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The Idea of Progress

Up to a decade ago, the dominant idea in the modern world was the idea of progress. What was good was called progressive, as if the concept of the good had lost all content; what was evil was called backward, as though the past were nothing but evil and to escape from its grip, its constricting influence, were the sole, the all-sufficient goal of human aspiration.

Three factors combined to impose the doctrine of progress on the modern mind: the naturalism of Rousseau, the mechanism of the old political economists, the evolutionary theory of Darwin. Rousseau in painted prose sang the praises of the savage, of spontaneous docility, generosity, native aestheticism, and personal religion. The political economists taught that success was mechanically inevitable, that each had but to follow his own self-interest and the greatest happiness of the greatest number would automatically follow. Finally the Darwinians brushed aside the secular view of man as a sinner and a child of sin, the secular exhortation to man to rise above his fallen state by repentance and conversion, and they substituted in its stead the new doctrine that the beneficent [sic] mechanism of nature itself had already raised man from the level of protoplasm or that of the apes, and no doubt would lead him on to undreamt heights of perfection.

The twentieth century is giving the lie to all of this. The political economists are utterly discredited: no economist to-day believes in the old theories; no thinking man who has lived through the depression can accept the view that the greatest happiness of the greatest number results automatically from the laws of supply and demand. Rousseauism, too, is finding its refutation in fact: it is the basis of modern education, and the criminality, the falling birth rates, the spontaneous ineptitude of the democracies being gobbled up one after another by a scheming plasterer with an idiotic creed, all this is more than sufficient to send Rousseau back among the his [sic] savages. Finally, as to Darwinian modes of thought, even Mr HG Wells is talking about the Germans as apes emerging from slimy caves, so that it appears the evolution has not taken place after all.

[2] I say, then, that the doctrine of progress appears to be bankrupt, and the question arises, Is this to be an occasion of pure joy for us. Certainly we cannot but rejoice that the false premisses of the doctrine of progress are being refuted and rejected. But there is an ulterior question that we have to answer, Does man progress?

On this issue, and it is the issue I am to discuss this evening, I think we must answer in the traditional manner with a distinction. As we could not agree with the unqualified affirmations of human progress, so also we cannot now agree with unqualified negations. Like philosophers, we cannot shout approval or cry condemnation with the mob; we must stand apart to take a long view, to distinguish, to separate, to point to this as good and that as evil.

Nor are we in this task left without certain general rules, certain criteria. The world is perpetually progressing and declining

And to begin we can readily distinguish between the principle and cause of human progress, and on the other hand the principle and cause of human decline.

There is progress, for man is endowed with intellect, and his intellect is a potency. At birth it is a tabula rasa, the materia prima of the spiritual order. Education brings up to the level of civilization and culture attained by the age. Problems that arise give birth to further actuations of intellectual potency. Thus down the ages we can discern a succession of benefits all deriving from the intellectual potency of man, and to illustrate this point, let me recall briefly and in outline the economic progress of man.

[3--I suspect this is a new but related document]

Last time: falsitas obiectiva, 1a 17 1

sin: in sinner, unreasonableness, negation priv of due form
in objective order, "what ought not to be" injustice in all its forms (indiv social), intemp, cowardice folly
in social political thought, based on false premises
eg experimenter on light, can't suppose "ought not to"

Innumerable perspectives

Idea of progress, run its course, time for us to affirm it worse and worse: depression, war

Distinguo: our training

wt distinction, isolation, anticlericalism

There is progress and decline, mixed: problem to distinguish

There is progress: intellectus ut potentia

decline: original sin, reign of sin.

Progress: a simple line, economic field

horticulture

hunting fishing (capital)

agriculture (fixed property: Mesopotamian temple states)

mechanical arts

nomadic tribes

commerce (basis of world civilization Medit basis

Atlantic basis

mechanical arts

leisure, art, literature, philosophy, science

applied science

applied philosophy

medieval law

enlightenment

catholic action

communist action

decline working in.

racialism

Economic development, leisure, intellectual development, etc

[4]

Decline, ie sin

double aspect: sin as falsity, false theories
sin as egoism, social tension, Marxist

Sin as falsity: a) for social good

nagualism b) not "I repent" but "I do right"
totemism adjustment of theory to practice
nature cults
sky gods
critique of gods, Plato
scepticism
fullness of time

Investiture

Anti-popes, Constance

Protestantism

Rationalism: Descartes to Kant

Naturalism: Rousseau to mod educ, dem gov by pub op

Communism: Marx Lenin Stalin (conservative 1936)

Racialism: Naz soz

Sin as egoism

progress work of dominant minority, masses uninspired
lacking initiative, intelligence, energy, risk
dominant minority looks out for self, denies or disregards
problems of others
princes
bourgeoisie
masses

Summary

a) lines of progress, of developing intellect
mechanism of progress, dominant minority
b) lines of decline, of falsifying intellect
mechanism of decline, power politics, class war

Combinations, interactions

applied science: devel of phil, destruction of phil
devel of econ, destruc of econ
devel of state central, destruct of st

Leave to you

Supernatural: ultimate analysis; intell, non-int, sup int
faith, not intellectual lethargy, credulity, but poss
of reason standing up in major decline
hope, not opium, pie in heaven, but limit econ determ
charity, not disordered beneficence, opp to justice,
proper order, but antidote to injustice, obje falsity

[Handwritten in margin next to final paragraph:] We preach perpetual
revolution - but not in Trotskyist sense but in sense of moving ???????