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Kathryn A. Shaddox
Ouachita Baptist University

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A BEGINNING SURVEY OF
SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

A Research Paper
Presented to
The Sociology Department
Ouachita Baptist University

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H290-1 Honors Special Studies
Honors Paper # 80

by
Kathryn Ann Shaddox
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A Beginning Survey of Sociological Theory

Since early antiquity man has been inquisitive and tried to explain the phenomena with which he comes into contact. However, many years elapsed before man made a concentrated effort to explain his relations to others. In the third quarter of the 19th century we have the beginnings of a new discipline which tried to explain the conditions under which human association takes place. This was the beginning of sociology as a field of scientific endeavor.

Sociology as a field of study was conceived in France, and later, German scholars formulated many theories about society. Comte and Durkheim, in looking for solutions of social problems, came upon the field of sociological inquiry. European scholars were a profound influence on the new discipline. Toward the end of the 19th century, sociology spread to the United States where it flourished.

The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the outstanding contributions of several of the more important or influential social theorists of the 19th and 20th centuries.

August Comte
1798-1857

Comte placed sociology in a special position in relation to the system of social sciences. He proposed two types of science: the theoretical and the applied. The theoretical is divided into two categories: descriptive and abstracts, the newest abstract science being sociology or social physics. Even though sociology had not obtained the positive or third stage of development, the method of sociology was positive. This means that social phenomena are regulated by social laws, and the task of the sociologist is to find those laws. Study is to be through direct observation; by historical review; by controlled experiment; or by comparing the phenomena to each other.¹

Comte believed that social phenomena should be studied from two points of view, the static and the dynamic. Social statics studies society in cross sections as a functioning whole. Social static aims to investigate harmony and to discover the conditions of social stability. Social dynamics may be defined as the science of progress or the successive modification of society which have taken place in a determined order. The first is the description of the parts and the refers to how the parts change and interact.

Comte's three stages of social evolution are: the theological, the metaphysical and the positive. The theological began terms. Man then gave supernatural powers to certain objects, the religion of fetishism. When man grouped several fetishes, the group was termed a diety. Man acquired several dieties, and his religion

¹Leonard Broom and Philip Selznick, Sociology, (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), P. 4.

became polytheistic. This was the first step toward rational or metaphysical thinking. The metaphysical smoothes the transition of the society from the theological to the positive by establishing an intellectual class. The positive period is attained when man adopts beliefs based of fact and reason.²

²Margret Vine, An Introduction to Sociological Theory, (New York: Logmans, Green & Company, 1959), pp. 28-29.

Comte's Works Translated into English:

Appeal to Conservatives. Translated by T. C. Donkin and
R. Congreve. London: Trubner and Co., 1899.

Early Essays on Social Philosophy. Translated by E. D. Hutton.
London: Routledge, 1911.

Passages from the Letters of Auguste Comte. Translated by
J. K. Ingram. London: Black, 1901.

System of Positive Policy. 4 vols. Translated by J. H. Bridges.
London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1875-1877.

The Catechism of Positive Religion. Translated by R. Congreve.
London: Chapman, 1958.

The General View of Positivism. Translated by W. A. Gillespie.
New York: Harper, 1891.

The Philosophy of Mathematics. Translated by J. H. Bridges.
New York: Harper, 1865.

The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte. Translated by A.
Martineau. London: Chapman, 1868.

Herbert Spencer
1820-1903

Comte's work was continued and greatly amplified by Herbert Spencer's work. Spencer's work was a master system designed to embrace all human life. He advanced the scientific basis for sociology by introducing the concept of social evolution. He championed the idea of the unity of the sciences. Spencer distinguished between two types of phenomena: the knowable and the unknowable. Things knowable were experienced facts and were capable of being known and conceived by human beings. Things unknowable were things beyond the realm of human knowledge and conception.

To understand his laws of the origins and development of all phenomena, his general laws of evolution. Spencer viewed sociology as the study of evolution in its most complex form. Sociology includes all factors which condition the life and activity of society. These were divided into three sections:

Three Universal Truths

- 1. Indestructability of Matter
- 2. Continuity of Motion³
- 3. Persistence of Force

Spencer applied the ideas of the natural science to sociology.

Secondary Proposition Derived from Universal Truths

- 1. Uniformity Law. Persistence of relation among forces. Forces never arise out of nothing nor lapse into nothing.
- 2. Forces are never lost but transformed into equivalents.
- 3. Everything moves along the line of least resistance.
- 4. Rhythm of Motion or Alternate Motion⁴

³Herbert Spencer, The Study of Sociology (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), p. 350.

⁴Ibid.

The individual was important in Spencer's sociology. He felt the individual should be free to adapt in his own manner and to use his initiative; however, there should be limits imposed which prevent his encroachment on others. Also, Spencer recognized the importance and rigidity of human habits. He collected a wealth of materials on customs and laws of various societies, but he did not concern himself with the effect of these customs on the individual.

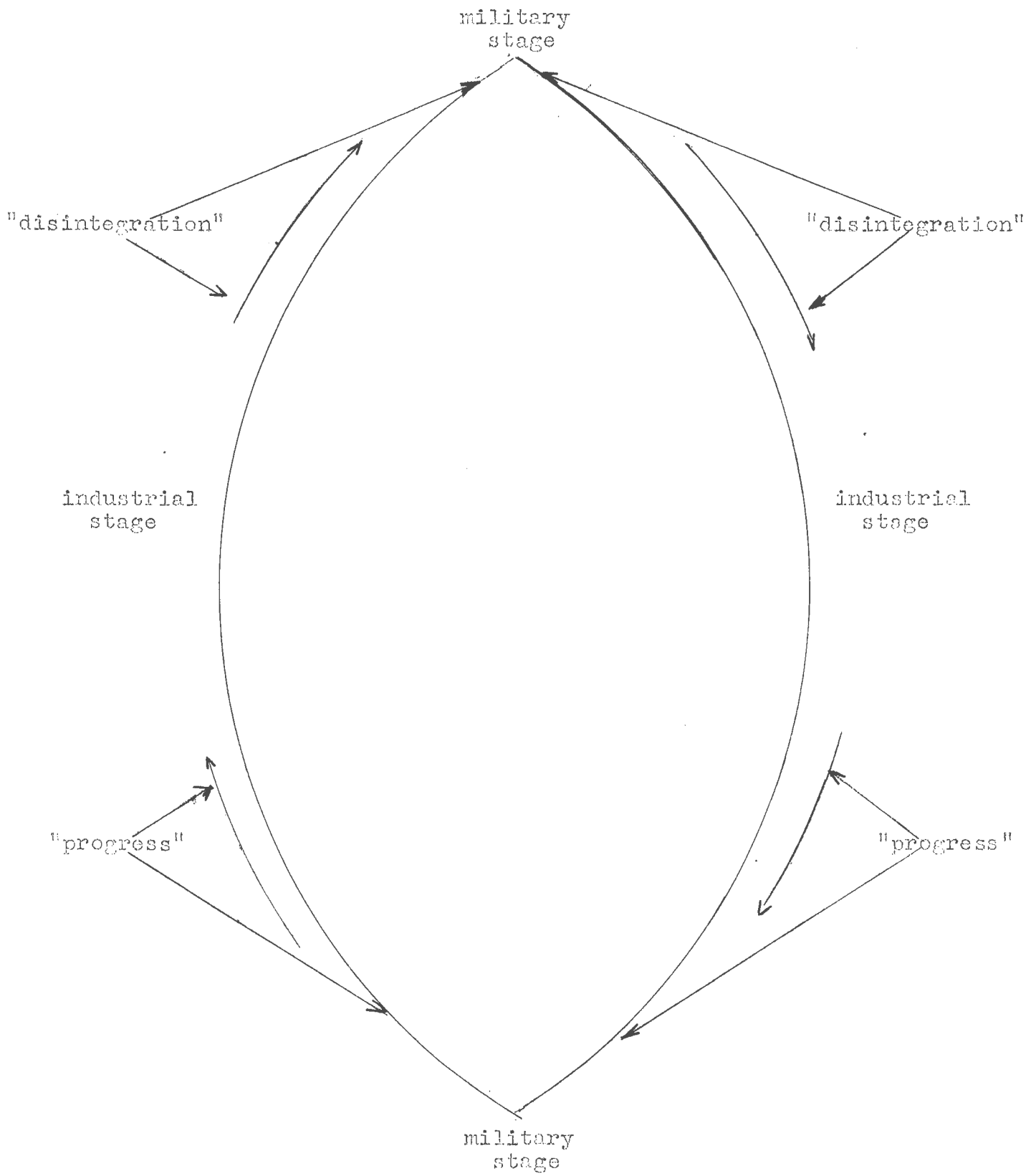
Spencer recognized the relationship of persons to society as a two way process, the society being in a state of equilibrium of forces. He accepted the philosophy that happiness is the goal of human life and society exists to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. To do this society is in constant conflict. This conflict is mainly economic and military. Since the institutions in these areas are changing, conflict would it turn become less important. The processes of differentiation and specialization in society accompanied the struggle for existence. So Spencer's conception of universal evolution was a change from the homogeneous and indefinite to the heterogeneous and definite.⁵

Spencer went into social change in much detail. He stated that all things change and become more complex. Change in one area of life brings changes at different and varying rates of speed in others. Spencer went as far as to classify the factors in social change as primary and secondary. Primary factors are the character of the individuals of the society and the conditions

⁵Don Martindale, The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), p. 240.

under which the society exists. Spencer's secondary, or derived, factors of human change were five in number. All these combine to bring about the process of development toward greater size, coherence, multiformity, and definiteness.

With Comte, Spencer made sociology a science and defined its scope. By linking society to natural phenomena, his organic theory of society gave impetus to the break from the metaphysical and religious ideas of the times.



Spenser's works

A System of Synthetic Philosophy. 10 vols. London: Appleton,
1862-1896.

An Autobiography. 2 vols. New York: Appleton, 1904.

Descriptive Sociology. 3 vols. London: Williams and Worgate,
1873-1885.

Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical. London: Manwaring,
1861

Essays. 3 vols. London: Longmans, 1858-1874.

Facts and Comments. London: Appleton, 1902.

Illustrations of Universal Progress. London: Appleton, 1864.

Philosophy of Style. London: Appleton, 1865.

Social Statics. London: Appleton, 1871.

The Classification of Sciences. London: Williams and Worgate,
1864.

The Man Versus State. London: Appleton, 1884.

Lester Frank Ward
1841-1913

The first American master system-builder was Lester Frank Ward. Ward believed in the intelligent, purposive activity of man--social telesis or creative evolution--instead of the automatic evolution of Spencer and Sumner. He considered feelings the dynamic, motivating agent in animals and man, and the needs and desires of the group for its preservation and development as the motivating factors in the evolution of culture.

Unlike most of his contemporaries Ward insisted that social laws gained in pure sociology. Pure sociology is the study of social values, norms, and institutions as they exist in the society. Pure sociology was divided into genesis, or the natural unconscious evolutionary development of man, and telesis, or the conscious planned evolutionary development of man. Genesis was further subdivided into statics and dynamics. Applied sociology is the application of the knowledge gained from pure sociology for the purpose of ameliorating difficulties in the society. The sociologist should use his theoretical knowledge in community planning and in elimination of social problems. The utilization of social laws in applied sociology is accomplished through telesis.⁶

Ward, like Spencer, agreed that society is a product of natural selection or adaptation. However, he made two significant additions to this theory: sympodial development and creative synthesis or synergy. In sympodial development he held that evolution develops in zizag like a vine.

⁶Arnold Rose, Theory and Method in Social Science (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1941), p. 73.

Because Ward considered the striving of gratification as the driving power of human action he worked on a classification of human desires. Desire is defined as the expression of any natural impulse which, at the moment, has not been gratified. Nature has two primary objects: the preservation of the individual and the continuance of the species or race which are secured by the functions of nutrition and reproduction, which correspond to the desires of gustatory and sexual appetites. These are the original and essential social forces. The nonessential include the aesthetic sentiments, the emotional or moral forces, and the intellectual forces.

Physical or Essential Forces
(function bodily)

1. Preservative forces
They form the basis of all action and desire, and they preserve and maintain individual life. The chief force is hunger, which gives rise to property, slavery, labor, and industry.
 - A. Positive or attractive, seeking pleasure
 - B. Negative or protective, avoiding pain
2. Reproductive forces
They form the basis of all efforts of nature to continue the race. The chief force is love, the influence of which is internal and molding, not creative.
 - A. Direct. The sexual desires
 - B. Indirect. Affection for parents or kin

Spiritual or Nonessential Forces

3. Socializing forces
They are the basis for race elevation, and chief civilizing impulses.
 - A. Emotional or moral, seeking the safe and good
 - B. Aesthetic seeking the beautiful
 - C. Intellectual, seeking the true and useful⁷

Ward in turn taught that group feelings were capable of direction by man's mind and that this enabled man to gain control over evolution prevalent in the animal world. From this Ward arrived

⁷

Vine, op. cit., p. 72.