

Herbert Spencer as an Anthropologist*

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Mention the name of Herbert Spencer to the average person and, if he is familiar with it at all, he is likely to say that Spencer was a political theorist who advocated *laissez faire*, and might even recall Spencer as a sociologist. But it is unlikely that he would identify Spencer as an anthropologist.

Moreover, in his failure to do so, he would find some company among professional anthropologists. Thus R. R. Marett wrote that Spencer "has never been recognized to belong to the true tradition of British anthropology . . .,"¹ while Robert H. Lowie, in his *History of Ethnological Theory*, failed to discuss Spencer or his work.²

However, when we turn to sociology, the field to which early anthropologists (e.g., Haddon) often relegated Spencer, we find, ironically, that many early sociologists would not own him either. For example, in reviewing a book by Franklin Giddings, Lester Ward wrote that Giddings was in harmony with Spencer "in confining sociology chiefly to anthropology . . ." L. L. Bernard maintained that Spencer's "anthropological bias . . . circumscribed his social viewpoint to the barbarian cultures." And Jay Rumney, in criticizing Spencer from the standpoint of sociology, complained that he "stressed too much what is now called cultural anthropology . . ."³

So we are confronted with the anomaly that neither anthropologists nor sociologists were ready to claim Spencer. The fact is that Herbert Spencer was a towering figure who could rightly be called the father, or co-father, of *both* sociology and anthropology. Certainly, most anthropologists today recognize Spencer as one of the major figures in the early history of their discipline. Along with Edward B. Tylor and Lewis H. Morgan, he ranks as one of the three great cultural evolutionists of the nineteenth century.

One reason why Spencer has not always been thought of as an anthropologist is that he called the science he pioneered "sociology,"⁴ and his major work in this field bore the title of *The Principles of Sociology*. Since this work draws on data from hundreds of primitive tribes throughout the

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world, and is thus far more broadly comparative than sociology as we now know it, why did Spencer not call his science "anthropology"?

Nothing I have read of Spencer's suggests that he ever actually considered labeling his study "anthropology." There appear to be several reasons for this. First, "anthropology" in those days usually meant *physical* anthropology. Writing in 1876, Spencer noted that "after occupying themselves with primitive arts and products, anthropologists have devoted their attention mainly to the physical characters of the human races. . . ." As late as 1910, E. B. Tylor wrote: "Anthropology. . . [is] the science which, in its strictest sense, has as its object the study of man as a unit in the animal kingdom."⁶

Secondly, while anthropology admittedly had something of a cultural as well as a biological connotation, the term also suggested a certain antiquarian interest. And since Spencer aimed at nothing less than establishing general laws of social evolution, he no doubt preferred to steer clear of a term that implied a concern with the quaint and the particular. Thus, when he was ready to give his study of society a name, he chose "sociology."

The word "sociology" had been introduced in its French form, *sociologie*, by Auguste Comte in 1839. Comte used it in place of "social physics," which was then the current expression for the scientific study of society. His intention was to label "by a single term that part of natural philosophy which relates to the positive study of the fundamental laws of social phenomena." In his 1859 article "What Knowledge is of Most Worth?" Spencer spoke for the first time of a science of "sociology," and envisioned as branches of it "Descriptive Sociology" and "Comparative Sociology."⁷ Years later, in the preface to Volume 1 of *The Principles of Sociology*, he gave his reasons for adopting the term:

For the Science of Society, the name "Sociology" was introduced by M. Comte. Partly because it was in possession of the field, and partly because no other name sufficiently comprehensive existed, I adopted it. Though repeatedly blamed by those who condemn the word as a "barbarism," I do not regret having done so.⁸

Spencer was indeed attacked for employing a word that combined Greek and Latin roots, a usage that classically educated Englishmen considered objectionable. Viscount Amberley, for example, asked in protest, "Why does a writer of Mr. Spencer's eminence lend the sanction of his authority to the barbarous compound 'Sociology'?" And Sir Frederick Pollock found the term "offensive to scholars as being a barbarously formed hybrid." (Even Émile Durkheim, more than fifty years after it was coined, pronounced "sociology" "a rather barbarous name to tell the truth. . . .")⁹

But Spencer defended his use of the term. "The heterogeneity of our speech is already so great," he wrote, "that nearly every thought is expressed in words taken from two or three languages. Already, too, it has many words formed in irregular ways from heterogeneous roots. Seeing this, I

accept without much reluctance, another such word: believing that the convenience and suggestiveness of our symbols are of more importance than the legitimacy of their derivation."¹⁰

But "barbarous" or not, the name "sociology" at least clearly connoted an approach to human society that was scientific rather than antiquarian or humanistic. And it was understood in those days to have a much wider scope than it does now. Thus, even Tylor, while he did not apply it to his own work, still thought of "sociology" as synonymous with "the science of culture," saying they were both "concerned with the origin and development of arts and sciences, opinions, beliefs, customs, laws and institutions generally among mankind within historic time. . . ."¹¹

Nowadays, when sociology is restricted largely to studies of contemporary Western society, while anthropology ranges over the cultures of all peoples in all places and all times, Spencer's "sociological" work, especially his *Principles of Sociology*, falls much more fittingly into "anthropology." But regardless of labels, Spencer devoted enormous thought and effort to erecting a comparative science of society of the most general kind, and his work gave a powerful impetus to the anthropology that came after him. In the pages that follow, I will attempt to piece together the history of Spencer's endeavors along these lines, which served to establish anthropology as a science on a broad theoretical and empirical basis, and which bequeathed to succeeding generations of anthropologists an impressive body of sound and illuminating propositions.

Biographical Background

Herbert Spencer was born in Derby in the English Midlands on April 27, 1820. Except for a period of three months, he never attended school, and was educated at home by his father and an uncle. Thus, his education was very uneven. He learned little or nothing of Latin, Greek, English, or history, but received an unusually firm grounding in geometry, algebra, trigonometry and mechanics. In fact, at the age of fifteen he was already reading Newton's *Principia*. Spencer's uncle wanted him to attend Cambridge, as he himself had, but Spencer declined, feeling that he was not suited for a university career.

Along with a strong interest in science, inculcated in him by his father, other important early influences on Spencer were political and economic. His family being staunch Dissenters, Spencer had from his youth an allegiance to the causes of religious freedom, political individualism, and social egalitarianism.

From 1837 to 1841, Spencer worked for the railroads, receiving training equivalent to that of a civil engineer. This training was later reflected here and there in his social theories, as when he wrote that the course of change was the path of least resistance, or of greatest traction, or the resultant of the two.¹²

In 1842 Spencer wrote a series of letters on "The Proper Sphere of Government" which were printed in a new radical journal called *The Non-conformist*. (He later expanded these letters into his first book, *Social Statics*, published in 1850.) In 1843 he left the railroads and moved to London, where he began his literary career. After several false starts, he obtained a position as sub-editor of the *Economist*, which allowed him time for his own writing.

The 1850's were a period of remarkable productivity for Spencer. During this decade he wrote two books, *Social Statics* and *The Principles of Psychology* (1855),¹³ and turned out no fewer than three dozen articles on a wide variety of topics. Several of these were to become classics. It was during the 1850's that the concept of universal evolution, the core and kernel of all of his later work, was first dimly glimpsed and then gradually expanded into a master principle. In Spencer's hands, as well as in those of others who followed him, this principle was to animate and unify all of the natural sciences. Let us try to trace the highlights of this intellectual development.

The Development of Evolution

Early in the 1850's, Spencer began to interest himself in the process of change that had made things what they are. Never having believed in special creation, and always inclining toward naturalistic explanations, Spencer sought alternative ways to account for the origin and development of things—for their transmutation, or, as he later called it, their "evolution."

In *Social Statics* the word "evolution" appeared only once.¹⁴ In this work, he afterwards wrote, "I did not yet recognize evolution as a process co-extensive with the cosmos, but only as a process exhibited in man and in society. . . ."¹⁵ *Social Statics* was actually a manifesto of Spencer's political philosophy, and not a scientific treatise at all, but scattered among its pages are several embryonic concepts that were later to mature in his scientific writings on society.¹⁶

In 1851 Spencer was asked to review W. B. Carpenter's *Principles of Physiology* for *The Westminster Review*, and this assignment turned out to have a profound effect on him:

In the course of such perusal as was needed to give an account of its contents, I came across von Baer's formula expressing the course of development through which every plant and animal passes—the change from homogeneity to heterogeneity. . . . this phrase of von Baer expressing the law of individual development, awakened my attention to the fact that the law which holds of the ascending stages of each individual organism is also the law which holds of the ascending grades of organisms of all kinds.¹⁷

Thereafter, Spencer began to study more and more phenomena, searching their histories for manifestations of this process.

The following year, 1852, Spencer wrote an article entitled "The Development Hypothesis" in which he openly rejected the doctrine of special creation, and argued instead that the present forms of plants and animals must have arisen through a gradual, natural process of transmutation. Contrasting the two possibilities, Spencer wrote:

Which, then, is the most rational hypothesis?—that of special creation which has neither a fact to support it nor is even definitely conceivable; or that of modification, which is not only definitely conceivable, but is countenanced by the habitudes of every existing organism?¹⁸

Darwin and Wallace were both very impressed by this article. Darwin later said that it was written with "remarkable skill and force," while Wallace thought that Spencer had contrasted the theories of Creation and Development "with such skill and logical power as to carry conviction to the minds of all unprejudiced readers. . . ." ¹⁹ In 1858, shortly after reading this essay, Darwin wrote to Spencer:

Your remarks on the general argument of the so-called development theory seem to me admirable. I am at present preparing an Abstract of a larger work on the changes of species [*The Origin of Species*]; but I treat the subject simply as a naturalist, and not from a general point of view, otherwise, in my opinion, your argument could not have been improved on, and might have been quoted by me with great advantage.²⁰

In "The Development Hypothesis" Spencer used the word "evolution" once and "evolved" twice, but he clearly had not yet adopted the term as a formal label for biological transmutation, let alone for the process of universal change. In succeeding essays the word "evolution" occurs somewhat more frequently, but still without any formal definition.

In the years after 1852, Spencer continued to concern himself with changes manifest throughout nature. He still saw increasing differentiation as the hallmark of evolution, and in "Progress: Its Law and Cause," first published in April 1857, he traced out this process in all orders of phenomena:

The advance from the simple to the complex, through a process of successive differentiations, is seen alike in the earliest changes of the Universe to which we can reason our way back; and in the earliest changes which we can inductively establish; it is seen in the geologic and climatic evolution of the Earth, and of every single organism on its surface; it is seen in the evolution of Humanity, whether contemplated in the civilized individual, or in the aggregation of races; it is seen in the evolution of Society in respect alike of its political, its religious, and its economical organisation; and it is seen in the evolution of all. . . [the] endless concrete and abstract products of human activity.²¹

Later that same year, while working on a paper called "The Ultimate Laws of Physiology," Spencer became aware that increasing *differentiation* was not all there was to evolution, and that the process of increasing *integration* was equally essential. Thus he wrote:

This change from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous is . . . usually . . . said to result from successive differentiations. This, however, cannot be considered a complete account of the process. During the evolution of an organism there occur, not only segregations of parts, but coalescences of parts. There is not only segregation, but aggregation. . . . This progressive integration, [is] manifest alike when tracing up the several stages passed through by every embryo, and when ascending from the lower organic forms to the higher.²²

Indeed, Spencer eventually came to regard increasing integration as the *primary* aspect of evolution, and increasing differentiation as *secondary*.²³

During this time Spencer also discerned two other aspects of the evolutionary process: the change from the infinite to the definite, and the change from incoherence to coherence.²⁴

By the late 1850's, Spencer had worked out a concept of evolution by means of which he felt he could elucidate the origin and development of any class of phenomena. Then, in 1858, while writing "The Nebular Hypothesis," he conceived the grand scheme of surveying the fields of biology, psychology, sociology, and morals from an evolutionary perspective. This scheme, which he proceeded to put into effect and which eventually ran to ten volumes and took thirty-six years to complete, was begun with the publication of *First Principles* in 1862. This book presents a systematic, comprehensive, and thorough analysis of every aspect of evolution, culminating in a rigorous definition of the process:

*Evolution is a change from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity, to a definite, coherent heterogeneity; through continuous differentiations and integrations.*²⁵

It should be emphasized that it was Spencer who introduced "evolution" formally into scientific discourse, and who gave the term its currency. Surprising as it may be to some, Darwin did not use the word "evolution" even once in the first five editions of *The Origin of Species*. Only in the sixth edition, published in 1872, ten years after Spencer had formally launched the term in *First Principles*, did Darwin decide to borrow it. And then he used it no more than half a dozen times in the *Origin*, and gave it no special definition. It is thus incorrect to say, as Ashley Montagu has, that "Lock, stock, and barrel, Spencer applied the concepts developed by Darwin to the interpretation of the nature and functioning of society."²⁶ Spencer had written article after article on many aspects of evolution before Darwin had published a line on the subject.

At first, Spencer did not use the term "evolution" to label that great process of universal transformation whose details he so carefully worked out. Although scattered uses of "evolution" appear in many of Spencer's articles in the 1850's, "progress" was the term which, for a long time, he still employed. As late as 1857 he entitled a major paper on evolution, "Progress: Its Law and Cause." True, the word "evolution" appeared more

than a dozen times in this article, but it was clearly subordinate to "progress." Spencer later wrote of that article: "Though it began by pointing out that the word progress is commonly used in too narrow a sense; yet the fact that I continued to use the word shows that I had not then recognized the need for a word which has no teleological implications."²⁷ Years later, replying to an inquiry about his introduction of the term "evolution," Spencer wrote, in the same vein, "the adoption of it arose from the perception that 'progress' has an anthropocentric meaning, and that there needed a word free from that."²⁸

A great deal has been made of the fact that, for a time, Spencer preferred the word "progress" to "evolution." Indeed, he has often been made to suffer for it. Critics are fond of quoting his words, first in *Social Statics*, that "Progress, therefore, is not an accident, but a necessity,"²⁹ and again in "Progress: Its Law and Cause," that "Progress is. . . a beneficent necessity."³⁰ If we examine the context of these two statements, though, we get a very different picture of the effect intended. Thus what follows the sentence, "Progress, therefore, is not an accident but a necessity" is this:

Instead of civilization being artificial, it is a part of nature; all of a piece with the development of the embryo or the unfolding of a flower. The modifications mankind have undergone, and are still undergoing, result from a law underlying the whole organic creation.³¹

And the full reading of the sentence in "Progress: Its Law and Cause" is this: "Progress is not an accident, not a thing within human control, but a beneficent necessity."³² Clearly, the thrust of these passages is that "progress" (or "evolution") is neither artificial nor fortuitous, but the natural product of a determinate process whose course is subject to laws and therefore capable of scientific study.

It is frequently asserted that it was Spencer's mature belief that evolution (or "progress") is inevitable.³³ It is true that in his earlier days he did hold such a belief. Thus, in *Social Statics* he wrote:

The inference that as advancement has been hitherto the rule, it will be the rule henceforth, may be called a plausible speculation. But when it is shown that this advancement is due to the working of a universal law; and that in virtue of that law it must continue until the state we call perfection is reached, then the advent of such a state is removed out of the region of probability into that of certainty.³⁴

But subsequently he changed his views in this regard, and in *First Principles* he wrote:

The doctrine of Evolution, currently regarded as referring only to the development of species, is erroneously supposed to imply some intrinsic proclivity in every species towards a higher form; and, similarly, a majority of readers make the erroneous assumption that the transformation which constitutes Evolution in its wider sense, implies an intrinsic tendency to go through those changes which the formula of

Evolution expresses. But all who have fully grasped the argument of this work, will see that the process of Evolution is not necessary, but depends on conditions; and . . . the prevalence of it in the Universe . . . is consequent on the prevalence of these conditions: the frequent occurrence of Dissolution showing us that where the conditions are not maintained, the reverse process is quite as readily gone through.³⁵

The moral of the story is an old one: before assuming that a man's earliest views on a subject were also his final ones, one needs to examine carefully the entire body of his work.

Thus, Spencer recognized both evolution and its opposite, *dissolution*, as operating in nature. "While evolution and dissolution . . . are opposite processes, and as a whole every aggregate is undergoing one or the other, yet speaking more precisely, both are everywhere concurrent, and the observed effect is the resultant of the two."³⁶

Evolution and dissolution do not, however, exhaust the possible states of nature. There is also *equilibrium*. Equilibrium is the condition toward which evolution generally proceeds. "Evolution under all its aspects, general and special," Spencer wrote, "is an advance towards equilibrium. . . . the theoretical limit towards which the integration and differentiation of every aggregate advances, is a state of balance between all the forces to which its parts are subject, and the forces which its parts oppose to them."³⁷

Beginnings of Sociology

In the original prospectus of what he came to call the *Synthetic Philosophy*, which he drew up in 1858, Spencer assigned only one volume to *The Principles of Sociology*.³⁸ Ahead of it on his schedule of publication came *The Principles of Biology* and the revision of *The Principles of Psychology*. During the first half of the 1860's, Spencer was occupied with the writing of these two works, so it was not until 1867 that he was ready to turn his attention to what was to be his major contribution to social science, *The Principles of Sociology*. As the time approached for undertaking this work, Spencer foresaw that he would need to familiarize himself with a large amount of ethnographic and historical data. As he later wrote in his *Autobiography*:

I had long been conscious that when I came to treat of Sociology. . . [t]here would be required an immense accumulation of facts so classified and arranged as to facilitate generalization. I saw, too, that it would be impossible for me to get through the amount of reading demanded, and that it would be needful for me to read by proxy, and have the collected materials prepared for use. Not, indeed, that this was my first idea. I began by thinking that I must have a secretary who would read to me. I soon became aware, however, that the requirements could not be thus met; and that I must get some one to devote himself, under my superintendence, to the gathering and grouping of data. There was no time to be lost. The elaboration and completion of the *Psychology* I expected would occupy me some two or three years; and unless, by the

end of that time due preparation had been made, I foresaw that I should suddenly have before me the task of building without bricks—or, at any rate, building without any adequate supply of bricks.³⁹

Accordingly, in 1867, Spencer engaged the services of a young Scottish university graduate, David Duncan, to act as his “amanuensis.” Spencer’s idea was to have Duncan read aloud to him from books on travel among primitive peoples, since no professional ethnographic monographs yet existed. In the work that Duncan was to do, Spencer wrote: “The characters of the people. . . had. . . to be described—their physical, moral, and intellectual traits. Then besides the political, ecclesiastical, industrial, and other institutions of the society—besides the knowledge, beliefs, and sentiments, the language, habits, customs, and tastes of its members—there had to be noticed their clothing, food, arts of life &c. Hence it was necessary that Mr. Duncan and myself should go through some books of travel together, so that he might learn to recognize everything relevant to Sociology.”⁴⁰

Duncan later described his indoctrination as follows: “For an hour or so before dinner he would listen while his secretary [Duncan himself], pencil in hand, read from books of travel. ‘Mark that,’ he would say when anything pertinent was met with. After familiarity with the work had in this way been gained, the present writer was left largely to his own discretion.”⁴¹

When, three years later, Duncan left Spencer’s employ to take a teaching position in India, Spencer hired a new researcher, James Collier, and in 1871, another one, a young German scholar named Richard Scheppig. Duncan had abstracted material on the uncivilized peoples of the world. Collier was assigned the task of recording information about existing civilized races, and Scheppig about extinct civilizations.

Descriptive Sociology

The abstracted data were arranged in “a system of tables suited to present all orders of social facts displayed by any community—facts of structure, function, and development, in such a manner that they can be compared with each other at a glance—each table being a kind of chart of the social condition of the community to which it is devoted.”⁴²

Spencer later explained that “this compilation of materials was entered upon solely to facilitate my own work.”⁴³ “But when some of the tables had been filled up and it became possible to appreciate the effect of thus having presented at one view the whole of the essential phenomena presented by each society, the fact dawned upon me that the materials as prepared were of too much value to let them lie idle after having been used by myself only. I therefore decided upon publishing them for general use. Thereafter Mr. Duncan did his work in the consciousness that it would be not lost in the fulfillment of a private end merely, but that he would have the credit derivable from it on publication. And thus was initiated *Descriptive Sociology*.”⁴⁴

Because of the departure of Duncan and the breakdown, through overwork, of Collier and Scheppig, publication of *Descriptive Sociology* proceeded more slowly than Spencer had hoped. But by 1881, when the series was suspended, eight volumes had appeared:

1. *English* (1873)
2. *Ancient Mexicans, Central Americans, Chibchans, Ancient Peruvians* (1874)
3. *Types of Lowest Races, Negritto, and Malayo-Polynesian Races* (1874)
4. *African Races* (1875)
5. *Asiatic Races* (1876)
6. *North and South American Races* (1878; 2nd ed., 1885)
7. *Hebrews and Phoenicians* (1880)
8. *French* (1881)

Spencer was sanguine about the prospects of *Descriptive Sociology*, believing that "the facts being so presented, apart from hypotheses, . . . [would] aid all students of Social Science in testing such conclusions as they have drawn and in drawing others." He expected that "exhibiting sociological phenomena in such wise that comparisons of them in their coexistences and sequences, as occurring among various peoples in different stages, were made easy, would immensely facilitate the discovery of sociological truths."⁴⁵ He also expected that such a presentation of the customs of primitive and ancient peoples would prove popular. But in this he was wrong. The reading public utterly failed to respond to ethnographic facts presented in this form. Concerning this failure Spencer noted, with more than a touch of irony:

The third volume of Forster's *Life of Dickens* sold 10,000 copies in ten days. The first part of *Descriptive Sociology* has been asked for by the public to the extent of not quite 200 copies in eight months. It was thus becoming clear that I had greatly overestimated the amount of desire which existed in the public mind for social facts of an instructive kind. They greatly preferred those of an uninteresting kind.⁴⁶

As a result of the large cost to him (£3,250 by 1881), Spencer finally decided to end publication of the series. In the notice of cessation which accompanied the last number of *Descriptive Sociology*, Spencer could not conceal his bitterness:

Should the day ever come when the love of personalities of history is less and the desire for its instructive facts greater, those who occupy themselves in picking out the gold from the dross will perhaps be able to publish their results without inflicting on themselves losses too grievous to be borne—nay, may possibly receive some thanks for their pains.⁴⁷

Despite its financial failure, Spencer never doubted the scientific value of *Descriptive Sociology*. In his will he provided that his future royalties

and the income from his investments should go to finance additional volumes of *Descriptive Sociology*. A few of these (such as the volume on China compiled by E. T. C. Werner, British Consul in Kiu Kiang, China) were already under way;⁴⁸ and others were later commissioned by the Herbert Spencer Trust established under the provisions of the will. Altogether, after Spencer's death, several more volumes of *Descriptive Sociology* appeared:

9. *Chinese* (1910)
10. *Hellenic Greeks* (1910)
11. *Ancient Egyptians* (1925)
12. *Hellenistic Greeks* (1928)
13. *Mesopotamia* (1929)
14. *African Races* (1930)
15. *Ancient Romans* (1934)

A revised edition of Number 3, *Types of Lowest Races* . . ., edited by David Duncan and Henry R. Tedder, was published in 1925, and Number 14 was a revision by Emil Torday of Number 4, *African Races*. In addition to these folio volumes, two unnumbered works appeared in octavo: Reuben Levy's *An Introduction to the Sociology of Islam* (2 vols., 1931-33), and John Garstang's *The Heritage of Solomon: an Historical Introduction to the Sociology of Ancient Palestine* (1934).

Critical reaction to *Descriptive Sociology* was sharply divided. Those reviewers who believed that social science was feasible and worthwhile praised the work. E. B. Tylor, for example, in reviewing Number 1, *English*, remarked: "So much information, encumbered with so little rubbish, has never been brought to bear on the development of English institutions." And he thought it provided "a sufficient answer to all disbelievers in the possibility of a science of history. Where the chronicle of individual lives often perplexes and mystifies the scholar, the generalization of social principles from the chronicler's materials shows an order of human affairs where cause and effect take their inevitable course, as in Physics or Biology."⁴⁹

An anonymous reviewer of the same volume, after noting "the immense labour here bestowed," remarked on "the great sociological benefit which such a mass of tabulated matter done under competent direction will confer," adding that "the work will constitute an epoch in the science of comparative sociology."⁵⁰

Most reviewers of *Descriptive Sociology*, though, having the prevailing literary humanist's aversion to social science, heaped scorn on it. Frederic Harrison called it "a pile of clippings made to order . . .," and Alexander Gibson found the work's many tables "of no use for any purpose whatever." The very virtues that had commended the work to Tylor, repelled David Ritchie, who found *Descriptive Sociology* to be "history with the human life

taken out of it, dead, dried, and sliced up into columns, not even written in construable English. . . ." Years later, Harold Laski wrote in a similar vein to Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., saying, "I find it difficult to respect a man who left his money to print the facts of sociology in parallel columns."⁵¹

Comparative sociology was unpopular and few were ready to benefit from this large body of compactly organized cultural data. *Descriptive Sociology* languished almost unused, and thus the Dutch sociologist S. R. Steinmetz was led to say: "The little use which has been made of this immense collection of well established and conveniently arranged facts is a grave reproach to our science" (my translation). Later, the American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley said of the enormous volumes of *Descriptive Sociology*, "it is my impression that they are much less known than they deserve to be." By mid-twentieth century Howard Becker could affirm that "it remains almost unknown." No better proof of his assertion can be found than John Madge's *The Origins of Scientific Sociology* in which Madge speaks of Spencer's "proposed but never achieved *Descriptive Sociology*!"⁵²

But *Descriptive Sociology* has not disappeared into total oblivion. Some recollection and appreciation of it remains. George P. Murdock has written of it:

This work, so little known among sociologists that the author has encountered few who have even heard of it, inaugurated a commendable effort to organize and classify systematically the cultural data on all the peoples of the world for the advancement of cross-cultural research, and thus clearly foreshadowed the development of the present Human Relations Area Files.⁵³

The Study Of Sociology

In his *Cours de philosophie positive* (1839-1842) Auguste Comte argued for a science of society patterned after physics.⁵⁴ Social relations were to be dealt with as scientific phenomena. John Stuart Mill, the leading English disciple of Comte, took up the argument for a social science in "The Logic of the Moral Sciences," Part 6 of his famous book, *A System of Logic*, concluding that human actions are subject to the laws of causality. Years later, in the 8th edition of *A System of Logic*, Mill wrote: "That the collective series of social phenomena, in other words, the course of history, is subject to general laws, . . . has been familiar for generations to the scientific thinkers of the Continent. . . . In our own country, however, at the time of first publication [1843], it was almost a novelty."⁵⁵

Spencer read Mill's *A System of Logic* in 1844, so that by then, if not before, he was familiar with the idea of a social science. In his first book, *Social Statics*, Spencer was still too absorbed by ethical and political issues to say much about a science of society. However, his efforts in the 1850's to hammer out a conception of universal evolution drew him to investigate how the laws of change were manifested in human societies.

It was in *The Study of Sociology*, which he wrote just before embarking on *Principles of Sociology*, that Spencer first grappled fully with the issue of social science. Here he set forth its objectives, writing that "sociology is proposed as a subject to be studied after scientific methods, with the expectation of reaching results having scientific certainty."⁵⁶

The Study of Sociology was, according to J. D. Y. Peel, "the first real theoretical justification for sociology in English."⁵⁷ It was not, however, an actual treatise on the subject. That was to come later in *Principles of Sociology*. As one contemporary reviewer put it, the book "does not actually lay the foundations of that science here, but he [Spencer] invites his readers to assist him in clearing the ground on which those foundations may subsequently be laid."⁵⁸

The book certainly filled a need. Prevailing attitudes were still strongly against the idea of a social science. Historians like Charles Kingsley and James Anthony Froude opposed it mainly on the issue of free will. "If it is free to a man to choose what he will do or not do," wrote Froude, "there is no adequate science of him."⁵⁹ Even those who spoke approvingly of "social science" were not always social scientists at heart. As Youmans observed in the preface to the American edition of *Descriptive Sociology*, published the same year as *The Study of Sociology*:

Much has passed under the name of Social Science to which it is wholly inapplicable. It is commonly used to cover all kinds of schemes and devices for the improvement of society, and it is often confounded with socialism, whereas its sole office is to give knowledge, reduced to system, concerning the social state, in all its forms and stages.⁶⁰

The Study of Sociology proved to be one of Spencer's most successful and influential books. In an incisive and readable style, Spencer marshaled the arguments for a social science in front of the literate English-speaking public, contending that human society was part of nature and could be studied and explained scientifically. Even the political economist J. E. Cairnes, an opponent of Spencer's on many issues, was forced to admit: "Never before has the conception of a social science been put forth with equal distinctness and clearness; and never has its claim to rank as a recognized branch of scientific investigation been placed upon surer grounds, or asserted with more just emphasis."⁶¹

The Principles of Sociology

With *The Study of Sociology* behind him, Spencer turned to his major work, *The Principles of Sociology*. Ethnographic evidence had been accumulating for six years through the work on *Descriptive Sociology*, and this provided him with a large reservoir of organized data on which to draw when, in March of 1874, he began writing *Principles of Sociology*.

As already mentioned, in the prospectus for *Synthetic Philosophy* drawn up in 1858, *Principles of Sociology* was to comprise one volume.

However, in the revised prospectus, issued publicly in the spring of 1860, the work had been enlarged from one volume to three. According to that prospectus, *Principles of Sociology* would deal with "general facts, structural and functional, as gathered from a survey of Societies and their changes: in other words, the empirical generalizations that are arrived at by comparing different societies, and successive phases of the same society."⁶²

In his *Autobiography*, Spencer described his method of work in writing the book:

by the time I began to build, there had been formed [from previous miscellaneous fact-gathering of his own] several considerable heaps of undressed stones and bricks. But now I had to utilize the relatively large masses of materials gathered together in the *Descriptive Sociology*. For economization of labour, it was needful further to classify these; and to save time, as well as to avoid errors in re-transcription, my habit was, with such parts of the work as were printed, to cut up two copies. . . . Then the process was that of reading through all the groups of extracts concerning the uncivilized and semi-civilized races. . . . As I read I marked each statement that had any significant bearing; and these marked statements were cut out by my secretary after he had supplied any references which excision would destroy. The large heap resulting was joined with the kindred heap of materials previously accumulated; and there now came the business of re-classifying them all in preparation for writing.⁶³

It had been Spencer's practice with previous volumes of the *Synthetic Philosophy* to have completed sections of the work printed in fascicles and sent off to subscribers. He followed this same policy with the first volume of *Principles of Sociology*. At the same time, parts of the work, as separate installments, were published in *The Fortnightly Review* in England and *The Popular Science Monthly* in the United States, the first installment appearing in June, 1874. The first edition of Volume 1 as a whole appeared in December, 1876.

Largely because of Spencer's poor health, Volume 2 did not appear until 1882, and Volume 3 not until 1896. Altogether the work encompassed three volumes and more than 2,100 pages. It was an enormous undertaking, completed in the face of declining health. A poignant section of the preface to Volume 3, completed when Spencer was an invalid of 76, bears quoting:

On looking back over the six-and-thirty years which have passed since the Synthetic Philosophy was commenced, I am surprised at my audacity in undertaking it, and still more surprised by its completion. . . . How insane my project must have seemed to onlookers, may be judged from the fact that before the first chapter of the first volume was finished, one of my nervous break-downs obliged me to desist. . . . Though, along with other deterrents, many relapses, now lasting for weeks, now for months, and once for years, often made me despair of reaching the end, yet at length the end is reached. Doubtless in earlier years some

exultation would have resulted; but as age creeps on feelings weaken, and now my chief pleasure is in my emancipation. Still there is satisfaction in the consciousness that losses, discouragements, and shattered health, have not prevented me from fulfilling the purpose of my life.⁶⁴

Volume 1 of *Principles of Sociology* was unlike any book published previously. Its combination of fact and theory had never been attempted. The results gave Spencer the confidence to assert near the end of the book: "The inductions arrived at, thus constituting in rude outline an Empirical Sociology, suffice to show that in social phenomena there is a general order of co-existence and sequence; and that therefore social phenomena form the subject-matter of a science."⁶⁵

Principles of Sociology was a masterful synthesis of an enormous amount of data. It contained many generalizations, functional and evolutionary, suggested or supported by a wealth of ethnographic and historical facts. It carried sociology and anthropology far beyond where it had stood before.

Yet the reception accorded *Principles of Sociology* was mixed. A few contemporary thinkers saw its value and praised its achievements. The French historian Hippolyte Taine, for example, writing to a friend, said he found the work "full of originality," with "many careful evidences as to recorded facts," and with a point of view "so entirely novel." The English philosopher Henry Sidgwick found "Political Institutions," part of Volume 2, "a most vigorous and useful essay towards the construction of scientific sociology." *The Saturday Review* noted that Spencer had "collected a great mass of scattered facts and made them significant in the light of general ideas as no other living man could have done it." And Grant Allen wrote that *Principles of Sociology* established Spencer "as the founder of a new and profound science before all his contemporaries."⁶⁶

Later scholars have also noted the significance of *Principles of Sociology*. George Stocking wrote that it was this work "which largely structured the thinking of the two generations of American social scientists before about 1920." Also referring to this work, Will Durant observed: "When everything else of Spencer's has become a task for the antiquarian, these three volumes will still be rich in reward for every student of society."⁶⁷

Yet the manner in which Spencer presented his data was not popular. One reviewer, Joseph Allen, had mixed feeling about it. On the one hand, he said, Volume 1 "deals with the most complex phenomena of human society and morals by the same even, clear, and precise method that it would apply to a question in mathematics or the structure of a honeycomb and the organization of a bee-hive." But on the other hand, Allen warned his readers that "it is a book of science, and not of literature. The reader will be disappointed if he looks for any amenities of treatment." Indeed, said Allen, "There is something almost implacable and forbidding in this austere scientific motive in dealing with so many topics." And in our own time, J. D.

Y. Peel, a biographer of Spencer's, has complained of the "leaden measures of the *Principles [of Sociology]*."⁶⁸

Spencer was aware that the general reading public had found this work heavy going. After finishing Volume 1, he suspended for a time the idea of publishing successive chapters of the rest of the work in the *Fortnightly Review*, noting that "the reason for the cessation was that the articles had not proved as attractive as I expected. . . . It seemed," he said, "as if the mass of readers preferred to have their amusement unadulterated by thought."⁶⁹ Later, in commenting on the lack of acceptance of some of the conclusions of Volume 2, even among men of science, Spencer wrote: "Beliefs, like creatures, must have fit environments before they can live and grow; and the environment furnished by the ideas and sentiments now current, is an entirely unfit environment for the beliefs which the volume sets forth."⁷⁰

Another reason that some readers found *Principles of Sociology* heavy going was that it included so many examples. The first edition of Volume 1 alone contained 2,192 references to 379 works.⁷¹ Thus Van Buren Denslow complained that in reading *Principles of Sociology* he felt "oppressed by the vast and ceaseless descent of Mr. Spencer's Niagara of illustrations." And a century later, Robert Nisbet lamented Spencer's "methodical transfer of file-slips to prodigious volumes of stupefying detail which can be read today only at the cost of narcolepsy."⁷² A review of Volume 2 in *The Saturday Review* perhaps put this complaint most colorfully:

Mr. Spencer seems never to know when he has enough of a good thing. We confess that towards the middle of more than one of his chapters we have lost patience with his Hottentots, Lepchas, Todas, Dhimáls, Santáls, and other uncanny tribes known only to Indian officials and missionaries. They are like an army of men in buckram always ready to come on the stage and swear allegiance to Mr. Spencer's theories. We should like to be spared them now and then. We do not want the King of Dahomey to prove to us that military government tends to be despotic; and we can believe without assurance from the Neilgherries, that people will as a rule not fight if they have nothing to fight about.⁷³

Spencer took cognizance of these criticisms and defended himself against them, noting in the preface to Volume 2 that:

On sundry of the following chapters when published in the *Fortnightly Review*, a criticism passed by friends was that they were overweighted by illustrative facts. I am conscious that there were grounds for this criticism; and although I have, in the course of a careful revision, diminished in many cases the amount of evidence given. . . the defect may still be alleged. That with a view to improved effect I have not suppressed a larger number of illustrations, is due to the consideration that scientific proof, rather than artistic merit, is the end to be here achieved. If sociological generalizations are to pass out of the stage of opinion into the stage of established truth, it can only be through exten-

sive accumulation of instances: the inductions must be wide if the conclusions are to be accepted as valid.⁷⁴

The types of illustrations used by Spencer were also sometimes found objectionable. Sociologist Charles Ellwood wrote that "Spencer's evolutionary method goes to such an extreme that it leads him to neglect the facts of present society and to depend too much upon the use of anthropological and ethnological materials."⁷⁵ And, years earlier, Lester Ward expressed discontent with *Principles of Sociology* in these words:

To go back of recorded history is deemed speculative and Utopian, and the thought seems scarcely to have struck any body that existing non-historic races may be regarded as living representatives of the prehistoric ancestors of existing civilized races. The study of society from the standpoint of evolution, admitting the evolution of society as well as of the rest of nature, is therefore a new departure, and the starting-point from primitive man in his pre-social state seems to many a strange way of looking at social questions.⁷⁶

The essence of Ellwood's and Ward's complaint was, of course, that Spencer was doing comparative ethnology instead of narrow, Western sociology. And indeed he was. As J. M. Robertson put it, "His 'Principles of Sociology,' in fact, constitute rather an anthropology. . . ."⁷⁷ There was a similar feeling among many classically educated Englishmen that Spencer had devoted too much attention to "ye savage customs of ye heathen," and not enough to the societies of Classical Antiquity. But Spencer was prepared to meet this objection:

The origins of religious and jural conceptions and usages, Mr. [Alfred] Benn thinks may fitly be sought in the traditions of the early Greek world; though as Curtius remarks (Bk. I, 136-7) this "is not. . . a world of beginnings; it is no world still engaged in an uncertain development, but one thoroughly complete, matured and defined by fixed rules and orders of life." For myself, in seeking for origins, I prefer to look for them among people who have not yet arrived at a stage in which there are metal weapons and metal armour, two-horse war-chariots, walled towns, temples, palaces, and sea-going ships.⁷⁸

Spencer criticized Sir Henry Maine on this same score, saying: "While utilizing the evidence furnished by barbarous peoples belonging to the higher types, . . . he has practically disregarded the great mass of the uncivilized, and ignored the vast array of acts they present."⁷⁹

We see, then, Spencer as a champion of the comparative method in its broadest possible application. It is true that nowhere does he lay down the logic of this method in detail. Yet he clearly recognized that the comparative method plays the same role in social evolution that it does in organic evolution: it is the only means available for inferring the earliest stages of social life of contemporary complex societies. The "soft tissue" of these social forms had long since decayed, and could be reconstructed only by examining

comparable stages of surviving primitive peoples. Thus, as J. M. Robertson aptly phrased it, *Principles of Sociology* was "a comparative anatomy of social institutions."⁸⁰

Still, Spencer was generally cautious regarding the conclusions that could be drawn from an application of the comparative method. Thus he wrote:

If societies were all of the same species and differed only in their stage of growth and structure, comparisons would disclose clearly the course of evolution; but unlikenesses of type among them, here great and there small, obscure the results of such comparisons. . . . we may infer that out of the complex and confused evidence, only the larger truths will emerge with clearness. While anticipating that certain general conclusions are to be positively established, we may anticipate that more special ones can be alleged only as probable.⁸¹

The Determinants of Social Evolution

The salient theme of *Principles of Sociology* is, of course, evolution. Throughout most of its 2,000 pages, Spencer is working to reveal the evolution of social systems, both its general sweep and its details. His reconstruction of this process is so elaborate and closely argued that I am reluctant even to try to summarize it. Let the interested reader open *Principles of Sociology* to, say, "Political Institutions," and see for himself the firm hand with which Spencer depicts the rise of the state.

However, the set of determinants that Spencer considers the basis of social evolution does not emerge so clearly from *Principles of Sociology*, nor from his other writings. As noted above, unlike many early social theorists, Spencer cannot be said to have singled out a master principle or "prime mover" of social evolution.⁸² Nevertheless he was very much interested in the causal process underlying social change. His interpretations of why culture evolves are intricate and are presented at several levels of analysis, from the most abstract and general to the most concrete and specific, scattered over many pages. Nowhere though does he bring them neatly together or analyze them in a systematic way.

In attempting to clarify his thoughts on this subject, perhaps it would be most instructive to start by examining the factors Spencer dismissed as unsuited to explain social evolution.

Ideas Not Prime Movers

Although the age of rationalism reached its peak in the eighteenth century, a belief in the primacy of ideas in promoting social change was still prevalent in the nineteenth. Herbert Spencer is often regarded as the epitome of rationalism, and it is also commonly believed that Spencer saw ideas as the prime movers of society. But this was not the case. Indeed, Spencer took pains to refute Comte's view that "ideas govern and overthrow the world":⁸³

Ideas do not govern and overthrow the world: the world is governed or overthrown by feelings, to which ideas serve only as guides. The social mechanism does not rest finally on opinions; but almost wholly on character. Not intellectual anarchy, but moral antagonism, is the cause of political crises. All social phenomena are produced by the totality of human emotions and beliefs; of which the emotions are mainly pre-determined, while the beliefs are mainly post-determined. Men's desires are chiefly inherited; but their beliefs are chiefly acquired, and depend on surrounding conditions; and the most important surrounding conditions depend on the social state which the prevalent desires have produced. The social state at any time existing, is the resultant of all the ambitions, self-interests, fears, reverences, indignations, sympathies, etc., of ancestral citizens and existing citizens. The ideas current in this social state, must, on the average, be congruous with the feelings of citizens; and therefore, on the average, with the social state these feelings have produced. Ideas wholly foreign to this social state cannot be evolved, and if introduced from without, cannot get accepted—or, if accepted, die out when the temporary phase of feeling which caused their acceptance, ends. Hence, though advanced ideas when once established, act on society and aid its further advance; yet the establishment of such ideas depends on the fitness of the society for receiving them. Practically, the popular character and the social state, determine what ideas shall be current; instead of the current ideas determining the social state and the character. The modification of men's moral natures, caused by the continuous discipline of social life, which adapts them more and more to social relations, is therefore the chief proximate cause of social progress.⁸⁴

So much for ideas as prime movers. Spencer clearly prefers feelings, as generated by human nature, as the "chief proximate causes" of social evolution. But, as we shall soon see, in addition to proximate causes, Spencer recognized intermediate and ultimate causes.

The Great Man Theory

Another theory in vogue in the nineteenth century was that the course of human history results largely from the actions of Great Men. This view had been trumpeted by Thomas Carlyle in his *Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1840), and echoed by many others. Of this theory Spencer wrote derisively, "if you wish to understand. . . [the] phenomena of social evolution, you will not do it though you should read yourself blind over the biographies of all the great rulers on record, down to Frederick the Greedy and Napoleon the Treacherous."⁸⁵

As early as 1850, in *Social Statics*, Spencer had written of social change: "Men who seem the prime movers, are merely the tools with which it works. . . ." He returned briefly to this issue in 1860 in "The Social Organism," writing: "Those who regard the histories of societies as the histories of their great men, and think that these great men shape the fates of their societies, overlook the truth that such great men are the products of their societies."⁸⁶

Spencer pursued this argument in *The Study of Sociology*. In a vivid passage he wrote:

Given a Shakespeare, . . . what dramas could he have written without the multitudinous traditions of civilized life—without the various experiences which, descending to him from the past, gave wealth to his thought, and without the language which a hundred generations had developed and enriched by use? Suppose a Watt, with all his inventive power, living in a tribe ignorant of iron, or in a tribe that could get only as much iron as a fire blown by hand-bellows will smelt; or suppose him born among ourselves before lathes existed; what chance would there have been of the steam-engine? Imagine a Laplace unaided by that slowly-developed system of Mathematics which we trace back to its beginnings among the Egyptians; how far would he have got with the *Mécanique Céleste*?⁸⁷

Where conditions in societies allow “great men” to arise and to seem, by their actions, to transform those societies, these great men must be seen as the instruments of social forces:

If it be a fact that the great man may modify his nation in its structure and actions, it is also a fact that there must have been those antecedent modifications constituting national progress before he could be evolved. Before he can re-make his society, his society must make him. So that all those changes of which he is the proximate initiator have their chief causes in the generations he descended from. If there is to be anything like a real explanation of these changes, it must be sought in that aggregate of conditions out of which both he and they have arisen.⁸⁸

Spencer’s trenchant attack on the Great Man Theory has had a profound effect on the status of this issue. Thus when, years later, W. H. Mallock attempted a defense of the Great Man Theory in his book *Aristocracy and Evolution*, Robert Rives La Monte described the book as “the wiggling tail of the snake that Herbert Spencer killed thirty years ago.” More recently, Sidney Hook noted that “the extent to which Spencer’s views have influenced modern social thought on the subject of the great man and his environment can hardly be exaggerated.”⁸⁹

The Individual and the Culture Process

In rejecting the Great Man Theory, Spencer stressed the importance of impersonal forces in producing social change. Some of his readers were bothered by this. They might be persuaded to abandon Great Men as the leading cause of evolution, but what about individuals in the mass? Was it not true that, no matter how abstract and impersonal social forces might be, their effects had to be expressed through the actions of particular people? And thus was not human initiative a necessary factor in the process? How could the individual *not* be assigned a role in social evolution?

But beyond the truth or falsity of Spencer’s view, some of his critics were

concerned with the effects its wide dissemination might have. If social evolution was indeed above and beyond individual wills, if it went on its merry way regardless of what people did or felt or thought, wouldn't a recognition of this fact lead to an enervating quietism?

Spurred by such questions, Spencer took the opportunity in a postscript to *The Study of Sociology* written in 1880 to clarify and amplify his views on the subject:

From the doctrines set forth in this work, some have drawn the corollary that effort in the furtherance of progress is superfluous. "If," they argue, "the evolution of a society conforms [to] general laws—if the changes which, in the slow course of things bring it about, are naturally determined; then what need is there of endeavours to aid it? The hypothesis implies that the transformation results from causes beyond individual wills; and, if so, the acts of individuals in fulfillment of their wills are not required to effect it. Hence we may occupy ourselves exclusively with personal concerns; leaving social evolution to go on its way."

To this argument Spencer made the following reply:

To expect that the society will evolve further while... [its citizens] remain passive, is to expect that it will evolve further without cause. Each man in whom dissatisfaction is aroused by institutions which have survived from a less civilized past, or whose sympathies make certain evils repugnant to him, must regard his feelings thus excited as units in the aggregate of forces by which progress is to be brought about; and is called on to expend his feelings in appropriate deeds... [Thus] social evolution is a process conforming to natural laws, and yet... it results from the voluntary efforts of citizens...

It is only by fulfilling their individual wills in establishing and maintaining the domestic relations, that citizens produce these aggregate results which exhibit uniformities apparently independent of individual wills.⁹⁰

Earlier in *The Study of Sociology* Spencer had written:

Nothing comes out of a society but what originates in the motive of an individual, or in the united similar motives of many individuals, or in the conflict of the united similar motives of some having certain interests, with the diverse motives of others whose interests are different... [and] not even an approach to an explanation of social phenomena can be made, without the thoughts and sentiments of citizens being recognized as factors.⁹¹

A final word might be added here. No one would deny that the active participation of flesh-and-blood human beings is required to bring about culture change. The question is, how do people *come to have* the ideals and objectives toward which they strive? And the best answer is that they absorb them from their culture.

Fears of an "enervating quietism" are groundless. The fact is, as Spencer might have argued, that a person is not free to choose whether he will be an activist or a quietist. His will to act, just as much as the goal toward which he acts, is implanted in him by his culture.

The Biological Basis of Social Differences

Anthropologists today are very careful to distinguish culture from biology. They agree that one cannot account for the differences in customs and institutions between any two societies through differences in physical type. However, this is not to deny that there is *some* connection between man and culture. Even so thoroughgoing a cultural determinist as Leslie White allowed that there is at least a *generic* relationship between the human organism and culture. On this point White wrote:

Culture has been produced by man and consequently bears a close relationship to him as a genus or species. As a system culture is adapted to man rather than to apes, ants, or elephants. Conversely, if man's organism were not what it is, his culture would be different. As Clarence Day has shown in his deceptively profound little book, *This Simian World*, a civilization built by super-ants or super-cows would be very different from the culture of super-simians. There is then a close relationship between man and culture. But the relationship is general rather than specific. This or that culture cannot be explained by appealing to man's structure or nature.⁹²

This is a relatively new tenet of anthropology. At the time Spencer was writing, almost no one believed it. Spencer saw a much closer relationship between culture and the human organism, one that is not only generic, but specific.

Spencer regarded society itself as based on certain organic propensities on the part of its constituent units. As early as *Social Statics* Spencer had written that "the very existence of society, implies some natural affinity in its members for such a union," and in *The Study of Sociology* he reiterated that "the very possibility of a society depends on a certain emotional property in the individual."⁹³ And the *type* of society formed depends on the type of human beings forming it, for in society, as elsewhere in nature, Spencer argued, "the nature of an aggregate is determined by the natures of its units."⁹⁴

Furthermore, society reflects the nature of its members in specific ways. Particular attitudes, customs, and institutions were thought by Spencer to spring more or less directly from the particular organic properties of the group's members. Thus he wrote that "such peculiar traits as are possessed by the highest varieties of men, must result in distinctive characters possessed in common by the communities into which they organize themselves."⁹⁵ For example, Spencer believed that some tribal groups of India, like the Todas, Santals, and Sowrahs, "have natures in which truthfulness seems to be

organic." And he argued that "the independence of the Greek nature" was "unlike Oriental natures," and attributed to this the fact that the ancient Greeks "did not readily submit to the extension of sacerdotal control over civil affairs."⁹⁶

Thus, for Spencer, the various branches of the human race are not equally endowed, intellectually or emotionally. He saw major differences in the potential for cultural development between major racial groups, and less marked but still noticeable differences between less dissimilar racial groups.

It follows from all this that the institutions of a society reflect what is attainable, given the organic nature of its members. For example, speaking of contemporary England, Spencer wrote that "the existing type of industrial organization, like the existing type of political organization, is about as good as existing human nature allows."⁹⁷

Now, if the customs and institutions of a society reflect the basic nature of its members, then before major changes can occur in the society, organic changes in its members have to occur. Thus we find Spencer writing that since "the structure and actions throughout a society are determined by the properties of its units, . . . the society cannot be substantially and permanently changed without its units being substantially and permanently changed."⁹⁸ And again, "our existing industrial system is a product of existing human nature, and can be improved only as fast as human nature improves."⁹⁹

Human nature, then, is not fixed and immutable. On the contrary, it is always changing. Spencer urged that "we have to get rid of the . . . belief . . . that human nature is unchangeable."¹⁰⁰ "Man, in common with lower creatures, is held to be capable of indefinite change."¹⁰¹ This is the familiar doctrine of human perfectability.

If human nature is plastic, the next question is, how does it change? Spencer wrote: "in common with every other creature, Man is modifiable. . . [and] his modifications, like those of every other creature, are ultimately determined by surrounding conditions."¹⁰² And elsewhere he spoke of "the biological truth that everywhere faculties adjust themselves to the conditions of existence."¹⁰³ More fully:

A fresh influence brought into play on society, not only affects its members directly in their acts, but also indirectly in their characters. Continuing to work on their characters generation after generation, and altering by inheritance the feelings which they bring into social life at large, this influence alters the intensities and bearings of all other influences throughout the society.¹⁰⁴

Let us pause here to make two observations. First of all, from the perspective of modern anthropology, we would say that Spencer failed to appreciate how much culture can change without the necessity for any concomitant change in the nature of its carriers. The most profound changes in cultural evolution have occurred during the last 10,000 years. In this

relatively brief span, human societies have gone from small, simple, nomadic bands to enormous and complex civilizations. Yet no anthropologist today believes that there has been any appreciable change in "human nature" during this time.

Secondly, in the passage quoted above we see evidence of Spencer's belief in the inheritance of acquired characteristics. This doctrine, we now know, is invalid, at least as far as *physical* traits are concerned. The blacksmith's son cannot inherit his father's bulging biceps. But as a *cultural* process, the inheritance of acquired characteristics certainly occurs.

Returning to Spencer's depiction of social change, we see it operating as follows. Environmental changes, modifying the conditions of existence, lead to a modification of human character. This modified character is no longer congruous with the existing social system. And this incongruity produces a disequilibrium which ultimately results in a reequilibration. The reequilibration yields a social system more consistent with the altered nature of its members. As Spencer wrote, "With a given phase of human character there must, to maintain equilibrium, go an adapted class of institutions, and a set of thoughts and sentiments in tolerable harmony with those institutions."¹⁰⁵ This influence was not one-way, but reciprocal:

Ever the tendency is towards congruity between beliefs and requirement. Either the social arrangements are gradually changed until they come into harmony with prevailing ideas and sentiments; or, if surrounding conditions prevent change in the social arrangements, the necessitated habits of life modify the prevailing ideas and sentiments to the requisite extent.¹⁰⁶

Out of this, Spencer saw "the increasing action and reaction of institutions and character, each slowly modifying the other through successive generations." This process, however, takes time, for "human nature, though indefinitely modifiable, can be modified but very slowly," and "before there arise in human nature and human institutions, changes having that permanence which makes them acquired inheritance for the human race, there must go innumerable recurrences of the thoughts, and feelings, and actions, conducive to such changes." Nor can the process be hurried. Spencer warned would-be reformers that "no teaching or policy can advance . . . [social evolution] beyond a certain normal rate, which is limited by the rate of organic modification in human beings."¹⁰⁷

But the process could not have been too slow, for, even among peoples belonging to the same linguistic family, Spencer discerned differences which he attributed to organic changes that had taken place among them. Thus he wrote:

we have still, among the races classed by the community of their language as Aryan, abundant proofs that subjection to different modes of life, produce in course of ages permanent bodily and mental differences: the

Hindu and the Englishman, the Greek and the Dutchman, have acquired contrasts of nature, physical and psychical, which can be ascribed to nothing but the continuous effects of circumstances, material, moral, social, on the activities and therefore on the constitution.¹⁰⁸

Cultural Forces and Social Change

The foregoing passages from Spencer concerning the causes of social evolution all date from 1873 or earlier. However, once Spencer immersed himself in the vast body of cultural data being gathered for the writing of *Principles of Sociology*, he began to reevaluate the role of the human organism in producing social change. The enormous cultural variability that he was finding was not matched by an equal amount of organic variability. As a result (although he never called attention to this change explicitly), Spencer began to attribute more importance to socio-cultural factors and less to the human organism.

In Volume 1 of *Principles of Sociology*, while still speaking of "the reciprocal influence of the society and its units," Spencer noted: "The control exercised by the aggregate over its units, tends ever to mould their activities and sentiments and ideas into congruity with social requirements; and these activities, sentiments, and ideas, in so far as they are changed by changing circumstances, tend to re-mould the society into congruity with themselves."¹⁰⁹ Here he is proposing alternating and reciprocal causation between social structures and sentiments, with the human organism left out—or at least no more than a mediating term. And then within the compass of three pages Spencer states emphatically and repeatedly the increasingly large role he now sees "superorganic" (cultural) factors playing in social evolution:

There remains in the group of derived factors one more, the potency of which can scarcely be over-estimated. I mean that accumulation of super-organic products which we commonly distinguish as artificial, but which . . . are no less natural than all other products of evolution.

These various orders of super-organic products . . . constitute an immensely-voluminous, immensely-complicated, and immensely-powerful set of influences.

. . . the ever-accumulating, ever-complicating super-organic products, material and mental, constitute a further set of factors which become more and more influential causes of change.¹¹⁰

It is scarcely too much to say that here, for the first time in Spencer's writings, there is at least a foreshadowing of the culturological axiom that culture begets culture.

Despite such statements, though, Spencer can hardly be called a culturologist. For him a full explanation of social evolution still required invoking the organic nature of its human members. And, since societies closely

reflect the organic nature of their members, one would have to conclude that the science of society is not an autonomous science: it must rely on the findings of the underlying sciences of biology and psychology. And indeed, this is precisely what Spencer maintained.

Thus he wrote, "psychological truths underlie sociological truths, and must therefore be sought by the sociologist. . . . without preparation in Mental Science there can be no Social Science";¹¹¹ and again, "the Science of Life yields to the Science of Society, certain great generalizations without which there can be no Science of Society at all."¹¹² Probably his fullest expression of this view is the following:

Society is made up of individuals; all that is done in society is done by the combined actions of individuals; and therefore, in individual actions only can be found the solutions of social phenomena. But the actions of individuals depend on the laws of their nature; and their actions cannot be understood until these laws are understood. These laws, however, when reduced to their simple expression, prove to be corollaries from the laws of body and mind in general. Hence it follows, that biology and psychology are indispensable as interpreters of sociology.¹¹³

The Allegation of Racism

Perhaps this is the place to take up the question of Spencer's alleged "racism." It is quite clear from the quotations above that Spencer did not believe the races were equally endowed, either intellectually or emotionally. Thus he wrote that human minds, as represented in various societies, differed "in their kinds and grades."¹¹⁴ He was sure that "differences of complexity exist between the minds of lower and higher races. . . ." ¹¹⁵ And he wrote, "Many conceptions which have become so familiar to us that we assume them to be the common property of all minds, are no more possessed by the lowest savages than they are by our own children. . . . Want of rational curiosity respecting. . . incomprehensible novelties. . ." characterized the lowest races.¹¹⁶ And he averred that "all biological science. . . convinces you that by no possibility will an Aristotle come from a father and mother with facial angles of fifty degrees. . . ." ¹¹⁷

"Gregariousness or sociality" was "a trait in the strength of which races differ widely. . . ." ¹¹⁸ "Clearly a very explosive nature—such as that of the Bushman—is unfit for social union. . . ." ¹¹⁹ And if the Bushmen were unable to form a society worthy of the name, they could hardly aspire to develop a civilization. Indeed, very few peoples could achieve this, since "the constitutional energy needed for continuous labour, without which there cannot be civilized life. . . is an energy not to be quickly acquired; but is to be acquired only by inherited modifications slowly accumulated."¹²⁰ And the capacity for participating in civilized life was so little developed

among many of the lower races, in fact, that it would be a mistake, said Spencer, to try to civilize them. "The intellectual and emotional natures required for high civilization," he wrote, "are not to be obtained by thrusting on the completely-uncivilized, the needful activities and restraints in unqualified form: gradual decay and death, rather than adaptation, would result."¹²¹

Would race mixture assist these lower races in absorbing the benefits of civilizations? Apparently not. "Some facts seem to show, that mixture of human races extremely unlike, produces a worthless type of mind—a mind fitted neither for the kind of life led by the higher of the two races, nor for that led by the lower—a mind out of adjustment to all conditions of life."¹²²

However, the fact that Spencer did not espouse the "psychic unity" of mankind did not mean that he believed in anything like a "prelogical mentality." Indeed, he opposed the view of the "reigning school of mythologists," led by Max Müller, that there was "a fundamental difference in mode of action between the minds of the superior races and the minds of the inferior races."¹²³ Instead, he argued that "the laws of thought are everywhere the same; . . . given the data as known to him, the primitive man's inference is the reasonable inference."¹²⁴

Furthermore, the fact that Spencer, more than any other classical evolutionist, was a believer in human perfectibility took some of the edge off his "racism." The capacity to undergo the organic modifications required to reach the level needed to produce civilization was not the unique possession of one race, but was present in all. This held out the prospect to any people that, if subjected to the proper conditions for a long enough time, they could attain a culture as high as that of any other group.

Beyond all this, the fact remains that when Spencer got down to accounting for the origin of the state or some other social form, he generally set aside all mention of race. Instead, he tried to explain such developments in functional terms, invoking factors like environment, economics, and warfare.

For this reason it is unfair to say, as Marvin Harris does, that Spencer "crippled the explanatory power of cultural evolutionary theory by merging and mixing it with racial determinism."¹²⁵ The *Principles of Sociology* fairly bristles with explanations of social forms that any unbiased person would accept as exemplifying "cultural materialism."

It is misleading, I think, to label Spencer a racist. If a racist is one who believes in the inequality of the races, then Spencer was indeed a racist. But if a racist is one who, holding this belief, acts on it in such a way as to discriminate against or exploit members of the "lower races," then Spencer was most certainly not a racist. In fact, he was a devoted champion of the rights of native peoples in the face of rampant European imperialism. Indeed, with regard to the treatment of native peoples and oppressed minorities, Spencer could easily be considered a liberal.

Environmental Determinants of Society

In trying to place Herbert Spencer in the intellectual firmament of nineteenth-century anthropology, Marvin Harris writes: "The question is, whether he was a *cultural* materialist, that is, whether he systematically elaborated a theory which accounted for cultural differences and similarities in terms of techno-economic and techno-environmental conditions. Although Spencer came closer than Morgan to such a viewpoint, he failed ultimately to achieve it because at each approach, the principle of biological reductionism interceded."¹²⁶

This overstates the case. There were many times when Spencer stepped back from the behavior of individuals and focused his attention on the impersonal forces that determined this behavior. Often he found these forces among the material conditions of existence. Thus, although he never laid heavy emphasis on it, Spencer was well aware of the influence of environment on society. In *The Study of Sociology* he wrote that the "phenomena of social evolution have, of course, to be explained with due reference to the conditions each society is exposed to—the conditions furnished by its locality and by its relations to neighbouring societies." Here and there in *Principles of Sociology* he took cognizance of the effect of environment. For example, he wrote that "the characters of the environment co-operate with the characters of human beings in determining social phenomena,"¹²⁷ and again that "the society as a whole has the character of its sustaining system determined by the general character of its environment . . ."¹²⁸ As societies change their habitats, so will their structures change:

While spreading over the Earth mankind have found environments of various characters, and in each case the social life fallen into, partly determined by the social life previously led, has been partly determined by the influence of the new environment.¹²⁹

Spencer occasionally cited cases of variations in the environment giving rise to corresponding changes in societies. Thus he wrote: "Where pasture is abundant and covers large areas, the keeping of flocks does not necessitate separation of their owners into very small clusters: instance the Comanches, who, with their hunting, join the keeping of cattle, which the members of the tribe combine to guard. But where pasture is not abundant, or is distributed in patches, many cattle cannot be kept together; and their owners consequently have to part."¹³⁰

Spencer also pointed out the effect that environment could have on the form of political organization. Rugged mountain terrain like that of Greece, for instance, promoted confederacies rather than strongly centralized monarchies. And then, in discussing political consolidation in other parts of the world, Spencer wrote as follows:

structure of the habitat, as facilitating or impeding communication, and as rendering escape easy or hard, has much to do with the size of the

social aggregate formed. To the illustrations before given, showing that mountain-haunting peoples and peoples living in deserts and marshes are difficult to consolidate, while peoples penned in by barriers are consolidated with facility, I may here add two significant ones not before noticed. One occurs in the Polynesian Islands—Tahiti, Hawaii, Tonga, Samoa, and the rest—where, restrained within limits by surrounding seas, the inhabitants have become united more or less closely into aggregates of considerable sizes. The other is furnished by ancient Peru, where, before the time of the Yncas, semi-civilized communities had been formed in valleys separated from each other “on the coast, by hot, and almost impassable deserts, and in the interior by lofty mountains, or cold and trackless *punas*.” And to the implied inability of these peoples to escape governmental coercion, thus implied by Squier as a factor in their civilization, is ascribed, by the ancient Spanish writer Cieza, the differences between them and the neighbouring Indians of Popoyan, who could retreat, “whenever attacked, to other fertile regions.”¹³¹

Energy and Social Evolution

Perhaps because his civil engineering background made it natural for him to think along these lines, Spencer was the first social scientist to recognize explicitly that cultural evolution depends on the manner and amount of physical energy harnessed. “Human progress,” he wrote, “is 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.”¹³² His fullest statement of this relationship between energy and social evolution appeared in *First Principles* and is worth quoting in full:

Based as the life of a society is on animal and vegetal products, and dependent as these are on the light and heat of the Sun, it follows that the changes wrought by men as socially organized, are effects of forces having a common origin with those which produce all . . . other orders of changes . . . Not only is the energy expended by the horse harnessed to the plough, and by the labourer guiding it, derived from the same reservoir as is the energy of the cataract and the hurricane; but to this same reservoir are traceable those subtler and more complex manifestations of energy which humanity, as socially embodied, evolves . . . Whatever takes place in a society results either from the undirected physical energies around, from these energies as directed by men, or from the energies of the men themselves.¹³³

Moreover, the Second Law of Thermodynamics having been formulated by Clausius in 1850, and its dire and inescapable consequences having been recognized in scientific circles, Spencer was forced to conclude: “If the Solar System is slowly dissipating its energies—if the Sun is losing his heat at a rate which will tell in millions of years—if with decreases of the Sun’s radiations there must go on a decrease in the activity of geologic and meteorologic processes as well as in the quantity of vegetable and animal life—if

Man and Society are similarly dependent on this supply of energy which is gradually coming to an end; are we not manifestly progressing towards omnipresent death? That such a state must be the outcome of the changes everywhere going on, seems beyond doubt."¹³⁴

Economic Factors and Social Evolution

The effect of economic factors in social evolution was also recognized by Spencer. He especially resorted to the use of these factors when tracing the development of more advanced societies. For example, his analysis of the role of commerce and industry in widening the base of Athenian oligarchy, thus paving the way for Greek democracy, is persuasive and brilliant. His thesis that representative government and the democratic state result from an increased concentration of people in towns, from the rise of artisan and merchant classes, and from expanding production and commerce is also illuminating and profound. Spencer concludes his analysis by saying: "Practically, therefore, it was the growing industrial power which then produced, and thereafter preserved, the democratic organization" of ancient Athens.¹³⁵

War as a Determinant of Society

Of all the material determinants which Spencer invoked, the one he used most frequently and most effectively was war. To war he attributed nothing less than the rise of the state, and before that, the successive political consolidations that led up to the state. If Spencer was not the first to propose this thesis, he was surely the first to substantiate it.

Innumerable quotations could be presented here to illustrate the effect Spencer attributed to war, but a few will have to do. In *Principles of Sociology* he wrote:

we... see that in the struggle for existence among societies, the survival of the fittest is the survival of those in which the power of military cooperation is the greatest; and military cooperation is that primary kind of cooperation which prepares the way for other kinds. So that this formation of larger societies by the union of smaller ones in war, and this destruction or absorption of the smaller un-united societies by the united larger ones, is an inevitable process through which the varieties of men most adapted for social life, supplant the less adapted varieties.¹³⁶

But Spencer was no truculent militarist glorying in the feats of battle. On the contrary, he loathed war, and recognized its positive effects on political evolution only after overcoming his repugnance of it. Thus he wrote:

Knowledge of the miseries which have for countless ages been everywhere caused by the antagonisms of societies, must not prevent us from recognizing the all-important part these antagonisms have played in civilization. Shudder as we must at the cannibalism which all over the

world in early days was a sequence of war—shrink as we may from the thought of those immolations of prisoners which have, tens of thousands of times, followed battles between wild tribes—read as we do with horror of the pyramids of heads and the whitening of bones of slain peoples left by barbarian invaders—hate, as we ought, the militant spirit which is even now among ourselves prompting base treacheries and brutal aggressions; we must not let our feelings blind us to the proofs that inter-social conflicts have furthered the development of social structures.¹³⁷

It should be noted, though, that Spencer did not see war playing a positive role in the world any longer. Thus he wrote that “the struggle for existence which has been going on between societies, and which, though in early times a cause of progress, is now becoming a cause of retrogression.”¹³⁸ “From war,” he said, “has been gained all that it had to give,” adding that the degree of “social evolution which had to be achieved through the conflicts of societies with one another, has already been achieved; and no further benefits are to be looked for.”¹³⁹

The Mechanisms of Social Evolution

Given his *determinants* of social evolution, what did Spencer see as the *mechanisms* involved? By mechanisms I mean the ways in which determinants, whatever they may be, operate to produce their effect. First was the mechanism of natural selection, or, as he preferred to call it, the survival of the fittest. Customs, institutions, and even entire societies are in competition, and the better adapted ones gradually displace the less well adapted. War, of course, is the ultimate expression of this competition, and “the survival of the fittest” its result. Through natural selection steel axes had replaced stone ones, trial by jury had replaced the *lex talionis*, and states had replaced tribes. The mechanism might be harsh, but it was real and it was effective.

The second mechanism that Spencer used to explain social evolution was the inheritance of acquired characteristics. Spencer was a firm believer in this principle, having used it originally to explain organic evolution. Since it is now well established that the traits an animal acquires during its lifetime are not transmitted by inheritance, Spencer’s use of this principle in biology proved erroneous. However, mistaken as it was in biology, the inheritance of acquired characteristics remains a striking and valid feature of sociology. The culture traits acquired by one generation are indeed transmitted to the next. And it is precisely because of this that cultural evolution proceeds so much faster than organic evolution.

Functionalism

Spencer is everywhere recognized as an evolutionist. What is not so commonly known is that he was also a *functionalist*. Indeed, as J. W. Burrow

observed, Spencer "devoted almost as much attention to structural/functional relations as to social evolution."¹⁴⁰

An inclination toward functional analysis can be seen in Spencer as early as *Social Statics*. It is also clear in his article "The Use of Anthropomorphism" in which he argued: "...all evolutions of humanity subserve, in the time and places in which they occur, some useful function...all religions, down to the lowest Fetichism, have, in their places, fulfilled useful functions...[and] men's theologies, as well as their political and social arrangements, are determined into such forms as the conditions require."¹⁴¹

Spencer's article "The Social Organism," written in 1860, elaborated on the notion that a society, with all of its parts, was a functioning system, and in *First Principles* he held that "structural changes are the slowly accumulated results of...functional changes..."¹⁴² In *Principles of Sociology*, Spencer exhibited functionalist principles in chapters on "Social Structures," "Social Functions," and the like.¹⁴³ In the same work he wrote: "There can be no true conception of a structure without a true conception of its function. To understand how an organization originated and developed, it is requisite to understand the need subserved at the outset and afterwards."¹⁴⁴

A great many pages of *Principles of Sociology* are filled with incisive discussions of the structure and function of the subsystems of a society, such as the sustaining system, the regulating system, the distributing system, etc. Indeed, according to Sorokin, Spencer "analyzed and classified these subsystems...more thoroughly and clearly than most of today's 'functionalist structuralists.'"¹⁴⁵

Even though Spencer's social evolutionism began to be rejected within his lifetime, his functionalism took root in both sociology and anthropology. One cannot read through the pages of Durkheim's *The Division of Labor* or *The Rules of Sociological Method*, for instance, without becoming aware of the profound effect that Spencer's functionalism had on Durkheim, despite the fact that Durkheim was always more ready to quarrel with Spencer than to acknowledge his debt to him. Directly through his own writings, and indirectly through Durkheim's, Spencer's functionalism greatly influenced A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. In fact, Radcliffe-Brown even retained a certain benevolent attitude toward Spencer's evolutionism, describing himself at one point as "one who has all his life accepted the hypothesis of social evolution as formulated by Spencer as a useful working hypothesis in the study of human society."¹⁴⁶

Later British social anthropologists, though, repudiated Spencer's evolutionism altogether, but they did pursue his functionalism energetically. About them Donald MacRae has said:

the very anthropologists who were most ready to reject theories of social evolution, wholeheartedly adopted and developed, for specifically sociological purposes, the idea of function and functional interdependence; these they used as essential tools for the analysis of social

structure. In this they had been anticipated by Herbert Spencer to a degree which is seldom, even today, fully realized.¹⁴⁷

Some recognition of the functionalists' indebtedness to Spencer does occasionally come to light. Edmund Leach, for one, has written: "The explicit idea that the study of social structure should be an objective for sociological inquiry seems to be due to Spencer. . . ." And Talcott Parsons, while perhaps inverting cart and horse, noted: "The combination of the idea of a self-regulating system and of functional differentiation taken together brings Spencer very close to the position of modern 'functional' theory in sociology and related disciplines."¹⁴⁸

However, the antagonism of British social anthropologists and their allies toward evolutionism continues unabated. J. W. Burrow, for example, says that Spencer exhibits in his writing "the *tension* to be found in much nineteenth-century sociology, between the hope of constructing a social series developing according to ascertainable laws and the approach to societies as systems of complex functional relations" (emphasis mine).¹⁴⁹ But this "tension" is not in nineteenth-, but in twentieth-century sociology and anthropology. And why tension at all? The two approaches of functionalism and evolutionism are not inconsistent but perfectly compatible.¹⁵⁰

Marvin Harris sees the issue in proper perspective when he writes that Spencer's functionalism did not pursue the narrow path of purely synchronic analysis, but was "deliberately subordinated to an interest in change." Spencer's accomplishments along these lines were well summarized by Philip Abrams when he wrote: ". . . between Spencer's evolutionism and his functionalism there is symbiosis not contradiction. . . . Using the principle of natural selection Spencer achieved what is often supposed to be impossible, a structural-functional sociology of change."¹⁵¹

The Organic Analogy

One of the distinctive features of Spencer's functionalism was his use of the organic analogy. He saw, between an animal organism and a human society, a series of parallels whose recognition, he thought, yielded a deeper understanding of the nature and function of societies.

This analogy, already suggested in *Social Statics*, was first fully explored by Spencer in "The Social Organism." In this article Spencer listed various ways in which societies were like organisms, saying that for the two, "The *principles* of organization are the same. . . ." He also pointed out counterparts between the organs of an animal and the subsystems of a society. Later, in *The Study of Sociology*, speaking of the organic analogy, Spencer said, "we are not here dealing with a figurative resemblance, but with a fundamental parallelism in principles of structure."¹⁵² And in *Principles of Sociology* Spencer offered countless examples of specific analogies between organisms and societies. Their number may weary the reader, but the parallels seldom fail to be instructive.

For various reasons, the organic analogy aroused great opposition among social scientists. Some felt, as did Tönnies, that "our real insight into...social evolution...is more hampered than promoted by...[the] method of biological analogies."¹⁵³ Others were less tempered in their remarks, going so far as to accuse Spencer of believing that society really was an organism. Spencer defended himself by saying:

Here let it once more be distinctly asserted that there exist no analogies between the body politic and a living body, save those necessitated by that mutual dependence of parts which they display in common. Though, in foregoing chapters, sundry comparisons of social structures and functions to structures and functions in the human body, have been made, they have been made only because structures and functions in the human body furnish familiar illustrations of structures and functions in general. . . .

And he added:

I have used the analogies elaborated, but as a scaffolding to help in building up a coherent body of sociological inductions. Let us take away the scaffolding: the inductions will stand by themselves.¹⁵⁴

Now that the dust has settled on this issue, the value of the organic analogy still survives. Radcliffe-Brown, for example, was not afraid to assert that "analogies, properly used, are important aides to scientific thinking and there is a real and significant analogy between organic structure and social structure."¹⁵⁵ Leslie White also embraced the organic analogy, stating:

A sociocultural system is like a biological organism in many respects. Both are thermodynamic systems; both maintain themselves by harnessing free (available) energy. Biological evolution and the evolution of sociocultural systems proceed by increasing the concentration of energy incorporated within their respective systems. Both processes of evolution are characterized by progressive diversification of structure and specialization of function. And both develop structural means of coordinating parts and functions and of regulating (controlling) the behavior of the whole; both move toward higher levels of integration.¹⁵⁶

Today, General Systems Theory helps us to see the organic analogy in a broader perspective. It is not so much that a society is an organism, but that societies and organisms are both *systems*. That is to say, each is a working unit of interdependent parts, organized into structures designed to carry out functions, all leading to the efficient operation of the whole.

"Unilinear" Evolution

Spencer's writings have been subjected to a variety of criticisms beyond those we have already examined. Some of them were warranted, but many were undeserved.

Among anthropologists, the critique most often made of Spencer's evolutionism was that it was "unilinear." John Gillin, for example, wrote that "in its classical form, evolutionary theory held that *all* cultures inevitably must pass through the *same* stages of development" (emphasis Gillin's). Franz Boas, referring to Spencer specifically, said that he "erred in assuming a single unilinear evolution. . . ." The sociologist Florian Znaniecki affirmed that for Spencer, "every society at any moment represents a certain stage in the universal evolution which follows the same line throughout the world." And V. Gordon Childe maintained that "the Spencerian evolutionists sought to document an hypothesis of unilinear social evolution. . . ."¹⁵⁷

Evidently, *someone* in the nineteenth century must have held the doctrine of unilinear evolution. But it was not Herbert Spencer. As early as 1873, in *The Study of Sociology*, Spencer wrote that "among other erroneous pre-conceptions" there was the "serious one, 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 being, rather, that social types, like types of individual organisms, do not form a series, but are classifiable only in divergent and re-divergent groups." No clearer rejection of unilinear evolution could be asked for, and this was no isolated disclaimer. In *Principles of Sociology* Spencer wrote: "Like other kinds of progress, social progress is not linear but divergent and re-divergent. Each differentiated product gives origin to a new set of differentiated products."¹⁵⁸ One can only conclude, with Morris Ginsberg, that "if . . . anthropologists were, as is alleged, seriously misled by the 'classical evolutionists', they either had not read their writings or, if they had, must have misunderstood them."¹⁵⁹

Alleged Disdain for History

Spencer is often chastised for disdain for history. Indeed, the list of critics who have reproached him for this is almost endless. Frederic Harrison said that "Spencer never had a glimmering of history." L. L. Bernard speaks of Spencer's "ignorance of history," and Abram Kardiner and Edward Preble considered this to be a "studied ignorance." David Masson asserted that Spencer "undervalues history," while John C. Greene says that Spencer "was not interested in history."¹⁶⁰

The list goes on. Charles Ellwood claimed there was "very little intelligent use of the historical method" in Spencer's work, and John Dewey believed "it would be hard to find another intellect of first class rank so devoid of historical sense. . . ." J. D. Y. Peel has argued that Spencer "disdained" to do history, and that he actually had "contempt for history." To end this dismal chorus, Walter Simon maintained that Spencer "scorned" history, while F. J. C. Hearnshaw held that he "despised" it.¹⁶¹

What can we say of this overwhelming concurrence of opinion that Spencer rejected history? Merely that it is wrong. To be sure, to the casual

student, certain passages from Spencer might appear to justify it, for there is no question that Spencer had no use for conventional history. Thus he wrote to James Knowles, editor of the *Contemporary Review*, "I ignore utterly the personal element in history, and, indeed, show little respect for history altogether as it is ordinarily conceived."¹⁶² And in his *Autobiography* he wrote:

When I go to see a ruined abbey or the remains of a castle, I do not care to learn when it was built, who lived or died there, or what catastrophe it witnessed. I never yet went to a battle-field, although often near to one: not having the slightest curiosity to see a place where many men were killed and a victory achieved. The gossip of a guide is to me a nuisance; so that, if need were, I would rather pay him for his silence than for his talk.¹⁶³

Spencer's friend and disciple Edward L. Youmans reported an incident of this kind. In writing to his sister about a visit he and Spencer had made to Edinburgh Castle, Youmans said: "in the bedroom of Mary, Queen of Scots, where her son was born, and let down outside through the window, an old Scotchman was trying to rally his recollections about some details, and appealed to Spencer. 'I am happy to say I don't know,' he replied. The old man was thunderstruck, and said he wished he knew all about history. 'I should hate to have my head filled up with it [Spencer replied], for it would exclude better things.'"¹⁶⁴

Spencer was especially critical of the way in which history was taught. "The births, deaths, and marriages of kings, and other like historic trivialities," he wrote, "are committed to memory, not because of any direct benefits that can possibly result from knowing them: but because society considers them parts of a good education."¹⁶⁵

What Spencer disdained, then, was not historical data themselves, but rather the selection and recital by historians of events that were neither significant nor instructive with regard to how societies had come to be what they are. Already in *Social Statics* Spencer had inveighed against the quest of traditional historians:

From the successive strata of our historical deposits, they diligently gather all the highly-coloured fragments, pounce upon everything that is curious and sparkling, and chuckle like children over their glittering acquisitions; meanwhile the rich veins of wisdom that ramify amidst this worthless debris, lie utterly neglected. Cumbrous volumes of rubbish are greedily accumulated, whilst those masses of rich ore, that should have been dug out, and from which golden truths might have been smelted, are left unthought of and unsought.¹⁶⁶

Spencer returned to this theme in his essay "What Knowledge is of Most Worth?":

That which constitutes History, properly so called, is in great part omitted from works on the subject. Only of late years have historians

commenced giving us, in any considerable quantity, the truly valuable information. As in past ages the king was everything and the people nothing; so, in past histories the doings of the king fill the entire picture, to which the national life forms but an obscure background. While only now, when the welfare of nations rather than of rulers is becoming the dominant idea, are historians beginning to occupy themselves with the phenomena of social progress. The thing it really concerns us to know is the natural history of society.¹⁶⁷

Spencer went on to tell historians how they should ply their craft: "The only history that is of practical value is what may be called Descriptive Sociology. And the highest office which the historian can discharge, is that of so narrating the lives of nations, as to furnish materials for a Comparative Sociology; and for the subsequent determination of the ultimate laws to which social phenomena conform."¹⁶⁸

When the time came to begin compiling *Descriptive Sociology* and to write *Principles of Sociology*, Spencer made extensive, but selective, use of the work of historians. "Though the greater parts of the facts from which true sociological generalizations may be drawn," he wrote, "are presented only by those savage and semi-civilized societies ignored in our educational courses, there are also required some of the facts furnished by the histories of developed nations."¹⁶⁹ And indeed, in the three volumes of *Principles of Sociology* reference is made to the works of an impressive array of historians: Herodotus, Xenophon, Tacitus, Grote, Gibbon, Mommsen, Ranke, Froissart, Hume, Duruy, Guizot, Michelet, Thierry, Fustel de Coulanges, Macaulay, Buckle, Stubbs, Freeman, Oviedo, Herrera, López de Gómara, Sahagún, Bernal Diaz, Southey, Schoolcraft, Prescott, and Bancroft, to name only the more prominent. How many social scientists have made as full a use of the data of history?

It is clear, then, that Spencer did not disdain history; he merely objected to what *passed* for history. He wanted the facts of history to be used for a greater purpose than mere narrative or chronicle. And he wanted better facts. Thus he proposed that historians turn their attention from the fluff and tinsel of history to its kernel and core. He urged them to gather and present the kinds of information that would allow the sociologist to erect a science of society.

As might be imagined, this view of history did not sit well with professional historians. Jesse Coursault objected that Spencer would make of the historian "a mere servant, a mere hewer of wood and drawer of water for the sociologist. . . ." Andrew D. White defended the study of memoirs, court intrigues, and battles, which Spencer had spurned, saying that much of interest and value could be extracted from them. Besides, White argued, "Meeting our ethical necessity for historical knowledge with statistics and tabulated sociology. . . is like meeting our want of food by the perpetual administration of concentrated essence of beef."¹⁷⁰

James Bryce, speaking no doubt for many of his colleagues who con-

tinued to cling to the unique and the particular, objected to the "scientific school" of history, whose "Coryphaeus," he said, "was the late Mr. Herbert Spencer." This school, Bryce remarked, "seeks to raise, or reduce, history to the level of an exact science. . . ." and "regards the course of human affairs as determined by general laws." Bryce decried the attempt to reach broad generalizations, warning that "No habit is more seductive." His sober judgment was that "the longer a man studies either a country or a given period, the fewer, the more cautious, and the more carefully limited and guarded in statement will his generalizations be."¹⁷¹

A few historians nevertheless recognized Spencer's criticism of conventional history as salutary. Albert G. Keller reported that, as a graduate student at Yale, he had heard the eminent historian George Burton Adams "in the course of an attack on 'sociology,' qualify his strictures by saying that the view Spencer had given of society as a whole and in the articulation of its parts had made it impossible for history ever again to be written as it had been before Spencer's time."¹⁷²

Deduction vs. Induction

Of the many anecdotes told about Herbert Spencer, the best known is probably the one involving his close friend and intellectual sparring partner, Thomas Henry Huxley. Spencer, in his *Autobiography*, recounted the incident as follows: "A witticism of his at my expense has remained with me these twenty years. He was one of a circle in which tragedy was the topic, when my name came up in connexion with some opinion or other; whereupon he remarked—'Oh! you know Spencer's idea of a tragedy is a deduction killed by a fact!'"¹⁷³

Indeed, Spencer's fondness for deduction has often been commented on. Kardiner and Preble, for instance, characterized Spencer as "one of the most 'deductive' minds in the social sciences," while Melville Herskovits said "Spencer was as complete a deductionist as science has ever seen. . . ."¹⁷⁴

Sometimes such comments imply, or even assert, that Spencer's deductions were mere speculations arrived at by pure excogitation with no factual basis whatever, and that, if facts were later added, they were merely to illustrate conclusions already formed. Alexander Goldenweiser wrote that Spencer's method consisted of bringing together "ideas gathered from many places and periods, to substantiate genetic schemes arrived at by speculation." Arnold Rose derided Spencer's "corps of secretaries collecting unrelated facts from all corners of the earth while he independently thought out what he believed were the laws of history." And Walter Greenwood Beach affirmed that "the facts gathered are not the material for induction; they are examples or illustrations of assumed laws already reached by deduction."¹⁷⁵

Such criticism is nothing new and was indeed already frequent during Spencer's lifetime. On more than one occasion he attempted to meet it, stating that most of his generalizations were, in fact, inductively arrived at. Writing in *Principles of Sociology*, just before turning to the section entitled "The Inductions of Sociology," Spencer stated that "before deductive interpretations of the general truths must come inductive establishment of them."¹⁷⁶

Still, Spencer was very much drawn to deduction. "Though my conclusions have usually been reached inductively," he wrote, "yet I have never been satisfied without finding how they could be reached deductively."¹⁷⁷ And elsewhere he said that "leaving a truth in inductive form is, in a sense, leaving its parts with loose ends; and the bringing it to a deductive form is, in a sense, uniting its facts as all parts of one fact."¹⁷⁸ Thus Spencer sought to show that a wide variety of social phenomena were manifestations or exemplifications of a general principle, and once the principle had been established, the facts could be deduced from it. However, some basis in fact must precede the principle. Spencer cited his article "Progress: Its Law and Cause" as an example of a major argument developed inductively: "Progress from homogeneity to heterogeneity was observed now in one class of phenomena and now in another, until the instances had become many and varied. Only then came the generalization that this transformation is universal; and only then did there commence a search for the ultimate truth from which the induction might be deduced."¹⁷⁹

The need for induction became increasingly clear to Spencer as he approached the task of writing *Principles of Sociology*. In pursuing this work, he said, "Simple induction now played a leading part. . . . Growing complexity of subject-matter implies growing complexity of causation; and with recognition of additional factors comes proof of the inadequacy of factors previously recognized."¹⁸⁰ The realization that the ideas he had held about social evolution were not entirely adequate to the task he now faced was brought home to him by *Descriptive Sociology*. "The *Descriptive Sociology*," he wrote, "had been for seven years in progress; making me gradually acquainted with more numerous and varied groups of social phenomena, disclosing truths of unexpected kinds, and occasionally obliging me to abandon some of my preconceptions."¹⁸¹

As an example of a preconception which the facts had forced him to change Spencer offered the following: "Dominant as political government is in the thoughts of all, it is naturally assumed to be the primary form of government; and this had been assumed by me, as by everybody. But the facts which the *Descriptive Sociology* put before me, proved that of the several kinds of control exercised over men the ceremonial control is the first."¹⁸² In the same vein he later wrote: "the control exercised over men's conduct by the theological beliefs and priestly agency, has been indispensable. The masses of evidence classified and arranged in the *Descriptive Sociology*,

have forced this belief upon me independently: if not against my will, still without any desire to entertain it."¹⁸³

It must be admitted, nonetheless, that Spencer did retain some preconceptions, and that a certain *a priori*ism showed through. For example, in *Principles of Sociology* he wrote: "The doctrine of evolution will help us to delineate primitive ideas in some of their leading traits. Having inferred, *a priori*, the characters of those ideas, we shall be as far as possible prepared to realize them in imagination, and then to discern them as actually existing."¹⁸⁴ Such arguments, however, form a small part of his work. Of course, where Spencer let a preconception stand without yielding to contrary facts, the preconception must not be allowed. But such instances in no way vitiate the many illuminating generalizations found throughout *Principles of Sociology*. Furthermore, if some proposition arrived at *a priori* or deductively later turned out to be true, its truth is surely not lessened by its derivation. As the historian of science George Sarton remarked on this score:

Spencer has often been reproached that his system is based far more upon preconceived ideas than upon the observation of reality. Yet it must be admitted that he managed to marshal an enormous amount of facts to support his theories. If it is true that the latter were generally ahead of his experience, is not the same true to a certain extent of every scientific hypothesis? Never mind where a man gets his theories if he can establish them on experimental grounds.¹⁸⁵

Viscount Samuel was once discussing the theory of relativity with Albert Einstein and found occasion to bring up the anecdote about Spencer's idea of a tragedy being a deduction killed by a fact. On hearing it, Einstein replied, "Every theory is killed sooner or later in that way. But if the theory has good in it, that good is embodied and continued in the next theory."¹⁸⁶

Ethnocentrism

The belief in the superiority of one's own culture—ethnocentrism—was one of the most difficult things for the young science of anthropology to surmount. It was easy to equate greater structural complexity, which European nations clearly manifested over primitive tribes, with a higher moral level. Thus, for example, from a preliminary survey of the family, Spencer concluded that "the domestic relations which are the highest ethically considered, are also the highest as considered both biologically and sociologically."¹⁸⁷

It cannot be denied that this kind of ethnocentrism was found, in varying degrees, among all the nineteenth-century evolutionists, including Spencer. Thus Herskovits was at least partially correct when he spoke of "the determined ethnocentrism that marked his thinking."¹⁸⁸

However, the issue is not that clear cut. The fact is that Spencer was well aware of the bias of ethnocentrism, struggled with it in himself, and partially overcame it.

Prior to launching on *Principles of Sociology*, Spencer turned out *The Study of Sociology*. Several chapters of this volume were devoted to an analysis of the various kinds of bias that threatened to cloud the vision of the would-be social scientist. Among them were class bias, patriotic bias, religious bias, and the like. About the effect that this analysis had on him, Spencer later wrote in his *Autobiography*:

While describing and illustrating the various forms of bias which a student of Sociology must guard against, I became conscious that I myself needed the warning I was giving. The result was that, while retaining my social ideals, I gained a greater readiness to recognize the relative goodness of forms which have passed away, and a greater preparedness for looking at the various factors of social development in an unprejudiced manner. Without losing my aversion to certain barbaric institutions, sentiments, and beliefs, considered in the abstract, I became more impressed with the necessity of contemplating them calmly, as having been in their times and places the best that were possible, and as unavoidably to be passed through in the course of social evolution.¹⁸⁹

This ambivalence continued to appear in Spencer's work subsequent to *The Study of Sociology*. On the one hand, he wrote such passages as this: "Yet only by seeing things as the savage sees them can his ideas be understood, his behavior accounted for, and the resulting social phenomena explained."¹⁹⁰ And again: "Instead of passing over as of no account, or else regarding as purely mischievous, the superstitions of the primitive man, we must inquire what part they play in social evolution."¹⁹¹ On the other hand, Spencer also spoke of the "prevalence in rude societies of practices which are to us in the highest degree repugnant," and of close consanguineal unions as "the most degraded relations of the sexes."¹⁹²

The balance that Spencer tried to strike between moral judgment and objective contemplation is perhaps best illustrated in this passage about the domestic relations of primitive peoples:

While, judging them relatively, by their adaptations to the accompanying social requirements, we may be led to regard as needful in their times and places, arrangements that are repugnant to us; . . . judging them absolutely, in relation to the most developed types of life, individual and national, [we shall] find good reasons for reprobating them.¹⁹³

Nonetheless, in passing moral judgments, Spencer did not always award the palm to Europeans. Over and over again he found among "savages" traits of character which he admired. Thus he wrote: "Characters are to be found among rude peoples which compare well with those of the best among cultivated peoples. With little knowledge and but rudimentary arts,

there in some cases go virtues which might shame those among ourselves whose education and polish are of the highest."¹⁹⁴ And as examples of this he cited the truthfulness of the Santáls, the honesty of the Lepchas, the amiability of the Bodo, and so on.

Not only did Spencer admire many primitive peoples, he staunchly defended their right to their lands and their freedom in the face of European colonial encroachment—which brings us to the alleged “Victorianism” of Spencer.

“Victorianism”

No greater disparagement is made of the early anthropologists than to call them “Victorian.” Julian Steward, for example, wrote: “The 19th-century school of cultural evolutionists—mainly British—reasoned that man had progressed from a condition of simple, amoral savagery to a civilized state whose ultimate achievement was the Victorian Englishman, living in an industrial society and political democracy, believing in the Empire and belonging to the Church of England.”¹⁹⁵

This picture of Spencer, whom Steward clearly meant to indict, is scarcely even a caricature. In the first place, Spencer was never a member of the Church of England. In his youth, his father had instilled in him a sense of natural causation which militated against his holding any religious beliefs, and those few which he then held did not long survive. Thus Spencer wrote in his *Autobiography*:

The acquisition of scientific knowledge, especially physical, had co-operated with the natural tendency thus shown [a dislike for authority and ritual]; and had practically excluded the ordinary idea of the supernatural. A breach in the course of causation had come to be, if not an impossible thought, yet a thought never entertained. Necessarily, therefore, the current creed became more and more alien to the set of convictions gradually formed in me, and slowly dropped away unawares.¹⁹⁶

The notion that Spencer took pride in the British Empire is totally false. He frequently and vehemently lashed out against the imperialism of England and other nations, speaking of it as “the cowardly conquest of bullet and shell over arrow and assegai. . . .” He also wrote of the “chronic state of indignation daily intensified, by our doings in Afghanistan, in Zululand, and on a small scale in other places.”¹⁹⁷

Spencer’s hatred of imperialism was well known to his contemporaries. Justin McCarthy praised his “austere and uncompromising love of justice,” and “instinctive detestation of brute, blind, despotic force. . . .”, and William James wrote of his “almost Quakerish humanitarianism and regard for peace.” It was no proper Victorian who declared, as Spencer did after the British instigation of the Boer War, “I am ashamed of my country.”¹⁹⁸

Another assertion often made of “Victorian” anthropologists is that they regarded monogamy as the touchstone of advanced sensibility. For Spencer,

wrote Crane Brinton, "*Monogamy as practiced in the British Isles is the fine flower of evolution.*" True enough, Spencer did write that "the monogamic form of the sexual relation is manifestly the ultimate form; and any changes to be anticipated must be in the direction of completion and extension of it."¹⁹⁹ Yet Spencer also had a good word to say for polygyny. He once wrote that "the men who, under a polygamous regime are able to obtain and to support more wives than one, must be men superior to the average; and hence there must result an increased multiplication of the best, and a diminished multiplication of the worst." When Robert Lowie wrote that "for the mid-Victorian thinker it was a foregone conclusion requiring only statement not proof that monogamy is the highest form of marriage. . .,"²⁰⁰ this did not apply to Spencer. Indeed, although Spencer believed monogamy to be superior to polygyny under certain conditions, he offered a number of explicit and persuasive arguments for his views, and these arguments were framed in terms of adaptive advantages rather than moral superiority.

Finally, modern-day anthropologists sometimes allege that for nineteenth-century evolutionists Victorian England was the pinnacle of human achievement, and they could envision no higher state. This was hardly the case with Spencer. In *The Study of Sociology* he wrote that "the changes which have brought social arrangements to a form so different from past forms, will in future carry them on to forms as different from those now existing." Nor could one foresee where such changes would lead: "the social states towards which our race is being carried," wrote Spencer, "are probably as little conceivable by us as our present social state was conceivable by a Norse pirate."²⁰¹

Might Spencer not see those changes as a regression from a Victorian peak? Evidently not, for he wrote: "after observing how the processes that have brought things to their present stage are still going on, not with a decreasing rapidity indicating approach to cessation, but with an increasing rapidity that implies long continuance and immense transformations; there follows the conviction that the remote future has in store, forms of social life higher than any we have imagined."²⁰²

Spencer and Morgan

Before turning to Spencer's influence on succeeding generations of scholars, it may be of some interest to see what his relations were with the other two great classical evolutionists, Lewis H. Morgan and Edward B. Tylor. Let us begin with Morgan.

The first evidence of any interchange between Morgan and Spencer is found in an entry in Morgan's journal of his trip to Europe in 1871. Writing from London to Joseph Henry of the Smithsonian Institution, Morgan acknowledged receipt of an advance copy of *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family*, and asked Dr. Henry to forward five more

copies to England for distribution to (among others) Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer.²⁰³ Upon receiving his copy of the work, Spencer acknowledged it cordially, writing to Morgan:

I am much indebted to you for the present of your great work on *Systems*, etc., which lately reached me. Hitherto, I have had but time to glance through it and to be impressed with the value of its immense mass of materials collected and arranged with so much labour. I thank you for it in more than a mere formal way that is common in the acknowledgement of presentation copies; for it comes to me at a time when I am making elaborate preparations personally and by deputy for the scientific treatment of Sociology, and its contents promise to be of immediate service.²⁰⁴

Nevertheless, Spencer made no use of *Systems*, or at least he never cited this volume among the hundreds of ethnographic works contained in the bibliography of *Principles of Sociology*.

While in England, Morgan met J. F. McLennan, and looked forward to meeting Spencer as well. In his journal entry for July 5, 1871, Morgan wrote: "I am to drive with him [McLennan] tomorrow to meet Herbert Spencer, whom Darwin in his 'Descent of Man' calls 'our great philosopher' and possibly Sir John Lubbock. Of course I anticipate much pleasure from meeting these men, that is if McLennan can catch them."²⁰⁵ There is no evidence that the meeting ever took place, however.

Although he had yet to publish anything substantial on sociology, by the early 1870's Spencer's general philosophy was already of great interest to the intellectuals of Rochester, N.Y., where Morgan lived. A Spencer Club was organized in Rochester in 1872 for the purpose of studying Spencer's works. "Mr. Morgan was not at first interested in metaphysical studies," wrote an acquaintance of his, "saying they were 'dry chips' to him. He later, however, read with care the works of Herbert Spencer, and as we have seen, joined the club. . . ." ²⁰⁶

Morgan found Spencer's philosophy distasteful—partly, suggests Bernhard Stern, because of Morgan's "religious orientation." In a letter to his friend the Rev. J. H. McIlvaine of Princeton in which he evidently invited McIlvaine to Rochester to address the Spencer Club, Morgan derided Spencer. This letter drew from McIlvaine the reply: "Nor have I read Spencer, not having a doubt but that he has proved himself as great an ass in the discussion of ancient society as you say. As for reviewing him I am doing greater work and cannot come down."²⁰⁷ In a letter to Darwin, Morgan also criticized Spencer, but Darwin's reply "recommended cautious analysis, rather than blind acceptance or rejection."²⁰⁸

Critical of him or not, Morgan sent Spencer a copy of *Ancient Society* when the book appeared in 1877. Spencer was again cordial in his acknowledgement: "I am much obliged by the copy of your work on *Ancient Society*. It would have been useful to me had I had it earlier, when I was treating of

the social composition and of family arrangements. I doubt not hereafter that when I come to deal with political organization, I shall find much matter in it of value to me."²⁰⁹ Again, Spencer did not cite *Ancient Society* in the two later volumes of *Principles of Sociology*. Nor is there any evidence that Spencer adopted or developed any of the theories of political organization set forth by Morgan in that work.²¹⁰

Further evidence, perhaps, of Morgan's antagonism toward Spencer is his very sparing use of the term "evolution," which had become Spencer's hallmark. Altogether, the word appears only six times in *Ancient Society*, "progress," "growth," and "development" generally being used instead.²¹¹ However, Blake McKelvey, who examined the manuscript of *Ancient Society*, interprets this meager use of "evolution" as indicating Morgan's lingering metaphysical beliefs. He writes: "In early drafts of the manuscript he occasionally used the word *evolved* in connection with basic social or technological ideas, yet in his final published text the term *implanted* was substituted, thus retaining the vitalistic view, holding a door open for divine action."²¹²

Still, in his later controversies with McLennan, Morgan found in Spencer an ally. McLennan's book *Primitive Marriage*, which Morgan thought contained "deficiencies in definitions, unwarranted assumptions, crude speculations and erroneous conclusions," Spencer also took pains to criticize. "Mr. Herbert Spencer in his 'Principles of Sociology,'" Morgan wrote, "has pointed out a number of them. At the same time he rejects the larger part of Mr. McLennan's theories respecting 'Female Infanticide,' 'Wife Stealing,' and 'Exogamy and Endogamy.' What he leaves of this work, beyond its collocation of certain ethnological facts, it is difficult to find."²¹³

Spencer and Tylor

Relations between Spencer and Tylor, as we have seen, were at first marked by a harmony of views. Tylor's review of the first volume of *Descriptive Sociology* was full of high praise.²¹⁴ However, Tylor's views on social evolution were very different from Spencer's, and he was intent on making the reading public aware of this fact. Thus in the preface to the second edition of *Primitive Culture*, dated September, 1873, he wrote:

It may have struck some readers as an omission, that in a work on civilization insisting so strenuously on a theory of development or evolution, mention should scarcely have been made to Mr. Darwin and Mr. Herbert Spencer, whose influence on the whole course of modern thought on such subjects should not be left without formal recognition. This absence of particular reference is accounted for by the present work, arranged on its own lines, coming scarcely into contact of detail with the previous works of these eminent philosophers.²¹⁵

Surprisingly, the two men had virtually no personal contact. In September of 1874 the two dined together at the home of Sir Mountstuart Grant Duff,²¹⁶ but I have found no other evidence of their being in each other's presence. After 1877, neither would have cared to be.

During that year, in reviewing the first volume of *Principles of Sociology*, Tylor chose to ignore all that Spencer had said about the structure and evolution of human society and focused instead on one small section of the book: Spencer's discussion of animism. Tylor claimed priority in enunciating this theory, and "came very close to accusing Spencer of plagiarism."²¹⁷ There followed a series of sharp exchanges in two academic journals in which each scholar argued for the independence of his views.²¹⁸ Moreover, according to Spencer, the respective theories were not as close as Tylor maintained. For one thing, Spencer said, according to the theory of animism "there is an alleged primordial tendency in the human mind to conceive inanimate things as animated—as having animating principles or spirits. The essential question is: has the primitive man an innate tendency thus to conceive things around? Professor Tylor says Yes; I say No."²¹⁹

And there was another difference. Spencer argued that the idea of a human soul was the earliest supernatural belief entertained by man (the so-called "ghost theory"), and only later was the notion of an animating spirit extended beyond human beings and attributed to animals, plants, and inanimate objects. Tylor's original theory, on the other hand, was that of a primary animism, that is, the attribution of spirits to animals, plants, and inanimate objects *prior to*, or at least no later than, their attribution to human beings.

Following one of Spencer's communications on the subject, Professor Croom Robertson, editor of *Mind*, wrote to Tylor that, in his opinion, Spencer's last statement "establishes his independence, and I confess I shall be somewhat surprised if you can bring decisive evidence to the contrary. If you cannot, I am still of the same opinion I before expressed that you can, when there is no question as to your independence, well afford to make a frank allowance of his."²²⁰ But Tylor would not accede to this opinion, stating, "My belief is strengthened the more I examine Spencer's writings, that his memory quite misleads him about where he gets his ideas."²²¹ And so the debate continued.²²²

Other issues were soon to embroil the two men in another argument. In a lecture delivered at the Royal Institution in April 1882, Tylor reviewed, after a fashion, the just-issued section of *Principles of Sociology* called "Ceremonial Institutions." In this lecture, which was later published,²²³ Tylor criticized Spencer for his unsubstantiated and conjectural explanations of the origin of a variety of ceremonial practices; for example, the samurai practice of wearing two swords. Tylor offered his own alternative explanations for a few of these practices which strike me as sounder, being based on a broader and deeper knowledge of the facts involved.

This latter passage of arms between Tylor and Spencer shows more clearly than the clash over animism the contrast in their thinking. Tylor showed himself better acquainted with the historical sources and more critical in handling them. But while revealing himself to be a superior cultural historian, Tylor also showed the limitations associated with historical particularism. His concern with the minute details of culture history arrested his attention and kept him from grappling with the broad problems of the evolution of sociocultural systems. Thus, while Tylor was generally sounder than Spencer, he was also narrower. Venturing less, he achieved less. His evolutionism was of the restricted Darwinian type—descent with modifications—and lacked the sweep and power of Spencer's. We might epitomize the men by saying that Tylor was a master of *fact*, Spencer a master of *theory*.

Nor is this view necessarily the biased opinion of a follower of Spencer. Others have made the same observation. George W. Stocking, an admirer of Tylor, has nevertheless written that Spencer's work "was much broader in point of view" than Tylor's. And Alexander Goldenweiser, in contrasting the work of the two men, observed: "When compared with the first volume of Spencer's *Sociology*, Tylor's classic work, *Primitive Culture*, was less a contribution to evolutionary thinking than an attempt to trace the life history of a particular belief, namely, animism."²²⁴

It must be added, though, that during his later years Tylor broadened and deepened his approach to anthropology. In his famous article, "On a Method of Investigating the Development of Institutions. . .," he set out to establish wide generalizations about the forms of human social organization, and employed, in a systematic and rigorous way, large-scale cross-cultural comparisons. And in his last major published paper, the article on "Anthropology" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Tylor spoke grandly of "The comparative science of civilization [which] not only generalizes the data of history, but supplements its information by laying down the lines of development along which the lowest prehistoric culture has gradually risen to the highest modern level."²²⁵

Being sounder and less prone to speculate than Spencer, Tylor made fewer mistakes, and thus his reputation fared much better than Spencer's with the generation of sceptics and particularists who, after 1900, gained control of much of anthropology. In an obituary of Tylor, Lowie wrote: "And while the circle of his influence widened, he retained the profound and growing respect of his professional colleagues. Even with the irreverent group of American fieldworkers who turn up their noses at the classical school of ethnologists his prestige remains undiminished. . . ." ²²⁶

Indeed, Tylor's reputation has never tarnished. Yet today, when the narrow empiricism of the Boas School has been replaced by a free-wheeling theorizing, the relative evaluation of the two men may well be changing. I would concur in MacRae's assessment that "Tylor's reputation has never

faded as much as Spencer's, but for all that I think his importance today is much less."²²⁷

The Influence of Spencer

Thanks to the Boasian tide of anti-evolutionism that engulfed American ethnology from around the turn of the century, Spencer's works were placed on the list of books not to be read. There they remained for more than fifty years, their author discredited, his influence reduced to almost nil.

However, with the resurgence of evolutionism due largely to the heroic efforts of Leslie White, the picture has markedly changed. The star of cultural evolution has once more risen, and with it, Herbert Spencer's. White himself, while citing Morgan and Tylor more often than Spencer as his intellectual forebears, nevertheless describes evolution in clearly Spencerian terms. The younger evolutionists trained under White have also acknowledged their indebtedness to Spencer (e.g., Sahlins and Service). The present writer, for example, freely proclaims his debt to Spencer, and has made Spencer's writings the focus of much of his own.²²⁸

British social anthropology rejected Spencerian evolutionism as quickly as did American ethnology, but unlike the latter, it has yet to readopt it. Nor does it show any signs of doing so. It was Spencer's functionalism, introduced to it via Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, that British social anthropology readily absorbed and which it continues to pursue with single-minded vigor.

In sociology, the reading of Spencer's works by such men as Sumner, Giddings, Cooley, Ward, and Small between 1870 and 1890 led directly to the founding of academic sociology in the United States.²²⁹ But, taking its cue from its sister science of anthropology, sociology also went through a long phase of anti-evolutionism, and during this phase, Spencer's name fell into deep disrepute. Now, however, evolutionism has again surfaced in American sociology, and this revival has had more than a little to do with Herbert Spencer. The leading figure in this resurrection was Talcott Parsons, who thirty years earlier had echoed Crane Brinton's question, "Who now reads Spencer?"²³⁰ With perhaps less of a nod to Spencer than he deserves, Parsons has nonetheless revived evolutionism very much along Spencerian lines.²³¹

It seems unduly narrow, though, to limit one's appraisal of Spencer's influence to social science. His greatest contribution was to formulate the universal principle of evolution which John Fiske rightly called "the supreme organizing idea of modern thought. . . ." William James, not one to extol Herbert Spencer lightly, nevertheless wrote in his obituary of Spencer: "long before any of his contemporaries had seized its universal import, he grasped a great, light-giving truth — the truth of evolution; grasped it so that it became bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh; and with a pertinacity of which the history of successful thought gives few examples, had applied it to

the whole of life, down to the minutest details of the most various sciences."²³²

Say "evolution" to the average person and he will think first of Charles Darwin. But important as Darwin's contribution was to it, it was nonetheless restricted in scope. What Darwin did was to argue convincingly that organic forms "have all descended . . . from common parents, and have all been modified in the course of descent,"²³³ and to propose a mechanism for this process. But from this recognition to the recognition of a profound and universal transformation, proceeding at many levels toward greater complexity and increased integration, is a large step. That step was taken by Spencer alone.

A great truth soon becomes coin of the realm. Thus, a century ago John Fiske wrote that "The ideas of which Mr. Spencer is the greatest living exponent are to-day running like the weft through all the warp of modern thought."²³⁴ But with the passage of time the source of these ideas has often been forgotten. Spencer, if remembered at all today, is likely to be remembered for other things, less worthy of recall.

Yet the pendulum always swings back, and, having reached one extreme of its arc, starts on its return journey. Spencer is coming back, and it is only fitting that the science he enriched above all others—anthropology—has been the first to welcome his return.

NOTES

1. R. R. Marett, *Tylor* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1936), p. 69.
2. Robert H. Lowie, *The History of Ethnological Theory* (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1937).
3. Alfred C. Haddon, *History of Anthropology* (London: Watts & Co., 1945), p. 126; Lester F. Ward, "Review of Franklin Giddings' *Principles of Sociology*," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 8 (1896):5; L. L. Bernard, "Herbert Spencer: The Man and His Age," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 21 (1922):248; and Jay Rumney, *Herbert Spencer's Sociology* (New York: Atherton Press, 1966), p. 22.
4. "Evidently Spencer's use of the term 'sociology' in his titles reassures many anthropologists that Spencer can safely be ignored . . ." (Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* [New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1968], p. 161).
5. Herbert Spencer, "The Comparative Psychology of Man," in *Essays: Scientific, Political, & Speculative* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1891), 1:369.
6. Edward B. Tylor, "Anthropology," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., 2:108.
7. Benjamin Kidd, "Sociology," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., 25:322; and Spencer, "What Knowledge is of Most Worth?" (1859), in *Essays on Education, Etc.* (London: Everyman's Library, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1911), pp. 19, 29.
8. Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, 3 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1876-1897), 1:v. There were several printings of each of the three volumes which differed in pagination. The pages cited in the present essay refer to the editions published as follows: Vol. 1 (1st ed., 1878; 3rd ed., 1910), Vol. 2 (1899), and Vol. 3 (1897).
9. Viscount Amberley, "Review of Herbert Spencer's *The Study of Sociology*," *Examiner*, January 10, 1874, p. 37; Sir Frederick Pollock, *An Introduction to the History of the Science of Politics*, rev. ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1911), p. 7; and Émile Durkheim, *Montesquieu and Rousseau, Forerunners of Sociology* (1892; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1965), p. 1.

- The very same reaction greeted Leslie White when he introduced the term "culturology" into anthropology, one reviewer, C. W. M. Hart, calling it "horrible to look at and horrible to hear" (quoted in Leslie A. White, *The Science of Culture*, 2nd ed. [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969], p. xxxv).
10. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1(1st ed.):v.
 11. Tylor, "Anthropology," p. 108.
 12. Spencer, *First Principles*, 6th ed. (London: Watts & Co., 1937), p. 485. Here is another example: "It is a principle in physics that, since the force with which a body resists strains increases as the squares of its dimensions, while the strains which its own weight subject it to increase as the cubes of its dimensions, its power of maintaining its integrity becomes relatively less as its mass becomes greater. Something analogous may be said of societies. Small aggregates only can hold together while cohesion is feeble; and successively larger aggregates become possible only as the greater strains implied are met by that greater cohesion which results from . . . a . . . development of social organization" (Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 2:281).
 13. Spencer, *Social Statics* (London: John Chapman, 1851; New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1883); and *idem*, *The Principles of Psychology* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1855).
 14. Spencer, *Social Statics*, p. 440. The term "evolution," in the general sense of development, was not often used in English in those days, but it did appear now and again in the scientific literature. Thus it can be found in the writings of the geologists Charles Lyell (for example, in his *Principles of Geology*. [London: John Murray, 1832], 2:11), and Adam Sedgwick (for example, in his *Discourse on the Studies of the University* (London: John W. Parker, 1833], p. 25).
 15. Spencer, "Evolutionary Ethics," *The Athenaeum*, no. 3432 (August 5, 1893), p. 193.
 16. For example, in *Social Statics* Spencer wrote: "we find a gradual diminution in the number of like parts, and a multiplication of unlike ones. In the one extreme there are but few functions, and many similar agents to each function: in the other, there are many functions, and few similar agents to each function" (quoted in Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2 vols. [London: Watts & Co., 1926], 2:9).
 17. *Ibid.*, 1:384-85.
 18. Spencer, "The Development Hypothesis," in *Essays: Scientific, Political, & Speculative*, 1:4.
 19. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 6th ed. (London: John Murray, 1890), p. xix; and Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Wonderful Century* (New York: Dodd Mead and Co., 1909), pp. 138-39.
 20. Francis Darwin, ed., *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, 2 vols. (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 1:497.
 21. Spencer, "Progress: Its Law and Cause," *Westminster Review*, n.s., vol. 11, p. 465.
 22. Spencer, "Transcendental Physiology" (originally published as "The Ultimate Laws of Physiology"), in *Essays: Scientific, Political, & Speculative*, 1:67.
 23. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2:154.
 24. *Ibid.*, 2:501.
 25. Spencer, *First Principles* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1862), p. 216. Critics of evolution have taken a certain amount of glee in deriding this definition, and especially, in parodying it. Thus the Rev. T. Kirkman penned this "translation" of Spencer's formula: "Evolution is a change from a no-howish, untalkaboutable, all-alikeness, to a somehowish and in-general-talkaboutable not-all-alikeness, by continuous somethingelseifications and sticktogetherations" (quoted in Spencer, *First Principles* [1937], p. 510). To this caricature, William Henry Hudson, Spencer's one-time secretary, retorted: "Translate the whole formula into Hottentot or Cherokee if you like; the truth for which it stands will not be made a whit less true" (William Henry Hudson, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Herbert Spencer*, rev. ed. [London: Watts & Co., 1906], p. 53).
 26. Ashley Montagu, *Darwin: Competition and Cooperation* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), pp. 32-33.

27. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 1:500.
 28. Herbert Spencer, "The Filiation of Ideas," in David Duncan, *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1908), 2:329n.
 29. Spencer, *Social Statics* (1851), p. 65.
 30. Spencer, "Progress: Its Law and Cause," in *Essays on Education, Etc.*, p. 195.
 31. Spencer, *Social Statics* (1851), p. 65.
 32. Spencer, "Progress: Its Law and Cause," p. 195.
 33. See, for example, Alexander Goldenweiser, *Anthropology* (New York: F. S. Crofts and Co., 1937), p. 506; C. D. Darlington, *The Facts of Life* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1955), p. 416; and Peter B. Medawar, *The Art of the Soluble* (London: Methuen & Co., 1967), p. 47.
 34. Spencer, *Social Statics* (1883), p. 78.
 35. Spencer, *First Principles* (1937), pp. 522-23.
 36. Quoted in H. S. Shelton, "Spencer's Formula of Evolution," *Philosophical Review* 19 (1910):250.
 37. Spencer, *The Principles of Biology*, rev. ed., 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1899), 2:537.
 38. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2:15.
 39. *Ibid.*, 2:171-72.
 40. *Ibid.*, 2:173.
 41. Duncan, *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, 1:185-86.
 42. Edward L. Youmans, preface to the American edition of *The Study of Sociology*, by Spencer (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1891), p. vi.
 43. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2:261.
 44. Quoted in Duncan, *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, 1:186-87.
 45. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2:261, 264-65.
 46. *Ibid.*, 2:268. In fact, the folio volumes of *Descriptive Sociology* were large and unwieldy, and even Edward L. Youmans, Spencer's loyal American disciple, commented on their "ugly form" (see Duncan, *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, 1:291).
 47. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2:352.
- In December of 1875 Spencer received a request from a Professor Soutchitzici of the University of Kiev to be allowed to translate the first number of *Descriptive Sociology* into Russian. Spencer agreed, and within two years, a copy of the Russian translation was in his hands. "What a go-ahead people they are!" he wrote to E. L. Youmans, and went on to note that the expeditious way the translation had been carried out "implies a strange contrast between the appreciation of the *Descriptive Sociology* in Russia and its non-appreciation in Britain" (*ibid.*, 2:308-309).
48. See Duncan, *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, 2:196n.
 49. Tylor, "Spencer's Descriptive Sociology," *Nature* 8 (1873):546.
 50. Review of Spencer's *Descriptive Sociology*, No. 1, *English, British Quarterly Review* 58 (1873):573.
 51. Frederic Harrison, "Agnostic Metaphysics," *The Nineteenth Century* 16 (1884):364; Alexander Gibson, review of Spencer's *Descriptive Sociology*, No. 1, *English, The Academy* 5 (1875):28; David G. Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891), p. 77; and Mark DeWolfe Howe, ed., *Holmes-Laski Letters: The Correspondence of Mr. Justice Holmes and Harold J. Laski, 1916-1935*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), 1:23.
 52. S. R. Steinmetz, "Classification des Types Sociaux," *L'Année Sociologique* 3 (1898-99): 43n.; Charles Horton Cooley, "Reflections Upon the Sociology of Herbert Spencer," *American Journal of Sociology* 26 (1920):144; Howard Becker, "Anthropology and Sociology," in John Gillin, ed., *For a Science of Social Man* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1954), p. 131; and John Madge, *The Origins of Scientific Sociology* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Macmillan, 1962), p. 538.
 53. George Peter Murdock, "Sociology and Anthropology," in Gillin, *For a Science of Social Man*, p. 16.

54. Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, vol. 1 (Paris: Borrani et Droz, 1852).
55. John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, 8th ed. (London: Longmans, Green 1886). The quoted passage appears on p. 607.
56. Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1886), p. 54. *The Study of Sociology* was written at the instigation of Edward L. Youmans, to appear in the new International Scientific Series which Youmans was editing for D. Appleton and Company.
57. J. D. Y. Peel, *Herbert Spencer, the Evolution of a Sociologist* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), p. 160.
58. Amberley, review of Spencer's *The Study of Sociology*, p. 37.
59. James Anthony Froude, "The Science of History," in *Short Studies on Great Subjects* (New York: Charles C. Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 11.
60. Youmans, preface to the American edition of *Descriptive Sociology, No. 1, English*, by Spencer (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1873), p. v.
61. J. E. Cairnes, "Mr. Spencer on Social Evolution." *Fortnightly Review* 23 (1875):63. For a full account of how Spencer came to write *The Study of Sociology* and the reception accorded the book, see Robert L. Carneiro, "Herbert Spencer's *The Study of Sociology* and the Rise of Social Science in America," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 118 (1974):540-54.
62. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2:481.
63. *Ibid.*, 2:277.
64. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 3:vi.
65. *Ibid.*, 1(1st ed.):618.
66. Hippolyte Taine, *Life and Letters of H. Taine*, 3 vols., trans. from the French by E. Sparvel-Bayly (London: Archibald Constable & Co., 1908), 3:182; Arthur and Eleanor Mildred Sidgwick, *Henry Sidgwick, A Memoir* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1906), p. 436; "Spencer's Ceremonial Institutions," *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 49 (1880):22; and Grant Allen "Personal Reminiscences of Herbert Spencer," *The Forum* 35 (1904):628.
67. George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), p. 117; and Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, rev. ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing Co., 1933), pp. 409-410.
68. Joseph H. Allen, review of *The Principles of Sociology, Vol. 1*, by Spencer, *The Radical Review* 1 (1877-78):353, 355; and Peel, *Herbert Spencer on Social Evolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. li.
69. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2:312.
70. *Ibid.*, 2:374.
71. *Ibid.*, 2:299.
72. Van Buren Denslow, *Modern Thinkers, Principally on Social Science* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke, & Co., 1880), p. 221; and Robert Nisbet, review of *Herbert Spencer, The Evolution of a Sociologist*, by Peel, *New York Times Book Review*, September 26, 1971, p. 36.
73. Anonymous, "Spencer's Political Institutions," *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art* 54 (1882):19.
74. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 2:vi. Even his old antagonist William James was impressed with Spencer's marshaling of evidence, especially in the *Principles of Sociology*. In an obituary of Spencer, James wrote: "although Spencer's intellect is essentially of the deductive and *a priori* order, starting from universal abstract principles and thence proceeding down to facts, what strikes one more than anything else in his writings is the enormous number of facts from every conceivable quarter which he brings to his support, and the unceasing study of minutest particulars which he is able to keep up. No 'Baconian' philosopher, denying himself the use of *a priori* principles, has ever filled his pages with half as many facts as this strange species of *a priorist* can show. This unflagging and profuse command of facts is what gives such peculiar weightiness to Mr. Spencer's manner of presenting even the smallest topic" (William James, "Herbert Spencer," *The Critic* 44 [1904]:22).
75. Charles Ellwood, *A History of Social Philosophy* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1938), p. 446.

76. Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1883), 1:193-94.
77. J. M. Robertson, *A History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Watts & Co., 1929), p. 343.
78. Spencer, "Replies to Criticisms on *The Data of Ethics*," *Mind* 6 (1881):97.
79. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1 (1st ed.):713.
80. J. M. Robertson, *Buckle and His Critics* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1895), pp. 383-84.
81. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 2:242-43.
82. Thus Frederic Harrison said that in the three volumes of *Principles of Sociology* "there is . . . nothing that can be called a philosophy of history . . ." (Harrison, "Sociology: Its Definition and Its Limits," *Sociological Review* 3 [1910]:103). And Nicholas Timasheff remarked: "Spencer was not a social monist. He did not single out some one factor that pushes society ahead through the various phases of its evolution" (Timasheff, *Sociological Theory: Its Nature and Growth*, 3rd ed. [New York: Random House, 1967], p. 42).
83. Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, p. 44.
84. Spencer, "Reasons for Dissenting from the Philosophy of M. Comte," in *Essays: Scientific, Political, & Speculative*, 2:128-29.
85. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, p. 37.
86. Spencer, *Social Statics* (1851), p. 433; and *idem*, "The Social Organism," in *Essays: Scientific, Political, & Speculative*, 2:268.
87. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, p. 35.
88. *Ibid.*
89. Robert Rives La Monte, *Socialism: Positive and Negative* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1912), p. 18; and Sidney Hook, *The Hero in History* (New York: Humanities Press, 1950), p. 67n.
90. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, pp. 411-13.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 382.
92. L. White, *The Science of Culture*, p. 123.
93. Spencer, *Social Statics* (1883), p. 28; and *idem*, *Study of Sociology*, p. 52.
94. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, p. 411.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
96. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 3:265.
97. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, p. 252.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 400.
99. *Ibid.*, p. 254. One wonders if Earnest Hooton had read Spencer when he wrote: "we must improve man before we can perfect his institutions. . ." (Earnest A. Hooton, *Apes, Men, and Morons* [New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1937], p. 16).
100. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, p. 145.
101. Spencer, *The Principles of Ethics*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1904), 1:vi.
102. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, p. 336.
103. Spencer, "Replies to Criticisms on *The Data of Ethics*," p. 85.
104. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, p. 106.
105. *Ibid.*, p. 395.
106. Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, 1:136.
107. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, pp. 337, 120, 402-403, 401.
108. *Ibid.*, p. 338.
109. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1 (3rd ed.):11-12.
110. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-14.
111. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, p. 382.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 326.
113. Spencer, "What Knowledge is of Most Worth?" pp. 29-30.
114. Spencer, "The Comparative Psychology of Man," p. 369.
115. *Ibid.*, p. 354.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 365.
117. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, p. 34.

118. Spencer, "Comparative Psychology of Man," p. 366.
119. *Ibid.*, p. 359.
120. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 2:270.
121. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, pp. 349-50.
122. Spencer, "Comparative Psychology of Man," p. 359.
123. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1 (3rd ed.):693.
124. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
125. Harris, *Rise of Anthropological Theory*, p. 129. See also *ibid.*, p. 292.
126. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
127. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, p. 53; and *idem*, *Principles of Sociology* 1 (3rd ed.):35-36.
128. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1 (1st ed.):615.
129. *Ibid.*, 3:331.
130. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1 (3rd ed.):704.
131. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 2:269. See also *ibid.*, pp. 373, 395. I quote this passage in full because it is an adumbration of the "circumscription theory" of the origin of the state. (See Carneiro, "A Theory of the Origin of the State," *Science* 169 [1970]:733-38.) This theory had already been proposed by Spencer in the first volume of *Principles of Sociology* (1 [1st ed.]:26-27). As early as 1860 the germ of it appeared in "The Social Organism," where Spencer wrote: "Though, in regions where circumstances permit, the tribes descended from some original tribe migrate in all directions, and become far removed and quite separate; yet, where the territory presents barriers to distant migration, this does not happen: the small kindred communities are held in closer contact, and eventually become more or less united into a nation" ("The Social Organism" [1891], pp. 281-82).
132. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 3:362.
133. Spencer, *First Principles*, 6th ed., pp. 198, 197.
134. *Ibid.*, pp. 461-62. In 1852 William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin) had written: "Within a finite period of time past the earth must have been, and within a finite period of time to come the earth must again be, unfit for the habitation of man as at present constituted, unless operations have been, or are to be performed, which are impossible under the laws to which the known operations going on at present in the material world are subject" (William Thomson, "On a Universal Tendency in Nature to the Dissipation of Mechanical Energy," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, vol. 43, no. 42 [1851-52], p. 142).
135. See Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 2:391-93, 421-25. The quote appears on pp. 424-25.
136. *Ibid.*, 2:280.
137. *Ibid.*, 2:231.
138. Spencer, "Evolutionary Ethics," p. 193.
139. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 2:664-65.
140. J. W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 193.
141. Spencer, "The Use of Anthropomorphism," *The Leader* 4, no. 189 (November 5, 1853):1076.
142. Spencer, *First Principles*, 4th ed. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1896), p. 462.
143. "It was Spencer who first used the terms 'social structure' and 'social function' in their modern sense, that is, to refer to the essential framework of institutions without which no continuing association of human beings in society is possible" (Donald G. MacRae, "Darwinism and the Social Sciences," in S. A. Barnett, ed., *A Century of Darwin* [London: Heinemann, 1958], p. 307).
144. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 3:3.
145. Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Sociological Theories of Today* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 157n.
146. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952), p. 189.
147. MacRae, "Darwinism and the Social Sciences," p. 300.

148. Edmund Leach, "Social Structure," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* 14 (1968):482; and Talcott Parsons, "Introduction," *The Study of Sociology*, by Spencer (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1961), p. vii.
149. Burrow, *Evolution and Society*, p. 191.
150. See Carneiro, "Structure, Function, and Equilibrium in the Evolutionism of Herbert Spencer," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 29 (1973):81-91.
151. Harris, *Rise of Anthropological Theory*, p. 235; and Philip Abrams, *The Origins of British Sociology: 1834-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 68.
152. Spencer, "The Social Organism," *The Westminster Review* 73 (1860):99; and *idem*, *Study of Sociology*, pp. 332-33.
153. Ferdinand Tönnies, "The Present Problem of Social Structure," *American Journal of Sociology* 10 (1905):584.
154. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1 (3rd ed.):592-93.
155. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, p. 195.
156. L. White, "Nations as Sociocultural Systems," *Ingenior* (Ann Arbor, Mich.) 5 (Autumn 1968):15.
157. John P. Gillin, *The Ways of Men* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948), p. 600; Franz Boas, "Anthropology," *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* 1 (1930):102; Florian Znaniecki, *Social Relations and Social Roles* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965), p. 105; and V. Gordon Childe, *Piecing Together the Past* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956), p. 164.
158. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, p. 329; and *idem*, *Principles of Sociology*, 3:331. For further evidence of this, see Carneiro, "Classical Evolution," in Raoul and Frada Naroll, eds., *Main Currents in Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1973), 78-81 and *passim*.
159. Morris Ginsberg, *Evolution and Progress* (London: William Heinemann, 1961), p. 199.
160. Harrison, "Sociology: Its Definition and Its Limits," p. 103; Bernard, "Herbert Spencer's Work in the Light of His Life," *Monist* 31 (1921):6; Abram Kardiner and Edward Preble, *They Studied Man* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1961), p. 48n; David Masson, *Recent British Philosophy* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1877), p. 167; and John C. Greene, "Biology and Social Theory in the Nineteenth Century: Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer," in Marshall Claggett, ed., *Critical Problems in the History of Science* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), p. 432.
161. Ellwood, *A History of Social Philosophy*, p. 446; John Dewey, "The Philosophical Work of Herbert Spencer," *Philosophical Review* 13 (1904):163; Peel, "Spencer and the Neo-Evolutionists," *Sociology* 3 (1969):181; *idem*, *Herbert Spencer on Social Evolution*, p. 1; Walter M. Simon, "Herbert Spencer and the 'Social Organism,'" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21 (1960):295; and F. J. C. Hearnshaw, "Herbert Spencer and the Individualists," in Hearnshaw, ed., *The Social & Political Ideas of Some Representative Thinkers of the Victorian Age* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1933), p. 53.
162. Quoted in Duncan, *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, 2:123.
163. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2:187.
164. Quoted in John Fiske, *Edward Livingston Youmans* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1894), p. 125-26.
165. Spencer, "What Knowledge is of Most Worth?" p. 3.
166. Spencer, *Social Statics* (1851), p. 49.
167. Spencer, "What Knowledge is of Most Worth?" pp. 27-28.
168. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
169. Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, 1:518.
170. Jesse H. Coursault, *The Principles of Education* (Boston: Silver, Burdett and Co., 1920), p. 184; Andrew D. White, "On Studies in General History and the History of Civilization," *Papers of the American Historical Association* 1, no. 2 (1885):18-19.
171. James Bryce, "On the Writing and Teaching of History," in *University and Historical Addresses* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1913), p. 357, 354, 356.
172. Albert G. Keller, *Reminiscences (Mainly Personal) of William Graham Sumner* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1933), pp. 31-32. The English philosopher Henry

- Sidgwick made the following entry in his journal for January 9, 1886: "Came back to Cambridge to-day and read more Herbert Spencer in the train. I find History studied as inductive Sociology more and more interesting, and quite wonder that I have neglected it so long" (quoted in Sidgwick and Sidgwick, *Henry Sidgwick, A Memoir*, pp. 436-37).
173. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 1:403. Elsewhere Spencer wrote of Huxley's "hatred of deductive reasoning" (Spencer, "The Filiation of Ideas," p. 326), and Huxley himself has left us ample evidence of this, as well as of his thoroughgoing agnosticism (a word of his own coinage). In a letter to Charles Kingsley, Huxley wrote: "I know nothing of Necessity, abominate the word Law (except as meaning that we know nothing to the contrary), and am quite ready to admit that there may be some place, 'other side of nowhere,' *par exemple*, where $2 + 2 = 5$, and all bodies naturally repel one another instead of gravitating together. . . . In other words, I believe in Hamilton, Mansel and Herbert Spencer so long as they are destructive, and I laugh at their beards as soon as they try to spin their own cobwebs" (quoted in Leonard Huxley, *Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley*, 2 vols. [London: Macmillan and Co., 1900], 1:242). Later, to another correspondent, Huxley wrote regarding Spencer: "I have been his devil's advocate for a number of years, and there is no telling how many brilliant speculations I have been the means of choking in an embryonic state" (quoted in *ibid.*, 1:333). William Irvine has neatly epitomized the relationship between Spencer and Huxley: "it was a friendship between a plenum and a vacuum. Spencer thought busily to keep his head full of speculation. Huxley thought just as busily to keep his antiseptically free from speculation. Huxley was full of facts. Spencer was full of ideas that craved facts" (William Irvine, *Apes, Angels and Victorians* [New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1955], p. 30).
 174. Kardiner and Preble, *They Studied Man*, p. 63; and Melville J. Herskovits, "A Genealogy of Ethnological Theory," in Melford E. Spiro, ed., *Context and Meaning in Cultural Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), p. 408.
 175. Goldenweiser, *History, Psychology, and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933), pp. 125-26; Arnold Rose, *Sociology: The Study of Human Relations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), pp. 13-14; and Walter Greenwood Beach, *The Growth of Social Thought* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 129.
 176. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1 (3rd ed.):443.
 177. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2:431.
 178. Spencer, "The Filiation of Ideas," p. 307.
 179. *Ibid.*, p. 326.
 180. *Ibid.*, p. 354.
 181. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2:274-75. It was sometimes suggested — by Frederic Harrison, among others — that Spencer's assistants could not help but be biased in favor of his theories, and that they tended to select data that fitted them. In attempting to dispel this notion John Fiske recounted the following incident: "one evening about twenty years ago [around 1874], . . . I was dining . . . with Spencer and his assistant, Dr. Richard Scheppig, a pleasant and accomplished German scholar, who compiled some parts of the Descriptive Sociology. . . . I happened to ask Dr. Scheppig for his opinion on some point involved in the doctrine of evolution, and I shall never forget his delicious reply, or think of it without laughing: 'I do not know anything whatever about evolution; I am a historian!' " (Fiske, *Edward Livingston Youmans*, p. 389).
 182. Spencer, "The Filiation of Ideas," p. 358.
 183. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2:467.
 184. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1 (3rd ed.):99. George Eliot, another close friend of Spencer, once poked gentle fun at this tendency in him. Writing to a friend she reported, "I went to Kew yesterday on a scientific expedition with Herbert Spencer, who has all sorts of theories about plants — I should have said a *proof*-hunting expedition. Of course, if the flowers didn't correspond to the theories, we said, '*tant pis pour les fleurs*'" (quoted in Gordon S. Haight, *The George Eliot Letters*, vol. 2 [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1954], p. 40).
 185. George Sarton, "Herbert Spencer, 1820-1920," *Scribner's Magazine* 67 (1920):698.

186. Quoted in Ronald W. Clark, *Einstein: The Life and Times* (New York: Avon Books, 1972), p. 481.
187. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1 (3rd ed.):612. In reacting to this, the Boasians went to the other extreme, arguing not only that the nations of Europe were not superior to primitive societies ethically, but that they were no more complex structurally. The pendulum thus swung from an indefensible ethnocentrism to an equally indefensible cultural egalitarianism.
188. Herskovits, *Man and His Works* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 469.
189. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2:254.
190. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, pp. 115-16.
191. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 2:230-31.
192. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1 (3rd ed.):616, 619.
193. *Ibid.*, 1 (3rd ed.):612.
194. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 2:233-34.
195. Julian H. Steward, "Cultural Evolution," *Scientific American* 194 (1956):69.
196. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 1:152-53.
197. Spencer, "Evolutionary Ethics," *Popular Science Monthly* 52 (1898):499; and *idem*, quoted in Duncan, *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, 1:293.
198. Justin McCarthy, *Reminiscences*, 2 vols. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1899), 2:319; and James, "Herbert Spencer's Data of Ethics," *The Nation* 28 (1879): 179.
199. Crane Brinton, *English Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Ernest Benn, 1933), p. 234; and Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1 (3rd ed.):764.
200. Lowie, *Primitive Society* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1920), p. 56.
201. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, pp. 122, 120.
202. *Ibid.*, pp. 399-400.
203. Lewis H. Morgan, "Extracts from the European Travel Journal of Lewis H. Morgan," ed. Leslie A. White, *Rochester Historical Society Publications* 16 (1937):371.
204. Quoted in Bernhard J. Stern, "Lewis Henry Morgan: American Ethnologist," *Social Forces* 6 (1928):350.
205. Morgan, "Extracts from the European Travel Journal," p. 368.
206. Charles Ayrault Dewey, "Sketch of the Life of Lewis H. Morgan with Personal Reminiscences," *Rochester Historical Society, Publication Fund Series 2* (1923):44.
207. Stern, *Lewis Henry Morgan: Social Evolutionist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), pp. 27-28. The quotation from McIlvaine appears on p. 28.
208. Blake McKelvey, *Rochester, The Flower City, 1855-1890* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 318.
209. Quoted in Stern, *Lewis Henry Morgan: Social Evolutionist*, p. 198.
210. The only works of Morgan that Spencer ever cited in the three volumes of *Principles of Sociology* were *The League of the Iroquois* (1851) and *Houses and House-Life of the American Aborigines* (1881).
211. See Carneiro, "Classical Evolution," in Naroll and Naroll, *Main Currents in Cultural Anthropology*, pp. 62-63.
212. McKelvey, *Rochester, The Flower City*, p. 319.
213. Morgan, *Ancient Society* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1909), p. 518.
214. Tylor, "Spencer's Descriptive Sociology."
215. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 2 vols., 6th ed. (London: John Murray, 1920), 1:vii.
216. Sir Mountstuart E. Grant Duff, *Notes from a Diary, 1873-1881*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1898), 1:82.
217. George W. Stocking, Jr., "'Cultural Darwinism' and 'Philosophical Idealism' in E. B. Tylor: A Special Plea for Historicism in the History of Anthropology," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 21 (1965):132.
218. See Carneiro, "Introduction," *The Evolution of Society: Selections from Herbert Spencer's Principles of Sociology*, ed. Carneiro (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. xxx-xxxi.
219. Quoted in Duncan, *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, 2:134.

220. Quoted in *ibid.*, 1:252-53.
221. Quoted in *ibid.*, 1:253.
222. Indeed, as late as 1901, the two men exchanged letters over this issue, Spencer doggedly replying to Tylor, "I cannot leave you under the impression that I accept your version of the matter, but I do not suppose your opinion will be altered" (quoted in *ibid.*, 2:193-94). Once, writing to Edward Westermarck, Tylor spoke of "Mr. Herbert Spencer whom both personally and in his works I dislike" (quoted in K. Rob. V. Wikman, "Letters from Edward B. Tylor and Alfred Russel Wallace to Edward Westermarck," *Acta Academiae Aboensis. Humaniora* 13, no. 7 [1940]:9).
223. Tylor, "The Study of Customs," *Macmillan's Magazine* 46 (1882):73-86.
224. Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, p. 117; and Goldenweiser, "Cultural Anthropology," in Harry Elmer Barnes, ed., *The History and Prospects of the Social Sciences* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925), p. 216.
225. Tylor, "Anthropology," p. 117. See also *idem*, "On a Method of Investigating the Development of Institutions; Applied to Laws of Marriage and Descent," *Journal of the [Royal] Anthropological Institute* 18 (1889):245-69.
226. Lowie, "Edward B. Tylor," *American Anthropologist* 19 (1917):262.
227. MacRae, "Darwinism and the Social Sciences," p. 308.
228. See Marshall D. Sahlins and Elman R. Service, eds., *Evolution and Culture* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1960), pp. 123-24. See also the following by Carneiro: "Introduction," *The Evolution of Society: Selections from Herbert Spencer's Principles of Sociology*; "Classical Evolution"; "Structure, Function, and Equilibrium in the Evolutionism of Herbert Spencer"; and "Herbert Spencer's *The Study of Sociology*."
229. See Carneiro, "Herbert Spencer's *The Study of Sociology*," p. 549.
230. Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1937), p. 3.
231. See Peel, "Spencer and The Neo-Evolutionists," p. 173; *idem*, *Herbert Spencer on Social Evolution*, p. xliii; and T. B. Bottomore, *Sociology: A Guide to Problems and Literature*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 293n.
232. Fiske, *Edward Livingston Youmans*, p. 148; and James, "Herbert Spencer," p. 22.
233. Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (London: John Murray, 1859), p. 457.
234. Fiske, "Sociology and Hero-Worship," *Atlantic Monthly* 47 (1881):77.