

# LUDWIG GUMFLOWICZ<sup>1</sup>

I. KOCHANOWSKI

Member of the International Institute of Sociology, Paris

WARSAW, August 26

Deeply moved, still suffering from the paralyzing effect which the news of the self-destruction of the great scholar has made upon me, I write these lines.

“Professor Ludwig Gumplowicz and his wife committed suicide by poison today.” This laconic telegram which filled the entire civilized world with reverent awe and deeply shocked the heart of everyone who knew the deceased more closely, relates the tragic final chapter of the life-history of as great a thinker as he was a man.

Without as yet attempting to give an exhaustive scientific valuation of the departed, I will here only try to throw some light on the torturing riddles of his life and death.

Gumplowicz, the writer, thinker, philosopher, sociologist, jurist, and historian, was an uncompromising pessimist; Gumplowicz, the man, was inspired by an idealism that knew no bounds in the renunciation of his wants, in sacrifice, and the love of absolute truth.

His students called him an angel, and this title was no exaggeration applied to a man who—without willing it—surrounded himself with the halo of a great soul and a noble mind.

Gumplowicz died for his beloved wife, who adored him, to save her the terrible sight of his agony, the sight of the gradual dissolution of a man who had suffered for months from cancer of the tongue. She died with him. The heroic pair reached the shore of the great silence only after fifteen years of deep sadness over the death of their son, Dr. Max Gumplowicz, who had already earned a well-deserved reputation and departed from life voluntarily (1894).

<sup>1</sup> Reprint from the Vienna weekly journal, *Die Wage*; translated by Mrs. Johanna Odenwald-Unger.

Before he had reached his seventieth birthday, Gumplowicz laid down his professorship and took a vacation. On this same birthday (March, 1908) he received a great many ovations, which, with wonted modesty, he was loath to accept. Prominent men, on that occasion, emphasized loudly, in spoken and written language, their gratefulness and appreciation of the scientific activity of the great savant, to whom, in the search after truth, no labor had been too difficult, and who had defended his ideas bravely and unflinchingly. In his honor a sociological society was founded in Graz during those days.

Sociology, which for some is "natural history" of the historical development of man, for others a synthesis of the most essential historical phenomena, an apex of the philosophy of the social sciences, or even a pure historiosophy, was for Gumplowicz a science which should be devoted exclusively to the investigation of the relations common to the social groups and classes. Starting from this foundation he devoted himself to the observation and investigation of social development with the high moral impartiality of the searcher after truth.

Science (sociology) [writes Gumplowicz] does not belong to any particular camp; it is not, indeed, a fighting party at all, it is an observation tower, a lookout, from which the movements of the fighting parties may be investigated. Its purpose is not victory, but knowledge; it should be beyond partiality."

And he knew very well the invincible obstacles standing in the way of the valuation of social events, for he wrote:

No chemist would ask whether oxygen *did well* in uniting with hydrogen, or whether it is *right* in mixing with quicksilver. No astronomer would ask, whether the moon, in appearing between sun and earth is worthy of praise or blame—but no historian could be found who would consider it unjustified to judge about the "right" or "wrong" action of King X or Minister Y; who would refrain from praise or blame in the conception of any action whatever.

While Auguste Comte, who regarded sociology as a natural science of society, could not keep up this standpoint in his own writings, and while Herbert Spencer, who warned so frequently and insistently as to the danger of subjectivity in sociological investigation, nevertheless fell a prey to the temptations of the

one-sided interests of the Manchester school and of capitalism, Gumplowicz insisted that sociology as a science must be kept free from the yoke of the subjective conception of the political and moral sciences.

Did he believe in the realization of this ideal?

No, but he loved it with the whole strength of his noble soul, and this, perhaps, characterizes better than anything else the nature of this scientific standpoint and the high dignity of that standard to which he remained true to the end. His innermost conviction commanded him to announce the idea, that the influence of subjectivism would always remain the source of the common mistakes and errors in the investigation of truth in so far as "the individual (i. e., the savant) acts as it *is*, and it *is* such, as its own *milieu* has *created* it;" but at the same time idealism whispered in his ear: "sociology must investigate the movements of the fighting parties and the laws of these movements from an *impartial standpoint*."

Among sociologists the one whom Gumplowicz valued most highly was Gustav Ratzenhofer who died in 1904. Not long ago he gave a flattering analysis of his system in the *Warsaw Historical Review*<sup>2</sup> (Polish). Gumplowicz' high appreciation of the ideas of the philosopher, Ratzenhofer, has its source in the spiritual kinship of these two savants; and this kinship was the result of certain cultural qualities of the "Zeitgeist" which called into being such men as Carlo Cattaneo, Friedrich Nietzsche, Gustav Ratzenhofer, and Ludwig Gumplowicz. All these men, though independent of each other, choosing different paths, turning their eyes into different directions, yet all were trying to reach the same aim, namely a revaluation of those social moral values which, being looked upon by humanity as fixed, unalterable, and invulnerable, had to be adapted to the modern intellect; all these men, similar in their starting-points and yet independent of each other, will be added, as chosen sons of the nineteenth century, to that society of mighty minds who, on the wings of genius, soar high up into the future of the centuries and generations, and if in this respect Carlo Cattaneo was an eclectic *sui generis*, Nietzsche

<sup>2</sup> *Przegląd Historyczny*, Vol. VI (Warsaw, 1908).

a psychologist of humanity, and Ratzenhofer a philosopher of its development *sub specie aeternitatis*, Gumplowicz, who remained true to the subject of social groups and, therefore, limited the direction of his studies most carefully, Gumplowicz was the first great scholar who conceived of the events which seem to form the essence of the origin and development of the state as taking place with strictest precision and the most systematic exactness. His chief merit, therefore, is doubtless to be found in the powerful influence which he exerted upon the political sciences. In his works he threw light on the essential basis of these sciences from the standpoint of sociology and its wealth of material gathered in the last few years, and he subjected them to a sharp criticism and careful investigation. Great changes are never brought about by the efforts of a single individual; even the greatest individuals can serve only as guides to further individual and collective labor. It was the imperishable merit of Gumplowicz to have been one of the first of European savants to attempt a liberation of the political sciences from the misty regions of the "juristic state" ("Rechtsstaat")—a juristical speculation par excellence, possessing from the very first its special scholastic style. To the brilliant studies of this great scholar who considered the "state" as a world in itself, capable of being analyzed, investigated, and determined almost exclusively within its own limits and by its own parts, and who brought to his studies a comprehensive sociological basis, this "state" revealed itself as a single link in the chain of social phenomena.

Ludwig Gumplowicz was born on March 9, 1838, in Krakau, the child of a prominent Polish family of Jewish origin. He studied in 1858–61 in the universities of Krakau and Vienna. Already in 1860 he began his journalistic career, and from 1869–74 he edited his own magazine *Kraj* (the *Country*) which had been founded by Prince Sapicka. In 1875—at the age of thirty-seven—he entered the University of Graz as lecturer in the science of administration ("Verwaltungslehre") and Austrian administrative law, was professor extraordinary at the same university in 1882, ordinary professor in 1893, and resigned in 1908, after thirty years' academic activity. His first sociological work was

*Race and State* (1875) the title of which was afterward changed into *The Sociological Idea of the State* (1881), and reappeared lately, enlarged, as *General State Law* ("Allgemeines Staatsrecht") (1907). How much Gumplowicz advanced the development of sociology is proved by the unusual circulation of his works, *The Sociological Idea of the State* and the *Outlines of Sociology* have appeared in two, the *Austrian State Law* and *General State Law* in three, German editions. Many of his larger works, as, for instance, the *Outlines of Sociology*, *Austrian State Law*, *The Race Struggle*, *Sociological Essays*, *Sociology and Politics*, and others, have been translated into foreign languages. Besides the Germans and Poles, in whose language Gumplowicz wrote his books himself, the English, French, Italians, Japanese, Roumanians, Russians, and Spaniards have endeavored to acquaint themselves with the works of this great thinker in their own language. A number of valuable, characteristic essays of the departed, which deserve to be collected, have appeared in numerous papers, reviews, and technical journals in his own and in foreign countries. In the last few years Gumplowicz has chiefly favored the Vienna paper *Die Wage*, Eleutheropulos' *Monatschrift für Soziologie*, the *Beilagen zur Münchener Allgemeinen Zeitung*, and the Warsaw *Przegląd Historyczny* which, in its next number, will publish his last essay on "Sociology and Politics."

Gumplowicz possessed to the last a wealth of youthful strength of mind which surprised everybody. When, as in each year, I visited him on July 18 in Graz, he showed, though suffering from a cruel disease, the liveliest interest in science and its mission. He seemed much concerned over the Congress of the International Institute of Sociology in Bern, which had then but recently adjourned.

"Sociology is not exactly his creation," writes Professor Dr. A. Eleutheropulos, "for it is a genuine science and a science is not born like a child, but develops gradually like a crystal. But Gumplowicz is one of the few, who have helped the formation of these crystals."

May earth be lighter to him than life, for which he achieved and yet suffered so much!