

SOCIO-CULTURAL PROGRESS THROUGH TIME: UNDERSTANDING HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

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Abstract

The study of societies and their cultures is inherently intertwined with the examination of change, particularly socio-cultural change, which has been a central focus of sociology since its inception as an academic discipline. This enduring interest in understanding the processes of change is exemplified by the work of sociologists such as Herbert Spencer, a foundational figure in the field. Spencer argued that sociology can only attain the status of a science by embracing the concept of natural evolutionary law, highlighting the importance of acknowledging the dynamic nature of social structures and institutions. This paper delves into the significance of studying evolutionary changes within sociology, emphasizing the necessity of recognizing societal transformations as integral to the discipline's scientific inquiry. By exploring the historical roots of this perspective and its implications for contemporary sociological research, this paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between societal dynamics and scientific inquiry in the field of sociology.

Keywords: sociology, socio-cultural change, evolutionary changes, social structures, social institutions

INTRODUCTION

Societies with their cultures which form the subject matters of sociology are always exposed to one form of process of change or the other. This explains why the phenomenon of change (particularly socio-cultural change) has been the focus of many sociologists right from the inception of the field as an academic discipline. For instance, in trying to justify the study of the concept of evolutionary changes as a major concern in the study of social structures and social institutions in the discipline of sociology, Herbert Spencer (one of the founding fathers of sociology) contextualized it thus: "Sociology can become a science only when it is based on the idea of natural evolutionary law. There can be no complete acceptance of sociology as a science, so long as the belief in social order not conforming to natural law, survives (Coser, 1977)."

The interpretation of the above, is that because all aspects of the universe, whether organic or in-organic, social or non-social, are always ultimately subjected to the laws of evolution – moving from one state to another, sociology can only assume a scientific status if it also studies these laws of evolution as it had been successfully done in the natural sciences. That is, society like nature, is always in a state of ceaseless flux and that change rather than persistence is the normal and natural condition of life. Therefore, if anything, change seems to be accelerating. The phenomenon of change is therefore a process that comes in so many forms and rates and it is so

common a phenomenon in social life. In fact, it is the commonality of this phenomenon that makes people to question the need for a special study of social change in spite of Spencer's justification for the study of evolutionary change.

In the science of humanity, particularly sociology, people have however found a sound case for the study of social change so long as it confines itself to certain problems such as the origins, mechanisms and forms of change. Right from the beginning of the study of philosophy therefore, philosophers and scholars alike have tried to carve a niche for themselves by trying to study either the origin of change, or mechanism of change, or the dimension of change or the form of change. In particular therefore, many classical sociologists concerned themselves with the problem of social change.

In the history of social thought therefore, the unit of social change is the social structure, which by definition consists of those relations between men that have achieved a certain definitiveness of forms and relative permanence. In spite of these characteristics of the social structures, sociological thinkers believed that the human social structures (which include cultures) do not remain unaltered. This explains why the properties of social systems, which were formerly conceived in fairly static terms, have come to be treated as dynamic social processes. In the same manner, the emphasis on a tightly knit interdependence of parts within a social system has given way to looser constructs which allow more variation among parts.

The outcome of this is the emergence of a much livelier concern and interest in issues of change and development with particular focus on related areas like aid, exploitation, urbanization, neocolonialism, nationalism, military rule and westernization, all of which have become part of historical sociology. In this paper, attempt is made to reflect on the concept of social change with particular focus on cultural change within the context of sociological contributions. In order to achieve this objective, the remaining part of this paper is organized to discuss the followings: the conceptual issues, sociologists and socio-cultural change and a concluding remark on what sociologists have gained from the discourse.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES: SOCIAL CHANGE, DEVELOPMENT AND EVOLUTION

Of all the phenomena which are of interest to sociologists, social change is perhaps the most elusive and therefore the most given to speculative debates. That is, closely related phenomena like development and evolution are not as problematic as the concept social change when it comes to the question of definition. This is because, looking at the various definitions of social change, considerable diversity of opinions exist amongst scholars even with respect to such formal questions as what constitutes the logical subject of social change, and what are its temporal and spatial dimensions?

It is, however, interesting to note that some people identify the subject matter of social change with the entire field of sociology, arguing that social life is life and therefore changes. This explains why in August Comte's work, sociology is seen as the study of static and dynamics – order and progress (Coser, 1977). Also in Comte's

submission on methods of inquiry, the notion of social change as the subject matter of sociology is adequately represented. According to him, by the method of comparison, the different stages of evolution may all be observed at once (Coser, 1977 p. 6). With this method, Comte was able to affirm that although human race as a whole has progressed in a single and uniform manner, various Populations have attained extremely unequal degrees of development. The significance of the above is that sociology at any level of discourse is always concerned with the issue of social change either directly or indirectly.

Contrary to the above notion of social change, there are other sociologists who used the word exclusively in connection with alteration in social organization and consequently exclude cultural change. There are also theorists who use the concept of social change to denote observable differences in any social phenomenon, be it a change in occupational mobility, in size and composition of the population.

However, students of development and evolution face a somewhat lighter task than students of social change. The reason for this is because development or evolution as autonomous process, constitutes but one form of social change the limit of which can be reasonably defined. It is important to note that the terms development as well as evolution introduce the specification of growth in the description of change. The word, growth, has quantitative referent only. That is, it refers to an expansion, an increase, a more of whatever it is that one determines to be the subject of growth. On the other hand, the word change has a qualitative referent; it refers to a difference in the character of whatever it is that one decided to be the subject of change. It can be inferred here that quantitative growth of social life at some point requires a qualitative change of social life in order to sustain and encourage further qualitative growth and change of social life.

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that development of social life is a process of continuous growth and change of social life. Such idea goes back to the early evolutionist schools in sociology and philosophy. In fact, early classical theorists like Spencer, Durkheim, Tonnies, Morgan and many others laboured on precisely this principal feature of evolution, namely that quantitative growth of social life at some stage involves a qualitative change of the forms of social life. The discussion above points to the simple fact the terms change, development and evolution are equated with the progress of man.

From all of the above therefore, social change is the transformation over time of the institutions and culture of a society (Giddens and Duneier, 2000). There is a distinction between social change and cultural change. Cultural change involves changes in material and non-material cultures. On the other hand however, social change is more often confined primarily to changes in social relationships.

SOCIOLOGISTS AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGE: A REVIEW

As it has been shown earlier, the subject of social change (including cultural change) is as old as sociology itself. From the time of Darwin, reference has been made to one aspect of social change or the other either overtly or covertly in sociological theorizing. Since then, intellectual interest in social change in different societies has

developed into different schools of thought or ideological perspectives (Adebisi, 2007). The law of human progress espoused by August Comte in his attempt to create a naturalistic science of society that will both explain the past development of mankind and help to predict its future course, represents the first concrete attempt to draw attention to the inevitability of change in human societies. As early as 1822, while August Comte was still serving under Saint Simon, he set for himself the assignment to discover the law of human progress, which emerged from his ambition to apply what he conceived to be a method of scientific comparison (Salawu and Muhammed, 2007).

From his law of human progress emerged his conception of the law of three stages. In this law, Comte believed that mankind has passed through three stages. These three stages, according to him, are the theological or fictitious stage; the metaphysical or abstract stage and the scientific or positive stage. Each stage represents a particular state of human development with its own sociocultural characteristics and belief – system. In the theological stage, for example, the human mind seeking the essential nature of being supposes all phenomena to be produced by the immediate action of the supernatural beings. On the other hand, in the metaphysical stage, the mind supposes abstract forces, which are capable of producing all phenomena. In the final stage, which is the positive stage, the mind is said to have given over the vain search after absolute notions, the origin and destination of the universe as the causes of phenomena. Instead, the mind applies itself to the study of their laws.

For August Comte, each successive stage or sub-stage in the evolution of the human mind necessarily grew out of the preceding one (a vivid indication of change). The implication of this is that, the constitution of the new social system cannot take place before the destruction of the old. August Comte in his philosophy on human progress believed that these three stages parallel the stages in the development of social organizations, types of social order, types of social units and the material conditions of human life. To him, all these evolved in similar manner as the changes in progressive mental development mentioned above take place (Coser, 1977). In trying to illustrate this position, August Comte said that each mental age has its own characteristics, which accompany the social organization and the type of political dominance. Thus, the theological stage is dominated by priests and ruled by military men. In the same vein, the metaphysical stage, which corresponds to the Middle Ages and Renaissance, was under the control of churchmen and lawyers. Finally, industrial administrators and scientific moral guides will govern the positive stage, according to August Comte.

Comte in his positive philosophy when he attempted to link the stages of human progress with types of social organizations. Accordingly, he pointed out that in the theological stage, the family is the prototypical social unit. In the metaphysical stage, it is the state that rises into societal prominence, while in the positive stage, the whole human race becomes the operative social unit (globalization). August Comte's ideas about social change as contained in his work on the law of human progress also cover the causes of such progress. In this regard, he attempted to advance reasons for the kind of human progress discussed above. Though he admitted other factors

such as intellectual evolution as the causes of human progress (development), he specifically stressed the factor of increase in population. Because of increase in population, he said that there will be division of labour, which becomes the powerful implement of social evolution or human progress (Gouldner, 1973). In Comte's Positive Philosophy quoted by Coser (1977), it is indicated that increase in population are seen as a major determinant of the rate of social progress (change). The aforementioned notion is captured thus:

The progressive condensation of our species, especially in its early stages brings about such a division of employment... as could not take place among smaller numbers: and ... the faculties of individuals are stimulated to find subsistence by mere refined methods... by creating new wants and new difficulties, this gradual concentration develops new means, not only of progress but of order, by neutralizing physical inequalities and affording a growing ascendancy to those intellectual and moral forces which are suppressed among a scanty population.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that division of labour, derived from increase in human population, is a force that drives human progress. From the discussion so far, we can also see clearly the tradition of progress (social change) in the work of August Comte. It is, however, necessary to point to the fact that the emphasis he laid on the necessary linkages between the ages of mankind, the stress on the inevitable increase in the cultural inheritance of humanity and the belief in the powers of science are what he inherited from Turgot (1750) who started the tradition of progress in social philosophy.

As reported by Coser (1977), the two lectures delivered by Turgot at Sarbonne were the first important version in modern times of the ideology of progress. Turgot (cited by Coser), emphasized the long historical chain of progress which, in the language of Coser, now culminates in modern rational man. The continuation of this work is found in the work of Condorcet titled: *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*. In this work, Condorcet tried to show the inevitability of social change in human history when he said: 'we pass by imperceptible graduations from the brute to the savage and from savage to Euler and Newton'. Following the tradition of Turgot, Condorcet strongly believed that he, too, could document the operation of progress in the past (Coser, 1977:22). Therefore, like his predecessor, Condorcet saw in science and technology, the means by which mankind had been propelled forward as well as the main engine of future advances.

However, unlike Turgot who relied on the regular appearance of men of genius to spur the movement of progress, Condorcet thought that:

... with enlightenment and state supported mass instruction, the number of productive scientists could be deliberately increase, and hence the rate of progress could be enormously accelerated... These men of science would be in the vanguard of humanity. The progress of the ordinary run of mankind would be more sluggish than that of men of scientific training, but common men would eventually accept scientific guidance to reach for further perfectibility.

What the above quotation from Coser's (1977:22) work points to is that human history is always replete with events of change from one state to the other until when a certain state of perfectibility will be attained by mankind. At that stage it is envisaged that though certain inequalities would continue to exist, but given the high level of achievement of the race as a whole, they would no longer lead to suffering and deprivation (Coser, 1977).

The issues of the nature of social change and the forces behind it continue to generate further theorizing among philosophers of notes in sociology. One theorist who also made the issue of change his major focus is Karl Marx who tried to link class struggle with social change. Like August Comte, Turgot and Condorcet, Karl Marx was also interested in the analysis of human progress. In particular, Karl Marx was he and Hegel were at least interested in finding out the general law of historical change, that is, the law that guides the transition from one stage to another. This is contained in the Theory of Dialectics. This theory can be applied to motion in nature and society. When it is applied to nature, it is known as Dialectical Materialism and is called Historical Materialism when it is applied to society.

According to Karl Marx, dialectics is the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought. The main core of this law is that changes take place as a result of struggle of opposites. This explains why Marx in his idea of social change recognized and emphasized the notion of class struggle. Hence, he was of the view that ever since human society emerged from its primitive and relatively undifferentiated state, it has remained fundamentally divided between classes. He opined that these classes clash in the pursuit of what he called class interest. The determinant of social and historical process is the class interest and the confrontation of power that they bring. In Karl Marx' approach, he continually centered his analysis on how the relationships between men are shaped by their relative positions in regard to the means of production.

Also implicit in the law of dialectics is the transformation of quantity into quality. That is, at each particular stage of development, the forces of production grow quantitatively until they can no longer be contained within the old and obsolete relation of production and they will thus burst out of the old mode of production. Thus, each historic stage can be seen as yet one further step (necessary step) away from this real natural process. Karl Marx' historical materialism consists of five stages of history which can be summarized thus:

At first, man owned his own land, the instruments with which he worked and he owned his own labour. But progressively, this unity gets to be dissolved, step by step, historical stage by historical stage. First, he loses control over his land, next he loses control over the instruments of his labour and finally he loses even control over his own labour.

In other words, the various historical stages represent steps in the evolution of private property. The summary from the foregoing is that Marx' framework in the analysis of social change is a chronological transition from one phase to another. In his scheme, Marx sees progress in human society as a growing emancipation of man from nature and growing control over nature. He also sees it as movement from the situation of primitive men to

that of original and spontaneous relations which emerge from the process of evolution of animals into human groups. Consequently, the emancipation experienced by the human societies affects not only the forces but also the relations of production.

Another far-reaching attempt in the explanation of social change in human society by sociological scholars is what has come to be known as theories of social evolution. The main thrust of the evolutionary theory is that the quantitative growth of social life at some stage involves a qualitative change of the forms of social life. Here, evolution is equated with progress of man. Early classical theorists like Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Ferdinand Tonnies, Morgan and many others laboured on precisely this principal feature of evolution mentioned above. The ideas of these early evolutionists will be clear by looking briefly at the work of some of them.

First on the list here is the contributions of Herbert Spencer whose concern was with evolutionary changes in the social structures and social institutions. Evolution, according to Spencer, is a universal process, which is a change from a state of relatively indefinite incoherent, homogeneity to a state of relatively definite, coherent and heterogeneity. The thrust of Spencer's theory of evolution is his belief that ultimately all aspects of the universe, whether organic or inorganic, social or non-social is subject to the laws of evolution. Thus, his sociological reflections concentrate on the parallels between organic and social evolution, which explains why biological analogies occupy a central place in all his sociological reasoning. Seen from this context, Spencer's most fruitful use of organic analogies was his notion that with evolutionary growth comes changes in any unit's structure and functions. This means that any increase in size brings in its wake increase in differentiation of the social system (Coser, 1977).

Accordingly therefore, Herbert Spencer attempted to classify types of societies in terms of evolutionary stage. To do this, Spencer arranged them in a series, which include simple, compound, doubly compound and trebly compound. This classification is according to the degrees of structural complexity. Specifically, he distinguished between simple societies, which were headless, those with occasional headship and those with unstable headship. Similarly, he classified both compound and doubly compound societies according to the complexity of their political organization. One other criterion which Spencer used to classify societies is the type of social regulation. In this regard, he distinguished between two types of society, which he called the militant societies and industrial societies. It should be noted that this classification is at variance with that based on stages of evolution.

The type of classification of societies as suggested by Herbert Spencer is rooted in a theory of society, which speculates that types of social structure depend on the relation of a society to other societies in its significant environments. This is to say that whether this relation is peaceful or militant, it will affect the internal structures of a society and its system of regulations. Thus, with peaceful relation comes the relatively weak and diffuse system of internal regulations. Also, with militant relations come coercive and centralized controls. This means that the internal structure, which characterizes each society now depends on the presence or absence of conflict

with neighboring societies. To illustrate this, Herbert Spencer identified the characteristic trait of the militant societies, which he noted to be compulsion. That is, in such societies, the citizens become the agents of the officer's will and there is compulsory cooperation. On the other hand, the industrial type of society is based on voluntary cooperation and individual self-restraint.

At this point, it is important to mention that the notion of evolution or development as discussed above first came to Herbert Spencer when he had contact with the writings of Lyell who wrote the Principles of Geology. He rejected Lyell's adverse arguments but adopted the hypothesis of development (Spencer, 1908). In his consideration of the theory of evolution, Spencer believed that the course of human progress is unilinear. In this belief, Spencer (1891) expressed the feeling that 'mankind's progress through stages of development is as rigidly determined as the evolution of individuals from childhood to maturity where no short-cut exists'. The interpretation of this is that in the course of development, there is no way from the lower forms of social life to the higher one. Spencer maintained that the process of progress cannot be abridged (Coser, 1977:96). Thus, in one of his numerous works, titled: Essays on Scientific, Political and Speculative, Spencer (1892) pointed out that 'the change from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous is displayed in the progress of civilization as a whole, as well as in the progress of every nation, and it is still going on with increasing rapidity'. He however modified this position later in his life, when he opined that 'although the evolution of mankind as a whole was certain, particular societies may retrogress as well as progress'. This position is well captured in his submission in his work titled: The Principles of Sociology, where he said: Like other kinds of progress, social progress is not linear but divergent and re-divergent... While spreading over the earth mankind have found environments of various characters and in each case the social life fallen into, partly determined by the social life previously led, has been partly determined by the influences of the new environment; so that the multiplying groups have tended over to acquire differences, now major and now minor: there have arisen general and species of societies (p. 331).

What the above means is that because human societies occupy environments that differ significantly from one another, they are bound to experience different types of social life-with different cultural patterns. This line of thinking distinguishes Spencer from classical sociologists like Comte, who holds a rigid position on theories of unilinear stages. In line with his new position about the theory of evolution, Spencer believes that social types, like types of individual organisms, do not form a series, but are classifiable only in divergent and re-divergent groups (Spencer, 1891 cited by Coser, 1977:7). This explains why for instance, savage and civilized races present different forms of society thereby representing different stages in the evolution of one form. In other words, there is no one single process of evolution. Each society will take on its own characteristics depending on the kind of

environment in which it operates and will undergo evolution according to the dictates of the environment and other conditions.

Flowing from the work of Herbert Spencer on evolutionary change is the contribution of Emile Durkheim to sociologists' understanding of the process of change. While Durkheim disagreed with Spencer's individualistic premises, he was said to be deeply obliged to Spencer's evolutionary views as most of Durkheim's views on the conception of evolution took off from the work of Spencer. For instance, Durkheim like Spencer conceived of evolution as moving from systems of mechanical to systems of organic solidarity, which however is not as vague as that of Spencer whose idea of evolution is movement from incoherent homogeneity to coherent heterogeneity (Coser, 1977:154). In Durkheim's conception, he stressed on what he called the progressive differentiation in human societies – a historical movement, which propels mankind 'from societies in which all men are alike to societies in which the division of labour makes men very unlike yet mutually dependent'. In this regard, Emile Durkheim owes a lot to both Herbert Spencer and Adam Smith.

In his discussion on types of human societies, Emile Durkheim also made a distinction similar to the one made by Ferdinand Tönnies between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* which in his own case, he called mechanical and organic solidarity. Durkheim equates the organic societies to modern societies which in his language are more 'progressive' and more 'desirable'.

Thorstein Veblen (1857 - 1929) also contributed to sociological thinking about social change, which he too did in the context on the concept of evolution. Veblen, according to Coser (1977:265) conceived of the evolution of mankind in Spencerian and Darwinian fashion – as a process of selective adaptation to the environment. In his work titled, *The Place of Science in Modern Civilization* published in 1919, Veblen asserted that there was no goal to historical evolution. This is contrary to the claims of the Hegelians and Marxists. Rather he considered historical evolution as 'a scheme of blindly cumulative causation, in which there is no trend, no final term, no consummation' (Veblen, 1919: 436 cited by Coser, 1977:265). Lewis Coser, quoting from the work of Dobriansky (1957) observed that in Veblen's conception of human evolution involved more than any thing the invention and use of ever more effective technologies. That is, put in the language of Veblen himself, 'the process of cumulative change that is to be accounted for is the sequence of change in the methods of doing things – the methods of dealing with the material means of life' (Dobriansky, 1957:159).

Veblen's view here, is that the state of the industrial arts' determined ultimately the state of adaptation of man to his natural environment. Technology is therefore seen as the determinant of man's ability to adjust to his social environment. In this regard therefore, Veblen argued that it is man's position in the technological and economic sphere that will determine his outlook and his habits of thought. In his own conception of evolution, Veblen believed that what gives birth to habits and customs, ways of acting and ways of thinking within any community is when men struggle to wrest a livelihood from nature.

These habits and customs become institutional molds overtime (Coser, 1977:265). In his book titled, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen sees the evolution of human societies as ‘a process of natural selection of institutions’. In the same book, he contended that ‘institutions are not only themselves the result of a selective and adaptive process which shapes the prevailing or dominant types of spiritual attitude and aptitudes; they are at the same time special methods of life and human relations’ (see Coser, 1977).

From the foregoing one can see the importance attached to human social institutions in Veblen’s conception of social evolution. Thus, to him as put by Lewis Coser, ‘the scheme of man’s social evolution is essentially a pattern of institutional change rooted in the development of the industrial arts’. In this scheme, it is possible to distinguish four main stages of evolution. Citing the work of Dorfman (1934) titled: *Thorstein Veblen and His America*, Coser summarized the four stages of evolution and their characteristics thus:

“... the peaceful savage economy of Neolithic time; the predatory barbarian economy in which the institutions of warfare, property, masculine prowess and the leisure class originated; the pre modern period handicraft economy; and finally the modern era dominated by the machine.”

As a summary from the foregoing, one can see that Veblen’s theory of social change is in the language of Coser, ‘a technological theory of history’. That is, in the final analysis, it is the ‘state of the industrial arts’ (the technology available to a society) that determines the character of its culture. This, the technology does by eroding the vested ideas, overcoming vested interest and reshaping institutions in line with its own needs and eventual birth of a new social order. It is important to mention here, as a way of concluding this part that, while Veblen agreed with the general evolutionary doctrine, he did not succumb to unilinear evolution which characterized Spencer’s work. Charles Horton Cooley (1864 – 1929), described as a holistic philosopher, had a brief touch with the issue of social change when he was converted in his early life to an evolutionary philosophy, which came as a result of reading the works of Darwin, who caught his admiration. Darwin touched Cooley’s philosophical reasoning particularly his stress on interactions and interrelations and his rejection of all types of atomistic interpretation in the study of man (Coser, 1973:319). In spite of his contact with Darwin’s ideas and philosophy, Cooley did not have much enthusiasm for ‘Social Darwinist’ evolutionary thinkers, in particular Herbert Spencer. In his book titled: *Sociological Theory and Social Research*, Cooley (1930) assessed Herbert Spencer’s work and said ‘it was Spencer’s general conception of the progressive organization of life... that appealed to me, rather than his more specific views on society, with which I (Cooley) was never in sympathy (Cited from Coser, 1977:319). From the above statement, one can deduce the interest, though marginal, of Cooley in the evolutionary trend of history. Cooley’s notion of progress linked him to some of his contemporaries like Ward, Small, Sumner, and Giddings. The common opinion he held with these people exposed his interest in the inevitability of change. In this context Cooley believe, like others, that ‘human nature is a plastic and modifiable, that man is teachable’. Viewing this belief in the context of change, Coser remarked that ‘one is warranted to look at man’s future with optimism’.

This can be interpreted to mean that the process of change will bring qualitative modification human existence as they progress from one historical epoch to the other. Just like his contemporaries mentioned above, Cooley's conception of change is that social change is a process that naturally occurs 'slowly', 'gradually', 'continuously', degrees.

One thing that however distinguishes Cooley from these other philosophers is that his own philosophy about change does not include the notion of stages. To him, social processes like rivalry, competition, conflict and struggle are real in all human societies. These, according to him, will however be resolved through compromise and selection, which will give birth to a new 'synthesis'. Thus, a new basis of cooperation of the hitherto struggling parts would emerge from such social process. In his theory of evolution which he expounded while at the University of Michigan, he treated such topics as the capitalist class, socialism, the labour movement, class control of the press (Cooley, 1930:10 and cited by Coser, 1977:325).

George Herbert Mead (1863 - 1931) contributed a little to the question of social change. His interest in the theory of evolutionism can be traced to the Darwinian tradition which influences the development of pragmatic philosophy. In particular, Darwin's theory of biological evolution served as the basis of the pragmatism of Mead. The substance of this theory is that the living organism engages in a continual struggle for control over the environment. In this context, Mead learnt from Darwin how to think in terms of 'process' instead of fixed forms – an indication that no activity or object is fixed. Mead's idea of evolutionary change is well embedded in his work titled 'Movements of Thought in the 19th Century' where he said, 'the heart of the problem of evolution is the recognition that the process will determine the form... The process takes now one form and now another, according to the conditions under which it is going on'. The literal interpretation of this is that every aspect of social life including human cultures and societal institutions are never in fixed form, but continue to undergo a process of change.

Robbert Ezra Park's (1864 – 1944) indebtedness to the Darwinian School of evolutionism is obvious from

Coser's (1977:375) comment about him where he said '... it is obvious that Park too stood generally under the shadow of Darwin's work...'.

The evidence for this observation can be found in the constant reference which Park made to Darwin's work in his book titled: Introduction to the Science of Sociology. According to Coser (1977:375)... there are thirty entries for Darwin in the index of the 'introduction' where Park made reference to his (Darwin) work and the book itself contains four selections from Darwin's work. Also through Paulsen, who was described as the intimate personal friend of Ferdinand Toennies, Park was introduced to Toennies' idea of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. Using

Tonnies idea as his own basis of reasoning, Park was able to make distinction between the urban civilization of the metropolis and simpler cultures.

In his 'Introduction to the Science of Sociology' Park conceived of the process of social change as involving a three-stage sequence, or what he called 'natural history'. The process as he sees it begins:

...with dissatisfactions and the resulting disturbances and social unrest, leading to mass movements, and ending in new accommodations within a restructured institutional order (cited from Coser, 1977:362).

The summary of the above contribution is that it is the social unrest that leads to the break-up of established routine and a preparation for a new collective action. This explains why Park's urban sociology is anchored in his conceptualization of various stages in the process of invasion and succession through which various groups carve out their ecological niches, their natural areas, in the urban environment (see Coser, 1977:363).

Vilfredo Pareto (1848 – 1923), a contemporary of some American philosophers like Cooley and Mead, was also attracted by social Darwinism and by Spencer in the conception of his own idea of progress. In his book titled, 'Cours' (1896), he had a deep belief in progress and therefore devoted a chapter to a discourse of social evolution. In the chapter, he sounded Spencerian as he centered his discussion on Spencer's concept of differentiation. Pareto's main argument is that societies have moved from an undifferentiated homogeneous state to a heterogeneous one, and as the societies have moved from an undifferentiated homogeneous state to a heterogeneous one, and as the societies progress through the process of differentiation, there is a cumulative increase in the degree of social differentiation – from the days of the Romans to the present (Coser, 1977: 409 cf, Finer).

However, when Pareto wrote the 'Treatise', his opinion about evolution started to change in favour of a cyclical Machiavellian theory of history and a belief in the relative constancy of essential human characteristics. This new belief set Pareto against the social Darwinians and Spencer as he became critical of them. Pareto rejected the twin notions of social evolution and progress and stood by the position that environmental changes could not explain changing institutional features. Put differently, Pareto believed that the environment does not impose and determine social forms but only sets limits to variations capable of survival. It is however important to note that although Pareto became critical of the social Darwinian idea on evolutionary change, he remained in debt to the Darwinian's and Spencerian's notions of the mutual interdependence of all social phenomena (Coser, 1977:409). Pitirim Sorokin (1889 – 1968) who based his sociological theory on the well-known distinction between social statics and social dynamics provides another monumental insight into socio-cultural change in his book titled: Social and Cultural Dynamics. In this book, he attempted to develop a full explanatory scheme for social and cultural change. His work has been described as 'a panoramic survey of the course of all human societies and cultures'. In his work, Sorokin opposes any unilinear explanation of human evolution just in the same way he opposes any approach that sees the cycle of cultures by way of quasi-biological analogies. In contrast to the

views above, he said socio-cultural phenomena are based on relatively coherent and integrated aggregates of cultural outlooks. These coherent and integrated cultural outlooks are termed by him 'mentalities' which according to him impress their meanings on specific periods in the global history of humankind. What this means is that each historical epoch is usually characterized by a particular dominant culture.

In his own scheme, Sorokin identified three different cultures each of which enables us to conceive and apprehend the nature of reality. These are: (1) Sensate Culture; (2) Ideational Culture; and (3) Idealistic Culture. At various periods of history, each cultural premise achieves preeminence over the others and such will impress its character on the main ways of thinking, feeling, or experiencing thereby making one historical epoch different from others. Consequently, the principal institutions of society such as law, art, philosophy, science and religion exhibit at any particular time a consistent mental outlook that is a reflection of the cultural premise that is most predominant. Thus, Sorokin holds that during the Sensate period, 'Science will be rigidly empirical in its method and procedures; art will strive for realism rather than for the imparting of transcendent visions; and religion will tend to be more concerned with the quest for concrete moral experience than for the truth of faith or reason (Coser, 1977:467).

Also in his explanation of socio-cultural change, Sorokin proceeds to explain why all major social changes must be recurrent. In his principle of immanent change, Sorokin rejected any explanation of social change through external factors. Instead he believes that each cultural mentality carries within itself its own demise through the exhaustion of its own premises (immanent change). Explaining cultural change, Sorokin opined that as cultural systems reach the zenith of their flowering, they become less and less capable of serving as an instrument of adaptation, as an experience for real satisfaction of the needs of its bearers, and as foundation for their social and cultural life (Sorokin, 1937 – 1941). When this stage is reached, there is a birth of a new cultural system which will go through the same processes of dominance and demise. The implication of all these is that all socio-cultural phenomena have their own limits. That is, literally translated, it means that all cultural phenomena have the time they will expire when they will no longer be functional. Thus, change in Sorokin's view implies the rise of a new life at the same time as it imparts dissolution of the old order. This aspect of Sorokin's work bears strong resemblances to the Hegelian Theory of Dialectics. Thus, like the Hegelians, Sorokin purports to explain the 'rhythmic periodicity' of all socio-cultural phenomena – an attempt which shows that all socio-cultural phenomena have their 'flowering' and withering periods.

WHAT SOCIOLOGISTS HAVE GAINED: A CONCLUDING REMARK

We have shown from the foregoing discussion that right from the inception of the discipline of sociology, the concept of socio-cultural change has occupied a central stage in sociological discourse among the founding fathers of sociology. Indeed the work of Charles Darwin (1809 – 1882), considered to be a pioneering conception of change in the context of biological evolution laid the foundation for evolutionary analysis in social philosophy,

particularly in sociology. Also, as it has been pointed out, the evolutionary conception of society is prominent in the work of the founding fathers of sociology like: August Comte (1798 – 1857), Karl Marx (1818 – 1883), Herbert Spencer (1820 – 1903), Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917), Thorste Veblen (1857 – 1929), Charlse Cooley (1864 – 1929) and George Herbert Mead (1863 – 1931). Others include; Robert Ezra Park (1864 – 1944), Vilfredo Pareto (1848 – 1923) and Pitirim A. Sorokin (1889 – 1968). Using some elements of biological analogy as in Darwin's work to analyse social phenomena, all the philosophers enumerated above see changed (sociocultural change) as a continuing progression of successive life forms (Muhammed et al. 2008). Their models of conceiving change as moving from one stage of historical epoch to the other gave rise to sociological interest in the explanation of socio-cultural change, which ultimately gave rise to various forms of theory of social change such as the evolutionary theory, functionalist theory of change, and the conflict theory of social change. It is interesting to note that each of these theories is an offshoot of the views and opinions of these founding fathers of sociology and their tradition. For instance, the evolutionary theory as it is known today, is a unique conception of society which is prominent in the work of the founders of sociology like August Comte, Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer who saw human societies as moving from theological stage to metaphysical stage and eventually to scientific stage with each stage being characterized by a unique type of socio-cultural form and belief systems. This kind of thinking also predominates in the work of Emile Durkheim who sees human development as progress from simple to more complex form of social organization. From the foregoing, change is conceived by the evolutionary theorists as an inevitable progressive movement of human cultures to a higher state.

The functionalist theory on the other hand is more concerned with the role of cultural elements in the preservation of social order than changes that occur in the cultural elements in the preservation of social order than changes that occur in the cultural elements. Thus, the focus of functionalist theorists is on what maintains a social system and not what actually changes it (Muhammed et al. 2008:118). While the interests of the functionalist theorists in the area of social change may be marginal, some of them have contributed to our understanding of social change using the evolutionary approach. For instance, Talcott Parsons (1902 – 1979) considered to be a leading functionalist theorist, in his work in 1966, sees the inevitability of social change in four key areas.

These key areas are what he called: differentiation process; adaptive upgrading; the inclusion of groups and societal experience of value generalization. Just like the evolutionary conception of change, Persons' theoretical position as summarized above also incorporates the general notion of continuing progress found in evolutionary theories. That is, each stage of evolution contains a better socio-cultural form which will provide a new form of integration not found in the stage before it. Thus, change according to persons will occur in the society while the new forms of integration will provide the stability required by the society. From the perspective of functionalist

theory therefore, there is emphasis on the persistence of social life and the inevitability of change as mechanism to maintain the equilibrium of the social system (society).

Another theory which emerges from the sociological discourse on socio-cultural change is the conflict theory whose major proponent is Karl Marx. Generally speaking, the conflict theory holds that social institutions and practices continue because people in power allow them to be so in order to maintain the status quo- cultures of social injustice, inequality and oppression of the lower class. Change thus becomes necessary and inevitable if only to alter status quo. There is no doubt that the conflict theory as it is today also contains a dose of evolutionary argument. In this regard, conflict theorists like Karl Marx also shared the general view of evolutionary theory which holds that human societies developed along a particular path (Muhammed et al. 2008: 119). But while the mainstream evolutionarily theorists like August Comte, Herbert Spencer and Emil Durkheim to mention but a few, believed that each successive stage is characterized by significant improvement over the previous one, the conflict theorists don not share this view. Instead, the Marxists believed that history proceeds through what they called a series of stages with each stage harbouring a class of exploited people (Marx, 1867).

The classes that have been so exploited in the course of history are: the slaves exploited by the ancient society; the serfs exploited by the feudal society and working class being subjected to exploitation by the modern capitalist society (Marx, 1867). Whether or not the conflict theorists share the same opinion with the evolutionary theorists on the end result of change, sociology and sociologists have gained the fact that although human societies are stable and long-lasting, they inevitably experience one form of change or the other in such a way that the societies will experience new functions (Parsons, 1966) or the societies will function more equitably (Marx, 1867). Thus, each stage of socio-cultural change represents a better form of human society.

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