

# The History Guide

## Lectures on Modern European Intellectual History

### Morelly, *Code of Nature* (1755)

The obscure tutor named Morelly, lived in the town of Vitry-le-François, in northwestern France. His first name, the dates of his birth and death, where he was born, and other biographical details, are not known. All that is certain is that he was the author of several philosophical works as well as an epic poem, *Basiliad*, which told of a communist utopia in a far-away land. This work was sharply criticized, and Morelly wrote *Code of Nature* in an attempt to provide a systematic philosophical justification of his communist ideas. The following excerpt consists of three passages on property from the first three sections of the work, and a large selection from the constitution in Part Four.

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The only vice that I perceive in the universe is *Avarice*; all the others, whatever name they be known, are only variations, degrees, of this one; it is the Proteus, the Mercury, the basis, the vehicle, of all the vices. Analyze vanity; fatuousness; pride; ambition; duplicity; hypocrisy; dishonesty; break down most of our sophistic virtues into their component parts, and they all resolve themselves into this subtle and pernicious element, *the desire to have*. You will even find it at the bottom of disinterestedness.

Now, would this universal plague, this slow fever, *private interest*, ever have been able to take hold if it had found no sustenance, nor even the slightest dangerous ferment?

I believe that no one will contest the justness of this proposition: that *where no property exists, none of its pernicious consequences could exist*. . . .

#### **The true medium of all political or moral demonstration, and the primary cause of all disorder**

. . . I dare to conclude here that is almost mathematically demonstrable that all division of goods, whether equal or unequal, and that all private *property* from among these portions is, it all societies, what Horace calls "material for the highest evil." All moral and political phenomena, are the effects of this pernicious cause; through it can be explained and resolved all *theorems* or *problems* about the origin or advancement of, the connection or affinity between, the different virtues and vices, disorders and crimes; about the true motives behind good or bad actions; about all the resolutions or perplexities of the human will; about the depravity of the passions; about the ineffectuality of precepts and laws that are meant to contain them; about the very *technical* faults in these lessons; finally, about all the monstrous productions that come from the aberrations of the mind or the heart. I say that the grounds for all these defects can be seen in the general tenancy of legislators to allow the primary link to all of all sociability to be broken by the usurpation of the resources that should belong in common to all humanity. . . .

#### **That which should remove from man any idea of moral evil**

it is therefore certain that this moral principal, "Do good in order to receive good," precedence among men over the other maxim, "do not do to others what you would find distasteful if done to you." Now, if you were to take away property, the blind and pitiless self-interest that accompanies it, you would cause all the prejudices in errors that they sustain to collapse. There would be no more resistance, either offensive or defensive, among men; there would be no more furious passions, ferocious actions, notions or ideas of *moral evil*. If any were to remain, or if some vestige of it were to re-emerge, this would only be the result of the merest accident, one of the smallest consequence. Minor oppositions of will, and obfuscating ever so slightly the light of reason among the opponents, would, far from weakening the domination of natural beneficence, only cause men to have a greater sense of its importance. In a word, there would be only a few small discords in society; it would quickly recover its harmony, and proceed to do far less to trouble this harmony than it would do to prevent it from fading away. . . .

#### **Model of Legislation that Conforms to the Intentions of Nature**

I am giving a sketch of laws as a sort of appendix, outside the body of the work itself, since it is unfortunately all too true that to form a republic of this sort would be just about impossible at the present time.

Any sensitive reader will be able to judge from the text, which requires no long commentaries, how many miseries mankind would be spared by the exercise of these laws. I have just proven that would have been easy for the first legislators to see to it that the peoples of the world were spared the knowledge of any of laws: if my proofs are complete, then I have achieved my objective.

I do not have the temerity to pretend to reform mankind; but I claim at least courage enough to be able to speak the truth untroubled by the outcries of those who bring truth into question because their concern is to deceive mankind, or at least to let it remain entangled in the errors by which they themselves had been duped.

### **Sacred and Fundamental Laws that would tear out the roots of vice and of all the evils of a society**

- I. Nothing in society will belong to anyone, either as a personal possession or as capital goods, except the things for which the person has immediate use, for either his needs, his pleasures, or his daily work.
- II. Every citizen will be a public man, sustained by, supported by, and occupied at the public expense.
- III. Every citizen will make his particular contribution to the activities of the community according to his capacity, his talent and his age; it is on this basis that his duties will be determined, in conformity with the *distributive* laws.

### **Distributive or Economic Laws**

- I. In order that everything be carried out in good order, without confusion or trouble, every nation will be enumerated and divided into *families, tribes* and *cities*, and, if the number of cities is large enough, into *provinces* as well.
- II. Each tribe will be made up of equal number of families, each city of a equal number of tribes, and so on.
- III. As the nation grows, the tribes and cities will be expanded proportionately, but only until the point is reached where it will be possible to form, out of the additional population, a new city or cities as populous as the original ones.
- IV. The number *ten* and its multiples will be the terms of all public division of things and persons; in other words, all in enumerations of things, all classifications, weights, measures, etc. will be made up of decimal parts.
- V. For each occupation, there will be so in so many *tens*, or so and so many *hundreds*, of workers, in proportion to the difficulty of the work, and in proportion to what is necessary to provide for the needs of a given city without overtiring the workers.
- VI. In order to regulate the distribution of the products of nature and art, it should first of all be noted that some products are *durable*, which is to say that they can be preserved, or that they remain usable for long time. Among the products of this sort are: (1) those that are in daily and general use, (2) those that are in general use, not all the time, (3) those that are constantly in use by a least one or a few persons at a time, and are used by everybody in the long run, (4) those that are never of either general or constant use: these latter are made by specific agreements for individual tastes. Now, all these durable products will be gathered together in public stores in order to be distributed to all the citizens, daily or at some other specified interval in the case of the first three categories of products, or on request, in the case of the fourth category.
- VII. It should also be noted that there is an order of products of nature and art that are *perishable*. These things will be brought to the public places and distributed there by those assigned in advance to the production and preparation of goods of the sort.
- VIII. The quantities of the products of every variety will be determined, and will then be apportioned, either according to the number of citizens of each city, or according to the number of those who use the particular product; the durable products will be publicly distributed according to the same rules, and the surplus will be placed in reserve.
- IX. In the case of the provisions that are made only on request, whether they be of a general or particular use, if the supply begins to run out before all orders have been filled, even if it is apparent that only one citizen will be deprived of his share, then all distribution of the product will be suspended, or else it will be apportioned in greatly reduced quantities, until the lack has been corrected. But particular care must be taken to prevent mishaps of this sort in the case of goods in general use.
- X. The surplus provisions of each city or province will be distributed among those in which there is danger of a shortage, or will be held in reserve for future cases of need.
- XI. In accordance with the *sacred laws*, nothing will be sold or exchanged between citizens. Someone who needs, for example greens, vegetables or fruits, will go to the public square, which is where these items will have been brought by the man who cultivate them, and take what he needs for one day only. If someone needs bread, he will go to baker and get the quantity that he needs for some specified period, and the baker will go to the public store to get the amount of grain that he needs for the quantity of bread that he has to prepare, whether for one day or several. Whoever needs an article of clothing will get it from the man who makes such articles, while the clothing-maker will get his fabrics from the man who manufactures them, and the manufacturer of fabrics will, in turn, get his raw material from the public store, where it will have been brought by those who cut or gather it: and so on, for all things that are to be distributed to heads of families, for their use and that of their children.
- XII. If the nation helps a neighboring or foreign nation by sending it some of its goods, or is helped in this way by some other nation, this commerce alone will be by the method of exchange, and will be carried out through the intermediary of

citizens whose transactions will be public; but scrupulous care must be taken to see to it that such commerce does not introduce private property of any sort into the republic.

### **Agrarian Laws**

I. Every city will have a stretch of cultivable land that will be as contiguous and as uniform as possible, that will not be held either as a whole or in part as private property by anyone, and that will be sufficient for the subsistence of the inhabitants.

II. If a city is situated in an arid region, then only crafts will be practiced there, and the neighboring cities will provide what is necessary for the subsistence of its inhabitants: but this city will nevertheless have, like every other community, its corps of agricultural workers, who will work either in the city's own territory wherever there are arable places, or in the agricultural areas of the neighboring cities.

III. Every citizen between the ages of 20 and 25, without exception, will be required to do agricultural work, unless some infirmity renders him unable to do so . . . .

### **Edile Laws**

I. Since the number of families in a tribe will not exceed a certain amount, or at least will exceed it by very little, and the number of tribes in a city will never exceed a certain amount by more than a margin of one, the areas of every city will be very nearly the same.

II. The public stores for all supplies and the public assembly rooms will be erected, in the form of a uniform and pleasant structure, around a great, even-sided, town square.

III. Outside this quadrangle will be the neighborhoods of the city, distributed at regular intervals, equal and size, of the same shape, and uniformly divided up into streets.

IV. Each tribe will occupy neighborhood, and each family will have spacious and comfortable lodgings within it; all these buildings will be uniform.

V. All the neighborhoods of the city will be laid out in such a way that they can be expanded whenever necessary without disturbing the regularity of the arrangement, and these expansions will not exceed certain limits.

VI. Some distance away, around the various neighborhoods of the city, arcades will be built, housing the workshops of every mechanical profession in which the corps of workers exceeds ten in number.

VII. Beyond this belt of workshops will be erected another circle of buildings to house persons who are employed in agriculture and related occupations. These buildings will also serve as workshops for these occupations, or as barns, store-rooms, stables, or tool-sheds, in whatever number these things are required by the particular city.

VIII. Beyond all these ranges of buildings, some distance away and in the most felicitous possible location, will be erected a spacious and comfortable building, in which every citizen who is ill will be lodged and cared for.

IX. Not far away, a comfortable retreat for all aged and infirm citizens will be erected.

X. Somewhere else, in the most unpleasant and barren location that can be found, will be erected a building surrounded by high walls, divided into small cells and enclosed in iron bars, in which all those who deserve to be separated from society for a time be incarcerated. . . .

### **Police Laws**

I. In every occupation, the oldest and most experienced will take turns every five days, according to seniority, in supervising five or ten of their companions, and will demand no more or less work of them than they would demand of themselves.

II. In every occupational group, there will be won master for every ten or twenty workers, and it will be his task to instruct them, inspect their work, and report on their work and conduct to the chief of the corps, will be chosen annually. Every master will hold his position for life, and will take his turn at being chief of the corps.

III. No one will be master in occupation sooner than one year after he has completed his agricultural service and returned to his original occupation, that is, not before he is twenty-six years of age . . . .

V. At the age of ten, every citizen will begin learning the occupation to which he is inclined, and of which he seems to be capable without excessively straining himself: at the aged fifteen or eighteen he will be married: between ages of twenty and twenty-five, he will perform one of the agricultural occupations: at twenty-six he will become a master either in his original occupation, if he returns to it, or in an agricultural occupation, if he chooses to remain in one. But, if he decides to take up an entirely different line of work, he cannot become a master until the age of thirty. At the age of forty, every citizen who has not by then become a master in some trade will be a free-lance worker, which is to say that, without being exempt from doing work altogether, he will nevertheless not be forced to do any work other than what he chooses, or any task other than what he imposes upon himself; he will be the master of his own free hours . . . .

VII. The Chiefs of each occupation will indicate the hours of rest and of work, and will designate which jobs have to be performed.

VIII. Every fifth day will be a public day of rest; for this reason, the year will be divided into seventy-three equal parts; every leap year, one of the days of rest will be doubled.

IX. Public festivals will always began on a day of rest, and will last six days, counting the day on which they begin.

X. The festivals will be celebrated immediately after the first plowing, before the beginning of the harvest, after the picking of the various fruits, and at the beginning of each year. During this last festival, all marriages will be performed, and the annually appointed chiefs of cities and occupational groups will take up their posts.

### **Sumptuary Laws**

I. At the age of thirty, every citizen will be allowed to address according to his taste, but not in any excessively fancy way. He will take his nourishment within his family circle as before, without intemperance or gluttony. The senators and chiefs are authorized by this law to punish all excesses in this matter, and they are themselves to give an example of moderation to others.

II. The young people between ages of twenty and thirty will be dressed uniformly within each occupation, in apparel that is both clean and appropriate to the particular work. Each corps will be distinguished by some color appropriate to the principal object of its work, or by some other distinguishing mark.

III. Every citizen will have both a work suit and a holiday suit, each of them modestly and appropriately adorned; the attire will be no more splendid than what the republic can afford, and no ornament will be permitted that might make a person stand out from the others in preference or regard. All manifestations of vanity will be suppressed by the chiefs and fathers of families.

### **Laws Pertaining to the Form of Government that would prevent all tyrannical domination**

I. Every head of a family will become a senator at the age fifty, and will have a deliberate and in decisive voice in every regulation that must be made pursuant to the intentions of the laws that the Senate is to preserve.

II. The other chiefs of families or of professional corps will be consulted in the regulation of matters concerning their occupations.

III. Every family in a tribe will take its turn in providing a chief for the tribe, who will hold that position for the rest of his life.

IV. The tribal chiefs will take turns at being chief of the city for terms of one year.

V. Each city will have its turn in providing a chief for the province, which will be an annual appointment, made by turns from chiefs of each of the tribes of the city. . . .

VI. Each province will have its turn in providing a chief for the entire state, who will all that position for life. . . .

### **Laws of Administration and Government**

I. The function of the Supreme Senate will be to examine the decisions and directives of the Senate of each city and to see to it that they contain nothing that could contradict laws of the state, either in the present or the future, and at the measures taken for police purposes or for the economy are wise and in conformity with the intentions of the laws. In consequence of this examination, the Supreme Senate will confirm or reject these particular directives in whole or in part: whatever has been less fixed as law for a single city will then be observed in all the others, and will be given the force of law by the acquiescence of the local Senates. . . .

IX. The annually appointed chiefs of cities and of provinces will occupy themselves only with their express functions; after the expiration of their terms, they will then be free to practice whatever profession wish. . . .

X. Every senator, political chief, workshop overseer and master artisan will be respected and obeyed in matters pertaining to the common service of the country, just as fathers of families are respected by their children.

XI. The formula of every public directive will be: *Reason wills it, the Law commands it.* . . .

### **Conjugal Laws that would do away with all debauchery**

I. Every citizen will be married as soon as he has reached the marriageable age; no one will be exempt from this, at least as long as nature or health presents no obstacle.

II. The marriage ceremonies will be held publicly to beginning of each year. The young people of both sexes will be brought together in the presence of the city Senate; every boy would choose the girl that pleases him and, after obtaining her consent, will take her as his wife.

III. The first marriage will be indissoluble for a period of ten years, after which divorce will be permitted, either at the consent of both partners in the marriage, or of one only. . . .

### **Educational Laws that would prevent the consequences of the blind indulgence of children by their parents.**

I. Mothers will nurse their own children if their health permits, and will not be exempted it from this without unquestionable proof of there own indisposition. . . .

IV. Within each tribe, all children reaching the age of five will be brought together, and the two sexes will be separately housed and fed in hand establishment set aside for this purpose. Their food, clothing and elementary education will be uniform throughout the land, without any distinctions, in accordance with the rules that be set down by the Senate.

V. For periods of five days a time, groups of parents will succeed one another in taking care of the children in these

establishments with as much care as they would give to their own, under the supervision of the tribal chief. They will apply themselves to inspiring moderation and obedience in their charges, and will try to prevent, through the use of either gentle persuasion or mild punishment, all discords, caprices, or bad habits; they will treat all the children with absolute equality.

VI. As their reason begins to develop, the children will be instructed in the laws of the country. They will be taught to respect the laws, to obey their parents, the chiefs, and other mature persons. They will be shown how to get along with their equals, to cultivate friendship with them, and never to lie. They will be instructed in activities suitable to their age, and, from time to time, in games that will help them to mold their bodies and prepare them for mature work. Nothing will be prescribed for them until they have first been made to see its reasonableness. These first instructions will continue to be cultivated by the masters, into whose care the children will be entrusted upon their leaving the first phase of childhood.

VII. Those children who prove to be robust enough to start learning, even before reaching the age of ten, the first principles of the profession for which they have been judged suitable, will be sent to the public workshops for several hours everyday to begin their apprenticeship.

VIII. All children upon reaching the age of ten, will leave the common paternal residence and go into the workshops, where they will be housed, fed and dressed, and where they will be instructed by the masters and chiefs of the various professions, whom they will obey as they would their own parents. They will all receive common treatment in every corps and in every workshop, where the two sexes will be separated and instructed in the occupations that suit them.

IX. The masters and mistresses, as well as the chiefs, in each profession, will include moral instruction in the technical exercises that they give. As the children begin to develop their rational faculties, some of them will begin to realize that there is a divinity, and, having heard people speak of it, they will begin to ask questions about this supreme being. In answer to their questions, they will be made to understand that this supreme being is the first and beneficent cause of everything that they admire or find to be lovable and good. Care will be taken not to give them any vague idea of this ineffable being, nor to pretend to explain his nature with terms that are void of sense: they will be told quite plainly that the author of the universe can be known only by his works, which proclaim him to be nothing other than a being who is infinitely good and wise, and that one cannot compare him to anything mortal. The young people will be made to realize that the feelings of sociability present in man are the sole oracles of divine intentions, and that it is in observing these sentiments that one can come to realize what a god is. They will be told that the laws are made in order to perfect these sentiments, and in order to apply systematically what these sentiments prescribe for the good of society.

X. All precepts, all maxims, all moral reflections, will be derived from the *Sacred and Fundamental Laws*, and always with respect to social unity and sympathy. All exhortations will emphasize the happiness of the individual as inseparably linked with the common good, and people will be encouraged to have the esteem and friendship of their fellow citizens and chiefs as the object of their endeavors.

XI. The chiefs and senators will watch carefully to see to it that the laws and rules for the education of children are everywhere exactly and informally observed, and to see to it above all that those faults of childhood that could tend to develop into the *spirit of private ownership* are wisely prevented or corrected. They will also prevent the minds of the very young from becoming imbued with any ridiculous myth, tale or fiction. . . .

### **Laws of Study that would prevent all aberrations of the human mind and all unworldly reveries**

I. The number of persons engaged in the sciences, and in the arts that demand more sagacity, penetration, concentration, industriousness and talent than they do physical strength, will be determined, so many for each branch of study, and so many for each city. The citizens best suited for work of this type of study will be instructed in it from early age, although this type of study will not exempt them from their term of agricultural work when they reach the age for it. Nobody, except for the prescribed number of masters and pupils in the arts and sciences, will be permitted to give his time to pursuits of this sort before reaching the age of thirty. At that age, those whose experience has perfected their understanding and developed their inclinations in the direction of some pursuit more elevated than the one in which they had previously been engaged, will be able to enter the arts or sciences.

II. There will be absolutely no moral philosophy other than that within the system of laws. The observations and precepts of this science will rest exclusively on the utility and wisdom of these laws, on the satisfactions that come from ties of blood and friendship, on the mutual service and regard that unite the citizens, on the usefulness of work, on love, on the all the general and special rules of good order and perfect concord. The study of this science will be common to all the citizens.

III. All metaphysics will reduce itself to what was said above concerning the divinity. As for man, it will be pointed out that he is endowed with reason, which is destined to make him sociable; that the nature of his faculties, as well as the natural principles of their operation, are unknown to us; that is only the *processes* of this reason that can be observed and followed by the thoughtful application of that same faculty: in that we do not know what constitutes the basis and sustenance of this faculty within us, just as we do not know what becomes of his principle when we die. It could perhaps be said that this *principle intelligent* subsists even after life, but that is useless to attempt to know a condition about which the author of nature has not instructed us in any palpable way: such would be the prescribed limits of speculations of this sort.

IV. Complete freedom will be allowed to the sagacity and penetration of the human mind in those speculative and experimental sciences that have as their object inquiry either into the secrets of nature, or into ways of perfecting the arts useful to society.

V. There will be a sort of public code for all the sciences, in which nothing beyond the limits prescribed by the laws will ever be added to metaphysics or to morals. Only discoveries in physics, mathematics, or mechanics, confirmed by reasoning and experiment, will be added to the code.

VI. The moral and physical beauty of nature, the objects of the sciences, of the pleasures and satisfactions of living in society, and the honor of the citizens who have contributed in a distinguished manner to the perfecting of things, will be celebrated in oratory, poetry, and painting.

VII. Every local Senate will maintain a written record of the activities of chiefs and of citizens worthy of being commemorated; but care will be taken to see that these histories are free of all exaggeration, flattery and, above all, of all falsification. The Supreme Senate will put all these histories together to compose the history of all nation.

VIII. Every chapter of these laws will be engraved separately on the necessary number of columns erected in the public square each city, and their intentions will always be followed according to the proper, direct, and literal sense of the text, this slightest alteration of which will never be permitted. If some obscurity or a ambiguity should be found in any one of the laws, it will be necessary to try to explain it by some other law, or to determine the meaning of this law once and for all, in the way most favorable to the principles of the *Sacred and Fundamental Laws*.

[Source: Albert Fried and Ronald Sanders, ed., *Socialist Thought: A Documentary History* ( New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), pp. 18-31.]

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