

剑桥政治思想史原著系列（影印本）

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

斯宾塞政治著作选

Spencer

Political

Writings

Edited by

JOHN OFFER

中国政法大学出版社

HERBERT SPENCER

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

斯宾塞政治著作选/(英)斯宾塞著. —北京:中国政法大学出版社, 2003. 5

剑桥政治思想史原著系列(影印本)

ISBN 7-5620-2413-8

I. 斯... II. 斯... III. 政治思想史—英国—近代—英文
IV. D095.614

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2003)第 051849 号

* * * * *

书 名	《斯宾塞政治著作选》
出 版 人	李传敢
经 销	全国各地新华书店
出版发行	中国政法大学出版社
承 印	清华大学印刷厂
开 本	880 × 1230mm 1/32
印 张	7.375
版 本	2003 年 7 月第 1 版 2003 年 7 月第 1 次印刷
书 号	ISBN 7-5620-2413-8/D·2373
印 数	0 001-2 000
定 价	16.00 元
社 址	北京市海淀区西土城路 25 号 邮政编码 100088
电 话	(010)62229563 (010)62229278 (010)62229803
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网 址	http://www.cupl.edu.cn/cbs/index.htm

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HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT



HERBERT SPENCER

Political Writings

原书由剑桥大学出版社于 1994 年出版,此影印本的出版获得剑桥大学出版社财团(英国剑桥)的许可。

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剑桥政治思想史原著系列

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在政治理论领域，“剑桥政治思想史原著系列”作为主要的学生教科丛书，如今已牢固确立了其地位。本丛书旨在使学生能够获得从古希腊到 20 世纪初期西方政治思想史方面所有最为重要的原著。它囊括了所有著名的经典原著，但与此同时，它又扩展了传统的评价尺度，以便能够纳入范围广泛、不那么出名的作品。而在此之前，这些作品中有许多从未有过现代英文版本可资利用。只要可能，所选原著都会以完整而不删节的形式出版，其中的译作则是专门为本丛书的目的而安排。每一本书都有一个评论性的导言，加上历史年表、生平梗概、进一步阅读指南，以及必要的词汇表和原文注解。本丛书的最终目的是，为西方政治思想的整个发展脉络提供一个清晰的轮廓。

本丛书已出版著作的书目，请查阅书末。

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

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Introduction

The Proper Sphere of Government was Spencer's first attempt to determine what relationships there should be between government and the individual, while *The Man versus The State* was the more famous sequel. In the intervening years his publications ranged far beyond the boundaries of political theory. *The Manchester Guardian* judged Spencer on his death England's one contemporary philosopher of world-wide reputation and ranked him 'among the two or three most influential writers of the last half-century'. Arnold Bennett conjures up a magnificent picture of what Spencer's unorthodox thoughts could unleash when the young Carlotta discovers *The Study of Sociology* in *Sacred and Profane Love*:

I went to bed early, and I began to read. I read all night, thirteen hours . . . Again and again I exclaimed: 'But this is marvellous!' I had not guessed that anything so honest, and so courageous, and so simple, and so convincing had ever been written.

It was imperative that a book so exhilarating, toppling conventional wisdom on every page, had to be concealed from her hidebound aunt: Carlotta tore from their binding the pages of *The Old Helmet*, 'probably the silliest novel in the world', and inserted her treasure in their place. Spencer's impact survived subsequent reflection undiminished: 'he taught me intellectual courage; he taught me that nothing is sacred that will not bear inspection; and I adore his memory'.

Herbert Spencer was born at his parents' house in Derby on 27 April 1820. His father was the dominant figure in the household although illness which was apparently related to anxiety restricted his

activities. His income came from teaching and the ownership of some small houses, although teaching was deserted for three years from 1824 when he moved the family to Nottingham to try his luck in the manufacture of lace. The enterprise failed and, money lost and lessons learned, he moved the family back to Derby and resumed teaching. At about this time he also abandoned his adherence to the Wesleyan church, taking nonconformity to extremes and becoming opposed to all forms of priesthood. In contrast, Spencer's mother retained her Wesleyanism throughout her life. She is portrayed by Spencer as placid and unquestioning and the victim of gruff and callous treatment from his father.

In such an atmosphere it can be no surprise that the boy sought sanctuary in reveries: imagining adventures, or 'castle-building' as he described it, remained a habit into youth and beyond. Although his mother gave birth to eight more children, only one survived for more than a few days, a sister named Louisa, who died before Spencer was four years old. In effect he was to grow up as an only child. He took to solitary rambles in the countryside and alongside the nearby river. Out of his rambles came an interest in entomology, in the study of which he was helped by his father. This early interest in nature was buttressed by two other important paternal contributions. Spencer's father was honorary secretary to the Derby Philosophical Society, a connection which gave Spencer access to a scientific library and contact with the scientific developments of the day. His father also trained him to look for the causes of things and to question authority, religious or otherwise. This training thus emphasised self-help rather than book learning in the acquisition of scientific expertise.

The emphasis on an unorthodox mental discipline dominated his boyhood education, parts of which were conducted in a notably haphazard manner. By his own account at the age of thirteen his knowledge of Greek and Latin was minimal and he was uninstructed in English grammar, history and mathematics.

There followed an abrupt change in his life. It had been arranged that he should leave home and reside with his uncle Thomas Spencer, at Hinton Charterhouse about five miles south of Bath, who was to continue his schooling. He endured the unfamiliar discipline for some days but then rebelled in fine spirit and set off back to Derby, walking about 120 miles. However, he was soon sent to Hinton again

and settled in reasonably well, completing his schooling by June 1836. But his learning was eclectic rather than comprehensive. Some additional Greek and Latin was acquired, and French was begun, but history, poetry and fiction were excluded. Trigonometry, mechanics and chemistry, however, were included. Thomas believed that Herbert's disregard of authority and self-will had been checked, although not to a sufficient degree or lasting extent: to Spencer's father he wrote that the boy 'must part with some of his confidence in his own judgment' (Duncan, *Life and Letters*, p. xvi).

More important than Spencer's formal education at Hinton was the model provided by his uncle's life. Having taken above average honours at Cambridge in 1820 he was then ordained; a period as Fellow of St John's College ended on his marriage, and he subsequently assumed the perpetual curacy of Hinton. An evangelical by conviction, he was by no means comfortable in the established church. On settling at Hinton he strove to reinvigorate the presence of the church in what had been a neglected appendage to a larger parish. His unflagging enthusiasm was not always popular. Whilst Spencer was his pupil the uncle's unremitting energy found a new outlet in the preparation of what became a large family of pamphlets: the first, published in 1836, was in response to the report on the poor laws of 1834 and discussed the ideas in relation to relief reforms which he was effecting in Hinton; later ones treated a range of poor law, social and evangelical Christian concerns. Thomas accepted the argument that unless relief was administered strictly it encouraged pauperism, eagerly opening his arms to the principle of less eligibility. He soon became the first chairman of the new Bath Poor Law Union Board of Guardians. Spencer was an interested participant in daily discussions on the poor law and corrected his uncle's proofs. An early and portentous consequence was the publication of a short article of his own in 1836 on the poor laws in a local magazine launched that year, and it is republished here for the first time (see Appendix). The article was not, in fact, quite his first publication since the same magazine had also published a piece by him on crystals. However, it is the first in a long line of publications which display a dominant or at least substantial concern with 'welfare'. Thomas' example was the inspiration.

The article is a reply to a communication antagonistic to poor law reform (as enacted in 1834) which had already appeared in the

magazine. Spencer commends the new measures in ebullient and pugnacious fashion. Two prominent features display the stamp of uncle on nephew. He follows Thomas in using 'human nature' as an explanatory concept, in a way that he never abandoned. Thus lax poor relief is adjudged harmful because of the 'natural tendency in human nature to lean upon any support that may be afforded' (p. 179). He also follows his uncle in lauding political economy (pp. 180-1):

Is that science to be despised, upon which are founded all the principles of good government? which teaches the philanthropist, and the statesman the best methods of following their several pursuits? On the contrary, political economy is a subject which ought to be admired, and more studied, than it has hitherto been.

His patchy formal education at an end, Spencer needed employment. Undoubtedly an intelligent young man, and very much science-minded, he also possessed the potentially unattractive cocksure confidence and iconoclastic and nonconformist predilections of father and uncle. A brief period as a teacher, a 'false start' he called it, was terminated when a family friend offered him employment in railway construction. Charles Fox, who had been a pupil of his father, had substantial engineering responsibilities in connection with the London and Birmingham line. Early in November 1837, Spencer moved to London to commence work in Fox's office. With its rapid advances over a succession of technological frontiers and its immense economic and social repercussions, the railway 'industry' of 1837 offered to a young participant of Spencer's character the most stimulating and challenging set of experiences available.

His work involved making surveys in association with the contractors for the line. Serious-minded to a fault, he neither read novels nor attended any of the capital's places of amusement. In September 1838 he moved on to a new post in Worcester. His didactic tendencies were not conducive to friendship or to easy relations with his superiors, although both eventually were established. His engineer-in-chief at Worcester, Captain W. S. Moorsom, in fact 'promoted' him to be his secretary in April 1840 and he moved to Powick, three miles from Worcester, to be close to Moorsom's home. By now his engineering responsibilities had spurred him on to write some articles for the *Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal*, and to make some related inventions. He was also expressing a wish to make public some ideas

Introduction

upon the state of the world and religion, together with a few remarks on education.

Rambles along the raw cuttings of the line led Spencer to an interest in palaeontology and geology and to the purchase of a copy of Lyell's *Principles of Geology*. Whilst Lyell criticised Lamarck's opinions on the origin of species, Spencer responded by leaning towards them, thus accepting that 'organic forms' had 'arisen by progressive modifications, physically caused and inherited'. The congruity of this view 'with the course of procedure throughout things at large, gave it an irresistible attraction; and my belief in it never afterwards wavered' (*Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 176-7). Indeed, it was to be pivotal in all his subsequent work.

A temporary break from railway work began in April 1841. He returned to Derby to work on an invention with his father, a venture soon abandoned. To plug the gap Spencer learnt to read music, took to glee singing, and developed an interest in phrenological psychology. After a year he returned to Hinton. Back in an environment where political ideas were discussed daily, and impressed by his uncle's devotion to his own pamphlets, Spencer immediately resumed writing on social matters, the first result being a series of twelve 'letters' published serially in the *Nonconformist* and given the general title *The Proper Sphere of Government*. Acceptance for publication was expedited by a letter of introduction sent by Thomas to the editor, his friend and fellow supporter of such radical reforms as complete suffrage, Edward Miall. Spencer saw his return to Hinton and the preparation of *The Proper Sphere of Government* as of crucial importance to his own subsequent achievements:

Had it not been for this visit to Hinton – had it not been for these political conversations with my uncle – possibly had it not been for his letter of introduction to Mr Miall, the first of these letters would not have seen the light, and the rest of them would never have been written. Had they never been written, *Social Statics*, which originated from them, would not even have been thought of. Had there been no *Social Statics*, those lines of enquiry which led to *The Principles of Psychology* would have remained unexplored. And without that study of life in general initiated by the writing of these works, leading, presently, to the study of the relations between its phenomena and those of the inorganic world, there would have been no *System of Synthetic Philosophy*.

(*Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 211)

Spencer was reluctant to consign the letters to the obscurity of the back numbers of a newspaper and early in 1843 arranged for them to be reprinted as a pamphlet, which duly appeared later the same year. This work secured for him neither the fame nor the fortune for which he had hoped, although he did receive some encouraging words from Carlyle, who had been sent a copy.

To a friend Spencer described the contents as 'political pills', adding that they are 'very good remedies for Tyranny and Toryism, and when duly digested are calculated to drive away crude notions and brace the system' (*Life and Letters*, p. 41). The series of letters opens with Spencer seeking to set a limit to the intervention of the state in social life. After presenting a version of the 'social contract' theory of the origin of civil government, Spencer declares that the role of government is (p. 7)

to defend the natural rights of man – to protect person and property – to prevent the aggressions of the powerful upon the weak – in a word, to administer justice. This is the natural, the original, office of a government. It was not intended to do less: it ought not to be allowed to do more.

The role of government thus defined allows 'the laws of society' full scope. Just as there are physical laws there are also psychical laws and social laws; in each case transgression, he says, produces its own punishment. To interfere is to transgress (p. 6):

there is in society, as in every other part of creation, that beautiful self-adjusting principle, which will keep all its elements in equilibrium; . . . so the attempt to regulate all the actions of a community by legislation, will entail little else but misery and confusion.

Spencer proceeds to condemn the utilitarian modes of thought that attempt to justify intervention by arguing that the 'general good' is thereby promoted. This thinking lies behind the restrictions placed on the import of corn, the establishment of a state church and the existence of the poor law, but in each case injustice and harm rather than good has ensued. In the third and fourth letters the case of the poor law is explored in detail. Poor law legislation was a highly controversial matter in both England and Ireland at the time Spencer was writing, with new statutes emphasising that relief was best granted only on condition that an applicant entered the workhouse of the poor law union concerned. Yet even a poor law set against

wage subsidies and outdoor relief is unacceptable to Spencer. Poor relief does not remove but rather prolongs the improvidence which causes distress and discourages the exercise of real benevolence. In a style which exemplifies the tenor of contemporary evangelical *laissez-faire* social thought – soteriological rather than incarnational – Spencer tells us that (pp. 21–2):

by allowing the wicked to take advantage of the right held out by the poor law, we not only annul the just punishment awarded to them, but we also take away the most effectual prompter to repentance and improvement.

Letters V and VI deal with possible challenges to his position arising from the view that war and colonisation are duties of government. He points out the deleterious consequences of colonisation on the mother country, the emigrants and the indigenous peoples. For Spencer neither colonisation nor treaties, but rather free trade with other countries, which is what justice demands, is vindicated. Wars of aggression are harmful and unnecessary, although defensive wars may be necessary. This concession, he says, does not indicate an imperfection in his definition of the duties of the state, but rather that the definition needs to be applied in all states. He later described his views on war as ‘utterly untenable’, although in a way which implies he had forgotten his point on wars fought for reasons of defence (*Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 209–10).

There is now a change of purpose. In the next three letters Spencer argues against the necessity for new legislative supervision demanded of government in the fields of education and health. Uniformity of instruction, which he believes would accompany a system of national education, is judged to be undesirable because it will reduce the diversity of minds and opinion: progress and truth have ‘ever originated from the conflict of mind with mind’ (p. 35). In education as in everything else competition is the only principle which can ‘hold out promise of future perfection’ (p. 37).

The campaign for public health legislation which led to the establishment of a General Board of Health in 1848 was already under way as Spencer wrote. Edwin Chadwick’s *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population* of 1842 was a rigorous analysis of the consequences of non-intervention and a decisive propaganda tool. Spencer’s chief argument owes something to his understanding of Lamarck. An interruption to the exercise of a species’ faculties

weakens them and 'an ultimate degeneracy of the race will inevitably ensue' (p. 49). Thus state measures to protect health, in doing for people 'what they are naturally fitted to do for themselves', are 'one of the most efficient means of lowering the standard of national character' (p. 50).

Letter X looks at some of the consequences of the neglect of which he alleges government is guilty in its proper sphere of activity, the administration of justice. The next letter relates his views about the duties of the state to the nature of the electorate; he finds no objection to the enfranchisement of 'the working classes'. The final letter of the series is for the most part a summary of what has gone before.

As political philosophy the essays are not perhaps particularly distinctive and Spencer is slapdash over what precise meaning is to be given to the 'aggressions' which justice is supposed to prevent. However, they do display well the distinctive mixture of evangelical and social and economic thought which characterised much early nineteenth-century political writing, and which Spencer never discarded entirely. They also show the kind of opposition faced by proponents of new legislation on social matters in the 1840s.

Spencer returned to Derby before he had completed *The Proper Sphere*. For the next few years until December 1848 his life was unsettled. He had intermittent employment on a range of railway projects which entailed considerable travel around England and Wales. On occasion he attended the parliamentary committees which scrutinised bills on new railways. Sometimes he based himself in London, sometimes in Derby. He continued to write articles for the *Nonconformist* and other journals, and also served in 1842 as the honorary secretary of the Derby branch of the Complete Suffrage Movement (less militant than the Chartists) and worked as sub-editor on a new Birmingham-based Complete Suffrage newspaper the *Pilot* in 1844. However, in the summer of 1848 another of his uncle's letters of introduction worked its magic; the end of the year saw him installed as a sub-editor on *The Economist*, at first resident on the premises. This was to give his life a new pattern.

His duties were not arduous and permitted him to complete a book subsequently published as *Social Statics*. The preparation of it had begun in 1846, prompted by thoughts 'which had made me dissatisfied with the letters on *The Proper Sphere of Government* – dissatisfied not so much with the conclusions set forth, as with the foundations

on which they stood' (*Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 305). The main new point is that there is a moral principle, from which the right role of the state can be derived: 'Every man has freedom to do all that he wills; provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man' (*Social Statics*, p. 103). However, this principle was foreshadowed in the earlier work, especially in the discussions of health and education. The principle guarantees that men's faculties will adapt to their circumstances in the optimum manner and hence guarantees progress; progressive modifications which mankind is undergoing as a result of adaptation are, moreover, the result of 'a law underlying the whole organic creation' (p. 65). It should also be noted that *Social Statics* proclaims that women should have the same freedom as men, although he substantially recanted on this position in later life.

Through his post with *The Economist*, residence in London and the publication of his book, new friendships were being made and intellectual and cultural horizons expanding. He first formed friendships with Marian Evans (later known as George Eliot) and G. H. Lewes in 1850. There were rumours that Evans and Spencer were to marry, which Spencer denied. Spencer never married. T. H. Huxley, the biologist, was another friend made in these years.

Early in 1853, Thomas died. The money which Spencer inherited allowed him to relinquish his sub-editing work and devote himself to his own writing. From now until 1860 he produced an impressive number of substantial essays for the top journals of the day: 'Over-legislation'; 'The Universal Postulate'; 'The Genesis of Science'; 'Railway Morals and Railway Policy'; 'Progress: its Law and Cause'; 'The Origin and Function of Music'; 'Representative Government: What Is It Good For?'; 'State Tamperings with Money and Banks'; 'The Morals of Trade'; 'The Social Organism'; 'Parliamentary Reform: the Danger and the Safeguards'; and 'Prison Ethics'. All of these essays were subsequently reprinted in his *Essays: Scientific, Political and Speculative* (three volumes). From this time also came four essays on education (which developed ideas first expressed in *The Proper Sphere*); issued as a book they became of considerable importance as a source of criticism of rote learning in schools. The summer of 1854 saw him resolved upon a further project: a book on psychology, which, he decided, could be commenced abroad; he embarked first for Le Tréport on the north coast of France and then went on to Paris.

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For some time his health had been of concern to him. Although he often described himself as idle, he was working very hard indeed. A crash came in July 1855 on a visit to North Wales:

One morning soon after beginning work, there commenced a sensation in my head – not pain, nor heat, nor fullness, nor tension, but simply a sensation, bearable enough but abnormal. The seriousness of the symptom was at once manifest to me. I put away my manuscript and sallied out, fishing-rod in hand, to a mountain tarn in the hills behind the hotel, in pursuance of a resolve to give myself a week's rest; thinking that would suffice.

(*Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 467)

Sleeplessness and a diminished ability to concentrate for long periods on writing were from now on to be fixed features of his life of which he often complained. However, his physical health remained in general good, and, indeed, there was no relaxing of his authorial ambitions. Nor was travel abandoned.

The Principles of Psychology duly appeared later in 1855. This book grafted his developmentalism on to associationist psychology, and thus attempted to remedy a defect of associationism by offering an explanation of the differences between the learning abilities of species. Among those impressed by the book was John Stuart Mill, though not without significant criticism of it. It also sought to answer epistemological questions about the nature of certainty in psychological terms. Once the book was out he travelled once more. First he went back to Le Tréport, and then to Devon to try a rural life on the advice of a physician. In 1856 he was on a yachting excursion to the Channel Islands and France, and followed this up with a stay in Scotland at Ardtornish, overlooking Mull, to visit a friend, Octavius Smith. (Ardtornish, which accommodated Spencer's fondness for salmon fishing, became a favourite resort.) In the autumn he was in Paris and met Comte (with whom he was in disagreement over the classification of the sciences). Early in 1857 Mill was added to his list of acquaintances.

Spencer's work in the 1850s led to an outcome destined to dominate the rest of his life. By 1858 a 'complete concept of evolution' had occurred to him, and he drew up a draft scheme of the volumes to elucidate this on 6 January. During the 1850s the idea of progressive development in the organic world had been worked out in the essays. 'A Theory of Population' of 1852 argued that among human beings