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HERBERT SPENCER AND HIS STUDY OF SOCIETY

Annotation. The authors present a systematic account by Spencer views in biology, sociology, ethics and politics; his idea that societies are organisms that progress through a process of evolution similar to that experienced by living species, a concept known to as social Darwinism is given.

Key words: Herbert Spencer, Sociology, society, «happiness» in *Social Statics*

Анотація. Автори описують погляди Спенсера в біології, соціології, етиці і політиці; його ідеї, щодо суспільства, що розвивається як біологічні організми, прогрес якого відбувається еволюційним шляхом; ця концепція в науці відома як соціальний дарвінізм.

Ключові слова: Герберт Спенсер, соціологія, суспільство, «щастя» у «Соціальній статистиці».

British philosopher and sociologist, Herbert Spencer was a major figure in the intellectual life of the Victorian era [5]. He was one of the principal proponents of evolutionary theory in the mid nineteenth century, and his reputation at the time rivaled that of Charles Darwin. Spencer's method is, broadly speaking, scientific and empirical, and it was influenced significantly by the positivism of Auguste Comte. Because of the empirical character of scientific knowledge and because of his conviction that that which is known – biological life – is in a process of evolution, Spencer held that knowledge is subject to change [10; 7].

H.Spencer is the best known for: 1) Developing and applying evolutionary theory to philosophy, psychology and the study of society; 2) Helping to develop the functionalist perspective, one of the major theoretical frameworks in sociology; 3) His political thoughts, primarily his defense of natural rights and for criticisms of utilitarian positivism [1; 9].

Herbert Spencer was born in Derby, England on 27 April 1820. After the lengthy illness he died in Brighton, England on December 8, 1903 (aged 83).

He was the eldest of nine children, but the only one to survive infancy. Spencer's father was a school teacher, however he was very unconventional and Herbert therefore received a largely informal and undisciplined education. Spencer had many eclectic interests and eventually trained as a civil engineer for railways. In his early 20s, however, he turned to journalism and political writing [1; 2].

From 1848 to 1853, Spencer worked as a writer and subeditor for *The Economist* financial weekly, and, as a result, came into contact with a number of political controversialists such as George Henry Lewes, Thomas Carlyle, Lewes' future lover George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans [1819–1880]).

In 1851 Spencer wrote his first book, *Social Statics: The Conditions Essential to Human Happiness*. «Social statics» is a term that Spencer borrowed from August Comte, which deals with the conditions of social order. In *Social Statics*, Spencer predicted that humanity would eventually become completely adapted to the requirements of living in society with the consequential withering away of the state. In this work, Spencer presents an account of the development of human freedom and a defense of individual liberties, based on a (Lamarckian-style) evolutionary theory [1; 10].

Given the variations in temperament and character among individuals, Spencer recognized that there were differences in what happiness specifically consists in *Social Statics* (1851). In general, however, «happiness» is the surplus of pleasure over pain, and «the good» is what contributes to the life and development of the organism, or – what is much the same – what provides this surplus of pleasure over pain. Happiness, therefore, reflects the complete adaptation of an individual organism to its environment – or, in other words, «happiness» is that which an individual human being naturally seeks [10].

In 1855, Spencer published his second book, *The Principles of Psychology*, which was much less successful than his first book. It was about this time that Spencer also began experiencing serious mental health problems, which would affect him for the remainder of his life. Because of this, he sought privacy and rarely went out in public. He was also limited in terms of how much work he could do and was only able to write for a few hours each day. He thus embarked on a lengthy project, which was the nine-volume *A System of Synthetic Philosophy*, which he wrote between 1862 and 1893. In it, he provided a systematic account of his views in biology, sociology, ethics and politics and presented his idea that societies are organisms that progress through a process of evolution similar to that experienced by living species, a concept known to as social Darwinism [1].

Society is (by definition, for Spencer) an aggregate of individuals, and change in society could take place only once the individual members of that society had changed and developed [8, c. 366–367]. Individuals are, therefore, «primary», individual development was «egoistic», and associations with others largely instrumental and contractual [10].

In 1883 Spencer was elected a corresponding member of philosophical section of the French academy of moral and political sciences. His work was also particularly influential in the United States, where his book, *The Study of Sociology*, was at the center of a controversy (1879–1880) at Yale University between a professor, William Graham Sumner, and the University's president, Noah Porter. Spencer's influence extended into the upper echelons of American society and it has been claimed that, in 1896, “three justices of the Supreme Court were avowed «Spencerians» [10].

Conceptual art and historical imagery illustrate a discussion of the «tragedy of modernity» using the writings of Herbert Spencer. The video is recounted Spencer's biography, his central social theory, and situates his work in the 19th century assumption of modernity as progress by Dr Dan Krier [6].

Spencer's idea of problems of coordination and control continue to have importance for contemporary theory, especially with theories that try to explain complex, modern global systems [3, c. 23].

In 1902, shortly before his death, Spencer was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature. He continued writing all his life, in later years often by dictation, until he succumbed to poor health at the age of 83. His ashes are interred in the eastern side of London's Highgate Cemetery facing Karl Marx's grave. At Spencer's funeral the Indian nationalist leader Shyamji Krishnavarma announced a donation of £1,000 to establish a lectureship at Oxford University in tribute to Spencer and his work [4].

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