

Sociological thoughts: chapter- 3 (course content- Herbert Spencer-The theory of social Evolution, Organic Analogy) paper- 2, Sociology (lecture-3)

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The Evolution of Societies

Spencer sought to build two classificatory systems of society related to his thesis of social evolution. The first thesis states that in the process of social evolution societies move from simple to various levels of compound on the basis of their degree of composition Process of Evolution of Societies. Spencer defined sociology as the study of societal evolution and believed that the ultimate goal of societal evolution is complete harmony and happiness. Spencer's theory of evolutionary change is built upon three basic principles: integration, differentiation, and definiteness. Spencer argued that homogenous phenomena are inherently unstable, which makes them subject to constant fluctuations. These fluctuations force homogeneous systems to differentiate, which results in greater multiformity. In other words, homogeneous systems grow to become heterogeneous.

Spencer focused much of his energy on trying to legitimize sociology as a scientific discipline. Spencer's general theory of social evolution involves the progress of society towards integration, heterogeneity, and definiteness. It also includes a fourth dimension, the increasing coherence of social groups. Social groups, according to Spencer, strive towards greater harmony and cooperation through the division of labour and the state. It is important to note the Spencer does not develop a linear theory of social evolution; he acknowledges that dissolution or no change at all may occur at any given moment. Spencer was a social realist in that he viewed society as an entity in and of itself – thus, the whole of society can live on even if its component parts die. As society grows, it becomes more complex and differentiated. Structures accompany this growth, which function to regulate external concerns like military activities and sustain internal issues like economic activities.

Distributing systems eventually emerge that function to help link together regulative and sustaining structures. Spencer uses his evolutionary theory to trace the movement from simple to compounded societies and from militant to industrial societies. Society evolves from the compounding and re-compounding of social groups. It also evolves from military societies dominated by conflict and a coercive regulative system to industrial societies characterized by harmony and a sustaining system of decentralized rule. Spencer thought the society that he was living in was a "hybrid society," exhibiting traits of both military and industrial societies. Although he ultimately hoped society in general would progress towards a state of industry, he recognized that the regression to a militant state was possible.