; but here they must be indicated somewhat more specifically.

We have seen that when corporate action is no longer needed for preserving the society as a whole from destruction or injury by other societies, the end which remains for it is that of preserving the

component members of the society from destruction or injury by one another: injury, as here interpreted, including not only immediate, but also remote, breaches of equity. Citizens whose natures have through many generations of voluntary cooperation and accompanying regard for one another's claims, been moulded into the appropriate form, will entirely agree to maintain such political institutions as may continue needful for insuring to each that the activities he carries on within limits imposed by the activities of others, shall bring to him all the directly-resulting benefits, or such benefits as indirectly result under voluntary agreements; and each will be ready to yield up such small portion of the proceeds of his labour, as may be required to maintain the agency for adjudicating in complex cases where the equitable course is not manifest, and for such legislative and administrative purposes as may prove needful for effecting an equitable division of all natural advantages. Resistance to extension of government beyond the sphere thus indicated, must eventually have a two-fold origin—egoistic and altruistic.

In the first place, it cannot be supposed that citizens having the characters indicated, will, in their corporate capacity, agree to impose on themselves individually, other restraints than those necessitated by regard for one another's spheres of action. Each has had fostered in him by the discipline of daily life carried on under contract, a sentiment prompting assertion of his claim to free action within the implied limits; and there cannot therefore arise in an aggregate of such, any sentiment which would tolerate further limits. And that any part should impose such further limits on the rest, is also contrary to the hypothesis; since it pre-supposes that political inequality, or status, which is excluded by the industrial type. Moreover, it is manifest that the taking from citizens of funds for public purpose other than those above specified, is negated. For while there will ever be a unanimous desire to maintain for each and all the conditions needful for severally carrying on their private activities and enjoying the products, the probabilities are immense against agreement for any other public end. And in the absence of such agreement, there must arise resistance by the dissentients to the costs and administrative restraints required for achieving such other end. There must be dissatisfaction and opposition on the part of the minority from whom certain returns of their labours are taken, not for fulfilling their own

desires, but for fulfilling the desires of others. There must be an inequality of treatment which does not consist with the *régime* of voluntary cooperation fully carried out.

“To one who is ruled by a predominant sentiment of justice, the thought of profiting in any way, direct or indirect, at the expense of another, is repugnant; and in a community of such, none will desire to achieve by public agency at the cost of all, benefits which a part do not participate in, or do not wish for.”

At the same time that the employment of political agencies for other ends than that of maintaining equitable relations among citizens, will meet with egoistic resistance from a minority who do not desire such other ends, it will also meet with altruistic resistance from the rest. In other words, the altruism of the rest will prevent them from achieving such further ends for their own satisfaction, at the cost of dissatisfaction to those who do not agree with them. To one who is ruled by a predominant sentiment of justice, the thought of profiting in any way, direct or indirect, at the expense of another, is repugnant; and in a community of such, none will desire to achieve by public agency at the cost of all, benefits which a part do not participate in, or do not wish for. Given in all citizens a quick sense of equity, and it must happen, for example, that while those who have no children will protest against the taking away of their property to educate the children of others, the others will no less protest against having the education of their children partially paid for by forced exactions from the childless, from the unmarried, and from those whose means are in many cases less than their own. So that the eventual limitation of State-action to the fundamental one described, is insured by a simultaneous increase of opposition to other actions and a decrease of desire for them.

§ 580. The restricted sphere for political institutions thus inferred as characterizing the

developed industrial type, may also be otherwise inferred.

For this limitation of State-functions is one outcome of that process of specialization of functions which accompanies organic and super-organic evolution at large. Be it in an animal or be it in a society, the progress of organization is constantly shown by the multiplication of particular structures adapted to particular ends. Everywhere we see the law to be that a part which originally served several purposes and achieved none of them well, becomes divided into parts each of which performs one of the purposes, and, acquiring specially-adapted structures, performs it better. Throughout the foregoing chapters we have seen this truth variously illustrated by the evolution of the governmental organization itself. It remains here to point out that it is further illustrated in a large way, by the division which has arisen, and will grow ever more decided, between the functions of the governmental organization as a whole, and the functions of the other organizations which the society includes.

Already we have seen that in the militant type, political control extends over all parts of the lives of the citizens. Already we have seen that as industrial development brings the associated political changes, the range of this control decreases: ways of living are no longer dictated; dress ceases to be prescribed; the rules of class-subordination lose their peremptoriness; religious beliefs and observances are not insisted upon; modes of cultivating the land and carrying on manufactures are no longer fixed by law; and the exchange of commodities, both within the community and with other communities, becomes gradually unshackled. That is to say, as industrialism has progressed, the State has retreated from the greater part of those regulative actions it once undertook. This change has gone along with an increasing opposition of citizens to these various kinds of control, and a decreasing tendency on the part of the State to exercise them. Unless we assume that the end has now been reached, the implication is that with future progress of industrialism, these correlative changes will continue. Citizens will carry still further their resistance to State-dictation; while the tendency to State-dictation will diminish. Though recently, along with re-invigoration of militancy, there have gone extensions of governmental interference, yet this is interpretable as a temporary wave of reaction. We may expect that with

the ending of the present retrograde movement and resumption of unchecked industrial development, that increasing restriction of State-functions which has unquestionably gone on during the later stages of civilization, will be resumed; and, for anything that appears to the contrary, will continue until there is reached the limit above indicated.

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Along with this progressing limitation of political functions, has gone increasing adaptation of political agencies to the protecting function, and better discharge of it. During unqualified militancy, while the preservation of the society as a whole against other societies was the dominant need, the preservation of the individuals forming the society from destruction or injury by one another, was little cared for; and in so far as it was cared for, was cared for mainly out of regard for the strength of the whole society, and its efficiency for war. But those same changes which have cut off so many political functions at that time exercised, have greatly developed this essential and permanent political function. There has been a growing efficiency of the organization for guarding life and property; due to an increasing demand on the part of citizens that their safety shall be insured and an increasing readiness on the part of the State to respond. Evidently our own time, with its extended arrangements for administering justice, and its growing demand for codification of the law, exhibits a progress in this direction; which will end only when the State undertakes to administer civil justice to the citizen free of cost, as it now undertakes, free of cost, to protect his person and punish criminal aggression on him.

And the accompanying conclusion is that there will be simultaneously carried further that trait which

already characterizes the most industrially-organized societies—the performance of increasingly-numerous and increasingly-important functions by other organizations than those which form departments of the government. Already in our own case private enterprise, working through incorporated bodies of citizens, achieves ends undreamed of as so achievable in primitive societies; and in the future, other ends undreamed of now as so achievable, will be achieved.

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§ 581. A corollary having important practical bearings may be drawn. The several changes making up the transformation above indicated, are normally connected in their amounts; and mischief must occur if the due proportions among them are not maintained. There is a certain right relation to one another, and a right relation to the natures of citizens, which may not be disregarded with impunity.

The days when “paper constitutions” were believed in have gone by—if not with all, still with instructed people. The general truth that the characters of the units determine the character of the aggregate, though not admitted overtly and fully, is yet admitted to some extent—to the extent that most politically-educated persons do not expect forthwith completely to change the state of a society by this or that kind of legislation. But when fully admitted, this truth carries with it the conclusion that political institutions cannot be effectually modified faster than the characters of citizens are modified; and that if greater modifications are by any accident produced, the excess of change is sure to be undone by some counter-change. When, as in France, people undisciplined in freedom are suddenly made politically free, they show by some *plébiscite* that they willingly deliver over their power to

an autocrat, or they work their parliamentary system in such way as to make a popular statesman into a dictator. When, as in the United States, republican institutions, instead of being slowly evolved, are all at once created, there grows up within them an agency of wirepulling politicians, exercising a real rule which overrides the nominal rule of the people at large. When, as at home, an extended franchise, very soon re-extended, vastly augments the mass of those who, having before been controlled are made controllers, they presently fall under the rule of an organized body that chooses their candidates and arranges for them a political programme, which they must either accept or be powerless. So that in the absence of a duly-adapted character, liberty given in one direction is lost in another.

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Allied to the normal relation between character and institutions, are the normal relations among institutions themselves; and the evils which arise from disregard of the second relations are allied to those which arise from disregard of the first. Substantially there is produced the same general effect. The slavery mitigated in one direction is intensified in another. Coercion over the individual, relaxed here is tightened there. For, as we have seen, that change which accompanies development of the industrial type, and is involved by the progress towards those purely equitable relations which the *régime* of voluntary cooperation brings, implies that the political structures simultaneously become popular in their origin and restricted in their functions. But if they become more popular in their origin without becoming more restricted in their functions, the effect is to foster arrangements which benefit the inferior at the expense

of the superior; and by so doing work towards degradation. Swayed as individuals are on the average by an egoism which dominates over their altruism, it must happen that even when they become so far equitable in their sentiments that they will not commit direct injustices, they will remain liable to commit injustices of indirect kinds. And since the majority must ever be formed of the inferior, legislation, if unrestricted in its range, will inevitably be moulded by them in such way as more or less remotely to work out to their own advantage, and to the disadvantage of the superior. The politics of trades'-unions exemplify the tendency. Their usages have become such that the more energetic and skilful workmen are not allowed to profit to the full extent of their capacities; because, if they did so, they would discredit and disadvantage those of lower capacities, who, forming the majority, establish and enforce the usages. In multitudinous ways a like tendency must act through a political organization, if, while all citizens have equal powers, the organization can be used for other purposes than administering justice. State-administrations worked by taxes falling in more than due proportion on those whose greater powers have brought them greater means, will give to citizens of smaller powers more benefits than they have earned. And this burdening of the better for the benefit of the worse, must check the evolution of a higher and more adapted nature: the ultimate result being that a community by which this policy is pursued, will, other things equal, fail in competition with a community which pursues the purely equitable policy, and will eventually disappear in the race of civilization.

“the diffusion of political power unaccompanied by the limitation of political functions, issues in communism. For the direct defrauding of the many by the few, it substitutes the indirect defrauding of the few by the many”

In brief, the diffusion of political power unaccompanied by the limitation of political functions, issues in communism. For the direct defrauding of the

many by the few, it substitutes the indirect defrauding of the few by the many: evil proportionate to the iniquity, being the result in the one case as in the other.

§ 582. But the conclusion of profoundest moment to which all lines of argument converge, is that the possibility of a high social state, political as well as general, fundamentally depends on the cessation of war. After all that has been said it is needless to emphasize afresh the truth that persistent militancy, maintaining adapted institutions, must inevitably prevent, or else neutralize, changes in the direction of more equitable institutions and laws; while permanent peace will of necessity be followed by social ameliorations of every kind.

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From war has been gained all that it had to give. The peopling of the Earth by the more powerful and intelligent races, is a benefit in great measure achieved; and what remains to be done calls for no other agency than the increasing pressure of a spreading industrial civilization on a barbarism which slowly dwindles. That integration of simple groups into compound ones, and of these into doubly compound ones, which war has effected, until at length great nations have

been produced, is a process already carried as far as seems either practicable or desirable. Empires formed of alien peoples habitually fall to pieces when the coercive power which holds them together fails; and even could they be held together, would not form harmoniously working wholes: peaceful federation is the only further consolidation to be looked for. Such large advantage as war has yielded by developing that political organization which, beginning with the leadership of the best warrior has ended in complex governments and systems of administration, has been fully obtained; and there remains for the future to preserve and re-mould its useful parts while getting rid of those no longer required. So, too, that organization of labour initiated by war—an organization which, setting out with the relation of owner and slave and developing into that of master and servant, has, by elaboration, given us industrial structures having numerous grades of officials, from head director down to foremen—has been developed quite as far as is requisite for combined action; and has to be hereafter modified, not in the direction of greater military subordination, but rather in the opposition direction. The power of continuous application, too, lacking in the savage and to be gained only under that coercive discipline which the militant type of society establishes, has been already in large measure acquired by the civilized man; and such further degree of it as is needed, will be produced under the stress of industrial competition in free communities. Nor is it otherwise with great public works and developed industrial arts. Though in the canal cut by the Persians across the isthmus of Athos, and again in a canal of two miles long cut by the Fijians, we see both that war is the first prompter to such undertakings and that the despotic rule established by it is the needful agency for carrying them out; yet we also see that industrial evolution has now reached a stage at which commercial advantage supplies a sufficient stimulus, and private trading corporations a sufficient power, to execute works far larger and more numerous. And though from early days when flint arrow-heads were chipped and clubs carved, down to present days when armour-plates a foot thick are rolled, the needs of defence and offence have urged on invention and mechanical skill; yet in our own generation steam-hammers, hydraulic rams, and multitudinous new appliances from locomotives to telephones, prove that industrial needs alone have come to furnish abundant pressure whereby, hereafter,

the industrial arts will be further advanced. Thus, that social evolution which had to be achieved through the conflicts of societies with one another, has already been achieved; and no further benefits are to be looked for.

“the one thing needful is the checking of international antagonisms and the diminution of those armaments which are at once cause and consequence of them. With the repression of militant activities and decay of militant organizations, will come amelioration of political institutions as of all other institutions. Without them, no such ameliorations are permanently possible. Liberty overtly gained in name and form will be unobtrusively taken away in fact.”

Only further evils are to be looked for from the continuance of militancy in civilized nations. The general lesson taught by all the foregoing chapters is that, indispensable as has been this process by which nations have been consolidated, organized, and disciplined, and requisite as has been the implied coercion to develop certain traits of individual human nature, yet that, beyond the unimaginable amount of suffering directly involved by the process, there has been an unimaginable amount of suffering indirectly involved; alike by the forms of political institutions necessitated, and by the accompanying type of individual nature fostered. And they show by implication that for the diminution of this suffering, not only of the direct kind but of the indirect kind, the one thing needful is the checking of international antagonisms and the diminution of those armaments which are at once cause and consequence of them. With the repression of militant activities and decay of militant organizations, will come amelioration of political institutions as of all other institutions. Without them, no such ameliorations are permanently possible.

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It is not to be expected, however, that any very marked effects are to be produced by the clearest demonstration of this truth—even by a demonstration beyond all question. A general congruity has to be maintained between the social state at any time necessitated by circumstances, and the accepted theories of conduct, political and individual. Such acceptance as there may be of doctrines at variance with the temporary needs, can never be more than nominal in degree, or limited in range, or both. The acceptance which guides conduct will always be of such theories, no matter how logically indefensible, as are consistent with the average modes of action, public and private. All that can be done by diffusing a doctrine much in advance of the time, is to facilitate the action of forces tending to cause advance. The forces themselves can be but in small degrees increased; but something may be done by preventing misdirection of them. Of the sentiment at any time enlisted on behalf of a higher social state, there is always some (and at the present time a great deal) which, having the broad vague form of sympathy with the masses, spends itself in efforts for their welfare by multiplication of political agencies of one or other kind. Led by the prospect of immediate beneficial results, those swayed by this sympathy, are unconscious that they are helping further to elaborate a social organization at variance with that required for a higher form of social life; and by so doing are increasing the obstacles to attainment of that higher form. On a portion of such the foregoing chapters may have some effect by leading them to consider whether the arrangements they are advocating involve increase of that public regulation characterizing the militant type, or whether they tend to produce that greater individuality and more extended voluntary cooperation, characterizing the industrial type. To deter here and there one from doing mischief by imprudent zeal, is the chief proximate effect to be hoped for.

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Further Information

SOURCE

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FURTHER READING

Other works by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/person/165>>.

School of Thought: 19th Century English Radical Individualists <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/collection/35>>.

“The distinctive principle of Western social philosophy is individualism. It aims at the creation of a sphere in which the individual is free to think, to choose, and to act without being restrained by the interference of the social apparatus of coercion and oppression, the State.”
[Ludwig von Mises, “Liberty and Property” (1958)]



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