

Palante Reviews Palante

Georges Palante

Dec 1, 1912

The individualist is, by his very essence, immoralist and atheist. On one hand social religiosity, on the other religious and social atheism: this is how the dilemma is posed. As for me, I have made my choice. I have opted for social atheism. I have expressed this atheism for the past fifteen years in a series of works of which the latest, *Les Antinomies entre l'individu et la société* (The Antinomies Between the Individual and Society) is a doctoral dissertation that was refused by the Sorbonne. I owe my readers an explanation on this subject.

Some among them could ask how it is that the individualist, the social atheist that I am could blithely have submitted his ideas to the verdict of an official jury. Some considered that I failed in my individualism by supposing that my thesis could be accepted and my ideas assimilated by the Sorbonnic directors of thought. Several have even, in a friendly fashion, reproached me for this: "What were you doing with that crowd?" As excuse I will first answer that in presenting my thesis I fully intended to not sacrifice the measure of my ideas. And then, I proposed to carry out a social experiment: to see how far the tolerance and liberalism of thought of my judges went. The experiment has been completed: it gave the predicted results. It even surpassed my expectations. The limits of this tolerance are even narrower than I had thought. Never was a dissertation refused with greater haste, more offhandedly. From the very beginning my judges judged my thought unassimilable. Ordinarily, when a doctoral candidate presents himself at the Sorbonne he receives neither the assent nor the complete refusal of the judges. He must submit his work to so many modifications that it is impossible for the judges to not recognize themselves and then refuse a work to which they have made such a large contribution. They admire themselves in their work and in their student.

If my work was immediately refused it is without any doubt because I completely lack the qualities of a student and that, however unimportant my thought, it at least has the merit of being mine.

And it is this is what my readers ask of me. It is me that search for in my work, and not an image of contemporary philosophy multiplied in a hundred copies of the ideas of my judges, MM. Séailles and Bouglé. I thus find myself amply justified and glorified in my attitude by this striking certificate of intellectual independence granted me by the Sorbonne.

Among my readers, only those with an interest in social order will be disquieted by the casualness with which they cast aside a work which, whatever the case, represents a serious and sincere effort at thought. There are a certain number of good spirits who feel that we can reconcile concern with one's material situation with the taste for philosophy. Contemporary science has its prebends, just as the church once had its. Is it fair that these prebends be exclusively reserved to members of Sorbonnic "teams"? Is it fair that in order to have the right to aspire to this one must roll over and make a litter of one's ideas? For me this question doesn't even exist. For quite a while I have, like Horace, staked out my position on mediocrity. With no difficulty I renounce the profit of a Sorbonnic discipleship and the honor of professing in some cushy intellectual position the ideas of M. Séailles. Of all the moral prejudices I combat I maintain only one: the preference for the freedom of spirit over opulence.

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