



1958

### 3. Darwinism and the Rise of Social Science

Robert L. Bloom  
*Gettysburg College*

Basil L. Crapster  
*Gettysburg College*

Harold L. Dunkelberger  
*Gettysburg College*

*See next page for additional authors*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/contemporary\\_sec15](https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/contemporary_sec15)

 Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Evolution Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

**Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.**

Bloom, Robert L. et al. "3. Darwinism and the Rise of Social Science. Pt. XV: Biology and the Rise of the Social Sciences." Ideas and Institutions of Western Man (Gettysburg College, 1958), 22-28.

This is the publisher's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link: [https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/contemporary\\_sec15/4](https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/contemporary_sec15/4)

This open access book chapter is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact [cupola@gettysburg.edu](mailto:cupola@gettysburg.edu).

---

### 3. Darwinism and the Rise of Social Science

#### Abstract

The two areas of the social sciences which were more stimulated by Darwin's research were anthropology and sociology. The Frenchman, Auguste Comte (1798-1857), generally regarded as the father of sociology and the originator of that term, laid the groundwork for the immediate application of the law of evolution to the study of society. Comte's conception of sociology is derived from his philosophy of history. Sharing the Enlightenment belief in progress, Comte saw history evolving through three stages. The first was the theological stage, in which men supplied supernatural explanations for the natural and social phenomena. This was followed by what Comte called the metaphysical stage, a period when men were immersed in speculation. The nineteenth century, he contended, was witnessing the dawn of the third, or positivist, stage of human history. Man was searching for, and would find, scientific law to explain social phenomena. Comte was convinced that through the discovery of these laws man would be able to control his destiny. After the publication of the *Origin of Species*, many thinkers were persuaded that the principal law had been discovered. [excerpt]

#### Keywords

Contemporary Civilization, Charles Darwin, Evolution, Anthropology, Sociology, Auguste Comte

#### Disciplines

Anthropology | Ecology and Evolutionary Biology | Evolution | Sociology

#### Comments

This is a part of [Section XV: Biology and the Rise of the Social Sciences](#). The [Contemporary Civilization](#) page lists all additional sections of *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, as well as the [Table of Contents](#) for both volumes.

#### More About Contemporary Civilization:

From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of "introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages."

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called *An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems*. A second edition, retitled *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker '66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

#### Authors

Robert L. Bloom, Basil L. Crapster, Harold L. Dunkelberger, Charles H. Glatfelter, Richard T. Mara, Norman E. Richardson, and W. Richard Schubart

### 3. Darwinism and the Rise of Social Science

The two areas of the social sciences which were most stimulated by Darwin's research were anthropology and sociology. The Frenchman, Auguste Comte (1798-1857), generally regarded as the father of sociology and the originator of that term, laid the groundwork for the immediate application of the law of evolution to the study of society. Comte's conception of sociology is *still in the influence of the Enlightenment* derived from his philosophy of history. Sharing the Enlightenment belief in progress, Comte saw history evolving through three stages. The (first) was the theological stage, in which men supplied supernatural explanations for natural and social phenomena. This was followed by what Comte called the metaphysical stage, a period when men were immersed in speculation. The nineteenth century, he contended, was witnessing the dawn of the (third) or positivist, stage of human history. Man was searching for, and would find, scientific laws to explain social phenomena. Comte was convinced that through the discovery of these laws man would be able to control his destiny. After the publication of the Origin of Species, many thinkers were persuaded that the principal law had been discovered. *Darwinism seemed to be the culmination of this.*

Among those inspired by Darwin's biological law of evolution was Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), the father of social or cultural anthropology. Anthropology is the science that studies man as both a physical and a social being, finding its materials and problems primarily in the races, languages, and cultures to be found in various places and at various times in man's history. Physical anthropology deals with the bodily form of man, special attention being given to racial differences. Social anthropology studies linguistic and cultural differences



between and among groups of human beings.

Tylor was born of Quaker parents in England during a time when the university regulations of that country denied admission to Quakers. His formal education, consequently, was limited. Poor health during adolescence caused him to abandon work in his father's brass foundry and to travel abroad. He made a tour of Mexico and his first book was an account of the investigations made during this trip. Tylor's major work was Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom (1871), which quickly became the standard treatise on anthropology. From 1883 to the closing years of his life, Tylor was at Oxford. He served originally as keeper of the museum and later as the university's first professor of anthropology.

Tylor's importance as an anthropologist is to be found less in his conclusions than in his general approach to the study of societies. He applied evolutionary theories to the races of mankind, falling into the then-common error which held that the Negroid and Mongoloid races represented stages in the development of the human race. Tylor has also been criticized for explaining that the customs of primitive peoples were the result of their moral and intellectual inferiority, and for not understanding them as the product of historical conditions and environmental forces. But his contribution to the development of the social sciences cannot be judged from such conclusions. His true significance lies in the fact that he was actually open-minded regarding methods for explaining human life in all its complexity. As the following selection from Primitive Culture indicates, his main concern was that man must study his culture as a complex whole if he is to know himself.

Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. The condition of culture among the various societies of mankind, in so far as it is capable of being investigated on general principles, is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action. On the one hand, the uniformity which so largely pervades civilization may be ascribed, in great measure, to the uniform action of uniform causes; while on the other hand its various grades may be regarded as stages of development or evolution, each the outcome of previous history, and about to do its proper part in shaping the history of the future. To the investigation of these two great principles in several departments of ethnography, with especial consideration of the civilization of the lower tribes as related to the civilization of the higher nations the present volumes are devoted.

Our modern investigators in the sciences of inorganic nature are foremost to recognize, both within and without

*survivals?*

their special fields of work, the unity of nature, the fixity of its laws, the definite sequence of cause and effect through which every fact depends on what has gone before it, and acts upon what is to come after it. They grasp firmly the Pythagorean doctrine of pervading order in the universal Kosmos. They affirm, with Aristotle, that nature is not full of incoherent episodes, like a bad tragedy. They agree with Leibnitz in what he calls "my axiom, that nature never acts by leaps (la nature n'agit jamais par saut)," as well as in his "great principle, commonly little employed, that nothing happens without its sufficient reason." Nor, again, in studying the structure and habits of plants and animals, or in investigating the lower functions even of man, are these leading ideas unacknowledged. But when we come to talk of the higher processes of human feeling and action, of thought and language, knowledge and art, a change appears in the prevalent tone of opinion. The world at large is scarcely prepared to accept the general study of human life as a branch of natural science, and to carry out, in a large sense, the poet's injunction to "Account for moral as for natural things." To many educated minds there seems something presumptuous and repulsive in the view that the history of mankind is part and parcel of the history of nature, that our thoughts, wills, and actions accord with laws as definite as those which govern the motion of waves, the combination of acids and bases, and the growth of plants and animals. *Man is a part of nature.*

The main reasons of this state of the popular judgment are not far to seek. There are many who would willingly accept a science of history if placed before them with substantial definiteness of principle and evidence, but who not unreasonably reject the systems offered to them, as falling too far short of a scientific standard. Through resistance such as this, real knowledge always sooner or later makes its way, while the habit of opposition to novelty does such excellent service against the invasions of speculative dogmatism, that we may sometimes even wish it were stronger than it is. But other obstacles to the investigation of laws of human nature arise from considerations of metaphysics and theology. The popular notion of free human will involves not only freedom to act in accordance with motive, but also a power of breaking loose from continuity and acting without cause, -- a combination which may be roughly illustrated by the simile of a balance sometimes acting in the usual way, but also possessed of the faculty of turning by itself without or against its weights. This view of an anomalous action of the will, which it need hardly be said is incompatible with scientific argument, subsists as an opinion patent or latent in men's minds, and strongly affecting their theoretic views of history, though it is not, as a rule, brought prominently forward in systematic reasoning. Indeed the definition of human will, as strictly according with motive, is



the only possible scientific basis in such enquiries. Happily, it is not needful to add here yet another to the list of dissertations on supernatural intervention and natural causation, on liberty, predestination, and accountability. We may hasten to escape from the regions of transcendental philosophy and theolgy, *not using* to start on a more hopeful journey over more practicable ground. None will deny that, as each man knows by the evidence of his own consciousness, definite and natural cause does, to a great extent, determine human action. Then, keeping aside from considerations of extra-natural interference and causeless spontaneity, let us take this admitted existence of natural cause and effect as our standing-ground, and travel on it so far as it will bear us. It is on this same basis that physical science pursues, with ever-increasing success, its quest of laws of nature. Nor need this restriction hamper the scientific study of human life, in which the real difficulties are the practical ones of enormous complexity of evidence, and imperfection of methods of observation.....

Among evidence aiding us to trace the course which the civilization of the world has actually followed, is that great class of facts to denote which I have found it convenient to introduce the term "survivals." These are processes, customs, opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home, and they thus remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved. Thus, I know an old Somersetshire woman whose hand-loom dates from the time before the introduction of the "flying shuttle," which new-fangled appliance she has never even learnt to use, and I have seen her throw her shuttle from hand to hand in true classic fashion; this old woman is not a century behind her times, but she is a case of survival. Such examples often lead us back to the habits of hundreds and even thousands of years ago. The ordeal of the Key and Bible, still in use, is a survival; the Midsummer bonfire is a survival; the Breton peasants' All Souls' supper for the spirits of the dead is a survival. The simple keeping up of ancient habits is only one part of the transition from old into new and changing times. The serious business of ancient society may be seen to sink into the sport of later generations, and its serious belief to linger on in nursery folk-lore, while superseded habits of old-world life may be modified into new-world forms still powerful for good and evil. Sometimes old thoughts and practices will burst out afresh, to the amazement of a world that thought them long since dead or dying; here survival passes into revival, as has lately happened in so remarkable a way in the history of modern spiritualism, a subject full of instruction from the ethnographer's point of view. The study of the principles of survival has, indeed,

*artifacts dug up. help in the study of anthropology. Dind "arrested" places where people's civilization has proper.*  
*Survivals - clothing - tells you something about life in an earlier society.*

no small practical importance, for most of what we call superstition is included within survival, and in this way lies open to the attack of its deadliest enemy, a reasonable explanation. Insignificant, moreover, as multitudes of the facts of survival are in themselves, their study is so effective for tracing the course of the historical development through which alone it is possible to understand their meaning, that it becomes a vital point of ethnographic research to gain the clearest possible insight into their nature. This importance must justify the detail here devoted to an examination of survival, on the evidence of such games, popular sayings, customs, superstitions, and the like, as may serve well to bring into view the manner of its operation.

Progress, degradation, survival, revival, modification, are all modes of the connexion that binds together the complex network of civilization. It needs but a glance into the trivial details of our own daily life to set us thinking how far we are really its originators, and how far but the transmitters and modifiers of the results of long past ages. Looking round the rooms we live in, we may try here how far he who only knows his own time can be capable of rightly comprehending even that. Here is the honeysuckle of Assyria, there the fleur-de-lis of Anjou, a cornice with a Greek border runs round the ceiling, the style of Louis XIV, and its parent the Renaissance share the looking-glass between them. Transformed, shifted, or mutilated, such elements of art still carry their history plainly stamped upon them, and if the history yet farther behind is less easy to read, we are not to say that because we cannot clearly discern it there is therefore no history there. It is thus even with the fashion of the clothes men wear. The ridiculous little tails of the German postilion's coat show of themselves how they came to dwindle to such absurd rudiments; but the English clergyman's bands no longer so convey their history to the eye, and look unaccountable enough till one has seen the intermediate stages through which they came down from the more serviceable wide collars, such as Milton wears in his portrait, and which gave their name to the "band-box" they used to be kept in. In fact, the books of costume, showing how one garment grew or shrank by gradual stages and passed into another, illustrate with much force and clearness the nature of the change and growth, revival and decay, which go on from year to year in more important matters of life. In books, again, we see each writer not for and by himself, but occupying his proper place in history; we look through each philosopher, mathematician, chemist, poet, into the background of his education, -- through Leibnitz into Descartes, through Dalton into Priestley, through Milton into Homer. The study of language has, perhaps, done more than any other in removing from our view of human thought and action the ideas of chance and arbitrary invention, and in



substituting for them a theory of development by the co-operation of individual men, through processes ever reasonable and intelligible where the facts are fully known. Rudimentary as the science of culture still is, the symptoms are becoming very strong that even what seem its most spontaneous and motiveless phenomena will, nevertheless, be shown to come within the range of distinct cause and effect as certainly as the facts of mechanics. What would be popularly thought more indefinite and uncontrolled than the products of the imagination in myths and fables? Yet any systematic investigation of mythology, on the basis of a wide collection of evidence, will show plainly enough in such efforts of fancy at once a development from stage to stage, and a production of uniformity of result from uniformity of cause. Here, as elsewhere, causeless spontaneity is seen to recede farther and farther into shelter within the dark precincts of ignorance; like chance, that still holds its place among the vulgar as a real cause of events otherwise unaccountable, while to educated men it has long consciously meant nothing but this ignorance itself. It is only when men fail to see the line of connexion in events, that they are prone to fall upon the notions of arbitrary impulses, causeless freaks, chance and nonsense and indefinite unaccountability. If childish games, purposeless customs, absurd superstitions are set down as spontaneous because no one can say exactly how they came to be, the assertion may remind us of the like effect that the eccentric habits of the wild rice-plant had on the philosophy of a Red Indian tribe, otherwise disposed to see in the harmony of nature the effects of one controlling personal will. The Great Spirit, said these Sioux theologians, made all things except the wild rice; but the wild rice came by chance.

"Man," said Wilhelm von Humboldt, "ever connects on from what lies at hand...." The notion of the continuity of civilization contained in this maxim is no barren philosophic principle, but is at once made practical by the consideration that they who wish to understand their own lives ought to know the stages through which their opinions and habits have become what they are. Auguste Comte scarcely overstated the necessity of this study of development, when he declared at the beginning of his 'Positive Philosophy' that "no conception can be understood except through its history," and his phrase will bear extension to culture at large. To expect to look modern life in the face and comprehend it by mere inspection, is a philosophy whose weakness can easily be tested. Imagine any one explaining the trivial saying, "a little bird told me," without knowing of the old belief in the language of birds and beasts, to which Dr. Dasent, in the introduction to the Norse Tales, so reasonably traces its origin. To ingenious attempts at explaining by the light of reason things which want the light of history to show their meaning, much of the learned nonsense of the world



has indeed been due.... Such are the risks that philosophers run in detaching any phenomenon of civilization from its hold on past events, and treating it as an isolated fact, to be simply disposed of by a guess at some plausible explanation. \*

---