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# VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN SOCIOLOGY

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The nineteenth century was a period of massive intellectual change. In both the United States and Europe there was a renewed awareness of the centrality of the “social” and the “cultural” in explanations of individual human behavior. New approaches emerged with a shared concern for establishing rigorous “scientific” methods in the study of social phenomena. Their proponents forged the new university disciplines of economics, geography, anthropology, psychology, and sociology, and they became involved in building a professional infrastructure of journals and associations to sustain this intellectual work. They inspired scientifically informed practices of social change through planning and social reconstruction. It is for these reasons that the last third of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century have been characterized as the “classical” period of the social sciences.

Patrick Geddes and his circle were among those in Britain who contributed to the development of classical sociology. In this chapter we will set out the intellectual and professional context in which they made these contributions, setting the scene for our consideration of their personal and business relations in chapters 2 and 3 and their own intellectual concerns in the remainder of the book.

### STATISTICAL SOCIAL RESEARCH

Although a number of the leading social thinkers of the nineteenth century used ethnographic and statistical data in their theoretical reflections, few were engaged in systematic data collection and analysis. There was, however, a parallel development of statistical survey work, undertaken in

isolation from theoretical reflection and providing an independent source for a disciplinary sociology.

The earliest attempts at systematic survey work occurred in France and were undertaken in close association with economic investigations into national wealth and resources. Quesnay's *Tableau Économique* (1758) set out a comprehensive model of the relations between production, distribution, and national wealth, and Quetelet (1848) explored the systematic "laws" of association among empirical measures of these. Over the nineteenth century a stream of works on "moral statistics"—statistics on crime and other social problems—were produced and yielded the empirical basis for such studies as that of Durkheim (1897) on suicide. In a different vein, Le Play collected information on household budgets and expenditure as a way of correlating environmental conditions with customary practices.

In Britain, early empirical surveys had been undertaken by Sir John Sinclair and Sir Frederick Eden, who used the clergy as respondents for their *Statistical Account of Scotland* (Sinclair 1791–92) and *The State of the Poor* (Eden 1797). These surveys preceded the work of Quetelet but had little long-term influence on intellectual life.<sup>1</sup> Together with the population theories and predictions of Malthus (1798), however, they led to the establishment of a regular population census that was to be carried out every ten years from 1801. Political economists began to make use of census data alongside Treasury data on financial resources but found the available statistics rather limited and many advocated more systematic data collection along the lines proposed by Quetelet.

The bases for this work of data collection were the local statistical societies, the earliest of which was formed in Manchester in 1833 (Ashton 1934; Abrams 1968). The following year the Statistical Society of London was formed by the British Association and similar societies were formed in Birmingham, Bristol, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, and other major cities. Oriented to investigation into social conditions and such "social problems" as poverty, wages, education, crime, and family disorganization, the social statisticians undertook house-to-house enquiries using rudimentary questionnaires. Much of this statistical work was purely descriptive, but there were some attempts at explanation. A major area in which such explanatory work was undertaken was the investigation of the effects of climate and of employment on health. Edwin Chadwick, a member of the London society, produced data on health and social conditions that informed his reports for the Poor Law Commissioners. William Farr was also a member and ensured that the society's work influenced the development of government statistics on health and the development of the population census. By the end of the 1840s, however, the statistical societies were largely moribund, their purposes seemingly made irrelevant by an improvement in economic and social condi-

tions and a growing reliance on benevolent action on the part of employers: the “Two Nations” depicted by Disraeli (1845) were seen as divided by culture and attitudes rather than by structural economic conditions.

The 1850s and '60s saw a growing involvement of professional expertise in the public policy of an increasingly, but incompletely, bureaucratized state. The National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (the SSA) was formed in 1857 as a discussion forum on the uses of social research in national and local government policy and administration, its proponents aiming to build an informed public opinion and to channel this influence into parliamentary considerations (Goldman 2002, 14–16). The SSA was based on the view that scientific knowledge is empirical knowledge that provides the basis for social reform. Such an approach embodied a positivism of the type espoused by Comte, though this was seen by its members as involving an exclusively statistical—and not theoretical—knowledge (Goldman 2002, ch. 10). The formation of the SSA paralleled similar moves elsewhere, most notably the European (though largely Franco-Belgian) society formed in Brussels in 1862, the American Social Science Association formed in 1865, and the German *Verein für Sozialpolitik* formed in 1872. The SSA maintained close links with various local statistical societies, including the Statistical Society of London (later the Royal Statistical Society), though a proposed merger never came off. The association sponsored and supported a number of investigations, reporting these at conferences and in its journals and *Transactions*.

The prime movers in the SSA were Benthamite liberal politicians, civil servants, businessmen, and social reformers. Apart from limited contacts with Mill and Spencer, the only sociologist to have any significant contact with the SSA was Le Play. Absent or weakly represented were academics other than a few political economists. Goldman (2002, 341–42) has suggested that the practical success of the SSA meant that its leadership felt no pressing need to establish a university discipline to take forward its aims. In France, Germany, and the United States, on the other hand, the social science associations were relatively unsuccessful in establishing liberal agendas and the impetus toward the building of a university discipline of sociology was correspondingly greater.

Awareness of the social problem of class was reflected in a growing literature of social exploration in which ethnographic observation and interviews largely replaced statistical concerns. The journalist Henry Mayhew had undertaken a number of investigations into work and street life for the *Morning Chronicle* in the late 1840s (Mayhew 1849–50; and see Mayhew 1861), but the principal example of this style of research was the radical Marxist study carried out by Engels (1845) on the streets of Salford and Manchester. Where Engels explained working-class demoralization in terms of the economic contradictions of the mode of production under which

they live, other social explorers saw demoralization as a moral failure on the part of the workers themselves (Mearns 1883; W. Booth 1890). Mayhew, however, interviewed many of the London poor and aimed to exhibit in his reports the consequences of employment conditions for the moral outlook and way of life followed.

It was this literature of social exploration that lay behind the growth of laborism and socialism in Britain from the 1880s: the SDF, Socialist League, and Fabian Society were all formed in 1884, and the Independent Labour Party was formed in 1893. Discussion in radical circles had stressed the salience of economic conditions and had decried the extent of the poverty that had been allowed to develop in the major cities. The American radical Henry George claimed that a massive proportion of the London population was living in poverty and his view had been taken up in radical circles as an argument for state action to address the problem of poverty. Charles Booth, a Conservative businessman from Liverpool, seriously questioned George's claim and went on to undertake the greatest of the nineteenth-century surveys, concluding, paradoxically, that George had understated the true extent of poverty.

Booth adopted the quantitative methods of the early statistical societies and combined these with the ethnographic methods of Mayhew for his investigation into the extent of London poverty and the causes of its existence (Bulmer 1991a). Beginning with an investigation of East London, he moved on to a comprehensive survey of the whole of London that he published in seventeen volumes (C. Booth 1901–02). His analysis employed a scheme of social classes, defined by the type of work and level of income of their members, and he showed that poverty was to be found in the bottom four classes of the distribution. Although he showed that only just over 8 percent of the population were "very poor," the true extent of poverty was estimated at more than 30 percent. Poverty, he argued, was produced by a combination of disadvantaged economic conditions (low pay, unemployment, and casual employment) and improvident habits. His survey went beyond poverty itself into a huge investigation of work conditions and community life that emulated and advanced upon the principles advocated by Le Play. The influence of Le Play was greatest, however, in a subsequent survey of York undertaken by Seebohm Rowntree (1901) in which household budget data were collected as a way of directly investigating the consumption and savings habits of ordinary working and nonworking families.

#### THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL THEORY

Sociology as a theoretically grounded discipline developed most comprehensively in France and Germany and, toward the end of the nineteenth century, in the United States. Each country had its distinctive traditions

of social thought, yet social theorists and researchers engaged in a growing international interchange of ideas. Globally, sociology existed as overlapping circles of intellectual concerns, and the sociology that developed in the United States was especially marked by the influence of French and German ideas as well as those that had developed in Britain.

Social thought in nineteenth-century France had its roots in the ideas of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and the Enlightenment encyclopedists. Though strongly influenced by English ideas on the political and intellectual importance of individual freedom, their main concern had been with the origins and character of specifically “social” phenomena. They saw inherited customs and material environmental conditions as the key determinants of individual actions and explored the ways in which action produced and was shaped by legal institutions and the social division of labor. Conservative theorists such as De Bonald and De Maistre set out an account of the “moral constraint” that social institutions exercise over individuals. Henri de Saint-Simon and then Auguste Comte took up this idea of the distinctiveness and autonomy of “social facts” and proposed a new science to study them. This science—to which Comte gave the newly coined name of “Sociology”—was to provide the knowledge and understanding that would make it possible to predict social trends and so to engage in a rational reconstruction of society through enhancing social harmony and establishing a universal brotherhood of humanity.

Emile Durkheim took up this program and established sociology as an intellectual discipline at the heart of the French educational system. Drawing especially on Montesquieu (Durkheim 1892), he explored the division of labor (1893) and individual acts of suicide (1897) from a sociological point of view, and he set out the principles of scientific method (1895) needed in undertaking social studies. His most important work was, arguably, his influential study of the origins of moral values and intellectual ideas in socially organized religious practices (1912). Other thinkers in France had explored the social dimensions of human activity (Espinass 1877; Worms 1896; Tarde 1890) and some had begun to construct a new discipline of geography to explore the effects of material conditions (see the later systematizations in Vidal de la Blache 1922; Febvre 1922), but it was Durkheim’s advocacy of the Comtean vision that dominated French thought. Working closely with his nephew Marcel Mauss (Durkheim and Mauss 1903; Mauss 1902, 1904–05, 1925), and with François Simiand and others, he founded a professional journal—the *Année Sociologique*—in 1896, established sociological ideas in the training of school teachers, and, in 1913, became the holder, at Bordeaux, of the key chair in sociology.

German social theory originated in the intellectual innovations of Immanuel Kant (1784), Johann Herder (1784–91), and, above all, Georg

Hegel (1821, 1831). Hegel held that social phenomena could be understood as complexes of ideas that provide the meanings that individuals give to their actions. He set out a theory of society and of history as the continual development of a social purpose through ever more universal stages: from familism through civil society to the nation-state. Wilhelm Dilthey (1883) spelled out the implications of this point of view for the development of the specifically “cultural sciences” emerging as the geography and “folk psychology” of Adolph Bastian (1881), Friedrich Ratzel (1882–91), and Wilhelm Wundt (1912). It was in the hands of Ferdinand Tönnies (1889), Werner Sombart (1902), and Max Weber (see, *inter alia*, 1904, 1904–05) that there was a specifically “sociological” implementation of this view. Their work focused on the forms and types of social relations in and through which individual actions are able to produce large-scale historical transformations, and they formed in 1910 a German Sociological Society (see Adair-Totef 2005) as the vehicle through which they could develop an empirically oriented approach to social life. The first chair in the subject, to which Franz Oppenheimer was appointed, was established at Frankfurt in 1918, and Max Weber was given a chair in the subject, at Munich, later that same year.

The socialist movements of Europe were bases for approaches to social theory that were French and German in origin but, by the late nineteenth century, had an international character. The early forms of socialism associated with Charles Fourier and Robert Owen had been transformed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848) into a politically grounded social theory of economic life. Though this rarely went under the name of sociology (but see Bukharin 1921), it had a significant influence on the work undertaken in the emerging departments of economics, politics, history, and sociology across the world. Marxism served as a critical foil for much of the work of Weber and as a specifically political doctrine, Marxism shaped most forms of late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century social theory.

The earliest expressions of social thought in the United States drew on ideas from Adam Smith, Montesquieu, and Herder, but systematic statements of social theory first developed in opposition to this liberal mainstream among defenders of the slaveholding system of the South. Henry Hughes (1854) and George Fitzhugh (1854) adapted Comte’s sociology to present a view of economic mechanisms as embedded in larger “organic” structures of custom and social solidarity. By contrast, Henry Carey constructed a more materialistic model of human action in which he drew on the work of Friedrich List (1841) to set out a view of social action as the outcome of the forces of attraction generated by the motions of individuals (Carey 1858–59, 1872). Somewhat later, Lester Ward (1883) returned to Comtean ideas and developed an account of the growth of rational social planning. This general approach influenced the theory of patriarchal gender divisions

produced by Charlotte Gilman (1898, 1911), though this never received mainstream attention. Sociology was established as a university discipline in the 1870s by William Sumner at Yale, the main influences on his evolutionary theory of the structuring of social inequalities (Sumner 1883) being Harriet Martineau and Herbert Spencer. He later developed this into a theory of the constraining power of customs and “folkways” (Sumner 1906).

It was, however, the establishment in the early 1890s of graduate and research departments at Chicago and Columbia that really established sociology as a professional discipline in the United States. Albion Small was appointed as head of the new department at Chicago, recruiting Charles Zueblin as an extension lecturer, and George Vincent (a key figure in the Chautauqua summer schools), as co-writer for some of his texts. Small brought to Chicago a number of thinkers who began to elaborate a distinctive set of theoretical ideas that they took from contemporary German sociology. John Dewey and George Mead developed a specifically social dimension to the psychology of William James (1890), stressing the interactional basis of self-formation. While systematized only much later (Dewey 1922; Mead 1927), their ideas influenced the sociological work of William Thomas (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918–19) and became the basis of what Herbert Blumer (1937) was to describe as “symbolic interactionism.” Empirical work on the city of Chicago itself led to the development of a specifically “ecological” perspective on urban processes that prospered after the appointment of Robert Park in 1914 and was undertaken in conjunction with the geographical work of Ellen Semple (1911) and the ecological studies of Harlan Barrows (1923).

Outside Chicago, Franklin Giddings (1896) developed a distinctive subjectivist approach at Columbia and sponsored quantitative work that he aligned with the work of the New York Charity Organization Society. A major influence on sociology at Wisconsin was Thorstein Veblen, who had taught economics at Chicago from 1892 to 1906 and was one of the few American sociologists influenced by Marx’s social theory. At Wisconsin, however, it was German formal sociology that was the principal influence (Ross 1901, 1920; Wiese-Becker 1932).

Small was the central figure in the institutional organization of American sociology. He started the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1895 and used it not only to present the work of his fellow Chicago sociologists but also to make available translations of key works in European sociology. The American Sociological Society was formed in 1905, having formerly been a section of the American Economics Association. This was explicitly intended as an academic association of teachers and researchers, unlike the earlier National Social Science Association, which had been an association of clergy and social reformers interested in the empirical study of “social problems” and



social welfare. The close association, at the heart of professional sociology, of the *AJS* and the *ASS* with the Chicago department lasted until the 1930s.<sup>2</sup>

#### VISIONS OF SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

For many of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century social scientists, the development of social theory was interwoven with an idealistic vision of social reconstruction. They saw this reconstruction as a comprehensive rebuilding of society, requiring the rejection of violence and revolution, the promotion of mass education and participation, and the recognition that social inequalities should be reduced in order to create a broader climate of fairness and opportunity. Reconstruction was to be a grassroots process, based on a growth of awareness, knowledge, and culture through lifelong education and the emergence of a new spirituality. It assumed that all social changes are interdependent and that a truly positive transformation of society would require the consent and involvement of millions of people inspired by education and a vision of a better future.

The roots of this reconstructionism lay in Comtean sociology and the social gospel of the Protestant churches. Among the Comtean theorists and researchers, sociology was seen as providing the theoretical knowledge and understanding that could guide informed social interaction and planning. The predictive capacity of social science was the basis of effective and informed social change. Where Marxists saw social change occurring through revolutionary action, the Comteans saw it as a gradual process led by an informed and enlightened elite. The social gospel inspired a more practical and reformist approach to social reconstruction. Ministers, theologians, and social activists such as Walter Rauschenbusch (1907, 1917) in New York, Jane Addams in Chicago, and Samuel and Henrietta Barnett in London emphasized the moral duty of the middle and upper classes to give charitable donations and to volunteer their labor to educate, train, and support the socially disadvantaged. The most immediate products of their efforts were lay outreach programs such as the YMCA, the Salvation Army, and the settlement house movement, but they linked to much wider movements in arts and crafts, garden cities, cooperatives, and alternative education. Most of the reconstructionists were middle-class visionaries seeking a peaceful middle ground between the opposing ideologies of capitalism and communism, working to build a society free from both exploitation and revolution. The reconstructionists could easily be caricatured as naive idealists, “do-gooders,” and “busybodies,” but many of the institutions that they were associated with still continue. Typically they advocated social outreach to urban slums and impoverished rural communities, cooperatives, arts exhibitions and performances, handicrafts, credit unions, community development,



participatory and lifelong learning, volunteerism, civic activism, grassroots democracy, and the growth of a range of nonprofit organizations. Albion Small was especially interested in the practical applications of sociology, and he worked closely with Jane Addams and her Hull House settlements. He made applied sociology and social work an integral part of the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago until the formation of a separate School of Civics and Philanthropy in 1904. Social reconstruction was seen as a "third way," neither capitalist nor communist, based on social mobilization and community solidarity.

Comtism, Protestantism, the social gospel, and the Christian socialist movement formed the mainstream of social reconstructionism, but this political orientation was inspired also by other religious movements, one Catholic and the other interreligious. In 1893, with the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII initiated the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, a call for peace, harmony, and redistribution between rich and poor and between capital and labor. *Rerum Novarum* sought to place national governments at the center of the political process, arbitrating between organized capital and organized labor and persuading both sides to moderate their demands, support humane living and working conditions, engage in collective bargaining, and reach nonviolent compromise. It was a reaction to the rise of communism and militant trade unionism, to the growth of social inequalities, and to the brutal repression of striking and demonstrating workers and peasants. Along with social gospel thinking and the rise of social democracy and political movements such as the Fabian socialists, it laid the basis for twentieth-century welfare states with labor legislation, old-age pensions, disability benefits, and other support systems.

The interreligious current reflected the growing fascination of Western intellectuals with Eastern religions. This was most notable with Buddhism and Hinduism, both of which originated in South Asia, but was also apparent in much newer ideals such as Theosophy, which originated in New York but offered a form of Eastern enlightenment, and the Bahá'í religion that originated in Iran. Typically the Western devotees did not undergo a complete religious conversion. Instead, they opted for meditation and yoga, and for the argument that all great religions ultimately embody the same moral principles and worship the same divine spirit. Many of the figures associated with reconstructionism interacted frequently with Annie Besant and other Theosophists, with Israel Zangwill and other Zionists, and with Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, and other Hindu visionaries.

Social reconstructionism was fundamentally a lay movement drawing on an eclectic set of religious traditions. Many of its adherents were not frequent churchgoers, and some had largely abandoned conventional Christianity. What united the movement was its profound idealism, its

internationalism, and its search for fundamental social changes that could forever end the prospects of war and violent revolution. Its advocates referred very often simply to “reconstruction” rather than to “social reconstruction,” but their thinking had little to do with reconstructing the physical fabric. Instead, they focused on developing ideas to change socioeconomic and political systems to create permanent conditions of peace, social harmony, and prosperity.

Sociology in Britain developed in parallel with these international trends and in conjunction with statistical, empirical work. Many of the earliest strands in British social theory had influenced the direction taken by social theoreticians in France, Germany, and the United States, and they continued to exercise an influence throughout the nineteenth century. Later developments in British social theory took place through dialogue with the key figures involved in the establishment of sociology elsewhere.

#### ECONOMIC INDIVIDUALISM AND SOCIAL ACTION

The dominant strand in nineteenth-century British social thought had its origins in the individualistic theories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Thomas Hobbes and John Locke had laid the foundations for this later work in their philosophical reflections on knowledge, reason, and individual liberty from state interference. The leading figures in the Scottish Enlightenment of the eighteenth century—David Hume, Adam Ferguson, John Millar, Dugald Stewart, and Adam Smith—explored the interplay of rationality and emotion in human action and applied these ideas to construct theories of the historical development of economic exchange, private property, division of labor, and class formation. This work took a more analytical turn under the influence of Jeremy Bentham and resulted in the political economy of David Ricardo (1817), Thomas Malthus (1820), and James Mill (1821). This “utilitarian” economics was based on the assumption that social activities could be explained in terms of individualistic, rational, and calculative actions. Social relations, and most particularly those of the economy, were seen as the outcomes of processes of social exchange among rationally motivated individual agents, each of whom is orientated by calculations of the possible “utility” to be derived from alternative courses of action.

The earliest attempt to broaden this political economy into a more general theory of social life was that of Harriet Martineau. On the basis of her reading of the early ideas of Comte, which she later presented in a summary translation (1853), she sought to unite Comte’s “positive” methodology for the social sciences with utilitarian economic ideas (Martineau 1831).

She was among the first of the social scientists to undertake theoretically informed empirical research, investigating structures of social inequality and the divisions of gender and ethnicity. Reflecting on her investigations into social inequalities in American society, she produced a textbook on methods of social research (Martineau 1838; on the basis of Martineau 1837). Somewhat later, Henry Sidgwick (1891) took utilitarian theory into the sphere of political analysis that had initially concerned Bentham (see Bentham 1789).

John Stuart Mill (1865) undertook a deeper philosophical investigation into Comte's methodology. Though he was critical of Comte's own theoretical conclusions, Mill began to construct a sociological theory that recognized cultural diversity but retained a strong individualistic foundation. Mill (1848) saw this view of the social as complementing the economic analysis that he had derived from the earlier work of his father. This theory was, however, only partly developed (Mill 1869). The associationist psychology of Locke held that the ideas, feelings, and sensations that make up the mental worlds of individuals are "associated" with one another through the frequency and recency with which they have been experienced, their similarity to one another, and the implications that they suggest (see Flugel 1933, chs. 2.2 and 3.5; Hearnshaw 1964, ch. 9). James Mill, as a principal advocate of this position, had seen pleasure and pain as mechanisms through which psychological elements become associated with each other. This view had already begun to be abandoned by the early nineteenth century, and John Mill's *Logic of the Moral Sciences* (Mill 1843) was influential in moving psychology away from this cognitive and purely intellectualist basis. His concern was to uncover the motivational factors generating economic and political actions and to recognize the importance of "will," emotion, and purpose in motivating the individual actions that drive social development.

Despite its concern for the moral justifications offered for political regulation and individual liberty, the individualistic approach was largely limited to the abstract analysis of economic activity. It was in this area that Stanley Jevons (1871) and Alfred Marshall (1890) set out ideas that made Britain a leading player in the international development of microeconomic theory. Despite the early promptings of Martineau, it was not until Maynard Keynes (1936) that economic thought adopted more systemic ideas about macrolevel social phenomena.

Comte's work, however, had taken a broader approach than British individualism and he rejected all claims for the foundational status of individual psychology in the social sciences. His argument that societies comprised social systems with distinctive, emergent properties that had to be explained in social terms was developed in Britain outside the framework of mainstream political economy.

## SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL EVOLUTION

Herbert Spencer was the British theorist who most clearly carried forward Comte's aspiration for a distinctively *social* form of theorizing.<sup>3</sup> Though he was critical of many aspects of Comte's work, and he vehemently denied all suggestions that he was a mere disciple of Comte, Spencer formulated a theory of the structure and development of whole societies. Individual action remained a central element in this theory, but he was the first British writer to properly recognize the power of social phenomena to constrain individual actions. So important and distinctive was Spencer's theory that it rapidly superseded in influence that of Comte, and it was taken up enthusiastically in the United States, in much of Europe, and in the Far East.

Spencer set out a systematic body of comparative and historical ideas that integrated social theory with a mass of empirical data on a wide variety of societies and traced social development from its most "primitive" to its most complex forms (Spencer 1873, 1873–93). Social structures, he argued, must be treated as autonomous and distinctively social facts that are formed through the linguistically mediated interactions that connect individuals with each other. As "social organisms" or social systems, they exhibit a pattern of development or structural change that Spencer referred to as "evolution," though his emphasis on internal, endogenous processes of development was somewhat at variance with the emerging evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin. Spencer saw social evolution as the outcome of a continual struggle for survival among social groups and their individual members. Competition, conflict, and struggle, he argued, are the driving forces in this social development.

The development of a social organism was seen by Spencer as a process of "growth" analogous to the growth of a plant from its seed. It is through growth that specialized "organs" come to be differentiated from the remainder of the social body, much as such physiological organs as the heart and lungs are formed when a human body develops from its embryonic to its infant stage. In the social organism, organs such as markets, churches, states, families, and so on each come to be regulated by specialized social institutions as a generalized structure of customs gives way to a more differentiated normative structure. At the level of the social organism as a whole, development is apparent as distinct "stages" of relative backwardness and advance. Thus, contemporary societies, Spencer argued, had evolved from earlier and more sharply stratified societies that adopted a "militant" orientation in their dealings with their individual members and with other societies. Centralized states play a key role in such societies. The modern social forms that developed from these primitive forms, he held, are "industrial" societies that have a greater degree of social equality and more pacific or civil

forms of regulation. Social solidarity in these societies is organized around individual citizenship rights and contractual relations that limit the powers of governments. Thus, the individualistic theories of political economy are particularly appropriate for the analysis of the highly differentiated spheres of economic and political activity found in industrial societies, but less so for studying the social institutions in which they are embedded.

Similar evolutionary accounts were proposed by anthropologists Sir Edward Tylor (1871) and Sir James Frazer (1890). Using evidence from the growing number of travel and missionary reports on “primitive” societies, they recognized an underlying similarity in human nature, which they saw as responsible for similarities of cultural development found in all societies. Spencer relied on a Lamarckian view according to which culture is the repository of acquired knowledge and capacities. Tylor and Frazer, however, remained close to Darwin and recognized the importance of selection processes in determining the outcomes of historical change. They highlighted certain common or universal constraints and conditions under which evolution occurs and concluded that the environmental selection of cultural traits leads all societies to pass through a similar sequence of evolutionary stages. Social development, they held, has run from stone age “savagery” to metal age “barbarism” and, eventually, to the “civilized” stage of advanced productive technology (see also Lubbock 1865, 1870).

A further distinctive twist to evolutionary theory was given by Benjamin Kidd, a self-educated amateur who was fascinated by developments in biology and became a convinced Darwinist.<sup>4</sup> His *Social Evolution* (1894; see also 1898) became a massive best-seller—more influential even than the works of Spencer—and he was invited to write the keynote entry on “Sociology” for the 1902 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Critical of Spencer’s reliance on the inheritance of acquired characteristics, Kidd gave even greater emphasis to conflict and struggle than had Spencer. It is, he argued, the struggles among “solidaristic” and internally altruistic social groups that shape overall social development. The members of social groups that build a collective consciousness and institutionalize social solidarity will act altruistically toward each other but will tend to come into conflict with rival social groups. The clash between groups is the mechanism through which occurs the natural selection of cultural traits that give competitive advantages in group struggle.

Kidd saw the rise of Western civilization and its contemporary ideals of collective welfare and social obligation as resulting from the extended solidarity consequent upon the adoption of Christianity. The declining influence of religion in the contemporary Western world, he argued, had weakened social solidarity and was, as a result, increasing individualistic self-interest at the expense of altruism. Kidd rejected the socialist solutions

of collective regulation through a powerful centralized state and advocated, instead, a renewal of Christian religion as a means of collective regeneration.

#### IDEALIST STRANDS IN BRITISH SOCIAL THEORY

By the early twentieth century, a broadly evolutionary or developmental approach had become the dominant form of social theory in Britain. Its implications were pursued, however, in a number of different directions, both idealist and materialist. Idealist interpretations of Spencer's arguments were pursued in the philosophical works of Edward Caird, David Ritchie, and Henry Jones. These writers drew heavily on the German idealism that the political philosopher T. H. Green (1879) had made the basis for a "New Liberalism," but they were particularly inspired by Hegel's social philosophy. They reinterpreted Spencer's concept of the social organism to emphasize the ideal or "spiritual" character of social processes. Where Spencer saw social organisms as constructed from calculative individual acts, the British Hegelians held that the spiritual or cultural integrity of social phenomena was a precondition for these individual actions (Jones 1883).

The most important social theorist to develop this argument was Bernard Bosanquet (1897, 1899), who held that the structure of a society must be seen as comprising webs of communication and interdependence through which individuals are connected into systemic social wholes and within which individual personalities and state activities are formed. The "social inheritance" of a society—its system of culture and social institutions—comprises the shared ideas that sustain social solidarity but are held within individual minds. The individual self is formed through socialization into the cultural heritage. There is, therefore, a "social mind" that exists as a dispersed system of cultural meanings and shared knowledge and is maintained in existence through the communicative acts of socialized individuals. Through this communicative interaction a "general will" can be formed as the basis of the social integration and role behavior of the individual members of a society.<sup>5</sup>

On this basis, the idealists explored the social character of modernity. While all societies that persist must maintain their cultural unity, they noted a decline in traditional solidarities and the slow and partial emergence of new forms of social solidarity in contemporary industrial societies. These new solidarities are not yet fully developed and industrial societies are marked by a breakdown of group solidarities that leaves individuals unrooted and disordered. Thus, the growing individualism of civil society and its associational forms of relationship is not a result of the decline of religion per se, as Kidd had argued. It is, rather, a result of the decay of the traditional solidarities that underpinned the organic communities of preindustrial societies. The

task of social policy, the idealists held, is to devise new bases of solidarity appropriate to contemporary industrialism.

They further agreed that in an industrial society the reciprocal interdependence of one individual upon another in a social division of labor is based on individual rights of citizenship and on the corresponding obligations toward others. The idealists saw it as the task of social reform to ensure that state action promotes and enhances these individual rights and obligations (Ritchie 1895; Bradley 1876). Correspondingly, social theory had to explore the contribution that individual citizens can make to social welfare by uncovering the principles of the "social good" that underpin social reform and social work (Jones 1910, 1919). The forms of social intervention and social work that these theoreticians sought to institutionalize were embodied in the work of the London-based Charity Organisation Society (COS). Formed to undertake social service and to provide a proper professional training for social workers, the COS became an instrument for the application of Bosanquet's ideas through a "School of Sociology" at the London School of Economics. Bosanquet's wife, Helen, drew on his theory in her own more empirical studies of inequality, family relations, and community (H. Bosanquet 1898, 1902, 1906) and made these the basis for the novel casework methods that she introduced into the social work of the COS.

The idealist social theorists had a substantial and continuing influence within British sociology and social policy, though their direct influence gradually diminished over time. Their lasting influence was on the philosopher and historian Robin Collingwood's work on Roman society (Collingwood 1923) and Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard's (1937, 1940) interpretation of his fieldwork on the Azande and the Nuer of East Africa.<sup>6</sup>

#### MATERIALIST STRANDS IN BRITISH SOCIAL THEORIES

The idealist theorists were concerned with the cultural systems of meaning that constituted the structures of social organisms, but a number of materialist theorists focused on the structural conditions themselves and their relations to the material environment. Having many affinities with the political economists, they recognized the autonomy of economic relations from individual actions and examined their interdependence with cultural factors in forming social wholes.

Marxism had far less impact on socialist thought in Britain than it had in France and Germany, and British socialism was strongly rooted in the cooperative tradition of Robert Owen and the communitarian and ecological ideas of John Ruskin and William Morris. Morris, along with Eleanor Marx and other radical socialists, had split from Henry Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation to form the Socialist League in which the ideas of Marx



and Ruskin could be fused. This same fusion was apparent in the Fabian Society, whose members included Edward Carpenter, Edward Pease, Hubert Bland, and, a little later, George Bernard Shaw.<sup>7</sup> Fabian membership later grew to include Annie Besant, Graham Wallas, Sydney Olivier, and Sidney Webb.<sup>8</sup> Politically, the society's members were radical Liberals who sought to build a progressive block within the Liberal Party, though its membership also included the Labourite politicians Tom Mann, John Burns, and Ben Tillett and the suffragist Emmeline Pankhurst.

Sidney Webb, the leading figure in the society, met Beatrice Potter in 1890. Potter—soon to become Beatrice Webb—had close family friendships with both Spencer and the Comtean writer Frederick Harrison, and she had worked with her cousin Charles Booth during his research into East End poverty. Her strong intellectual interests in the cooperative movement and its contribution to social change were brought into the Fabian Society. Influenced by Harrison's (1877) interpretation of Comte, however, the Webbs took the view that social policy had to be devised by an elite of administrators armed with a scientific knowledge of relevant facts gained through social research.

A Marx study group was formed within the Fabian Society with a view to formulating a non-Marxist socialism that, nevertheless, took seriously the principal elements in Marxist economic theory. While the society recognized the importance of class divisions in contemporary capitalism, the labor theory of value was rejected in favor of a rent-based theory of exploitation.<sup>9</sup> The influential *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (Olivier 1889) was the first outcome of these discussions and set out the key elements of a non-Marxist social theory of material life in which the growing market power of industrial and financial monopolies within the economy was seen as associated with a growing polarization of social classes.

The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) was formed as a Fabian organization in 1895, the Webbs seeing it as the most effective way of advancing the society's theoretical and empirical work.<sup>10</sup> The School organized lectures in economics, statistics, commerce, and political science. It hosted the COS lectures in sociology and soon set up its own department in the subject. Many of its lecturers developed the Fabian interpretation of Marxist theory, and the most important Marxist-inspired work in later years was that of Harold Laski (see, for example, Laski 1919).<sup>11</sup>

#### TOWARD A TWENTIETH-CENTURY MAINSTREAM

Idealist and materialist theories vied for intellectual influence in the emerging British social sciences of the twentieth century, and Geddes and Branford brought them together within their Sociological Society. These intellectual

differences were the subject of lively debate in the society and helped to shape the sociological ideas that Geddes and Branford themselves developed. When a department of sociology came to be properly established at the LSE, however, it was Leonard Hobhouse who was appointed to the chair. Hobhouse produced a powerful form of evolutionism that showed strong influences from both the idealists and the Fabians, and it was his theory that became the basis of the dominant intellectual framework for British sociology through much of the first half of the twentieth century.

Hobhouse studied and taught philosophy at Oxford, working in an environment dominated by the Hegelian thought that helped to shape his major study in the philosophy of knowledge (Hobhouse 1896). Through his involvement in labor politics and the work of the Fabian Society, he produced an early study of the labor movement (Hobhouse 1893) and became convinced of the need for tighter links between trades unions, cooperatives, and municipal organizations. Resigning from Oxford to take up political journalism, he continued to work on theoretical issues and produced a major statement of evolutionary psychology (Hobhouse 1901). Following an invitation to lecture on political science at the LSE, Hobhouse began work on a comparative sociology of mental development through a critical engagement with the work of the idealist social theorists at Oxford (Hobhouse 1906). On the strength of this work he was appointed to the new LSE chair of sociology in 1907.

Hobhouse developed a distinctive understanding of the social world as a network of interacting and communicating individuals who sustain relatively fixed and autonomous structures of relations through the “social mind” that is brought into being by their communication. Like Bosanquet, he recognized that this social mentality is not an actual entity that exists separately from the individual members of a society but is a network of communicated ideas and meanings contained in and circulating among individual minds. Central to the social mind are the “rules” that comprise the major social institutions—the normative factors that regulate social interactions. A population that shares a set of rules is a community, and these rules are embodied in its customs and laws. Simple, undifferentiated societies are organized through a single, cohesive system of rules, but socially differentiated communities are formed into distinct clusters of social institutions that regulate each specialized sphere of activity.

Hobhouse saw social entities developing over time according to definite evolutionary principles. The natural selection of rules and ideas ensures the integration of societies as ongoing organisms and is the basis of their long-term transformation. At a global level, he depicted a general evolution from simple kinship-based societies, through “civilized” societies with centralized, authoritarian states, to modern “civic” societies based around

individual principles of citizenship (Hobhouse 1924; see also Hobhouse et al. 1914). Individual citizenship rights are means to social improvement, and Hobhouse saw them as the basis for a new and reconstructed liberalism (Hobhouse 1911).

This view of the evolutionary development of liberal citizenship was a major influence on his colleague Richard Tawney (1921) and was later taken up by Thomas H. Marshall as the basis of his own influential account of citizenship rights (Marshall 1949). Through Marshall, this has continued to influence work in the area of migration, rights, welfare, and citizenship. The main disciple of Hobhouse within British sociology, however, was Morris Ginsberg (1921), who devoted himself to promoting the intellectual inheritance of Hobhouse against all perceived challenges. Ginsberg, however, made no real contribution to developing or enlarging Hobhouse's ideas, and he excluded any other approach to sociology from the LSE—the only significant department of sociology in the country through the middle years of the twentieth century.

The pool of ideas from which Hobhouse drew also inspired others to develop related ideas on society and the social mind. Robert MacIver, a lecturer at Aberdeen University and the first British person after Hobhouse to include the word *Sociology* in his job title, was strongly influenced by idealist philosophy and by the new work of Durkheim and Simmel. He produced an important and influential study of community (MacIver 1917) before leaving Britain for Canada and the United States, where he published a short introduction to sociology (MacIver 1921) that popularized and developed the ideas of his earlier book. This book was published first in England, intended for a university extension audience, and was extremely influential in the sociological debates of the 1920s.<sup>12</sup>

Psychologist William McDougall worked on the anthropological expedition to the Torres Straits led by Alfred Haddon and W. H. R. Rivers (see Herle and Rouse 1998). It was this practical exposure to cultural differences that led to him developing a more specifically *social* psychology. His most important work (McDougall 1908) was produced in the same year as a key work by Graham Wallas (1908) on the same subject, and McDougall's attempts to build a social psychology were further developed in a book published shortly before he left Britain to settle in the United States (McDougall 1920).<sup>13</sup>

During the 1920s, two further strands of theory developed from the work of Hobhouse. These carried forward a similar view of the social organism, but rejected his overarching evolutionary approach. A structural sociology akin to that of Durkheim was developed in the work of Rivers (1924) and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1922), while Hobhouse's LSE colleague Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) set out a "functionalist" view in which culture

played a central part. These approaches had their greatest influence in the new social anthropology departments of Britain and its colonial territories. Their lasting impact was to encourage the reception of American structural functionalism after World War II.

Geddes and Branford worked at the heart of the intellectual debates discussed in this chapter. Of all the British theorists, they had, perhaps, the most extensive international links to their contemporaries in France, Germany, and the United States. They contributed their distinctive perspective to the general intellectual ferment of the time, and they drew on some of its most advanced expressions. They promoted the cause of teaching sociology through the establishment of lectureships and chairs, and their Sociological Society and *Sociological Review* were among the first in the world to be established. We will examine this project in the remainder of this book, beginning with a consideration of their personal backgrounds and connections in chapter 2 and the intellectual networks associated with their work in chapter 3.