THE SOCIOLOGY OF HERBERT SPENCER

Herbert Spencer saw himself as a philosopher rather than as a sociologist. His grand scheme was termed Synthetic Philosophy, and it was to encompass all realms of the universe: physical, psychological, biological, sociological, and ethical. The inclusion of the ethical component makes this philosophy problematic because ideological statements do occasionally slip into Spencer's sociology. Spencer's philosophy was a grand, cosmic scheme, but when he turned to sociology, he made many precise statements and introduced a copious amount of empirical data to illustrate his theoretical ideas. Spencer was, at best, a mediocre philosopher, but he was a very accomplished sociologist, even though he took up sociology rather late in his career. We will begin with the moral philosophy, just to get it out of the way, and then we will turn to his important sociological contributions.[1]

SPENCER'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY: SOCIAL STATICS AND PRINCIPLES OF ETHICS

In his later years, Spencer often complained that his first major work, *Social Statics,*[2] had received too much attention. He saw this book as an early and flawed attempt to delineate his moral philosophy and, hence, as not representative of his more mature thought. Yet, the basic premise of the work is repeated in one of his last books, *Principles of Ethics.*[3] Despite his protests, there is considerable continuity in his moral arguments, although we should emphasize again that his more scientific statements can and should be separated from these ethical arguments.

Because Spencer's moral arguments did not change dramatically, we will concentrate on *Social Statics.* The basic argument of *Social Statics* can be stated as follows: Human happiness can be achieved only when individuals can satisfy their needs and desires without infringing on the rights of others to do the same. As Spencer emphasized,

> Each member of the race . . . must not only be endowed with faculties enabling him to receive the highest enjoyment in the act of living, but must be so constituted that he may obtain full satisfaction for every desire, without diminishing the power of others to obtain like satisfaction: nay, to fulfill the purpose perfectly, must derive pleasure from seeing pleasure in others.[4]

In this early work, as well as in *Principles of Ethics,* Spencer saw this view as the basic law of ethics and morality. He felt that this law was an extension of laws in the natural world, and much of his search for scientific laws represented an effort to develop a scientific justification for his moral position. Indeed, he emphasized that the social universe, like the physical and biological realms, revealed invariant laws. But he turned this insight into an interesting moral dictum: Once these laws are discovered, humans should obey them and cease trying to construct, through political legislation, social forms that violate these laws. In this way he was able to base his laissez-faire political ideas on what he saw as a sound scientific position: The laws of social organization can no more be violated than can those of the physical universe,

and to seek to do so will simply create, in the long run, more severe problems.[5] In contrast with Comte, then, who saw the discovery of laws as the tools for social engineering, Spencer took the opposite tack and argued that once the laws are ascertained, people should "implicitly obey them!"[6] For Spencer, the great ethical axiom, "derived" from the laws of nature, is that humans should be as free from external regulation as is possible. Indeed the bulk of *Social Statics* seeks to show how his moral law and the laws of laissez-faire capitalism converge and, implicitly, how they reflect biological laws of unfettered competition and struggle among species. The titles of some of the chapters best communicate Spencer's argument: "The Rights of Life and Personal Liberty," "The Right to the Use of the Earth," "The Right of Property," "The Rights of Exchange," "The Rights of Women,"[7] "The Right to Ignore the State," "The Limit of State-Duty," and so forth.

In seeking to join the laws of ethics, political economy, and biology, Spencer initiated modes of analysis that became prominent parts of his sociology. First, he sought to discover invariant laws and principles of social organization. Second, he began to engage in organismic analogizing, drawing comparisons between the structure of individual organisms and that of societies:

> Thus do we find, not only that the analogy between a society and a living creature is borne out to a degree quite unsuspected by those who commonly draw it, but also, that the same definition of life applies to both. This union of many men into one community—this increasingly mutual dependence of units which were originally independent—this gradual segregation of citizens into separate bodies, with reciprocally subservient functions—this formation of a whole, consisting of numerous essential parts—this growth of an organism, of which one portion cannot be injured without the rest feeling it—may all be generalized under the law of individuation. The development of society, as well as the development of man and the development of life generally, may be described as a tendency to individuate—*to become a thing*. And rightly interpreted, the manifold forms of progress going on around us, are uniformly significant of this tendency.[8]

Spencer's organismic analogizing often goes to extremes in *Social Statics*— extremes that he avoided in his later works. For example, he at one point argued that "so completely ... is a society organized upon the same system as an individual being, that we may almost say that there is something more than an analogy between them."[9]

Third, *Social Statics* also reveals the beginnings of Spencer's functionalism. He viewed societies, like individuals, as having survival needs with specialized organs emerging and persisting to meet these needs. And he defined "social health" by how well these needs are being met by various specialized "social organs."

Fourth, Spencer's later emphasis on war and conflict among societies as a critical force in their development can also be observed. While decrying war as destructive, he argued that it allows the more organized "races" to conquer the "less organized and inferior races"—thereby increasing the level and complexity of social organization. This argument was dramatically tempered in his later, scientific works, with the result that he was one of the first social thinkers to see the importance of conflict in the evolution of human societies.[10]

In sum, then, *Social Statics* and *Principles of Ethics* are greatly flawed works, representing Spencer's moral ramblings. We have examined these works first because they are often used to condemn his more scholarly efforts. Although some of the major scientific points can be

seen in these moral works, and although his scientific works are sprinkled with his extreme moral position, there is, nonetheless, a distinct difference in style, tone, and insight between his ethical and scientific efforts. Thus, we would conclude that the worth of Spencer's thought is to be found in the more scientific treatises, relegating his ethics to deserved obscurity. We will therefore devote the balance of this chapter to understanding his sociological perspective.[11]

SPENCER'S FIRST PRINCIPLES

In the 1860s, Spencer began to issue his general Synthetic Philosophy by subscription. The goal of this philosophy was to treat the great divisions of the universe—inorganic matter, life, mind, and society—as subject to understanding by scientific principles. The initial statement in this rather encompassing philosophical scheme was *First Principles,* published in 1862.[12] In this book Spencer delineated the "cardinal" or "first principles" of the universe. Drawing from the biology and physics of his time, he felt that he had perceived, at the most abstract level, certain common principles that apply to all realms of the universe. Indeed, it must have been an exciting vision to feel that one had unlocked the mysteries of the physical, organic, and super-organic (societal) universe.

The principles themselves are probably not worth reviewing in detail; rather, the imagery they communicate is important. For Spencer, evolution is the master process of the universe, and it revolves around movement from simple to complex forms of structure. As matter is aggregated—whether this matter be cells of an organism, elements of a moral philosophy, or human beings—the force that brings this matter together is retained, causing the larger mass to differentiate into varying components, which then become integrated into a more complex whole. This complex whole must sustain itself in an environment, and as long as the forces that have aggregated, differentiated, and integrated the "matter" are sustained, the system remains coherent in the environment. Over time, however, these forces dissipate, with the result that the basis for integration is weakened, thereby making the system vulnerable to forces in the environment. At certain times, these environment forces can revitalize a system, giving it new life to aggregate, differentiate and integrate, whereas at other times, these forces simply overwhelm the weakened basis of integration and destroy the system. Thus, evolution is a dual process of building up more complex structures through integration and dissolution of these structures when the force driving them is weakened.

This is all rather vague, of course, but it gives us a metaphorical vision of how Spencer viewed evolution. Evolution revolves around the process of aggregating matter—in the case of society, populations of human beings and the structures that organize people—and the subsequent differentiation and integration of this population. The forces that aggregate this matter—forces such as immigration, new productive forms, use of power, patterns of conquest, and all those phenomena that have the capacity to bring humans together—are retained, and as a consequence, they also become the forces that differentiate and integrate the matter. For example, if war and conquest have been the basis for aggregation of two populations, the coercive and organizational power causing their aggregation is also the force that will drive the pattern of differentiation and integration of the conquered and their conquerors. When this force is spent or proves ineffective in integrating the new society, the society becomes vulnerable to environmental forces, such as war-making from another society.

This image of evolution helps explain the issues that most concerned Spencer when he finally turned to sociology in the 1870s. His view of evolution as the aggregation, differentiation, integration, and disintegration of matter pushed him to conceptualize societal dynamics as re-

volving around increases in the size of the population (the "aggregation" component), the differentiation of the population along several prominent axes, the bases for integrating this differentiated population, and the potential disintegration of the population in its environment. Evolution is thus analysis of societal movement from simple or homogeneous forms to differentiated or heterogeneous forms as well as the mechanisms for integrating these forms in their environments. This is all we need to take from Spencer's *First Principles.*

Spencer moved considerably beyond this general metaphor of evolution, however, because he proposed many specific propositions and guidelines for a science of society. Ultimately, his contribution to sociological theorizing does not reside in his abstract formulas on cosmic evolution but, rather, in his specific analyses of societal social systems—what he called *super-organic* phenomena. This contribution can be found in two distinct works, *The Study of Sociology,* which was published in serial form in popular magazines in 1872, and the more scholarly *The Principles of Sociology,* which was published in several volumes between 1874 and 1896. The former work is primarily a methodological statement on the problems of sociology, whereas the latter is a substantive work that seeks to develop abstract principles of evolution and dissolution and, at the same time, to describe the complex interplay among the institutions of society.

SPENCER'S *THE STUDY OF SOCIOLOGY*

The Study of Sociology[13] was originally published as a series of articles in *Contemporary Review* in England and *Popular Science Monthly* in America. This book represents Spencer's effort to popularize sociology and to address "various considerations which seemed needful by way of introduction to the *Principles of Sociology,* presently to be written."[14] Most of *The Study of Sociology* is a discussion of the methodological problems confronting the science of sociology. At the same time, and in less well-developed form, there are a number of substantive insights that later formed the core of his *Principles of Sociology.* We will first examine Spencer's methodological discussion and then his more theoretical analysis, even though this division does not correspond to the order of his presentation.

The Methodological Problems Confronting Sociology

The opening paragraph of Chapter 4 sets the tone of Spencer's analysis:

> From the intrinsic natures of its facts, from our natures as observers of its facts, and from the peculiar relation in which we stand toward the facts to be observed, there arise impediments in the way of Sociology greater than those of any other science.[15]

He went on to emphasize that the basic sources of bias stem from the inadequacy of measuring instruments in the social sciences and from the nature of scientists who, by virtue of being members of society, observe the data from a particular vantage point. In a series of insightful chapters—far superior to any statement by any other sociologist of the nineteenth century—Spencer outlined in more detail what he termed *objective* and *subjective* difficulties.

Under objective difficulties, Spencer analyzed the problems associated with the "uncertainty of our data." The first problem encountered revolves around the difficulty of measuring the "subjective states" of actors and correspondingly, of investigators' suspending their own subjective orientation when examining that of others. A second problem concerns allowing public passions, moods, and fads to determine what is investigated by sociologists, because it is all

too easy to let the popular and immediately relevant obscure from vision more fundamental questions. A third methodological problem involves the "cherished hypothesis," which an investigator can be driven to pursue while neglecting more significant problems. A fourth issue concerns the problem of personal and organizational interests influencing what is seen as scientifically important. Large-scale governmental bureaucracies, and individuals in them, tend to seek and interpret data in ways that support their interests. A fifth problem is related to the second, in that investigators often allow the most visible phenomena to occupy their attention, creating a bias in the collection of data toward the most readily accessible (not necessarily the most important) phenomena. A sixth problem stems from the fact that any observer occupies a position in society and hence will tend to see the world in terms of the dictates of that position. And seventh, depending on the time in the ongoing social process when observations are made, varying results can be induced— thereby signaling that "social change cannot be judged ... by inspecting any small portion of it."[16]

Spencer's discussion is timely even today, and his advice for mitigating these objective difficulties is also relevant: Social science must rely on multiple sources of data, collected at different times in varying places by different investigators. Coupled with efforts by investigators to recognize their bias, their interests, and their positions in society as well as their commitment to theoretically important (rather than popular) problems, these difficulties can be further mitigated. Yet many subjective difficulties will persist.

There are, Spencer argued, two classes of subjective difficulty: intellectual and emotional. Under intellectual difficulties, Spencer returned to the first of the objective difficulties: How are investigators to put themselves into the subjective world of those whom they observe? How can we avoid representing another's "thoughts and feelings in terms of our own"?[17] For if investigators cannot suspend their own emotional states to understand those of others under investigation, the data of social science will always be biased. Another subjective intellectual problem concerns the depth of analysis, for the more one investigates a phenomenon in detail, the more complicated are its elements and their causal connections. Thus, how far should investigators go before they are to be satisfied with their analysis of a particular phenomenon? At what point are the basic causal connections uncovered? Turning to emotional subjective difficulties, Spencer argued that the emotional state of an investigator can directly influence estimations of probability, importance, and relevance of events.

After reviewing these difficulties and emphasizing that the distinction between subjective and objective is somewhat arbitrary, Spencer devoted separate chapters to "educational bias," "bias of patriotism," "class bias," "political bias," and "theological bias." Thus, more than any other sociologist of the nineteenth century, he had a clear recognition of the many methodological problems confronting the science of society.

Spencer felt that the problems of bias could be mitigated not only by attention to one's interests, emotions, station in life, and other subjective and emotional sources of difficulty but also by the development of "mental discipline." He believed that by studying the procedures of the more exact sciences, sociologists could learn to approach their subjects in a disciplined and objective way. In a series of enlightening passages,[18] he argued that by studying the purely abstract sciences, such as logic and mathematics, one could become sensitized to "the necessity of relation"—that is, that phenomena are connected and reveal affinities. By examining the "abstract-concrete sciences," such as physics and chemistry, one is alerted to causality and to the complexity of causal connections. By examining the "concrete sciences," such as geology and astronomy, one becomes alerted to the "products" of causal forces and the operation of lawlike relations. For it is always necessary, Spencer stressed, to view the context within

which processes occur. Thus, by approaching problems with the proper mental discipline—with a sense of relation, causality, and context—one can overcome many methodological difficulties.

The Theoretical Argument

The opening chapters of *The Study of Sociology* present a forceful argument against those who would maintain that the social realm is not like the physical and biological realms. On the contrary, Spencer argued, all spheres of the universe are subject to laws. Every time people express political opinions about what legislators should do, they are admitting implicitly that there are regularities, which can be understood, in human behavior and organization.

Given the existence of discoverable laws, Spencer stressed, the goal of sociology must be to uncover the principles of morphology (structure) and physiology (process) of all organic forms, including the super-organic (society). But, he cautioned, we must not devote our energies to analyzing the historically unique, peculiar, or transitory. Rather, sociology must look for the universal and enduring properties of social organization.[19] Moreover, sociologists should not become overly concerned with predicting future events because unanticipated empirical conditions will always influence the weights of variables and, hence, the outcomes of events. Much more important is discovering the basic relations among phenomena and the fundamental causal forces of them.

In the early and late chapters of *The Study of Sociology,* Spencer sought to delineate, in sketchy form, some principles common to organic bodies. In so doing, he foreshadowed the more extensive analysis in *Principles of Sociology.* He acknowledged Auguste Comte's influence in viewing biology and sociology as parallel sciences of organic forms and in recognizing that understanding of the principles of biology is a prerequisite for discovering the principles of sociology.[20] As Spencer emphasized in all of his sociological works, certain principles of structure and function are common in all organic bodies.

Spencer even hinted at some of these principles, on which he was to elaborate in the volumes *of Principles of Sociology.* One principle is that increases in the size of both biological and social aggregates create pressures for differentiation of functions. Another principle is that such differentiation results in the creation of distinctive regulatory, operative, and distributive processes. That is, as organic systems differentiate, it becomes necessary for some units to regulate and control action, for others to produce what is necessary for system maintenance, or for still others to distribute necessary substances among the parts. A third principle is that differentiation initially involves separation of regulative centers from productive centers, and only with the increases in size and further differentiation do distinctive distributing centers emerge.

Such principles are supplemented by one of the first functional orientations in sociology. In numerous places, Spencer stressed that to uncover the principles of social organization, it is necessary to examine the social whole, to determine its needs for survival, and to assess various structures by how they meet these needs. Although this functionalism always remained somewhat implicit and subordinate to his search for the principles of organization among super-organic bodies, it influenced subsequent thinkers, particularly Emile Durkheim.

In sum, then, *The Study of Sociology* is a preliminary work to Spencer's *Principles of Sociology.* It analyzes in detail the methodological problems confronting sociology; it offers guidelines for eradicating biases and for developing the proper "scientific discipline"; it hints at the

utility of functional analysis; and, most important, it begins to sketch out what Spencer thought to be the fundamental principles of social organization. During the two decades after the publication of *The Study of Sociology,* he sought to use the basic principles enunciated in his *First Principles* as axioms for deriving the more specific principles of super-organic bodies.

A NOTE ON SPENCER'S *DESCRIPTIVE SOCIOLOGY*

Using his inheritance and royalties, Spencer commissioned a series of volumes to describe the characteristics of different societies.[21] These volumes were, in his vision, to contain no theory or supposition; rather, they were to constitute the "raw data" from which theoretical inductions could be made or by which deductions from abstract theory could be tested. These descriptions became the data source for Spencer's sociological work, particularly his *Principles of Sociology.* As he noted in the "Provisional Preface" of Volume 1 *of Descriptive Sociology:*

> In preparation for *The Principles of Sociology,* requiring as bases of induction large accumulations of data, fitly arranged comparison, I ... commenced by proxy the collection and organization of facts presented by societies of different types, past and present . . . the facts collected and arranged for easy reference and convenient study of their relations, being so presented, apart from hypotheses, as to aid all students of social science in testing such conclusions as they have drawn and in drawing others.[22]

Spencer's intent was to use common categories for classifying "sociological facts" on different types of societies. In this way, he hoped that sociology would have a sound database for developing the laws of super-organic bodies. In light of the data available to Spencer, the volumes *of Descriptive Sociology* are remarkably detailed. What is more, the categories for describing different societies are still useful. Although these categories differ slightly from volume to volume, primarily because the complexity of societies varies so much, there is an effort to maintain a consistent series of categories for classifying and arranging sociological facts. Volume 1, *The English,* illustrates Spencer's approach.

First, facts are recorded for general classes of sociological variables. Thus, for *The English,* "facts" are recorded on the following:

1. inorganic environment
    a. general features
    b. geological features
    c. climate
2. organic environment
    a. vegetable
    b. animal
3. sociological environment
    a. past history
    b. past societies from which present system formed
    c. present neighbors
4. characteristics of people
    a. physical
    b. emotional
    c. intellectual

It will be recalled that this initial basis of classification is consistent with Spencer's opening chapters in *Principles of Sociology.* (See his section on "Critical Variables.")

Second, most of *The English* is devoted to a description of the historical development of British society, from its earliest origins to Spencer's time, divided into the following topic headings:

division of labor
regulation of labor
domestic laws—marital
domestic laws—filial
political laws—criminal, civil, and industrial
general government
local government
military
ecclesiastical
professional
accessory institutions
funeral rites
laws of intercourse
habits and customs
aesthetic sentiments
moral sentiments
religious ideas and superstitions
knowledge
language
distribution
exchange
production
arts
agriculture, rearing, and so forth
land—works
habitations
food
clothing
weapons
implements
aesthetic products
supplementary materials

Third, for some volumes, such as *The English,* more detailed descriptions under these headings are represented in tabular form. *The English,* for example, opens with a series of large and detailed tables, organized under the general headings "regulative" and "operative" as well as "structural" and "functional." The tables begin with the initial formation of the English peoples around A.D. 78 and document through a series of brief statements, organized around basic topics (see previous list), to around 1850. By reading across the tables at any given period, the reader can find a profile of the English for that period. By reading down the columns of the table, the reader can note the patterns of change of this society.

The large, oversize volumes of *Descriptive Sociology* make fascinating reading. They are, without doubt, among the most comprehensive and detailed descriptions of human societies ever constructed, certainly surpassing those of Weber or any other comparative social scientist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the descriptions are flawed by the sources of data (historical accounts and travelers' published reports), Spencer's methodology is sound, and because he employed professional scholars to compile the data, they are as detailed as they could be at the time. Had the volumes of *Descriptive Sociology* not lapsed into obscurity and had they been updated with more accurate accounts, modern social science

would, we believe, have a much firmer database for comparative sociological analysis and for theoretical activity.

SPENCER'S PRINCIPLES OF SOCIOLOGY

The *Principles of Sociology* is a massive work—more than two thousand pages.[23] It is filled with rich descriptive detail from *Descriptive Sociology,* but the book's importance resides in the theory that Spencer developed as the successive installments of this work were released between 1874 and 1896. In *The Principles of Sociology,* Spencer defined sociology as the study of *super-organic* phenomena—that is, of relations among organisms. Thus, sociology could study nonhuman societies, such as ants and other insects, but the paramount super-organic phenomenon is human society. Spencer employed an evolutionary model in analyzing human societies because, over the long haul of history, societies had become ever-more complex. They had followed the basic principles, articulated in *First Principles,* of evolutionary movement from small, homogeneous masses to more complex and differentiated masses. Thus, for Spencer, evolution is the process of increasing differentiation of human populations as they grow in size.

This movement from small and homogeneous to large and complex social forms is always influenced, Spencer argued, by several important factors. One is the nature of the people involved, another is the effects of environmental conditions, and a third is what he termed *derived factors* involving the new environments created by the evolution of society. This last factor is the most important because the larger and more complex societies become, the more their culture and structure shapes the environment to which people and groups must adapt. Of particular importance are the effects of (1) size and density of a population and (2) the relations of societies with their neighbors. As the size and density of a population increases, it becomes more structurally differentiated, with the result that individuals live and adapt to highly diverse social and cultural environments. As societies get larger, they begin to have contact with their neighbors, and this contact can range from cordial relations of economic exchange to warfare and conquest. As we will see, these two derived factors are related in Spencer's scheme because the nature of internal differentiation of a population is very much influenced by the degree to which it is engaged in war with its neighbors.

The Super-Organic and the Organismic Analogy

Part 2 of Volume 1 of *Principles of Sociology* contains virtually all the theoretical statements of Spencerian sociology. Employing the organismic analogy—that is, comparing organic (bodily) and super-organic (societal) organization—Spencer developed a perspective for analyzing the structure, function, and transformation of societal phenomena. Too often commentators have criticized him for his use of the organismic analogy, but in fairness to him, we should emphasize that he generally employed the analogy cautiously. The basic point of the analogy is that because both organic and super-organic systems reveal organization among component parts, they should reveal certain common principles of organization. As Spencer stressed,

> Between society and anything else, the only conceivable resemblance must be due *to parallelism of principle in the arrangement of components.*[24]

It is not surprising that Spencer, as one who saw in his *First Principles* a unity in evolutionary processes among realms of the entire universe and as one who had enumerated the principles

of biology, should begin his analysis of the super-organic by trying to show certain parallels between principles of societal and bodily organization.

Spencer began his analogizing by discussing the similarities and differences between organic and super-organic systems. Among important similarities, he delineated the following:

1. Both society and organisms can be distinguished from inorganic matter, for both grow and develop.
2. In both society and organisms, an increase in size means an increase in complexity and differentiation.
3. In both, a progressive differentiation in structure is accompanied by a differentiation in function.
4. In both, parts of the whole are interdependent, with a change in one part affecting other parts.
5. In both, each part of the whole is also a microsociety or organism in and of itself.
6. And in both organisms and societies, the life of the whole can be destroyed, but the parts will live on for a while.[25]

Among the critical differences between a society and an organism, Spencer emphasized the following:

1. The degree of connectedness of the parts is vastly different in organic and super-organic bodies. There is close proximity and physical contact of parts in organic bodies, whereas in super-organic systems there is dispersion and only occasional physical contact of elements.

2. The nature of communication among elements is vastly different in organic and super-organic systems. In organic bodies, communication occurs as molecular waves passing through channels of varying degrees of coherence, whereas among humans communication occurs by virtue of the capacity to use language to communicate ideas and feelings.

3. In organic and super-organic systems, there are great differences in the respective consciousness of units. In organic bodies, only some elements in only some species reveal the capacity for conscious deliberations, whereas in human societies all individual units exhibit the capacity for conscious thought.

The Analysis of Super-Organic Dynamics

If Spencer had only made these analogies, there would be little reason to examine his work. The analogies represent only a sensitizing framework, but the real heart of Spencerian sociology is his portrayal of the dynamic properties of super-organic systems. We begin by examining his general model of system growth, differentiation, and integration; then we will see how he applied this model to societal processes.

System Growth, Differentiation, and Integration As Spencer had indicated in *First Principles,* evolution involves movement from a homogeneous state to a more differentiated state. Spencer stressed that certain common patterns of movement from undifferentiated states can be observed.

First, growth in an organism and in society involves development from initially small units to larger ones.

Second, both individual organisms and societies reveal wide variability in the size and level of differentiation.

Third, growth in both organic and super-organic bodies occurs through compounding and re-compounding; that is, smaller units are initially aggregated to form larger units (compound-

ing), and then these larger units join other like units (recompounding) to form an even larger whole. In this way organic and super-organic systems become larger and more structurally differentiated. Hence, growth in size is always accompanied by structural differentiation of those units that have been compounded. For example, small clusters of cells in a bodily organism or in a small, primitive society initially join other cells or small societies (thus becoming compounded); then these larger units join other units (thus being recompounded) and form still larger and more differentiated organisms or societies; and so on for both organic and super-organic growth.

Fourth, growth and structural differentiation must be accompanied by integration. Thus, organic and societal bodies must reveal structural integration at each stage of compounding. Without such integration, recompounding is not possible. For instance, if two societies are joined, they must be integrated before they can, as a unit, become compounded with yet another society. In the processes of compounding, growth, differentiation, and integration, Spencer saw parallel mechanisms of integration in organisms and societies. For both organic and super-organic systems, integration is achieved increasingly through the dual processes of (1) centralization of regulating functions and (2) mutual dependence of unlike parts. In organisms, for example, as the nervous system and the functions of the brain become increasingly centralized, the organs become ever-more interdependent, whereas in super-organic systems, as political processes become more and more centralized, institutions become increasingly dependent on one another.

Fifth, integration of matter through mutual dependence and centralization of control increase the "coherence" of the system and its adaptive capacity in a given environment. Such increased adaptive capacity often creates conditions favoring further growth, differentiation, and integration, although Spencer emphasized that dissolution often occurred when a system overextended itself by growing beyond its capacity to integrate new units.

These general considerations, which were initially outlined in Spencer's 1862 *First Principles,* offer a model of structuring in social systems. In this model the basic processes are (1) forces causing growth in system size, (2) the differentiation of units, (3) the processes whereby differentiated units become integrated, and (4) the creation of a "coherent heterogeneity," which increases the level of adaptation to the environment.

Thus, for Spencer, institutionalization is a process of growth in size, differentiation, integration, and adaptation. With integration and increased adaptation, a new system is institutionalized and capable of further growth. For example, a society that grows as the result of conquering another will tend to differentiate along lines of conqueror and conquered. It will centralize authority, it will create relations of interdependence, and, as a result, it will become more adapted to its environment. The result of this integration and adaptation is an increased capacity to conquer more societies, setting into motion another wave of growth, differentiation, integration, and adaptation. Similarly, a non-societal social system such as a corporation can begin growth through mergers or expenditures of capital, but it soon must differentiate functions and then integrate them through a combination of mutual dependence of parts and centralization of authority. If such integration is successful, it has increased the adaptive capacity of the system, which can grow if some capital surplus is available.

Conversely, to the extent that integration is incomplete, dissolution of the system is likely. Thus, social systems grow, differentiate, integrate, and achieve some level of adaptation to the environment, but at some point, the units cannot become integrated, setting the system into a phase of dissolution. Figure 5.1 illustrates this process.

Thus, Spencer did not see growth, differentiation, and integration as inevitable. Rather, as differentiation increases, problems of integrating the larger social "mass" generate pressures to find solutions to these problems. For example, if the roles people fill are poorly coordinated, if crime and deviance are high, if commitments to a society's values are weak, if people have no place to work, and if many other disintegrative pressures prevail, then people will seek solutions. These disintegrative tendencies are a kind of "selection pressure" because, as problems of integration mount, members of a population see the problems and attempt to do something about them. If members find ways to develop relations of mutual interdependence and to regulate their actions with centralized authority, they can stave off these pressures for disintegration and prevent dissolution: Many societies, Spencer argued, had failed to respond adequately to pressures for integration, and as a result, they had collapsed or, more likely, had been conquered by a more integrated and powerful population. Indeed, Spencer argued that war has been an important force in human evolution because the more integrated and organized society will generally win wars against less integrated societies. As the conquered are integrated into the social structure and culture of their conquerors, the size and scale of society increases, and so, even as some societies dissolve or are conquered, the scale of societies had been slowly growing. Spencer's famous phrase "survival of the fittest" was partly intended to communicate this geopolitical dimension of societal evolution.
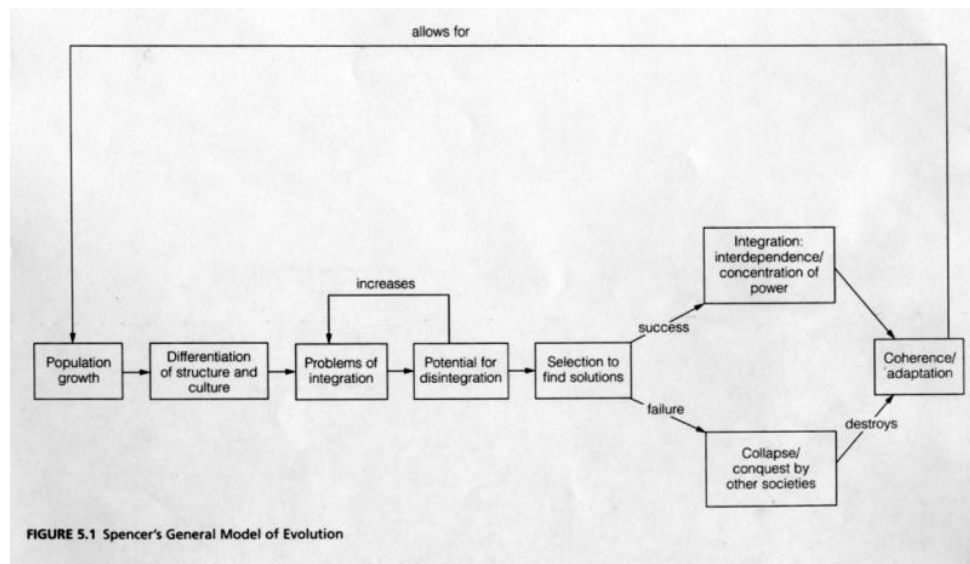

FIGURE 5.1 Spencer's General Model of Evolution

Geopolitical Dynamics Spencer's model of geopolitics is rather sophisticated for his time. As noted earlier, he argued that one of the most important forces increasing the size and scale of societies was war. Throughout *Principles of Sociology,* a theory of geopolitics is developed——a theory that, surprisingly, is ignored by contemporary sociology.

In this theory, Spencer posited that when power becomes centralized around its coercive base, leaders often use the mobilization of coercive power to repress conflicts within the society and, equally often, to conquer their neighbors. The reverse is also true: When leaders must deal with internal conflicts or external threats from other societies, they will centralize power to mobilize resources to deal with these sources of threat. So, for example, if there is class or ethnic conflict within a society, coercive power will be used to repress it, or if a neighboring society is seen as dangerous, political leaders will centralize coercive power to meet this perceived threat. Indeed, leaders will often use real or imagined internal and external threats as a way to legitimate their grabbing more power; once this power is consolidated, it can be used to centralize power even further.

The result is that once this cycle of threat and centralized power is initiated, it becomes self-fulfilling, for several reasons. First, when power is concentrated, it is used to usurp the wealth and resources of a population, within the result that inequality increases. Those with power simply tax or take resources from others to finance war making and supplement their privilege. And, as inequality increases, the sense of internal threat also escalates because those who have had their resources taken are generally hostile and pose a threat to elites who must then concentrate even more power to deal with this escalated threat, thereby increasing inequality and raising new threats. Over the long run, Spencer felt, this escalating cycle would potentially cause the disintegration of a society, or make it vulnerable to conquest by other societies. Second, when power is concentrated and used to make war against other societies, resources must be extracted to pay for this military effort, thus potentially causing escalated inequality and internal threat, which would compound problems of making war. As long as a society is successful in adventurism, the resentments of those who must pay for it often remain muted, but when external war making does not go well, the resentments from those who have had their resources taken will increase and pose internal threats to leaders, forcing them to mobilize more coercive power, if they can. Third, when power is concentrated to make war, and such efforts at conquest are successful, it then becomes necessary to control those who have been conquered. Needs to manage a restive and resentful population push political leaders to concentrate more power, thus extracting ever-more resources for social control. As resources are channeled to social control, inequality increases, thereby escalating internal threats, which require even more usurpation of resources to maintain social control.

For Spencer, then, concentrating power was a double-edged sword. It allowed one population to conquer another and to increase the size, scale, and complexity of human societies, but it also increased inequalities and internal threats that, unless the cycle of concentrating ever-more power could be broken, would cause the disintegration of the new, larger, and more complex society. This is why, Spencer argued, that military adventurism in the industrial era was ill advised; it drained a population's resources toward coercive and control activities and away from innovation and investment in domestic production. In essence, Spencer was arguing against the creation of what we would call today the *military-industrial complex.* Moreover, Spencer felt that once power was concentrated around the coercive base (military and police) of power, decision making by leaders in government was biased toward the use of coercion rather than alternatives, such as negotiation, compromise, use of incentives, and other alternatives to repression and tight control. For example, if Spencer had seen the rise of the Soviet Union through most of the twentieth century, his theory of geopolitics might have led him to predict its collapse in the 1990s.

Spencer's theory of geopolitics is woven throughout the pages *of Principles of Sociology,* and it is part of a much more general theory of evolution of societies moving from simple to more complex forms. Spencer conceptualized these movements as a series of prominent stages.

Stages of Societal Evolution Spencer argued that increases in the size of a social aggregate necessitate the elaboration of its structure. Such increases in size are the result of high birth rates, migrations, and joining populations together through conquest and assimilation. Although Spencer visualized much growth as the result of compounding and recompounding— that is, successive joining together of previously separate social systems through treaties, conquest, expropriation, and other means—he also employed the concept of compounding in another sense: to denote successive stages of internal growth and differentiation of social systems.

Spencer employed the terms *primary, secondary,* and *tertiary compounding,* by which he meant that a society had undergone a qualitative shift in the level of differentiation from a simpler to a more complex form.[26] These stages of compounding marked a new level of differentiation among and within what Spencer saw as the three main axes of differentiation in social systems: (1) the *regulatory,* in which structures, mobilizing and using power manage relations with the external environment, while engaging in internal coordination of a society's members; (2) the *operative,* in which structures meet system needs for production of goods and commodities and for reproduction of system members and their culture; and (3) the *distributive,* in which structures move materials, people, and information. In simple societies, these three great axes of differentiation are only incipient, being collapsed together, but as societies grow and compound, distinctive structures emerge for each of these axes. The subsequent course of evolution then occurs with further differentiation between and within these axes.

Primary compounding occurs when the simplest structures become somewhat more complex. At first, only a differentiation of regulatory and operative processes is evident. For example, the sexual division of labor between males and females might move to one where some males have more authority than do females (regulatory functions), while females began to shoulder a greater burden in gathering food and in socializing the young (operative functions). Thus, the first big shift in the level of differentiation is along the regulatory and operative axes; only with further growth and differentiation of the population does a distinctive set of structures devoted to distribution of resources, people, and information emerge. Secondary compounding occurs, Spencer argued, when the structures involved in regulatory, operative, and distributive functions undergo further differentiation. For example, internal administrative structures might become distinguished from warfare roles in the regulative system; varieties of domestic activities, with specialized persons or groups involved in these separate activities, might become evident; or distinguishable persons or groups involved in external trade and internal commerce might become differentiated. Tertiary compounding occurs when these secondary structures undergo further internal differentiation, so that one can observe distinct structures involved in varieties of regulatory, operative, and distributive processes.

Figure 5.2 represents these dynamics diagrammatically as a model. This model outlines the "stages" of societal evolution in three respects. First, Spencer saw five basic stages: (1) simple without head or leadership, (2) simple with head or leadership, (3) compound, (4) doubly compound, and (5) trebly compound. Second, he visualized each stage as being denoted by (1) a given degree of differentiation *among* regulatory, operative, and distributive processes and (2) a level of differentiation *within* each process. Third, he suggested how the nature of regulation, operation, and distribution changes with each stage of compounding (as denoted by the descriptive labels in each box in Figure 5.2).

FIGURE 5.2 Spencer's Model of Evolution
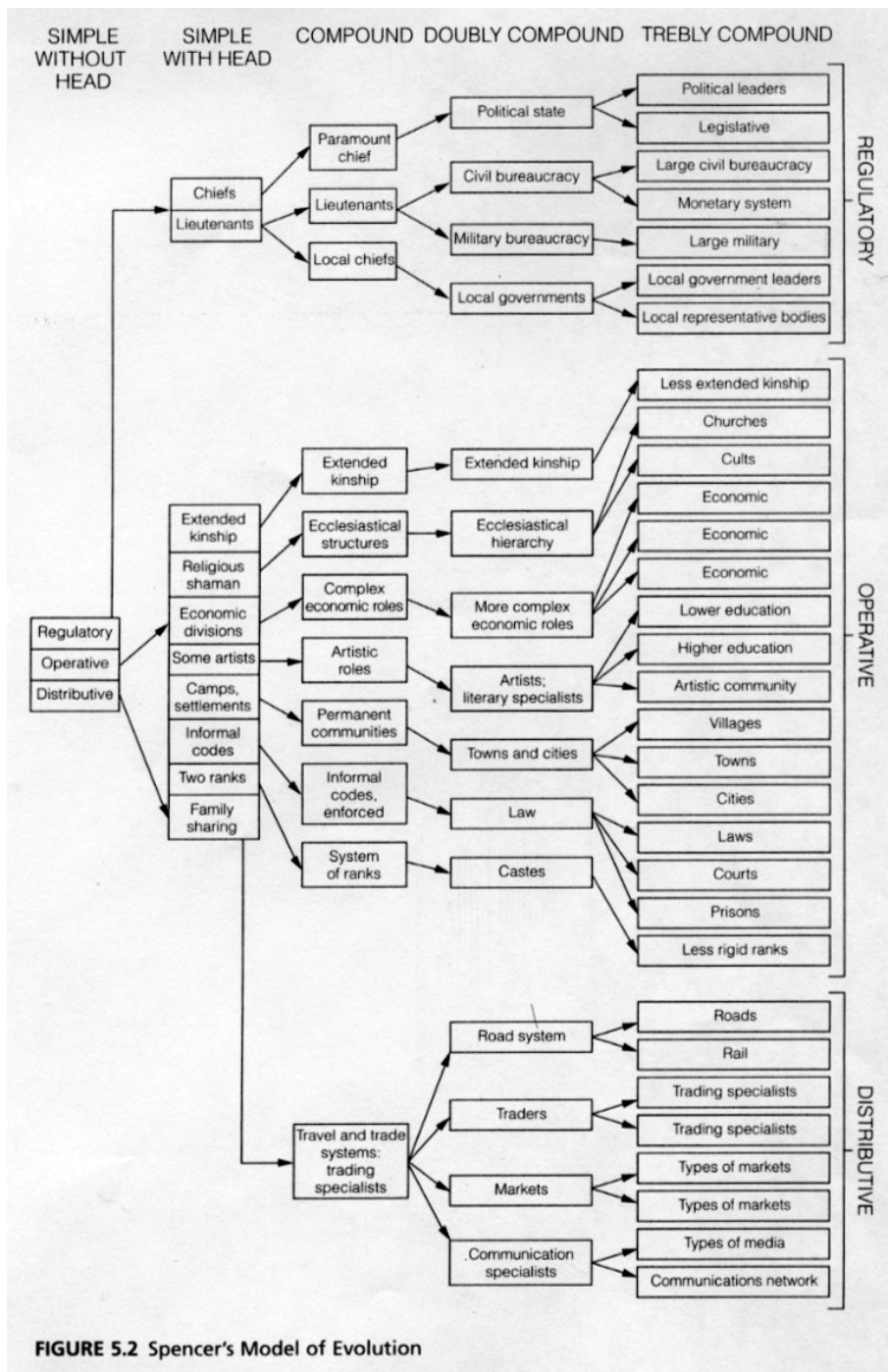
Contained within Spencer's view of the stages of evolution is a mode of functional analysis. By viewing social structures with reference to regulatory, operative, and distributive processes, Spencer implicitly argued that these three processes represent basic "functional needs" of all organic and super-organic systems. Thus, a particular structure is to be assessed by its contribution to one or more of these three basic needs. But Spencer's functionalism is even more detailed, for he argued in several places that all social structures had their own internal regulatory, operative, or distributive needs, regardless of which of the three functions they fulfilled for the larger social whole in which they were located.[27] For example, the family might be viewed as an operative structure for the society as a whole, but it also reveals its own division of labor along regulatory, operative, and distributive functions.

Sequences of Differentiation Spencer devoted most of his attention to analyzing the regulatory system because he was primarily a theorist of power.[28] His discussion revolves around delineating those conditions under which the regulatory system (1) becomes differentiated from operative and distributive processes and (2) becomes internally differentiated. We consider Spencer a political theorist because of this emphasis on the regulating system—that is, the center of power in society.

If we translate differentiation between regulatory and operative functions into more modern terminology, then the first phase of differentiation is between the emergence of a political system and specialized structures involved in (a) production or the conversion of resources into usable commodities and (b) reproduction or the regeneration of people as well as their culture. Most of Spencer's sociology is devoted to the regulatory system, especially the cause and consequences of centralized power on operative and distributive processes. In general, Spencer posited the following conditions as increasing the concentration and centralization of power:

1.   When productive processes become complex, they require some kind of external authority to coordinate activity to ensure that exchanges proceed smoothly, to maintain contractual obligations, to prevent fraud and corruption, and to ensure that necessary productive activities are conducted. These pressures for external authority lead to the mobilization of power. Once this capacity to regulate the economy exists, the level of production can expand further, creating new pressures for expanded use of power to coordinate more complex levels of economic activity.

2.   When there are internal threats, typically arising from conflicts over inequalities, centers of power will mobilize to control the conflict. Ironically, the use of power to control conflict often increases inequality because those with power begin to usurp resources for themselves. As a result, as more power is concentrated, further inequality and conflict will ensue in a cycle of conflict, use of power to control and usurp, increased inequality, and escalated potential for conflict.

3.   When there are external threats from other societies arising from economic competition or military confrontations, centers of power will mobilize coercive force to deal with such threats. Consequently, they will also set off the dynamics described under (2) above because when power is mobilized to deal with threats, it is also used to enhance the well being of elites, thereby increasing inequality and the potential for conflict. Moreover, as noted for Spencer's theory of geopolitics, when a political system is mobilized for conflict with other societies, it will generally pursue war as the first option (rather than diplomacy), with the result that if it wins a war, this very success creates new internal threats, as specified in (2) above, revolving around the inequalities between conquerors and conquered.

As both regulatory and operative processes develop, Spencer argued, pressures for transportation, communication, and exchange among larger and more differentiated units increase. The result of these pressures is that new structures emerge as part of a general expansion of distributive functions. Spencer devoted considerable attention to the historical events causing increases in transportation, roads, markets, and communication processes, and by themselves, these descriptions make for fascinating reading. At the most general level, he concluded:

> The truth we have to carry with us is that the distributing system in the social organism, as in the individual organism, has its development determined by the necessities of transfer among inter-dependent parts. Lying between the two original systems, which carry on respectively the outer dealings with surrounding existences, and the

inner dealings with materials required for sustentation *sic*\\ its structure becomes adapted to the requirements of this carrying function between the two great systems as wholes, and between the sub-divisions of each.[29]

As the regulatory and operative systems expand, thereby causing the elaboration of the distributive system, this third great system differentiates in ways that facilitate increases in (1) the speed with which material and information circulate and (2) the varieties of materials and information that are distributed. As the capacities for rapid and varied distribution increase, regulatory and operative processes can develop further; as the latter expand and differentiate, new pressures for rapid and varied distribution are created. Moreover, in a series of insightful remarks. Spencer noted that this positive feedback cycle involved an increase in the ratio of information to materials distributed in complex, differentiating systems.[30]

In sum, then. Spencer's view of structural elaboration emphasizes the processes of structural growth and differentiation through the joining of separate systems and through internal increases in size. As an evolutionist, Spencer took the long-range view of social development as growth, differentiation, integration, and increased adaptive capacity; then, with this new level as a base, further growth, differentiation, integration, and adaptive capacity would be possible. His view of structural elaboration is thus highly sophisticated, and though flawed in many ways, it is the equal of any other nineteenth-century social theory.

System Dialectics and Phases As we have emphasized, Spencer saw war as an important causal force in human societies. War pushes a society to develop centralized regulatory structures to expand and coordinate internal operative and distributive processes. Yet war can have an ironic effect on a society: Once these operative and distributive processes are expanded under conditions of external conflict, they increasingly exert pressures for less militaristic activity and for less authoritarian centralization. For example, a nation at war will initially centralize along authoritarian lines to mobilize resources, but as such mobilization expands the scope of operative and distributive processes, those engaged in operation and distribution develop autonomy and begin to press for greater freedom from centralized control. In this way, Spencer was able to visualize war as an important force in societal development but, at the same time, as an impediment to development if concentrated power is used to concentrate even more power. And in an enlightening chapter on "social metamorphoses,"[31] he argued that the dynamic force underlying the overall evolution of the super-organic from homogeneous to heterogeneous states was the successive movement of societies in and out of "militant" (politically centralized and authoritarian) and "industrial" (less centralized) phases. This cyclical dynamic is presented in Figure 5.3, which views these phases somewhat more abstractly than in Spencer's portrayal.

Figure 5.3 presents one of the most interesting (and often ignored) arguments in Spencerian sociology. For Spencer, there is always a dialectical undercurrent during societal evolution (and dissolution) revolving around the relationship between regulatory and operative processes. On the one hand, each of these initial axes of differentiation encourages the growth and development of the other in a positive feedback cycle, and on the other hand, there is an inherent tension and dialectic between the two. For example, war expands regulatory functions; increased regulatory capacity allows for more extensive coordination of operative processes; greater operative capacity encourages expanded war efforts and, hence, expansion of the regulatory system. But at some point in this cycle, development of internal operative structures primarily for war making becomes counterproductive, limiting the scope and diversity of development in operative processes. Indeed, Spencer argued that too much political control of production and reproduction causes economic stagnation and, in the reproductive

sphere, arouses resentments. Over time, and under growing pressures from the internal sector, as mobilization against tight control increases, the warlike profile of the regulatory system is reduced. Thus, as resentments against too much power arise, it is not inevitable that political elites will continue to concentrate power to manage such threats, as we examined earlier in Spencer's theory of geopolitics. Spencer saw an alternative: Growing resentments leads political leaders to make concessions and to recognize that they must release some of their control. Spencer never specifies the conditions under which leaders will give up power; he simply assumed that it had been an important dynamic in the evolution of human societies from simple to complex forms. When power is released, operative structures expand and differentiate in many directions, but over time, these structures become too divergent, poorly coordinated, and unregulated. A war can provide, Spencer believed, the needed stimulus for greater regulation and coordination of these expanded and diversified operative processes, thus setting the cycle into motion once again. Alternatively, problems of coordination become so acute that government must step in to restore order.

Such had been the case throughout evolutionary history, Spencer thought. Curiously, he also seemed to argue that modern, industrial capitalism made the need for war and extensive regulation by a central state obsolete. No longer would it be necessary, in Spencer's capitalistic Utopia, for centralized government, Operating under the pressures of war, to seek extensive regulation of operative and distributive processes. These processes were, in his vision, now sufficiently developed and capable of growth, expansion, and integration without massive doses of governmental intervention. Here, Spencer's ideology clearly distorts his perceptions because advanced capitalism requires the exercise of control by government, yet, the analysis of the dialectic between militant and industrial societies allowed him to see how concentrated power could be lessened without disintegration.

FIGURE 5.3 Phases of Institutionalization
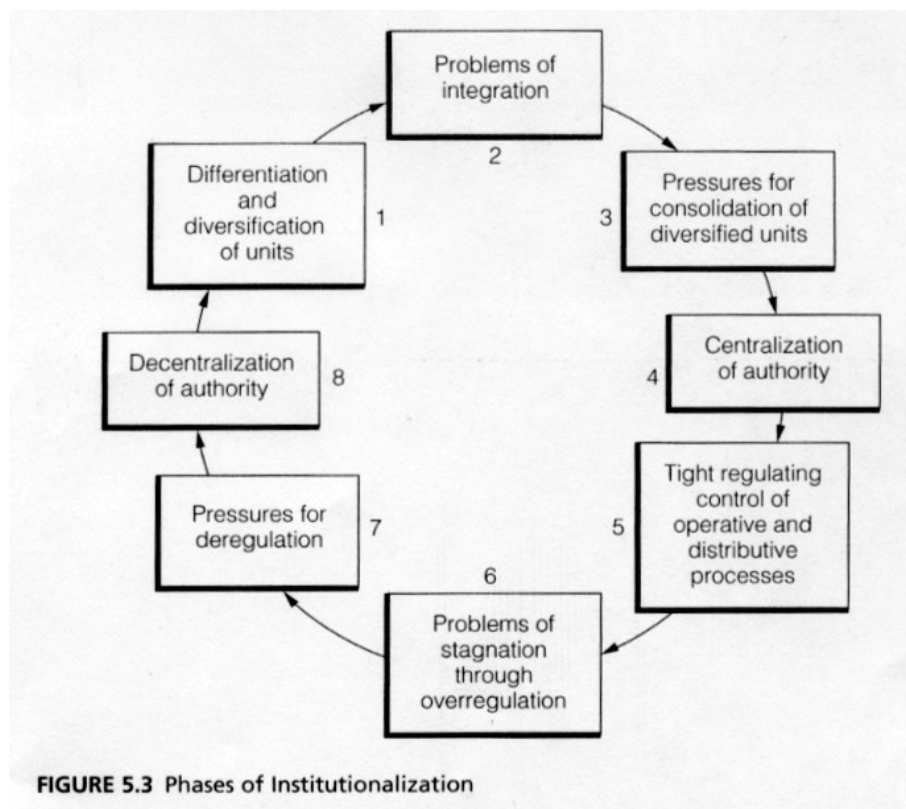
Classifying Social Systems Spencer also used these models of societal evolution ([Figure 5.2](#)) and system phases ([Figure 5.3](#)) as a basis for classifying societies. His most famous typology ([Table 5.1](#)) is of what he termed *militant* and *industrial* societies—a typology, that has frequently been misunderstood by commentators. Too often it is viewed as representing a unilinear course of evolutionary movement from traditional and militant to modern and industrial societal forms. Although Spencer often addressed the evolution of societies from a primitive to a modern profile, he did not rely heavily on the militant-industrial typology in describing types or stages of evolutionary change. Rather, as is emphasized in [Figure 5.3](#), the militant-industrial distinction is primarily directed at capturing the difference between highly centralized authority systems where regulatory processes dominate and less centralized systems where operative processes prevail.[32] The term *industrial* does not refer to industrial production in the sense of modern factories and markets but, instead, to a reduction in centralized power and to the vitality and diversity of operative processes. Both the simplest and most modern societies can be either militant or industrial; Spencer hoped that modern industrial capitalism would be industrial rather than militaristic. As we noted in the last section, however, Spencer saw societies as cycling in and out of centralized and decentralized phases. The typology is meant to capture this dynamic.

Table 5.1 Spencer's Typology of Militant and Industrial Societies		
Basic System Processes	**Militant**	**Industrial**
1. Regulatory processes		
a. Societal goals	Defense and war	Internal productivity and provision of services
b. Political organization	Centralized, authoritarian	Less centralized; less direct authority over system units
2. Operative processes		
a. Individuals	High degrees of control by state; high levels of stratification	Freedom from extensive controls by state; less stratification
b. Social structures	Coordinated to meet politically established goals of war and defense	Coordinated to facilitate each structure's expansion and growth
3. Distributive processes		
a. Flow of materials	From organizations to state; from state to individuals and other social units	From organizations to other units and individuals
b. Flow of information	From state to individuals	Both individuals to state and state to individuals

The distinction between militant and industrial societies emphasizes that during the course of social growth, differentiation, integration, and adaptive upgrading,[33] societies move in and out of militant (dominance of regulatory) and industrial (operative) phases. Militant phases consolidate the diversified operative structures of industrial phases. The causes of either a militant or industrial profile for a system at any given time are varied, but Spencer saw as critical (1) the degree of external threat from other systems and (2) the need to integrate dissimilar populations and cultures. The greater the threat to a system from external systems or the more diverse the system's population (an internal threat), the more likely it is to reveal a militant profile. Once external and internal threats have been mitigated through conquest, treaties, assimilation, and other processes, however, pressures for movement to an industrial profile increase. Such is the basic dynamic underlying broad evolutionary trends from a homogeneous to a heterogeneous state of social organization.

Spencer's other typology, which has received considerably less attention than the militant-industrial distinction, addresses the major stages in the evolution of societies. Whereas the militant-industrial typology seeks to capture the cyclical dynamics underlying evolutionary movement, Spencer also attempts to describe the distinctive stages of long-term societal development, as was modeled earlier in [Figure 5.2](#). This typology revolves around describing

the pattern and direction of societal differentiation. As such, it is concerned with the processes of compounding. As was evident in Figure 5.2, Spencer marked distinctive stages of societal growth and differentiation: simple (with and without leadership), compound, doubly compound, and trebly compound.

In Table 5.2 we have taken Spencer's narrative and organized it in a somewhat more formal way. But the listing of characteristics for simple (both those with leaders and those without), compound, doubly compound, and trebly compound societies for regulatory, operative, and distributive as well as for demographic (population characteristics) dimensions captures the essence of Spencer's intent. Several points need to be emphasized. First, although certain aspects of Spencer's description are flawed, his summary of the distinctive stages of societal is equal, or superior, to any that have been delineated recently by anthropologists and sociologists.[34] Second, this description is far superior to any developed by other anthropologists and sociologists of Spencer's time.

Spencer sought to communicate what we can term *structural explanations* with this typology. The basic intent of this mode of explanation is to view certain types of structures as tending to coexist. As Spencer concluded,

> The inductions arrived at... show that in social phenomena there is a general order of co-existence and sequence; and therefore social phenomena form the subject-matter of a science reducible, in some measure at least, to the deductive form.[35]

Thus, by reading down the columns of Table 5.2, we can see that certain structures are likely to coexist within a system. And by reading across the table, the patterns of change in structures with each increment of societal differentiation can be observed. Moreover, as Spencer stressed, such patterns of social evolution conformed to the general law of evolution enunciated in *First Principles*.

> The many facts contemplated unite in proving that social evolution forms a part of evolution at large. Like evolving aggregates in general, societies show *integration,* both by simple increase of mass and by coalescence and re-coalescence of masses. The change from *homogeneity* to *heterogeneity* is multitudinously exemplified; up from the simple tribe, alike in all its parts, to the civilized nation, full of structural and functional unlikenesses. With progressing integration and heterogeneity goes increasing *coherence.* We see the wandering group dispersing, dividing, held together by no bonds; the tribe with parts made more coherent by subordination to a dominant man; the cluster of tribes united in a political plexus under a chief with sub-chiefs; and so on up to the civilized nation, consolidated enough to hold together for a thousand years or more. Simultaneously comes increasing *definiteness.* Social organization is at first vague; advance brings settled arrangements which grow slowly more precise; customs pass into laws which, while gaining fixity, also become more specific in their applications to varieties of actions; and all institutions, at first confusedly intermingled, slowly separate, at the same time that each within itself marks off more distinctly its component structures. Thus in all respects is fulfilled the formula of evolution. There is progress towards greater size, coherence, multiformity, and definiteness.[36]

In sum, then, Spencer provided two basic typologies for classifying societal systems. One typology—the militant-industrial distinction—emphasizes the cyclical phases of all societies at any stage of evolution. The second typology is less well known but probably more important. It delineates the structural features and demographic profile of societies at different stages of

evolution. Embedded in this typology is a series of statements on what structures tend to cluster together during societal growth and differentiation. This typology is, in many ways, the implicit guide for Spencer's structural and functional analysis of basic societal institutions, which comprises Parts 3 through 7 in Volumes 1 and 2 *of Principles of Sociology.* We should, therefore, close our review *of Principles of Sociology* by briefly noting some of the more interesting generalizations that emerge from Spencer's description of basic human institutions.

Table 5.2 Spencer's Stages of Evolution

System Dimensions	Simple Society		Compound Society	Doubly Compound	Trebly Compound (Never Formally Listed)
	Headless	*Headed*			
1. Regulatory system	Temporary leaders who emerge in response to particular problems	Permanent chief and various lieutenants	Hierarchy of chiefs, with paramount chief, local chiefs, and varieties of lieutenants	Elaboration of bureaucratized political state; differentiation between domestic and military administration	Modern political state
2. Operative system					
a. Economic structure	Hunting and gathering	Pastoral; simple agriculture	Agricultural; general and local division of labor	Agricultural; extensive division of labor	Industrial capitalism
b. Religious structure	Individualized religious worship	Beginnings of religious specialists: shaman	Established ecclesiastical arrangements	Ecclesiastical hierarchy; rigid rituals and religious observance	Religious diversity in separate church structures
c. Family structure	Simple; sexual division of labor	Large, complex; sexual and political division of labor	Large, complex; numerous sexual, age, and political divisions	Large, complex; numerous sexual, age, and political divisions	Small, simple; decrease in sexual division of labor
d. Artistic-literary forms	Little art; no literature	Some art; no literature	Artists	Artists; literary specialists; scholars	Many artistic literary specialists; scholars
e. Law and customs	Informal codes of conduct	Informal codes of conduct	Informal codes; enforced by political elites and community members	Written law and codes	Elaborate legal codes; civil and criminal
f. Community structure	Small bands of wandering families	Small, settled groupings of families	Village; permanent buildings	Large towns; permanent structures	Cities, towns, and hamlets
g. Stratification	None	Chief and followers	Five or six clear ranks	Castes; rigid divisions	Classes; less rigid
3. Distributive system					
a. Materials	Sharing within family and band	Intra- and interfamilial exchange and sharing	Travel and trade between villages	Roads among towns; considerable travel and exchange; traders and other specialists	Roads, rail, and other non-manual transportation; many specialists
b. Information	Oral, personal	Oral, personal	Oral, personal; at times mediate by elites or travelers	Oral and written; edicts; oracles; teachers and other communications specialists	Oral and written; formal media structures for edicts; many communication specialists
4. Demography profile					
a. Size	Small	Large	Larger; joining of several simple societies	Large	Large
b. Mobility	Mobility within territory	Less mobility; frequently tied to territory	Less mobility; tied to territory; movement among villages of a defined territory	Settled; much travel among towns	Settled; growing urban concentrations; much travel; movement from rural to urban centers

THE ANALYSIS OF SOCIETAL INSTITUTIONS

Fully two-thirds of *Principles of Sociology* is devoted to an evolutionary description and explanation of basic human institutions.[37] For Spencer, institutions are enduring patterns of social organization that (1) meet fundamental functional needs or requisites of human organization and (2) control the activities of individuals and groups in society. Spencer employed a "social selection" argument in his review of institutional dynamics. The most basic institutions emerge and persist because they provide a population with adaptive advantages in a given environment, both natural and social. That is, those patterns of organization that facilitate the survival of a population in the natural environment and in the milieu of other societies will be retained, or "selected"; as a consequence, these patterns will become institutionalized in the structure of a society. Because certain problems of survival always confront the organization of people, it is inevitable that among surviving populations a number of common institutions would be evident for all enduring societies—for example, kinship, ceremony, politics, religion, and economy. Spencer discusses more than these five institutions, but our review will emphasize only these, because they provide some of the more interesting insights in Spencerian sociology.

Domestic Institutions and Kinship

Spencer argued that kinship emerged to meet the most basic need of all species: reproduction.[38] Because a population must regulate its own reproduction before it can survive for long, kinship was one of the first human institutions. This regulation of reproduction involves the control of sexual activity, the development of more permanent bonds between men and women, and the provision of a safe context for rearing children.

Spencer's discussion of kinship was extremely sophisticated for his time. After making the previous functional arguments, he embarked on an evolutionary analysis of varying types of kinship systems. Although flawed in some respects, his approach was nonetheless insightful and anticipated similar arguments by twentieth-century anthropologists. Some of the more interesting generalizations emerging from his analysis are the following:

1. In the absence of alternative ways of organizing a population, kinship processes will become the principal mechanism of social integration.

2. The greater the size of a population without alternative ways of organizing activity, the more elaborate will be a kinship system, and the more it will reveal explicit rules of descent, marriage, endogamy, and exogamy.

3. Those societies that engage in perpetual conflict will tend to create patrilineal descent systems and patriarchic authority; as a consequence, they will reveal less equality between the sexes and will be more likely to define and treat women as property.[39]

Ceremonial Institutions

Spencer recognized that human relations were structured by symbols and rituals.[40] Indeed, he tended to argue that other institutions—kinship, government, and religion—were founded on a "preinstitutional" basis revolving around interpersonal ceremonies, such as the use of (1) particular forms of address, (2) titles, (3) ritualized exchanges of greetings, (4) demeanors, (5) patterns of deference, (6) badges of honor, (7) fashion and dress, and (8) other means for or-

dering interactions among individuals. Thus, as people interact, they "present themselves" through their demeanor, fashion, forms of talk, badges, titles, and rituals, and in so doing they expect certain responses from others. Interaction is thereby mediated by symbols and ceremonies that structure how individuals are to behave toward one another. Without this control of relations through symbols and ceremonies, larger institutional structures could not be sustained.

Spencer was particularly interested in the effects of inequality on ceremonial processes, especially inequalities created by centralization of power (as i; the case in the militant societies depicted in Table 5.1). These interesting generalizations emerge from his more detailed analysis:

1. The greater the degree of political centralization that exists in a society, the greater the level of inequality will be and, hence, the greater the concern for symbols and ceremonials demarking differences in rank among individuals will be.

2. The greater the concern over differences in rank, (1) the more likely people in different ranks are to possess distinctive objects and titles to mark their respective ranks, and (2) the more likely interactions between people in different ranks are to be ritualized by standardized forms of address and stereotypical patterns of deference and demeanor.

3. Conversely, the less the degree of political centralization and the less the level of inequality, the less people are concerned about the symbols and ceremonies that demark rank and regulate interaction.[41]

Political Institutions

In his analysis of political processes in society, Spencer also developed a perspective for examining social class structures.[42] In his view, problems of internal conflict resulting from unbridled self-interest and the existence of hostility with other societies have been the prime causal forces behind the emergence and elaboration of government. Although governments reveal considerable variability, they all evidence certain common features: (1) paramount leaders, (2) clusters of subleaders and administrators, (3) large masses of followers who subordinate some of their interests to the dictates of leaders, and (4) legitimating beliefs and values that give leaders "the right" to regulate others. Spencer argued that once governmental structures exist, they are self-perpetuating and will expand unless they collapse internally for lack of legitimacy or are conquered from without. In particular, war and threats of war centralize government around the use of force to conquer additional territories and internally regulate operative processes, with the result that governmental structures expand. Moreover, the expansion of government and its centralization create or exacerbate class divisions in a society because those with resources can use them to mobilize power and political decisions that further enhance their hold on valued resources. Thus, Spencer developed a very robust political sociology, and although a listing of only a few generalizations cannot do justice to the sophistication of his approach, some of his more interesting conclusions are the following:

1. The larger the number of people and internal transactions among individuals in a society, the greater will be the size and degree of internal differentiation of government.

2. The greater the actual or potential level of conflict with other societies and within a society, the greater will be the degree of centralization of power in government.

3.   The greater the centralization of power, the more visible class divisions will be; and the more these divisions create potential or actual internal conflict.

Religious Institutions

Spencer's analysis emphasized that all religions shared certain common elements: (1) beliefs about supernatural beings and forces, (2) organized groupings of individuals who share these beliefs, and (3) ritual activities directed toward those beings and forces presumed to have the capacity to influence worldly affairs.[43] Religions emerge in all societies, he argued, because they increase the survival of a population by (1) reinforcing values and beliefs through the sanctioning power of the supernatural and (2) strengthening existing social structural arrangements, especially those revolving around power and inequality, by making them seem to be extensions of the supernatural will.

Spencer provided an interesting scenario on the evolution of religion from primitive notions of "ancestor spirits" to the highly bureaucratized monotheistic religions that currently dominate the world. He saw the evolution and structural patterns of religion as intimately connected to political processes, leading him to propose the following generalizations:

1.   The greater the level of war and conquest by a society, the greater are the problems of consolidating diverse religious beliefs, thereby forcing the expansion of the religious class of priests to reconcile these diverse religions and create polytheistic religions.

2.   The greater the political centralization and the greater the level of class inequalities in a society, the more likely is the priestly class to create a coherent pantheon of ranked deities.

3.   The more government relies on the priestly class to provide legitimation through a complex system of religious beliefs and symbols, the more this class extracts wealth and privilege from political leaders, thereby consolidating their distinctive class position and creating an elaborate bureaucratic structure for organizing religious activity.

4.   The more centralized a government is and the more it relies on religious legitimation by a privileged and bureaucratized class of priests, the greater is the likelihood of a religious revolt and the creation of a simplified and monotheistic religion.

Economic Institutions

For Spencer, the long-term evolution of economic institutions revolves around (1) increases in technology or knowledge about how to manipulate the natural environment, (2) expansion of the production and distribution of goods and services, (3) accumulation of capital or the tools of production, and (4) changes in the organization of labor.[44] In turn, these related processes are the result of efforts to achieve greater levels of adaptation to the environment and to meet constantly escalating human needs. That is, as one level of economic adaptation is created, people's needs for new products and services escalate and generate pressures for economic reorganization. Thus, as new technologies, modes of production, mechanisms of distribution, forms of capital, and means for organizing labor around productive processes are developed, a more effective level of adaptation to the natural environment is achieved; as this increased adaptive capacity is established, people begin to desire more. As a result, economic production becomes less and less tied to problems of survival in the natural environment during

societal evolution and increasingly the result of escalating wants and desires among the members of a society.

Spencer further argued that war decreased advances in overall economic productivity because mobilization for war distorts the economy away from domestic production toward the development of military technologies and the organization of production around military products or services. For Spencer, war depletes capital, suppresses wants and needs for consumer goods, encourages only military technologies, and mobilizes labor for wartime production (while killing off much of the productive labor force). Only during times of relative peace, then, will economic growth ensue. Such growth in the domestic economy will be particularly likely to occur when there are increases in population size. In Spencer's view, escalating population size under conditions of peace creates pressure for expanded production while increasing needs for new products and services. These and many other lines of argument in his analysis of the economy have a highly modern flavor, but unlike his approach to other institutions, he presents few abstract generalizations, so we will not attempt to conclude with any here.

This brief summary of Spencer's analysis of basic institutions does not do justice to the sophistication of his approach. As much as any scholar of his time, or of today, he saw the complex interrelationships among social structures. One reason for this sophistication in his analysis is his in-depth knowledge of diverse societies, which he acquired through the efforts of researchers hired to construct descriptions of historical and contemporary societies. Throughout his work, his ideas are illustrated by references to diverse societies. Such familiarity with many historical and contemporary societies came from his efforts to build a "descriptive sociology."

CRITICAL CONCLUSIONS

Herbert Spencer is, without doubt, the most neglected of the early sociological theorists. Comte is, of course, also neglected but unlike Spencer, he never really developed a theory. Spencer did articulate a theory that, for the most part, is ignored by contemporary sociologists. Why should this be so?

There can be no doubt that Spencer's moral philosophy stigmatized him, especially his view that government should not intervene too extensively to help the unfortunate. Such a view ran counter to the expansion of the welfare state in the twentieth century. This, ideology taints Spencer's sociology, and it has clearly made scholars reluctant to give it a fair reading.

Spencer's coining of the phrase "survival of the fittest" and the use of this idea in much twentieth-century conservative philosophy, and even worse, in the eugenics movement of the last century further stigmatized his sociology. Indeed, those advocating the selective breeding of humans, or alternatively, the natural death of the "less fit" have at times made appeals to Spencer, a fact which certainly has not helped our retrospective view of him.

Spencer also was the supreme generalist at a time when academic disciplines were beginning to specialize. Spencer's sociology is a part of a much larger, almost cosmic vision of evolution in all domains of the universe. Twentieth-century sociologists were less likely to embrace such grandiose and rather vague pronouncements, and this is even more the case for the discipline today where hyper-specialization is rapidly occurring.

Spencer's emphasis on evolution as the master societal process was also to get him into trouble. By the second decade of the twentieth century, evolutionary thinking was under heavy attack, and as the supreme evolutionary thinker in the social sciences, Spencer was under constant criticism. When the evolutionary paradigm collapsed and fell into obscurity in the 1930s, so did Spencer's sociology. Even with the revival of evolutionary thinking in the 1960s in sociology, Spencer was never resurrected, except by a few dedicated scholars.

Spencer probably wrote too much. The key ideas of Spencer's sociology must be extracted from thousands of pages, and most sociologists are unwilling to read all these materials. Spencer's works are filled with far too many examples and illustrations, and his work gets sidetracked on issues that are of little interest to sociologists today. This is also true of other theorists in sociology's early pantheon, but contemporary scholars are unwilling to make the effort to wade through all of the pages.

Still, if scholars will have the patience to read through these many pages, there are many strong points in Spencer's sociology that deserve a re-hearing. First, Spencer developed a very sophisticated theory of politics in his sociology. This theory emphasizes that the concentration of power dramatically transforms all other institutional system, as can be seen by the propositions that we have listed in the text, and it sets into motion both geopolitical and dialectical dynamics. Even by today's standards, this portion of Spencer's sociology is rather sophisticated. Indeed, Spencer should be considered a political theorist as much as a functionalist or evolutionary thinker, and if this fact were recognized, perhaps sociologists would be willing to give his work another reading. Second, Spencer's views on the dynamics of differentiation are worth revisiting. The basic relationships among system size, level of differentiation, and integration through interdependence and power do represent some of sociology's most powerful laws, and although more contemporary sociologists have worked with these ideas, they seem to forget from where they come. And third, even though the use of so much data from his *Descriptive Sociology* makes reading *The Principles of Sociology* an arduous task, there is much to be learned from these materials. Few sociologists have ever documented their arguments with so much ethnographic and historical detail. In some ways, Spencer can serve as a model for how this should be done.

Yet, there are problems in Spencer's sociology. Although the ideological tracks are not as prominent, they are still in *The Principles of Sociology,* and they do indeed detract from his arguments and erode his credibility. Spencer's general arguments about evolution—"matter in motion," and the like—are vague; although contemporary general systems theory tries to employ similar concepts across system levels, the lack of broad acceptance of this modern approach tells us why Spencer's efforts at a general systems theory will never be useful. Spencer's organismic analogy, along with the functionalism that inheres in this analogy, also pose problems, especially in recent decades where functionalism as a theoretical approach now appears to be dead. To analyze structures through the needs they meet—in the case of Spencer's sociology, needs for regulation, operation, and distribution—is always problematic, because outcomes often appear to cause themselves. For example, if a structure is seen to meet a need for regulation, it is easy to imply that regulation, or the outcome, caused the structure meeting this outcome to emerge. Functional arguments often have the circular reasoning, which is why sociologists are suspicious of such arguments. There are many questionable elements in Spencer's sociology, but no more so than for other founders of the discipline. In the end, there is a prejudice against Spencer, one not founded on a careful reading because most sociologists have never read Spencer, but a prejudice that has been passed down from one generation of sociologists to the other.

Still, there is powerful theory in Spencer's sociology. In the next chapter, we will try to ignore the problematic aspects of Spencer's grand Synthetic Philosophy and, instead, extract the useful theoretical arguments. These arguments, we believe, can still inform sociology.

NOTES

1. Spencer's complete works, except for his *Descriptive Sociology* (see later analysis), are conveniently pulled together in the following collection: *The Works of Herbert Spencer,* 21 vols. (Osnabruck, Germany: Otto Zeller, 1966). However, our references will be to the separate editions of each of his individual works. Moreover, many of the dates for the works to be discussed span several years because Spencer sometimes published his works serially in several volumes (frequently after they had appeared in periodicals). Full citations will be given when discussing particular works. For a recent review of primary and secondary sources on Spencer, see Robert G. Perrin, *Herbert Spencer: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1993).

2. Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics: or, the Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified, and the First of Them Developed* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1888). This was originally published in 1851; the edition cited here is an offset print of the original.

3. Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Ethics* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1892-1898). A very high-quality and inexpensive edition of this work is published by Liberty Press, Indianapolis.

4. Spencer, *Social Statics,* p. 448.

5. Ibid., pp. 54-57.

6. Ibid., p. 56.

7. Spencer's arguments here are highly modern and, when compared with Marx's, Weber's, or Durkheim's, are quite radical.

8. Spencer, *Social Statics,* p. 497.

9. Ibid., p. 490.

10. Ibid., p. 498.

11. It should be remembered that this perspective was developed between 1873 and 1896. For a more complete and detailed review of Spencer's sociology during this period, see Jonathan H. Turner, *Herbert Spencer: A Renewed Appreciation* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985).

12. Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (New York: A. L. Burt, 1880; originally published in 1862). The contents of this work had been anticipated in earlier essays, the most important of which are "Progress: Its Law and Cause," *Westminster Review* (April 1857), and "The Ultimate Laws of Physiology," *National Review* (October 1857); moreover, hints at these principles are sprinkled throughout the first edition of *Principles of Psychology* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1880; originally published in 1855).

13. Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1873).

14. Ibid., p. iv.

15. Ibid., p. 72.

16. Ibid., p. 105.

17. Ibid., p. 114.

18. Ibid., pp. 314-326.

19. Ibid., pp. 58-59.

20. Ibid., p. 328.

21. The full title of the work reads *Descriptive Sociology, or Groups of Sociological Facts.* The list of volumes of *Descriptive Sociology* is as follows: vol. 1: *English* (1873); vol. 2: *Ancient Mexicans, Central Americans, Chibchans, Ancient Peruvians* (1874); vol. 3: *Types of Lowest Races, Negritto, and Malayo-Polynesian Races* (1874); vol. 4: *African Races* (1875); vol. 5: *Asiatic Races* (1876); vol. 6: *North and South American Races* (1878); vol. 7: *Hebrews and Phoenicians* (1880); vol. 8: *French* (1881); vol. 9: *Chinese* (1910); vol. 10: *Hellenic Greeks* (1928); vol. 11: *Mesopotamia* (1929); vol. 12: *African Races* (1930); and vol. 13: *Ancient Romans* (1934). A revised edition of vol. 3, edited by D. Duncan and H. Tedder, was published in 1925; a second edition of vol. 6 appeared in 1885; vol. 14 is a redoing by Emil Torday of vol. 4. In addition to these volumes, which are folio in size, two unnumbered works appeared: Ruben Long, *The Sociology of Islam, 2* vols. (1931-1933); and John Garstang, *The Heritage of Solomon: An Historical Introduction to the Sociology of Ancient Palestine* (1934). For a more detailed review and analysis of these volumes, see Jonathan H. Turner and Alexandra Maryanski, "Sociology's Lost Human Relations Area Files," *Sociological Perspectives* 31 (1988), pp. 19-34.

22. *The English,* classified and arranged by Herbert Spencer, compiled and abstracted by James Collier (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1873), p. vi.

23. Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology,* 3 vols., 8 parts (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1885; originally initiated in 1874). This particular edition is the third and is printed in five separate books; subsequent references are all to this third edition. Other editions vary in volume numbering, although part numbers are consistent across various editions.

24. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology,* vol. 1, p. 448 (emphasis in original).

25. This particular listing is taken from Jonathan H. Turner, *The Structure of Sociological Theory* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1998).

26. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology,* vol. 1, pp. 479-483.

27. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology,* vol. 1, p. 477.

28. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology,* vol. 1, part 2, pp. 519-548.

29. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 518.

30. Of course, the absolute amounts of both increase, but the processing of information—credits, accounts, ideas, purchase orders, and so on—increases as a proportion of things circulated.

31. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology,* vol. 1, pp. 577-585.

32. The misinterpretation of Spencer's intent steins from his introduction of the typology at several points in *Principles of Sociology.* From its usage in his discussion of political and industrial (economic) institutions, it would be easy to see the typology as his version ot the stages of evolution. But if one reads the more analytical statement in the early chapter on social types and constitutions in vol. 1, paying particular attention to the fact that this chapter precedes the one on social metamorphoses, then our interpretation is clear. Because Spencer uses another typology for describing the long-run evolutionary trends, it seems unlikely that he would duplicate this effort with yet another typology on militant-industrial societies. See, in particular, *Principles of Sociology,* vol. I, part 2, pp. 569-580.

33. We are using Parsons' terms here because they best connote Spencer's intent. See Parsons, *Societies,* cited in note 34.

34. See, for example, Parsons, *Societies* and *The System of Modern Societies* (Englewood Cliffs: NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971); Gerhard Lenski, Jean Lenski, and Patrick Nolan, *Human Societies* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991); and Morton H. Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society* (New York: Kandom House, 1967).

35. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology,* vol. I, part 2. p. 597.

36. Ibid., p. 596.

37. See Turner. *Herbert Spencer* (cited in note 11), for a more detailed review of Spencer's institutional analysis.

38. Spencer, *Principles oj Sociology,* vol. 1, part 3, pp. 603-757. See also Leonard Beeghley, "Spencer's Analysis of the Evolution of the Family and the Status of Women: Some Neglected Considerations," *Sociological Perspectives* (formerly *Pacific Sociological Review)* 26 (August 1983), pp. 299-313.

39. See Turner, *Herbert Spencer* (cited in note 11), p. 115.

40. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology,* vol. 2, part 4, pp. 3-216.

41. See Turner, *Herbert Spencer, p.* 122.

42. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology,* vol. 2, part 5, pp- 229-643.

43. Ibid., vol. 2, part 6, pp. 3-159. We should note how close this view of religious functions is to that to be developed by Durklieim.

44. Ibid., vol. 2, part H. pp. 327-608.

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