

STUDIES IN ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE.

EDITED BY THE HON. W. PEMBER REEVES, PH.D.,
Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science.

No. 51 in the Series of Monographs by writers connected with the London
School of Economics and Political Science.

THE METAPHYSICAL
THEORY *of the* STATE



THE METAPHYSICAL THEORY *of the* STATE

A CRITICISM *by* L. T. HOBHOUSE,
D.LIT., MARTIN WHITE PROFESSOR OF
SOCIOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



LONDON : GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD.
RUSKIN HOUSE 40 MUSEUM STREET, W.C. 1
NEW YORK : THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

First published September 1918

Reprinted March 1922

" . April 1926

Reprinted in Great Britain by Phototype Ltd., Barnet, Herts.

(All rights reserved)

DEDICATION

TO LIEUTENANT R. O. HOBHOUSE, R.A.F

MY DEAR OLIVER,

If you can carry your memory across the abyss which separates us all from July 1914, you will remember some hours which we spent reading Kant together in a cool Highgate garden in those summer days of peace. I think by way of relaxation we sometimes laid aside Kant, took up Herodotus, and felt ourselves for a moment in the morning of the world. But it is of Kant that I remind you, because three years later I was reading his great successor in the same garden in the same summer weather, but not with you. One morning as I sat there annotating Hegel's theory of freedom, jarring sounds broke in upon the summer stillness. We were well accustomed to the noises of our strange new world that summer. Daily if the air was still we heard, as some one said, the thud of guns across the northern sea, and murmur of innumerable 'planes. But this morning it was soon clear that something more was on foot. Gunfire, at first distant, grew rapidly nearer, and soon broke out from the northern heights hard by. The familiar drone of the British aeroplanes was pierced by the whining of the Gothas. High above, machine guns barked in sharp staccato and distant thuds announced the fall of bombs.

Presently three white specks could be seen dimly through the light haze overhead, and we watched their course from the field. The raid was soon over. The three specks drifted away towards the east, the gunfire died down, the whining faded away, and below the hill the great city picked up its dead. The familiar sounds resumed their sway, the small birds chirruped from the shrubs, and the distant murmur of the traffic told of a world going steadily on its accustomed course.

As I went back to my Hegel my first mood was one of self-satire. Was this a time for theorizing or destroying theories, when the world was tumbling about our ears? My second thoughts ran otherwise. To each man the tools and weapons that he can best use. (In the bombing of London I had just witnessed the visible and tangible outcome of a false and wicked doctrine, the foundations of which lay, as I believe, in the book before me. To combat this doctrine effectively is to take such part in the fight as the physical disabilities of middle age allow. Hegel himself carried the proof-sheets of his first work to the printer through streets crowded with fugitives from the field of Jena. With that work began the most penetrating and subtle of all the intellectual influences which have sapped the rational humanitarianism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in the Hegelian theory of the god-state all that I had witnessed lay implicit. You may meet his Gothas in mid air, and may the full power of a just cause be with you. I must be content with more pedestrian methods. But "to make the world a safe place for democracy," the weapons of the spirit are as necessary as those of the flesh. You have described to me times when your lofty world is peaceable enough—above the Canal in the dawn, when all the desert lies gray and still before the first sunbeam sets the air moving, or alone in the blueness, cut off by a bank of

cloud from earth. When at such times the mind works freely and you think over the meaning of the great contest, I should like to think that you carried with you some ideas from this volume to your heights. At any rate you will bear with you the sense that we are together as of old, in that in our different ways we are both fighters in one great cause.

Your affectionate father,

L. T. HOBHOUSE.

NOTE

THE substance of this volume was given in a course of lectures at the London School of Economics in the autumn of 1917.

I have to thank my colleague Dr. A. Wolf for reading the MS. and making several useful emendations of detail.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
DEDICATION	5
LECTURE I	
THE OBJECTS OF SOCIAL INVESTIGATION	II
LECTURE II	
FREEDOM AND LAW	26
LECTURE III	
THE REAL WILL	44
LECTURE IV	
✓ THE WILL OF THE STATE	71
LECTURE V	
VARYING APPLICATIONS OF THE METAPHYSICAL THEORY	96
CONCLUSION	134
<hr/>	
APPENDIX I	
HEGEL'S THEORY OF THE WILL	138
APPENDIX II	
THE THEORY OF THE ABSOLUTE	150
INDEX	155

THE METAPHYSICAL THEORY OF THE STATE

LECTURE I

THE OBJECTS OF SOCIAL INVESTIGATION

PEOPLE naturally begin to think about social questions when they find that there is something going wrong in social life. Just as in the physical body it is the ailment that interests us, while the healthy processes go on without our being aware of them, so a society in which everything is working smoothly and in accordance with the accepted opinion of what is right and proper raises no question for its own members. We are first conscious of digestion when we are aware of indigestion, and we begin to think about law and government when we feel law to be oppressive or see that government is making mistakes. Thus the starting-point of social inquiry is the point at which we are moved by a wrong which we desire to set right, or, perhaps at a slightly higher remove, by a lack which we wish to make good. But from this starting-point reflection advances to a fuller and more general conception of society. If we begin by criticizing some particular injustice, we are led on to discuss what justice is. Beginning with some special social disorder, we are forced to examine the nature of social order and the purposes for which society exists. The social theory which we reach on these lines is a theory of ends, values, purposes, which leads us up to Ethics or Moral Philosophy, to questions of the rights and duties of man, and the means by which institutions of society may be made to

conform thereto. The principles of Ethics are supreme, or, as they have been called, architectonic. They apply to man in all relations and to life on all sides. They guide, or are meant to guide, the personal life of man no less than his collective and political activities. They provide the standard by which all human relations are to be judged. When, therefore, we study social and political institutions with a view to ascertaining their value or justification, our inquiry is in reality a branch of Ethics. Our results rest in the end on the application of principles of well-being to the social organization of man. This is one perfectly legitimate method of social inquiry, and as involving an analysis of common experience, leading up to or down from a theory of ends or values, it is appropriately called "Social Philosophy."

Legitimate as it is, this method of investigating society has its special danger. In pursuing the ideal it sometimes loses hold of the actual. In analysing the meaning of institutions it may overlook their actual working, and if we follow it too blindly we may end either in abstract propositions which have little relation to practical possibility and serve only to breed fanatics; or in abandoning the interest in actual society altogether and amusing ourselves with the construction of Utopias. In reaction from this tendency many students would say that the primary business of social theory is to investigate the facts of social life as they are, the historical development of society and its several institutions, the statistical description of any given society as it is, the endeavour to ascertain the laws of cause and effect which, it is held, must permeate social life as they permeate every other sphere of reality. In place of a social philosophy, then, we have a social science, and it is held that by a social science we can ascertain, measure and predict, just as we can ascertain, measure and predict the behaviour of any system of physical bodies.

Without touching here on the question whether in social science prediction is possible or not, it is sufficient to say that the scientific study of social life or the

endeavour to ascertain the relations of cause and effect is not only a legitimate object but one which has in point of fact yielded good results. Few would now deny that the strictly scientific method has its place in social inquiry. But objection may still be taken to the distinction between ideals and facts. To begin with, it may be urged that the social inquirer could not if he would lay aside his ideals. Whenever we are dealing with social life we are dealing with a matter of profound interest to ourselves. When the chemist wishes to ascertain the temperature at which a solid liquefies, or a liquid boils, he has in the end to read off a certain observation, and it is not a matter of profound human interest whether the figure that he reads is 150° or 160° ; but when a social student inquires how an institution is working, whether a new law is attaining its object, whether Trade Union activity is or is not succeeding in raising wages, shortening hours or otherwise improving the condition of the operatives, the answer to his question is not only in reality much more difficult to ascertain but is also one which stirs prejudices, confirms or refutes presuppositions, is certain to be challenged by lively interests. The difficulty is not peculiar to the study of contemporary fact. History, even ancient history, is written in a certain spirit and a certain temper dependent on the personal presuppositions of the writer. Human affairs are so complex and the interweaving of cause and effect so subtle that in the presentation of an historical development there will always be an element dependent on the point of view of the writer and on the selection and emphasis which may honestly seem the fairest selection and the natural emphasis to the particular writer, but which may seem quite other to a different investigator approaching the same object with a different background of thought.

Nor is this all. Putting aside all that may be said as to the bias of investigators, it may be urged that the subject of investigation itself is charged throughout with the ideals, emotions, interests of men and women, both

as individuals and as corporate bodies; and, moreover, the logic of those ideals, the very thing which social philosophy investigates, the degree, that is, of their mutual consistency or inconsistency, is a matter of profound importance to their actual working. If two ideals penetrate the same nation or the same class and those two ideals are at bottom in conflict, the results must show themselves in the tangle of history. They must manifest themselves in divided aims and ultimately in failure. If, on the other hand, they are coherent and harmonious, then once more that result must appear in the greatness of the success attending their historical development. Thus, if we start with the most rigid determination to adhere to facts, we shall find that ideals are a part of the facts, and if we say that nevertheless we will treat them as facts without examining their truth, we shall find it hard to adhere to that position because their consistency and coherence, which are intimately relevant to their truth, deeply affect their practical efficiency.

It may be granted that it is easier to distinguish the philosophical and the scientific treatment of society in principle than to keep them apart in practice. In principle we call the philosophical inquiry that which deals with the aim of life, with the standard of conduct, with all that ought to be, no matter whether it is or is not. The scientific method we call that which investigates facts, endeavours to trace cause and effect, aims at the establishment of general truths which hold good whether they are desirable or not. The distinction of principle is clear, but in point of fact the inquiry into ideals can never desert the world of experience without danger of losing itself in unreality and becoming that which the poet of idealism was unfairly called, "a beautiful, ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in vain." The ideal, though it has never been realized and perhaps may never be realized, must grow out of reality. It must be that which we can become, not that which is utterly removed from the emotions and aspi-

rations which have grown up within us in the actual evolution of mind. The ethically right, Professor Höffding has said, must be sociologically possible. Thus, even as pure theory, the philosophical view cannot afford to disregard the facts. Still less can it do so if it passes over, as philosophy should, into the constructive attempt to reorganize life in accordance with its ideals. If the principles which it discovers are to be realized in this workaday world, this can only be by intimate knowledge of the details of this world, by the control of events through their causes, for the discovery of which we must go to pure science. Social Science, on the other hand, as we have seen, cannot ignore the elements of idealism as a working factor, as one of the forces, if you will, among the other forces, which it studies; nor can it disregard the logical consistency or inconsistency of ideas, upon which their working force depends. Thus the philosophical, the scientific, and the practical interest, however distinct in theory, tend in their actual operation to be intermingled, and it must be admitted that we cannot carry one through without reference to the other.

Nevertheless, to keep the issues distinct at every point is the first necessity of sound reasoning upon social affairs. What is essential for social investigation, whether it starts with the philosophic or scientific interest, is that in putting any question it should know precisely what that question is; specifically, whether it is a question of what is desirable, of what ought to be; or a question of what has been, is, or probably will be. These two questions, though necessarily related, are no less necessarily distinct, and to confuse them is the standing temptation of the social inquirer. If the social philosopher has sometimes thought to legislate for society without first informing himself of the facts as to what is possible and what is not, the scientific sociologist on his side is not innocent of all encroachments. It is a standing temptation to overbear questions of right and wrong by confident predictions, which in reality rest more on the prepossessions of the prophet than on his insight into cause and effect.

✓ It is the ~~weakness~~ of human nature that it likes to be on the winning side, and just as in an election the argument most effective in catching votes is the demonstration that we are winning already—a demonstration which might seem to make effort on that side superfluous—so in the study of social and economic development it is rhetorically effective to demonstrate that a particular social change is at hand, that it is an inevitable consequence of a concatenation of events that is bringing it about whether we will or not; and this demonstration exercises, and is intended to exercise, a kind of coercion upon our minds whereby we resign ourselves to accept the change as desirable on the strength of arguments which have never touched its desirability at all, but have proved, if they have proved anything, nothing more than the probable effect of certain operative causes. Intellectually, this method is one of confusion; morally, it is paralysing to the will. If there were nothing for us but to accept the trend of events as we find it, then our science would relapse into fatalism, and, as members of the society which we study, we should be in the position simply of knowing the course of the stream which carries us along without any increase in the power to guide it, whether it happen to be taking us into the haven or over Niagara.

When we allow Social Science thus to persuade us of the inevitableness of things, we are reversing the normal course of science. For, whatever else may be said of science, one of its functions is to increase human power, and this applies to sciences which deal with human life as well as to sciences which deal with inanimate objects. When we know the etiology of a disease we acquire for the first time a real prospect of controlling it. So it should be in social affairs, but so it can only be if we hold firmly to the distinction between the desirable and the actual, if we grasp clearly the principles which should regulate social life, and do not allow ourselves to be shaken in our hold of them by any knowledge of the changes which are actually going on among us. The

foundation, therefore, of true social method is to hold the ideal and the actual distinct and use our knowledge of the one as a means to realizing the other.¹ We may pursue the two investigations, if we will, side by side, for we have seen how very closely they are interwoven. But every question that we ask and every statement that we make ought to be quite clearly a statement as to fact or an assertion of what ought to be, and never a hybrid of the two.

This distinction would, I think, be accepted both by the bulk of ethical thinkers and of scientific students of society, but there exists a form of social theory which repudiates it in principle. The foundation of this theory is the belief that the ideal is realized in the actual world, and in particular in the world of organized society, not in the sense already noted above that there are ideals operating as psychological forces in human beings, but in the sense that the world at large, and in particular the social world, is, if properly understood, an incarnation or expression of the ideal; that, as one thinker would put it, the Absolute is perfection; or, as Hegel, who may be considered as the father of this school, laid down, "the insight to which . . . philosophy is to lead us is that the real world is as it ought to be."¹ The theory of society on this view is not to be detached from general metaphysics; it is an integral part of the philosophy of things. Just as in a simple form of religion, the powers that be are ordained of God, so with the metaphysician who starts from the belief that things are what they should be, the fabric of human life, and in particular the state system, is a part of an order which is inherently rational and good, an order to which the lives of individuals are altogether subordinate. The problem of social theory upon this view will not consist in the formulation of ideals as distinct from anything actual, yet capable of becoming actual if once human beings grasp them with a very firm determination to realize them; still less can it consist in investigating facts in distinction from

¹ *Philosophy of History*, p. 38.