





# Herbert Spencer



**Herbert Spencer** (27 April 1820 – 8 December 1903) was an English **philosopher, biologist, anthropologist, sociologist**, and prominent classical liberal **political theorist of the Victorian era.**

**Spencer developed an all-embracing conception of evolution as the progressive development of the physical world, biological organisms, the human mind, and human culture and societies. He was "an enthusiastic exponent of evolution" and even "wrote about evolution before Darwin did."**

**As a polymath, he contributed to a wide range of subjects, including ethics, religion, anthropology, economics, political theory, philosophy, literature, biology, sociology, and psychology.**

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1848-1853: Was the sub-editor on the free-trade journal *The Economist*.

1851: Published his first book, *"Social Statics"*.

1855: Published his second book, *"Principles of Psychology"*.

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Read more at <http://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/herbert-spencer-171.php#zdkctxqZe7Y7hOuC.99>

# life

- Spencer was born in Derby, England on 27 April 1820, the eldest of nine children, but the only one to survive infancy. He was the product of an undisciplined, largely informal education. His father, George, was a school teacher, but an unconventional man, and Spencer's family were Methodist 'Dissenters,' with Quaker sympathies.
- From an early age, Herbert was strongly influenced by the individualism and the anti-establishment and anti-clerical views of his father, and the Benthamite radical views of his uncle Thomas. Indeed, Spencer's early years showed a good deal of resistance to authority and independence.

# life

- A person of eclectic interests, Spencer eventually trained as a civil engineer for railways but, in his early 20s, turned to journalism and political writing.
- From 1848 to 1853, Spencer worked as a writer and subeditor for *The Economist* financial weekly and, as a result, came into contact with a number of political controversialists

# life

- In 1851 Spencer's first book, *Social Statics, or the Conditions Essential to Human Happiness* appeared. ('Social statics'--the term was borrowed from Auguste Comte--deals with the conditions of social order, and was preliminary to a study of human progress and evolution--i.e., 'social dynamics.')
- In this work, Spencer presents an account of the development of human freedom and a defense of individual liberties, based on a (Lamarckian-style) evolutionary theory.



- In 1855, Spencer published his second book, *The Principles of Psychology*.
- *The Principles of Psychology* was much less successful than *Social Statics*, however, and about this time Spencer began to experience serious (predominantly mental) health problems that affected him for the rest of his life.
- This led him to seek privacy, and he increasingly avoided appearing in public.

- Although he found that, because of his ill health, he could write for only a few hours each day, he embarked upon a lengthy project--the nine-volume *A System of Synthetic Philosophy* (1862-93)--which provided a systematic account of his views in biology, sociology, ethics and politics.
- This 'synthetic philosophy' brought together a wide range of data from the various natural and social sciences and organized it according to the basic principles of his evolutionary theory.

# works

- *The Man versus the State:*
- *The Principles of Psychology*
- *First Principles*
- *Principles of Biology*

# “Evolution” – The Most Exciting Concept of the 19th Century

- “Evolution” was one of the most exciting ideas of the 19th century. Its most influential sponsor was the naturalist Charles Darwin. Darwin developed the concept of “Evolution” in his “Origin of Species – 1859.”
- Spencer, the sociological giant of the second half of the 19th century, was enamored by the idea of evolution. He applied the principle of evolution to the social world and called it “social evolution.”
- He saw social evolution as “a set of stages through which all the societies moved from simple to the complex and from the homogenous to the heterogeneous.”

# Meaning of the Concept of “Evolution

- The term “evolution” comes from the Latin word “evolvere” which means “to develop” or to “unfold.” It closely corresponds to the Sanskrit word “Vikas”.
- Evolution literally means gradual “unfolding” or “unrolling.” It indicates changes from “within” and not from “without”-, it is spontaneous, but not automatic.
- It must take place on its own accord. It implies continuous change that takes place especially in some structure. The concept applies more precisely to the internal growth of an organism

# Meaning of “Social Evolution”:

- The term “evolution” is borrowed from biological science to sociology.
- The term “organic evolution” is replaced by “social evolution” in sociology. Whereas the term “organic evolution” is used to denote the evolution of organism, the expression “social evolution” is used to explain the evolution of human society.
- Here the term implies the evolution of man’s social relations. It was hoped that the theory of social evolution would explain the origin and development of man.

# Spencer's Theory of Evolution

- As L.A. Coser has pointed out the “evolutionary principle” or “the law of evolution” constitutes the very basis of Spencerism.
- Spencerian interpretations relating to “evolution” could be divided into two parts:
- (A) General Theory of Evolution, and (B) Theory of Social Evolution.
- In his book “First Principles” -1862 we get his views about the first theory, and information and interpretations about the second theory, are available in his sociological treaties namely, “The Study of Sociology” and “The Principles of Sociology.”

# A. General Theory of Evolution

- **Spencer's Concept of "Universal Evolution":**
- Spencer made "evolution" a universal principle in his treatise "First Principles." The fundamental principle behind every phenomenon or every development whether it is physical or social in nature, there is the supreme law of evolution operating.
- The law of evolution, according to him, is the supreme law of every becoming.
- According to Spencer, "evolution is a change from a state of relatively indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite coherent heterogeneity."



# law of evolution

- For Spencer, this law of evolution was universal in character for it was applicable to the physical, organic and the social world.
- Spencer was of the opinion that this universal process of evolution would explain the “earliest change which the universe at large is supposed to have undergone “It also explains the law of evolution “as a master key to the riddles of the universe.”

# Three Basic Laws as Proposed by Spencer:

- **1. Law of Persistence of Energy or Force:**
- There is a persistence of force in the world. There is the persistence of some sustaining energy in which all phenomena are rooted and upon which all phenomena rest.
- But this force or energy itself lies beyond our knowledge. This is a major, irreducible fact which we cannot explain, but which we are obliged simply to accept.

## 2. The Law of Indestructibility of Matter:

- The basic elements of matter and energy in the world are neither created nor destroyed, but conserved.
- It means there is a basic “indestructibility” of the elements of matter.

### 3. The Law of Continuity of Motion:

- There is a continuous motion in the world. All things continue in motion. As it is in the case of matter, motion also cannot be stopped or destroyed.
- When the form of the matter changes, motion also changes. Though energy passes from one form to another, it always persists, and never disappears nor does it get extinguished.

# Four Secondary Propositions or Laws:

- **(a) Uniformity of Law:**
- There is a persistence of certain relationship among the forces in the world. The world is an order of elements.
- Recurring manifestations of events in the natural world, the forces, elements of matter, and relations of motion existing among them have a definite regularity.

- **(b) Law of Transformation and Equivalence of Forces:**
- The force, the elements of matter, the motion, are never lost or dissipated entirely in a process of change.
- They are merely transformed into the manifestation of some other event or some other form of existence.

- **(c) The Law of Least Resistance and Great Attraction:**
- There is tendency of everything [all forces and elements] to move along the line of least resistance and of greatest attraction.

- **(d) The Principle of Alteration or Rhythm of Motion:**
- All phenomena in nature have their own particular rate and rhythm of movement, of duration and development.
- Force, matter and motion, each of these, has its appropriate pattern of transformation



# Evolutionary Theory – A Joint Product of the Seven Laws

- It is significant to note that Spencer derived from these basic propositions his “law of evolution.”
- According to Spencer, when we examine the nature of both order and change in any kind of phenomena in the world we find that the pattern of transformation is the same, and could be formulated in the following words.
- “Evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion, during which the matter passes from relatively indefinite incoherent homogeneity to a relatively definite coherent homogeneity.”

- “According to Spencer, all the phenomena of nature, the stars and planetary systems, the earth and all terrestrial phenomena, biological organisms and the development of species and all the changing psychological and sociological process of human experience and behaviour – followed this pattern of change.

- All process of change are similar, in that they emerge out of the physical stuff of the world..... in this condition of organised complexity; from a condition of indefiniteness to a condition of definiteness
- This was how Spencer made evolution a universally applicable system of analysis.
- Spencer thus made applicable the laws of evolution to analyse the development and evolution of the human society. It is in this context he gave birth to “the theory of social evolution.”

## B. Social Evolution Theory

- Two of the main books written by Spencer namely, (i) “The Study of Sociology “, (ii) “The Principles of Sociology”, provide us more details about his “theory of social evolution.”
- Just as “the theory of organic evolution” analyses the birth, development, evolution and finally death of the organism, in the same manner “the theory of social evolution” analyses the genesis, development, evolution and finally the decay (?) of the society.

- Spencer was of the opinion that the evolutionary principle could be applied to the human society for he treated human society as an organism.
- Both the organism and the society grow from simple to complex and from homogeneous to heterogeneous.

- Spencer's Theory of Evolution" involves two essential but interrelated trends or strains of thought:
- (i) Change from simplicity to complexity or movement from simple society to various levels of compound societies; and
- (ii) Change from military society to industrial society.

- **(i) Change from Simplicity to Complexity, or Movement from Simple Society to Various Levels of Compound Society:**
- As Spencer repeatedly argued all phenomena in all fields proceed from simplicity to complexity. Societies also undergo evolutionary stages of development.
- Spencer identified four types of societies in terms of stages of their evolutionary development – simple, compound, doubly compound and trebly compound.

- **(a) Simple Society:**
- This is the most primitive society without any complexities and consisting of several families.
- **(b) Compound Society:**
- A large number of above mentioned simple societies make a compound society. This is clan society.



- **(c) Doubly Compound Society:**
- These consist of several clans compounded into tribes or tribal society.
- (d) Trebly Compound Society: Here the tribes are organised into nation states. This is the present form of the world.
- The master trend in this process of universal evolution is the increased differentiation of social structures which leads inevitably to better integration and adaptation to environment.

## **(ii) Change from Military [Militant] Society to Industrial Society:**

- According to Spencer, evolution proceeds from military society to industrial society.
- The type of social structure depends on the relation of a society to other societies in its significant characteristics.

- (i) Thus while the military society is characterised by compulsory co-operation, industrial society is based on voluntary co-operation.
- (ii) While the military society has a centralised government, the industrial society has a decentralised government.

- (iii) Military society has economic autonomy whereas it is not found in industrial society.
- (iv) There is the domination of the state over all other social organisations in the military society whereas in the industrial society the functions of the states are very much limited;

# Critical Remarks

## Comments in Appreciation:

- 1. As Bogardus has pointed out, “Spencer emphasised the laws of evolution and natural causation. He described social evolution as a phase of natural evolution.
- 2. Spencer has made the principles of evolution universal in character. It is indeed, a remarkable intellectual exercise.

- 3. Spencer's work inspired the British social thought to a great extent. "L.T. Hobhouse, G.C. Wheeler, and in later generation, Morris Ginsberg continued work in his general evolutionary tradition while rejecting his anti-reformist individualism.
- In America, W.G. Sumner.....may be said to have been a disciple of Spencer, Ward, Cooley, Veblen, Giddings, Ross, and Park, whether agreeing with his ideas or using them as a springboard for dissent, were all in Spencer's debt."

- 4. According to Bogardus, “Spencer deserves credit, however, for developing the concept of social evolution as a phase of natural evolution and for stressing the idea of natural sequences in secretary matters.”
- 5. Abraham and Morgan have rightly commented: “No one after Spencer ever matched either the sheer volume of sociological writing nor made more significant contributions to the science of human society.”

# Comments against Spencer's Views:

- 1. No modern sociologist subscribes to the “theory of social evolution” in its original form as put forward by Spencer. His attempt to equalise evolution with progress is totally rejected. But its modified form known as “Theory of Neo-Evolutionism” advocated by the anthropologists like, Leslie A. White, V. Gordon Childe and others, is getting some publicity in the anthropological circles.



- 2. Bogardus is unhappy with Spencer's theory of social evolution for it underestimates the importance of man. He writes: "The emphasis upon 'man' as a primary unit neglects the importance of the 'group' in the social evolutionary process.
- Moreover, Spencer underrated the intellectual nature of primitive man; he denied to early man the qualities involving exclusiveness of thought, imagination, and original ideas."

- 3. Spencer had spoken of uniformity in the process of evolution. He “did not realise that societies at the same stage of evolution do not necessarily possess identical politics, ethics, art and religion.”
- 4. “While Spencer believed that social part exists for the social whole, today, society is believed to exist for the welfare of the individuals.

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thank you