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State and Social Order. Herbert Spencer and Lamarckism on spontaneous development of social relations. A political analysis

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Abstract

Herbert Spencer is unanimously recognized as the most profound interpreter of the evolutionary theory of knowledge, as well as deep was his influence on Charles Darwin himself and his studies on human genetic development. The basic idea of the Spencerian approach is that individual knowledge is the result of primordial sensory experiences, which are transformed into notions that are part of the human genetic heritage. This *a priori* knowledge is therefore the result of an instinct for the development of certain brain functions that adapt to the social environment and, at the same time, modify it through the sum of the different fragmentary knowledge possessed by other individuals. In this way an approach to the development of mental and relational faculties is outlined, which assumes the principles of Lamarckian evolutionary theory. The aim of this paper is to underline the methodological bases of Spencer's theory of knowledge by linking them to the examination that the English philosopher carries out on the origin of political societies.

Keywords: Spencer, Lamarck, Society, Evolution, Politics

Riassunto. *Stato e ordine sociale. Herbert Spencer e il lamarckismo nello sviluppo spontaneo delle relazioni sociali. Un'analisi politica*

Herbert Spencer è unanimemente riconosciuto come il più profondo interprete della teoria evoluzionistica della conoscenza, così come profonda fu la sua influenza sullo stesso Charles Darwin e sui suoi studi sullo sviluppo genetico umano. L'idea fondamentale dell'approccio spenceriano è che la conoscenza individuale sia il risultato di esperienze sensoriali primordiali, che si trasformano in nozioni facenti parte del patrimonio genetico umano. Questa conoscenza a priori è quindi il risultato di un istinto per lo sviluppo di determinate funzioni cerebrali che si adattano all'ambiente sociale e, allo stesso tempo, lo modificano attraverso la somma delle diverse conoscenze frammentarie possedute da altri individui. In questo modo si delinea un approccio allo sviluppo delle facoltà mentali e relazionali che assume i principi della teoria evoluzionistica lamarckiana. L'obiettivo di questo articolo è sottolineare le basi metodologiche della teoria della conoscenza di Spencer collegandole all'esame che il filosofo inglese svolge sull'origine delle società politiche.

Parole chiave: Spencer, Lamarckismo, Società, Evoluzione, Scienze Politiche

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1. Herbert Spencer's philosophy of knowledge. Evolution and social networks. A brief critique to Parsons

«Society is a growth, not a manifacture» (Spencer, 1860a, p. 93). The relational dynamics that develop in modern societies are composed of an inhomogeneous set of partial knowledge that interacts with each other. This knowledge is, in turn, the result of experiential factors that characterize some functions of the human mind, as they accumulate in some areas of the brain to become genetic material that is transmitted over time between the various generations.

Deductive cognitive processes are therefore conditioned by notions that are genetically transmitted from individual to individual. They constitute an *a priori* knowledge that Immanuel Kant defended in the course of his intellectual activity (Kant, 1999). This a priori knowledge is the result of a spontaneous adaptation to external environmental conditions, or to those conditions that the surrounding social space made available to us and from which we can draw the intellectual stimuli useful for selecting the hypotheses that can guarantee us the development of the necessary cognitive functions for the formulation of new hypotheses to be continuously subjected to falsification. The continuous interactions between individuals allow the emergence of this knowledge and, in particular, its translation into practical notions by the individuals themselves.

Where, however, does this knowledge come from? How can individuals exchange notions of which they have no knowledge? How does a child who doesn't know how to operate a particular tool except by observing the gestures of adults?

«*Nihil est in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensu*». The peripatetic observation, inherited and disclosed by St. Thomas Aquinas, leads us to reflect that there may have been a primordial stimulus that prompted man to know not through brain functions, but through the sensory dimension, in particular through touch, smell and sight. Gottfried Leibniz dusted off this definition by adding a further step: «*nisi ipse intellectus*». For Leibniz the truths of reason are thus based on the logical principle of non-contradiction and are therefore *a priori* or independent of experience and facts; factual truths, on the other hand, properly rest on the principle of sufficient reason, according to which nothing happens without there being a sufficient reason for it to happen in this way rather than otherwise, and are *a posteriori* or dependent on experience and by definition on facts. The human intellect is incapable of deriving contingent knowledge without the function of experience and limits *a priori* knowledge to notions that can be demonstrated on the basis of what the mind already possesses (Von Leibniz, 1666).

In many of his works, Plato argued that the cognitive process is similar to the brain activity that leads to remembering previous facts, since memories are phenomena experienced by the soul; this, once incarnated in the body, needs empirical experiences to bring back these innate

notions. The mental processes underlying knowledge are the product of a synthesis between *a priori* and *a posteriori* processes (Plato, 2008, p. 199). In describing his theory, Lamarck started from psychological categories; in his reflection on the causes of human development, the modifications in the organic world were caused by the fact that when certain needs arise, these are able to determine the orientation of the functions of the organism. These functions are capable of teleologically leading to the formation of new organs. It can be concluded that all goal-oriented activities are not only due to psychic but also intellectual factors.

This tendency towards evolution translates into an emotional drive, an intellectual curiosity inherent in individual organisms in response to certain stimuli from the surrounding environment (Cassirer, 1958). The way the body reacts leads to the birth of new organs in response to certain functions. «Nature provides nothing in vain. Instincts and organs are only preserved as they are required» (Spencer, 1981, p. 128); these organs are transmitted to successive generations and decay when they no longer fulfill those functions, or give way to new organs.

> In the progress of life and in the progress of the individual, the adjustment of the inner tendencies to the outer persistencies, must begin with the simple and advance to the more and more complex; seeing that both within and without, the complex relations are made up of the simple ones, and cannot be established before the simple ones have been established…the only thing required for the establishment of a new internal relation answering to a new external one, is, that the organism shall be sufficiently advanced to cognize the two terms of such new relation, and that being thus advanced, it shall be placed in circumstances in which it shall experience this new relation. Here also, there is a manifest harmony between the *a priori* inference, and the inference from observation (Spencer, 1855, p. 532).

Herber Spencer was firmly convinced that human nature can be progressively modified through adaptation to external conditions. «Mind has its laws as well as matter» (Spencer, 1982, p. 183). The organic forms originated through physically caused and inherited mutations, in the same way that individual human faculties and instincts developed to respond functionally to the changing needs of adaptation to circumstances.

Cerebral evolution goes hand in hand with physical evolution, perhaps even anticipating it,

as it is the sensitive experience which, undergoing external stimuli, imposes synaptic transformations which in turn induce modifications of physical behavior.

If, as the instincts become higher and higher, the various psychical changes of which they are severally composed become less and less definitely coordinated; there must come a time when the coordination of them will no longer be perfectly regular. If these compound reflex actions, as they grow more compound, also become less decided; it follows that they will eventually become comparatively undecided. The actions will begin to lose their distinctly automatic character. And that which we call instinct will gradually merge into something higher. Thus, then, we see that the conclusions deducible from the experience-hypothesis, are in harmony with such facts as we possess. We see that the evolution of instincts, as resulting from experience, is quite comprehensible. We see that, if produced by experience, this evolution must proceed from the simple to the complex; which is the indication of positive evidence so far as it is attainable. And we see that by a progression thus wrought out, instinct must in the end insensibly pass into a higher order of psychical action; which is just what we find it to do m the higher animals (Spencer, 1855, p. 553).

According to Spencer (Spencer, 1855, p. 578), evolution is an ontogenetic process, as it concerns the development of the single individual, but the processes of acquisition of information and their processing by the mind acquire epigenetic characteristics, as a single phenomenon is susceptible to different interpretations in the process of maturation of individual experience. «Life, under all its forms, has arisen by a progressive, unbroken evolution». The evolution of cognitive mechanisms is an inductive path, as a process that goes from the simple to the complex through successive differentiations.

The peculiarity of Spencer, who approaches what was argued by Mill regarding his method of ratiocinative and inductive logic, lies in the tendency to envisage the possibility of offering a reconciliation between induction and deduction, through the belief that the deductive phase anticipated the inductive phase.

To empirically support the existence of forms of *a priori* knowledge, Spencer theorized that the mental states of ancestors were a sort of *tabula rasa*, whose propensity for development was identified on the basis of the respective experiences, successively inherited from generation to generation. Knowledge is distinguished in an *a posteriori* stage for the

individual, but a priori for society as a whole. Human mental activity evolves on the basis of a «continuous differentiation and integration of states of consciousness» (Spencer, 1988, p. 333).

Adhering to the Lamarckian principles on the inheritance of characters acquired on the basis of the educative action of the environment, Spencer inherits a dynamic vision of human nature. He strongly supports the presence of deductive presuppositions of human knowledge, which however necessarily start from the inductive experiences of the ancestors, expanding the gnoseological boundaries to the consideration of the historical development of the evolution of the human race[1].

> The behaviour of the social unit as exposed to environing conditions- inorganic, organic and super-organic- depends in part on certain additional traits. Beyond those visible specialities of organization which the body displays, and beyond those hidden specialities of organization implied by the mental type, there are those specialities, still less traceable, implied by the acquired beliefs. As accumulated ancestral experiences, moulding the nervous structures, produce the mental powers; so personal experiences, daily elaborated into thoughts, cause small modifications of these structures and powers. A complete account of the original social unit must include these modifications- or, rather, must include the correlative ideas implying them. For, manifestly, the ideas he forms of himself of other beings and of the surrounding world, greatly affect his conduct (Spencer, 1898a, p. 94).

The historicization of human evolution, physical and intellectual, does not represent an attempt to outline a philosophy of history, as Spencer realizes that the evolutionary process is the result of a non-linear development of social facts and that history is only a succession of unpredictable events. The evolution of the human mind, as well as the material one, is the result of an interaction between the environment and the perceptive capacities of the human mind[2].

«As the environment differs, the course of evolution must differ» (Spencer, 1891b, p. 73);

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1 Lamarck himself, approaching John Locke's criticism of innatism, had argued that the origin of individual instinct was to be sought in the first experiences of primordial ancestors, which were fixed in their nervous system and transmitted by them over the course of centuries (Lamarck, 1994, pp. 326-332).

2 Spencer enters into controversy with the historical determinism of Hegel and Schelling, who reveal a linear path of history as an incarnation of the universal spirit. (Spencer, 1891b, pp. 1-73).

the environment therefore performs an educational function towards the individual and the set of states of consciousness that configure the mind undergo interactive mutations based on stimuli from the outside (Spencer, 1891a, pp. 62).

In this way Spencer comes very close to the Lockean method of cognitive processes. The stimuli that induce a newborn to feed through the mother's breast or a duckling to immerse itself in the water in the instant following the exit from the egg are the result of an atavistic heritage that began with a direct experience of the progenitor.

In Spencer, knowledge was made up of statements resulting from mental relationships that arise from the attempt to describe the objective world through the relationship between a thing and one of its properties. The gnoseological and linguistic level end up being characterized by a causal chain of brain functions (Linguiti, 1991, pp. 7-34).

The urge to act and to know derives, according to Spencer, from an inner strength, from a spontaneous impulse dictated by the will to adapt to the surrounding environmental conditions.

> The definition of conduct which emerges is either acts adjusted to ends, or else the adjustment of acts to ends; according as we contemplate the formed body of acts, or think of the form alone. And conduct in its full acceptation must be taken as comprehending all adjustments of acts to ends, from the simplest to the most complex, whatever their special natures and whether considered separately or in their totality (Spencer, 1879, p. 5).

It can be argued that human action is dictated by a means-end calculation that each individual implements to try to resolve a situation of uncertainty. Individuals, within the context of the situational constraints in which they are placed, hierarchize their needs on the basis of selective impulses dictated by emotional states such as desires and feelings and tend to create what they consider most indispensable.

The subjective action is therefore subjected to an evolutionary adaptation which transforms it from a merely instinctive act, describable as a merely biological manifestation, to a substantially cultural conduct, as elements such as memory, reason, feelings and will come

into play (Spencer, 1855, p. 487). The human evolutionary adaptation then becomes the cause of behaviors that represent a spontaneous «combination of heterogeneous changes, both simultaneous and successive, *in correspondence with external coexistences and sequences*» (p. 368)[3].

Just as he claims that the organic forms were formed by the spontaneous union of simpler physiological units in response to external stimuli, in the same way he claims that the validity of the fundamental concepts elaborated by the conscience on the basis of the phenomenal reality experienced by it (Spencer, 1891a, p. 48). In this way the concepts of space, time, movement and force are taking shape in the human mind corroborated by the correspondence between the cognitive mechanism born from these and the complex of external objective relationships. These concepts are transmitted by inheritance starting from primordial experiences carried out by organisms without rational faculties, becoming part of the individual genetic heritage.

It is in the *First Principles* (1867) that Spencer detaches himself from the tendency of contemporary scientific theory, which considers the visual faculties the engine of evolutionary conduct. He founds an epistemology based on the central function of touch, through which it is possible to acquire awareness of matter and space based on the feedback received from the resistance imposed by certain objects, which in turn impose a certain muscular tension (Spencer, 1867, p. 166). In the act of impressing a movement on a foreign body, the force necessary for its movement puts into operation those latent cognitive functions which represent the a priori for subsequent generations.

Touch and the resisting force are in a causal relationship with the nervous drive that leads to the development of certain motor and intellectual faculties, in the same way that they are in a causal relationship with cognitive processes, since they constitute the mother tongue in which they are recorded the first experiences and through which it is possible to interpret the symbols learned later.

[3] It was shown, that what are called "spontaneous variations" are interpretable as results of miscellaneously compounding the changes wrought in different lines of ancestors by different conditions of life. These still more complex and multitudinous effects so produced, are thus further illustrations of the multiplication of effects (Spencer, 1864a, p. 428).

Biological systems are thus outlined as open systems, as they are constantly aimed at learning to guarantee their survival. The survival of the fittest does not indicate the survival of the fittest in nature, but the ability to adapt to multiple stimuli coming from the open environment. The increase in the interdependencies between physical phenomena and internal changes guarantees the evolution of the organism. A society is an organism.

When we say that growth is common to social aggregates and organic aggregates, we do not thus entirely exclude community with inorganic aggregates. Some of these, as crystals, grew in a visible manner; and all of them, on the hypothesis of evolution, have arisen by integration at some time or other. Nevertheless, compared with things we call inanimate, living bodies and societies so conspicuously exhibit augmentation of mass, that we may fairly regard this as characterizing them both. Many organisms grow throughout their lives; and the rest grow throughout considerable parts of their lives. Social growth usually continues either up to times when the societies divide, or up to times when they are overwhelmed (Spencer, 1898b, p. 449).

It is not something detached from the individuals who compose it, but it is a reality made up of the multiple interactions of individuals who exchange continuous feedback in order to optimally satisfy their needs by joining forces with those of others[4].

The mere gathering of individuals into a group does not constitute them a society. A society, in the sociological sense, is formed only when, besides juxtaposition there is cooperation. So long as members of the group do not combine their energies to achieve some common end or ends, there is little to keep them together. They are prevented from separating only when the wants of each are better satisfied by uniting his efforts with those of others, than they would be if he acted alone. Cooperation, then, is at once that which cannot exist without a

[4] Concerning this argument, Carl Menger (1996, p.169) was about to support the same thesis. He stated that the ultimate elements to which the exact theoretical interpretation of natural phenomena must refer are atoms and forces. Both are non- empirical in nature. We cannot represent atoms to ourselves, and natural forces we can only represent by means of images, and in reality we understand them only as causes unknown to us of real movements. This leads to extraordinary difficulties in the final analysis for the exact interpretation of natural phenomena. Things are different in the exact social sciences. Here it is human individuals and their activities that constitute the ultimate elements of our analysis, which is of an empirical nature, and therefore the exact social sciences have a great advantage over the exact natural sciences. The boundaries of natural knowledge and the difficulties deriving from this for the theoretical understanding of natural phenomena do not actually exist for exact research in the ambit of social phenomena. When Comte conceives society as real organisms, that is, as more complex organisms than natural ones, and defines their theoretical interpretation as the incomparably more complicated and difficult problem, he falls into a big mistake. His theory would be correct only in the case of social scientists who conceive theories that are meaningless with respect to the current state of theoretical natural sciences, and who wish to interpret social phenomena in the manner of atomism in use in the natural sciences, and not of specifically scientific-social atomism.

society, and that for which a society exist (Spencer, 1891b, p. 449).

At the basis of the social order, like the organic one, there is the principle of cooperation made possible by the increasing complexity that social formations acquire.

According to Spencer, there are basically two social formations that have established themselves mainly over time: those where the state community totally absorbs the individual private dimension and where cooperation is imposed by force, differently from those social realities in which cooperation it develops spontaneously from the drive of individual associates to pursue private goals (Spencer, 1891b, pp. 449-450).

Spencer defines these realities as military society the first and industrial society the second (Spencer, 1898b, pp. 568-642). Both have the element of cooperation. But if a characteristic of the first reality is that cooperation is forcibly imposed to achieve public ends, in the second conformation cooperation, which develops spontaneously, allows the development of individual intelligences through the cognitive stimuli offered by the constant encounter and clash with the knowledge of others. In industrial societies, cooperation is constantly evolving, as it passes from simple forms of aggregation to more complex and heterogeneous forms.

We may distinguish as homogeneous co-operation, (1), that in which like efforts are joined for like ends that are simultaneously enjoyed. As cooperation that is not completely homogeneous, we may distinguish, (2), that in which like efforts are joined for like ends that are not simultaneously enjoyed. A cooperation of which the heterogeneity is more distinct is, (3), that in which unlike efforts are joined for like ends. And lastly comes the decidedly heterogeneous cooperation, (4), that in which unlike efforts are joined for unlike ends (Spencer, 1879, p. 140).

The public purpose is therefore achieved indirectly through actions intentionally aimed at maximizing individual well-being (Di Nuoscio, 2000, pp. 61-75).

Just as the mechanisms of development of human knowledge undergo their evolutionary thrust starting from the multitude of stimuli received from the external environment in combination with the internal sensory world, so social knowledge evolves starting from sympathetic mechanisms which are the cause of the encounter spontaneous between different

wills.

The scope for altruistic activities will not exceed the desire for altruistic satisfactions. In natures thus constituted, though the altruistic gratifications must remain in a transfigured sense egoistic, yet they will not be egoistically pursued-will not be pursued from egoistic motives. Though pleasure will be gained by giving pleasure, yet the thought of the sympathetic pleasure to be gained will not occupy consciousness, but only the thought of the pleasure given. To a great extent this is so now. In the truly sympathetic, attention is so absorbed with the proximate end, others' happiness, that there is none given to the prospective self-happiness which may ultimately result (Spencer, 1879, p. 250).

However, it is not possible to adhere to the thesis of evolutionary universals made by Talcott Parsons, as the interruption of sympathetic relationships, both organically and socially, can lead to a regression to the tribal state of society and the primordial state of brain functions (Parsons, 1964, pp. 339-357)[5]. Universal and necessary laws cannot be established, such as Comte's law of three stages, to describe evolutionary processes, precisely on the basis of its non-linearity and multidimensionality.

In fact, Spencer himself warns that evolutionary progress is not infinite, but rather undergoes regressive phases when the human being ceases to respond to the inductive/deductive interactive system. The survival of the fittest society, like the fittest individual, is given not so much by the constant tendency to progress, but by the ability to maintain a balance between ascending and descending historical phases thanks to the inter-individual networks born from the spontaneous encounter between individuals, which create the driving force for the constant social aggregation and disaggregation permitted by the freedom existing in open societies.

It is possible, and, I believe, probable, that retrogression has been as frequent as progression. Evolution is commonly conceived to imply in everything an intrinsic tendency to become something higher. This is an erroneous conception of it. In all cases it is determined by the cooperation of inner and outer factors. This cooperation works changes until there is reached an equilibrium between the environing actions and the actions which the aggregate opposes to them – a complete equilibrium if the aggregate is without life, and a moving

[5] See also (Collerone and Città, 2013, pp. 19-24).

equilibrium if the aggregate is living (Spencer, 1898a, p. 95).

The famous expression «Spencer is Dead […] he was the intimate confidant of a strange and rather unsatisfactory God, whom he called Evolution», represents the total lack of real understanding of Spencerian philosophy (Parsons, 1968, p. 3). The confusion that the American sociologist denounces in the pages of his most famous work on the history of sociology lies in the interpretation of Spencerian individualism in a utilitarian sense. Individualism, atomism, empiricism, human action understood as a mathematical calculation of the relationship between means and ends, are part, according to Parsons, of Spencerian positivism[6]. In this model, according to the author, scientifically verifiable knowledge of the situation in which (the actor) acts becomes the only significant orienting medium in the action system.

This gross error lies *ab origine* in the interpretation of Spencerian individualism as atomism, «described as the strong tendency to consider mainly the properties of conceptually isolated unit acts and to infer the properties of system of action only by a process of 'direct' generalization from these» (Parsons, 1968, p. 52).

However, the error is justifiable if one takes into account the cultural differences that characterize the two sociologists. Spencer was the son of the industrial revolution and the heir to Smith's optimism on the effectiveness of market systems in paving the way for personal growth. Parsons had instead absorbed the failure of the post-World War I laissez faire system and espoused the cause of public intervention in the free economy, which brings with it the death of the myth of the self-made man and introduces new hope in the intervention of the collective public in the training path of personal fulfillment.

[6] «The theoretical action system characterized by these four features, atomism, rationality, empiricism and randomness of ends will be called in the present study the utilitarian system of social theory» (Parsons, 1968, p. 60).

2. Spencer and the spontaneous evolution of Society. Differences between Organicism and Collectivism and political implications

Changing the illustration, and regarding society as an organism, we may say that it is impossible artificially to use up social vitality for the more active performance of one function, without diminishing the activity with which other functions are performed. So long as society is let alone, its various organs will go on developing in due subordination to each other. If some of them are very imperfect, and make no appreciable progress towards efficiency, be sure it is because still more important organs are equally imperfect, and because the amount of vital force pervading society being limited, the rapid growth of these involves cessation of growth elsewhere. Be sure, also, that whenever there arises a special necessity for the better performance of any one function, or for the establishment of some new function, nature will respond (Spencer, 1860b, pp. 390-391).

In considering the manifestations in which social order occurs, Spencer pays close attention to the biological metaphor of society as an organism. Both arise from rudimentary elementary forms and then mutate into more articulated contexts that exceed the original nucleus in size.

Although society as a whole is a relational form uniting many small units and functions, it does not reveal itself as a mere juxtaposition of parts. In the same way that a living organism outlives its elementary units, so society outlives the life of individuals. The body politic survives over time by growing in complexity[7].

Not only organisms, but also mechanisms show an adequacy of the parts with respect to the whole, and not only in the former, but also in the latter, the normal function of the whole is conditioned by the normal nature of the parts. But the organism differs from the mechanism because on the one hand it is not like the latter the result of a human calculation, but the product of a natural process, and on the other hand because every single part of it (each organ) is conditioned not only in its normal formation, but also in its normal essence by the connection of the parts with a higher whole (the organism as a whole) and by the normal essence of the remaining parts (the other organs), which is not the case at all of the mechanism (Menger, 1996).

Spencer's sociology takes these same positions; according to the English social scientist,

[7] «the life of a society is independent of, and far more prolonged than, the lives of any of its component units; who are severally born, grow, work, reproduce, and die, while the body-politic composed of them survives generation after generation, increasing in mass, in completeness of structure, and in functional activity» (Spencer, 1891a, p. 272).

the use of the analogy between organisms and society only serves to differentiate individualist methodological approaches from holistic ones. Societies, like natural organisms, «are not made, but grow» (Spencer, 1860b, p. 263). However, unlike the latter, social organizations are not equipped with a single sensory system, instead possessing multiple ones, as many as there are formations that individual cooperation manages to structure. The claim of a constitution of associative structures on a collectivist basis falls in front of the observation that the non-existence of a collective conscience leads to the affirmation that collective life must necessarily be subordinated to individual life (Spencer, 1891a, p. 277).

The theoretical understanding of social structures passes through the understanding of the duplicity of the constitutive phenomena. Thinking of society as a single whole does not prevent reflection on how much attention should be given to its individual components, as using an individualistic methodology does not prevent thinking of the growth of social networks in evolutionary terms.

As far as the social sciences are concerned, the dynamism of inter-individual relationships leads to a change in environmental conditions which does not necessarily lead to progress, but creates a process of development and evolution towards a further degree of social relations. It is therefore not possible to establish *a priori* universal laws that can explain the course of history, given that it progresses on the basis of unintentional outcomes deriving from the interaction of the material world, the sensible world and the world made up of the products of human intelligence. Evolution is not a mechanistic process, but a multidimensional trend. However, one can think of the idea of progress in society and in society if one focuses on the spontaneous dynamics that lead to the growth of inter-individual relationships.

Carl Menger himself warned about the indiscriminate use of the analogy between society and organism. He warned in particular about the false use of the term organic when one tries to describe, through this term, phenomena predetermined by a collective will. Lamarckian speaking, society is not born from a predetermined idea of response to external phenomena, but develops teleologically in view of a spontaneous response to the function of connection between individual wills.

Spencer represents this philosophy through the example of the development of language,

which from a supernatural gift becomes a communication system that responds to the individual need to exchange thoughts and conjectures.

Up to quite recent days, Language was held to be of supernatural origin. That this elaborate apparatus of symbols, so marvelously adapted for the conveyance of thought from mind to mind, was a miraculous gift, seemed unquestionable […] Already the evolution of Language has been traced back far enough to show that all its particular words, and all its leading traits of structure, have had a natural genesis; and day by day investigation makes it more manifest that its genesis has been natural from the beginning. Not only has it been natural from the beginning, but it has been spontaneous. No language is a cunningly-devised scheme of a ruler or body of legislators (Spencer, 1891c, pp. 402-203).

As Karl Popper has argued (1989, pp. 44-45), the development of descriptive and argumentative functions has constituted the most powerful adaptive tool for the evolution of social relations. It is only through these two functions that human beings have the possibility of enhancing the relationality that puts individuals in contact and allows the constitution of homogeneous social bodies that reciprocally exchange goods and services, thus creating new functions and new needs.

Let us turn now to the social organism, and the analogies of structure and function which may be traced in it. Of course these analogies between the phenomena presented in a physically coherent aggregate forming an individual, and the phenomena presented m a physically incoherent aggregate of individuals distributed over a wide area, cannot be analogies of a visible or sensible kind; but can only be analogies between the systems, or methods, of organization. Such analogies as exist result from the one unquestionable community between the two organizations: *there is in both a mutual dependence of parts*. This is the origin of all organizations; and determines what similarities there are between an individual organism and a social organism (Spencer, 1891c, p. 411).

The lack of a sensory center within social contexts confronts us with the following observation: social systems, like biological ones, are open systems[8]. Just as language,

[8] «One cardinal difference is that, while in the individual organism there is but one centre of consciousness capable of pleasure or pain, there are, in the social organism, as many such centres as there are individuals, and the aggregate of them has no consciousness of pleasure or pain-a difference which entirely changes the ends to be pursued» (Spencer, 1891c, p. 411).

following Popper's assertions, is produced by the brain, but leads the brain itself to the growth of new logical connections through the argumentative function, so the multiplication of effects that are produced by the meeting of individual wills arises from spontaneous interactions between individuals that lead to the evolution of social relationships through the constant meeting of individual needs.

«Evolution in conduct considered under its moral aspect, is, like all other evolution, towards equilibrium. I do not mean that it is towards the **e**quilibrium reached at death, though this is, of course, the final state which the evolution of the highest man has in common with all lower evolution; but I mean that it is towards a moving equilibrium» (Spencer, 1879, p. 72).

The company was born from the creation of certain functions and evolves through the creation of new functions, in a seamless process that creates what Spencer has defined as a «moving equilibrium» (Spencer, 1891c, pp. 403-404).

The author's purpose is precisely to estimate the impact that the unintentional outcomes deriving from intentional human actions have on the shaping of the groups and associations that constitute the backbone of national realities, placing itself in the wake of Menger's observations on the analogy between natural entities and social entities.

Natural organisms are composed of elements that serve the functioning of the whole in an exclusively mechanical way, they are the result of a pure causal process, of the mechanical play of natural forces. The so-called social organisms cannot on the contrary be understood and interpreted only as the product of purely mechanical influences of forces. They are rather the result of human activities, of the activities of men who think, feel and act. Therefore, if we speak of the "organic origin" of social phenomena, or rather of a part of them, this can be based on the fact that a part of social phenomena is the result of a common will oriented towards their foundation (the convention, the legislation positive, etc.), while another part is the unreflected result of human activities (that is, the unintentional result of them) tending towards essentially individual goals (Menger C. 1996, pp. 137-138).

Just as organisms evolve without external interventions which impose the direction of their growth, so modern societies, in which private interests promote the spirit of seeking systems for improving existential conditions, evolve on the basis of cooperation not mediated by

coercive structural systems and subversives of peaceful coexistence[9]. Freedom becomes an ethical and anthropological *a priori* from which to derive the inductions that promote the understanding of the spontaneity of social networks.

The absence of a single sensory organ referable to society as a whole leads to a better understanding of how the idea of an open society was associated with the nascent industrial society. The absence of a single administrative center which determined the historical path of social progress has allowed the formation of many centers of representation of individual interests. Just as private interest, free from the coercive pressure of a charismatic leader, has allowed the creation of many commercial activities, in the same way the absence of a repressive state of individual freedoms has allowed the flowering of many associations that represent social issues.

The political life of a society is therefore dictated by the variety of individual intellect, by the multiplicity of opinions that support those inductions that lead to the understanding that social organizations are constituted through a teleological and not a teleonomic process.

> Varied mental constitution produces variety of opinion; different minds take different views of the same subject; hence, every question gets examined in all its bearings; and, out of the general mass of argument, urged forward by antagonist parties, may sound principle be elicited. Truth has ever originated from the conflict of mind with mind; it is the bright spark that emanates from the collision of opposing ideas; like a spiritual Venus, the impersonation of moral beauty, it is born from the foam of the clashing waves of public opinion. Discussion and agitation are the necessary agents of its discovery; and, without a universal dissimilitude in the minds of society, discussion and agitation could never exist (Spencer, 1981, p. 230).

If the social order of industrial societies is the result of a spontaneous evolution dictated by the primordial spirit to find an answer to survival in free cooperation, then it is not possible for an entity to be established to which individual freedom is subordinated. The measure of freedom is not given by the government system but by the greater or lesser number of limits

[9] «The spread of scientific knowledge, and of the scientific spirit, has not been brought about by laws and officials. Our scientific societies have arisen from the spontaneous cooperation of these interested in the accumulation and diffusion of the kinds of truth they respectively deal with» (Menger, 1996 p. 436).

imposed on each associate.

«The theory that the social formation we call the state always arises organically is one-sided. Equally erroneous, and even more antihistorical, is the theory according to which all states arose originally through a pact aimed at their foundation, or by the action of some powerful or groups of powerful consciously aimed at that end» (Menger, 1996, p. 164). The state thus becomes a social situation rather than a juridical and administrative reality. Political organizations do not arise from pacts or conventions between powerful groups, but are the unreflected development of voluntary cooperation.

Apart from the few functions, including those of protection from external aggressions, the task of a state is to protect individual freedoms from government coercion. The moment it abdicates this function, it is the inalienable right of the individual to get away from this situation[10].

3. Conclusions. Herbert Spencer and Positivism: Considerations on synthetic philosophy, evolutionism and open society

While the militant social type is dominant, and the industrial organization but little developed, there is but one coordinating agency for regulating both sets of activities; just as we saw happens with the lower types of individual organisms. It is only when a considerable advance has been made in that metamorphosis which develops the industrial structures at the expense of the militant structures, and which brings along with it a substantially-independent coordinating agency for the industrial structures - it is only then that the efficiency of these spontaneous cooperations for all purposes of internal social life becomes greater than the efficiency of the central governing agency (Spencer, 1891c, p. 430).

The industrial societies described by Spencer are modern democratic societies that have structured themselves around multiple centers of power, thus rejecting monocratic centralism. They are those «polyarchies» defended by Robert Dahl (1972) that represent Western

[10] «If every man has freedom to do all that he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man, then he is free to drop connection with the state - to relinquish its protection, and to refuse paying towards its support», (Spencer, 1860b, p. 206).

democratic societies. The reduction of state power corresponds to an expansion of the sphere of individual freedoms; the role of the state then becomes that of linking these freedoms in such a way that they are compatible between individuals.

In industrial societies, collective action that directs individual wills towards a single end is no longer necessary, but rather it is directed towards the protection of the same from unnecessary interference for peaceful coexistence (Spencer, 1898b, p. 399). Democratic societies present a particular dynamism, dictated by their peculiar polycentrism which allows them to quickly adapt to the perverse effects of social relations.

Democratic systems are autopoietic systems, systems that continuously redefine themselves. This is because free societies are realities in constant evolution, they are the unintentional outcome of the combination of individual subjective actions which show an adaptive character with respect to certain situations. This is Spencer's debt in particular to Adam Smith and his seminal work concerning the scattered knowledge in society[11].

However, they are not the product of a predetermined and rigid selection. In democratic systems, ineffective solutions are not completely discarded to make way for more optimal solutions, but are perfected to match the demand for certain needs with the offer of services aimed at satisfying them.

Pursuing his own private interests, each individual produces externalities that represent opportunities for others. The feedback mechanism based on the principle of trial and error

[11] Indeed Smith (1998, p. 594) was the first to note that what is the species of domestic industry which his capital can employ, and of which the produce is likely to be of the greatest value, every individual, it is evident, can, in his local situation, judge much better than any statesman or lawgiver can do for him. The statesman who should attempt to direct private people in what manner they ought to employ their capitals would not only load himself with a most unnecessary attention, but assume an authority which could safely be trusted, not only to no single person, but to no council or senate whatever, and which would nowhere be so dangerous as in the hands of a man who had folly and presumption enough to fancy himself fit to exercise it. Smith was subsequently re-evaluated by Friedrich Von Hayek, who shed new light on the concept of limited knowledge, due to which no planner can think of centralizing particular knowledge of time and place without producing socio-political aberrations such as totalitarianism. Hayek (1945, pp. 524-525) stated that if we agree that the economic problem of society is mainly one of rapid adaptation to changes in the particular circumstances of time and place, it would seem to follow that the ultimate decisions must be left to the people who are familiar with these circumstances, who know directly of the relevant changes and of the resources immediately available to meet them. We cannot expect that this problem will be solved by first communicating all this knowledge, issues its orders. We must solve it by some form of decentralization. But this answers only part of our problem. We need decentralization because only thus can we ensure that the knowledge of the particular circumstances of time and place will be promptly used. But the "man on the spot" cannot decide solely on the basis of his limited but intimate knowledge of the facts of his immediate surroundings. There still remains the problem of communicating to him such further information as he needs to fit his decisions into the whole pattern of changes of the larger economic system.

does not turn out to have Darwinian roots, but rather Lamarckian ones, as externalities can be described as new organic functions that are born and die according to their usefulness.

Examining the evolutionary path from a military society to an industrial society allows Spencer to lay the methodological foundations for a better distinction between individualism and collectivism.

The parallelism between the two realities constitutes the most peculiar aspect of Spencerian sociology, whose term is marked only and exclusively by peaceful coexistence. This is the function of the transition between historical phases which should lead to the post-industrial society, a reality in which the liberation of labor from the pre-industrial monopoly market is transformed into emancipation from the more tiring and restrictive aspects of work.

Although this consideration seems to bring Spencerian evolutionism closer to Marxian utopianism, the intent of the English philosopher is to underline how the increased interdependence of the parts progressively leads to the decrease of their antagonism. The gradual overcoming of conflict between individuals leads to the conciliation between selfishness and altruism (Lanaro, 1997, pp. 161-166).

Further, it is to be noted that while the unlimited authority of the greatest man ceases to be needful; and while the superstitious awe which upholds that unlimited authority decreases; it at the same time becomes impossible to get the greatest man to the top. In a rude social state, where might is right, where war is the business of life, where the qualities required in the ruler, alike for controlling his subjects and defeating his enemies, are bodily strength, courage, cunning, will, it is easy to pick out the best; or rather--he picks himself out. The qualities which make him the fittest governor for the barbarians around him, are the qualities by which he gets the mastery over them. But in an advanced, complex, and comparatively peaceful state like ours, these are not the qualities needed; and even were they needed, the firmly-organized arrangements of society do not allow the possessor of them to break through to the top. For the rule of a settled, civilized community, the characteristics required are--not a love of conquest but a desire for the general happiness; not undying hate of enemies but a calm dispassionate equity; not artful manoeuvring but philosophic insight (Spencer, 1981, pp. 368-369).

From the example of the French revolution, Spencer derives that even through a violent event it is not possible to change the intimate structure of a society, because it is the result of

an evolutionary adaptation that reacts to coercive events. Hence the rejection of historical determinism and the presumption of the possibility of reason being able to bend events to its will.

The fundamental law of social coexistence is fundamentally based on the voluntary modeling of individual lives on those of others. The composition of individual actions becomes the intimate essence of societies that protect freedoms by rejecting conformity and the presumption of perfect knowledge. These considerations refer to a necessary comparison with the principles of Positivism, the philosophical school to which Spencer is traced.

What is positive? The idea behind the gnoseological aspect of positivism consists in considering the objects of knowledge objectively placed, *positum*, outside the human dimension and man can try to understand them through the tools of science. In the vision of the fathers of French positivism, Claude Henri de Saint Simon and Auguste Comte, it is possible to trace a historical path that leads to the elaboration of the necessary law of progress, which leads human societies out of critical epochs, characterized by disorder, to arrive at organic epochs based on the order given by the improvement of the sciences. Historical progress and scientific progress become synonymous in an attempt to trace a single historical path, which does not take into account individual events, but represents a description of the evolution of society as an organic whole (Antiseri and De Mucci, 1995, pp. 13-14)[12].

In particular, August Comte tries to trace, through the study of social progress, a method of investigation that unifies disciplines and knowledge in an interdependent line. In the *Opuscules de philosophie sociale* (1819-1828) Comte, similarly to Spencer, identifies two types of society: a dying one, the theological and military one, a nascent one, the industrial and scientific one, in which scientists replace theologians in an attempt to provide the intellectual and moral basis of the new social order.

The law of the three stages, mentioned above, aims to describe social progress through the transformation of the human spirit and knowledge. The first stage sees the phenomena as products of the action of supernatural subjects; in the second they are explained as works of abstract or natural forces; in the third man, aware of the limit of knowledge, is content to

[12] See also Acton, 1951, pp. 291-310.

establish the invariable laws that command them.

In studying the development of human intelligence as a whole in the various spheres of activity, from its first and simplest beginning down to the present day, I believe I have discovered a great fundamental law which governs it with an immutable necessity, and which seems to me can be firmly established, both on the rational evidence furnished by knowledge of our organization and on the historical verifications which result from a careful examination of the past. This law consists in the fact that each of our main conceptions, each branch of our knowledge, passes successively through three theoretically different stages [...] In the positive stage, the human spirit, recognizing the impossibility of attaining absolute knowledge, gives up seeking the origin and destiny of the universe and to know the intimate causes of phenomena, to devote himself to discovering ... the laws that actually govern them, i.e. their invariable relationships of succession and similarity (Aron, 1989, p. 86).

This law connects directly with the rigorous classification that Comte offers of the sciences, which imposes a progressive path that goes from mathematics and biology to sociology. The scientific method that has triumphed in the analytical sciences must extend to the fields of politics by creating sociology. However, biology, as a synthetic science, prevails over mathematical analysis as it takes advantage of a holistic method of investigation, given that it is not possible to explain the functions of individual organs without referring to the organic system as a whole. Here then is that the terminal stage of scientific progress is identified with the offer of a methodology that is able to explain human phenomena through a synthesis that favors the primacy of the whole over the individual: a social fact cannot be understood except by linking it to the society as a whole.

Through this position, Comte wanted to explain the history of humanity as a path that passes from an atavistic phase to one in which the two dimensions of order and progress prevail. In the first dimension, static definition, in which scientific thought harmonizes the different existential conditions of societies, dynamically reaching a universal vocation, unifying all fields of knowledge and unifying ideas, even in the political field, thus putting a brake on the intellectual anarchy of modern societies.

Ideas govern and overthrow the world or, in other words, the whole social mechanism is based on opinions... The great political and moral crisis of today's societies ultimately depends on intellectual anarchy. Our gravest evil consists, in fact, in the profound divergence that exists today in all minds regarding all the fundamental maxims, the stability of which is the first condition of an effective social order. Until individual intelligences have given, with a unanimous sentiment, their adherence to a certain number of general ideas capable of forming a common social doctrine, we cannot hide the fact that the condition of peoples will necessarily remain fundamentally revolutionary, despite all the political palliatives that could be adopted, and will, in reality, involve only provisional institutions (Aron, 1989, p. 90).

Comtian sociology becomes the philosophy of everything, or the rational coordination of different human events according to a single design. For Comte the spontaneity of human action denounces what he defines as "fetishism", describing it as that tendency to give dignity to things by feeling them as having a soul of their own. Only positivism, as a scientific method, constitutes the cure for fetishism; positivism represents the final stage of human development, the end of history in the Hegelian sense, as a uniformity between intellectual, political and moral disciplines. The transition from fetishism to positivism is found in the static phase of social evolution, understood as a phase of consensus, in which all individual opinions and ideas blend into a coherent whole with the scientific ideas of modern society. The dynamic phase, or the phase of progress, represents the final phase of a process of social growth which leads to the realization of the positivist utopia. Fetishism, individuality and the inconsistency between ideas are the only obstacles to the realization of this deterministic utopia which instills a totalitarian tone in the study of society by French positivism and by Comte in particular.

The main part of this evolution, the one that has most influenced general progress, undoubtedly consists in the continuous development of the scientific mentality starting from the primitive works of Thales and Pythagoras up to those of Lagrange or Bichat. No enlightened man today would doubt that, in this long succession of endeavors and discoveries, human genius has not always followed an exactly determined path, the exact prior knowledge of which would have allowed, in a certain sense, a sufficiently informed intelligence, to predict, before their more or less near realization, the essential advances reserved for each era (Aron, 1989, p. 107).

Spencer does not fall into this error, which leads positivism, as noted by J. S. Mill, to embody «nothing less than a spiritual disposition» (Mill, 2014, pos. 1102. *Ebook*). Spencer does not adopt the concept of progress as the ultimate indicator of evolution, therefore as the end of history. Indeed, history is constantly evolving because it is the human being himself who never stops changing nature in order to interact with environmental stimuli.

Spencerian *Social Statics* does not represent a weird attempt to unify in the same system a holistic methodology for understanding social relations but, on the contrary, serves as a methodological premise for establishing the impossibility of deriving, from the study of social facts, universal laws that can explain the diversity and complexity of society[13].

Spencer (1860b, p. 16) stated that «There is no way of coming at a true theory of society, but by inquiring into the nature of its component individuals. To understand humanity in its combinations, it is necessary to analyze that humanity in its elementary form--for the explanation of the compound, to refer back to the simple. We quickly find that every phenomenon exhibited by an aggregation of men, originates in some quality of man himself». He well understood that, although individual actions are teleologically oriented, they involuntarily give rise to a series of consequences that generate unintended effects. Society is one of these effects, therefore its origin is ateleological, therefore impossible to describe using the concept of progress as an outcome of organically predetermined historical facts.

Among other things, the possibility that there may be regressive episodes in the development of human societies calls into great question the term itself of the end of history. This is why the Spencerian system of synthetic philosophy limits itself to establishing evolutionism as a method of investigation of sciences that have individual actions as their object, taking into account that they develop in a continuous interactive system between an *a priori* knowledge and experiences that can be formulated *a posteriori*.

In this way, the Spencerian system of social investigation, structured on the principles of

[13] «It is a trite enough remark that change is the law of all things: true equally of a single object, and of the universe. Nature in its infinite complexity is ever growing to a new development. Each successive result becomes the parent of an additional influence, destined in some degree to modify all future results […] Strange indeed would it be, if, in the midst of this universal mutation, man alone were constant, unchangeable. But it is not so. He also obeys the law of indefinite variation. His circumstances are ever altering; and he is ever adapting himself to them» (Spencer, 1860b, pp. 32-33).

integration and differentiation, as it tends to examine the parts prevailing over that of the whole, takes on tones that are detached from the holistic research of the classics of positivism. Spencer himself has argued that the title of *Social Statics* has never had anything to do with the Comtian work unknown to him. The interest in science and evolution constitutes for the English philosopher a method that could be defined as pedagogical, constantly taking into account the ever-changing nature, admonishing the presumption of omniscient reason to tame it and encouraging its understanding as a place of spontaneous composition of individual needs.

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