

Herbert Spencer's Theory of Causation*

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I. Introduction

In *An Autobiography* Herbert Spencer recalls that he "early became possessed by the idea of causation." His father taught him that "whatever occurred had its assignable cause of a comprehensible kind," and that there is "natural causation everywhere operating."¹ In an important essay recounting his intellectual development, Spencer again stresses that "ideas of physical causation were repeatedly impressed on me." By the age of seventeen, the idea of natural causation had become "dominant" in his thinking.²

Causation, according to Spencer, is more fundamental than evolution, which it logically implies.³ Natural law itself is simply the "uniformity of relations among phenomena," and this uniformity results from causal laws. Causation applies to all aspects of existence, including human thought and action, and, "to the advanced student of nature, the proposition that there are lawless phenomena has become not only incredible but almost inconceivable."⁴ If disciplines (such as sociology) do not seem to be law-governed, "the presumption is not that they are irreducible to law, but that their laws elude our present means of analysis."⁵

Spencer's remark that he became possessed by the idea of causation is scarcely an exaggeration. It permeates his thinking and emerges as the leit-motif of his intellectual perspective. To discover causal laws is the essence of science; and Spencer's conviction that causal laws are universally operative led to his attempt to place sociology, and even ethics, on a scientific foundation.

This paper traces Spencer's theory of causation through various disciplines, with special emphasis on Spencer's "scientific" system of ethics—something he regarded as the crowning achievement of his life's work. I shall attempt to explain Spencer rather than criticize him. His theories are subject to many criticisms, even when accurately portrayed. But, more

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often than not, slander⁶ and misrepresentation⁷ have been the stock tools of Spencer critics. Spencer estimated that "in three cases out of four the alleged opinions of mine condemned by opponents, are not opinions of mine at all, but are opinions wrongly ascribed by them to me."⁸ Unfortunately, the record of commentators during the past few decades has not been much better.

A fair appraisal of Spencer's thought and influence must be preceded by an accurate rendering of his theoretical system. This is not an easy task. The ten-volume *Synthetic Philosophy*—surely one of the most ambitious intellectual undertakings of the nineteenth century—is an imposing, cumbersome, and complex work. Few readers are willing to journey through its pages. But it is also an integrated work, and Spencer rightly feared that his ideas (such as "survival of the fittest") would be wrenched from their proper context by his critics and thereby distorted. It is therefore difficult to deal with an isolated aspect of Spencer's ideas, particularly in the field of ethics. But because causation is a thread interwoven throughout the entire *Synthetic Philosophy*, it is particularly well-suited as a basis from which to gain an overall perspective.⁹

II. Spencer's Theory of Knowledge

In explicating Herbert Spencer's theory of causation, we shall begin by outlining his objections to the theory of David Hume. Hume, according to Spencer, wishes to ground the notion of cause in experience; and finding no impression corresponding to causal necessity, he reduces causality to a psychological habit based on observed regularities.

Spencer objects to this approach. First, if ideas must be traced to impressions, as Hume requires of necessity, then where is the impression corresponding to the idea of "habit" that looms so large in Hume's own theory? "No one can point out an impression answering to the idea *habit*, any more than he can point out an impression answering to the idea *cause*."¹⁰ Secondly, Hume surreptitiously relies on a notion of cause in the course of presenting his argument:

How can *experience* and *habit* be assigned as giving origin to the notion of *cause*, without involving the notion of cause in the explanation? How is it possible to convey the thought that experience *produces* in us this notion, without taking as the very basis of the thought the notion of causation? How is it possible to speak of habit as a "principle which *determines*" (i.e., *causes*) us to think of things as causally related, without including this conception of cause in the explanation?¹¹

Spencer's attack on Hume is part of his broader attack on "metaphysicians" in general. For reasons not made clear, Spencer associates the term "metaphysician" with idealists (such as Berkeley) and skeptics (such as Hume)—while regarding his own defense of "transfigured realism" as

beyond the ken of metaphysical speculation. In any case, "Metaphysics, in all its Anti-Realistic developments, is a disease of language."¹² The doubts raised by metaphysicians (i.e., idealists and skeptics) concerning the existence of an objective world independent of consciousness are "caused by the misinterpretation of words."¹³ Language, for Spencer, is a product of gradual evolution. It arose in a particular context to serve specific functions.

Language has, in fact, been throughout its development moulded to express all things under the fundamental relation of subject and object, just as much as the hand has been moulded into fitness for manipulating things presented under this same fundamental relation; and if detached from this fundamental relation, language becomes as absolutely impotent as an amputated limb in empty space.¹⁴

In other words, the subject-object relationship (which entails objective existence) is built into the structure and meaning of language. Hence language cannot legitimately be used to defend idealism and skepticism; indeed, language "*absolutely refuses to express the idealistic and sceptical hypothesis.*"¹⁵ Metaphysicians, in presenting their arguments, necessarily undercut the very basis of the language they use. The words used by metaphysicians "one and all, turn traitors."¹⁶

As we shall see, Spencer's argument for causal necessity is similar to the preceding argument for objective existence. Causal necessity is an inseparable aspect not only of language, but of human thought itself. Before turning to this argument, however, we must examine another of Spencer's objections to "metaphysicians," because it leads us directly into Spencer's theory of the "Unknowable."

Metaphysicians, according to Spencer, greatly overestimate the power of reason. They make reason into "the final object of superstition," and they foster "an awe of Reason which betrays many into the error of supposing its range to be unlimited."¹⁷ To those who view Spencer as a hyper-rationalist, remarks such as these (which are scattered throughout Spencer's writing) may be surprising. But they follow from two features of Spencer's theory. The first is his conception of reason (which we shall examine later in this essay). Reason, for Spencer, is the result of organic evolution, and evolution teaches us that there are no radical discontinuities, or breaks, in nature. Apparent differences of kind invariably shade into differences of degree.¹⁸ Reason is no exception. It is not a gift of the gods, a capacity unique to man. It is simply a more highly developed form of instinct, and as such it is subject to the limitations imposed by organic structure—i.e., the biological, physiological, and psychological nature of man.¹⁹ Reason cannot transcend the limits imposed by its organic constitution.

Spencer's assault on intellectual hubris also stems from his belief in the "Unknowable"—which he variously refers to as the "Unconditioned," the "Absolute," the "Infinite," the "First Cause," etc. Spencer was greatly influenced in this area by William Hamilton and by his disciple Henry Mansel,

both of whom he quotes at length in *First Principles*.²⁰ We are psychologically constrained, according to Spencer, to believe in the existence of an external world that causes our sensations and ideas, but we are barred from attaining knowledge of this reality. Why? Because all knowledge consists of relating and classifying—of differentiating and integrating experiences according to their likeness and unlikeness. All thought is conditional; it is made possible by classifying experiences according to common characteristics. Particular experiences are understood by being subsumed within a broader classification of previous experiences. But the ultimate cause of all experience—the “Real” as opposed to the “Phenomenal”—is, by definition, unique and unclassifiable. It is *sui generis*, because there is no broader group in which it can be incorporated. It cannot be related in thought to past experiences because it is the cause of all experiences. The Real, argues Spencer, in order to be thought of “must be thought of as such or such—as of this or that kind. Can it be like in kind to anything of which we have experience? Obviously not.” It “cannot be classed at all. And to admit that it cannot be known as of such or such kind, is to admit that it is unknowable.”²¹

The upshot of this is that, although we know that the Real exists, we cannot know its nature. We have, as Spencer puts it, an indefinite knowledge of the Absolute; we are aware of its existence (indeed, we cannot deny it without lapsing into absurdity), but we cannot have definite knowledge of its attributes.

Spencer's belief in the Unknowable permits him (he thinks) to avoid any metaphysical commitment concerning the nature of reality. He denies that he subscribes to materialism, determinism, or to any “ism” that implies knowledge of reality as it exists apart from consciousness. The true natures of space, time, matter, motion, and force are “absolutely incomprehensible.”²² Even a “true cognition of self” is impossible.²³ “Ultimate Scientific Ideas, then, are all representations of realities that cannot be comprehended.” The man of science “truly knows that in its ultimate nature nothing can be known.” The “reality existing behind all appearances is, and must ever be, unknown.”²⁴

This metaphysical agnosticism, it seems, threatens to plunge Spencer into a hopeless solipsism or, at the very least, into skepticism. If we can only know phenomena, if we can never penetrate into the noumenal realm, then how can we ever be said to have accurate or verifiable knowledge?

Spencer counters skepticism with his theory of “transfigured realism,” which he summarizes as follows:

While *some* objective existence, manifested under *some* conditions, remains as the final necessity of thought, there does not remain the implication that this existence and these conditions are more to us than the unknown correlatives of our feelings and the relations among our

feelings. The Realism we are committed to is one which simply asserts objective existence as separate from, and independent of, subjective existence. But it affirms neither that any one mode of this objective existence is in reality that which it seems, nor that the connexions among its modes are objectively what they seem. Thus it stands widely distinguished from Crude Realism; and to mark the distinction it may properly be called Transfigured Realism.²⁵

To say that knowledge is phenomenal or pertains only to appearance is not to suggest that knowledge is deceptive or unreliable. Spencer emphatically denies that his phenomenalism lends aid and comfort to skepticism. First, as he repeatedly emphasizes, "It is impossible to conceive that our knowledge is a knowledge of Appearances only, without at the same time assuming a Reality of which they are appearances; for appearance without reality is unthinkable."²⁶ Phenomenal knowledge, in other words, is not manufactured by the mind; it is the product of external forces. To argue that such knowledge is somehow not real, or that it is illusory, is again to misuse words as metaphysicians are prone to do. We often associate the term "appearance" with visual perceptions; and because vision is vulnerable to deceptions and illusions, we assume that a similar uncertainty must attend every use of the word "appearance." "Had *phenomenon* and *appearance* no such misleading associations, little, if any, of this mental confusion would result."²⁷ The sense of touch better conveys what Spencer means than does vision. A tactual impression indicates that *something* caused the sensation, without giving us knowledge of the nature of the cause. This is the "appearance" to which Spencer refers.

All knowledge is relative to human consciousness, but this does not disqualify knowledge as "real." The idea of reality itself is a mode of consciousness; we can never escape our consciousness in order to observe a reality "out there" unvarnished by perception. To use the term "real" to designate something that can be known without an act of consciousness is therefore a "verbal fiction." In fact, "By reality we mean *persistence* in consciousness. . . . The real, as we conceive it, is distinguished solely by the test of persistence; for by this test we separate it from what we call the unreal."²⁸

There is a clear distinction, Spencer maintains, between a person standing before us and the idea of such a person. The person persists in consciousness; we cannot will him away as we can the idea. The former is objective, i.e., an object of consciousness; whereas the latter is subjective, i.e., a subject of consciousness. This subject-object relation (which may also be described as self and not-self, or as ego and non-ego) is *the* fundamental context in which all thought occurs. To reduce the objective to the subjective (as the idealist does), or to question the existence of the objective (as the skeptic does), is to obliterate the basic relation that makes thought possible. Thought, as we have seen, is for Spencer the establishing of mental relationships—a process of classification. If the basic distinction between subject

and object were not an inherent feature of our mental apparatus, thought as we know it would be impossible.

(We should pause here to consider what may strike the reader as a peculiar feature of Spencer's methodology. Time and again Spencer appears to confuse epistemology with psychology. By showing what a person is compelled to believe psychologically, Spencer infers that such beliefs enjoy epistemological validity. This is no oversight or slip on Spencer's part; it is a deliberate method employed throughout his epistemology. Although it is an exaggeration to say, as J. D. Y. Peel does, that Spencer's "general procedure is to reduce logic to psychology,"²⁹ it is nevertheless true that Spencer's epistemology is inextricably tied to his psychology—including his notions of necessity and impossibility, for which he was criticized by J. S. Mill.³⁰ The rationale behind Spencer's approach and its important implications for his system will, I hope, become clear as we proceed.)

Given that phenomenal knowledge is not illusory, what is the nature of the correspondence between our ideas and unknowable reality? Since we are denied direct access to the noumenal world, how can we segregate subjective beliefs that are worthy of acceptance from those that are not?

Spencer attempts to answer this question in his chapter "Transfigured Realism" (in the second volume of *Principles of Psychology*). There he argues that the correspondence between the objective and subjective is indirect. We cannot take an idea *A* and compare it directly to an objective property *X*. But if *X* is uniformly connected to *Y* in the outer world, this relationship will manifest itself in consciousness as an invariable connection between *A* and *B* in thought. The objective relation between *X* and *Y* corresponds to the subjective relation between *A* and *B*. Reasoning, as we have seen, consists of establishing mental relationships. When the relationship between mental states corresponds to objective relationships, we have justified beliefs.

An illustration offered by Spencer may clarify this point. Imagine looking through a window at a trunk. Dots may be placed on the window corresponding to each angle of the trunk, and then these dots may be joined with lines. We now have an "outline-representation" of the trunk, a representation that is far different than the trunk itself. The outline is two dimensional, whereas the trunk is three dimensional. The trunk is much larger than its outline, its position in space is different, and so forth.

Nevertheless, representation and reality are so connected that the positions of his eye, the glass, and the trunk, being given, no other figure is possible; and if the trunk is changed in attitude or distance, the changes in the figure are such that from them the changes in the trunk may be known. Here, then, he has a case of a symbolization such that, along with extreme unlikeness between the symbol and the actuality, there is an exact though indirect correspondence between the varying relations among the components of the one and the varying relations among the components of the other.³¹

Spencer applies this theory of indirect correspondence to all knowledge in rather elaborate detail. Even granting his position, however, there remains a nagging question. Has he not merely shifted the problem rather than solved it? If we cannot directly compare the subjective to the objective, how can we compare a subjective relation to an objective relation? Reality would seem to be closed to investigation in this area as well.

This is where Spencer's evolutionary psychology enters center stage. Intelligence is a manifestation of organic evolution and is subject to the same laws of development. Life, in general terms, is "*the continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations.*"³² An organism is continuously striving to adapt to its external environment. This requires that it be able to discriminate, if only on a rudimentary level, between different kinds of stimuli. If it is to survive, it must be able to react differently in different circumstances. As life forms became more complex, and as the external relations they faced became more numerous and complex, more sophisticated adaptive mechanisms evolved—from reflex actions and instincts ("compound reflex action"³³) to memory and intelligence. All of these fall on an evolutionary continuum with no clear line of demarcation between one development and the next.

When regarded under its fundamental aspect, the highest reasoning is seen to be one with all the lower forms of human thought, and one with instinct and reflex action, even in their simplest manifestations. The universal process of intelligence is the *assimilation* of impressions. And the differences displayed in the ascending grades of intelligence are consequent upon the increasing complexity of the impressions assimilated.³⁴

Intelligence, then, is a sophisticated mechanism of adjustment. As we have seen, its basic function is to classify, i.e., to establish mental relationships. "Under its most general aspect . . . all mental action whatever is definable as *the continuous differentiation and integration of states of consciousness.*"³⁵ When the classification becomes too complex to be processed automatically, reasoning emerges to handle the overload.

Reason evolved, then, as an adaptive mechanism—as a means of facilitating man's life-sustaining activities. But its evolution has been unceasing and continues even now. Throughout the long history of conscious life, the environment has bombarded organisms with regular "impressions" (i.e., stimuli). These persistent impressions have altered the nervous structure underlying intelligence, and the resulting modifications have been passed from generation to generation. (Spencer, as is well known, embraced a Lamarckian form of evolution where acquired characteristics are inheritable.) "Hereditary transmission," argues Spencer, "applies to psychical peculiarities as well as to physical peculiarities."³⁶

From this modifiability of consciousness, Spencer derives a theory of *a priori* "forms of intuition" or "forms of thought." The only inherent form of thought is the "consciousness of likeness and unlikeness"³⁷—this is the

basic process of consciousness that renders classification possible. But through innumerable experiences of the human race, certain "universal forms" of reality have enmeshed themselves in the fabric of human intelligence. The invariable features of the real (noumenal) world have established corresponding relations in consciousness through modification of the nervous system. The result of Spencer's reasoning is a modified Kantianism.³⁸ He embraces *a priori* truths as far as the individual is concerned, but maintains that these truths have their foundation ultimately in the accumulated experience of the human race. The terms "*a priori* truth" and "necessary truth"

are to be interpreted not in the old sense, as implying cognitions wholly independent of experiences, but as implying cognitions that have been rendered organic by immense accumulations of experiences, received partly by the individual, but mainly by all ancestral individuals whose nervous systems he inherits.³⁹

Spencer elaborates on this theme as follows:

Corresponding to absolute external relations, there are established in the structure of the nervous system absolute internal relations—relations that are potentially present before birth in the shape of definite nervous connexions; that are antecedent to, and independent of, individual experiences; and that are automatically disclosed along with the first cognitions.... But these pre-determined internal relations, though independent of the experiences of the individual, are not independent of experiences in general: they have been determined by the experiences of preceding organisms.... [T]he human brain is an organized register of infinitely-numerous experiences received during the evolution of life, or rather, during the evolution of that series of organisms through which the human organism has been reached. The effects of the most uniform and frequent of these experiences have been successively bequeathed, principal and interest; and have slowly amounted to that high intelligence which lies latent in the brain of the infant—which the infant in after life exercises and perhaps strengthens or further complicates—and which, with minute additions, it bequeaths to future generations.⁴⁰

External relations, according to Spencer, impose themselves on the structure of consciousness, causing certain internal relations to become inseparable features of thought. This leads to Spencer's "law of intelligence": "the strength of the tendency which the antecedent of any psychical change has to be followed by its consequent, is proportionate to the persistence of the union between the external things they symbolize."⁴¹ A persistent relation manifest in consciousness shows that this relationship corresponds to an objective relation, because the subjective persistence could have arisen only as a result of innumerable experiences. Thus, returning to an earlier point, although the subjective *A* cannot be known to correspond to the objective *X*, the subjective *A-B* relation, if it is a persistent feature of thought, can be known to correspond to the objective *X-Y*

relation. Persistence is the key here. Just as the man standing before us is termed "real" because he persists in consciousness, so a relation that persists in consciousness—a relation that cannot be expunged from thought—is likewise real.

Here we have the merger of epistemology and psychology. Spencer's ultimate criterion of certitude is a psychological test. The psychological inability to conceive the negation of a simple proposition⁴² "shows a cognition to possess the highest rank—is the criterion by which its unsurpassable validity is known."⁴³ To assert the psychological impossibility of negating a proposition "is at the same time to assert the psychological necessity we are under of thinking it, and to give our logical justification for holding it to be unquestionable."⁴⁴ The mistakes encountered in employing this test do not militate against the test itself, any more than mistakes in addition negate mathematical laws.⁴⁵ This "universal postulate," as Spencer calls it, offers psychological necessity as the basis of rational justification.

The foregoing discussion of Spencer's epistemology is but an outline of the theory presented in *First Principles* and *The Principles of Psychology*. It sets the context for his presentation of causation, to which we now turn.

III. Force and Causation

Philosophy, according to Spencer, represents "completely unified knowledge." By deriving principles of the highest generality, it seeks to integrate the "partially-unified knowledge" of the various sciences.⁴⁶ But philosophy is possible only to a developed intelligence, and such intelligence is "framed upon certain organized and consolidated conceptions of which it cannot divest itself and which it can no more stir without using than the body can stir without help of the limbs."⁴⁷ These indispensable conceptions, these *a priori* ideas, are the axioms from which all reasoning—and therefore all philosophy—must proceed. They cannot be proved because the concept of "proof" presupposes their validity. We must accept these axiomatic ideas as true, at least provisionally, in order to philosophize. Then we can test them (after a fashion) by ascertaining if the conclusions deducible from them correspond with observed facts. If these axioms allow us to anticipate experiences, and if they enable us to coordinate our beliefs in a coherent manner, then they have been vindicated (even if not technically proved) in the only way possible.⁴⁸

Four of Spencer's *a priori* ideas are space, time, matter, and motion.⁴⁹ Analysis reveals that these are not fundamental ideas, however; they "are built up of, or abstracted from, experiences of force."⁵⁰ Force, although the "ultimate of ultimates" as far as *a priori* ideas are concerned, is an abstraction and a generalization derived from the fundamental sensation of "resistance." Resistance is "the primordial, the universal, the ever-present constituent of consciousness."⁵¹ What is resistance? It is the subjective feeling of muscular tension, or strain, which man experiences when he comes

into direct contact with physical objects. In order to effect change (e.g., to move an object), man must exert muscular force; and when man contacts an object with this muscular force, the sensation of resistance is the consequence. Eventually this sensation of resistance is abstracted from particulars, and it is generalized to include all kinds of change, including change in the external world. Spencer explains at some length how this basic notion of force is the ground from which other *a priori* ideas are generated. When force encounters resistance, for example, that which causes the resistance constitutes our fundamental notion of "matter." When, on the other hand, a muscular action is not hindered at all, we have the basis from which the idea of "space" is generated. (It must be remembered that Spencer is not suggesting that the process of abstraction occurs within a single life span. The individual is born with the "form" or "idea" of force preprogrammed into his nervous system. Force and its derivatives are among the "organized nervous connexions caused by habit in thousands of generations."⁵²)

With this notion of "force" we have the rudiments of Spencer's theory of causation. Causal necessity—the uniformity of physical laws—is, for Spencer, a corollary of a "physical axiom" known as the "persistence of force." Spencer is not always clear or consistent when defending his approach to causation, but I shall attempt to outline what I regard as its outstanding features.

First, we should understand what Spencer means by "physical axioms." These are necessary truths in the physical realm which are as uncontroversial as logical or mathematical truths. It is true, Spencer admits, that undeveloped or undisciplined minds may be unable to grasp the "necessity" of physical axioms, but the same is true of mathematical and logical axioms. A savage may not even know that 7 and 5 are 12, much less understand that 7 and 5 *must* equal 12. A child learning arithmetic may add 7 and 5 to equal 11, so the necessity of the procedure obviously escapes him as well. The perception of necessity, in other words, depends upon the development of intelligence; and merely to trot out witnesses who cannot see the necessity of physical axioms no more refutes those axioms than the savage and the child refute mathematical laws.⁵³

The "physical axiom" with which we are most concerned is the persistence of force. But for the purpose of illustrating Spencer's method of verifying these axioms, his argument for "the indestructibility of matter" may be profitably consulted.

"The consciousness of logical necessity," argues Spencer, "is the consciousness that a certain conclusion is implicitly contained in certain premises explicitly stated."⁵⁴ Similarly, implicit within a physical concept, such as matter, there may lurk necessary implications that need only to be drawn out. A basic implication of the concept "matter," Spencer contends, is its indestructibility—the principle that matter can be neither created nor destroyed. As mentioned previously, the idea of "matter" is derived from

the idea of "force," so he views the indestructibility argument as resting ultimately on the persistence of force (to which we shall turn shortly). But note this major argument put forward by Spencer for the indestructibility of matter:

Conceive space to be cleared of all bodies save one. Now imagine the remaining one not to be removed from its place, but to lapse into nothing while standing in that place. You fail. The space which was solid you cannot conceive becoming empty, save by transfer of that which made it solid. What is termed the ultimate incompressibility of Matter, is an admitted law of thought. However small the bulk to which we conceive a piece of matter reduced, it is impossible to conceive it reduced into nothing. . . . Our inability to conceive Matter becoming non-existent, is consequent on the nature of thought. Thought consists in the establishment of relations. There can be no relation established, and therefore no thought framed, when one of the related terms is absent from consciousness. Hence it is impossible to think of something becoming nothing, for the same reason that it is impossible to think of nothing becoming something—the reason, namely, that nothing cannot become an object of consciousness. The annihilation of Matter is unthinkable for the same reason that the creation of Matter is unthinkable.⁵⁵

There are obvious objections to this argument that we need not explore,⁵⁶ but the passage is interesting as a typical Spencer argument that incorporates his "universal postulate" (the inconceivability test) and his theory of reasoning as an act of relating. Note also the mention of a "law of thought." Such laws describe how reasoning operates as a psychological fact, not—as many philosophers would maintain—how reasoning *should* operate as judged by an ideal standard. It is because Spencer believes that psychological laws have developed as a survival response over many generations, and therefore must correspond to objective reality, that he is willing to place confidence in them as a guide to truth.

More fundamental than the indestructibility of matter is the persistence of force. This means that the quantity of force in the universe (as known phenomenally) remains constant, neither decreasing nor increasing. We observe unceasing change in nature, and in asserting that force, although modifiable in its form, remains constant in quantity, we are simply asserting the persistence of the unknowable cause that underlies changing phenomena.⁵⁷

This physical axiom cannot be proved, because "it is tacitly assumed in every experiment or observation by which it is proposed to prove it."⁵⁸ Quantitative science requires measurement, and measurement requires a unit of measure that is assumed to remain constant through time. Specifically, units of linear extension (such as we find on a gauge or ruler) are the basis of measurement; and we must presume that these units do not vary during or between acts of measurement, or else variations may be caused by

the measurement process rather than by the thing being measured. This argument applies to the "space-occupying species of force," i.e., matter. Spencer uses a similar argument regarding the other major category of force known as "energy." In all measurement involving weight, one must presume a constant gravitational pull—i.e., one must presume the persistence of force—if experimentation is to proceed.

From the persistence of force, there follows the persistence of relations among forces.

Supposing a given manifestation of force, under a given form and given conditions, be either preceded by or succeeded by some other manifestation, it must, in all cases where the form and conditions are the same, be preceded by or succeeded by such other manifestation. Every antecedent mode of the Unknowable must have an invariable connexion, quantitative and qualitative, with that mode of the Unknowable, which we call its consequent.⁵⁹

This is a statement of the uniformity of causal law. Uniformity of law, Spencer argues, is "resolvable as we find it into the persistence of relations among forces" which in turn "is a corollary from the persistence of force."⁶⁰ Thus what was originally an inductive conclusion—that there is a constant causal relation among phenomena—is now seen to follow with deductive necessity from the persistence of force.

Given identical causes and conditions, identical effects must follow. We simply cannot, according to Spencer, imagine identical causes and conditions being followed by different effects, because this would require that we conceive of force as increasing or diminishing in quantity—something Spencer says is contrary to the laws of thought. For example, imagine identical bullets fired from identical guns under identical conditions. To simultaneously imagine the bullets travelling at different speeds or following different trajectories is impossible. We would have to imagine that identical forces did different work—that some force had disappeared or come from nothing. "Such a modification of the consequents without modification of the antecedents, is thinkable only through the impossible thought that something has become nothing or nothing has become something."⁶¹

Again, Spencer argues that the uniformity of law, the constant relation between cause and consequent, is presupposed by scientific investigation and cannot itself be proved by science. We observe innumerable instances of uniform laws, but causal necessity cannot be proved inductively. We understand the necessity of cause and effect when we understand that the uniformity of law is an *a priori* truth—a physical axiom. Inherited nervous systems have established this as a principle by which all reasoning must abide. In his characteristic manner, therefore, Spencer argues not that causal necessity is a principle that we *should* accept given the arguments in its favor, but that causal necessity is a principle that we do and *must* accept given the organic constitution of our reasoning mechanism.

This lengthy summary of Spencer's epistemology and its relation to his

theory of causation brings us to the most famous aspect of his work: his theory of evolution. I shall not attempt to summarize his various laws of evolution (such as the instability of the homogeneous) unless a particular law is germane to a topic under discussion. Here I wish to emphasize that, in Spencer's view, the theory of evolution is not complete until its laws can be deduced from the persistence of force and the persistence of relations among forces.⁶² (The latter, as we have seen, is another way of stating the uniformity of causal law.) The universality of causation, writes Spencer, implies "the interpretation of all things in terms of a never-ceasing redistribution of matter and motion. . . ."⁶³ A theory of evolution is but the logical unpacking of the causal relations implicit within the persistence of force, so the laws of evolution presented in *First Principles* may be viewed as the logical unraveling of Spencer's theory of causation.⁶⁴

If evolutionary laws are logically deducible from the persistence of force and the uniformity of law, then they should apply to all phenomena—from the inorganic to the "super-organic" (i.e., social phenomena). Indeed, this evolutionary analysis is the guiding theme of the *Synthetic Philosophy*. The search for causal relations as manifest in evolutionary principles is the means by which the unified knowledge of philosophy can be most nearly attained. That some aspect of phenomena should be considered exempt from causal regularity is for Spencer unthinkable. Such a suggestion is a regression to a pre-scientific mode of thinking.

Before turning to Spencer's application of causation to social and moral theory, we should note a few aspects of his evolutionary theory that become especially important later in this essay.

Evolution continues until equilibrium is achieved, after which dissolution occurs. Although phenomena in their totality are subject to this sequence, it does not necessarily apply to any *particular* phenomenon (any particular person, species, society, etc.). In other words, evolution does *not* "imply in everything an *intrinsic* tendency to become something higher."⁶⁵ The progress of evolution in a particular case "is not necessary, but depends on conditions. . . ."⁶⁶ Where these conditions are absent, "retrogression" or "dissolution" follow (as when a species dies out).

The cosmic process brings about retrogression as well as progression, where the conditions favor it. Only amid an infinity of modifications, adjusted to an infinity of changes of circumstances, do there now and then occur some which constitute an advance: other changes meanwhile caused in other organisms, usually not constituting forward steps in organization, and often constituting steps backwards. Evolution does not imply a latent tendency to improve, everywhere in operation. There is no uniform ascent from lower to higher, but only an occasional production of a form which, in virtue of greater fitness for more complex conditions, becomes capable of a longer life of a more varied kind.⁶⁷

A related point is made by Spencer concerning his maligned "survival of the fittest" maxim. This, when applied to social theory, has earned him the

highly misleading label of "social Darwinist." Spencer makes it clear that survival of the fittest does *not* imply "survival of the better." "Under its rigorously-scientific form, the doctrine is expressible in purely-physical terms, which neither imply competition nor imply better and worse."⁶⁸ He writes:

the law is not the survival of the "better" or the "stronger". . . . It is the survival of those which are constitutionally fittest to thrive under the conditions in which they are placed; and very often that which, humanly speaking, is inferiority, causes the survival.⁶⁹

That Spencer uses "survival of the fittest" to describe a value-free evolutionary process should be kept firmly in mind, because this, perhaps more than any other doctrine, is the source of many confusions and misinterpretations of his theory.⁷⁰

Finally, we should note that the theory of universal causation led Spencer to reject any theory of free will in man. As much as Spencer dislikes terms like "determinism" (because they imply knowledge of the ultimate nature of things), he is clearly a determinist by any reasonable standard. Spencer rejects free will as a "subjective illusion":

That every one is at liberty to do what he desires to do (supposing there are no external hindrances), all admit. . . . But that every one is at liberty to desire or not to desire, which is the real proposition involved in the dogma of free will, is negatived as much by the analysis of consciousness as by the contents of the preceding chapters.⁷¹

The illusion of free will is reinforced by the apparent lack of uniformity in human action. This Spencer explains as owing to "the extreme complication of the forces in action," which are "so intricate, and from moment to moment so varied, that the effects are not calculable." Nevertheless, so-called volitional actions are "as conformable to law as the simplest reflex actions."⁷² The apparent lawlessness of human action should not deceive us into thinking that man is exempt from universal causal laws.

IV. Causation and Social Theory

If there is one thing that most Spencer critics and supporters agree on, it is that a strong tension exists between Spencer *qua* sociologist and Spencer *qua* libertarian. As a founding father of sociology, Spencer helped to create a discipline whose practitioners have (for the most part) been hostile to his *laissez faire*. Conversely, *laissez-faire* advocates typically look askance at Spencer's involvement in sociology, especially regarding his organismic concept of society. In view of this common complaint that Spencer's sociology lends more support to his political opponents than to his allies, it is surely a great irony that Spencer took precisely the opposite point of view. Spencer saw sociology as justifying less, rather than more, government intervention. Indeed, the basic political lesson to be learned from sociology is that polit-

ical meddling in voluntary relationships has many, often unforeseen, detrimental effects. And the idea of causation, here as elsewhere, plays a central role in Spencer's argument.

Spencer's most complete discussion of the methodology of social science appears in *The Study of Sociology*. Significantly, in the opening chapter ("Our Need of It") Spencer begins with examples of short-sighted political thinking by persons who have but a rudimentary grasp of social causation. Concerning those who offer simplistic political solutions for complex social problems, Spencer writes:

Proximate causes and proximate results are alone contemplated. There is scarcely any consciousness that the original causes are often numerous and widely different from the apparent cause; and that beyond each immediate result there will be multitudinous remote results, most of them quite incalculable.⁷³

Many people are ignorant of physical causation, so it is perhaps no surprise that many more are ignorant of social causation, which is "so much more subtle and complex."⁷⁴ Where there is little or no awareness of social causation, "political superstitions" flourish. Among these superstitions is the belief that government has a special efficacy beyond "that naturally possessed by a certain group of citizens subsidized by the rest of the citizens." In addition, the "ordinary political schemer is convinced that out of a legislative apparatus, properly devised and worked with due dexterity, may be had beneficial State-action without any detrimental reaction."⁷⁵

In opposition to these "crude political opinions" stands the sociologist: the scientist who understands that causal laws apply as much to society and social interaction as to other phenomena. The sociologist demands that society be studied "as lower phenomena have been studied — not, of course, after the same physical methods, but in conformity with the same principles."⁷⁶ The principles Spencer has in mind are causal laws.

An example of a causal law applied to social theory is seen in Spencer's principle called the "multiplication of effects." This asserts, in essence, that "the effect is more complex than the cause." According to Spencer, "when the components of a uniform aggregate are subject to uniform force, they, being differently conditioned, are differently modified."⁷⁷ Likewise, the previously uniform force becomes differentiated into a group of dissimilar forces; and as these dissimilar forces impact on still more aggregates, uniform or otherwise, further differentiation occurs in geometrical progression.

The multiplication of effects is a secondary cause of the evolutionary trend from homogeneity to heterogeneity,⁷⁸ and it explains the advance of society towards greater diversity and complexity. An increase in population, for instance, intensifies competition for the means of subsistence; and this pressures individuals to confine themselves to a specialized area of labor in which they are better able to compete. Along with the division of labor arise

new occupations and more efficient methods of production. New and better materials are discovered and are eventually used in areas other than those for which they were originally intended. New products emerge, altering the tastes, customs, and habits of a people. From the cause of population increase, therefore, a vastly complex social matrix emerges. One change induces countless others, and each of these changes in turn becomes a cause of innumerable other effects.⁷⁹

The multiplication of effects explains social heterogeneity, and it also explains the futility of attempting to legislate social ills out of existence. A particular piece of social legislation designed to cure a particular social evil will set in motion a complex network of causation with unpredictable consequences. "How, indeed, can any man, and how more especially can any man of scientific culture, think that special results of special political acts can be calculated, when he contemplates the incalculable complexity of the influences under which each individual, and *à fortiori* each society, develops, lives, and decays?"⁸⁰ When we examine a single phenomenon—say, the price of cotton—we witness extremely complex and intricate causal relationships that render exact prediction impossible. How much more impossible it must be to calculate the impact of a single law on the whole of society.

This caveat against prediction is, for Spencer, a matter of degree. To say that exact, quantitative prediction (or, as Spencer calls it, "prevision") is impossible, is not to say that *all* prediction is impossible. There is a degree of regularity in human behavior that makes general predictions, and therefore a social science, possible.⁸¹ This is where we must fall back on our causal laws. These laws—the principles of evolution that apply to all phenomena—specify the general course a society will follow *given certain conditions*. If we know that, given certain conditions, a society will continually progress, then sociology can tell us what conditions must be maintained. This progress cannot be accelerated beyond its normal rate—and any attempt to do so by legislative means is presumptuous tinkering with natural law—but the natural progress can be retarded or reversed by short-sighted human intervention. Sociology, therefore, cannot give us knowledge with which to speed up social progress artificially, but it can give us knowledge of *how not to interfere*, thereby preserving the conditions essential to progress.⁸²

What are the essential conditions of social progress with which sociology bids us not to interfere? All conditions can be narrowed to one fundamental principle: that the relation between cause and consequence in human action should not be interfered with. Each person should experience the natural effects of his own conduct. If, as Spencer puts it, "evil arises from divorcing cause and consequence in conduct, then the implication is that good arises from making the connexion between cause and consequence more definite and certain."⁸³

This conduct/consequence doctrine recurs throughout Spencer's social

and ethical writings. It is referred to, directly or indirectly, dozens of times, and he leaves no doubt as to its importance:

The law of relation between conduct and consequence, which, throughout the animal kingdom at large, brings prosperity to those individuals which are structurally best adapted to their conditions of existence, and which, under its ethical aspect, is expressed in the principle that each individual ought to receive the good and the evil which arises from its own nature, is the primary law holding of all creatures.⁸⁴

Despite the stress that Spencer puts on this doctrine, it has been strangely ignored by most commentators. *It may be described, without exaggeration, as the fundamental principle running throughout his social, ethical, and political theories.* We shall examine it in more detail when we discuss Spencer's ethical theory (particularly his theory of justice). For now we shall summarize its role in Spencer's sociology.

The nature of man, according to Spencer's evolutionary theory, is not fixed; it is "indefinitely modifiable,"⁸⁵ especially in its intellectual and moral aspects. We have seen how *a priori* ideas become an inherent feature of man's intelligence, as innumerable experiences of the human race have modified man's nervous structure. The same is true, Spencer maintains, of moral sentiments. As part of life's adaptive mechanism, man's emotional responses have adjusted themselves to the conditions of survival, which vary depending on the environment. Life-sustaining actions, habitually repeated, generate feelings of pleasure, while life-negating actions generate feelings of pain. In a primitive society where warlike qualities (strength, cunning, etc.) are necessary for survival, feelings of pleasure accompany the exercise of warlike faculties. As society evolves, as voluntary cooperation becomes the dominant mode of interaction, new emotions suited to the new environment evolve as well. Brutality generates abhorrence, and pleasure is derived from peaceful activities. These evolving moral sentiments, like *a priori* ideas, result from the accumulated experiences of the human race. They become an organic part of man's nature, and the modifications of one generation are inherited by the next, and so on indefinitely.

The evolution of moral sentiments, argues Spencer, is an integral part of man's evolutionary development. But the progress of moral sentiments to a higher stage, like all progress, is conditional. Since sentiments are adaptive responses to the environment (and in this they illustrate the life process in general), it is the environment to which man is adapting that will determine which specific sentiments will evolve. The natural course of social evolution is towards increasing heterogeneity; a society becomes more specialized and differentiated. But this process also entails more integration, i.e., more interdependence among the individuals in society. As the division of labor becomes more specialized, each person must depend more on others for desperately needed goods and services. And as voluntary cooperation and

exchange become essential to human survival, particular sentiments suited to these activities evolve as well. "Altruistic sentiments" develop which motivate one to respect the rights of others and—at the highest stage of social evolution—to further the welfare of others voluntarily. That is,

since, as a society advances in organization, the inter-dependence of its parts increases, and the well-being of each is more bound up with the well-being of all, it results that the growth of feelings which find satisfaction in the well-being of all, is the growth of feelings adjusted to a fundamental unchanging condition to social welfare.⁸⁶

The relation between social evolution and moral evolution is not one-directional. Social conditions influence moral sentiments; but these moral sentiments provide motivation for human actions and thereby affect social conditions. There is a constant interaction between social and moral development—an interaction, Spencer argues, that will continue only so long as the basic condition for interaction is maintained. This condition is expressed in the conduct/consequence doctrine. If individuals are to adapt to the changing conditions of social progress, they must be free to experience the beneficial or harmful consequences of their own actions. If voluntary cooperation is to evolve unchecked, for example, then individuals must be free to experience the rewards of such cooperation. In this way the moral sentiments appropriate to voluntary cooperation, particularly the sentiment of justice, will emerge over time. If, on the other hand, the causal relation is severed—if human intervention denies to successful activity its reward or grants to unsuccessful activity undeserved rewards—then moral sentiments inappropriate to social progress will develop and possibly arrest or reverse progress itself.

This is what we see with laws that are positively-regulative, i.e., laws that interfere with voluntary transactions. Such laws sever the causal relation between conduct and consequence, thereby hindering social and moral progress. The sociologist, with his grasp of social causation, is able to point out the long-term consequences of legislative meddling. He is able to explain the laws of social progress that need *laissez faire* in order to operate. "I do not think," writes Spencer, "that *laissez-faire* is to be regarded simply as a politico-economical principle only, but as a much wider principle—the principle of letting all citizens take the benefits and evils of their own acts."⁸⁷

In *The Principles of Sociology* Spencer likens social development to a "rolling snowball or a spreading fire" where there is "compound accumulation and acceleration." An intricate social network evolves (as we see in a market economy) that is so interdependent that any considerable change in one activity "sends reverberating changes among all the rest."⁸⁸ Society, in other words, is an unplanned spontaneous order, and a major function of sociology is to explain the evolution of this order that is the result of human action but not of human design.⁸⁹ Society is not a product of reason or

planning, and its development cannot be directed by reason or planning. Spencer has nothing but contempt for social planners, whom he refers to as "schemers":

A fly seated on the surface of the body has about as good a conception of its internal structure, as one of these schemers has of the social organization in which he is embedded.⁹⁰

The preceding account, albeit highly condensed, shows how Spencer relates his sociology to his advocacy of *laissez faire*. His theory of causation in the form of the conduct/consequence doctrine is the connecting link. The scientist seeks to apply causal laws to changing phenomena, and the social scientist is no different. The sociologist, after recognizing the conduct/consequence doctrine to be an indispensable condition of social progress, will relate this knowledge to others. The result, Spencer hopes, will be to reduce meddlesome interference by politicians who fail to see the long-range effects of their actions.

But what of Spencer's concept of the "social organism"? "I cannot but think," wrote Thomas Huxley, "that the real force of the analogy is totally opposed to the negative view of State function."⁹¹ "In fact," echoed the philosopher D. G. Ritchie, "the conception of society as an organism seems to admit of more easy applications to the defence of just those very views about the State which Mr. Spencer most dislikes. . . ."⁹² To deal with this issue adequately would require a separate essay, but I would like to emphasize a few aspects of the "social organism" analogy employed by Spencer.

This analogy unquestionably causes Spencer some difficulties, and in drawing out the similarities between society and an organism he sometimes pushes the parallels to absurd limits. But we must remember that this is an analogy used by Spencer for the purpose of illustration; he does not intend to say that society is literally an organism, as this passage makes clear:

Here let it once more be distinctly asserted that there exist no analogies between the body politic and a living body, save those necessitated by that mutual dependence of parts which they display in common. Though, in foregoing chapters, sundry comparisons of social structures and functions to structures and functions in the human body, have been made, they have been made only because structures and functions in the human body furnish familiar illustrations of structures and functions in general. The social organism, discrete instead of concrete, asymmetrical instead of symmetrical, sensitive in all its units instead of having a single sensitive centre, *is not comparable to any particular type of individual organism, animal or vegetal*. All kinds of creatures are alike in so far as each exhibits co-operation among its components for the benefit of the whole; and this trait, common to them, is a trait common also to societies. . . . community in the fundamental principles of organization is the only community asserted.⁹³ (Emphasis added)

Spencer maintains that the analogy between biology and sociology

"merely yields mutual illumination,"⁹⁴ and that it is "but as a scaffolding to help in building up a coherent body of sociological inductions"⁹⁵ — inductions that will stand on their own merit, if need be. In other words, societies exhibit certain principles of organization that are common to all phenomena, organic and inorganic. The organic analogy is used because social organization more closely parallels a living entity than it does an inanimate object.

Prior to his discussion of the social organism in *The Principles of Sociology*, Spencer concludes that society is "an entity," and he rejects the "nominalist" view (which might be described today as methodological individualism) that "the units of a society alone exist, while the existence of the society is but verbal."⁹⁶ Spencer's argument for this may appear puzzling, unless one understands his epistemological framework which we examined previously.

Thus we consistently regard a society as an entity, because, though formed of discrete units, a certain concreteness in the aggregate of them is implied by the general persistence of the arrangements among them throughout the area occupied.⁹⁷

Recall that, for Spencer, "persistence in consciousness" is the sole test by which we distinguish the real from the unreal. Because societies exhibit persistent relations among their component parts, Spencer is led by his epistemological criterion to regard them as "real" things. If there is a problem in Spencer's analysis, therefore, it lies deeper than his social methodology. It lies in his epistemological theory.

Whatever the actual implications of the social organism analogy may be, Spencer clearly regards it as supportive of his *laissez faire*. To view society as an organism is to understand that it "is a growth and not a manufacture," and that it is "not artificially put together" but instead has "spontaneously evolved."⁹⁸ The organic analogy enables Spencer to illustrate social differentiation, specialization, and — perhaps most importantly for his *laissez faire* — the delicate interdependence of individuals in an advanced society. These add up in Spencer's eyes to a complex spontaneous order that can be interfered with only at great peril.

V. Ethics and the Conduct/Consequence Doctrine

Spencer regards his scientific system of ethics as the culmination and driving force of his life's work. From 1842 (when Spencer published *The Proper Sphere of Government*) onwards, "my ultimate purpose, lying behind all proximate purposes, has been that of finding for the principles of right and wrong in conduct at large, a scientific basis."⁹⁹ The "establishment of rules of right conduct on a scientific basis is a pressing need," wrote Spencer in 1879; and he offered his *Principles of Ethics* to fill that need.

This ultimate purpose of Spencer's work — the transformation of ethics

into a science—is to be accomplished through the fusion of moral principles and causal necessity. Spencer wishes to deduce moral rules from “the laws of life” and thereby achieve “results which follow . . . in the same necessary way as does the trajectory of a cannon-shot from the laws of motion and atmospheric resistance.”¹⁰⁰ This emphasis on causation is present even in Spencer’s early work, *Social Statics*. There he speaks of “an indissoluble bond between cause and consequence” and “the inseparable connection between conduct and its results.” He maintains: “there is an inevitable law of causation in human affairs, which it is for man to learn and conform to.”¹⁰¹

But the young Spencer, coming as he did from a tradition of Protestant dissent, placed his ethical system on an essentially theological foundation. “God wills man’s happiness,” he asserts in *Social Statics*, and “God intends he should have that liberty” essential to happiness.¹⁰² Spencer eventually became dissatisfied with this *deus ex machina*, particularly as his agnosticism solidified in later years, and he set out to provide a “scientific” underpinning for his ethics and, ultimately, his theory of natural rights.

Spencer views deduction as a defining characteristic of a mature science. Hence, if ethics is to achieve scientific status, its moral rules must be deductively ascertainable from causal laws: “throughout the whole of human conduct, necessary relations of causes and effects prevail; and . . . from them are ultimately derived all moral rules.”¹⁰³ Spencer leaves no doubt that this derivation, in order to be scientific, must be deductive; “rules of conduct can become scientific only when they are deduced from these causal relations.”¹⁰⁴

Spencer objects to other ethical systems because “they are characterized either by entire absence of the idea of causation, or by inadequate presence of it.”¹⁰⁵ By alleging that other theories “neglect ultimate causal connexions,” Spencer means that they fail to posit causal laws from which moral rules necessarily follow, thereby preventing the elevation of ethics to a science.

This is one reason why Spencer criticized utilitarianism (or “empirical utilitarianism,” as he sometimes called it¹⁰⁶). Because utilitarians classify actions as beneficial or harmful according to their consequences, they recognize causation to a limited extent. But utilitarianism (according to Spencer) is based on the observation of particular cases, from which general rules are reached through induction. Therefore, although utilitarians can say that certain consequences do in fact follow certain actions, they cannot assert that these consequences *must* follow as a matter of causal necessity. Utilitarians *assume* that like relations will hold in the future, but they cannot produce necessary grounds for so believing. Ethics, thus deprived of necessity and predictability, is denied “a completely-scientific form of knowledge.”¹⁰⁷

It is not sufficient, Spencer argues, for ethics merely to list which actions

cause which consequences. Ethics must explain "how and why certain modes of conduct are detrimental, and certain other modes beneficial."

These good and bad results cannot be accidental, but must be necessary consequences of the constitution of things; and I conceive it to be the business of Moral Science to deduce, from the laws of life and the conditions of existence, what kinds of action necessarily tend to produce happiness, and what kinds to produce unhappiness.¹⁰⁸

Why does Spencer oppose the inductive method of "empirical utilitarianism"? Two of his reasons are relevant here. First, suppose we observe (as best as we can) which actions produce the greatest surplus of pleasures over pains and then generalize from these observations to arrive at ethical principles. These principles then become the basis by which we judge the legitimacy of social and political institutions. This is fine, Spencer says, *if* we assume that human nature remains constant over time. If we assume that our descendants will derive pleasures and pains from the same kinds of actions as we do presently, then a case might be made for the empirical method (although other obstacles remain, such as the variations of pleasure and pain among people of the same generation¹⁰⁹). The crucial question, therefore, is: Are men changing? If they are, then empirical generalizations, even if we assume their validity at the present time, will turn out to be mistaken in the long run. Imagine an empirical utilitarian among ancient Norsemen who derived their pleasure from combat. Now imagine the same utilitarian in a peaceful, industrial society where violence causes intense feelings of anguish. Surely, argues Spencer, the ethical principles reached through induction will differ in each case. Similarly, the causes of pleasure and pain will differ in future generations.

Why is this important? Because to judge our current institutions (especially political institutions) on the basis of the present connections between actions and their emotional concomitants is, in effect, to freeze progress at its current level. It is to hinder the development of "higher" emotional sentiments, such as "positive beneficence," which Spencer believes will evolve if given the chance. Moral sentiments, argues Spencer, are subject to evolutionary progress if the proper conditions are maintained. A "rational utilitarian" (Spencer's alternative to an empirical utilitarian) will deduce moral principles from the laws of life, including the laws of human development. His conclusions, therefore, instead of resting on current pleasure-pain responses, will specify the *general conditions* that must be maintained if the evolution of moral sentiments is to continue on its normal course. (Note the similarity of this argument to Spencer's argument concerning social progress in the preceding discussion of sociology.)

Spencer's second objection to empirical utilitarianism is a bit complicated, but a consideration of it will lead us directly into some important features of Spencer's ethical theory. The gist of this criticism is that empirical utilitarianism has little, if any, relevance to the moral conduct of individ-

uals—i.e., to the way humans actually (and, given their natures, *must*) behave. To expect individuals significantly to alter their behavior on the basis of a conscious calculation of utility seems to Spencer absurd. The individual is born with moral sentiments (innate emotional reactions), and these sentiments have evolved over generations. Thus, “there exists a primary basis of morals independent of, and in a sense antecedent to, that which is furnished by experiences of utility.”¹¹¹ These sentiments, Spencer emphasizes, were not the result of conscious calculations; rather, they were “established by habitual association of feelings, without any idea of causal connection.”¹¹² In other words, as life-sustaining activities were habitually repeated, pleasure became associated with those activities. The pleasure-pain response is part of life's adaptive mechanism, and the accumulated responses of past generations have rendered certain moral sentiments organic. The empirical utilitarian, in bidding people to follow the dictates of rational calculation—as if moral sentiments can be ignored—is therefore demanding the impossible.

This brings us to a major element in Spencer's ethical theory that most commentators manage to overlook. Although Spencer may be called a “rationalist” insofar as he believes that ethical principles are subject to rational demonstration, he is far from being a rationalist in his analysis of human behavior. Reason takes a poor second to emotion in his analysis of human action. “The emotions are the masters,” he writes, and “the intellect is the servant.”¹¹³ Cognition “does *not* produce action.”

It is never the knowledge which is the moving agent in conduct; but it is always the feeling which goes along with that knowledge, or is excited by it. . . . The mere cognition does not affect conduct—conduct is affected only when the cognition passes out of that intellectual form in which the idea of distress is little more than verbal, into a form in which this term of the proposition is developed into a vivid imagination of distress—a mass of painful feeling.¹¹⁴

Spencer elaborates on this theme throughout many different books and essays. It leads him to deny “the curative effects of teaching.”¹¹⁵ It is plainly wrong to believe that “when men are taught what is right, they will do what is right.”¹¹⁶ “This belief in the moralizing effects of intellectual culture, flatly contradicted by facts, is absurd *a priori*.”¹¹⁷ Men are motivated by their moral habits (which derive in large measure from moral sentiments), so the effort to improve moral habits through the teaching of moral truth reverses cause and effect. “Were it fully understood that the emotions are the masters and the intellect the servant, it would be seen that little can be done by improving the servant while the masters remain unimproved.”¹¹⁸

Ethical teaching, however conclusive, has no effect on natures which have made little approach towards harmony with it. Only the few who are in a measure organically moral, will benefit by its injunctions; reinforcing those beliefs which their conduct ordinarily betrays. . . . By all

means let us have a tracing down of morals to the laws of life, individual and social, and a continual emphasizing of the truths reached; but it must go along with the understanding that *only as the discipline of a peaceful social life slowly remoulds men's natures, will appreciable effects be produced.* (Emphasis added)¹¹⁹

Spencer often makes the same point by saying that it is *character* rather than abstractly held belief which determines the course of social change. And any ethical theory worth its salt must take the factors that influence character seriously into account.

We are now in a position to examine some details of Spencer's ethical theory, but the foregoing material must be kept firmly in mind. There is a tendency, when reading *The Principles of Ethics*, to skim over references to the evolution of moral conduct, as if these are incidental to Spencer's basic theory.¹²⁰ But it is virtually impossible to extract a coherent theory of ethics from Spencer's writing without paying close attention to its wider context — particularly the role played by Spencer's theory of causation.

Spencer's effort to render ethics a science involves him in a thoroughgoing ethical naturalism, where ethical propositions can be reduced to descriptive (non-normative) propositions without loss of content. Although Spencer is not always consistent in his employment of terms, there is little doubt that value terms (such as "good" and "bad") and moral terms ("moral" and "immoral") are regarded by him as convenient, short-hand descriptions of a factual state of affairs. Indeed, this is what we would expect from Spencer's determinism, which leaves little room for terms such as "ought" (a point we shall return to shortly).

A casual reading of *The Principles of Ethics* provides strong clues of this ethical naturalism. One chapter on "Animal Ethics" is followed by a chapter entitled "Sub-Human Justice." Here Spencer denies that ethics must confine itself to conduct where praise and blame are relevant (i.e., to conduct where we can attribute responsibility). Instead, "the primary subject-matter of Ethics is conduct considered objectively as producing good or bad results to self or others or both."¹²¹ Ethics is concerned with the causal relation between conduct and consequence, and this relation obtains among species other than man. "Not for the human race only," notes Spencer elsewhere, "but for every race, there are laws of right living."

The animal, like the man, has need for food, warmth, activity, rest, and so forth; which must be fulfilled in certain relative degrees to make its life whole. . . . Hence there is a supposable formula for the activities of each species, which, could it be drawn out, would constitute a system of morality for that species.¹²²

Obviously, in speaking of animal ethics, Spencer is not suggesting that animals "should" follow moral principles,¹²³ so we must understand that Spencer's ethical theory has nothing fundamentally to do with normative

judgments. The basic goal of ethics is to *describe*—specifically, to describe causal relations—rather than to *prescribe*.

This naturalism is further illustrated by Spencer's analysis of the terms "good" and "bad." In their non-moral sense, these words indicate the suitability of means to ends. A "good" knife, for example, is one that cuts well; whereas a "bad" knife is one that cuts poorly. In the realm of animal conduct (purposeful behavior) we see the continuous adjustment of acts to ends in the process of sustaining life, and this is where the *ethical* concept of "good" emerges. Acts are ethically good, generally speaking, if they are "conducive to life" and ethically bad if they "directly or indirectly tend towards death."

In order to label life-sustaining acts as "good," we must make "an assumption of extreme significance... an assumption underlying all moral estimates."¹²⁴ We must assume, according to Spencer, that life is worth living—and this brings us to the "primary meanings of the words good and bad." The optimist believes that life provides, on balance, more pleasure (a term used loosely by Spencer to designate any kind of gratification or "agreeable feeling") than pain; whereas the pessimist believes that life brings, on balance, more pain than pleasure. Both optimist and pessimist agree, however, that pleasure is the standard of value. Any debate over the desirability of life must tacitly assume that pleasure is an intrinsic value and that pain is an intrinsic disvalue. Ethics is rendered meaningless without this assumption. "Pleasure somewhere, at some time, to some being or beings, is an inexpugnable element of the [moral] conception. It is as much a necessary form of moral intuition as space is a necessary form of intellectual intuition."¹²⁵

The last statement is significant, and it revives a common Spencerian tactic. As with his *a priori* ideas and physical axioms, Spencer is insisting not that we ought to accept pleasure as the standard of value because there are weighty arguments in favor of it, but that we must—given the nature of our moral consciousness inherited from our progenitors—accept pleasure as a standard in order to make sense out of all moral phenomena. In showing that all moral systems tacitly accept the pleasure standard, Spencer is attempting to demonstrate the *a priori* nature of this standard. To suppose that pleasure is not an intrinsic value, says Spencer, "creates absurdities." Clearly, we have an application of Spencer's inconceivability test in order to verify the *a priori* character of the pleasure standard.

Pleasure, according to Spencer, is what makes life valuable. It is what provides the motive among sentient creatures to engage in life-sustaining activities. Pleasure indicates successful life-activity, whereas pain indicates unsuccessful life-activity. Therefore, other things being equal, when an organism engages in pro-life activity it is also engaged in pleasurable activity, and vice versa. These are two sides of the same coin. We must always keep Spencer's naturalism in mind. When he says that life is good, he

means that life yields a surplus of pleasure over pain. The pleasure does not somehow bestow an abstract quality of "goodness" on life. Pleasure itself *is* the value, i.e., the motivational factor imbedded in moral consciousness.

If the preceding is an accurate account, then where do the "oughts" come in? Where does Spencer stop describing the laws of life and the principles deducible therefrom and begin recommending what, according to his theory, people "ought" to do?

Spencer does have his oughts, but they are of a hypothetical character. We have seen that specific actions are deemed morally good if they further one's life. This entails that one must accept the "optimist" view that life yields more pleasure than pain. Spencer is clear on this issue. The "arguments of the work [*Principles of Ethics*]," he wrote in response to a critic, "are valid only for optimists." The conclusions "can reasonably be accepted only by those who hold that life in the aggregate brings more pleasure than pain."¹²⁶ In other words, *if* you hold that life on the average produces more pleasure than pain (and is therefore good), then you "ought" to concern yourself with the rules of conduct by which life is maintained and enhanced.

This attributing of a hypothetical imperative to Spencer's theory, it should be noted, is superimposed and somewhat out of place. Like the designation of Spencer as an ethical naturalist, it is an attempt to force Spencer into the mold of modern ethical classification. The fit is not a comfortable one. For while we ponder the abstract meaning of "ought" and speculate on the meta-ethical foundations of moral duties and obligations, Spencer is busy analyzing these terms as sentiments and feelings of sentient beings. Thus he can casually speak of a squirrel gathering food for the winter "as doing that which a squirrel ought to do." And he can speak of animals having an "obligation" to observe their respective moral codes. And, without any hint of surprise, he can refer to a dog's "consciousness of duty."

When Spencer analyzes "duty" and "ought" he discusses them as *psychological facts to be explained*, not as abstract concepts to be picked apart and justified. "Whence comes the sentiment of duty . . . ?" he asks, and it is by analyzing the sentiment that he establishes its meaning.¹²⁷ When a critic charged that Spencer, as a strict determinist, could give no intelligible meaning to terms such as "ought" and "obligation," Spencer replied in characteristic fashion:

If you ask me what prompts me to denounce our unjust treatment of inferior races, I reply that I am prompted by a feeling which is aroused in me. . . . If you say that my theory gives me no reason for feeling this pain, the answer is that I cannot help feeling it; and if you say that my theory gives me no reason for my interest in asserting this principle, the answer is that I cannot help being interested.¹²⁸

The critic wanted epistemological justification. Spencer's epistemology,

as we have seen, shades into psychology; and he responds to epistemological questions by pleading psychological necessity. With no knowledge of Spencer's epistemological framework, the above response appears foolish. Spencer looks as if he is simply too thickheaded to grasp the issue at hand. When we understand Spencer's epistemology, however, the same response (however much we may think it inadequate) is at least intelligible. In this and in other areas, Spencer is difficult to understand without a comprehensive grasp of his various theories.

The same blending of epistemology and psychology, I have argued, best explains Spencer's treatment of "value." To consider "value" in the abstract and then to ruminate on its "true" meaning is foreign to Spencer's methodology. "Value," for Spencer, is a psychological fact. Living beings seek values, i.e., things conducive to their lives. The question then becomes, "What can explain this?" Spencer's answer is simple: the indissoluble bond between pleasure and pro-life activities renders life valuable. "Value" and "pleasure" have become organically linked in our moral consciousness; pleasure has become an *a priori* form of our moral intuition.

Thus far we have examined two aspects of the relation between action and pleasure in Spencer's theory. These bear repeating in order to facilitate the discussion of justice that follows.

First, pleasure "is produced by the exercise of any structure which is adjusted to its special end," so, "supposing it consistent with the maintenance of life, there is no kind of activity which will not become a source of pleasure if continued."¹²⁹

Secondly, pleasure, although caused by actions, becomes the motivation for future actions of the same kind. Moral habits are formed through the repeated associations of pleasure and action, and these habits eventually become organic through hereditary transmission. These moral sentiments are far more influential than ideas in determining human conduct.

Social progress, as mentioned previously, is conditional in Spencer's evolutionary theory. Retrogression or dissolution can occur if the conditions essential to progress are not maintained. Therefore, as society naturally evolves, individuals must be free to adapt to the changing conditions. They must be rendered "fit" through the evolution of (primarily) intellectual and moral characteristics. As a voluntary contractual society evolves from a society of status, individuals must develop the character necessary for the conditions of survival. Successful activity must yield pleasure (agreeable feelings) in order to promote more activity of the same kind. Unsuccessful activity must yield pain (disagreeable feelings) in order to discourage the formation of moral habits that will perpetuate failure. This means that each person should experience the natural effects of his own actions. The relation between conduct and consequence must be preserved. Causation must be permitted to operate in order to preserve the conditions necessary for social progress. The basic condition, argues Spencer, is the law of equal free-

dom—the principle of *justice*. Let us take a closer look at this crucial area of Spencer's ethics.

Among the higher species of animals, argues Spencer, we see two basic laws of species preservation. First, the young must be cared for in inverse relation to their capacities. The more helpless they are, the more care they require. After maturity, however, survival requires that the "ill fitted must suffer the evils of unfitness, and the well fitted profit by their fitness."¹³⁰ Although observance of these laws will not prevent the death of individual members of the species, it will lead to continuance of the species as a whole. Hence, "in order of obligation, the preservation of the species takes precedence of the preservation of the individual."¹³¹

Let us now consider "the law of the species" as it applies to adults only, leaving aside the question of the young.

This law we have seen to be that individuals of most worth, as measured by their fitness to the conditions of existence, shall have the greatest benefits, and that inferior individuals shall receive smaller benefits, or suffer greater evils, or both.¹³²

Biologically, this law implies survival of the fittest. Ethically, it means that "each individual ought to be subject to the effects of its own nature and resulting conduct."¹³³ This concept of justice applies to some extent on a sub-human level, albeit with important qualifications. But as organisms ascend higher in the evolutionary scale, as they become more complex and differentiated, sub-human justice becomes more operative. Whether a given fly is swallowed by a predator, for instance, depends little on the individual differences and abilities among flies. But as organisms become more distinctly individuated, their particular capacities play a greater role in determining their survival.

For gregarious animals who seek association with others of their kind, a new factor arises. Self-sustaining acts are performed in the presence of others performing similar acts, so restraints on interference among members of the same species must evolve in order to retain the benefits of association. There is "the need for noninterference with the like actions of associated individuals." This is "an imperative law for creatures to which gregariousness is a benefit."¹³⁴

There is yet another requirement of species survival. Individuals must occasionally be sacrificed in order to serve the needs of the species as a whole. Such occasions are rare, but when they arise they constitute a "qualification" of the conduct/consequence principle. (The need for this sacrifice disappears in the absence of enemies.)

We now move on to "human justice":

Of man, as of all inferior creatures, the law by conformity to which the species is preserved, is that among adults the individuals best adapted to the conditions of their existence shall prosper most, and that individuals

least adapted to the conditions of their existence shall prosper least—a law which, if uninterfered with, entails survival of the fittest, and spread of the most adapted varieties. . . . ethically considered, this law implies that each individual ought to receive the benefits and the evils of his own nature and consequent conduct: neither being prevented from having whatever good his actions normally bring to him, nor allowed to shoulder off on to other persons whatever ill is brought to him by his actions.¹³⁵

Man exhibits more variety than any other animal, and he profits immensely from human association and cooperation. But the advantages of association are conditional; one's own life-sustaining activities should not be interfered with if the net advantages of cooperation are to outweigh the net disadvantages. The relation between conduct and consequence can be preserved only if there is mutual non-interference among members of society. This is what is specified by the principle of justice.

Spencer now considers the "sentiment of justice." Man is forever adapting to his environment, including his social life. When social conditions require particular habits of conduct, the feelings appropriate to those habits come to dominate. These moral sentiments are then passed on to future generations, and among them is the sentiment of justice.

There are two aspects to the sentiment of justice: the egoistic and the altruistic. The egoistic side is basically the desire to be left alone—the desire to be free of the frustrations and irritations caused by restraint. The altruistic side arises from the "sympathetic tendency" in man, i.e., the ability to arouse a feeling in oneself by observing it in others. The altruistic aspect of justice concerns the desire for freedom of action not simply for oneself (the egoistic motive), but for others as well; and it develops as man's sympathetic abilities develop.

What are the social conditions best suited for the development of the justice sentiment? A free "industrial" society, answers Spencer. An authoritarian "militant" society, on the other hand, discourages this sentiment.

Having discussed the basis for the principle of justice, how is it to be formulated? Spencer argues that it must have a positive element and a negative element.

It must be positive in so far as it asserts for each that, since he is to receive and suffer the good and evil results of his actions, he must be allowed to act. And it must be negative in so far as, by asserting this of everyone, it implies that each can be allowed to act only under the restraint imposed by the presence of others having like claims to act. . . . Hence, that which we have to express in a precise way, is the liberty of each limited only by the like liberties of all. This we do by saying:—Every man is free to do that which he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man.¹³⁶

This rather prosaic summary of Spencer's theory of justice, unencum-

bered by interpretation and elaboration, points out the central role that the conduct/consequence doctrine plays in his theory of justice. If there remains any doubt, this passage should remove it:

Justice, then, as here to be understood, means preservation of the normal connexions between acts and results—the obtainment by each of as much benefit as his efforts are equivalent to—no more and no less. Living and working within the restraints imposed by one another's presence, justice requires that individuals shall severally take the consequences of their conduct, neither increased or decreased. The superior shall have the good of his superiority; and the inferior the evil of his inferiority. A veto is therefore put on all public action which abstracts from some men part of the advantages they have earned, and awards to other men advantages they have not earned.¹³⁷

So fundamental is the conduct/consequence doctrine that it provides the basis for both the "survival of the fittest" principle (in biology) and the "law of equal freedom" (in political theory). Of course, we have not examined how Spencer applies this principle in practice, nor have we explored its many problematic areas—such as the many loopholes it leaves open to Spencer to justify such things as military conscription (in the name of "relative ethics"). Nevertheless, the derivation of a theory is distinct from its application to specific problems, and my purpose has been to show how causation plays a fundamental role in Spencer's ethics and theory of justice.

NOTES

1. Herbert Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2 vols. (New York: Appleton, 1904), 2:6–7.
2. Spencer, "The Filiation of Ideas," in David Duncan, *The Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1911), pp. 335–36.
3. Spencer, *Autobiography*, 2:7.
4. Spencer, "Of Laws in General, and the Order of Their Discovery," in *Recent Discussions in Science, Philosophy and Morals* (New York: Appleton, 1878), p. 152.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
6. Spencer is a victim of "psycho-history" in Richard L. Schoenwald, "Town Guano and Social Statics" (*Victorian Studies*, vol. 9, Supplement, Summer 1968, pp. 691–710). Schoenwald deftly attributes Spencer's anti-statism to his alleged resentment of toilet training. Even Harry Elmer Barnes (*An Introduction to the History of Sociology* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948], p. 129) argues that Spencer's "persistent and ever growing resentment against the extension of governmental activity probably was personally motivated by a subconscious neurotic reaction."

Probably the most vicious of recent smears is found in Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959), pp. 183–87. Spencer's work, according to Himmelfarb, "was more a parody of philosophy." Spencer—"the dilettante whose writing was as facile as his thinking"—was "amateurish and self-taught," and his "image is comic and pathetic." Himmelfarb expresses surprise that Thomas Huxley ("who did not tolerate fools readily") had a high regard for Spencer's ability. Himmelfarb might find it equally difficult to explain why many nineteenth century intellectual greats held Spencer in high esteem. John Stuart Mill is a case in point. Mill, in *A System of Logic* (8th ed. [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887], pp. 201–202), wrote: "I believe, with Mr. Spencer, that the difference between us, if measured by our conclusions, is 'superficial rather than substantial'; and the value I attach to

so great an amount of agreement, in the field of analytic psychology, with a thinker of his force and depth, is such as I can hardly overstate."

Upon rereading Spencer's *The Principles of Psychology* (2 vols. [New York: Appleton, 1899, 1901]—which, we should bear in mind, contains as much of what we now call epistemology as it does psychology—Mill wrote to Spencer in 1864: "I cannot help expressing to you how much my opinion of it, though already high, has been raised..." (Duncan, *Life and Letters*, p. 114). In 1868 Mill likened Spencer to Darwin: "I have seldom been more thoroughly impressed by any scientific treatise than by your *Biology*. . . . I do not doubt that your book, like Darwin's, will form an era in thought on its particular subject" (*ibid.*, p. 152). Elsewhere Mill reiterated "the very high value I attach to your philosophic labours" (*ibid.*, p. 119). In 1866, when Spencer announced that he would have to discontinue his work owing to lack of funds, Mill—along with Huxley, Tyndall, and others—arranged a subscription program to assist Spencer financially. Eventually this proved unnecessary. (See Spencer, *Autobiography*, 2:156–61, and ("Appendix C") 573–75.)

Spencer had the misfortune to be mistaken about the inheritability of acquired characteristics, and for this history has never forgiven him. But, unlike some modern critics, Spencer's contemporaries realized that fallibility does not necessarily entail incompetence. Alfred R. Wallace (who arrived at a theory of natural selection about the same time as Darwin) stated that, despite his disagreements with Spencer, "I yet look upon these as but spots on the sun of his great intellectual powers, and feel it to be an honour to have been his contemporary..." (Wallace, *My Life: A Record of Events and Opinions*, 2 vols. [London: Chapman and Hall, 1905], 2:33).

Charles Darwin once said about Spencer that "he is about a dozen times my superior" (Francis Darwin, *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, 2 vols. [New York: Basic Books, 1959], 2:239). Derek Freeman ("The Evolutionary Theories of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer," *Current Anthropology* 15, no. 3 [September 1974]: 211–21) maintains that this remark was intended facetiously. This is a reasonable interpretation, given the context in which the remark occurred. But Freeman also wishes to dismiss the following assessment of Spencer's philosophic abilities: "It has . . . pleased me to see how thoroughly you [E. Ray Lankester] appreciate (and I do not think that this is general with the men of science) H. Spencer; I suspect that hereafter he will be looked at as by far the greatest living philosopher in England; perhaps equal to any that have lived. But I have no business to trouble you with my notions" (Darwin, *Life and Letters*, 2:301).

Freeman retorts that "Darwin was echoing a common opinion of his day"—ignoring Darwin's comment that this opinion was uncommon among scientists. In any case, continues Freeman, Darwin "was no expert when it came to philosophy"—as Freeman presumably is. Perhaps J. S. Mill's credentials are sufficient to impress Freeman.

According to Freeman, "when it came to the field in which [Darwin] was an expert, he was under no illusions as to Spencer's unimportance as a scientific thinker, and, as we have seen, he was never convinced by Spencer's conclusions." (This view is shared by Himmelfarb, *Darwin*, p. 186.) In the comments on Spencer deleted from the original edition of Darwin's autobiography, he does state that he did not profit from, nor was he convinced by, Spencer's work. (For this passage, see Himmelfarb, *Darwin*, pp. 185–86.) This does not exactly square with other comments made by Darwin, however. In a letter to Lyell written in 1860, Darwin enclosed a letter from Spencer, "who puts, to my mind, the philosophy of the argument better than anyone else. . . ." (Darwin, *Life and Letters*, 2:84). After the publication of Spencer's "Mr. Martineau on Evolution" (1872), Darwin wrote to Spencer: "I dare say you will think me a foolish fellow, but I cannot resist the wish to express my unbounded admiration of your article. . . . Every one with eyes to see and ears to hear. . . ought to bow their knee to you, and I for one do" (*ibid.*, 2:344; cf., *ibid.*, 1:497).

Spencer's purported incompetence in biology was not a view shared by a number of prominent biologists of his day. J. Arthur Thomson, after praising Spencer's *The Principles of Biology* (2 vols. [New York: Appleton, 1900–01] as a "biological classic," went on to say: "Much that is in *The Principles of Biology* has now become common biological property; much has been absorbed or independently reached by others; con-

ssciously or unconsciously we are now, as it were, standing on Spencer's shoulders, but this should not blind us to the magnitude of Spencer's achievement. The book... was the introduction of order, clearness, and breadth of view. It gave biology a fresh start by displaying the facts of life and the inductions from these for the first time clearly in the light of evolution" (*Herbert Spencer* [London: J. M. Dent, 1906], pp. 93-94).

The biologist Lloyd Morgan (quoted in *ibid.*, p. 93) also had fulsome praise for Spencer's work on biology: "What strikes one most forcibly is the extraordinary range and grasp of its author, the piercing keenness of his eye for essentials, his fertility in invention, and the bold sweep of his logical method. In these days of increasingly straitened specialism, it is well that we should feel the influence of a thinker whose powers of generalisation have seldom been equalled and perhaps never surpassed."

7. For Spencer-misrepresentation elevated to a fine art, see Mark Francis, "Herbert Spencer and the Myth of Laissez-Faire," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39 (April-June 1978), pp. 317-28. In this article Francis not only distorts Spencer but includes Thomas Hodgskin—the radical individualist and *laissez-faire* advocate—as well. To catalogue Francis's errors and falsifications would require an article as long as his original. Here I shall note a few highlights.

Francis claims (*ibid.*, p. 381) that both Hodgskin and Spencer oppose hereditary rights to property. He cites three pages in Hodgskin's *The Natural and Artificial Right of Property Contrasted* (1832; reprint ed., Clifton, N.J.: Augustus Kelly, 1973) and chapter nine of Spencer's *Social Statics* (London: Chapman, 1851). Let us first consider the Hodgskin references.

Two of the Hodgskin citations (pp. 17, 54) do not mention hereditary rights at all—unless one supposes that the remark, "a right of property is not the offspring of legislation" (p. 17), was interpreted by Francis as pertaining to such rights. The third reference (p. 32) contains Hodgskin's argument against the right of property established by plunder and conquest which, in the tradition of the Norman Yoke theory, he maintained was the basis for most of the land ownership in England. "The present legislators of Europe," he writes, "are the descendants of men... who were unacquainted with any wealth-creating arts, and who lived by appropriating the produce of others." Unjust titles gained through conquest, according to Hodgskin, cannot be legitimately bequeathed to future generations. An injustice is not negated through inheritance. The major point here—which Francis astonishingly overlooks—is to contrast unjust ("artificial") rights with just ("natural") rights. *Nowhere* does Hodgskin oppose hereditary rights per se. He never hints that property justly acquired cannot be passed from one generation to the next.

Chapter nine of *Social Statics* is entitled "The Right to the Use of the Earth." Here Spencer opposes, in principle, the private ownership of land. (Hodgskin disagrees with Spencer on this point.) Existing titles to land were acquired through violence and fraud and are thereby invalid. Therefore, they cannot be transferred through inheritance, because one cannot bequeath something one does not legitimately own. "Does sale or bequest generate a right where it did not previously exist?" asks Spencer. In other words, an individual cannot bequeath land because an individual cannot own land in the first place. This has nothing to do with hereditary rights concerning property to which one does have legitimate title. To this Spencer, like Hodgskin, was never opposed.

Francis's basic thesis is that Spencer evolved from an anarchist, anti-*laissez-faire* philosophy during the 1840's and early 1850's (as represented in *Social Statics*) to a conservative, pro-*laissez-faire* philosophy in the 1880's. "Spencer's political thought underwent another major change in the 1880's," according to Francis, "and he eventually did become an advocate of *laissez-faire*..." (*Herbert Spencer*, p. 327). As for Spencer's early *Social Statics*, it "was mistaken by some contemporaries as a *laissez-faire* tract" (*ibid.*, p. 326) which, Francis assures us, it was not. Francis also attributes this opposition to *laissez-faire* to Hodgskin. Referring to the similarities between Hodgskin and the early Spencer, Francis writes: "these ideas are not *laissez-faire* ones. There is no question of telling business to get on with it, undisturbed by government interference" (*ibid.*, p. 322).

Contrary to Francis, both Hodgskin and the early Spencer were ardent champions of *laissez faire*. In the classical *laissez-faire* style, they argue that government should leave business unregulated and unmolested in the absence of force or fraud.

Consider Hodgskin's first major work, *Travels in the North of Germany* (2 vols. [Edinburgh, 1820; reprint ed., New York: Augustus Kelly, 1969]). Here we see the hostility to government intervention that was to characterize Hodgskin's entire career. In the realm of economics, argues Hodgskin, "there is little or no necessity for human legislation." "It is notoriously known, that individual industry is the source of national wealth; that the natural love of luxury and distinction constantly excites industry, and that this is never so well regulated, nor so productive, as when it is left entirely free" (*ibid.*, 1:467).

Hodgskin is remarkably consistent on this point. Government should not "take on itself the administration of the poor" (*ibid.*, 2:108). It should not interfere in money or banking. Private industry is better able to provide public works, such as roads. Hodgskin even suggests that police duties should be taken out of government hands and placed in the private sector (*ibid.*, 1:73). If this is not extreme *laissez faire*, then what is?

Hodgskin's *Popular Political Economy* (London, 1827; reprint ed., New York: Augustus Kelly, 1966) defends a free market unregulated by government. In his *A Lecture on Free Trade* (London, 1843; reprint ed., New York: August Kelly, 1966), Hodgskin argues that lack of "freedom for industry" is "sufficient to account for all the miseries of our social condition" (p. 9). Francis's portrait of an anti-*laissez-faire* Hodgskin is further strained by the fact that Hodgskin endorses the term "*laissez faire*" by name on at least several occasions. "We advocate *laissez-faire* in education . . . as in trade," he wrote in his article "Shall the State Educate the People?" (*The Economist*, April 3, 1847, p. 380). *Laissez faire*, for Hodgskin, means "the undirected exertions of merchants, manufacturers, and farmers." This is the natural spontaneous order—an order that is "invariably deranged when it is forcibly interfered with by the state" ("Is *Laissez-Faire* Anarchy?" *The Economist*, September 1, 1849).

Francis's treatment of Spencer is equally inexcusable. First, Spencer was never an anarchist, as even a cursory reading of his early work should make clear. Secondly, *Social Statics* was not mistaken for a defense of *laissez faire*—it is a defense of *laissez faire*. Even overlooking Spencer's opposition to state education, governmental sanitation regulations, a state postal service, and the like, chapter 23 alone ("The Regulation of Commerce") is a clear illustration of Spencer's attitude. There he defends "commercial liberty," condemns "interferences with freedom of exchange," and even equates economic regulation with slavery. "Political economy has shown us . . . that our wisest plan is to let things take their own course." Again, if this is not straightforward *laissez faire*, then what is? (For some unfathomable reason, Francis thinks that Spencer's defense of a moral sense doctrine in *Social Statics*—which he later abandoned—disqualifies him as a *laissez-faire* theorist. The notion of *laissez faire* employed by Francis is extremely bizarre.)

Thomas Huxley, in his article "Administrative Nihilism" (in his *Collected Essays*, vol. 1 [New York: Appleton, 1894]), maintains that Spencer's use of the social organism model and his defense of *laissez faire* are incompatible. Spencer, according to Francis, replied "that they were in agreement, that he too was opposed to *laissez-faire*." Actually Spencer said no such thing. This is simply another Francis distortion. Spencer does not accept Huxley's criticism—this, after all, is the reason he penned a reply, "Specialized Administration" (in *Recent Discussions*, pp. 237–79). Spencer objects to the term "*laissez faire*" "in the sense which the phrase commonly suggests" (p. 277), i.e., as the government doing less in all spheres. Throughout his life Spencer distinguished between the positive and negative functions of government. He favored less positive intervention by government, but more negative intervention. By the latter he meant a more efficient administration of justice—the enforcement of the law of equal freedom. Spencer was uncomfortable with the term "*laissez faire*" because he feared it would be taken to mean less government in both the negative and the positive spheres, which he did not endorse. Therefore, one finds denunciations of "*laissez faire*" throughout his writing (early and late—a fact that Francis ignores). But Spencer did not object to *laissez faire* in its "true meaning" as less positive interference by government, as this letter written in 1873 (prior

to his alleged conversion in the 1880's) indicates: "I do not think that *laissez-faire* is to be regarded simply as a politico-economical principle only, but as a much wider principle—the principle of letting all citizens take the benefits and evils of their own acts. . . . And while *laissez-faire*, as I understand it, forbids the stepping between these private acts and their consequences, it is quite consistent with the doctrine that a government should, far more effectually and minutely than at present, save such individuals from suffering evils or claiming benefits due to the acts of others" (Duncan, *Life and Letters*, p. 161).

If Francis is correct—if Spencer accepted *laissez-faire* in the 1880's but had rejected it previously—then how can we explain Spencer's reference, in 1891, to "that miserable *laissez-faire* which calmly looks on while men ruin themselves in trying to enforce by law their equitable claims. . . ." (Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, 2 vols., [New York: Appleton, 1901], 2:44. This passage is from part 4, which was issued separately in 1891.) Again, in 1893, Spencer repeats that "no one has more vehemently condemned" this kind of "miserable *laissez-faire*" than he has throughout his career (Spencer, "Evolutionary Ethics," in *Various Fragments*, ed. ed., [London: Williams and Norgate, 1900], p. 115).

One must wonder whether the absurd misrepresentations by Mark Francis—of which the preceding are but samples—result from incompetence or deliberate falsification. In any case, his article sets a new low in Spencer exegesis.

For a discussion of some common myths concerning Spencer, see George H. Smith, "Will the Real Herbert Spencer Please Stand Up?" *The Libertarian Review*, (December 1978), pp. 14–18.

8. Spencer, "Exaggerations and Mis-Statements," in *Facts and Comments* (New York: Appleton, 1902), p. 351.
9. I am concerned with Spencer's mature thought rather than with his early work. Although germs of his later theories can be found, for example, in *Social Statics*, I shall not attempt to trace the development of these views.
10. Spencer, *Psychology*, 2:349.
11. *Ibid.*, 2:349–50.
12. *Ibid.*, 2:502. Spencer attributes to "metaphysicians" a common assumption: "that we are primarily conscious only of our sensations," from which we must infer the existence of an external world (*ibid.*, 2:369). This assumption, he astutely points out (in common with many Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophers), invariably lands us in either idealism or skepticism. In contrast, Spencer maintains that the primary object of consciousness is not a sensation, but an external world. Indeed, "the existence of a sensation is an hypothesis that cannot be framed until external existence is known" (*ibid.*). Again, this is similar to the argument of Aristotelian/Thomistic philosophers. If Spencer had included the Aristotelian tradition of metaphysics in his critical survey, he would have been obliged to place himself within a metaphysical tradition (despite his important divergences from it) rather than claiming to exempt himself altogether. Cf. *ibid.*, 2:376.
- For a brief though astute summary of Spencer's metaphysical system, see Thomas Case, "Metaphysics," in *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (New York: The Encyclopedia Britannica Co., 1911), 18:227–28.
13. Spencer, *First Principles*, 6th ed. (New York: Appleton, 1901), p. 141.
14. Spencer, *Psychology*, 2:335. The resemblance between many of Spencer's arguments concerning language and the arguments of twentieth-century "ordinary language philosophers" has, as far as I know, never been explored.
15. *Ibid.* Consider this interesting passage (*ibid.*, 2:500): "Anti-Realistic beliefs have never been held at all. They are but ghosts of beliefs, haunting those mazes of verbal propositions in which metaphysicians habitually lose themselves. Berkeley was not an Idealist: he never succeeded in expelling the consciousness of an external reality, as we saw when analyzing his language and his reasonings. Hume did not in the least doubt the existence of Matter or of Mind: he simply persuaded himself that certain arguments ought to make him doubt. Nor was Kant a Kantist; that Space and Time are nothing more than subjective forms was with him, as it has been and will be with every other, a verbally-intelligible proposition, but a proposition which can never be rendered into thought, and can never therefore be believed."

This, for Spencer, is not an *ad hominem* attack. It is an application of his psychological criterion for epistemological justification—a subject that is discussed below.

16. *Ibid.*, 2:367. Perhaps the only kind word that Spencer had for "metaphysics" is found in *ibid.*, 2:502.
 17. *Ibid.*, 2:314–15.
 18. *Ibid.*, 1:136.
 19. *Ibid.*, 1:453–54. As Spencer puts it elsewhere (*First Principles*, p. 92): "Our duty is to submit ourselves to the established limits of our intelligence, and not perversely to rebel against them." Cf. *Psychology*, 2:315: "Reasoning... is nothing more than re-coordinating states of consciousness already coordinated in certain simpler ways; and re-coordination can no more give to the results reached a validity independent of that possessed by the previously-coordinated states, than cutting a piece of wood into a certain shape can give it a power independent of that which the substance of the wood already has."
 20. See, for example, Spencer, *First Principles*, pp. 62–65. It is through Hamilton and Mansel that Kantianism enters Spencer's thought, as F. C. S. Schiller observes (Schiller, "Spencer, Herbert," in *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 25:635). For some of Spencer's disagreements with Hamilton and Mansel, see *First Principles*, pp. 73–83; and *Psychology*, 2:365–66.
 21. Spencer, *First Principles*, pp. 67–68.
 22. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
 23. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 55–57.
 25. Spencer, *Psychology*, 2:494. A careful reading of the entire chapter from which this quote is taken ("Transfigured Realism") is essential in order to understand Spencer's epistemology.
 26. Spencer, *First Principles*, p. 74. As Spencer puts it in *Psychology*, 1:208: "Not a step can be taken towards the truth that our states of consciousness are the only things we can know, without tacitly or avowedly postulating an unknown something beyond consciousness. The proposition that whatever we feel has an existence which is relative to ourselves only, cannot be proved, nay cannot even be intelligibly expressed, without asserting, directly or by implication, an external existence which is not relative to ourselves." Cf. *First Principles*, pp. 33, 55.
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
 28. *Ibid.*, p. 143. Cf. Spencer, *Psychology*, 1:146: "Existence means nothing more than persistence...."
 29. J. D. Y. Peel, *Herbert Spencer: The Evolution of a Sociologist* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), p. 117. See Spencer, *Psychology*, 2:87–93, where Spencer distinguishes logic from the psychological process of reasoning. Logic, he states, is concerned with "objective existence," or the "non-ego," whereas reasoning is concerned with subjective processes or the ego. It is accurate to say that Spencer regards reasoning as a psychological process—and therefore subject to psychological laws—but this does not apply to logic. Spencer's alleged merger of logic and psychology is contradicted in the following passage where, referring to the syllogism as one aspect of logic, Spencer states (*ibid.*, 2:98): "The process of thought which the syllogism seeks to describe, is not that by which the inference is reached, but that by which it is justified."
- When Spencer discusses the "negative justification of realism," he attempts to offer "proof that Realism rests on evidence having a greater validity than the evidence on which any counter-hypothesis rests" (*ibid.*, 2:367). Here he points to inconsistencies in idealism and skepticism and attempts to show that realism enjoys logical priority and necessity—that realism must be assumed as true in any attempt to deny it.
- Only when Spencer turns to the "positive justification" of realism does he resort to psychology. "Its absolute validity will be shown if we find it to be a necessary product of thought proceeding according to laws of thought that are universal." Thus, "Our analysis and our subsequent synthesis will be psychological rather than logical" (*ibid.*, 2:445). Note that an explicit distinction between logic and psychology is drawn here.
- 30. See Mill, *Logic*, pp. 193–204. For Spencer's reply, see Spencer, *Psychology*, 2:409–22.

Cf. Spencer, "Mill Versus Hamilton—The Test of Truth," in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Aesthetic*, enl. ed. (New York: Appleton, 1881), pp. 388–413; and Duncan, *Life and Letters*, pp. 119–23.

31. Spencer, *Psychology*, 2:495. Cf. Spencer, *First Principles*, pp. 71–72.: "what we call truth, guiding us to successful action and consequent maintenance of life, is simply the accurate correspondence of subjective to objective relations; while error, leading to failure and therefore towards death, is the absence of such accurate correspondence."
32. Spencer, *Biology*, 1:99. A more complete definition of life (*ibid.*, 1:93) is: "The definite combination of heterogeneous changes, both simultaneous and successive, in correspondence with external co-existences and sequences." Spencer is aware of the difficulties in using the word "correspondence" to describe the life process, but he replies that this word is the "least objectionable" to express the required meaning (*ibid.*, 1:97–98).
33. Spencer, *Psychology*, 1:432.
34. *Ibid.*, 2:299–300.
35. *Ibid.*, 2:301.
36. *Ibid.*, 1:422.
37. See *ibid.*, 2:352. On the distinction between "forms of intuition" and "forms of thought," see *ibid.*, 2:351n.
38. We should not exaggerate Spencer's Kantianism, as he criticized Kant at some length as one of the despised "metaphysicians." (See *ibid.*, 2:350–64.) Spencer attacked Kant on two grounds. First, contrary to Kant, *a priori* forms have a foundation in experience. They are *a priori* for the individual, but *a posteriori* for the human race. Secondly, Spencer attacks the notion that space and time are subjective forms with no corresponding reality. Spencer accepts space and time as *a priori*, but credits them with objective counterparts.
39. Spencer, *First Principles*, p. 159.
40. Spencer, *Psychology*, 1:470–71.
41. *Ibid.*, 1:417. Cf. *ibid.*, 1:413.
42. Simple propositions, according to Spencer, "are not further decomposable." These he contrasts with "complex propositions" in the course of rebutting an example given by J. S. Mill (*ibid.*, 2:410).
43. *Ibid.*, 2:407.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*, 2:412–14.
46. Spencer, *First Principles*, pp. 117–19. Spencer regards his notion of philosophy as an ideal that can only be approximated, but never fully achieved. (See *ibid.*, p. 256.) Because Spencer is commonly portrayed as having, in his own mind, solved the major problems of philosophy and science, it is useful to note that throughout the *Synthetic Philosophy* he often advances his theories as tentative and speculative, while urging further work in a particular area. Did Spencer see himself as a one-man synthesizer of the world's knowledge? Consider this disclaimer (*First Principles*, pp. 508–509): "Of course, what may now be done cannot be done by any single individual. No one can possess that encyclopedic information required for rightly organizing even the truths already established. Nevertheless, as all organization, beginning in faint and blurred outlines, is completed by successive modifications and additions, advantage may accrue from an attempt, however rude, to reduce the facts now accumulated—or rather certain classes of them—to something like coordination. Such must be the plea for the several volumes which are to succeed this."

Spencer often uses the history of science as an illustration of gradual evolution. He was well aware that his work would be subject to revision and possibly rejection as more facts became available.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
48. *Ibid.*
49. For a detailed discussion, see Spencer, *Psychology*, 2:136–231. For a good summary of this and the material that follows, see James Seth, *English Philosophers and Schools of Philosophy* (London: J. M. Dent, 1912), pp. 286–91. Cf. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), vol. 8, pt. 1, pp. 145–51.

50. Spencer, *First Principles*, p. 151.
51. Spencer, *Psychology*, 2:232. Spencer sometimes uses inconsistent terminology in distinguishing "force" from "resistance." Presumably "force" is a "cognition," whereas "resistance" is a "feeling". For a clear presentation of the difference between cognitions and feelings, see Spencer, "Bain on the Emotions and the Will," in *Illustrations of Universal Progress* (New York: Appleton, 1875), pp. 321–24. Cognitions, he writes, are "those modes of mind in which we are occupied with the *relations* that subsist among our feelings...." Feelings, on the other hand, are "those modes of mind in which we are occupied, not with the relations subsisting between our sentient states, but with the sentient states themselves...."
52. Spencer, *Psychology*, 2:419.
53. Spencer, *First Principles*, pp. 155–56.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 157–58.
56. Of course many persons claim to be able to conceive precisely the thing (the creation or annihilation of matter) that Spencer claims we cannot conceive, and who is to say whether this alleged ability represents a higher or lower intellectual development? Spencer, I think, would give a response to this argument something like the following.

Suppose we are looking at two lines of (what I see as) unequal length. You disagree and claim to see no difference between them. I reply that you must not be looking closely enough, because there is a difference of at least several inches between them. But you remain steadfast in your assertion of equality, so I measure the lines with a ruler and, sure enough, one is six inches and the other is nine inches. Incredibly, you still do not waver. You profess to see no difference between what I call "six inches" and what I call "nine inches." At this point we can go no further. Of the difference in lengths "I can give no further evidence than that I am conscious of it, and find it impossible, while contemplating the lines, to get rid of the consciousness" (*Psychology*, 2:410–11). If I take your assertions seriously, I must attribute them to faulty or undeveloped powers of discrimination.

Does this mean that it is simply my perception pitted against your perception, with no means of settling the disagreement? Here Spencer probably would attempt to show that his perception is more consistent with observed facts, and that it lends coherence to many other beliefs. This is indeed the method he employs with his "physical axioms." He is aware that assertions of their necessity will be met with skepticism, so he says, in effect: Let us accept these principles as true for the sake of argument. Then I will show you how they make sense out of experience and how they are able to integrate our other beliefs. After you see these relationships, then you will understand that these physical axioms are in fact necessary—that they are indissoluble features of the reasoning process. In other words, after certain relationships are pointed out to you, then you will perceive a necessity that escaped you previously. Of course, if one still disagrees with Spencer—as did J. S. Mill—then it seems that Spencer has no viable response. Certainly he would never attribute to Mill inferior mental powers.
57. Can we say that the Unknowable "causes" phenomena? At times Spencer appears to say so. But in a letter (1899) to A. W. Benn (Duncan, *Life and Letters*, p. 402), Spencer writes: "The idea of Cause is itself an entirely relative idea, and being so, is in the last resort inapplicable to the relation between phenomena and that which transcends phenomena, however needful it may seem to us to use the word in that relation. Cause in our conception has for its ultimate symbol the relation in consciousness between the sense of effort and any change which we produce by effort; and we use that subjective relation as a symbol for all objective relations of Cause, and when attempting to pass the limit, thought rushes out to form a relation between phenomena and that which transcends them, and inevitably carries with it this same conception of Cause. But inevitably it is a symbolic conception, and much as it seems needful for us to think of the Unknowable as Cause, yet clearly our conception of Cause, being in its origin subjective and symbolic, is essentially inapplicable."
58. Spencer, *First Principles*, p. 173.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
62. See Spencer, *Autobiography*, 2:195.
63. Spencer, *First Principles*, "Appendix B," p. 524.
64. Spencer defines evolution as follows (*ibid.*, p. 367): "Evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion; during which the matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity; and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation" (italics omitted). For a summary of how Spencer's theory of evolution developed and changed over the years, see his *Autobiography*, 2:193-99.
65. Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, 3 vols. (New York: Appleton, 1900-1901), 1:95.
66. Spencer, *First Principles*, "Appendix B," p. 528. Cf. Spencer, *Biology*, 2:525, where Spencer argues that evolutionary modifications are "immediately or remotely consequent on surrounding conditions."
67. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 3:609-10.
68. Spencer, "Mr. Martineau on Evolution," in *Recent Discussions*, p. 339.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 340.
70. To some extent Spencer invited misinterpretation, because he often did not heed his own warning about the value-free nature of survival of the fittest. See, for example, *Biology*, 1:531, where "worst" and "best" are used in conjunction with this doctrine. For a more detailed discussion of Spencer's "survival of the fittest," see Smith, "Will the Real Herbert Spencer Please Stand Up?"
71. Spencer, *Psychology*, 1:500.
72. *Ibid.*, 1:502.
73. Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (paper ed., Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1961), p. 2.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
77. Spencer, *First Principles*, p. 398.
78. In his early essay "Progress: Its Law and Cause" (in *Illustrations of Universal Progress*, pp. 1-60), Spencer considers the multiplication of effects to be the primary cause of "progress" (Spencer's early term for "evolution"). "Thus," he writes, "the evolution of a homogeneous society into a heterogeneous one, is clearly consequent on the general principle, that many effects are produced by one cause" (p. 53). However, as he explains in his *Autobiography* (1:586-87), he later modified this view. In the final edition of *First Principles* he treats it as a "secondary cause" (p. 401) after the "instability of the homogeneous" (pp. 368-97).
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 416-21. For a detailed discussion of the role of population increase in furthering social progress, see *Biology*, 2:522-38. Regarding social progress, argues Spencer, "In all cases pressure of population is the original cause" (2:527). This progress will continue "provided that the actions and reactions which have been described are not artificially interfered with." Unfortunately, "these actions and reactions have been hitherto, and are now, greatly interfered with by governments, and the continuance of the interferences may retard, if not stop, that further evolution which would else go on" (2:532). This is an application of Spencer's conduct/consequence doctrine which is discussed below.
80. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, p. 14.
81. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.
82. See *ibid.*, pp. 365-67.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 382.
84. Spencer, *Ethics*, 2:15.
85. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, p. 108. The future evolution of man will affect mostly his intellectual and moral capabilities, as Spencer explains in *Biology*, 2:524-25.
86. Spencer, *Psychology*, 2:609.
87. Duncan, *Life and Letters*, p. 161. On Spencer's attitude toward *laissez faire* see note 7 above. Spencer, it should be noted, was never opposed to private charity, even though he

was commonly misrepresented in this regard. See Duncan, *Life and Letters*, pp. 334–35; and Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, pp. 371–74.

88. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 3:411.

89. See Spencer's reference to Adam Ferguson in *Study of Sociology*, p. 298. Cf. Spencer, "Specialized Administration" (in *Recent Discussions*, pp. 237–79), where Spencer compares social order to the evolution of language: "Solely under pressure of the need for communicating their ideas and feelings—solely in pursuit of their personal interests—men little by little developed speech in absolute unconsciously that they were doing anything more than pursuing their personal interests" (p. 239). Spencer then applies this "invisible hand" explanation to social evolution: "how marvellous are the results indirectly and unintentionally achieved by the cooperation of men who are severally pursuing their private ends" (p. 240).

Herbert Spencer, in my judgment, is a major theorist in the spontaneous order school of social theory. The similarities, for example, between Spencer and F. A. Hayek are remarkable, yet Hayek pays little attention to Spencer's contributions. And it should be noted that Spencer did more than simply repeat the principles of spontaneous order defended by Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, and others. In a sense, Spencer's entire social theory may be seen as an elaboration of the spontaneous order model. Spencer explicated this model in far more detail than his predecessors.

90. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 3:411.

91. Huxley, "Administrative Nihilism," p. 271.

92. David G. Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference* (London: Sonnenschein, 1902), p. 22.

93. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1:592. Spencer may be saying here that society is an organism unlike any other *particular* organism, rather than (as I am interpreting him) that society is not literally an organism at all. There is evidence for both interpretations. Spencer does say repeatedly that society "is an organism," and he even refers to society at times as "a living whole" (*ibid.*, 1:460). Yet, as I illustrate in this discussion, he clearly specifies that this is an analogy; and he elsewhere refers to societies as "super-organic" instead of organic. I suspect some of this confusion may be attributed to a careless use of terms on Spencer's part.

94. Spencer, "The Filiation of Ideas," in Duncan, *Life and Letters*, p. 570, n. 1.

95. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1:592–93.

96. *Ibid.*, 1:447.

97. *Ibid.*, 1:448.

98. Spencer, "The Social Organism," in *Illustrations of Universal Progress*, pp. 385–88. In addition to specifying the similarities between societies and organisms in this essay, Spencer also stresses their important dissimilarities—something he does in most of his discussions concerning the organism analogy.

99. Spencer, *Ethics*, 1:xiii.

100. *Ibid.*, 2:467.

101. Spencer, *Social Statics*, pp. 40–41.

102. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

103. Spencer, *Ethics*, 1:56.

104. *Ibid.*, 1:58.

105. *Ibid.*, 1:49.

106. In a famous letter to J. S. Mill, Spencer states that "I have never regarded myself as an Anti-utilitarian," and he went on to outline his differences (most of which are covered here) with "the doctrine of Utility as commonly understood" (*Autobiography*, 2:100–102)—which he elsewhere refers to as "empirical utilitarianism." For Spencer's other objections to "empirical utilitarianism," see *Ethics*, 1:162ff., 220ff., 231ff.; 2:468ff.

107. *Ibid.*, 1:57.

108. *Ibid.*

109. See *ibid.*, 1:174–86.

110. Spencer, "Replies to Criticisms" ("Appendix E"), in *Ethics*, 2:468–70.

111. Spencer, "Morals and Moral Sentiments," in *Recent Discussions*, p. 12.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
113. Spencer, "Feeling Versus Intellect," in *Facts and Comments*, p. 38.
114. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, pp. 327-29.
115. *Ibid.*, p. 330.
116. Spencer, "Feeling Versus Intellect," p. 41.
117. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, p. 331.
118. Spencer, "Feeling Versus Intellect," p. 43.
119. Spencer, "What Should the Sceptic Say to Believers?" in *Facts and Comments*, p. 282.
120. See, for instance, Tibor Machan, "Introduction," in Spencer, *The Principles of Ethics*, (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Classics, 1978), p. 14, who asserts that Spencer's "own ethical views are probably closest to" Aristotle's. It is difficult to imagine two thinkers who differed more fundamentally in their ethical theories than Spencer and Aristotle.
121. Spencer, *Ethics*, 2:3.
122. *Ibid.*, 1:132.
123. At least he would not employ this term as understood by the contemporary ethicist. He does employ it in his own peculiar sense, however, as discussed later in this essay.
124. *Ibid.*, 1:26.
125. *Ibid.*, 1:46.
126. Spencer, "Replies to Criticisms, in *ibid.*, 2:465.
127. *Ibid.*, 1:124.
128. Spencer, "The Moral Motive" ("Appendix C"), in *ibid.*, 2:446-47.
129. *Ibid.*, 1:186.
130. *Ibid.*, 2:4.
131. *Ibid.*, 2:6.
132. *Ibid.*, 2:8.
133. *Ibid.*
134. *Ibid.*, 2:15.
135. *Ibid.*, 2:17.
136. *Ibid.*, 2:45-46.
137. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 2:610. For some other references to the conduct/consequence doctrine and its relation to justice, see *Ethics*, 2:18, 29, 60, 99, 103-104, 122, 130, 150, 213, 270-71, 370-71, 475.