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Herbert Spencer's Four Theories of Social Evolution[1]

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Although there is at present a revival of critical interest in Spencer, more disagreement than agreement exists among scholars regarding the exact nature of his social evolutionism. It is here argued that the single term "social evolution" was actually applied by Spencer to four quite different theories—an inherent source of difficulty for his readers. This essay, which strongly affirms each discipline's need for an accurate history of itself, provides a novel but fully documented analysis of what Spencer himself understood by "social evolution." It is concluded that an entirely new chapter on Spencer is required before either his historical or contemporary relevance can be accurately gauged.

INTRODUCTION

There is today a resuscitation of interest in the sociology of Herbert Spencer. The present revival of Spencer marks a complete reversal of an earlier and long-lasting consensus among social theorists. In 1937, Parsons (1968, 1:3) expressed the earlier view when he echoed Brinton's query: "Who now reads Spencer?" Spencer's God—evolution—had abandoned him. "Spencer is dead." Several years later, it was proclaimed by Faris (1950, p. 176) that the "evolutionary conceptions of Spencer and his followers have all but disappeared from modern sociology" and by Corwin (1950, p. 187) that "Spencer's influence is today extinct."

The social evolutionists were dismissed for reconstructing history in their quest to establish the origins (not functions) of sociocultural traits and for generally violating the functional integrity of the whole by ripping traits from their systemic context. Social evolutionism, with which Spencer was conspicuously identified, did not seem compatible with an emerging functionalism; it did not seem to lend itself to a rising conception of society as a functionally integrated whole and to a methodological predilection for analyzing observable constitutive traits of the social whole in terms of their functional consequences for its integration and adaptation.

Today, the funeral orations of Brinton, Parsons, and others seem altogether premature. As Nisbet observes (1969, pp. 223 ff., 322 n.), there

[1] I should like to express a warm note of appreciation to Robert A. Nisbet for having initially stimulated a critical interest in reexamining the sociology of Herbert Spencer against the backdrop of current scholarly opinion and to Joseph B. Ford for having helpfully discussed with me the many-sided necessity of having an accurate history of sociology.

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is at present a resurgence of evolutionism. Sociologists of this persuasion are now lauding Spencer for his pioneering efforts at building an evolutionary theory of society. Parsons (1961, p. viii) himself suggests that the revival of evolutionary thinking "testifies to Spencer's importance." And Lenski (1970, pp. 60, 110–11) applauds Spencer for having taken an "evolutionary view of history." This renewed interest in Spencer and evolutionary models of change seems to parallel the increasing attention being given to the modernization (or "development") of Third World countries.

In the wider context of a renascence of interest in Spencer, it is now discovered that "he was also a thoroughgoing functionalist" (Carneiro 1968, p. 124), and, moreover, "between Spencer's evolutionism and his functionalism there is symbiosis not contradiction" (Abrams 1968, p. 68). Was Spencer discarded for not having what he had all along, namely, a functionalism?

Each science needs an accurate history of itself. As Gouldner (quoted in Goldthorpe 1970*a,* p. 9) has cogently answered Whitehead's famous aphorism about a science being "lost" which "hesitates to forget its founders": "But to forget something, one must have known it in the first place. A science *ignorant* of its founders does not know how far it has travelled nor in what direction; it, too, is lost." The immediate problem of this paper is one of empirical history, for the current written accounts and analyses of Spencer's evolutionary theory are incomplete and often contradictory. Much of this results from a failure to recognize that Spencer had more than one theory of social evolution. Taken in their totality, then, existing accounts of Spencer's thinking make it impossible, first, to determine precisely in what his position consists; second, to raise questions of the relevance—positively or negatively instructive—of any of his formulations for today's evolutionism; and third, to judge, as Gouldner suggests we must, distance and direction traveled—to judge, for example, whether we have indeed, to quote Brinton, "evolved beyond Spencer."[2] It is hoped, then, that the present effort will help bridge the gap between Spencer's actual social evolutionary theory and existent views of it.

THE DISARRAY IN THE CURRENT CRITICAL LITERATURE

The social evolutionism appearing, in greater or lesser degrees, throughout most of Spencer's nearly two dozen published volumes has received a very

[2] This is indeed a moot question. For while Parsons (1966, p. 109) claims neo-evolutionism is not just something which belatedly claims the "old social evolutionists were simply right after all" but rather is a theory which is "more than merely reviving old ideas," Nisbet (1969, pp. 227–28) insists he "cannot find the substantive difference": "The differences between contemporary *social* evolutionary theory and the theory of Herbert Spencer do not seem very large or very significant."

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wide range of critical interpretation. The following may be taken as a representative survey. LaPiere and Bock maintain that for Spencer evolution resulted from immanent forces: he "assumed that social change comes about through the working of some process that is built into society, some inherent process" (LaPiere 1965, p. 37); it was an "unfolding of potential," something over which "external" causes had but minimal influence, an influence never affecting the "course or direction of change" (Bock 1964, pp. 23–24). On the other hand, for Burrow (1966, p. 202), Spencer was an " 'environmental determinist.' He holds that all changes come about through the action of changes in the action of the environment on the subject of change."

According to Abrams (1968, p. 68) and numerous others, natural selection was the key to Spencer's social evolutionism. Conversely, Peel (1972, p. xxii) states that "natural selection, though accepted, was a late and superfluous element in a system that was essentially Lamarckian." For Harris (1968, pp. 107, 129, 130), Spencer, while purporting a belief in universal progress, biologized history. His "fundamental error was that he drastically over-emphasized the importance of hereditary factors as causal elements in the explanation of the behavioral specialties exhibited by Homo sapiens populations"; he thus espoused a "racial determinism." In contrast, Carneiro (1968, p. 126) writes that Spencer did not believe " 'racial' differences" could account for sociocultural differences: "Almost invariably he explained cultural phenomena primarily by the interplay of cultural and environmental factors."

For Bock (1964, pp. 23–24), Spencer held that change was "inevitable" and had a definite "direction," one determined by "something within society or culture": "The direction of social change is from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous. . . ." This was social evolution, something synonymous with change. Vine (1969, pp. 57–58) reaches a similar view: evolution was "automatic," and Spencer stated that "societies or social systems always tend to become more heterogeneous." For LaPiere (1965, p. 37), Spencer's conception of evolution was decidedly unilinear: "Every society, Spencer thought, goes through a series of fixed and immutable stages." So conclude Moore (1963, p. 7), Roth (1973, p. 78), and, just recently, Denisoff, Callahan, and Levine (1974, p. 6). Timasheff (1967, p. 42), among innumerable others, argues that "Spencer persistently removed culture items from their contexts and fitted them into his own preconceived patterns." But, on the other hand, for Abrams (1968, p. 72), Spencer only employed stages "as an organizing principle," and the "analysis throughout the *Principles of Sociology* tends to be in terms of particular interactions of structure and function in this or that concrete setting." Similarly, Carneiro (1968, p. 126) states that Spencer saw the "process by which societies develop as consisting, by and large, in responses

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to particular problems posed by cultural and natural environments, rather than in movement through a universal and necessary series of stages." There was no "unilinearity" (see also Andreski 1971, p. 14). And, according to Burrow (1966, pp. 191–92, 203), Spencer did not see evolution as inevitable nor even as the most common form of change (see also MacRae 1969, p. 29). Evolution was contingent, not necessary or inevitable. Neither did Spencer violate the unity of the whole, for he approached "societies as systems of complex functional relations" and was interested in "types of societies, not the history of isolated institutions or culture traits."

Buckley (1967, pp. 12–13) declares that Spencer was ignorant of (social) species and phylogeny (speciation). Similarly, for Bock (1964, p. 36), Spencer's theory of social evolution bore no true analogy to theories of biological evolution: the latter was concerned with the "problem of differences"—speciation—while the former saw all societies as of one form (species), differing only in their stages of "maturity." Lenski (1970, p. 60), on the other hand, praises Spencer for having recognized real and important "similarities between organic and socio-cultural evolution. . . ." Similarly, in the opinion of Goldthorpe (1970*b*, p. 79), Spencer did attempt to show "that the evolution of societies, considered as entities, was a process essentially akin to that of the evolution of [biological] species."

Vine writes (1969, p. 55), "Because of Spencer's focus on evolution, change, and origins, he gave little attention to the persistence of social structures"; more generally, "he was not concerned with the problems of social control and the perpetuation of social systems." A similar view is expressed in Parsons (1967, p. 30; see also 1968, 1:4, 311 ff., 346), where it is stated that Spencer's view amounted to "the negation of social control." For Gluckman (1965) and Bock (1964, p. 37), functions are ignored in Spencer's evolutionary sociology. Conversely, it seems to Coser (1971, p. 97) and Peel (1971, p. 183) that Spencer did seek out functions of traits for integration, persistence, adaptation, and the like.

Spencer's social evolutionism is many things to many scholars. Few of their interpretations are complete or free from serious inaccuracies; taken together, they are often mutually contradictory. The argument of this paper is that Spencer had not one, but four discrete theories of what he, himself, frequently termed "social evolution" (and sometimes "social development"). Not all, but perhaps a good share of the current exegetic diversity in sociology's empirical history stems from this unrecognized fact.

SOCIAL EVOLUTION AS PROGRESS TOWARD AN IDEAL "SOCIAL STATE"

The earliest usage is to be found in Spencer's *Social Statics,* first published in 1850, which spells out the functional prerequisites of an ideal society

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or "social state." It is a society based upon amity, individual altruism, an elaborate specialization of functions, criteria which recognize only achieved qualities (as opposed to ascribed ones), and, primarily, a voluntary cooperation among highly disciplined individuals. It is, accordingly, a society in which formal government practices negative regulation only—"ought nots."

In this future society (movement toward which constitutes "social progress" or, as it was later renamed, "social evolution") much, then, depends not merely upon voluntary contractual relations generally but, far more basically, upon a well-diffused (and somewhat puritan) morality (e.g., 1892, p. 106).[3] That is, essentially, the solution to the book's foremost problem, namely, "how an aggregate of citizens may stand without tendency to conflict and disruption" (1904, 1:414). A "system of equity"—rights and duties—and full commitment to it by individuals constitute the *sine qua non*. The question, however, is how this state of affairs comes about.

The crucial assumption is this: "Conduct has to be ruled either from without or from within. If the rule from within is not efficient, there *must* be a supplementary rule from without . . ." (1892, p. 106). For Spencer (1969, p. 106; 1897, 3:553; 1860, p. 5), the essence of society is cooperation and regulation—the "control of individuals." Rules and norms and controlling or constraining agencies exist to the extent that spontaneous behavior does or would threaten social stability. "Controlling agencies" of all kinds, from group customs and diffuse public opinion to formal government and law norms, are seen as functionally indispensable concomitants of collective existence. The extent of "external control" is variable, however, and the ideal society presumes the elimination of the chief conditions which necessitate extensive "rule from without."

Intersocietal hostilities constitute the major factor brutalizing personality, accentuating egoism, and developing within the group behavioral propensities for conflict because of the means which are chosen (e.g., technically efficient, not necessarily normative, ones) to obtain commonly desired but relatively scarce objects and ends. In short, "war fosters anti-social sentiments" (1969, p. 252). Even with the important intragroup consolidating effects which, as Spencer well sees, derive from war and the preparation for it, the aggressive substratum is always a potential threat to the cohesion and stability of the group; its expression against fellow citizens is prevented only by the continued existence of outgroups and the elaborate regulating structures endemic to military societies—for example, ancient Sparta, Peru, and Mexico. In view of this threat, an ideal society must presuppose the cessation of intergroup hostilities and also an even-

[3] Unless otherwise specified, references are to Spencer.

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tual stabilization of population, for in dilating population is found the Malthusian source of the "struggle for existence."

In his earliest and most optimistic writings, Spencer derives pacifism (as well as declining fertility rates) from advancing industrialization, itself unexplained beyond being loosely connected with certain phenomena which war alone has produced—namely, large, consolidated, and highly dense aggregates in which population pressure engenders successive functional-structural specializations. History is thus to bequeath societies which are wholly industrialized and differentiated, wholly pacific, and which have fertility levels that, at most, do not exceed the capacity of economic organization for functionally absorbing new increments of population. Spencer naively assumes that the consequences of war—large-scale nations and thus the possibility of extensive economic interdependencies—will aid in putting an end to war.

Apart from threat or military exigency, the activity of work—"peaceful labour"—is to become the setting for the full development of "altruistic sentiments" and the corresponding diminution of "egoistic sentiments." "Moral nature" (or social values generally) varies with "social organization," and the "moral nature proper to a social organization based on contract instead of *status* [as with the military society]—the moral nature fostered by a social life carried on under voluntary co-operation instead of compulsory co-operation, is one . . . which works out political freedom" (1897, 3:139). If positive governmental control ("oughts") subsides, it is because it becomes less necessary for social equilibrium. "The diminution of external restraint" takes place "at the same rate as the increase of internal restraint" (1892, p. 106). Spencer also looks for a long-range change in human nature itself, namely, the securing of altruism as a species trait (via environmental-hereditary adaptation) by the continuation of peaceful cooperation for an indefinite period of time; that is to say, social and cultural changes might be followed by organic changes. On balance, then, it is the conditions of existence which are primary: "Social traits are not peculiar to any variety of men [race] but are dependent on conditions" (quoted in Abel 1970, p. 133).

The older Spencer is less sanguine, seeing not a progressive decline of warfare (together with its consequences for a society's structure, culture, and character) but "rhythms" between war and peace, with the massive industrialized-militarized state cemented by permanent *bureaux*. Spencer's earliest view thus is revamped. Whereas the "industrial type of society" denotes a society which is both pacific and industrialized,[4] the historical heir to the "militant type of society" (thanks to spreading industrialism

[4] At least, this is the case in Spencer's earlier use of the expression. Later on, "industr*ial*" is used to mean peaceful or pacific, but not necessarily industrial*ized*.

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and its assumed antimilitary nature), both become, by the 1880s, "theoretically constructed" types to be used strictly in comparative analysis (see 1897, 1, pt. 2, chaps. 10–11; 2, pt. 5, chaps. 17–18). But as the view stands at the beginning of Spencer's long career, it is concerned with "the equilibrium of a perfect society" and connotes a process of change which is the realization of man's altruistic potential, "a development of man's latent capabilities under the action of favourable circumstances" (1892, pp. 233, 237). It is, consequently, a morally progressive change. It is, additionally, necessary and inevitable, given the expected attainment of anterior conditions—war, for large and dense aggregates, these producing in turn internally specialized and interdependent economic relations and, finally, peace. It is change that is more or less organized by stages, hence directional and uniform in large part, and it is unaffected by race. Spencer's view is holistic, that is, it relates social activity, structure, culture, and personality; it is much informed by Spencer's constant awareness of the problem of maintaining social order and control.

SOCIAL EVOLUTION AS THE DIFFERENTIATION OF SOCIAL AGGREGATES INTO FUNCTIONAL SUBSYSTEMS

A second distinguishable theory called social evolution by Spencer amounts to, first, the assumption of functional requirements for a society's continued existence and, second, the general proposition that whole societies tend to differentiate into "societal subsystems," the functions of which correspond to these requirements.

From the wider spectrum of Spencer's writings, it is clear that what he alternatively calls "social requirements" and "social needs" are dictated by conditions which are logically more primitive and which are temporally prior or at least coextensive. These conditions are the exigencies posed, first, by the facts of human nature (for instance, mortality, reproduction, sustenance needs); second, by society's external environment (for example, flora, fauna, climate, topography, human life); and, third, by the nature of "social existence" itself (that is, the unique "conditions produced by social aggregation"). Plural existence—the sheer fact of a juxtaposition of individuals in time and space—is a problem insofar as societal persistence presupposes some degree of interindividual cooperation as against a Hobbesian "war of all against all." From the above exigencies, the following requirements emerge, each being closely tied to the idea of interunit cooperation: procreation ("maintenance of the race"), production ("social sustentation"), exchange ("social distribution"—the disposition of scarce resources), communication ("internuncial function"), means for position-role placement ("the transmission of positions and functions"—required because the "maintenance of a society's organiza-

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tion implies that the units forming its component structures shall severally be replaced as they die" by the criteria of "personal qualities" or "inheritance," in short, by a principle of stratification [1897, 2:258, 259, 263]), and the control of individual behavior ("social regulation"—the inducement of common beliefs, values, and ideas, which involves political, social, and intraindividual or internalized control and by which "social cohesion" is possible).

This last element points up the essence of social life. For Spencer (1897, 2:244, 263; 3:553), societies presuppose "mutual dependencies" and cooperation. But cooperation, far from being automatic or spontaneous, entails supraindividual forces, namely, "regulation, and an implied submission to regulating agencies" (1969, p. 106). Cooperation presumes cohesion as well as rendering it possible (1897, 2:262–63); and both, along with the empirical realization of specific functions, presuppose regulation. As Spencer (1860, p. 5) affirms, "from the far past even to the present, social needs have subordinated individual needs, [and] the chief social need has been the control of individuals." In his view, there are three distinct facets of social regulation: political control, social control, and socialization.

There is, first, the problem of control for the realization of collective goals. Political organization is required, that is, individual actions and "volitions" must be "constrained" in such ways that "social safety shall not be endangered by the disorder consequent on unchecked pursuit of personal ends" (1897, 2:246–47). Spencer's (1897, 2:606) most frequent illustration of a collective goal is that of defense: "The continued existence of a society implies," for example, "that it shall not be destroyed by foreign foes"; he discusses how this goal empirically constrains the operation (or limits the variability) of other social activities and both structural and cultural processes such as production, distribution, general measures of social control, and sanctioned attitudes and opinions.

There is, second, the necessity for the establishment and maintenance of interindividual relationships which are "cohesive," which show a "tolerable harmony." "Social union," Spencer insists (1897, 2:272), "requires a considerable homogeneity of nature among [individuals]." As such, groups of individuals "made alike in ideas and sentiments, are groups in which the greatest social cohesion and power of co-operation arise" (1897, 2:285–86). The focus here is upon the overall control of a plurality of individuals—the realization of orderly and stable social relationships and patterns by the diffusion and maintenance of common values and beliefs.

There is, finally, the problem of establishing and maintaining a correspondence between the sentiments, beliefs, and values of most individuals and the wider social organization with its associated normative substratum.

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This is essentially a problem of legitimizing the social order, of giving it an "ethical sanction." "Unless the mass of citizens have sentiments and beliefs in something like harmony with the social organization in which they are incorporated, this organization cannot continue" (1961, p. 158). The focus here is intraunit, that is, the inculcation in successive generations of individuals of the belief that existing social structure and cultural values are legitimate, are worthy of positive affect and support, quite apart from any sanctions associated with deviation. The relevant process here is socialization.

Spencer's basic explanatory form, in this second theory, is functionalist—"one in which the *consequences* of some behavior or social arrangement are essential elements of the *causes* of that behavior" (Stinchcombe 1968, p. 80). To understand, Spencer argues (1897, 3:3), how *basic* organizations—kinship, religious, economic, ceremonial, political—everywhere originate and persist, it is necessary to understand their functions, the needs subserved. The chief proposition is that, "apart from all their special differences, societies have general resemblances in their modes of origin and development. . . . [S]ocial organization has laws . . ." (1969, pp. 148–49). Confronted with common functional problems, societies display certain basic commonalities. Spencer's (1873–1934) *Descriptive Sociology,* the empirical foundation for the *Principles of Sociology* (1897), demonstrates the existence of universal social institutions and social activities.

None of this means, as Durkheim (1964, chap. 5) and others have charged, that Spencer fails to separate, in sociological explanation, the causes of origin (efficient causes) and functions. Indeed, referring to religion, for example, Spencer writes (1880, pp. 10–12), "we are bound to ask its origin and its function. . . ." What Spencer does mean is that, with respect to social phenomena corresponding to social needs ("vital functions," as he also terms them), generalist causes (i.e., those in which the focus of determinacy resides in the properties of the individual qua individual or in the collectivity qua collectivity) explain what is constant and "necessary," what is functionally essential, and historical causes or "special facts" explain what is "accidental" or a variation (see, e.g., 1961, p. 192). For example, history explains the particular tenets and dogmatics of this or that religion, while sociology—conceived as the "generalizing science" par excellence—explains the universality of religion, with its integral "codes of conduct" and sanctions for deviation, as well as cognitive orientations to what defies rational comprehension. In a fundamental sense, to paraphrase Homans (1950, p. 271), efficient causes often play into the hands of final ones, that is, social functions. No critical understanding of Spencer is possible, then, without a clear idea of his key ob-

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jective of discovering "general facts," phenomena "displayed by societies in general, dissociated, so far as may be, from special facts due to special circumstances" (1904, 2:481; 1897, 1:37).

Real societies, Spencer holds, differentiate into "societal subsystems" (regulative, sustaining, and distributive), which he (1897, pts. 2–8) tends to analytically decompose into universal institutions, for example, kinship, religious, political, ceremonial, and economic institutions. A good share of the *Principles of Sociology* consists in an analysis of alternative structural *possibilities* (i.e., different institutional forms) for meeting functional imperatives common to all societies as well as more or less typical ways in which types or species of societies (e.g., simple, complex, military, pacific) *do* meet these problems, such as the structural ways in which social order is characteristically achieved in simple or in complex societies. With respect to procreation, for instance, Spencer (1897, 1:603) notes that "the requirement that a due number of adults shall arise in successive generations, may be fulfilled in variously-modified ways. . . ." Generally, kinship functions for "social self-preservation" ("propagation"), socialization ("the rearing of children"—fostering "moral discipline" and "intellectual culture" through parents' "care of their children's minds"), and, in proportion as "kinships become more definite and extended," for "social cohesion" and "social stability" as well (1897, 1, pt. 3, esp. pp. 273, 717, 718). The basic rubric of functional analysis is this: "Family organizations of this or that kind have first to be judged by the degree in which they help preserve the social aggregate they occur in" (1897, 1:610). A similar logic informs Spencer's treatment of other principal social institutions. Religious institutions, for instance, generally "maintain and strengthen social bonds, and so conserve the social aggregate" (1897, 3:102). But one cannot, a priori, transfer assumptions concerning the functioning of an institution in one society or class of societies to another society or class of societies. Compared with what is typical of primitive society, for example, religion in "Christendom has not exemplified in any considerable degree a like consolidating effect" (1897, 3:98). Thus, in the final analysis, religious beliefs and rites must be "consider[ed] solely with reference to the function they fulfil where they are indigenous" (1868, 1:445–46). Generalization follows, does not precede, careful comparative analysis.

In conclusion, this second theory is one of origins and process, of movement toward a first stage of "functional equilibrium." In response to functional requirements, social aggregates tend to evolve what Spencer at one point calls "answering structures." An important part of Spencer's functional analysis consists in relating the latter to the former for each society or species of society surveyed. This second theory is based on the acceptance of immanent causation in that, to put it most abstractly, the focus

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of determinacy in the origin of cross-cultural phenomena which are functionally related to basic social needs is seen to reside in the properties of individuals and of pluralities. The theory allows for external causes insofar as environmental factors are seen as facilitating or retarding "social intercourse." It is Lamarckian to the extent that Spencer sees a tendency toward adaptation ("conscious," e.g., production, and "unconscious," e.g., religious beliefs, for those in action) to the general conditions of social existence in a physical environment and Darwinian to the much more limited extent that it is not held that *all* social assemblages become and persist as societies (1897, 1:622). Race does not affect particular adaptations of various groups.

If, for Spencer, general phenomena are owing to general causes, more specific phenomena are owing to more specific causes; for example, some differentiation of authority exists in all societies, but it is more centralized in military societies and more diffused in pacific societies. The process of functional differentiation resembles an ontogenetic movement toward increased heterogeneity of structure and function. However, fixed stages are not suggested by Spencer to describe this process, for it is not inevitable. There is the necessary condition of a permissive environment, and the belief is present if not well expressed in Spencer that arrangements evolved are not always fully efficient for given functional ends (Spencer here cryptically refers to "abortive attempts," i.e., unexplained exceptions to general developmental principles). The broader theory is not atomistic, dealing with isolated phenomena, but holistic, explicating a process relevant to the total social aggregate. While the theory points to what is common across societies, it does not assume all societies are completely alike—of one species—differing only in their stages of maturity or inevitable development. The problems of persistence, adaptation, control, and the like weigh heavily, for they are the warp and weft of the concept of society—"an aggregate presenting multitudinous phenomena" which "are held together as parts of one great combination" (1888, p. 108). In his functional analysis, Spencer makes both general statements (what, e.g., religion typically, as a mode, functions for) and more specific statements (what, e.g., the effects of religion were in this or that society during this or that time period).

SOCIAL EVOLUTION AS AN ADVANCING DIVISION OF LABOR

A third identifiable process called "social evolution" by Spencer (1904, 2:297) is that of an "increasing division of labour." This is in essence an equilibrium theory. In point of fact, the concept of equilibrium, not that of automatic and unproblematic serial change, is central to Spencer's general sociology (Perrin 1973, pp. 50–52). Specifically, for instance, an in-

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crease in population size constitutes a "perturbation" of a prior social equilibrium: augmented numbers impose new adaptive exigencies on existent social organization which require structural adjustments. By way of general definition, "the evolution of a society [is] at once an increase in the numbers of individuals integrated into a corporate body, an increase in the masses and varieties of the parts into which this corporate body divides, as well as the actions called their functions, and an increase in the degree of combination among these masses and their functions . . ." (1937, p. 464).

The present theory revolves about changes in size, in type of cohesion, and in degree of differentiation. First, unlike the second theory, where a minimum (though never specified) and not necessarily ever-dilating size was presumed, the third theory takes continued population growth as its *sine qua non*. The historical formation of large aggregates has been primarily "by union of groups, and union of groups of groups" (1897, 1:464–65). While natural increase in a group's size is not a universal phenomenon (there may be a population policy), the unions have been made possible, at bottom, by a general "excess of fertility" among the species and the resultant competition for scarce resources (1971, pp. 33–37, 121, 123–24). However, the immediate mechanism of the compounding of groups has been war (1961, p. 176).

Second, this evolutionary process also involves a fundamental change in the principle of social cohesion. Prior to the interdependence wrought by an advancing division of labor in a given society, the "only mutual dependence is that consequent on mechanical union"; societies "primarily consist of many like segments" (1969, pp. 207, 227). The principle of cohesion in noncomplex societies is ideational homogeneity, something expressed through kinship, religion, and custom. In such a society, its "ideas and usages form a kind of invisible framework for it, serving rigorously to restrain certain classes of its actions" (1897, 2:322). "The power of the society over the individual is greatest among the lowest peoples. . . . Inherited rules which the living combine to maintain, and the authority of which no one dreams of questioning, control all actions" (1904, 1:511–12). The ubiquity and potency of what Spencer terms the "aggregate will" are most pronounced in the least complex societies.

Throughout the *Principles of Sociology*, Spencer details how kinship, common rites and beliefs, and ceremonials (customs and usages) generally, both maintain and reflect a "relative homogeneity." But war, and its imperatives and results, ushers in the state, the primacy of political integration and allegiance, and the setting, the requisite prior coherence, for a ramification of economic bonds, themselves multiplied by the immediate cause of competition. Briefly, war historically made large aggregates possible, and the "pressure of population" (size and density)—the "im-

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mediate cause [of] competition"—made it "possible for the number of special occupations to increase" (1897, 3:368; see also 1:471 ff.); the latter made further (sustained) growth possible with still greater "demand" and the "intensifi[cation of] the functional activity of each specialized person or class" (1868, 1:52; see also 1897, 2:250; 3:368). The division of labor, then, is a functional adaptation—a re-equilibration—in those societies where an increase in volume and density aggravates the pressure for survival and fosters greater functional specialization—an "advance in organization," as Spencer often puts it. The third basic defining trait of modernity, then, is differentiation of social structure (see esp. 1937, p. 292).

Well-known and commonly accepted critiques notwithstanding (e.g., Durkheim 1933, pp. 200 ff.; Parsons 1968, 1:4, 311 ff.), the principle of cohesion in complex societies is not, for Spencer, one of naked economic "interest" among self-gratifying individuals. With respect to social cohesion, Spencer, throughout his writings, cites not only "pecuniary interests" but also political allegiance ("love of country"), "family bonds" (e.g., the concern with family honor characteristic of upper social strata), the "restraining" and "sacred sanction" of religious values, governmental and judicial superintendency over the execution of contracts, various customary norms not specifically spelled out in formal political and religious creeds, and notably, a general normative ("moral") consensus—a "social opinion," a "social force," which regulates the means through which interest motivation can legitimately operate (1897, 2, pt. 5; 3, pt. 6; 1969, p. 273 ff.). In his "Railway Morals and Railway Policy" and "The Morals of Trade" (1891, 3:52–112, 113–51), for example, Spencer takes considerable note of the disorder which obtains in proportion as self-interest is unrestrained and unregulated. Referring to his own industrialized England, for instance, Spencer unequivocally declares: "A system of keen competition carried on, as it is, *without adequate moral restraint,* is very much a system of commercial cannibalism" (1891, 3:138, italics added). Spencer refers to "cheat and be cheated" and has but little faith in the professional ethics Durkheim later emphasizes (1969, p. 247). In fact, Spencer calls for greatly heightened and extended morality in economic relations and occupational and professional groups (law, the military, trade, banking, transportation, politics, and manufacturing are all mentioned); from society itself is required a "purified public opinion." Economic relations can only become sufficiently moral and stable "by a stern criticism of the means through which success has been achieved" (1891, 3:151). Spencer (1891, 3:147) observes that "with the great majority of men, the visible expression of social opinion is far the most efficient of incentives and restraints." Spencer also turns to government, which is called a "social force," and insists that the "restraining power of the State over individ-

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uals, and bodies and classes of individuals," is both "requisite" and in need of extension (1969, p. 288). The bonds effected by the division of labor in modern societies do not, cannot, rest upon a presumed automatic harmony of individual interests: the concomitant must be a well-diffused morality and restraint.[5]

The problem of integration is apparent to Spencer at all levels of analysis. With respect to groups connected with institutions (e.g., military, political, religious, and business institutions), social classes, and organizations of all kinds, "the dominant aim of each is to maintain itself," to resist alteration; "hence parts once formed tend to continue, whether they are or are not useful" (1897, 2:254, 263). ". . . When the function is needless, or even detrimental, the structure still keeps itself intact as long as it can" (1897, 2:255). The advancing functional specialization which is the subject of Spencer's third theory of social evolution sharply points up, then, the inherent problem of reintegration: reestablishing the "social *consensus*" which is the *sine qua non* of social order, according to Spencer's model.

The sociocultural universals Spencer identifies—kinship, religion, "distinctions of duties," etc.—do not of course operate everywhere equally well for social cohesion. Religion in nonliterate societies, for example, is regarded by Spencer as an extremely puissant "controlling agency." But religion in modern industrialized societies, while still seen as a "social bond," is held to be much weaker in controlling individual actions, economic or otherwise. Indeed, in the last work of his "Synthetic Philosophy" —the *Principles of Ethics*—Spencer (1966*a*, 1:iv) indicates that "moral injunctions are losing the authority given by their supposed sacred origin." The current and future problem, a problem of social order and stability, lies in the filling of the social void. While Spencer clearly sees the problem—a growing morality of *expediency*—he fails to provide any solution.

In conclusion, Spencer's third theory is by no means devoid of attention to the Hobbesian problem of order. Beyond this, change is not seen

[5] Durkheim's (1933, pp. 200 ff.) critique of Spencer's understanding of "contractual solidarity" seems primarily based upon Spencer's (first) theory of evolution toward an ideal "social state" (where individual altruism and an ultimate identity of interests are basic) and his initial enthusiasm for classical laissez-faire economics. In so doing, Durkheim is wide of the mark in two ways. First, Durkheim (1933, pp. 204 ff.) admits that Spencer's view of a so-called "spontaneous accord of individual interests" pertains only to the ideal society not yet in existence; and then he proceeds as if this (utopian) view constitutes Spencer's entire position on the question of the source of solidarity for actually-existing industrialized societies. Second, Durkheim makes no mention of Spencer's later awareness of many of the abuses and excesses of laissez-faire economics and emphasis upon the necessity of a basic "homogeneity" (of ideas, sentiments, values—of morality) to undergird and cincture a "heterogeneous" system of economic cooperation.

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as an automatic and inevitable unfolding of inherent potential in a preordained direction. Rather, the "progress of a social organism toward more heterogeneous and more definite structures . . . continues only as long as the actions which produce these effects continue in play" (1937, p. 523). In Spencer's adaptive model, "structural complexity" depends upon the complexity of the exigencies or "forces" under which a society exists. Thus, the "tendency to progress from homogeneity to heterogeneity [of structure] is not intrinsic but extrinsic"; it "is determined by the cooperation of inner and outer factors," equilibration or adjustment, which "works changes until there is reached an equilibrium between the environing actions and the actions which the aggregate opposes to them . . ." (1937, p. 535; 1897, 1:95). In the present model, the impact of new increments of population on existent social organization introduces differentiating forces, for example, strain, intensified competition, and specialization. Spencer's analyses are most concerned not with "external conditions" generally but with those owing to intersocietal relations (hostile, nonhostile) and with the variable of size—the numbers to be sustained—vis-à-vis the strictures of physical environment. In the present regard, Spencer's functional analyses range from assessing the role played by political and economic bonds in consolidating large aggregates (while at the same time undermining or attenuating bonds of region, custom, and kin) to examining the relative inefficiency of modern religious and moral codes and governmental agencies in supplying a fully effective restraint against corruption and individual egoism and aggression.

SOCIAL EVOLUTION AS THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES OF SOCIETIES

The final theory concerns the origin of social species. A persistent error among many students lies in the contention that what Spencer called social evolution was in no case a true analogue of biological evolution (phylogeny or speciation) (Bock 1964, pp. 31, 36). Spencer's biology (1966*b*) sought to explain both ontogeny (embryonic development) and phylogeny, and his sociology was similar in principle. To the former (ontogeny) corresponded, first, the primordial differentiation of whole societies into functional subsystems and, second, a continuing ramification of the division of labor under appropriate conditions; to the latter (phylogeny) corresponded the proliferation of social types or species, classified structurally as simple, compound, doubly compound, and trebly compound and then by such further subdivisions as type of political headship and whether settled, nomadic, or mixed (1897, 1, pt. 2, chap. 10).

It is ironic that the exact criticism Bock (1964, pp. 31, 36) launches at both Comte and Spencer is levied by Spencer against Comte. Comte is decisively taken to task by Spencer (1961, p. 300) for the "erroneous

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preconception" which holds "that the different forms of society presented by savage and civilized races all over the globe, are but different stages in the evolution of one form." The "truth," Spencer (1961, p. 300) argues, is "that social types, like types of individual organisms, do not form a series, but are classifiable only in divergent and re-divergent groups." Societies have differentiated (from a supposed "original unity of the human race") and spread over the face of the earth, and "the multiplying groups have tended ever to acquire differences, now major and now minor"; thus, "there have arisen genera and species of societies" (1897, 3: 331; see also 1961, p. 53).

Any discussion of "species of societies" necessarily presupposes some definition for each one, as well as an account of how all the species have come to be. Here, to oversimplify, Spencer combines Malthus (surplus fertility), Lamarck (adaptations to local environments and conditions with subsequent transmission through culture or tradition), and aspects of Darwin (variation and intersocietal competition with extinction or loss of political autonomy involved in the compounding of small societies into larger societies—more generally, a "survival of the fittest"). Fertility, "geologic or climatic alterations" of habitats, migrations in "many directions," "perpetual adjustments to conditions perpetually changing" with "numerous divergences and re-divergences of structures"—"branching and re-branching of species"—struggle and war, consolidation and extinction, are the key concepts (1868, 1:379; 1897, 1:95–97; 2:241, 280; 3:609–10; 1904, 1:587; 1937, p. 477; 1966*b,* 1:521). Functional analysis is a populational approach in that it assesses the effects of certain data—differences in size, fertility levels, efficiency of communication; degrees of public control of resources, military cooperation, coordination, and organization; and the like—on the "probability of success" or "social survival" of differentially endowed societies.

This fourth theory is in all important respects a populational theory. The "entire aggregate of societies which the Earth supports, from primitive hordes up to highly civilized nations," Spencer points out (1937, p. 526), "has been becoming more various in the forms of societies it includes, and is still becoming more various." The population has become more diversified; the proportion of smaller, simpler societies has gradually declined vis-à-vis larger, highly compounded societies; the internal differentiation of the "average type" (statistical mode) has increased; still "larger nations" are likely, and there has been "human progress" over time, something "measured by the degree in which simple acquisition is replaced by production; achieved first by manual-power, then by animal power, and finally by machine-power" (1897, 1:96–97; 3:362, 609–10; see also Lenski [1970, chap. 5], whose conclusions are quite similar). Finally, taking the population of societies as a whole, Spencer (1971, p.

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81; 1897, 3:610) identifies, first, a progressive trend toward economic integration, with the population "growing ever more heterogeneous in respect of the separate functions assumed by separate nations" and, second, a trend toward political integration, beginning with a "federation of the highest nations," which aims at minimizing wars.

While "taking the entire assemblage of societies, evolution may be held inevitable as an ultimate effect of the co-operating factors . . . acting on them all through indefinite periods," it is not "inevitable in each particular society, or even probable"; nor is there "some intrinsic proclivity in every species towards a higher form" (1897, 1:96; 1937, p. 522). In fact, this kind of evolution, which involves the compounding of some societies and extinction of others, is largely irrelevant to individual societies (1897, 2:280, 555). What is commonly taken as Spencer's postulate of linear or unilinear development of every society, something he explicitly rejects (1897, 1:226; 2:609), is really the assumption that small and simple societies originate before larger and more complex ones (see, e.g., 1897, 1: 550).

Social isolation and stability of environment mean "fixity." There are no autogenous forces in social structure or culture which necessarily impel a given society through fixed stages of change. As Spencer (1937, p. 522) once answered his critics, "all who have fully grasped the argument of this work [*First Principles*]"—and most did not—"will see that the process of Evolution is not necessary, but depends on conditions. . . ." It is only in Spencer's second theory that we find anything approaching immanent causation: that is, the development which springs from "associated men" with biopsychological properties existing in a physical setting.

While Spencer talks about species of societies and suggests a wide range of differences, his own grappling with the "problem of differences" is largely confined to his two classifications of social species—from simple through trebly compound (with internal functions and structures becoming increasingly interdependent, or more "organic," at each successive "degree of composition") and, later, into military and pacific types. Spencer's macroevolutionism also contains and is supported by a social structuralism: he hopes to show that the morphological principle of classification is also an important causal variable. That is, Spencer (see, e.g., 1897, 1:686) is interested in discovering whether cultural phenomena and institutional arrangements—kinship, religion, custom, etc.—as well as modal personality characteristics, vary with overall morphology (simple, compound, etc.) and also with main "social activity" (a predominance of war or peaceful labor). That Spencer finds few cultural phenomena or institutional arrangements to consistently vary by structurally defined social type, or that his interest, while writing the various installments of the *Principles of Sociology* (over a 20-year period), shifts more and more to

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the military-pacific dichotomy, need not concern us here. What is important to note is Spencer's clear recognition of social species and his attempt to embrace, in both bases of classification, strictly social—not biological, racial, or psychological—causal principles. Spencer's chief shortcoming is a common one: namely, no classification of societies ever does justice to the "problem of differences" or the multiplicity of causation.

In conclusion, this fourth theory is strictly analogous to biological evolution and populational thinking. Spencer's phrase "survival of the fittest," coined in his "A Theory of Population" of 1852 (reprinted in 1966*b*, vol. 1), antedates Darwin's "natural selection" by several years. The latter concept, though reinforcing Spencer's own convictions, represented nothing really new for Spencer (1966*b*, 1:548): the "process of Natural Selection is literally a survival of the fittest." What Spencer did borrow from Darwin—and apply, in conjunction with the Lamarckian "direct adaptation" or "use-inheritance," to the evolution of both organic and social species—was "spontaneous variation" (1904, 1:587; 2:116; 1897, 1:95–98). With respect to social species, "favourable variations" became an escape clause for speculating about differential military successes among societies more or less equal in size, resources, and environmental context.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

While Spencer is correctly understood by most critics to have applied the single term "evolution" to all orders of data (from inorganic to superorganic), it is not recognized that four separate theories or views governed the use of the single term "social evolution." (Nearly anything that seemed to display an increase in complexity was, confusingly, seen by Spencer as "evolving" or "developing.") This is doubtless responsible for much of the incongruity in today's critical literature. Also, of course, Spencer attempted to link all his theories to lofty, all-embracing "first principles"; however, each stands or falls on its own merit and immediate (physical, biological, or social) matrix.

With respect to his social theories, we may conclude that the first theory of social evolution (as initially formulated) is an example of the hoary Western belief in progress (see Nisbet 1969, pp. 160 ff., on Spencer's affinity with Comte and other 19th-century believers in progress). It has no real consistency with the others. The second, third, and fourth theories, however, are interdependent, by virtue of their all being analogues of biological processes: namely, early and advanced ontogenesis (initial functional differentiation, advancing division of labor) and phylogenesis (social speciation).

Although Spencer wrote over a 63-year period (1839–1902), added to and revised many of his views, and filled numerous volumes, the fact that

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these four theories have not been distinguished before and that so many baseless criticisms have stood for so long points up the continuing need for a much-improved Spencer chapter in the history of sociology. While Spencer has been ignored and, generally speaking, dealt out of the sociological tradition, much of what he had to say is with us today. His first theory, which evolved into a model of rhythmic alternation of militarism and pacifism and which includes his laws of "sequence" and "co-existence" respecting structure, culture, and personality, directly inspired Andreski's military sociology (Fletcher 1971, p. 2) and Sorokin's (1961) theory of emergencies—indeed, Spencer's (1897, 1:739) and Andreski's (1954, p. 33) definitions of the military society are identical. The second theory, though its influence is uncertain, seems remarkably similar to current views of "functional problems" and the "general proposition" that "total societies *tend* to differentiate into sub-systems" which subserve them (Parsons and Smelser 1956, p. 47). Spencer's functional analysis, passed on in part through Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown, and Malinowski, seems, in its essentials, but little different from the modern variant. The same may be said of the related equilibrium model, passed on, principally through Pareto, to Henderson, Parsons, Homans, and others (see Lopreato 1965, pp. 3 ff.). The third theory, taken over and much improved by Durkheim (whose understanding of the nature of contract was far superior), continues to inspire interest. The fourth theory hardly differs from the structure of much of today's neoevolutionism, as witness Parsons's (1966, p. 2) basic vocabulary (variation, selection, adaptation, differentiation, and integration) and his definition of sociocultural evolution as proceeding "by variation and differentiation from simple to progressively more complex forms" (all this is said while arguing that "the early social evolutionists fell far short of developing a truly evolutionary perspective" [Parsons 1966, p. 2 n.]). Spencer's views need to be gingerly reexamined and his relevance, both historical and contemporary, carefully reassessed. Only by such a judicious reappraisal can the demand for an accurate empirical history of sociology be satisfied and the ultimate question of Spencer's current utility be answered.

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