Evolutionary and functionalist historical sociology

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Of all the so-called foundational approaches to historical sociology presented in this volume, the two least likely to find adherents are evolutionary and functional accounts. There are three standard reasons for why such approaches are held to be inadequate. The first is that evolutionism is tied to a positivistic and an over-generalizing view of history; the second is that functionalism is inherently teleological and conservative; and the third is that evolutionary functionalism invariably produces a developmental scheme of human history. These deficiencies are frequently traced to a common problem, a neglect of human action. Our intention in this discussion is to show why and how these criticisms are themselves deficient, and to demonstrate that they exacerbate the problems of evolutionary functionalism while proving inadequate in the alternatives they suggest for explaining social change.

Historical sociology and the science of society

Sociology's very first formulations proposed evolutionary theory as the foundation of a scientific approach to social change. These early aspirations to a science of history have often been diagnosed as a conceit of nineteenth century historiography, in which, as Garland Allen puts it, 'social evolutionists … sought to discover the laws of historical development that would provide the basis for understanding the past and even possibly for predicting the future' (1992: 217). Historians of the last fifty years, as well as more recent postmodern sociologists have been largely intolerant of such 'grand' evolutionary approaches. On the one hand, historians have tended to emphasise the importance of the particular and subjective meaning; on the other, postmodernists have cast doubts on continuity and large historical narratives of any kind.[1] Many critics now would simply argue that history is not a science at all, and that evolutionary sociology's claims otherwise mean it misunderstands the nature of historiography and is founded, therefore, on a false basis.[2]

However, attempts to discount the appropriateness of scientific criteria to historical inquiry have been undermined by recent developments in postpositivist philosophies

of science. These approaches to science emphasise the explanatory successes and progressive character of science, but do so by transforming the once-dominant positivist framework. Kuhn (1962), Lakatos (1970) and Laudan (1996), for example, focus in different ways on the problem-solving nature of scientific activity in which 'truths' are reconstructed rather than accumulated in a linear fashion. In this way, science appears discontinuous in terms both of its categories and of its objects, and as organized into paradigms or research programmes. Significantly, for our argument, postpositivist theorists of science have either utilized evolutionary metaphors in order to capture the progressive character of scientific change in terms of lines of descent,[3] or have explicitly espoused an evolutionary theory of science in order to capture its history (Hull, 1988; Toulmin 1972). We believe that these applications of evolutionary frameworks are contemporary exemplars for evolutionary historical sociology. They demonstrate the viability of general evolutionary accounts of change in domains other than that of biology.

Postpositivist theories of science have also called into question another common criticism of the ambition for a science of history. The standard view of explanation within positivism is that of the 'covering law model' which posits the symmetry between explanation and prediction. According to Hempel (1942; 1965), historical explanations did not have the form of the covering-law model and could only be characterized as mere 'explanatory sketches'. The problem with this position, however, is that if it were true for human history, it would also have to be true for natural history. Evolutionary biology, therefore, would also have to be excluded from lawful science. This was indeed the attitude of many philosophers of science, including (at least, initially) Popper (1974: 136). Postpositivism, however, shifts the terms of the debate by looking more carefully at the history of scientific change. This examination indicates that older understandings of the natural sciences were modelled too closely on a single discipline, that of physics. From a reconstructive point of view, it becomes obvious that defining biology as a science requires a different understanding of successful explanation (Scriven, 1959). Indeed, looking at the history of successful biological explanations leads commentators such as Robert Richards (1992) to argue that <u>all</u> explanations are explanatory sketches and that the covering law model exemplified in physics is no less dependent upon wider narrative devices to fix its terms. Under a postpositivist understanding of science, then, the idea

of a science of history looks much less problematic than it does under positivism, and the first criticism against evolutionary historical sociology is no longer a serious obstacle. The next criticism, however, would appear to be less tractable.

For many sociologists, it is precisely because evolutionary theory is associated with functionalism that it is rejected. Functionalism is straightforwardly regarded as an illegitimate, teleological form of analysis where consequences are held to call forth their causes (for a discussion, see Isajiw, 1968). There are two aspects to this problem. One is that while it is clear that the teleological form of explanation is inadequate and that many functionalists have committed this error, illegitimate teleology is not a necessary consequence of functionalism (Isajiw, 1968; Turner and Maryanski, 1988). The evolutionary paradigm in biology since the Modern Synthesis, for example, has succeeded in removing teleology from functional accounts of change.[4] Evolutionary theory there encompasses variation as the explanation of the origin of a new form, with fitness as the explanation of its survival and reproduction. Why should the situation be logically different in historical sociology? Why shouldn't the integration of evolution and functionalist approaches be the solution to the problem of teleology in sociology, rather than its accentuation?

The second point is that the mere recognition of the problem of illegitimate teleology does not solve or prevent it. In the case of Spencer, his theoretical weaknesses are at least partly the result of his failure to understand the problem. [5] He explicitly claimed that 'to understand how an organization originated and developed, it is requisite to understand the need subserved at the outset and afterwards' (1897: 2). Parsons' teleological errors, on the other hand, occurred in spite of his clear recognition of the illegitimacy of backwards causation. Durkheim, too, was careful to distinguish between the explanation of the reproduction of an item and the causal explanation of its origins, writing that, 'when … the explanation of a social phenomenon is undertaken, we must seek separately the efficient cause which produces it and the function it fulfils. We use the word "function", in preference to "end" or "purpose", precisely because social phenomena do not generally exist for the useful results they produce' (1964 [1895]: 95). Yet Durkheim's care was to little avail, for he too slipped into a deficient form of functionalist teleology that was similar to Spencer's. The problem of functionalism cannot, therefore, be simply solved by recognizing the

dangers of attributing causal powers to effects, and we will elaborate below on what the solution actually is and why the replication occurs.

The other standard charge of functionalism is that it nurtures conservatism and promotes social arrangements to maintain the status quo. This criticism, we believe, is unjustified (and, indeed, frequently only arises as an adjunct of the previous criticism). Functionalist explanations are invariably adaptationist (or adjustment oriented) accounts, and understanding change is built into them (Hempel, 1965: 323-4; Nagel, 1956: Chapter 10). Although functionalist approaches may have trouble identifying how to intervene in processes in order to bring about desired change, it would be hard to think of any intervention that would not have unintended consequences, no matter the explanation that informed it (see Hull, 1988: 355-6, and our discussion of Spencer, below). It is the empirical interconnectedness of any system's elements and processes that is the source of the problem, not functionalism per se, and Spencer clearly recognized this issue. Functionalist accounts can be used to justify conservative politics, but they can also be used in the service of any other political agenda (Nagel, 1956: 282-3; Merton 1968 [1948]).

The greatest problem remaining in these common criticisms is that when conjoined with evolutionary theory, functionalism has almost invariably produced a linear and developmental approach to history. In functional-developmental history, the modern capitalist West is always presented as the outcome of a necessary and progressive sequence of stages. Critics of this interpretation of history usually consider development to be a mechanical social process, which while being historically inept, is also (more importantly) irredeemable, because it does not give due consideration to human agency. These criticisms of the unsatisfactory teleology of functionalism, where system needs apparently call forth their fulfilment, usually set out a different teleology of human purposes. This argument proposes that a proper recognition of the role of intentional action would, in fact, resolve many of the problems of functionalism.[6]

The history of sociological theory, however, does not advance the critics' cause. Each generation of evolutionary functionalism has set itself the task of fully accounting for human agency and its capacity to bring about change. Spencer's teleological

functionalism was deeply concerned with individual human action, conceiving of it as the driving force of social evolution and one with a superior moral claim. He was followed by a wave of sociologists whose overriding objective was also to reconcile evolutionary theories of social change with a theory of purposeful human action and individual responsibility (e.g.: Ward, 1897 [1883]; 1906; Giddings, 1922 [1896]; 1906 [1893]; Hobhouse, 1927 [1913]; 1966 [1924]). All of these evolutionary sociologists are now largely forgotten, except as historical curiosities, precisely because they failed to produce that reconciliation. Parsons, as we shall show, is a more recent representative of that same failure.

The argument of this chapter is that understanding why sociology has so far failed to achieve such integration will allow us to see more clearly both how to deliver the promise of evolutionary and functional historical sociology, and how it is distinct from its usual representation in the sociological literature. In the process, we shall identify a paradox at the heart of current understandings of historical sociology. We shall show that a deficient, teleological and developmental approach to history frequently derives from attempts to overcome the problems of evolutionary functionalism by resort to what is believed to be an alternative emphasis on human agency. In part, this explains the curious phenomenon of why writers as diverse as Giddens (1976; 1981) Habermas (1976[1973]; 1979 [1976]), and Eder (1992; 1999) can identify the limitations of functionalism and argue for the peculiarities of the human species in terms of the special role of communication through meaning and symbols, and yet be brought back to a developmental scheme of evolutionary history. Thus, Habermas and Eder emphasize collective 'learning' where, as Habermas puts it, 'not learning, but not-learning is the phenomenon that calls for explanation at the socio-cultural stage of development' (1976: 15).[7] Paradoxically, then, the early foundations of evolutionary sociology appear to be 'true' foundations, however deficient they are, because they persist in a variety of theories which claim their validity through 'refuting' this historical basis.

In this chapter, then, we are concerned with two ways in which the task of explicating foundations can be understood and the relationship between them; the first is that of the historical roots and assumptions of the approach, while the second is that of identifying the factors that ensure its replication. Although the history of sociology

offers many evolutionary functionalists who would typify the troubled nature of functionalist analysis, it is the relationship between Spencer and Parsons that most clearly exemplifies both aspects of the problematic with which we are concerned. In what follows, we shall argue that Spencer's evolutionary functionalism is, indeed, deficient. However, the problem is not one that can be solved by resort to a teleology of 'action'. This is Parsons' solution and, after him, it has become the <u>default</u> response in sociological theory. We shall conclude by suggesting an alternative interpretation of the evolutionary paradigm in historical sociology.

Spencer : the problems of typological history

Spencer typifies the ambivalent relationship evolutionary sociology has had with history, and exemplifies why evolutionary approaches are not often considered to be proper candidates for historical sociology. History on its own, Spencer argued, was far inferior to a synthesizing evolutionary framework: 'Until you have got a true theory of humanity, you cannot interpret history; and when you have got a true theory of humanity, <u>you do not want history</u>' (1852, in Duncan, 1908: 62; 1961 [1873]: 26-33; 1929 [1860]: 34-5).

Such a theory of humanity, Spencer continued, was to be found in observable facts and the general laws of life[8]. These laws, his investigations told him, were fundamentally evolutionary. 'There are not several kinds of Evolution having traits in common, but one Evolution going on everywhere after the same manner,' he proclaimed (1937 [1862]: 490). To establish this, he outlined an overarching theory of evolution based on universal principles which were applicable to all phenomena and observable in their effects as an increase in complexity. Deducing from the primary principles of existence (the indestructibility of matter, the continuation of motion, and most fundamentally, the persistence of force) he defined evolution as: '<u>an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion; during which the matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a </u>relatively <u>definite, coherent heterogeneity</u>' (1937: 358-9).

Spencer conceived of the specialization of functions and their increasing interdependence as the 'incidental' effects of a constant drive to equilibration, in which a temporary balance was reached between dissipating and integrating forces

external and internal to the system. All systems, therefore, were in a perpetual process of equilibration even in fairly stable environmental conditions. Within his statement of the different aspects of human evolution (biological, psychological, social and moral) he posited a dual evolutionary process in which Lamarckist and Darwinian mechanisms worked hierarchically to achieve <u>development</u>. [9] This is where the key flaw of Spencer's 'evolutionary' theory is located. Evolution in terms of <u>selection</u> is opportunistic. [10] It follows no pathway, and is exogenously determined. Development, however, means a sequence of changes driven by the internal state of the developing entity, in a way that overrules environmental influences (Sober, 1984: 153; Nisbet, 1986: 42). Spencer's conflation of evolution and development continues to bedevil evolutionary accounts in historical sociology and, of course, contributes to its teleological character where evolution is conceived as the progressive realization of higher forms.

Spencer's analysis of society depended explicitly on the close parallel he drew between social organization and the way in which organisms worked. The 'scaffolding' of the organic analogy[11] at least partly transformed the principles of classical mechanics on which his more general evolutionary theory was based, by emphasizing that social evolution was the <u>adaptive</u> increase of differentiation and integration. Von Baer's developmental embryology was Spencer's means of fusing differentiation and development into a 'universal law of change', since it specified a direction to evolution through a progressive increase of organizational complexity. Societies exhibited the same processes of equilibriation as any other system, and their evolutionary paths were responses to environmental factors ranging from resource availability to inter-societal conflict. Natural and social environments were the substantive forces behind evolutionary change. Environmental conditions worked either <u>directly</u> on system units to bring about equilibriation, or <u>indirectly</u>, through the elimination of the maladapted by natural selection or survival of the fittest.

The direct process was Lamarckian[12] and it explained individual difference as a consequence of ongoing and direct adaptation of individuals to environmental change. The indirect was Darwinian and it explained species or society difference as the greater adaptive success in a competitive situation of certain structural adaptations. This conceptual strategy allowed Spencer to absorb Darwin's natural selection as

merely a supplementary mechanism within his theory of social evolution[13]. 'Survival of the fittest' became an account of collective and not of individual processes; the development of the socially integrated individual was accounted for by the Lamarckian mechanism. The mechanisms worked together[14] since individual habits were inheritable (through embryonic germ cells), and eventually, the better adaptations would dominate quantitatively (through elimination or preservation). Social progress was the overall result. The complete fulfilment of individual human nature and interests was, in Spencer's vision, the final development of society. Progress, therefore, was an indivisible goal that was achieved by the accumulated action of all individuals within a society (1978 [1892-3]: Vol 1, p 332; 1888 [1850]: 482-3, 490).

The progressive Lamarckian emphasis makes it very difficult to write off Spencer's social evolutionism as a ruthless 'social Darwinist' culling-out of inferior individuals and groups. While he did accept the trials of life as necessary to the emergence and development of good qualities, he also genuinely believed that altruism and a sensibility for justice were progressive developments in the minds and behaviours of individuals, as well as in societies. It was state-administered forms of benevolence which he condemned[15] (1981b [1871]: 473; 1981c [1884]). Even here, his object of attack was not so much intervention itself as the oversimplified understandings of social processes and simplistic conceptions of what intervention could achieve. The very complexity of social phenomena in advanced societies meant unintended effects were rampant and development could as easily be obstructed as fostered by social engineering. 'A fly seated on the surface of a 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,' he complained (1897: 403). Only by realizing the functional needs of a society in relation to particular external or internal conditions could even limited state intervention be justified, especially since he correlated the increasing limitation of the state's functions with the progressive increase of individual liberty (e.g.: 1893b [1879, 1882]: Vol 2, p 660).

To analyse the needs of social systems, Spencer distinguished between three basic requirements of regulation, sustenance, and distribution. They governed the evolution of the structures that carried out those functions (1893a [1876]: Vol 1, Pt 2, Chapters

6-9; 1961: 54-6; 1898-9 [1864, 1867]: Vol 1, Part 1, Chapter 3). He conceived of 'the multiplication of particular structures <u>adapted to particular ends</u>' (1893b: Vol 2, p 659 – emphasis added), and stressed that these 'specially-adapted' structures naturally performed their 'purpose' better than a more generally adapted structure. Here we see a theoretically laden interpretation of adaptation. Instead of simply adapting to present and prior circumstances, adaptation is made in relation to achieving certain purposes. Divergence, rather than underlying adaptation as it does in modern biology, was held by Spencer to be an <u>effect</u> of adaptation (e.g.: 1898-9: Vol 1, Part 2, Chapter 9; 1888: 75-6; La Vergata, 1995: 223). 'Structural changes are the slowly accumulating results of functional changes,' he repeatedly insisted (1937: 406). Spencer was obviously minimizing the significance of <u>chance</u> variation (Darwin's perspective), overriding it with a more 'meaningful' Lamarckian law of structures and systems constantly meeting the demand for fitness 'until the[ir] adaptation is complete'[16] (1888: 74-5; 1908 [1899]: 558-9; 1892 [1886]: Vol 1, Chapter 9; 1937: 455-463). 'While all see that the <u>immediate</u> function of our chief social institutions is the securing of an orderly social life by making these conditions [of harmonious social life] imperative, very few see that their <u>further</u> [more important] function is that of fitting men to fulfil these conditions spontaneously. The two functions are inseparable' (1961: 318 – emphasis added). Such a strategy not only conflates causes and effects, but can also lead to the general presumption that all structures should be analysed as actually adaptive or functional. As Alexander Rosenberg points out in his discussion of sociological functionalism (1995: 149-150), with such a perspective, 'nothing will refute the hypothesis that the institution has some function or other.' If survival 'needs' cannot be established independently of the actual survival of an institution, a circular argument results: the structure persists therefore it meets needs (or the other way around). Consequently, the approach can be 'empirically empty' and condemned to explanatory vacuity.

Further to this problem, however, is how functionalism generates developmental classifications of social change. 'Functional adaptation is the sole cause of development,' said Spencer (1908: 541), making it clear that his version of functionalism did not account for <u>all</u> change as adaptive or functional. By building criteria of progress into the evolutionary functionalist model, he compared existing societies' structures to ideal standards and diagnosed some of them (such as an

interventionist government in a complex society that was without external threats or internal fractures) as maladaptive or dysfunctional. Freedom was the measure of progress in Spencer's social evolutionary analyses. [17] 'The greatest attainable amount of individual liberty' was, as far as he was concerned, 'the true end' of social evolution (1892: Vol 3, p 382). The key functionalist question Spencer asked throughout his evolutionary analyses was, therefore, not 'how does it function to achieve order?', but, 'how does it function to achieve freedom?' Spencer's conception of an ideal social trajectory, then, is a perfect illustration of Rosenberg's claim that, 'functionalism is a natural development of the strategy of finding meaning in human affairs' (1995: 146). Social institutions and their evolution are invested with purpose (above and beyond individual purpose), and a progressive pattern attributed to social history.

On the basis of an eclectic array of evidence gleaned from secondary sources on past and present societies, Spencer constructed two typologies of societies which were obliquely and directly concerned with categorizing social structures and organization in relation to how they facilitated freedom. The first divided societies into four stages of organizational complexification which he termed simple, compound, doubly-compound and trebly-compound. The primary categorical distinction was 'the degree of composition', or how many units clustered together to form the society. The subsequent categories were secondarily described by the type and stability of political leadership as well as level of sedentariness or settlement. Shifts from one category to another were driven by population growth, followed by the integration of simple social units, and the increasing heterogeneity and coordination of an evolving society's components and their functions (1893a: Vol 1, Pt 2, pp 537-44; 1961: 309-11). War functioned to catalyse this consolidation process, since 'simple growth' and 'direct union' did not lead on their own to the next stage. That function, however, was cancelled by the social arrangements of the most complex societies.

Heterogeneity of structure was not itself invested with ethical desirability, and for this reason, the differentiation typology was only supplementary to the second. Spencer's second typology made the connection between complexity and freedom clearer by positing a polar categorization of social modes of organization: militant and industrial (1893b: Vol 2, Pt 5, Chapters 17-18). The former described a society in which the

outer system needs for defence (and offence) predominated; the latter, one in which the inner system needs for sustenance dominated the organization of activities. These types were 'distinct in origin and nature': one arose consciously from the coercive pursuit of social ends, whereas its alter arose unconsciously from the cooperative pursuit of individual ends. For the most part, the militant-industrial schema could be mapped into the first typology so that all societies (except the very simplest) had both features, with one type relatively dominant over the other (1893a: Vol 1, Pt 2, p 544). Spencer also, however, presumed that social systems with less centralized regulatory systems and more developed sustaining systems were more advanced evolutionarily[18] (1893a: Vol 1, Pt 2, p 567; 1893b: Vol 2, Pt 5, p 568; 1897: 361; Peel, 1971: 208). Consequently, even though his ideal typology claimed these two modes of organization to be antithetical and distinct in their origins, it also implied an optimal directional shift from a militant to an industrial phase[19], one that occurred within advanced compound societies in particular.

In this evolutionary incorporation of organizational types, Spencer further proposed that the industrial stage was not the ultimate or most desirable end of social evolution. Beyond it lay the achievement of an 'ethical state' of humankind, a state that he occasionally speculated on as a shift from 'life to work to work for life', and sustenance to gratification[20] (1893a: Vol 1, Pt 2, p 563). It obviously represented the most progressive synthesis of individual and society described by his two mechanisms, and embodied the full realization of equal freedom. The real purpose, then, of Spencer's second typology was to capture the conditions necessary for the achievement of this future ethical state as well as to describe freedom's increase. Institutional heterogeneity was one of those requisites, and this is why the first typology is subordinate to the second.

Spencer's undoubted drive towards internal cohesion of the typologies and mechanisms within his theory, however, by no means indicates his theory of social change to be adequate. We do not believe that it is possible to forgive Spencer the deficient form of his functionalism and focus on the 'profound substance' of his sociology, as Jonathan Turner urges (1985: 55). The problem is that Spencer's functionalism is all-pervasive when his sociology is looked at in the light of his moral theory which, in turn, is a necessary part of his synthetic ambition. Moreover, the

typologies his functionalism helped produce have little to commend them from a historical sociological point of view. The militant-industrial distinction exhibits all the problems of unfalsifiable ideal types, and both it and the differentiation typology impose a stage model on history and its interpretation, pressing historical evidence into a pre-defined shape. Spencer is notorious for discarding many items that provided counter-examples to his classifications with the justification they were 'incidental' rather than 'essential' pieces of evidence, or for accepting travellers' narratives with little substantiation simply because they fit the typologies (Peel, 1972: xxviii; Haller, 1971: 128-9; Brinton, 1937: 703).[21] These failings are part of a bigger problem, in which sociological typologies are derived from a priori categories and ruled by a developmental logic (Nisbet, 1969: 162-3). The whole scheme becomes simply a template to be applied to the historical record.

We must stress here the distinction we are making between the two processes of development and evolution. Development is not evolution[22]: 'they are altogether different phenomena,' says biologist Peter Medawar, who is unable to make up his mind as to 'whether Spencer grasped this point or not' (1967: 45-6). Spencer certainly made a distinction between the two processes but only to claim that development was an 'increase of structure and not (an) increase in bulk' (1898-9: Vol 1, p 162). Evolution, however, entailed both processes so was itself developmental. This conceptual conflation of evolution and development consequently put Spencer's vast historical data collection at the service of a project with little capacity for further theoretical reconstruction. Although evolution in Darwin's day did mean development and complexification (Bowler, 1975: 109), the reconstructions of Darwinism (through probabilistic reasoning, Mendelian and molecular biology) into the Modern Synthesis no longer permit the conceptual conflation of development and evolution.[23] Only by conceiving of evolution as a process of directionless selection could the functionalist impasse have been avoided, and with his ideas of purpose and freedom at stake, Spencer was not prepared to submit to selectionism. He thereby perpetuated a tradition of conceptualizing social change as purposeful, meaningful and directional, which was precisely the source of his appeal to Parsons.

Parsons: Teleological history and the teleology of action

It is our claim that the attempt to find a solution in <u>action</u> to objectionable functionalist teleology is precisely what leads Parsons back to Spencer, just as it is the resort to action on the part of Parsons' critics that take them back to the forms of functionalism they object to in Parsons (and Spencer). Parsons (1937: 3) began his first major work elaborating an action frame of reference with a repudiation of Spencer and, yet, scarcely two decades later, he came to rely on a Spencerian concept of differentiation to understand social change. In conjunction with his own four-function paradigm, Parsons set out a developmental account of the emergence of modern societies in terms of stages derived from the application of his functional requirements to historical societies (1966, 1971). As with Spencer, Parsons' typologies were generated by the logic of his a priori categorical scheme. For both of them, concrete empirical systems were not themselves the basis for the re-specification of types and underlying categories: they were either taken as confirming them, or they were ignored.

Although he believed he disagreed with the early evolutionists about what progress entailed, Parsons was as convinced as any of them that social evolutionary theory was a 'paradigm of a progressive, developmental social change' (1977: 297). He summarized this paradigm's guiding statement as:

> 'The assumption is that, in the complex of "goal directed thrusts" in a system of action, there will on the one hand be some kind of balance between internal pressures towards innovative change and factors of situational and environmental opportunity for it. If the combined "pressure" of these factors is sufficient they will bring about some kind of "outlet" for the tendency to change. For this to happen new structures and processes may be necessary' (1977: 275).

The criterion he considered to be the measuring stick of advance was 'greater generalized adaptive capacity' (1977: 230-1; 1966: 26). Adaptation concerned 'the relations of a living system to its external environment'[24] (1977: 111). Adaptive upgrading occurred with the improvement of a social system's capacity to adapt to its environments[25], and was, he believed, observable and measurable. Parsons' ability to 'measure' this increased capacity, however, depended entirely on his description of the process that supposedly enabled it: differentiation.

Differentiation occurred with the splitting of a generalized structural unit (meeting a number of functional requirements) into functionally specialized units. These specialized structures were able to attain their functional goals far more efficiently than their more general predecessors (1977: 51, 282). The system goal, over time, was more <u>effective</u> performance, a claim Parsons justified by citing Mayr's famous account of teleonomy or direction-seeking behaviour in organisms (1977: 112; Mayr, 1974). The higher the species, the greater the importance of this factor. A divergence from Spencer's differentiation can be noted here. Parsons focused on structural differentiation and did not theorize the differentiation of the four general functions (which remained static categories, features of all societies), whereas Spencer, foregrounded functional differentiation rather than general functions[26]. Just as for Spencer, however, Parsons' differentiation led to the system problem of integration and how the solidarity of the social entity was to be achieved. Since differentiation was concerned with the relationship of structures to external phenomena, then the concept of integration, conversely, was about the internal relationships of the system. Integration could, therefore, be considered to be adaptation in relation to internal environments. Foremost amongst integrative processes (from the point of view of development) was inclusion, which, according to Parsons, referred to the incorporation of newer, more functionally efficient structures within the normative framework of the societal community (1977: 293; 1971: 27).

Parsons made an explicit turn to biology as a source of analogy for the process of social development in terms of 'evolutionary universals'. Vision was an example of an evolutionary universal in the animal kingdom; the hand and brain were good examples of evolutionary universals for human biological evolution. All organisms, said Parsons, had to develop vision <u>in order</u> to evolve to 'higher levels'. The structures of vision might have been somewhat different, but their function was the same. Hands and brains illustrated the increased adaptive capacity of a species, even though losses of lower level functions (locomotion, infantile independence) may have been incurred as a result (1964: 340). In societies, the most basic evolutionary universals were fourfold: religion (as the most basic form of culture), language (for communication), kinship (for organization), and technology. These complexes were

definitional of human society in its most <u>primitive</u> form, and came as a set (1964: 341-2).

After these, in the next tier, come the evolutionary universals that shifted society into the <u>intermediate</u> level: social stratification and cultural legitimation. They were accompanied by the emergence of written language. These processes could most generally be described as the differentiation of the cultural and social systems. Initially unified, these systems had now lost their identity with each other and could never be reunited. Stratification was the 'hierarchical status differentiation that cuts across the overall seamless web of kinship' (1964: 346). It functioned to permit dynamic leadership and more flexible use of resources by 'releasing' the society from the obstacles of ascription (in the early stages of stratification at least) as did its partner universal. Cultural legitimation was closely connected to stratification, according to Parsons, and both together were prerequisites for social advance. Legitimation entailed the 'differentiation of cultural definitions' from 'taken-for-granted fusion with the social structure' and the institutionalization of the legitimating function (1964: 346). Parsons was most concerned with the institutionalized identification of a society's members with that society. It was invariably political in its effects, he claimed, although always based in religious sentiment. This identification functioned to collectively coordinate action, once the traditional adherence to a non-differentiated kinship system had been supplanted (1964: 345-6). Written language was the critical breakthrough which assisted this process by giving a society an objective record of its culture and norms, thereby further crystallizing the independence of the cultural system from the social system it circumscribed (1966: 26-7).

These universals laid the ground for the next advance, from intermediate to <u>modern</u>. The prerequisites that had to stimulate such a shift were administrative bureaucracy, paired with money and markets, and universalized norms in partnership with democratic association. Bureaucracy was institutionalized power, backed up by the system-wide legitimation of that power. As was Weber, Parsons was convinced that bureaucracy was the most efficient form yet invented of administration, and the only form capable of organizing the specialized operations of a modern society (1964: 347-9). Power had to be concentrated for performance to improve and that was why

bureaucracy was needed for social advance. It was connected to the capacity to utilize resources effectively and to meet general <u>collective</u> goals. Money and markets, which 'liberated' resources from ascriptive and particularistic bonds, allowed these resources to be used flexibly in achieving social goals (1964: 349-50).

Neither of this pair of universals would be stable or effective enough without the next pair of evolutionary universals: generalized universalistic norms and democratic association. System-wide norms, especially those institutionalized in the legal system, defined and regulated power structures and their administration. They also regulated market relations and the resources represented by money. So important were these universal norms that Parsons considered their 'crystallization into a coherent system' to have been more important than the industrial revolution in bringing the modern world into being (1964: 351). Just as the development of written language had been the developmental impetus of the shift from primitive to intermediate, the institution of a formal universalized legal system had launched modernity from the intermediate stage (1966: 27). The fullest early exemplar of such a universalistic normative order was English common law, claimed Parsons, and only once it had developed could the industrial revolution have materialized in England (1964: 353). Such a legal system then allowed the final evolutionary universal to emerge: a full-blown democracy of elected representation and universal adult suffrage. Since power depended on consensus, it had to be not only legitimated at the level of universal values, but also legitimated by 'structured participation' (1964: 356). Totalitarian organization would eventually prove unstable, predicted Parsons, who was obviously thinking of the USSR in particular. Altogether, these 'organizational complexes' constituted the 'structural foundations of modern society'. They conferred 'adaptive advantage(s)' on their vehicle societies over societies without such 'structural potential' (1964: 357).

With this model of social development, Parsons clearly felt he had overcome problems in his earlier work, such as <u>The Social System</u> (1951), which had emphasised static, structural categories over dynamic processes of social change. Parsons now classified societies according to the extent of institutional specialization around functions, such as the extent to which political institutions are separated from economic institutions, or economic institutions separated from the household, and how the household then becomes specialized around functions of socialization. His

scheme of functional imperatives was, however, supposed to apply to all societies. Societies with lesser specialization, therefore, could be no less 'adequate' than those with greater degrees of specialization. There could, therefore, be no 'internal' requirement for greater structural differentiation <u>except by assuming an overarching system goal of more effective performance</u>.

At the same time, the idea of 'superiority' carried the implication of evolutionary change where better adapted forms are realized out of the deficiencies of 'lesser' forms. Furthermore, the way in which structural differentiation occurred around the four functions, each with its characteristic 'sub-system', suggested an 'end' to the process of development. This end coincided with the realization of the institutional structures of modern capitalism. Unlike Spencer, Parsons and other modernization theorists did not self-consciously organize their functional analysis in terms of a direct affirmation of a final 'ethical state', but it was implicit in the logic of structural differentiation.[27] Progress was guaranteed by the very way in which they theorized social change.

Even Parsons' sympathizers were uneasy about the implications of his scheme as they began to emerge around the writing of <u>The Social System</u>. One early critic was Merton, whose codification of functional analysis as a sociological paradigm (1968) was also intended as a coded critique of Parsons. Merton characterized existing functionalist approaches in anthropology in terms of three distinctive postulates. These were the postulates of 'universal functionalism' (where every item was assumed to have a function), 'indispensability' (where each function was held to be necessary) and 'functional unity' (where each item was held to contribute to the functioning of a whole). Merton's concern was to establish functionalism as what would now be termed a research programme, in which these postulates were addressed as variables and the circumstances of their variation made the object of research. At the heart of his critique was the postulate of 'functional unity' or the idea of society as a functioning whole or totally integrated system, in relation to which functions could be defined.

While Parsons' theory increasingly came to exemplify the problems which Merton had associated with the postulate of 'functional unity', Merton's elaboration of his own

argument led him directly onto the terrain occupied by Parsons. In order to come up with a more satisfactory statement of functional analysis, he argued that it would be necessary to make a further distinction between <u>latent</u> and <u>manifest</u> functions. The latter referred to the conscious intentions of actors and the former to the objective consequences of their actions. According to Merton, most of the unfortunate consequences of functional analysis in sociology were the result of the conflation of these categories. In turn, he argued that the distinction was constitutive of the problems social inquiry had to address, although it was unnecessary in biology. This feature, as far as Merton was concerned, explained both why functionalism was relatively unproblematic in that discipline and why there were limits to the organic analogy. Thus, for Merton, 'the motive and the function vary independently and ... the failure to register this fact in an established terminology has contributed to the unwitting tendency among sociologists to confuse subjective categories of motivation with the objective categories of function' (1968: 115).[28]

Simply put, Merton's proposed codification of social inquiry in terms of an analytical distinction between subjective motivation and objective function was the resolution that Parsons himself had proposed in <u>The Structure of Social Action</u> and associated essays. Later generations of critics, such as Habermas and Giddens make similar arguments to those of Merton. Habermas' conceives of social inquiry as divided between two conceptual strategies, one of systems which 'ties the social scientific analysis to the external perspective of the observer,' while the other, 'begins with the members' intuitive knowledge' (1987[1981]: 151). This is quite similar to Merton's distinction between latent and manifest functions, even if it is dignified with a deeper philosophical discusssion. According to Habermas, 'the fundamental problem of social theory is how to connect in a satisfactory way the two conceptual strategies indicated by their respective notions of "system" and "lifeworld"' (1987: 151), and he offers his own theory as just such a generalized integration of categories.

For his part, Parsons had taken it as axiomatic both that the social sciences required a general framework of categories and that it must take as its point of reference human action.[29] Hitherto, he argued, the dominant emphasis had been upon 'positivistic' schemes which sought to explain behaviour in terms of the 'external' influences upon it. Action, he said, was a process oriented to the realization of an end. It occurred in

conditional circumstances that had to be calculated and utilized by actors in the pursuit of their ends. However, 'ends' and 'conditions' (including 'means') had to be understood as analytically distinct categories. This claim was important because it meant that action could not be understood as an emanation of cultural values, which is the case with some forms of idealism. Parsons' action was not free from determination by circumstances. Consequently, his idea of action involved 'effort' to conform with norms (which governed ends and the selection of their means of realization), since action had to transform circumstances and, therefore, accommodate and assess its conditions in order to be successful. Additionally, in order to be rational, action had to be based upon an adequate understanding of the factors necessary to the realization of ends. Thus, Parsons, referred to the 'intrinsic rationality of the means-end relation' in terms of the necessary role of 'valid knowledge as a guide to action' (1937: 600). Action, however, could not be reduced to its conditions, since an understanding of the agency of the actor and, consequently, of the subjective meaning of an action, were necessary for an adequate account. With conditions and means classified as technical in substance and, as such, external to any given actor, the 'subjective' voluntary aspect of action was associated with the actor's capacity to form ends.[30]

Parsons saw the problems of positivism as consisting of the problematic role of the category of 'ends' within their such schemes.[31] He addressed his criticisms primarily to the 'utilitarian' conception of action where ends are 'given'. By this he meant that the way in which actors arrive at their preferences had not been addressed, and attention had been focused solely on the processes by which they are realized. The implication, Parsons suggested, was that ends varied, 'at random relative to the means-end relationship and its central component, the actor's knowledge of his situation' (1937: 63).

A discussion of 'unit acts' provided only the basic elements of an action frame of reference. Explanation, argued Parsons, required a further step in the analysis, from 'unit acts' to their location within 'systems' of action. This step, he said, 'consists in generalizing the conceptual scheme so as <u>to bring out the functional relations</u> in the facts already descriptively arranged' (1937: 49) This further generalization of the scheme was intended to identify emergent properties of <u>systems</u> of action; that is,

properties which appeared in relation to any consideration of the co-ordination of actions and which were not reducible to analysis in terms of unit acts alone. Thus, Parsons wrote that, 'action systems have properties that are emergent only on a certain level of complexity in the relations of unit acts to each other. These properties cannot be identified in any single unit act considered apart from its relation to others in the same system. They cannot be derived by a process of direct generalization of the properties of the unit act' (1937: 739). The concept of emergent properties, then, served to identify the 'elements of structure of a generalized system of action' (1937: 718), and these elements of structure were to be further analysed in terms of their functional relations; that is, in terms of the logical relations established within the theoretical system.

As Parsons developed his theory – in The Social System and after - he offered a distinction between different levels of analysis, namely personality, social system and culture. He added a fourth level of 'organism' once the four-fold scheme of functional imperatives had been fully elaborated. These levels corresponded to the analytical distinctions made in the earlier statement of the action frame of reference. The level of personality, therefore, matched the individual actor viewed as a system. The level of culture referred to the symbols and meanings which were drawn upon by actors in the pursuit of their personal projects as they negotiated social constraints and facilities. As Parsons said, the three key features of the cultural system were 'that culture is transmitted, it constitutes a heritage or a social tradition; secondly, that it is learned, it is not a manifestation, in particular content, of man's genetic constitution; and third, that it is shared. Culture, that is, is on the one hand the product of, on the other hand a determinant of, systems of human social interaction' (1951: 15). Finally, the social system corresponded to that level of interaction among a 'plurality of actors' which was the primary focus of the analysis of the 'problem of order' in the earlier work. The social system was a structure of positions and roles organized by normed expectations and maintained by sanctions.[32]

Parsons proposed that each of the levels formed a system in its own right, where the characteristics of a system are relations of logical coherence among its parts. At the same time, each system functioned in relation to the other systems and interpenetrated them. In other words, their interpenetration, or interdependence, also constituted a

system. This is what Parsons had previously referred to as the 'total action system'. His real focus of sociological attention, however, was the social system, and he proposed four functional prerequisites, or imperatives, which were necessary to its constitution and operation. Two of the imperatives (pattern maintenance and integration) were concerned with normative issues, and two (adaptation and goal attainment) were concerned with the non-normative. Similarly, two were concerned with cultural principles (integration and goal attainment) and two with issues of integrity in a potentially hostile lower-level environment (pattern-maintenance and adaptation). Together they supplied the axes of the two by two tables that proliferated throughout Parsons' later writings.[33]

It is not necessary to follow Parsons through the details of every additional specification of his scheme, where everything was divided by four and four again. The social system will serve as one example. This subsystem was further divided into sub-subsystems, which were defined by the priority accorded to one or other of the functional pre-requisites in its organization. The economy subsystem was defined by the adaptation pre- requisite, the polity subsystem by the goal attainment prerequisite, the societal community sub-system by the integration pre-requisite, and the socialization subsystem by the pattern-maintenance pre-requisite. Each subsystem, however, was also specified by the subordinate but mutual operation of the other pre-requisites. The diagrams of exchanges between systems and among subsystems within systems became increasingly complex, but they could never shake off the problems that defined them.

Were the pre-requisites to be merely the categories of a descriptive approach to societies, as Parsons sometimes suggested in the context of his application of the scheme to the evolution of societies, then it might be argued that they could served a heuristic purpose where the extent of their realization in practice would be an 'empirical' issue. However, the variance of empirical systems in terms of the specific 'values' of their elements was supposed to occur alongside invariant relations between their elements. Consequently, the idea that there could be an 'indefinite number of concrete empirical systems' was already compromised by the theoretical logic of the categorical scheme.

As we have seen, Parsons (1966, 1971) did describe more extensive differentiation as an improvement in 'adaptive upgrading', and this affirmed the 'superiority' of more specialized systems over those which were less specialized. This strategy, however, reproduces the position he initially criticized in Spencer, where the only source of change was adaptive reaction to the external environmental. It is very difficult, overall, to find any improvement on Spencer's supposed evolutionary theory in Parsons. Several commentators, in fact, believe Parsons' version to be the inferior one (e.g.: Peel, 1969). Certainly, Parsons' resort to an action frame of reference only served to reinforce the Spencerian elements, rather than to transcend them. An ongoing examination of evolutionary sociology would demonstrate that just as Parsons' reproduced Spencer's core approach and its problems, so too do Parsons' critics reproduce the central elements of his scheme (see footnotes 6, 7, 31, &, especially, 32).

Evolution without developmental schemes

The key issue for an evolutionary approach to historical sociology must surely be to allow a proper role to historical research through which theoretical claims can be revised and transformed, similar to the manner described by postpositivist accounts of science. If so, it would seem that the answer will not be found by founding evolutionary theory on an a priori scheme of categories. The standard resolution of seemingly antithetical orientations toward the particular and the general in terms of a general framework of action produces the very deficiencies it is self-consciously designed to overcome. It is precisely that proposed resolution that gives to this form of historical sociology its underlying ahistorical character of being dependent upon a set of logical presuppositions that transcend research. Moreover, if action is made universal, so, too, will any functions that are derived from the elaboration of the scheme. Functions become definitional of societies, rather than the means of distinguishing among empirically variable social practices and institutions with the consequent reification and teleology that has discredited functionalist and evolutionary approaches in historical sociology. If the impasse of developmental typologies imposed upon the historical record is to be avoided, then the appropriate objects of analysis in historical sociology would have to be institutions, not whole societies (as Merton implied in his critique of the postulate of functional unity).

Succumbing to developmental functionalism is, of course, not a uniquely sociological fault. Biological 'Darwinism', until the 1920s at least, fell into the same habit when natural selection was assimilated to a directional model of biological complexification (Bowler, 1988). It took biology several decades from the publication of Darwin's Origin to find methods, supplementary theories (of inheritance) and evidence by which to realize the implications of selection. Both Rosenberg's (1995: 147) and Turner and Maryanski's (1988: 116) cogent analyses of sociological functionalism point out that the only way effectively to 'ground' functionalist analyses as causal accounts and purge them of illegitimate teleology is by invoking selectionism[34]. Sociology, with the notable exception of Runciman, however, has shied away from an explicitly selectionist explanation of social change. [35] Such an account would have to describe a causal process, premissed on variation and transmission, and its functional effects. It would explain successive changes by adaptation and fitness, but insist on empirical analysis to establish such explanations. By integrating levels of analysis, it would refuse reduction.

If, as we have argued, natural history and the history of societies are epistemologically equivalent undertakings, the way is open to consider that each might be approached in terms of a common evolutionary framework. We should be careful at this point, however, to suggest that this is not at all to recommend a reduction of history to biology, such as the project of sociobiology (although we do not accept that sociobiology is as straightforwardly reductionistic as critics like Rose and Rose [2000] make out). Nor do we wish to propose that evolutionary sociology be couched at the level of biological change[36]. Social change is not independent of biology, but its entities and processes are quite different objects of analysis. Indeed, current arguments by philosophers and researchers of evolution are largely anti-reductionist. They deem evolutionary explanations to be specific to the different levels and characteristics of phenomena manifest in species and societies, populations and individuals.[37]

Not only has selection proved to be highly successful in explaining biological variety and speciation, but it has also marked out a conceptual space that is separate from age-old developmental accounts of change. If evolutionary and functionalist

approaches are to win any support in historical sociology, it is clear that presuppositions of general needs have to be abandoned for empirical research programmes, in which testable claims are made about adaptation and functionality. Non-tautologous criteria of fitness are not easy to establish about any phenomena but without their establishment, evolutionary sociology is condemned to tendentious speculation, rediscovered and then denied for its all too evident faults by each generation of sociologists.

NOTES

[1] Since Weber, a tendency in sociology has been to concede that the immediate object of inquiry, in history and sociology alike, is the particular case or historically specific event, but then to argue that general concepts can be useful as means toward that understanding. Weber suggested that sociology, in contrast to history, was more oriented to the development of general types, rather than concrete, individual types: 'we have taken for granted that sociology seeks to formulate type concepts and generalized uniformities of empirical process. This distinguishes it from history, which is oriented to the causal analysis and explanation of individual actions, structures, and personalities possessing cultural significance' (1968 [1922]: 19). The general types are then argued to derive their form from the characteristics of action in general, as distinguished against the meanings of specific actions which give rise to particular and individual objects of analysis. In essence, we shall suggest that it is Parsons (1937) who offers the most systematic elaboration of this argument.

[2] This position is advanced by some advocates of neo-positivism. Jonathan Turner, for example, writes that, 'we must recognize that positivistic and historical explanations are fundamentally different modes of understanding the universe, making criticisms of one by the other somewhat inappropriate. Historical explanations are causal descriptions of sequences of empirical events (or classes of such events), whereas positivistic explanations are deductive, seeking to explain empirical events with abstract laws. The two kinds of explanation simply yield different kinds of knowledge; and while science usually seeks deductively organized theory, historical analysis serves other useful purposes. But, when historical sociologists insist that

positivism is an inappropriate approach to sociological analysis because deductive explanation and scientific explanation are impossible … they have made sociology redundant with history' (1992: 163-4). Alternatively, a pro-science critic of evolutionary sociology might claim that science was more properly served by historical research that assiduously collected evidence and reached its localized conclusions inductively – a process not generally believed to be a feature of evolutionary schemes.

[3] Kuhn, for example, invokes evolutionary criteria to deny any charge of relativism made against his work, writing that, 'I believe it would be easy to design a set of criteria – including maximum accuracy of predictions, degree of specialization, number (but not scope) of problem solutions – which would enable any observer involved with neither theory to tell which was the older, which the descendant. For me, therefore, scientific development is, like biological evolution, unidirectional and irreversible. One scientific theory is not as good as another for doing what scientists normally do. In that sense I am not a relativist' (1970: 264).

[4] We do not say, as we might have been expected to, that teleology has not been an issue in biology 'since Darwin'. Marx, for example, perceived Darwin's contribution precisely in those terms, writing in a letter to Lasalle that, 'despite all shortcomings, it is here that, for the first time, "teleology" in natural science is not only dealt a mortal blow but its rational meaning is empirically explained' (1986[1861]: 247). However, that 'mortal blow' to teleology is now judged to have been undelivered until the Modern Synthesis of evolutionary biology was achieved. Only then did the conflation of selection and species development become unsustainable (Bowler, 1988). For a discussion of Marx and Darwin, see Allen (1992). We shall not deal with Marx in this chapter because he is the topic of another contribution. In any case, Marx's account of modes of production has many of the features we attribute to developmental approaches which cannot be properly translated into selectionist evolutionary accounts. It is the latter, we believe, that will prove more satisfactory to an effective evolutionary historical sociology.

[5] Spencer did recognize a difference between 'vicious' illegitimate teleology and legitimate teleology, but still insisted that the latter was compatible with claiming 'the welfare of the organism, or the species, is in every case the end to further which a structure exists' (1978: Vol 2, 483-4). What is his justification? Illegitimate

teleologies would simply state a structure was 'put there to further the end', which he found too stark an explanation. Legitimate teleological functionalism, he asserted, explained the existence of something 'as having gradually arisen by furthering the end.' Such a distinction is hardly persuasive and gives him no defence against the standard criticism of teleological functionalism.

[6] The following statement from Giddens is typical in that it shows how the idea of 'system needs' is introduced – through the idea of feedback mechanisms of which an actor may be unaware – even as the category is being denied. Giddens writes, 'if there are no independent system needs ... the notion of function is superfluous for the only teleology that has to be involved is that of human actors themselves, together with the recognition that their acts have consequences other than those they intend, and that those consequences can involve homeostatic processes' (1977: 111).

[7] In the sentence immediately before the one above, Habermas writes that, 'the fundamental mechanism for social evolution in general is to be found in an automatic inability not to learn' (1976: 15). It will become clear in the course of this chapter just how statements like this one commit the writer to a stadial scheme of historical development, where 'deviations' from the societal types that are derived from the 'ideal history' as learning, are assigned to 'not-learning' and as such do not call into question that ideal historical account. This is the opposite of the relation between theory and research in evolutionary biology.

[8] See Haines (1992) for a discussion of Spencer's attempts to conform to the philosophy of science of the day, as set out by Herschel, Whewell and Mill. Spencer's commitment to the 'proper' practice of science was as strong as Darwin's, yet both his and Darwin's works were found methodologically wanting by Herschel and his adherents.

[9] Lamarckian 'evolution' describes a process of physiological adjustment to changing environmental conditions through habits shaping physical structures that could be inherited by offspring. Darwinian evolution encompasses blind inheritable variation which is selected due to the greater fitness it confers on its possessors in particular environmental conditions.

[10] It is important to make clear here that <u>selection does not mean</u> <u>'choosing'</u>. This is what some contemporary sociological theorists have done, thereby turning selection into a process of purposive human choice (e.g.: Luhmann, 1995). As far as we are

concerned, such a concept of selection is developmentalist and agential, and it is in these frameworks that all the problems of evolutionary theory reside. If there is an issue of purposive action, here, it much more centrally concerns the role of unintended consequences of action. As Merton (1936) observed, unanticipated consequences are of supreme importance explanations in historical sociology.

[11] Spencer was explicit that social evolution had to be understood as a process in its own right, owing nothing to the completely separate process of organic evolution apart from a base of reasoning and a material substrate (1981a [1860]; 1893a: Vol 1, Pt 2, Chapter 2). In addition, he perceived natural selection to be able to 'operate freely in the struggle of one society with another', but to be hampered and overwhelmed in its operation amongst social units. Hence, within societies, only Lamarckism or the 'inheritance of functionally-produced modifications' was an adequate explanation of social differences (1898-9: Vol 1, p 553).

[12] It is probably wise to differentiate between Lamarck's own four laws of evolution (1815, in McKinney, 1971: 18-19) and the more common application of the term. The latter, which could be called vulgar Lamarckism, is primarily concerned with direct adaptations and their transmission to descendants.

[13] In biological analysis, Spencer believed that natural selection was the primary mechanism at lower levels of complexity, and that habit or Lamarckian processes were 'supreme' at higher levels of development (1908: 565).

[14] See these Spencer references for details of how the mechanisms worked: 1893b: Vol 2, Pt 4, p 241; 1904: Vol 2, p 552; 1908: 558, 565; 1898-9: Vol 1, Part 2, Chapters 8, 10, Appendix B; Vol 2, pp 618-23; 1892: Vol 1, pp 389-466, 467-78. Since the two mechanisms worked in tandem, there is no need to divide Spencer's evolutionary theories into 'four quite different theories' as Perrin (1976) does. Even he admits three are interdependent (p 1356), and if we look at how the two mechanisms work on different explanatory levels and in different domains of phenomena, all 'four' are synthesized.

[15] It was this anti-interventionism that was Durkheim's primary target in his criticism of Spencer and, in relation to it, he misunderstood Spencer's 'social' individualism. Indeed, Spencer's explanation of the rise of the idea of the freedom of the individual in social differentiation and increased specialization was very similar to Durkheim's,

probably because Durkheim borrowed a great deal more from Spencer than he admitted or is commonly recognized.

[16] Statements such as 'all unfitness must disappear … humanity must in the end become completely adapted to its conditions' (1888: 79) appear most strongly in Social Statics. In all the revisions and in the caveats Spencer offered in editions subsequent to the first, he did not revise this basic understanding of adaptation as outlined above. It is reinforced in The Principles of Sociology and The Principles of Ethics, although the emphasis on the actual achievability of final perfection decreased.

[17] Spencer's Law of Equal Freedom was 'Every man is free to do that which he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man' (1978: Vol 2, 62; 1888: 121). Equal freedom was the conceptual pivot of not just his moral and political philosophy, but also of his psychology and sociology (see Weinstein, 1990, 1998, for excellent discussions). This interpretation runs counter to that of several commentators. J. N. Gray (1982), for example, argues that Spencer's evolutionary theory should be kept separate from his much better moral theory. Jonathan Turner (1985: 51; 1981: 79) also believes that the sociological and moral aspects of Spencer's work are distinct. According to his argument, Spencer's moral theory is 'highly recessive' in his sociological work and functionalism, therefore, does not 'drive' his analysis of sociology. Our argument above is that Spencer's moral philosophy connects his sociology, psychology and biology at multiple levels, and that his functionalism is far more 'intrusive' than Turner would have it. Given Spencer's synthesizing ambitions, it would be misleading, we believe, to try and isolate particular aspects of his work.

[18] Turner, however, believes that Spencer's militant-industrial classificatory scheme was not evolutionary (1985: 93). This may be true where Spencer is emphasizing the ideal type nature of the distinction, but not when he (contradictorily and much more persistently) discusses the types in a developmental way.

[19] Regression was possible, and Spencer, in his later less sanguine years, saw a great deal more of it happening (e.g.: the 'remilitarization' of Germany and England) than his theory had originally predicted. While he did see war as a progressive force, in that it brought about greater population density and culled 'relatively-feeble' groups,

at a certain point in a society's evolutionary trajectory it became primarily negative, since it obstructed the conditions that maximized freedom.

[20] Spencer noted a third type of society was possible, although not desirable, in which 'the diffusion of political power, unaccompanied by the limitation of political functions' resulted in a non-progressive communist society (1893b: Vol 2, p 663).

[21] See Goldthorpe (1991) for discussion of the problem of evidence as a more general issue in historical sociology.

[22] Development here means a substantive process, and is not referring just to the 'illegitimate teleology' (a logical flaw) that troubles functionalism. A word of warning about a simple distinction between development and evolution is necessary, however. Although there are few grounds so far for believing laws of development shape evolutionary processes in biology, the possibility is under investigation. See Depew and Weber (1995) for a discussion.

[23] By drawing upon the progressive reconstruction of the evolutionary paradigm in the Modern Synthesis, we are necessarily offering a 'presentist' account in which Spencer's contribution is discussed in the light of modern understandings of evolution, in order to consider the possibility of a reconstructed version of social evolution. Presentism is usually understood as 'Whig' historiography, in which the past is looked at solely in terms of the future state nurtured within it (Butterfield 1965[1931]; Stocking, 1968; Seidman, 1983). We claim, however, that any account of science concerned with the progressive reconstruction of understanding is necessarily presentist, without necessarily being Whiggish (see Hull, 1979; Mayr, 1990; and Ruse, 1987).

[24] Parsons attempted to distinguish himself from Spencer by claiming his predecessor had a passive view of adaptation rather than an active one (1977: 51).

[25] Parsons was emphatic that environments must be conceived of in the plural, since his analysis did not conceive of environment as a simple physical geographical space, but as the 'environing' subsystems of organisms, personalities, and culture, which mediated the physical conditions in different ways (1977: 297; 1966: 10-16).

[26] In Parsons, specialization allowed the functional differentiation of the four general functions, and presumed functionally dedicated structures to be logically more efficient. Spencer, while he had set out his three functional prerequisites as an aid to classification, was overall more fascinated by the minutiae of functional

differentiation than by his general categories. 'Functional adaptation,' insisted Spencer (1908: 54), 'was the sole cause of development.'

[27] In fact, Parsons claimed that the latest evolutionary universal in fully modern societies was the institutionalization of science and its technological application, although he did not discuss the level of society it would bring about. He also accepted that a wholly new '"postmodern" phase of social development' could arise from very different origins to those of the current modern social system (1971: 3), but believed that this was only a weak theoretical possibility. Curiously, Alexander (1984) wishes to claim that the teleological implications of the scheme can be avoided by arguing that de-differentiation is a possible future development of any concrete system, though he fails to specify how it can be represented as an 'adaptive upgrading'. He also argues that there is a necessary ethical dimension to Parsons' work which is the ideal of social individualism (Alexander, 1978). Ironically, for his part, Habermas's evolutionary and functional approach is organized in terms of an ethics of 'ideal speech' and, so, is rather closer to Spencer's approach, organized as it is in terms of an ideal ethical state, than he might appreciate.

[28] From Merton's own perspective, however, it is unfortunate that he chose the categories of manifest and latent function to establish the distinction, since it is the common reference to function that has encouraged others to believe that the distinction is elided.

[29] Parsons wrote that, 'the results of the analysis of human behaviour from the objective point of view (that is of an outside observer) and the subjective (that of the person thought of as acting himself) should correspond, but that fact is no reason why the two points of view should not be kept clearly distinct. Only on this basis is there any hope of arriving at a satisfactory solution of their relations' (1991[1935]: 232).

[30] A detailed account of the correspondence between Parsons' concepts of action and system and those of Giddens can be found in Holmwood and Stewart (1991) and Holmwood (1996).

[31] Parsons' characterized evolutionary theory as a form of 'radical positivism'. His own view was that the grip of positivism over social inquiry was breaking down and this would lead to a more satisfactory resolution of the problems of social inquiry. In an early essay which prefigured the concerns of The Structure of Social Action, Parsons wrote that, 'the positivistic reaction against philosophy has, in its effect on

the social sciences, manifested a strong tendency to obscure the fact that man is essentially an active, creative, evaluating creature. Any attempt to explain his behaviour in terms of ends, purposes, ideals has been under suspicion as a form of "teleology" which was thought to be incompatible with the methodological requirements of positive science' (1991: 231). Within positivism, an assumption of the 'randomness' of ends is also regarded as unsatisfactory (because of its implicit 'indeterminacy'), but the tendency is for theorists to move in the other direction to that suggested by Parsons. Thus, 'radical' positivists – in which category Parsons included social Darwinism – attempted to deny the 'analytical independence' of ends, reducing them to the 'situation' of action; that is, they attempted to see action as entirely the product of determining stimuli located in the external environment. There is, then, what Parsons called, a 'utilitarian dilemma' within positivism where, 'either the active agency of the actor in the choice of ends is an independent factor in action, and the end element must be random; or the objectionable implication of the randomness of ends is denied, but then their independence disappears and they are assimilated to the conditions of the situation, that is to elements analysable in terms of non-subjective categories, principally heredity and environment, in the analytical sense of biological theory' (1937: 64). A recent, detailed criticism of Parsons' resort to evolutionary theory is Haines (1987), but she replicates the pattern we identify when she claims that the problems with his approach will be resolved by rectifying his neglect of action.

[32] Giddens (1976) and Habermas (1987) also offer a distinction of levels of structure (or culture), society and person, characterizing them in much the same way as did Parsons (see Holmwood and Stewart, 1991; Holmwood, 1996).

[33] Although Giddens argues vigorously that his theory of structuration has no 'functionalist overtones at all' and has declared that it would be helpful to 'ban' the term altogether, along with that of 'adaptation' (1981: 19, 16, 21), he proposes universal 'structural features' and forms of analysis to which they give rise which are remarkably similar to those of Parsons. Thus, he, too, identifies four structural principles with similar points of reference: signification, legitimation, authorisation and allocation. He argues further that two aspects of how they are articulated can be identified: 'one is how far a society contains distinct spheres of "specialism" in respect of institutional orders: differentiated forms of symbolic order (religion,

science, etc); a differentiated "polity", "economy" and "legal/repressive apparatus". The second is how modes of institutional articulation are organized in terms of overall properties of societal reproduction: that is to say "structural principles"' (1981: 47-8). Habermas (1987), for his part, identifies two sets of two functions associated with the dimensions of system and life-world, respectively, and like Parsons and Giddens uses them to produce a scheme of institutional differentiation with co-ordinating mechanisms operating through generalized media of interchange. Giddens and Habermas also provide a developmental sequence of societal types which mirrors that of Parsons. For all their hostility towards evolutionary thinking, they produce a developmental typology, classifying major types of societies in much the same way as Parsons, namely: band societies, settled agricultural communities, city-states, empires, feudal societies, capitalist societies and socialist societies (Giddens 1981: 96; Habermas 1976; Parsons 1966).

[34] Neither discussion is very hopeful about selectionism, however. Rosenberg is dissuaded by various disanalogies. These can be circumvented by considering selection to be a general model of explanation of which biology is one example and sociology another. There is no epistemological reason why sociology should slavishly imitate every aspect of biological selectionism. Turner and Maryanski's doubts are due to the difficulty of carrying out an adequate historical analysis. The difficulties are serious, it is true, but not a priori insurmountable. The best use for functionalism, conclude Turner and Maryanski (1979: 31), is simply to look at how variation in one part causes variation in a social whole. Functionalism should be practised only as a method for collecting and organizing data; functional explanation, however, should be avoided. How theoretical categories might be wrong for explanation but useful for description is not made clear. Moreover, the 'social whole' all too easily becomes a statement of a pre-defined societal type, rather than a code for the interdependence of parts as the object of research.

[35] In fact, Runciman is also concerned to construct typologies of major kinds of societies which in our view is not consistent with the selectionist approach to which he is ostensibly committed.

[36] We are also, obviously, rejecting what might be called social Darwinism. This is a confusing metaphor that takes either a straightforward biological form, in which the genetically superior wipe out the inferior, or is conceived of as social eliminationism,

where the more powerful (or socially 'fit') suppress or otherwise subordinate the less powerful. Neither is by any means adequate, and are not necessary forms of social evolution.

[37] Dupré (1994), for example, has addressed the issue of reductionism evinced in methodological individualism in the social science where it is argued that collectivities must be reduced to their component individual acts. He argues that there is no parallel thesis in biology and that there are, therefore, no grounds for arguing analogically from biology that the social sciences must be reductionist. Nor, in any analogy between biological and social processes, is selection to be conceived of as a simple 'survival of the fittest' eliminationism: instead, vastly more creative processes of adaptation and fitness are conceptualized in the core ideas of modern evolutionary theory.

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