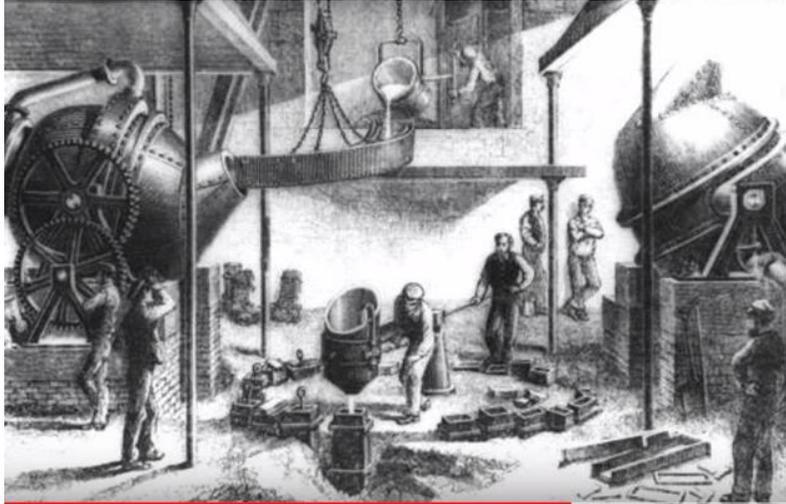


Heilbroner's The Worldly Philosophers, Chapter V The Dreams of Utopian Socialists (Summary)



(see endnotes for sources for images)

Tracing the birth of socialist ideas

- Heilbroner points to London of the 1820's as the birthplace for the rise of socialist ideas, occurring during the industrial revolution (18th-19th centuries).
- See 2 short videos on the industrial revolution:

<http://www.history.com/topics/industrial-revolution> (3 minutes)

<http://apecsec.org/pros-and-cons-of-industrial-revolution/> (see first 2 minutes)

What was the impact of the industrial revolution on the quality of everyday life? What were conditions like in the early 1800's?

- Heilbroner describes horrific conditions of grinding poverty, child labor, brutality and human rights violations, lack of sanitation and education, low life expectancy, no labor rights, and exploitation.



- See short video, Poverty in the Victorian era (images):
<http://youtu.be/ZsqJH4ReoWI>



- Major societal upheaval – changing from an agricultural, feudal way of life. People found themselves in unfamiliar terrain. Significant structural changes for labor, urbanization, family, culture, politics, philosophy, religion.
- The novels of Charles Dickens and Victor Hugo describe the bleak struggle of this time period; Dickens own father was in debtors prison.

People were naturally questioning the morality of this system and its impact on human dignity.

Three types of solutions were being proposed at the time:

- Violence and uprising, mobs (pg 106-107)
- Gradual and measured factory reforms
- Sweeping change – experiments in social engineering (this is the focus of Heilbroner’s chapter V)

Robert Owen and New Lanark experiment (pg 107-116)

- 1815-1825, experimentation with highly structured, socially engineered villages. Idealism, good intentions, social experimentation; there was strongly mixed reception to these ideas, perceived as naive.
- New Lanark “Villages of Cooperation” (UK) experiment failed. “New Harmony” (Indiana, USA) - “independence from private property, irrational religion and marriage” also failed.
- However – his tracts and teachings were attractive to the working classes, and this was the time of the first trade unions.
 - “The Grand National Moral Union of the Productive and Useful Classes” was a national union founded in 1833 with 500,000 members and the goal of deep social change (pg 114). The government and employing classes stamped it out within 2 years (the foundation eventually for what was to become the Labour Party).
- Heilbroner states, “He was not, by any stretch of the imagination, an economist. But he was more than that; he was an economic innovator who reshaped the raw data with which economists have to deal. Like all the Utopian Socialists, Owen wanted the world changed; but while others wrote, powerfully or otherwise, he went ahead and tried to change it.”

Count Henri de Rouvroy de Saint-Simon (pg 116-121)

- A revolutionary noble with grand ideas to change the world “a passionate disciple of the new ideas of freedom and equality” but with “nine-tenth ideas and one-tenth plan.” Like Owen, he dabbled in failed social experiments. He wrote an endless stream of mostly unread tracts and books, but had a small band of followers, the “Saint Simion Church” which began to spread, based on the idea that those who do the least (the elite wealthy) get the most, and that this must be reversed.

Charles Fourier (pg 121-124)

- Fourier also was an eccentric visionary, society should be organized into phalanxes (similar to Owen’s villages), highly structured down to the smallest detail. The idea took hold in the U.S. with 178 groups with large membership, but none lasted for long.

Heilbroner summarizes, “Do they appear ridiculous, these Utopians? ...They are worth our attention because they were courageous... They lived in a world that was not only harsh and cruel but that rationalized its cruelty under the guise of economic law....Reformers of the heart rather than of the head...” (pg 124).

Heilbroner traces the birth of these new ideas and describes the significance of Owen’s contribution, “The world is not inevitably good or bad but to the extent that we make it so. In that thought Owen left behind him a philosophy of hope more powerful than all his fanciful notions about spades and plows or money or Villages of Cooperation.” (pg 115-116). “Utopia builders had existed since Plato, but it was not until the French Revolution that they had begun to react to economic as well as political injustice” (pg 126).

John Stuart Mill (pg 126-135),

- Mill was a child prodigy, by age 13 he made a complete survey of all knowledge on political economy. Later in life he wrote “Principles of Political Economy, and discovered ideas that we can tinker with distribution of the wealth we create, the distribution of wealth depends on the laws and customs of society which could tax, subsidize, expropriate and redistribute (pg 129). He also recognized the difficulties of redistribution and its impact on human freedom and potential for “a tyrannical yoke” (pg 131). “Mill was above all else a believer in the possibility of changing social behavior(pg 132)...and became the great economist of his day” (pg 134) .
- These ideas lay the intellectual foundation for Marx, next chapter.

How did the Catholic Church respond to the social ills during the industrial revolution?

(Source: Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, chapter 6 On Human Work, pages 115-138)

Rerum Novarum, 1891, Pope Leo VIII

- This encyclical was a response to the exploitation of workers during the industrial revolution, affirming workers and their rights.
- It responded to ideological manipulation – socialist and communist – of the just claims advanced by the world of labor.
- “It is above all a heartfelt defense of the inalienable dignity of workers, connected with the importance of the right to property, the principle of cooperation among the social classes,

the rights of the weak and of the poor, the obligation of workers and employers and the right to form associations.” (pg 119)

- The human person is the measure of the dignity of work – not a labor force with an exclusively material value or an impersonal commodity. Human well being is the final goal, not profit per se. Work is for man, not man for work.
- There is an intrinsic social dimension and timelessness – “We are heirs of the work of generations and at the same time shapers of the future of all who will live after us.” (122)
- Relationship between labor and capital
 - Labor has an intrinsic priority over capital (a mere instrument)
 - Relationship of interdependent complementarities – beware of demonizing, polarizing, dehumanizing either, there must be charity and mercy toward both. “utterly unjust...denying the effectiveness of the other...”(pg 123). “
 - The right to unionize and strike
 - The church’s social doctrine teaches that relations within the world of work must be marked by cooperation: hatred and attempts to eliminate the other are completely unacceptable.” And “unions may not misuse the tools of contention...and be able to evaluate the consequences that their decisions will have on the common good.” (pg 134)
- Rest on the Sabbath, rest from work is a right.
- Man must not be enslaved by work but be concerned about his soul. Work should not be a source of anxiety.
- Institution of private property is a right. Property must be placed at the service of work.
- People have a right to work, full employment is a mandatory objective, unemployment is a social disaster that has negative consequences on the personality, the marginalized and socially excluded. Education and skills are critical to employment.
- Man is to cultivate and care for creation, we have a duty to work, and not live at the expenses of others. Idleness is harmful to the person. We are called to work to provide for ourselves and for charity for needy neighbors. Jesus condemns the behavior of the useless servant who buries his talent in the ground
- Work is essential to support family life, work and family life are interdependent and we should seek to understand them together, work should not penalize but support the family nucleus (balance).
- Women’s right to work must be guaranteed, beware of exploitation and servitude.
- Child labor is violence and slavery, a serious violation of human dignity.

In conclusion, what is our responsibility regarding these ideas?

- “Men and women of science and culture are called to make their particular contribution to solving the vast and complex problems connected with work, which in some areas take on dramatic proportions...that they suggest lines of action for guiding change in a way that will be most beneficial to the development of the entire human family. To these men and women falls the important task of reading and interpreting the social phenomena with wisdom and with love of truth.” (pg 139)

Discussion questions:

- Were conditions better for people before the industrial revolution?
- Why did Owen's experiments fail?
- What is the underlying philosophical import of the burgeoning socialist ideas of the 19th century? (e.g., secularism, perfectability of man, hubris)
- How do these ideas influence how we think today about international development, idealism, or social engineering?
- What do these readings make us think about assumptions about the appropriate role of government, capitalist vs. socialist solutions to poverty, paternalism vs freedom?
- Speaking of social experiments, what do we think about the economic order of a monastery, or the ideas of Dorothy Day?

Sources and links:

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Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. 2006.

Children of the industrial revolution: https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=E_tFFQyEu_Q

Child labor: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=kKcFDUDIRCE>

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