

Liberalism, Progress, and Comparative Inquiry:
Trans-Atlantic Exchanges and the Making of the American Science of Politics

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Abstract

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This study interprets the making of the American science of politics in the late nineteenth century as an episode in the history of liberal thought. I bring to the fore an underplayed aspect of liberalism: the views it offers of processes of qualitative change—whether called civilization, progress, evolution, or development—that make a liberal social and political order possible and desirable. These views have been foundational for the liberal science of politics, and are especially evident in historical and comparative inquiry.

The American science of politics developed through the reception and remaking of two European intellectual traditions, one naturalistic and the other historicist in its methodological outlook. My narrative follows these two traditions from Europe via trans-Atlantic exchanges to their American adaptation. In studying their development

among European intellectuals, I focus especially on the liberal figures Herbert Spencer, François Guizot, Johann Bluntschli, Henry Maine, Edward Freeman, and James Bryce. I then recount how, from the mid-1870s forward, these traditions were received and remade by American intellectuals including Herbert Baxter Adams, John Burgess, Woodrow Wilson, A. Lawrence Lowell, Frank Goodnow, Lester Frank Ward, and William Graham Sumner. While the historicist tradition was the departure point for the new field of political science, naturalism was the founding tradition for sociology.

By the early twentieth century, a liberal science of politics was well developed in America. The science encompassed varying views of processes of qualitative change. My study analyzes these views from two angles. On the one hand, I situate them within methodological traditions shaping the way scholars formulate views of transformative change. On the other, I identify shared theoretical visions that frame and are influenced by the pursuit of these views. I show that such visions developed along largely parallel lines within both traditions, as individuals across methodological divides responded to events and trends in the social and political world of their day. My study suggests that changing liberal views of change embody a dynamic interaction in which liberal scientists of politics engage an ever-shifting world that recurrently frustrates their aspirations to integrate past and contemporary change within a scientific vision.

This thesis is dedicated to
the intellectual grandson of William Graham Sumner,
with appreciation for his sage sense of intellectual modesty.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Introduction.</i>	The American Science of Politics.....	1
<i>Chapter One.</i>	European Exemplars of Comparative and Historical Inquiry: The Naturalistic Tradition and Classical Liberalism.....	23
<i>Chapter Two.</i>	The European Historicist Tradition: Further Varieties of Scientific Method and Liberalism.....	61
<i>Chapter Three.</i>	The Liberal Science of Politics in the American Academy: From Institutional History to Political Science.....	110
<i>Chapter Four.</i>	Rounding out a New Discipline: From the Columbia School of Political Science to the American Political Science Association...	165
<i>Chapter Five.</i>	Evolutionary Naturalism Enters the Academy: Ward, Sumner, and the Place of Sociology in the American Science of Politics....	206
<i>Conclusion.</i>	Liberalism on and in History.....	262
<i>Bibliography.</i>	282

INTRODUCTION. THE AMERICAN SCIENCE OF POLITICS

The science of politics that took shape in America in the late nineteenth century, and that subsequently grew to a scale unmatched anywhere in the world, is an embodiment and expression of American liberalism. This argument lay at the heart of Bernard Crick's *The American Science of Politics*,¹ written some fifty years ago. It is a guiding premise of my study of the making of the American science of politics. In pursuing this study, I seek to bring to the fore an underplayed aspect of liberalism: the views it offers of transformative processes—whether called civilization, progress, evolution, or development—that make the emergence and maintenance of a liberal social and political order possible. These views have been foundational for liberal social science, and are especially evident in wide-ranging historical and comparative inquiries. They are not static. They embody a dynamic interaction in which liberal intellectuals have responded to an ever-changing world that recurrently frustrates their aspiration to integrate past and contemporary change within a scientific vision.

In setting out to interpret the making of the American science of politics as an episode in the history of American liberalism, much depends upon how I choose to understand “American liberalism.” Two emphases set my approach apart from that of Crick. First, I stress the plurality of liberalism. My interest is in alternative liberal visions, their contrasts and interactions, and how they change in response to challenges

¹ Bernard Crick, *The American Science of Politics: Its Origins and Conditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959). On the reception of this work, see Michael Kenny, "History and Dissent: Bernard Crick's *The American Science of Politics*," *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 4 (2006): 547-53.

to the beliefs, hopes and fears that give them theoretical shape. I study the American science of politics in terms of, and in order to illuminate, American liberalisms.

My second emphasis is on trans-Atlantic exchange. America's liberal visions, or at least the subset of them I investigate, cannot be understood without attending to the European currents on which they drew.² Like their counterparts throughout the emerging American social sciences, scholars of politics in the late nineteenth century set out with beliefs indebted to European liberal exemplars. Their science took root and flourished in America during what was, however, a transformative era within the history of liberal thought. As a result, the American science of politics during the 1870s-1900s contains three liberal visions, the relation between which becomes clear if we situate them in a trans-Atlantic narrative. The overarching trajectory of that narrative is the transition from "classical" liberalism—which reached its zenith in mid-nineteenth century Britain—to "modern," or as I will prefer, "progressive" liberalism—which would reach its zenith in mid-twentieth century America. Not coincidentally, each peak moment was reached during a time when the nation housing it confidently saw itself leading the globe into a bright liberal future.

The first liberal vision found among American scholars of politics in the closing decades of the nineteenth century was a variant of the synthetic vision of the march of civilization and progress offered by British classical liberalism in its glory days. But in the 1880s that vision was on the ebb, and scholars in America began to depart from it in

² While I attend to the impact of European liberalisms on American intellectuals, trans-Atlantic exchange was not unidirectional. European liberals were often very concerned with the American experience. For example the French scholar Laboulaye was deeply influenced by the debates around, and interpretations of, the U.S. Constitution, and also an impassioned advocate of the North's cause in the Civil War.

two alternative directions.³ Some began to forge a progressive liberal vision that retained progress as a central ordering idea while breaking with key classical liberal principles, especially regarding the role of government. Others remained more wedded to those principles, responding to the growing gap between them and ongoing trends of political and social change by increasingly detaching their scholarship from notions of progress. A disillusioned classical liberalism thus took shape as an alternative to the path charted by progressive liberal scholars. The three liberal visions found in the American science of politics in these decades hence come together as parts of a narrative of divergence from a theoretical starting point most fully articulated by British classical liberals in the mid-nineteenth century.

The narrative I have just sketched is, however, incomplete. American scholars of politics have always been, and still remain, largely liberals of one stripe or another. But their studies consist in something more multi-faceted than a simple projection of a liberal vision onto the world. Their studies are, both in substance and character, significantly shaped by beliefs and practices that cannot be reduced to an expression of liberalism(s). A major locus of such beliefs and practices is found in the methodological traditions that scholars inherit, work within, and sometimes transform. These evolving traditions carry forward alternative beliefs (of varying degrees of consistency and explicitness) about the philosophical premises and research practices proper to, or incompatible with, scholarly (or, more usually, “scientific”) work in the study of politics.

³ Parallel departures took place among British liberals, with the rise of the “new liberalism” corresponding to (and interacting with) the rise of progressive liberalism in America. My claim that this vision reached its peak in mid-twentieth century America should be seen in the light of the fact that, in Britain, the political and intellectual force of this liberal vision was increasingly supplanted in the early- to mid-twentieth century by the rise of socialism to a dominant position on the “left” that it never achieved in America.

The trajectory of the American science of politics in terms of methodological traditions lies—alongside the trajectory of liberal visions—at the heart of my study. Why address both? Because they are mutually illuminating. The trajectory of methodological traditions is not reducible to that of liberal visions, but it is not entirely independent of it either. The autonomy of these traditions is exemplified by the fact that, early in Chapters One and Two, I engage non-liberal European exemplars of historical and comparative inquiry in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars to explore major transformations of the two methodological traditions—one “naturalistic,” and the other “historicist”—that later fed into American scholarship. But the interplay between trajectories is evident in the fact that it was mid-century *liberal* practitioners of these traditions, engaged later and at greater length in Chapters One and Two, who were the most important direct influence upon American scholars.

The trans-Atlantic exchange central to the making of the American science of politics thus involved the migration of liberal theoretical visions interwoven with each of two alternative methodological traditions. Chapters Three to Five of my study explore how American academics from the mid-1870s through the start of the twentieth century received and remade the liberal visions and the methodological traditions they inherited from Europe. Liberalism that was “modern” (i.e. progressive liberal) in its vision, and a science of politics that was “modern” (or, perhaps more accurately, “modernist”)⁴ in its

⁴ The temporal scope of “modernist” as I use the term here parallels that of such phrases as “modern art” or “modernist literature,” and stands in contrast to more expansive conceptions of the “modern” that take the French Revolution, or the Enlightenment, or the scientific revolution, etc., as their starting point. For a wide-ranging exploration of “modernism” in this sense, tracking family resemblances across changes in math and science, through philosophy, into art and literature, see William R. Everdell, *The First Moderns: Profiles in the Origins of Twentieth Century Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

methodological commitments took shape beside one another in progressive-era America. I narrate their emergence with attention not only to their convergent aspects, but also to the array of alternative liberal visions and methodological possibilities displayed in the work of American scholars in this period. While some of these—such as the vision of disillusioned classical liberalism—would largely disappear from the American science of politics by the 1940s, they should not be written out of the early history of the science.

A General Conception of Liberalism

I have stressed that my study explores multiple liberal visions. This emphasis may seem, however, to beg the question of what makes them all varieties of liberalism. I thus sketch here the general conception of liberalism presupposed by my historical narrative. Any such conception must necessarily take or imply stances on contested issues of both method and substance in the history of political thought. To fully explicate and justify these stances would take a study in itself. This is not that study. My intent here is only to make explicit an essential conceptual basis of the current work.

The starting point for my general conception of liberalism is a historical one situated in time by the history of the word “liberalism” (or, in French, *libéralisme*). This word entered political use during the decades after the Napoleonic wars, which had ended with the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty to the French throne. During the 1815-30 reign of the restored monarchy, *libéralisme* came into use to label the views of a group of parliamentary critics (including, prominently, Benjamin Constant) of the government. In the same period “liberalism” entered British usage as a label for the

views of the radical wing of the opposition Whig party.⁵ After the watershed year of 1830—during which the July revolution overthrew the Bourbon monarchy and established a new constitution in France, and a general election ended decades of Tory hegemony and paved the way for the 1832 Reform Act in Britain—both liberal movements moved beyond oppositional origins toward a role in government. But at mid-century their paths diverged. Liberal influence in France declined sharply with the coup of Louis Napoleon and the founding of the Second Empire in 1851-52.⁶ In Britain, by contrast, liberalism continued its ascent. During the 1850s and 1860s the Whig Party developed into the Liberal Party while still forming, as it had since 1830, most British governments.

As “liberalism” came into use to label the views of these political movements, it also came to denote the stance of intellectuals who gave these views a more theoretical articulation. These intellectuals were personally involved in the political movements in Britain and France. Several of them were, at some point, members of parliament, and in France, they were also leaders and statesmen. The most famous of these thinkers—Benjamin Constant, François Guizot, and later Alexis de Tocqueville in France; James Mill and later John Stuart Mill in Britain—provide the starting point for my conception of liberalism as a theoretical stance. Even as later cleavages make the question of who is or is not a liberal a matter of contention with regard to twentieth-century figures such as

⁵ G. de Sauvigny, "Liberalism, Nationalism and Socialism: The Birth of Three Words," *Review of Politics* 32, no. 2 (1970): 150-55.

⁶ This claim presupposes a conception of liberalism that makes commitment to institutions of constitutional representative government one of its baseline components, but not a commitment to a specific type of economic policy. Support for *laissez-faire* economic principles is neither sufficient nor necessary to be a liberal in the terms of my study. The Cobden treaty and other economic policy moves of the Second Empire did not, by my conception, give the Empire a “liberal” character so long as Napoleon III’s government was still illiberal in its institutional character.

Friedrich Hayek and John Dewey, both sides in such disputes agree that, whatever liberalism may be, these early- to mid-nineteenth century thinkers embody it. In forging a general conception I have started from this common ground, seeking a stance that can encompass these five far from identical thinkers. Doing so results in a conception that is, in turn, general enough to apply to figures beyond those in whose thought it is grounded.

The liberalism of Constant, Guizot, Tocqueville, and James and John Stuart Mill can be treated in general terms as a theoretical stance integrating views of government, society, and history in a web of mutually supporting beliefs. Different strands of this web have their own lineages, and the historical question of when and how they first came together lies beyond the scope of this project.⁷ What is crucial for my general conception is that it brings together views in these three areas: it understands liberalism as offering, at once, a theory of government, of society, and of history.

With regard to government, liberalism advocates constitutionalism and representative legislative assemblies. For liberals, government is to act within the confines and along the lines prescribed by a constitution, and it has an attendant duty to respect and enforce the rule of law more generally. There is, moreover, to be a public assembly—whose members are chosen in some significant measure by election—which will provide a setting for legislation, the presentation of grievances, and critical scrutiny of government policy and action. This assembly is not to be a mere talking shop that the

⁷ Approaching seventeenth- or eighteenth-century thinkers in terms of “liberalism” entails retrospectively projecting a label that first gained political and theoretical content in the context of the nineteenth century movements I have pinpointed. This is no reason to rule out such projections. But they should, I believe, proceed from, rather than be used to ground, a general conception of “liberalism” as a theoretical stance. Once we have a general conception—based preferably on nineteenth-century figures who understood themselves to be articulating “liberalism” and whose claim to do so is largely non-contentious—then we might set out to ask who the precursors of this theoretical stance were, which thinker or school marks the move from precursors to “liberalism” (though the baby did not, at first, know its name), etc.

executive can heed, ignore, or manipulate as it wishes: there must be mechanisms to ensure that the executive is, at least in certain respects, responsible to the assembly. More specific implications of the liberal call for constitutional representative government are, however, matters on which the liberal thinkers of the early- to mid-nineteenth century diverged. A general conception of liberalism that encompasses these thinkers must allow for this variety. Liberalism is thus not, in my conception, committed to a specific theory of constitutionalism. As such it is not committed definitely for or against, for example, judicial review or monarchy (so long as the monarch is constitutionally limited). Likewise, liberalism is not, in my general conception, committed to a specific theory of representation. There is no single liberal position on the proper extent of the suffrage, organization of the electoral process, or relationship between elected members of the assembly and those who elect them.

Advocacy of constitutional representative government is, however, not sufficient to qualify a thinker as liberal. Liberalism is one heir, but not the only one, of a long lineage of theorizing critical of absolutist government. To capture what set liberals of the early- to mid-nineteenth century apart from Whigs in the mode of Edmund Burke it is simpler to look to their views about society than to try to tease out subtle contrasts in the demands that both made for constitutional representative government. Unlike Burke, liberal thinkers were critical of efforts to perpetuate a social order shaped by, and acting to preserve, special status and privileges based on factors such as religion or noble birth. My conception of liberalism hence gives a key role to commitment to a society open to individual talents irrespective of parentage or religious beliefs. Whether this commitment also extends to rejecting differential treatment of individuals on other bases

(such as sex or wealth)—and what specific kind of laws or government actions are seen as an obstacle to, or necessary to support, a social order open to individual talents—are, however, issues where my general conception encompasses a variety of views.

The outline of liberalism I have been sketching is so far, I expect, uncontroversial. What is more distinctive about my conception is its incorporation of a theory of history as a third integral element of the web of beliefs making up liberalism as a theoretical stance. The liberal thinkers of the early- to mid-nineteenth century from whom my conception starts situated society and government in relation to historical processes of qualitative transformation that they saw as leading up to, and continuing to develop within, their own day. They spoke of “improvement,” “progress,” “enlightenment,” or “civilization.” And they saw these processes making the political and social order they favored possible and desirable. As they saw it, these processes had made the political and social arrangements of absolute monarchy and hereditary aristocracy anachronistic. Such arrangements were features of the European past with no place in its future. To the extent they still existed, they did so as remnants of the past battling against the tide of history and, in so doing, frequently causing significant and indefensible harm.

This view of history was far from incidental. Liberal thinkers such as James Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville differed greatly about the past virtues or vices of the hereditary aristocracy. But they shared a crucial commonality in their belief that its time had passed. Liberalism consists, in my conception, less in a common hostility to past institutions, or unblemished celebration of the future to come (we might recall, for example, how easily John Stuart Mill combined sweeping talk of progress with

apprehensive fears), than in certain beliefs about the processes of historical transformation against which the present is to be understood. A notion of qualitative historical change is as integral to liberalism as to its younger, nineteenth-century cousin, Marxism. However, a key difference sets apart liberal theories. Where liberals frame transformative historical processes around changes leading up to a liberal political and social order, Marxism frames that order as only a way station in a historical dynamic destined eventually to make a liberal order as outdated as feudal aristocracy and absolute monarchy appear to the liberal.⁸

The conception of liberalism that I have sketched is general enough to extend well beyond the early- to mid-nineteenth century intellectuals invoked during the last several pages. This conception can, for example, encompass on equal terms the divergent visions in twentieth-century liberalism presented on the one hand by Hayek, and on the other by Dewey. It also highlights where we might look to understand what sets those two visions, or other liberal views, at odds—we might, for example, look to contrasting concepts of constitutionalism and the rule of law, or different beliefs about the kinds of government actions, or restraints thereupon, conducive to a stable liberal order and to progressive change within that order.

⁸ A core element of disillusioned strands in both liberalism and Marxism consists in rethinking the views of history that I emphasize here. Yet the “liberal” or “Marxist” character of such strands is best captured when we approach them via their descent and departure from these starting points in “classical” liberalism and Marxism.

The Liberal Interpretation of History: The Foundation of a “New Political Science”

Liberalism, as conceived in this study, presumes or actively pursues an interpretation of history in terms of processes of qualitative transformation that make the emergence and maintenance of a liberal social and political order possible. Such an interpretation can be fleshed out in a variety of ways, and is especially evident in wide-ranging works of historical and comparative inquiry. The methods employed in pursuing and presenting such an interpretation, and the substantive content of the various views that are presented, are the interwoven central foci of my study.

To give a sense of what is involved here it may be best to start with an example. An early and canonical example of a liberal view of history is found in Benjamin Constant's best known work, his 1819 lecture “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns.”⁹ Constant here ties the republican liberty of classical Greece and Rome to the social order then existing—including, very prominently, slavery—and argues that this social order was qualitatively different from that of modern Europe with its large nation states and extensive commerce. With this comparison, Constant laid a basis for an argument that France had gone astray during the revolutionary era in no small part due to well-meaning but confused leaders who dreamt of recreating ancient political ideals and institutions. That aspiration had been doomed to fail since it did not take into account that the character of the society into which they hoped to introduce such ideals and institutions was fundamentally different from that of the ancients. Yearning for an unattainable past had, moreover, obscured and undermined the kind of

⁹ Benjamin Constant, “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with That of the Moderns,” in *Political Writings*, ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

liberty—a liberal liberty of private individual freedoms secured under a constitutional government—that was realizable in modern society. In Constant’s lecture, antiquity was thus summoned up as a point of comparison with which to articulate an argument about what was, and was not, possible in the France of his day. This offered a way to challenge French republicans and win the mantle of “liberty” for liberals like himself who, unlike republicans, would accept a restored Bourbon monarchy if it was constitutionally limited and paired with a representative parliament.

Constant’s lecture nicely illustrates basic propositions of liberal views of history that carry forward to the present day. First, a distinctively modern form of society has come into being in Europe (and in colonies or ex-colonies settled by Europeans).¹⁰ Second, this qualitative social change has altered what is possible and desirable in government. Third, and more specifically, what it makes possible and desirable is constitutional government that includes a representative assembly, and protects the freedoms of private individuals. Fourth, what it rules out as infeasible or undesirable is basically everything else.¹¹

These propositions reflect a fundamental shift in political thought that had begun, but certainly not been universally embraced, during the Enlightenment(s). Well into the early-modern period, classical antiquity remained a potent source of positive examples in reflections upon political institutions and behavior. Machiavelli had looked to the

¹⁰ Since the transformation of Japan under the Meiji Restoration most liberals have viewed modern society as having first appeared among European peoples, but later spreading beyond them. Earlier liberals could be found on both sides of the question of whether modern society was uniquely European or not.

¹¹ The liberal may endorse other forms of government as suitable, beneficial, or even necessary under other social conditions. Such a perspective is taken, for example, by John Stuart Mill when he treats despotic rule as an outdated hindrance to further progress in advanced European societies, while also believing it to have played, at times, a progressive role in earlier European history, and as still potentially having such a role to play in other parts of the world. John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (New York: Harper, 1862).

Roman Republic to draw lessons for the republics of his day; Bodin looked to imperial Rome in constructing and justifying a rising monarchical absolutism. Such viewpoints continued through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. They were evident, for example, both in Rousseau's political theory and Napoleon's political practice. Constant was far from battling intellectual straw men when he gave his lecture. But during the decades after the lecture, the view that absolute monarchy and classical republics were anachronisms would steadily spread. For an explicit and pithy declaration of the shift in political thought that belief in qualitative historical transformation entailed, we may turn to Alexis de Tocqueville. This French liberal politician-intellectual of the post-Constant generation famously declared, in the preface to the 1835 first volume of his *Democracy in America*: "A new political science is needed for a world altogether new."¹²

How would this new liberal science proceed? It would, by definition, study government and politics in light of one or more processes of qualitative change.¹³ These might be identified using the Lockean concept of "improvement," the eighteenth-century favorites "enlightenment," "civilization," and "progress," or the new nineteenth-century concepts of "evolution" and "development." But the most significant question was less the concept employed than how it would be fleshed out. Some liberal intellectuals took up a naturalistic methodological standpoint and approached the phenomena of social and

¹² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 7.

¹³ The liberal science of politics need not focus directly on qualitative change. It might, for example, focus on comparing societies seen as sharing the same "advanced" level. The goal of such comparative inquiry is not to describe, explain, or offer maxims about transformative change, but to explore what policies may make an existing liberal order more stable, or facilitate some desired change within the broader confines of that order. Though the notion of qualitative transformation is not at the center of attention here, it still plays an essential role. This form of comparative inquiry presupposes that it is "advanced" societies that offer examples and contrasts most relevant to the query at hand. Such a premise rests on some (however implicit or under-specified) notion of a qualitative historical change that set these societies apart.

political change as subject to natural laws or recurring regularities akin to those studied in the natural sciences. Others took up a historicist standpoint that emphasized the exceptionalism of what had occurred in European history. It will be one of the principal goals of my study to make clear through a variety of examples just what each of these options entailed, especially for the practice of historical and comparative inquiry. The crucial point to note here is that the full range of these methodological possibilities was pursued by liberal intellectuals in Europe, and in turn taken up during the making of the American liberal science of politics in the closing decades of the century. To explore the variety and change over time in liberal views of qualitative historical change it is critical to bring this full range of possibilities within the scope of this study.

“Political Science,” the “American Science of Politics,” and “Traditions”

In recalling Tocqueville’s invocation of a “new political science,” we should be sensitive to shifts in usage that “political science” has undergone between his day and our own. In American academic usage during the twentieth century, the phrase came to carry a largely disciplinary connotation: political science is today, first and foremost, whatever academic political scientists choose to teach and write. This connotation could become widespread, however, only after a group of scholars cleaved off from the older American Historical Association (AHA) to establish the American Political Science Association (APSA) in 1903. That institutional founding marked, solidified, and helped to propagate a novel scholarly identity: political scientists understood as practitioners of an academic field distinguishable from that of the historian, economist, or sociologist. In making this move, American scholars left behind European exemplars to take up a role

as intellectual and institutional pioneers. The establishment of the APSA was a crucial turning point for movement away from the broad conception of political science evident in the naming of the School of Political Science, founded at Columbia in 1880. The breadth of the older conception is illustrated by the fact that, among early faculty in this School, there were scholars who would serve as presidents, not only of the APSA, but also of the AHA, the American Economic Association, and the American Sociological Society.¹⁴

The disciplinary connotation of “political science” makes the phrase potentially misleading. It threatens to direct attention away from intellectual currents that cross, or are altogether outside, the discipline’s boundaries. The APSA did not, and never has, monopolized American scholarship on matters political. When we study the history of that scholarship, we are well advised to look outside, as well as inside, the discipline of political science. It was this approach that Bernard Crick used when he critically explored the idea of a science of politics that would aspire to the kind of knowledge achieved by natural scientists. Crick turned primarily to sociologists to locate the roots of this “scientism” (or, to use the less pejorative phrase I prefer, naturalism) and then followed its diffusion into the political science discipline. Political science thus did not appear in Crick’s book as an intellectual monolith universally characterized by such naturalism. Instead it appeared as an institutionally demarcated academic field into which naturalism was increasingly penetrating at the cost of an earlier, indigenous methodological tradition.

¹⁴ R. Gordon Hoxie, ed., *A History of the Faculty of Political Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955).

Crick's narrative of naturalism, spreading from an early home within sociology into political science during the twentieth century, is basically correct. In my study, I deal with the period before this diffusion, when political science and sociology were more methodologically distinct than they subsequently became. I follow Crick in making late-nineteenth century American sociology a major part of the story of the American science of politics. Indeed, my Chapter Five focuses on the same figures Crick stressed: Lester Frank Ward and William Graham Sumner. While my treatment of these figures is, I hope, more sympathetic than Crick's, a perhaps more important difference lies in my treatment of the currents that led up into the political science discipline. Perhaps the most problematic feature of Crick's account is his fleeting valorized image of the older methodological tradition in political science whose decline he bemoaned. In Chapters Three and Four I explore the methodological orientation(s) of the early political science discipline in more detail than Crick. Where he drew a line from the American founders to the discipline, I find it originating in the reception and remaking of various strands of the European historicist tradition. This account is made possible by my general emphasis on situating American developments in a trans-Atlantic setting. I follow through on this emphasis by devoting my opening two chapters to traditions and specific exemplars of nineteenth-century European thought that influenced American scientists of politics. In Chapter One I introduce the naturalistic tradition subsequently taken up by the American sociologists I explore in Chapter Five. In Chapter Two, I survey the historicist tradition that, as I show in Chapters Three and Four, was the departure point for the emergence in American of a freestanding field of political science.

Since I retain “political science” and “political scientists” to identify a discipline and its members, it would be confusing to say that my study is, in the aggregate, a study of the making of American political science. Instead, I am studying the making of *the American science of politics*. With this phrase I mean to group intellectual discourses and works that aspire to study politics scientifically, regardless of the discipline they might be housed in, or the methodological tradition they exemplify.¹⁵ I turn to these traditions to organize my study, not to delimit its content.

Identifying the American science of politics as my broad object of study leaves open the question of how to talk about what I find inside this domain. To differentiate and characterize aggregations inside this domain, I have been using the concept of an intellectual tradition. Without going into a full elaboration,¹⁶ let me note some distinctive features of this concept as I employ it. I understand traditions as intellectual aggregations to be self-consciously crafted and deployed by a scholar in light of the specific concerns guiding his or her study. I would expect other scholars studying the material I study, but with concerns different from mine, to craft traditions somewhat different from my own. But this does not mean that I can group individuals together in a tradition any way I please. When grouping, I stress intellectual inheritances, while also highlighting how the individuals in a tradition remake these inheritances to address new puzzles, and thereby change the character of their tradition.

¹⁵ I draw the phrase “American science of politics” from the title of Crick’s book. I do so in part to signal intellectual debts, and in part because it works better than any other alternative to “political science.” My usage is, however, not identical to Crick’s. For him “American science of politics” commonly, though not always, focused on scholars aspiring to emulate the natural sciences. By contrast, in employing the phrase, I have no notion of “science” in mind any more restrictive than the German *Wissenschaft*, which equates more closely perhaps to the way the term “scholarly” is used in the American academy today.

¹⁶ For a more extensive discussion of the approach to intellectual traditions that I employ in my account, see Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

My study engages intellectual trajectories at the level of liberal political theory and at the level of method. While I might construct aggregate traditions at both levels, this would entail placing each individual I treat into two traditions at once. To avoid confusing the presentation of my narrative, I hence restrict my talk of “traditions” to methodological traditions, i.e. to traditions that follow intellectual inheritance and adaptations in the domain of research practices and premises. (Specifically, I have in mind here premises studied in the philosophy of the social, historical, and human sciences.) When grouping individuals in terms of varieties of liberal political theory I have instead spoken of “visions” and “perspectives.”

To show how traditions work in this study, let me give an example of intellectual lineage drawn from my historicist methodological tradition. In Chapter Two I note the rise among European historicists of work in comparative “Aryan” institutional history. I focus there, among others, on the English liberal historian Edward Freeman, who coined the phrase “comparative politics” to label historicist research applying “the Comparative Method” to political institutions.¹⁷ In Chapter Three, I discuss the connections between Freeman and the first American graduate program in the study of politics: the program in “historical and political science” that the new Johns Hopkins University began to offer in the late 1870s. By establishing this lineage I lay a basis on which to explicate what the early Hopkins’ PhD Woodrow Wilson had in mind in the late 1880s when he declared: “Certainly it does not now have to be argued that the only thorough method of study in politics is the comparative and historical.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Edward Freeman, *Comparative Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1873), 1.

¹⁸ Woodrow Wilson, *The State: Elements of Historical and Practical Politics* (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1889), xxxv-vi.

Wilson's emphasis on "thorough method" is one that echoes down through the American science of politics to the current day. By situating Wilson's methodological views in trans-Atlantic perspective we are reminded that this emphasis was not born in America; it was taken over from European exemplars. Within comparative inquiry a rising concern with method is evident in the talk of "the Comparative Method" that emerged in multiple settings in nineteenth-century European intellectual life. The phrase then had several meanings, and these bear at most a partial resemblance to those it has subsequently come to carry. But what is shared by all talk of "the Comparative Method" ("the Historical Method," "the Statistical Method," etc.) is a belief that getting method right is essential to intellectual sophistication and progress. Similar beliefs can be found in earlier thinkers—especially, of course, Descartes. But in the nineteenth century this belief gained a new prominence and came to exert an influence upon political thought more widespread than at any earlier time.

Intellectual Professionalization and Liberalism in Europe and America

A belief in the import of method was one of two factors encouraging intellectual professionalization that originated in early nineteenth-century Europe, gained momentum through the mid-century, and then crossed the Atlantic to thrive in America. The second factor was institutional, and consisted in the rise and diffusion of the research university. These two factors were not always combined. Indeed, a significant trait of the naturalistic tradition was that, while it put great emphasis upon method, it developed largely outside the academy until the close of the nineteenth century. The

historicist tradition, by contrast, combined an emphasis upon method with a secure institutional home in the academy that helped its professionalization proceed faster.

When these two currents were combined they reinforced each other in a dynamic movement that promoted professionalized academic work, and helped to bring such work to prominence throughout much of intellectual life. In late nineteenth-century America, the reception of the research university model fuelled the rise of a burgeoning complex of new or reformed academic institutions. These provided the setting and support without which the American science of politics would never have taken on the shape or size it did. From tiny beginnings in the 1870s, the academic study of politics gained momentum in the 1880s and 1890s, with the founding of scholarly journals and graduate programs, and a growing number of new textbooks and other publications. Eventually, in 1903, the American Political Science Association was founded. Just two years later, in 1905, so also was the American Sociological Society, most of whose leading members made politics one of their domains of study, but did so as adherents of the naturalistic tradition, which at the time attracted little interest or support among the political scientists.¹⁹

The two factors favoring the professionalization movement form a key backdrop to the making of the American liberal science of politics. When studying this episode we must grasp why American scholars saw their inquiries as an advance upon the work of

¹⁹ On the history of professionalization in American social inquiry as a whole, see Mary Furner, *Advocacy and Objectivity: A Crisis in the Professionalization of American Social Science* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1975); Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). On the emergence of a specific “political science” discipline—which cannot be explained by professionalization alone—see Robert Adcock, “The Emergence of Political Science as a Discipline: History and the Study of Politics in America, 1875-1910,” *History of Political Thought* 24, no. 3 (2003): 481-501.

European figures such as Tocqueville. Their sense of advance rested on two beliefs. First, the scholars shared Tocqueville's belief that qualitative historical transformation called for a new science to come to grips with a new world. They believed their later position in time enabled them to better grasp the shape of this transformation, and that, as a result, their contributions to the new liberal science advanced beyond Tocqueville's. Secondly, belief in the importance of method was widespread among American scholars. Their sense of advance was deepened by their belief that they were adopting, applying, and refining scientific methods that produced results more sophisticated in conceptual apparatus, more careful in reasoning, and better grounded in empirical fact. We cannot understand the American science of politics if we do not recognize that nearly all those who participated in its making believed—as have their successors—that their work could, should, and did, constitute an intellectual advance.

In the making of the American science of politics intellectual and institutional trends of the modern era came together to produce results unprecedented in the history of political thought. Liberalism, belief in the importance of method, and the research university all came to prominence in Europe during the early- to mid-nineteenth century. But, as we shall see in Chapters One and Two, the origin of these trends varied and the relation between liberalism and the professionalized discourses of academics studying politics took on different shapes in different national contexts. In German universities—where the ideals and institutions of an academy emphasizing research were pioneered—schools of inquiry about government and politics developed in which liberal theoretical visions were more the exception than the norm. By contrast, when American research universities began to take shape some half a century later, professionalization and liberal

political thought came together to an unprecedented degree to produce a liberal science of politics that, in the twentieth century, would surpass all competitors in its size and technical sophistication.

The development of professionalized modes of research and reflection on matters political brought a profuse new strand of liberal discourse to American political thought. As a professionalized discourse—and one that became ever more so over time—the American science of politics produced texts more specialized, technical, and at times dull than the engaging works of gentleman generalists like Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill. This is, however, no more a reason for the historian of political thought to skip over this science than it would be to skip over medieval scholasticism which is, perhaps, no less specialized, technical, and at times dull. Not only is there little ground to exclude the American liberal science of politics from the history of political thought, there are compelling positive reasons why it deserves attention. By attending to this science we can better make sense of how it came about that, a century after “liberalism” entered the language of French and British politics, the word finally began to acquire major import in American politics.²⁰ We must study the American liberal science of politics if we want to grasp how this belated American “liberalism” is historically related to liberal movements in European political and intellectual life, and thereby forms a chapter within the general history of Western liberalisms.

²⁰ On this development, see John Gunnell, *Imagining the American Polity: Political Science and the Discourse of Democracy* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), chap. 5.

**CHAPTER ONE. EUROPEAN EXEMPLARS OF COMPARATIVE AND HISTORICAL
INQUIRY: THE NATURALISTIC TRADITION AND CLASSICAL LIBERALISM**

If we are to study the roots and trajectories of the American science of politics as it took shape from the 1870s through the opening years of the twentieth century, we must know something about the European exemplars that influenced this nascent liberal science. Major exemplars, such as Herbert Spencer, Johann Bluntschli, and Sir Henry Maine, overlapped in some key respects: all drew upon conceptions of progress in crafting views of historical change sweeping through centuries or even millennia, and all fleshed out these conceptions using cross-societal comparisons. But this overlap was accompanied by methodological and theoretical variety and debate. In this and the next chapter I selectively survey historical and comparative inquiry in nineteenth-century France, Germany, and England, focusing on intellectual developments and exemplary figures which would subsequently be invoked and adapted by American scholars of politics.

I organize my survey in terms of two broad methodological traditions: naturalism and historicism. While each tradition can be followed back into the eighteenth century, and beyond, both were transformed during the decades following the 1815 end of the Napoleonic wars. This remaking—which saw each tradition independently develop talk of “the Historical Method” and “the Comparative Method”—is a leading point of departure for my study. In the current chapter, I focus on the naturalistic tradition in post-Napoleonic Europe. In Chapter Two I focus on the historicist tradition. For each tradition, I explore both its broad methodological features, and significant differences

within it. The picture I am thus seeking to convey is of two European traditions which are, in turn, internally differentiated by sub-traditions that I discuss as “currents,” “strands,” or when appropriate, “schools.” To stem a possible confusion, I should stress that my two-level picture does not map lines of uniform division. Beside figures who defined and promoted their intellectual work by drawing divisions along one or more of these lines, we can find others who bridged such divides. The increasing concern with method that I highlight involved an increase in the former mode of intellectual behavior, not its universal predominance.

The French and German intellectuals whom I will explore as pioneering contributors to the methodological remaking of historical and comparative inquiry were, at best, lukewarm toward liberalism, and more often actively hostile toward it. The rising tide of liberalism in political and intellectual life from the 1820s forward did, however, over time come into increasing interaction with the growing concern with methodological matters. An emerging intersection between these two trends found one of its earlier exemplars in John Stuart Mill’s 1843 *System of Logic*.¹ Liberal practitioners of historical and comparative inquiry during the mid-century and later would be far from uniform adherents of the naturalistic tradition which Mill expounded—let alone of the particular research practice (the “Inverse Deductive, or Historical Method”) that he advocated for social science. But they were, nonetheless, swept up in the broad trend of increasing concern about method. The mid-century intertwining of this trend with liberal political thought forged the common parameters of the European currents and exemplars

¹ John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic Ratiocinative and Inductive*, ed. J. Robson, vol. VIII, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (London: Routledge, 1996).

that would become the principal points of departure for the American liberal science of politics. By the end of Chapter Two we will have an overview of this interweaving in hand, and thus will be ready to begin our detailed study of theoretical and methodological trajectories among American intellectuals and scholars from the 1870s forward.

Naturalism, Evolution, and the Founding of Sociology

The naturalistic methodological tradition approaches human phenomena as part of nature. Viewed as a sub-domain of natural phenomena, individual and social life are held to be subject to natural laws or recurring regularities, just as are the phenomena studied by physical, chemical, and biological scientists. Naturalists often warn that uncovering laws or regularities is especially challenging when dealing with human phenomena, and they may also believe that success in the endeavor requires the use of research practices particular to this substantive domain. But if they recognize such differences, they do so against the backdrop of their belief that the kind of knowledge sought when studying man and society can, and should, take the same general form as that sought in the modern natural sciences. The unity of science expounded by naturalists thus concerns first and foremost the aspirations of scientific inquiry, not necessarily specific practices used in undertaking inquiry in various domains. For example, when Hobbes, in the introduction to *Leviathan*, invited his reader to “read thy self” when evaluating the claims about laws of human nature and their consequences

advanced in the book, he highlighted a practice that could only be applied to human phenomena, but this in no way conflicted with his naturalism.²

Methodological naturalists during the nineteenth century could look back to seventeenth-century figures like Hobbes as forerunners, but their shared tradition had undergone significant shifts since Hobbes's day. During the eighteenth-century Enlightenment(s), the growing belief that a qualitatively new form of society was coming into being in modern Europe was accompanied by a deepening interest and engagement in efforts to conceptualize and study processes of qualitative social change. Naturalism now extended beyond its search for laws or regularities characterizing constant features of human nature and society to also seek them in the dynamics and trajectory of social transformation—conceived in Lockean terms as “improvement,” or in the increasingly popular conceptual vocabularies of “enlightenment,” “civilization,” and “progress.” For Enlightenment naturalists, such as Turgot and Condorcet in France, transformative social change was to be treated as a natural process structured by laws or regularities arising from general propensities in human nature, and/or general features of the way human societies relate to their environment. This viewpoint provided a basis upon which to construct, in the famous phrase of the Scottish Enlightenment, a “natural history of society”: an ordered synthetic account, framed in terms of general types, of successive stages through which societies “naturally” develop in the process of progressive social transformation.

The naturalistic currents of the French and Scottish Enlightenments provided the starting point for nineteenth-century historical and comparative inquiry in the naturalistic

² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 10-11.

tradition. Such inquiry carried forward practices and vocabulary from the earlier students of progress. But a new concept—“evolution”—and an accompanying methodological reorientation distinguished a new current of naturalistic inquiry, which I will single out as “evolutionary naturalism.” In this and the following section, I provide a general overview of evolutionary naturalism and explore lines of debate within it. I proceed through an explication and comparison of two of its leading exemplars: Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer. These founding fathers of what they—and we following them—call “sociology” offered substantively divergent accounts of social evolution. But their works had major methodological parallels that reflected common beliefs shaping the way each understood their shared aspiration to craft a naturalistic account of social evolution. It is to these beliefs and this aspiration that I look in characterizing evolutionary naturalism as the general methodological stance within which historical and comparative sociological inquiry took shape.³

Beyond Enlightenment Naturalism: Auguste Comte and “the Comparative Method”

Discussions of comparative historical sociology and its methodology often invoke figures from the nineteenth century as founding fathers. For several decades now such discussions have recurrently ruminated over “Mill’s Methods”—which, curiously enough, are sharply at odds with the practice actually advocated for social science in

³ While I focus upon the proto-sociologists Comte and Spencer, the general methodological stance of evolutionary naturalism might also be explicated via the works of other prominent figures, such as Edward Tylor, the pioneer of anthropology as an academic study in England. For overviews of Tylor that situate his methodology relative to the broad stream of nineteenth-century naturalistic inquiry, see John Burrow, *Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), chap. 7; Margaret Hodgen, *The Doctrine of Survivals: A Chapter in the History of Scientific Method in the Study of Man* (London: Allenson, 1936).

John Stuart Mill's *System of Logic*.⁴ These discussions have, at the same time, ignored Auguste Comte, whose *Cours de Philosophie Positive* of 1830-42—in addition to coining the word “sociology”—exerted a major influence on Mill's *Logic*, and especially its views about social science. While Mill's admiration for Comte later fell away from the peak it reached in the early 1840s, he would, even in his most critical period, continue to hold that Comte's treatment of social science methodology in the *Cours* was “so much truer and more profound than that of any one who preceded him, as to constitute an era in its cultivation.”⁵ I take Mill's judgment to be correct regarding the novelty of Comte's methodological views, and I will hence explicate them at some length.

Ignoring Comte's methodological teaching entirely is, it might be noted, a rather recent phenomenon. If we look beyond the generational horizon of contemporary social science, we find that an earlier twentieth-century literature did acknowledge Comte as a pivotal figure in the methodological history of naturalistic social science.⁶ Comte was here presented as the conduit through which legacies of Enlightenment naturalism—as

⁴ For two key origins of contemporary conversation about “Mill's Methods,” see Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 36-37; Morris Zelditch, Jr., “Intelligible Comparisons,” in *Comparative Methods in Sociology: Essays on Trends and Applications*, ed. Ivan Vallier (Berkeley, CA: California University Press, 1971), 267-307. For recent illustrations of the continuing vitality of this curious conversation, see James Mahoney, “Strategies of Causal Assessment in Comparative Historical Analysis,” in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Science*, ed. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 337-72; John S. Odell, “A Major Milestone with One Major Limitation,” *Qualitative Methods: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section on Qualitative Methods* 4, no. 1 (2006): 37-40.

⁵ John Stuart Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1961; first published 1865), 123. For details of the direct intellectual exchange between Mill and Comte in the 1840s, see Oscar A. Haac, ed., *The Correspondence of John Stuart Mill and Auguste Comte* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction 1995).

⁶ Frederick Teggart, *Theory of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1925); Kenneth Bock, “The Comparative Method” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1948); Kenneth Bock, *The Acceptance of Histories: Toward a Perspective for Social Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956).

pursued by French and Scottish figures such as Turgot, Condorcet, Lord Kames, and Adam Ferguson—were carried forward to the mid-nineteenth century. Interpreting Comte in this way did not, however, entail endorsing Mill’s belief in the epoch-making character of Comte’s methodology. Indeed, proponents of the conduit interpretation went so far in the opposite direction as to declare that Comte did not offer “anything that could be hailed as ‘new’ by a nineteenth-century scholar.”⁷

In stressing Comte’s debts to Enlightenment naturalism the conduit interpretation does make noteworthy points. It reminds us that certain foundational methodological beliefs of Comte and later evolutionary naturalists—for example, the belief that human phenomena are subject to natural laws—carried forward views from earlier currents in the naturalistic tradition. This interpretation also documents the extended lineage of the research practice at the center of Comte’s account of “the Comparative Method” in sociology.⁸ As explicated in the *Cours*, this practice:

consists in a comparison of the different coexisting states of human society on the various parts of the earth’s surface,—those states being completely independent of each other. By this method, the different stages of evolution may all be observed at once. Though the progression is single and uniform, in regard to the whole race, some very considerable and very various populations have, from causes that are little understood, attained extremely unequal degrees of development, so that the former states of the most civilized nations are now to be seen, amidst some partial differences, among contemporary populations inhabiting different parts of the globe.⁹

⁷ Bock, “The Comparative Method”, 189.

⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. 5.

⁹ Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, trans. Harriet Martineau, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London: Trübner, 1875), II: 86. This and subsequent citations to Comte’s most influential work are to the English translation and condensation by Harriet Martineau. The French original consisted of six volumes that were published individually as completed, with the first being published in 1830 and the last in 1842.

In tracing the lineage of this practice, the conduit interpretation laid the basis for a narrative in which, while credited for the phrase “the Comparative Method,”¹⁰ Comte appeared to be simply passing forward a methodology that had been well established among Enlightenment scholars.

This narrative falls short, however, in significant ways. If the practice of “the Comparative Method” was indeed not new with Comte, there were, nevertheless, critical shifts in the way he construed this practice. These are part of a broader methodological reorientation that set Comte’s founding vision of sociology—and evolutionary naturalism more generally—apart from previous naturalistic approaches to qualitative social change. The transformation here is evident at the level of conceptual usage. Enlightenment naturalists such as Condorcet spoke of “progress,” but not of “evolution.” When Comte used “evolution” as a synonym for “progress” he was importing a key concept from Lamarckian-era biology. But he was doing something more substantial than just taking up a concept associated with celebrated developments in natural science. This move was one element in a methodological reorientation drawing upon biology at multiple points. Comte believed that the “succession of social states exactly corresponds, in a scientific sense, with the gradation of organisms in biology”; and in line with this belief, he construed comparisons of “co-existing states of human society” at “different stages of evolution” as a practice analogous to that used in comparative anatomy. Exposure to such “biological methods” was, Comte held, essential to prepare scholars to

¹⁰ It is worth noting that, aside from Comte, few evolutionary naturalists used the phrase “the Comparative Method.” Its wide usage in discussions of their methodology dates only from the close of the nineteenth century, and derived as much or more from Franz Boas’s critical attack upon them as from the work of evolutionary naturalists themselves. Franz Boas, “The Limitations of the Comparative Method in Anthropology,” *Science* 4, no. 103 (1896): 901-08.

study sociology: it would “familiarize them with the comparative method,” and introduce them to “the general spirit of investigation proper to organic science.”¹¹

Comte’s treatment of the comparative method was thus one element of his broad effort to reorient naturalistic social inquiry to build upon recent developments in “organic science.” This effort relied centrally on the analogical concept of the “social organism”: a concept that, in turn, facilitated Comte’s import of other biological concepts—including “function”—into his sociology. In elaborating the organicist orientation of the science he was forging, Comte was consciously breaking from Enlightenment naturalism. Looking back to his forerunners, he explained:

Political philosophy made a great advance during the last century, inasmuch as social development became more and more the express object of historical treatment. The process was defective, of course, from the absence of all theory of evolution, by which alone any scientific dignity can be given to works which, without it, remain essentially literary.¹²

Beyond diverting attention from Comte’s participation in the rising organicism widespread in post-French Revolution, post-Enlightenment thought, the conduit view of Comte also falls short by diverting our attention from a key point of disagreement within the emerging methodological paradigm of evolutionary naturalism. The point at issue here was the relationship between the comparative study of currently existing societies, especially societies at lower levels of development, and other research practices that might be used in crafting naturalistic accounts of social evolution. In focusing on Comte’s support for the prior practice, the conduit interpretation obscures a core feature of his overall methodological vision: his subordination of that practice to a practice of

¹¹ Comte, *Positive Philosophy*, II: 91, 95.

¹² *Ibid.*, II: 356.

historical comparison which he singled out under the name “the Historical Method.” This alternative practice was both the central element in Comte’s vision of how sociology should proceed, and the element of that methodological vision which Mill most admired.

Comte on “the Historical Method”

Comte put “the Comparative Method” of comparing currently existing societies under strong constraints. He insisted that the societies compared should be “completely independent of each other.”¹³ Even more importantly, he stressed that this practice was unable to address a fundamental question in evolutionary-naturalist sociology: it could give “no idea of the order of succession” of the various “states of human society.” The alternative practice of “the Historical Method” lay at the center of Comte’s methodology because he believed that it could uncover the order in which states of society naturally succeed one another in the course of social evolution. This order had to be known before contemporary societies could be positioned relative to one another along an evolutionary continuum. Only after such positioning was achieved could sociologists turn to the study of societies currently existing at various levels of development to verify and flesh out details in their substantive account of social evolution, the general shape of which was to have been settled by prior use of “the Historical Method.” While the comparative study

¹³ While this precondition strongly constrained potential uses of “the comparative method,” it in principle secured those uses from the charge (popular in retrospective criticisms of evolutionary naturalism) that the quality of their inferences are compromised by the possible effects of the diffusion of traits between the societies being compared.

of societies in the contemporary world thus had a role in Comte's evolutionary-naturalist sociology, it was subordinated to the all-important "Historical Method."¹⁴

This subordinate status was evident as Comte concluded his methodological reflections and set out to present a substantive account of social evolution. Unlike other later evolutionary naturalists, such as Herbert Spencer, who would draw heavily on accounts of contemporary primitive societies as a keystone of their substantive analysis, Comte discussed such societies only in passing asides during a brief section of his own account. In that section he was characterizing the earliest stages of social evolution. But in doing so, he relied principally upon deductive reasoning from asserted general traits of human nature, not upon examples. By contrast, when characterizing later stages of social evolution (to which he devoted the vast bulk of his attention) Comte concentrated on a historical series of examples, running from ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, through the Catholic Middle Ages and on to the modern history of Western Europe, up to the events of his own day and age.¹⁵

Comte's analysis of this historical succession of societies exemplifies the practice he had in mind when talking of "the Historical Method." He had explained during his methodological discussion that this practice involved an "historical comparison of the consecutive states of humanity," with each of the "consecutive social states" being analyzed "as the necessary result of the preceding, and the indispensable

¹⁴ Comte, *Positive Philosophy*, II: 86-87.

¹⁵ Comte's account of social evolution takes up much of the last two of the six volumes of the *Cours de Philosophie Positive*. In Martineau's two-volume condensation and translation it takes up pages 124-412 of the second volume. Of these pages, 124-50 present general views on "social dynamics; or, the theory of the natural progress of human society," 151-95 treat the beginnings of social evolution, and the bulk of the pages, 196-412, survey its later stages.

mover of the following.”¹⁶ In beginning his substantive account, he further explicated this practice. Comte now stressed that it should study the development over time of “a single social series,” and he identified the best series to study as the series that culminated in the “vanguard of the human race”—“the nations of Western Europe.” Comte also explicitly limited the scope of his historical analysis: it was to be “concerned only with social phenomena which have influenced, more or less, the gradual disclosure of the connected phases” leading up to the social state of contemporary Western Europe. In line with this limitation, he rejected out of hand the criticisms of those who might wish he would “mix up with the review such populations as those of India and China and others that have not aided the process of development.”¹⁷

The account that Comte constructed using his “Historical Method” was intended to be something more than a survey of how thousands of years of history culminated in the social state taking shape in the Western Europe of his day. Comte conceptualized the societies that he treated as examples of a series of general social types, and he believed that the historical order of their succession followed the natural order of social evolution. Comte’s approach here rested upon his belief in a common human nature, which he unpacked into two more specific premises. First, he contended that the “development of the human mind is uniform in the midst of all diversities of climate”; second, he held that “the progress of the race” could vary “only with regard to its speed, and without any reversal in the order of development or any interval of any importance being overleaped.”¹⁸ These two premises underlay his confident belief that he could infer the

¹⁶ Comte, *Positive Philosophy*, II: 87, 69.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, II: 151-52.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II: 86, 76-77.

ordering of social evolution as a general natural process from the chronological ordering of social types in the history of Western Europe and its Mediterranean antecedents.

Comte was well aware that such inferential reasoning could not stand apart from a theory of human nature. Indeed, his methodological vision of sociology called for the explicit articulation of a theory of human nature. This theory was to be independently based on biological evidence, and deductions from it were to provide a check on findings inductively drawn from use of “the Historical Method.” He summed up the envisioned methodological procedure as follows:

As the social phenomenon, taken as a whole, is simply a development of humanity, without any real creation of faculties, all social manifestations must be to be found, if only in their germ, in the primitive type that biology constructed by anticipation for sociology. Thus every law of social succession disclosed by the historical method must be unquestionably connected, directly or indirectly, with the positive theory of human nature; and all inductions that cannot stand this test will prove to be illusory, through some sort of insufficiency in the observations on which they are grounded. The main scientific strength of sociological demonstrations must ever lie in the accordance between the conclusions of historical analysis and the preparatory conceptions of the biological theory.¹⁹

As Comte formulated it, the key methodological procedure of evolutionary naturalistic sociology was thus to draw inductive findings about the natural course of social evolution from an analysis of historically consecutive social states, and to check these findings for their consistency with deductive inferences drawn from a “positive theory of human nature” grounded in biology.

It was Comte’s vision of this two-sided procedure that John Stuart Mill embraced as an era-making step in social science methodology. In his 1843 *System of Logic*, Mill presented the “Inverse Deductive, or Historical Method” as the methodological way

¹⁹ Ibid., II: 90-91.

forward in the scientific (which, for him, was necessarily naturalistic) study of social phenomena.²⁰ While he replaced Comte's advocacy of a theory of human nature rooted in biology with a preference for grounding such a theory in psychology, Mill otherwise carried over the substance of Comte's teaching about "the Historical Method" with a theory of human nature serving as a check. The substantive potential of this procedure was, for Mill, amply testified to by the account of social evolution presented in the *Cours*. When, some two decades later in 1865, Mill published an overall evaluation of Comte's oeuvre that aired sharp criticisms—particularly of the vision for a new political and social order offered in Comte's 1851-54 *Système de Politique Positive*—he still judged the account of social evolution in the earlier *Cours* so impressive as to declare:

We wish it were practicable in the compass of an essay like the present, to give even a faint comprehension of the extraordinary merits of this historical analysis. It must be read to be appreciated. Whoever disbelieves that the philosophy of history can be made a science, should suspend his judgment until he has read these volumes of M. Comte.²¹

²⁰ Mill, *System of Logic*, Book VI. When Mill, in his *Autobiography*, credited Comte as the inspiration for the idea of the "Inverse Deductive" method as presented in his *Logic*, he also gave a succinct statement of how this method contrasted with the "Deductive" method. Mill here explained that "the Inverse Deductive Method" differs "from the more common form of the Deductive Method in this—that instead of arriving at its conclusions by general reasoning, and verifying them by specific experience (as is the natural order in the deductive branches of physical science), it obtains its generalizations by a collation of specific experience, and verifies them by ascertaining whether they are such as would follow from known general principles." John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957; first published 1873), 135.

²¹ Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, 106.

Herbert Spencer: Intertwining Evolutionary Naturalism with Classical Liberalism

Methodological parallels between Comte and Spencer have led interpreters since the mid-nineteenth century to group them, and label both with the term “positivist” which Comte coined. I follow these prevailing norms in the former, but not in the latter respect. Spencer stridently objected to being labeled a positivist and his reasons for doing so are close enough to the concerns of my study to warrant attention. He worried that the label cast him as a disciple of Comte, thereby misrepresenting the fact that, beyond some minor matters—such as his adopting Comte’s term “sociology”—parallels between them reflected only a shared debt to “the doctrine and method elaborated by Science.” It was, Spencer emphasized, this “common heritage” that gave rise, for example, to their parallel belief in “invariable natural laws.”²² In choosing my concepts and framing my discussion I have sought to do credit to these concerns. I thus present Spencer as extending the naturalistic methodological tradition in ways sufficiently parallel to Comte to justify grouping them as twin exemplars of evolutionary naturalism, but sufficiently different enough that contrasts between them illuminate the scope of divergence within this current of the naturalistic tradition. In exploring these matters, I begin by stressing the divergence in political theory that helped set Spencer’s sociology substantively apart from that of his fellow evolutionary naturalist.

²² Herbert Spencer, “Reasons for Dissenting from the Philosophy of M. Comte,” in *Recent Discussions in Science, Philosophy, and Morals* (New York: Appleton, 1871), 116-20, 30. Spencer’s objection to classification as a positivist was taken up by some of his closest followers, such as the American John Fiske. See John Fiske, *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy, Based on the Doctrine of Evolution, with Criticisms on the Positive Philosophy*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1874), preface and chap. X.

Comte's Positive Polity vs. Spencer's Classical Liberalism

Methodological differences alone do not suffice to explain the stridency with which Spencer rejected the label positivist. Comte founded positivism as something much more than a philosophy of science. It also embraced an accompanying political theory. He saw his “positive philosophy” not only as laying the methodological foundation for the “positive science” of society (i.e. sociology), but also as pointing and leading the way to the “positive polity.” The forging of this new social and political order would, Comte taught, be the key feature of the next, culminating stage in social evolution. The positive polity would be characterized by the concentration of “spiritual power” in the hands of scientists (with artists as junior partners), and “temporal power” in the hands of bankers, merchants, and industrialists. There would be no need or role for the “transitory and inadequate” institutions of representative and constitutional government developed in England and foolishly admired by continental liberals. But there would be an essential role for sociology. The knowledge it developed was to guide the cooperative endeavors of the elites wielding the two powers as they shaped and guided society in its spiritual and temporal domains, so as, for example, to provide “security of Education and Employment” for all, and thereby, to lead society forward along a path combining “order” and “progress.”²³

Such envisioned endeavors were sharply at odds with the classical liberal political theory to which Spencer was wedded, and he responded to the divergence firmly. After identifying “M. Comte’s ideal of society” as “one in which *government* is developed to the greatest extent,” he set in contrast to it his classical liberal conviction

²³ Comte, *Positive Philosophy*, II: 386-412.

that the “form of society towards which we are progressing” was “one in which *government* will be reduced to the smallest amount possible, and *freedom* increased to the greatest amount possible.”²⁴ The reason Spencer objected so stridently to being labeled a positivist was thus, in large part, precisely because he understood the term as Comte had intended: that is, as denoting the endorsement, not only of an evolutionary naturalistic methodology in social inquiry, but also of the ideal of a technocratic government drawing on the resulting science of sociology to manage contemporary society and direct future social change.

Spencer could divorce evolutionary naturalism from this ideal and wed it to classical liberalism because he saw the relationship between sociology and progressive change differently than Comte. As an evolutionary naturalist Spencer, like Comte, charged sociology with developing consistent and cumulative knowledge of natural laws in the social domain. But he expected advances in this endeavor to produce compelling evidence that the complexity of societies is such that efforts consciously to shape the details of their current and future character produce unintended consequences, which are, on the whole, generally worse than the outcomes that occur in the absence of such efforts. Thus where Comte looked to sociology to guide an active technocratic government with broad powers and responsibilities, Spencer expected it to teach that such a government, no matter how well intentioned, hinders the march of progress. In Spencer’s hands sociology would buttress the classical liberal conviction that government’s role in modern societies should be limited to securing favorable conditions—the rule of law, stable property rights, and national security from external

²⁴ Spencer, “Reasons for Dissenting,” 128 (*italics in original*).

aggression being essential—under which social progress can, and will best, proceed on its own momentum. To the extent sociology promised to serve an immediate practical end it was, Spencer believed, principally as a potential corrective to calls for more extensive government action to address contemporary social evils:

Is it not possible, then—is it not even probable, that this supposed necessity for immediate action, which is put in as an excuse for drawing quick conclusions from few data, is the concomitant of deficient knowledge? Is it not probable that as in Biology so in Sociology, the accumulation of more facts, the more critical comparison of them, and the drawing of conclusions on scientific methods, will be accompanied by increasing doubts about the benefits to be secured, and increasing fear of the mischiefs which may be worked? . . . consciousness that in both cases the one thing needful is to maintain the conditions under which the natural actions have fair play? Such a consciousness, to be anticipated from increased knowledge, will diminish the force of this plea for prompt decision after little inquiry; since it will check the tendency to think of a remedial measure as one that may do good and cannot do harm. Nay more, the study of Sociology, scientifically carried on by tracing back proximate causes to remote ones, and tracing down primary effects to secondary and tertiary effects which multiply as they diffuse, will dissipate the current illusion that social evils admit of radical cures.²⁵

Spencer's Evolutionary Theory of Social Progress

Through half a century of sociological writings, Spencer consistently exemplified the intertwining of evolutionary naturalism with classical liberalism. But the substantive product of this combination changed over time. I schematize these changes by differentiating two periods in Spencer's sociological thought. First I explore the evolutionary theory of social progress that he forged in the 1850s-1860s during the political and intellectual heyday of Victorian liberalism. I then turn to the culminating formulation of his sociology as presented in his *Principles of Sociology*, published successively in multiple parts between the mid-1870s and the mid-1890s. Drawing on a

²⁵ Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (New York: Appleton, 1874), 21-22, see also 401-02.

key development in his methodology, and written in the changed—and to an aging Victorian classical liberal, the profoundly disillusioning—political context of the late-nineteenth century, this work introduced a more somber evolutionary naturalism. In a telling departure, not only from Comte but also from the first period of Spencer's own sociological thought, the once synonymous concepts of “evolution” and “progress” here began to come apart.

When Spencer first took up the legacies of the Enlightenment search for natural laws of social progress in the mid-nineteenth century, he reoriented this search, as had Comte, in light of biology, and especially of work in comparative anatomy. We thus again find in his writings an exemplar of naturalistic social inquiry pivoting around the concept of the social organism, and importing biological concepts such as “evolution” and “function.”²⁶ For example, when Spencer extended the stance of classical political economists who had put division of labor at the center of social progress, he remade their stance, as had Comte, by analogizing the division of labor to the physiological division of functions, which comparative anatomists argued marked the course of evolution in organisms.²⁷ In drawing on biological studies of evolution to illuminate the study of social progress, Spencer and Comte were, however, drawing on a body of work that was, we must remember, pre-Darwinian. Evolution was conceptualized here as a cumulative, progressive, step-by-step movement along a fixed developmental dimension. It would take decades after the 1859 publication of the *Origin of Species* before the devastating implications of Darwin's theory for this older conception of evolution were

²⁶ Herbert Spencer, "The Social Organism," in *On Social Evolution*, ed. J.D.Y. Peel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972; first published 1860), 53-70.

²⁷ For example, see Comte, *Positive Philosophy*, II, 115-22; Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: McKay, 1880; first published 1862), 291-92.

understood and accepted even among biologists. When we come across “evolution” in the sociology of Comte and Spencer we are always moving within parameters set by this pre-Darwinian conception of the direction of evolutionary change.²⁸

Spencer recognized Comte as the first thinker to “set forth with comparative definiteness, the connexion between the Science of Life and the Science of Society.”²⁹ But parallels between them here derived primarily from independent engagements with one of most prestigious natural sciences of the day. The independence of their views was evident in their adoption of opposing stances on points disputed among biologists at this time. Thus, while praising Comte’s general emphasis on the importance of biology for sociology, Spencer lamented his belief in “the fixity of species.” Spencer argued that Comte’s belief in this “dogma” kept “his conceptions of individual and social change within limits much too specific.” Favoring instead the “indefinite modifiability of species,” Spencer held this alternative stance to be “one of the cardinal truths which Biology yields to Sociology—a truth without which sociological interpretations must go wrong.”³⁰

As Spencer suggests, the contrast here went beyond favoring opposing stances in biology. Spencer and Comte’s views about the nature of species were connected, via their implications for human nature, with disagreement about how a naturalistic study of social change should proceed. A uniform human nature was presupposed by, and invoked as a source of checks upon, Comte’s endeavor to infer natural laws of social

²⁸ In emphasizing the incompatibility of Spencer’s conception of evolution with Darwinian theory, I follow Robert Bannister’s critical history of the debates around “social Darwinism.” Robert Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

²⁹ Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, 328-29.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 329.

evolution from the findings of his “Historical Method.” Disagreeing with the presupposition, and aware of its connection to the way Comte approached the study of social evolution, Spencer rejected both together. He argued that, from Comte’s belief in fixity of species,

Hence arose, among other erroneous pre-conceptions, this serious one, that the different forms of society presented by savage and civilized races all over the globe, are but different stages in the evolution of one form: the truth being, rather, that social types, like types of individual organisms, do not form a series, but are classifiable only in divergent and re-divergent groups.³¹

If Spencer rejected the foundational beliefs of Comte’s methodology for identifying the direction of social evolution, what alternative approach did he propose? Spencer understood the goal here in the same pre-Darwinian terms as Comte: to outline the contours of social evolution understood as a natural process cumulatively tracking a general direction. But he saw the task of specifying this direction as a philosophical one. It was, moreover, to be undertaken as part of an overarching philosophical endeavor to conceptualize evolution in terms sufficiently universal as to synthesize the naturalistic study of all phenomena: from the inorganic, to the organic, and the “super-organic” (i.e. social) domain.³² For Spencer, social evolution had to be rooted within this synthetic perspective if sociology was to be a “science, in the complete meaning of the word.”³³

³¹ Ibid.

³² Spencer pursued this philosophical endeavor in his *First Principles*. The first edition of the book was published in 1862, but substantial changes in the 1867 second edition makes that, and later editions, the best guide to the broad framework of Spencer’s “System of Synthetic Philosophy.”

³³ Spencer’s full claim is: “Only when it is seen that the transformations passed through during the growth, maturity, and decay of a society, conform to the same principles as do the transformations passed through by aggregates of all orders, inorganic and organic—only when it is seen that that the process is in all cases similarly determined by forces, and is not scientifically interpreted until it is expressed in terms of those forces;—only then is there reached the conception of Sociology as a science, in the complete meaning of the word.” Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, 329.

The overarching framework of Spencer's "Synthetic Philosophy" did however, by dint of its necessary abstraction,³⁴ leave considerable work to be done in identifying the concrete changes that instantiated evolution in specific substantive domains. In pursuing this work for the social domain, Spencer drew recurrently upon pre-Darwinian biologists' arguments about the direction of evolution in organisms—believing they illuminated social evolution via the parallels he saw between societies and organisms. Much of the concrete content in Spencer's specification of the direction of social evolution thus derived from analogical reasoning centered around these parallels. For Spencer, social evolution involved: 1) increasing societal size (i.e. more individuals in the society), accompanied by 2) increasing complexity of social organization (instantiated in an increasing differentiation of both "structures" and "functions" in society; one aspect of which was a growing division of labor), and 3) increasing mutual dependence between the increasingly differentiated parts of the "social organism."³⁵ While Comte had used the social organism analogy and imported biological concepts, Spencer took this line of thought much further. One result was that talk of "structure" and "function" pervaded his sociology. For example, when summing up "the nature of the Social Science" in his *Study of Sociology*, he declared:

Social organisms, like individual organisms, are to be arranged into classes and sub-classes . . . And just as Biology discovers certain general traits of development, structure, and function, holding throughout all organisms, others

³⁴ To give an idea of the abstraction involved let me quote one of Spencer's overarching formulations: "*Evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion: during which the matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent, homogeneity to a definite, coherent, heterogeneity; and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation.*" Spencer, *First Principles*, 334 (italics in original).

³⁵ For the development and refinement of this conception of the direction of social evolution see Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, 330-34; Spencer, *First Principles*; Herbert Spencer, "Progress: Its Law and Cause," in *Essays on Education, Etc.* (London: Dent & Sons, 1911; first published 1857), 153-97; Spencer, "Social Organism."

holding throughout certain great groups, others throughout certain sub-groups these contain; so Sociology has to recognize truths of social development, structure and function, that are some of them universal, some of the general, some of them special.³⁶

Besides specifying the *direction* of the social changes constitutive of “evolution” (at this point in his thought still conceptually interwoven with “progress”), Spencer also explicated the *dynamic* he saw giving rise to such changes. Comte had rooted social evolution in a natural propensity to progress that he saw as inherent in the human mind. External conditions might, however, hamper realization of this propensity, and it was to such conditions that Comte thought sociologists could look to explain why societies had reached very different stages of evolution. Spencer reversed the thrust of this argument. He did not see a propensity to progress inherent to human nature itself, and instead rooted the dynamics of change in the relation between societies and their environments. Rather than viewing this relationship as a source of potential hindrances slowing the working out of an innate tendency toward progress, he saw it as the taproot of all social change—including, but not limited to, change in the specific direction of evolution.

Spencer conceived of social change as produced by societies adapting, or failing to adapt, to a lack of “equilibrium” between themselves and their environment. While a society in steady equilibrium with its environment was a rarity, it was possible, and such a society might exhibit no tendency to qualitative change.³⁷ The thrust of Spencer’s

³⁶ Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, 59. In flagging Spencer’s concern with function, it is worth noting that, while he sees institutions (a.k.a. structures) arising to serve functions, he does not think they must persist in doing so. Rather, he holds that “the instinct of self-preservation in each institution soon becomes dominant over everything else; and maintains it when it performs some quite other function than that intended, or no function at all.” Ibid., 19.

³⁷ While Spencer’s conception of evolution in terms of changes in a specific *direction* stood in contrast to the view that took shape in the aftermath of Darwin, his account of the *dynamic* driving change was more parallel to Darwin’s theory. Spencer, like Darwin, saw population growth beyond the means available to support it as one key part of this dynamic. The label “Social Darwinism” is, nevertheless, still misleading.

thought here is evident in his prescient view of Japan in the 1860s, after its forced opening to the West, and before the Meiji Restoration:

The finished fabric into which its people had organized themselves maintained an almost constant state so long as it [Japan] was preserved from fresh external forces. But as soon as it received an impact from European civilization, partly by armed aggression, partly by commercial impulse, partly by the influence of ideas, this fabric began to fall to pieces. There is now in progress a political dissolution. Probably a political reorganization will follow.³⁸

As this example suggests, Spencer's conception of a society's environment encompassed not only its natural environment, but also other societies it interacted with. Such interactions had a key role in his account of evolutionary dynamics. These interactions often led to conflict, and it was under the pressure of waging war that some societies adapted to evolve more complex forms of organization, which helped them to prevail in cross-societal conflicts. Societies less successful in adapting were, by contrast, eliminated or subsumed by conquest. While many societies thus disappeared, those that remained were larger and more internally complex: hence human society, viewed in the aggregate, moved forward along the evolutionary scale.

This conflict mechanism was, for Spencer, a core dynamic of the earlier stages of social evolution. Though he believed it had ceased to play a progressive role in relation to the interactions of societies at the highest levels of evolution, he saw it still at play when those societies interacted with peoples at lower evolutionary stages. Suffering and violence were, Spencer taught, natural consequences of the European imperial expansion prominent in his day. Seen from his evolutionary naturalistic standpoint, this expansion

Spencer's account of these dynamics was developed before *Origin of Species* appeared. A more accurate portrait of intellectual links would situate Spencer and Darwin by noting that each independently extended a path previously blazed by the political economist Malthus.

³⁸ Spencer, *First Principles*, 438-39.

and its consequences appeared as the most recent example of a natural mechanism of conflictual cross-societal interaction at work throughout human history. That mechanism would, moreover, continue to recur until the whole globe came—through the elimination or conquest of less evolved peoples, or in some cases, their successful evolutionary adaptation in response to European pressures—under the control of societies of a relatively highly evolved type.³⁹

The darkness of Spencer's naturalistic account of the origins and spread of more evolved types of society was, however, decisively alleviated by his commitment to the old Enlightenment idea that progress would culminate in societies whose values and organization centered upon the peaceful pursuit of commerce and industry. Against the backdrop of the industrial revolution, the older concept of "commercial society" had been largely supplanted by the concept of "industrial society," but the basic optimistic narrative carried forward. For Spencer, and for Comte also, an epoch-making transition from "military" to "industrial" society was a crucial component of the naturalistic analysis of social change.⁴⁰

Military and Industrial Society: Parallels and Divergence between Spencer and Comte

How did the transition from military to industrial society relate to evolution? Up into the early 1870s, Spencer paralleled Comte in tying this transition to social evolution, indeed so much so as to make it an integral part of the process of evolution. Both saw the

³⁹ Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, 192-95; Herbert Spencer, "Selections from *Social Statics*," in *On Social Evolution*, ed. J.D.Y. Peel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972; first published 1851), 17-19, 21-22.

⁴⁰ For Comte's views on the military to industrial society transition as discussed in the next few paragraphs, see *Positive Philosophy*, 144-46, 183-89, 302-26, 375-78. For Spencer's views see *Study of Sociology*, 194-99.

impact of war in early stages of social evolution bringing about changes that paved the way for the rise of industry, and ultimately for the transition to industrial society. They emphasized the early spur to industry arising from military demands for arms and other products. Industry could, in turn, grow beyond such beginnings and reach a scale sufficient to be profitable in serving other demands if more extensive populations had been brought (or, usually more accurately, forced) into peaceful interaction. This came about largely as a result of societal expansion through war. The growth of industry required, moreover, a labor force as well as a market. But in the earlier stages of social evolution people were loath to engage in industrial work: the origin of disciplined labor had to be found, Comte and Spencer both suggested, in the enslavement of populations conquered in war.

While on this account industry could never have developed outside of a military society, it was also the case that as industry expanded and became more prosperous it came increasingly into conflict with the values and institutions of a society prioritizing war. There was a point in evolution beyond which the benefits industry accrued from war came to be outweighed by the costs it incurred. War destroyed men and material resources that could have been drawn into industrial development, and it sustained a social ethos that valued skill in war over skill in industry (originally the skill of the slave). The transition to an industrial society proper began when commercial and industrial leaders recognized the changed situation and set out to win sway over political institutions and reorient society away from war. As industrial society was brought into being on the domestic front this would, in turn, facilitate peaceful relations between

societies sufficiently evolved to have undergone this domestic transition. The final stage of evolution was thus to be a golden age of industrial prosperity and international peace.

The agreement of Comte and Spencer on broad outlines of the transition from military to industrial society was accompanied, however, by divergence in their more detailed views of the internal workings of this emergent new social type. Each of them read into it the aspirations of their own political theory. For Comte, economic and sundry other forms of competition were a pathological legacy of earlier stages of social evolution and were, as such, to be superseded. He saw a fully developed industrial society—exemplified in his vision of the “positive polity”—as transcending competition in politics, economics, and indeed, all domains. Its central features were cooperative coordination among elites drawing on sociology to manage and direct society and its development, and the promulgation by these elites of a new “religion of humanity” that would win and sustain popular support for this order. This vision had, as its utopian linchpin, Comte’s conception of society as a compound whole with a common interest that could and would be consciously grasped and acted upon by elites. This was a central element of the analogy of the social organism as he deployed it: just as the most highly evolved organic bodies had developed conscious brains that determined their interests and coordinated their internal bodily functions, so would society, as it evolved toward the highest stage, develop the intellectual and political equivalent of such a brain. Tellingly Spencer explicitly rejected any such equivalence when he treated the social organism in his own sociological writings.

Comte’s political theory of technocratic corporatism was, we noted earlier, at odds with Spencer’s classical liberalism. Just as Comte offered a sociological view of

the highest stage of social evolution that accorded with his political theory, so did Spencer. In line with his classical liberal commitments, Spencer interpreted the transition from a military to an industrial society in terms of a shift from one mode of competition to another. Predatory competition giving victory to the stronger was to be supplanted by (or perhaps sublimated into) peaceful competition among independent organizations in all spheres of society. Where Comte believed the common good in a large and complex industrial society would be best served by cooperative coordination among elites, Spencer expounded the beneficence of open competition. This classical liberal vision had, as its own utopian linchpin, the belief that economic and political competition could proceed as independent activities—with political organizations not looking to the resources of industrial organizations to gain advantages in their competition, and industrial organizations, in turn, not looking to political organizations to give them economic advantages via the use of state power.

The Principles of Sociology: A New Spencer?

The evolutionary theory of social progress that Spencer had forged in the heady days of mid-century Victorian liberalism thus wound its way towards a utopian moment. In doing so it paralleled Comte's theory. Even as these proto-sociologists' views of the details of the imminent industrial society differed in line with the conflict between Comte's corporatism and Spencer's classical liberalism, their theories displayed parallels of form that echoed Enlightenment-era pursuits of a theory of progress. Evolutionary naturalism was not, however, inextricably bound to this legacy. It could move beyond it to the extent that the concept of "evolution" came apart from the concept of "progress,"

for which it had initially been introduced as a synonym. Departure along these lines is one trajectory found in the late-nineteenth century. A pioneering, if ultimately partial, such move was taken by Spencer in his late work, *The Principles of Sociology*, published in successive parts between 1876 and 1896.

There had been shifts in Spencer's treatment of social change during the first period of his sociological thought. The talk of "progress" predominant in his works in the early 1850s had, for example, steadily given way to talk of "evolution." But this shift had not been accompanied by any qualitative reorientation in the structure of his thought—both terms labeled change along the same general dimension. In the 1870s, however, Spencer did move away from this essentially unilinear way of conceptualizing social change. Crystallized in the first volume of *The Principles of Sociology*, this departure marks the mature period of Spencer's sociological thought.⁴¹ In this 1876 work Spencer pulled the military vs. industrial contrast apart from social evolution to make each a conceptually independent dimension in a two-dimensional classification of social types.

What were the ramifications of this reorientation? Most obviously, the import of the military vs. industrial contrast was heightened by its elevation into an independent dimension of sociological inquiry. Separating this dimension from social evolution also had the effect of concentrating the evaluative moment within Spencer's sociology. In its new role, the military vs. industrial contrast was still, perhaps even more, infused with classical liberal commitments. In the *Principles*, Spencer thus conceptualized industrial society as a social type emphasizing voluntary rather than compulsory cooperation, in

⁴¹ In summing up the reorientation of Spencer's thought and its ramifications in this and the next two paragraphs, I draw on Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, 3 vols. (New York: Appleton, 1898), I: 549-97.

which political power was democratic or representative rather than despotic, and limited rather than unlimited in its control over personal conduct. Attachment of these valued traits to a sociological dimension now set apart from social evolution entailed, however, shifts in the concept of social evolution: it became more focused on core components of social size and complexity, and thereby lost some of the evaluative weight it accrued in earlier work from its interweaving with the military vs. industrial contrast.

The two-dimensional sociological vision opened up new options in Spencer's thought. It offered a conceptual framework in which he could, for example, engage the fact that traits of military society were common in contemporary societies whose size and complexity placed them at a high level of evolution. Moreover, breaking down the once integral connection between military-to-industrial transition and the forward march of evolution freed Spencer to see evolutionary advance as potentially combinable, depending on conditions, with movement either way along the military/industrial society dimension. Because Spencer retained a classical liberal concept of progress centered on advance toward industrial society, the result here was the opening of a new gap, albeit a partial one, between "evolution" and "progress." I will return to these issues in closing this discussion, but first I inquire into the methodological and theoretical departures that gave shape to the reorientation of Spencer's sociological thought.

We may begin to address the sources of this reorientation by asking how Spencer himself saw the relationship between *The Principles of Sociology* and his previous work. Spencer viewed the *Principles* as the culmination of his sociology—related to his earlier work, but also differentiated by a methodological aspiration intended to advance his sociology to a new, more scientific level. Where he earlier forged his sociological views

via analogical and deductive reasoning illustrated by scattered examples, Spencer saw the *Principles* as testing, revising, and refining those views on a new inductive basis. In contrast to Comte, who had based his use of induction on a limited number of societies consciously selected with attention to their historical interconnection or independence,⁴² Spencer aspired to draw upon information about as many geographically and typologically diverse societies as possible.

To appreciate the character of Spencer's methodological aspiration we must attend to a research project he set up as a preliminary to his culminating sociological work. In 1867 he had organized a team of three assistants to collect sociological facts about as many societies, past and present, as possible, and to arrange and summarize the findings in tables based on a classification scheme he devised. While this project was begun to aid his own work, Spencer decided its results should also be published: between 1873 and 1881 eight folio volumes thus successively appeared under the title of *Descriptive Sociology*.⁴³

⁴² As we saw earlier, in practicing his "Historical Method" Comte compared societies historically connected as successive parts of a single social series. In contrast, his "Comparative Method," which he explicated but practiced little, compared co-existing societies that were independent of one another. The common methodological trait here is his effort to secure inferential quality by considering in which of two distinctive ways comparison is practiced and selecting societies to study that satisfy the specific premises of the practice used.

⁴³ Herbert Spencer, *Descriptive Sociology; or, Groups of Sociological Facts, Classified and Arranged by Herbert Spencer*, 8 vols. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1873-81). The work of the project was divided between three divisions—1) Uncivilized Societies; 2) Civilized Societies—Extinct or Decayed; 3) Civilized Societies—Recent or Still Flourishing. Division 1 was largely completed in four volumes surveying African, Asian, and Native American "races." But only limited headway was made on the other divisions. In Division 2 volumes appeared on the ancient Hebrews and Phoenicians and on civilizations in Central and South America prior to European arrival. In Division 3 volumes were published on France and England. The project was suspended in 1881 after publication of these eight volumes because its expenses exceeded Spencer's means to support it. At his death in 1903, Spencer left money to revive the project, but while three further volumes did appear (Division 2 volumes on the Hellenic Greeks and Ancient Egyptians; and one in Division 3 on China), the project was never completed on the scale initially planned.

The *Descriptive Sociology* project bears remembering as a pioneering example of the endeavors, prominent within naturalistic comparative social science in the twentieth-century, to collect data covering a wide variety of societies and make it available to all scholars as a basis for inductive inquiry. As in such later endeavors, Spencer saw the “data” his team assembled as a neutral set of facts to be used in developing and testing “hypotheses.” He thus explained in the preface to *Descriptive Sociology* that its volumes deliberately did not put forward “hypotheses,” but simply presented “the facts collected and arranged for easy reference and convenient study of their relations” so as “to aid all students of Social Science in testing such conclusions as they have drawn and in drawing others.” While this pioneering project predated the statistical tools of correlational analysis, the basic methodological standpoint underlying such analysis was already surprisingly well articulated here. In explicating the great significance he ascribed to the project, Spencer declared: “before there can be reached in Sociology, generalizations having a certainty making them worthy to be called scientific, there must be definite accounts of the institutions and actions of societies of various types, and in various stages of evolution, so arranged as to furnish the means of readily ascertaining what social phenomena are habitually associated.”⁴⁴

To what extent did the *Descriptive Sociology* shape views presented in *The Principles of Sociology*? Spencer himself saw it as crucial. Looking back on his own intellectual development late in life, he recalled the project as having recurrently led him

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1: Preface. Spencer would explicitly talk of “correlations” when reiterating this standpoint in 1879 in the Preface to Part IV of the *Principles*. See Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 2: vi.

to revise his views.⁴⁵ Since the vast majority of societies surveyed by the project were in its division of “uncivilized societies,” it seems safest to credit Spencer’s self-narrative in this area. The treatment of such societies was, in general, much more nuanced and sympathetic in the *Principles* than in earlier work. Of particular interest for our purposes, Spencer now emphasized that, rather than being universally warlike, a significant number of simple societies were profoundly peaceful. Moreover, he noted that, when peaceful, such societies also tended to be characterized by voluntary cooperation and democratic forms of government. This finding provided one major impetus for the reorientation of Spencer’s sociological thought. That reorientation was necessary if he was, as he did, to treat these societies as examples of the “industrial” type, despite their primitive level on an evolutionary scale. This treatment also entailed a refiguring of the concept of industrial society itself: by now singling out voluntary cooperation as its core characteristic Spencer opened his way to identifying societies lacking industry (in the sense usually given to that term) as examples of this social type.⁴⁶

The motivations favoring the reorientation of Spencer’s sociological thought in the mid-1870s extended, however, beyond those arising from his inductive methodological aspiration. This reorientation was also promoted by a change in his political theory. The form of Spencer’s earlier sociological thought had crystallized

⁴⁵ Herbert Spencer, “The Filiation of Ideas,” in *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, ed. David Duncan (New York: Appleton, 1908), 351-62.

⁴⁶ Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, I: Part II, Chap. X. Spencer’s use of certain simple societies as a key empirical reference point for a conception of industrial society centering upon voluntary cooperation (rather than “industry” as usually construed) was further developed in the second volume of the *Principles*. See Chap. XVIII of Part V.

around 1850 during the years he worked as a sub-editor at *The Economist*.⁴⁷ At that time he had confidently seen the rising tide of liberal politics, as exemplified in the recent success of the popular movement to repeal the Corn Laws, bringing Britain toward his social ideal. However this confidence had waned when subsequent trends—as seen in the declining political popularity of Richard Cobden and his “Manchester liberalism”—moved in directions at odds with Spencer’s strident *laissez-faire* classical liberalism. As he found himself increasingly out of sync with contemporary politics, Spencer’s earlier optimism about the promise of the present and near future had given way to a critical, even caustic, outlook upon current events. The disillusioned political theoretical stance he developed would receive its most widely read expression in the polemical essays of his 1884 *The Man versus The State*.⁴⁸ But the crystallization of this disillusioned stance dated to the 1870s. It was not only contemporary with, but had also helped to motivate and shape, the reorientation of Spencer’s sociological vision.

The connections here are well displayed in the 1876 opening volume of *The Principles of Sociology*. After Spencer introduced his sociological typology in which the military vs. industrial contrast stood apart as a separate dimension, he turned in his next chapter to consider the “social metamorphoses” involved when societies moved position within his two-dimensional typological space. Because the integral connection between military-to-industrial transition and evolutionary advance, found in his earlier writings,

⁴⁷ In concluding his discussion of his years at *The Economist* (1848-53) in his autobiography Spencer declared: “In short, I think I may say that the character of my later career was mainly determined by the conceptions which were initiated, and the friendships which were formed, between the times at which my connexion with *The Economist* began and ended.” Herbert Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2 vols. (New York: Appleton, 1904), 1: 491.

⁴⁸ Herbert Spencer, *The Man Versus the State, with Six Essays on Government, Society, and Freedom* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1992; first published 1884).

was broken in the new typology, there were multiple forms these metamorphoses could in principle take. But Spencer's attention was notably focused. What interested him were "transformations of the militant into the industrial and the industrial into the militant," and, most specifically, how an industrial society "retrogrades towards the militant type."⁴⁹ Spencer's political disillusionment had already led him by 1871 to begin interpreting recent events in highly evolved societies in terms of such retrogression.⁵⁰ While that interpretation was hard to square with his sociological vision as it had developed since the early 1850s, the incipient disjuncture was resolved in the mid-1870s by the reorientation exemplified in the two-dimensional vision of the *Principles*.

Much of Spencer's discussion of social metamorphoses was devoted to a critical analysis of British political trends. He charged that the Liberal party had lost its way. Where it had once promoted "individual liberty" by "abolishing religious disabilities, establishing free-trade, removing impediments from the press, etc." it now "vied with the opposite party in multiplying State-administrations which diminish individual liberty." Liberal party politicians had forgotten that "in essence Liberalism stands for the freedom of the individual *versus* control of the State."⁵¹ While suffused with disillusionment, Spencer's discussion here involved more than mere caustic carping; in analyzing British political trends he used and expounded his reoriented sociological vision. He interpreted these trends as signs of a general type of social metamorphosis—reversion from traits of industrial society to those of a military society—that he saw currently developing in parallel in Britain and on the European continent. The "changes of late undergone by our

⁴⁹ Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1: 579.

⁵⁰ See the 1871 essay "Specialized Administration" included in Liberty Fund's edition of *The Man Versus the State*.

⁵¹ Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1: 585 (italics in original).

own society” were, Spencer thus proposed to his British readers, “kindred” to contemporary changes seen, for example, in Bismarck’s Germany.⁵²

In interpreting changes in Britain and Europe in this way Spencer was doing more than scoring polemical points: he was setting up a naturalistic explanation of those changes. Spencer held it to be a general sociological truth—established both by reasoning from the analogy of the social organism, and by induction from many examples of societies at all levels of evolution—that military conflict, and preparation for conflict, always promote in domestic affairs the kind of government compulsion characteristic of the military social type. The contemporary reversion toward this type was, as such, explained by Spencer as a natural consequence of the revival of international antagonisms that followed the breakdown in the 1850s of the long continental peace that had lasted since the close of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815.

In sociological terms the intent of Spencer’s analysis of British politics was to show this relationship between international and domestic affairs playing itself out in his (and many of his readers’) own country. Looking back over the past six decades of British politics, he contended:

if we contrast the period from 1815 to 1850 with the period from 1850 to the present time, we cannot fail to see that along with increased armaments, more frequent conflicts, and revived military sentiment, there has been a spread of compulsory regulations. While nominally extended by the giving of votes, the freedom of the individual has been in many ways actually diminished; both by restrictions which ever-multiplying officials are appointed to insist on, and by the forcible taking of money to secure for him, or others at his expense, benefits previously left to be secured by each for himself. And undeniably this is a return towards that coercive discipline which pervades the whole social life where the militant type is predominant.⁵³

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1: 580.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1: 587.

Spencer would develop this line of argument further as one example within the extended study of political institutions published in 1882 as Part V of the *Principles*. He there pushed his argument further back in time; singling out 1775-1815 as an earlier era of retrogression toward the military type associated with international conflict, and following this association through centuries of English history marked by the periodic ebb and flow of progress toward the industrial type.⁵⁴

Spencer's treatment of English history highlights the role that a belief in liberal progress continued to play in his later sociological work. His schema of periodic shifts between progress and retrogression provided backdrop to his belief that the current trend toward military society would, as such trends had in the past, turn around at some point. With a decline in international antagonisms, the way would open for renewed progress toward the ideal of industrial society. Hence, while the reorientation of his sociological vision gave Spencer a standpoint from which he critically interpreted the present, he contained his disillusionment within certain bounds. The leading tones of *The Principles of Sociology* were indeed disillusioned realism and criticism, and these became more pronounced over the two decades that Spencer worked on the book. But even as the gloom in his analysis of the present continued to deepen as events in the 1880s and 1890s marched ever further down paths at odds with his ideals, Spencer held to his belief that a return towards classical liberal progress would come at some point in the future.

The sparks of liberal hope that broke through when Spencer stepped back from his own day were especially startling because he asserted that renewed classical liberal progress not only could happen, but *would* happen. At the close of his sociological

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2: 620-28, 32-37.

writings he still saw the course of the future as, in its broadest outlines, inferable from the course of past change. Reorientation of his sociology in the 1870s had given him a new ability to engage ebbs and flows within human history. But this engagement was pursued alongside a continued belief that an underlying natural process of evolution was inexorably working itself out in the course of history as seen at its most overarching level. While the reorientation freed up Spencer's classical liberal concept of progress, and his naturalistic concept of evolution, to part ways in his sociological analyses of specific times and places—above all the present and near future—it had not fully separated them. The gap between them was contingent upon inter-societal military conflicts, which Spencer held would necessarily disappear before the highest evolutionary level was reached. That level would be attained only after a final securing of international peace; and that peace would entail the end of military society and full realization of industrial society. The ultimate endpoints of classical liberal “progress” and of “evolution” were still one and the same. *The Principles of Sociology* deferred this endpoint into a distant future, but the necessity of its eventual realization remained a core premise. Spencer could close the 1896 final volume of his culminating sociological work by quoting views he had advanced almost fifty years earlier in his *Social Statics* because he still believed, almost despite himself, in a classical liberal end of history.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ibid., 3: 608-11.

**CHAPTER TWO. THE EUROPEAN HISTORICIST TRADITION:
FURTHER VARIETIES OF SCIENTIFIC METHOD AND LIBERALISM**

In turning to the historicist tradition we face a situation parallel to the one we engaged in taking up the naturalistic tradition. The historicist tradition, like the naturalistic tradition, underwent a methodological reorientation in the early-to-mid nineteenth century. But before we can explore this change—and the rising tide of “scientific methods” it spurred—we must have a sense of what historicism was prior to this transformation. In the first half of this chapter I give a broad introduction to the historicist tradition and an overview of tendencies introduced during its methodological remaking. In the second half of the chapter I explore how the rising concern with method intertwined with liberal theoretical visions in the work of the three historicist scholars with the most direct influence on the American science of politics: Johann Bluntschli, Henry Maine, and Edward Freeman.

The Historicist Tradition: Its Emergence, Character, and Transformation

Historicism is often principally associated with German scholarship. This association is correct with regard to historicism’s methodological remaking. That transformation was largely pioneered in the departures and debates of German scholars in the 1810s-1830s; above all at the University of Berlin, founded in 1810 and the archetype of the modern research university. But while the intellectual currents radiating out from the German academy during the decades after the Napoleonic Wars reoriented the methodological consciousness of historicism, the tradition itself was not specifically German in origin or reach. The emergence and crystallization of historicism during the

eighteenth century had been a Europe-wide intellectual phenomenon. Students of this development diverge in how and where they draw a line between precursors and full-fledged historicists, but they give one or the other role to the Italian Giambattista Vico, French Baron de Montesquieu, and English Edmund Burke, alongside the German Johann Gottfried Herder.¹

What marked off historicism as a distinctive outlook emerging against the backdrop of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment(s)? Historicism was interwoven with the same growing interest in qualitative social change whose impact on Enlightenment naturalism we earlier stressed. Its emergence took place, however, at just those points in eighteenth-century thought where the comparative and historical studies spurred by this growing interest overflowed the channels of Enlightenment naturalism. It was, for example, most evident in Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* at moments when the French aristocrat's thoughts and attachments carried his inquiries beyond the ordering framework of Natural Law and general regime types laid out at the beginning of his classic work.

The most extended such moment came at the end of *The Spirit of the Laws*. In Books 28, 30, and 31, Montesquieu pursued a comparative and historical study of the laws and institutions of the Germanic tribes who conquered the Western Roman Empire. He explored how the development of these laws and institutions over multiple centuries

¹ The classic study is Meinecke's *Die Entstehung des Historismus*. Friedrich Meinecke, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*, trans. J. E. Anderson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972). In my study I diverge from Meinecke's treatment of the move from precursors to full-fledged historicism as a specifically German contribution (and the emphasis on the irrational and power politics this brings to the fore of his conception of "historicism"). But Meinecke's treatment of the eighteenth-century Italian, French, and British thinkers he deals with is magisterial, and the major influence on the sketch I give here. His insights into the specific character of historicism in Germany would, moreover, also be a key reference point if I were to refine my general European survey by differentiating national varieties of historicism.

gave rise to the feudal system, and to the monarchy and nobility of France. In studying this development, Montesquieu exhibited two leading methodological traits of an emergent historicism. First, he approached this historical development as something exceptional. It was, he believed, “an event which happened once in the world and which will perhaps never happen again.”² He hence made no effort to treat it as an example of any of the general processes of rise and corruption associated with the regime types he had earlier introduced. Secondly, Montesquieu approached this historical development with an openness, and even sympathy, which stood out starkly against the backdrop of those Enlightenment intellectuals, such as Voltaire, who viewed the Middle Ages as an era of barbaric abuses and religious superstition with few, if any, redeeming features or legacies.³

In combining an emphasis on exceptionalism with sympathetic engagement, and in applying this approach to a long historical line of institutional development, the study with which Montesquieu closed *The Spirit of the Laws* exuded an emergent historicism. But this was just one moment in a labyrinthine work, which, at other times, prominently exemplified the possibilities of naturalism. A blend of approaches along these lines was, however, characteristic of proto-historicist works. It was, in turn, the fading away of this blend that marked the move from an emergent historicism toward its crystallization as a distinct methodological tradition. Such a freestanding historicism would be exemplified

² Charles de Secondat baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. Basia Miller Anne Cohler, and Harold Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; originally published in French in 1748), 619.

³ The attitude taken toward the Middle Ages by Montesquieu in the historical study that concluded his classic work had been foreshadowed earlier in the work when, in his admiring discussion of the English constitution in Book 11, he famously suggested, with reference to the Germanic conquerors: “the English have taken their idea of political government from the Germans. This fine system was found in the forests.” *Ibid.*, 166.

toward the end of the eighteenth century in Burke's thought. Its rise as a broader European tradition is closely interwoven with the epoch of the French Revolution, and more specifically, with the intellectual turn away from early modern Natural Law theories that accompanied the tide of reaction which rose as the Revolution entered its more radical phases and war began between France and the other great powers.

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic decades thus mark a watershed in the history of historicism. By the time the wars of this era ended in 1815 the methodological transformation of the tradition was already under way at the young University of Berlin. But before considering the departures and debates among German academics, I round out my general introduction of historicism by engaging with the French liberal politician and historian, François Guizot. In singling out Guizot I have several goals in mind. First, I want to explore further traits of historicism that I flagged in discussing Montesquieu. By using a second French figure to pursue this goal I am, moreover, seeking to counter tendencies to see Germany as the home of "true" historicism. To the that extent Guizot's approach stood apart from that of his German contemporaries of the early- to mid-nineteenth century, this was not because it was less historicist, but because it was largely unmarked by the methodological reorientation brewing in Berlin. His approach thus offers a point of comparison against which to identify what that transformation involved. Finally, while these methodological issues are my main concern in treating Guizot, I have a political theoretical concern also. With Guizot we are introduced to a classical liberalism of a significantly different tenor from Spencer's: a liberalism infused with Whiggish reverence for England's political institutions (Guizot followed Montesquieu's

and Burke's lead here), rather than the provincial English radicalism out of which Spencer and "Manchester liberalism" arose.

Guizot and the Study of European History

François Guizot was both a historian and a politician, with one role or the other coming to the fore in accord with the ebb and flow of liberalism within French politics. Appointed as a professor of history at the Sorbonne in 1812, Guizot entered political life in 1814 following the downfall of Napoleon. After holding some significant offices in the late 1810s, he resigned from the government in 1820 when the tenuous balance between liberal and reactionary forces under the restored Bourbon monarchy tipped in favor of reaction. As Guizot's political career faded, he poured himself into scholarship. During the 1820s he published books on French, English, and general European history, as well as preparing for the press over fifty volumes of French and English primary historical documents. His scholarly production slowed dramatically, however, after the 1830 revolution ended Bourbon rule. Under the new constitutional monarchy of Louis Philippe, Guizot's political fortunes rose again; he would play a prominent role within the liberal governments that ruled France until the 1848 revolution. It was, indeed, Guizot whose call to the French middle-classes to "*Enrichissez-vous*" has, fairly or not, been remembered by posterity as a defining phrase of the 1830-48 liberal regime.

Analyzing the details of Guizot's political activities is a task I happily leave to others; it is his scholarship that occupies the center of my attention. Of his prodigious output during the 1820s, the work most important to Guizot's intellectual reputation was his *General History of Civilization in Modern Europe*. First delivered in 1828 as an

acclaimed lecture series at the Sorbonne (the audience included an admiring Alexis de Tocqueville, and his soon-to-be travel companion to America, Gustave de Beaumont), the lectures became, when published, a popular and influential book that exemplified common characteristics of historicism as a broad European tradition. These can be brought into relief by contrasting Guizot's approach with the naturalistic approach that his fellow countryman, Comte, soon thereafter applied to the history of civilization in Europe when using the sociological "Historical Method" in the *Cours de Philosophie Positive*. On display here were two alternative views of how comparative inquiry with a wide historical scope could proceed, and the kind of knowledge it should aspire toward.

As a starting point for this contrast, we may note a comment of Comte's that no historicist would ever make. When reflecting on the character of his "Historical Method" as he began his substantive historical survey, Comte stated that, but for the sake of clear exposition, he would give an "essentially abstract" account. Such an account would, he explained, "be history without the names of men, or even of nations."⁴ Comte's claim reflected the naturalistic beliefs that underwrote his sociology. Comte believed that, as a science, sociology must aspire to discover natural laws; that such laws, as natural laws, apply across time and place; and that the action of these laws is hence evident in the history of all societies. In talking of an "abstract" account of the history that led up to contemporary Western Europe, Comte imagined a presentation of this history in terms to which sociology must, on his account, aspire. To interpret particular historical changes

⁴ Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, trans. Harriet Martineau, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London: Trübner, 1875), II: 153.

in conceptually abstract terms was a critical step if those changes were to be seen as embodying the operation of invariable natural laws.⁵

Where Comte approached the history of European civilization as embodying a natural process at work in all societies, Guizot emphasized the exceptionalism of European civilization as it had developed since the fall of Rome. This civilization was, he held, qualitatively different from all other civilizations found in world history, “whether in Asia or elsewhere, including even those of Greece and Rome.” It was set apart by a continual struggle between multiple “principles of social organization,” associated with a plurality of social classes and groups, none of which ever entirely managed “to master the others.” This variety was created by the mixing of peoples, ideas, and institutions that resulted from the barbarian conquest of Western Europe. The dynamic interplay among these elements through many centuries had, Guizot contended, given “European civilization its real, its immense superiority.”⁶

For the liberal Guizot this “immense superiority” of European civilization was registered, above all, in liberty of thought and constitutional representative government, which he saw as the most valuable achievements of recent centuries. He approached these achievements as the culmination of the path of development onto which Europe had been directed by the barbarian conquest. The Germanic barbarians had brought a critical new element—“the love of individual liberty”—into European history. Glancing

⁵ An aspiration to subsume the events of human history under the operation of nature and its invariable laws was, of course, just as important for Spencer’s vision of sociology as for Comte’s. Expressing this aspiration with vigor, Spencer declared at one point that: “the highest office which a historian can discharge, is that of so narrating the lives of nations, as to furnish material for a Comparative Sociology; and for the subsequent determination of the ultimate laws to which social phenomena conform.” Herbert Spencer, “What Knowledge Is of Most Worth?,” in *Essays on Education, Etc.* (London: Dent & Sons, 1911; first published 1859), 29.

⁶ François Guizot, *General History of Civilization in Modern Europe, from the Fall of the Roman Empire to the French Revolution*, ed. George Wells Knight (New York: D. Appleton, 1896), 26-33.

briefly back to the ancient Greeks and Romans, Guizot declared that they had known liberty only as “political liberty,” and not as “personal liberty.” Guizot here wedded a belief (following in the legacy of Montesquieu) in the valuable legacy of the Germanic barbarians with a contrast between ancient and modern Europe that paralleled, perhaps even echoed, the 1819 lecture of senior French liberal politician-intellectual Benjamin Constant.⁷ In its substantive *content* Guizot’s work exemplified a leading political thrust of French liberalism, which advocated combining a representative parliament with a constitutional monarch.⁸ But, in its *form*, his work—above all, its equation of a search for the “essential” character of European civilization with a search for the “distinctive” character of that civilization—exemplified the broader historicist tradition, which could as easily be turned to conservative as to liberal ends.

All studies in this tradition were concerned with the historical individuality of their objects of study. But this did not require treating these objects as exceptional in every respect. Before taking up the question of what made modern European civilization distinctive, Guizot first asked what “civilization in general” consists in: on his account, “the progress of society” *and* “the progress of individuals.”⁹ While we can imagine variants of historicism which automatically reject any such engagement with a general concept, that kind of rejection is only a possible, not a necessary, characteristic of

⁷ *Ibid.*, 57-58. Cf. Benjamin Constant, “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with That of the Moderns,” in *Political Writings*, ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Comte perhaps had Guizot in mind when he complained that historians gave a “far too accidental character” to European society in the Middle Ages “by exaggerating the influence of the Germanic invasions.” Comte, *Positive Philosophy*, II: 231-32.

⁸ Guizot’s commitment to constitutional monarchy gives his classical liberalism a rather different political content and tenor from Spencer’s. The radical flavor of Spencer’s political thought is evident, for example, in his belief that hereditary monarchy was an institutional hang-over from “militant society” that must, at some point, in the future course of liberal progress give way to an elected head of state. Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, 3 vols. (New York: Appleton, 1898), II: 653.

⁹ Guizot, *Civilization in Europe*, Lecture 1.

historicism. What is to be noted here is that Guizot's opening reflections on civilization as a general phenomenon involved none of Comte's appeal to, or aspiration toward, natural laws. Moreover, in the context of his book as a whole, they served principally to introduce and focus his interest in European exceptionalism. After an introductory lecture on "Civilization in General," Guizot devoted his pivotal second lecture to "European Civilization in Particular: Its Distinguishing Characteristics—Its Superiority—Its Elements." He then spent the entire rest of his fourteen lectures on a synthetic survey of European history, from the fall of Rome to the French Revolution. This survey gave historical content to his core thesis about the pluralism of social principles and classes, and its beneficent consequences.

In presenting a "general history" that elaborated the distinctiveness of modern European civilization, Guizot approached that civilization as a concrete historical whole with a discernible unity. It had general characteristics rooted in shared inheritances and experiences, and ongoing interactions and influences across its parts. But its unity was a complex one that did not rest in or entail uniformity in its parts. Guizot stressed (and indeed celebrated) the emergence, between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, of the sense of distinctive nationality: in various regions of Europe, diverse social classes who had long lived alongside one another came to see themselves as together constituting a political/cultural unit, a nation with a common interest and character that transcended and united them. The parallel emergence of nationality in different locations was a general movement within the historical development of European civilization considered as a whole. But the nations that emerged were themselves also concrete historical

wholes, each of which could itself be the object of historicist inquiry engaging it as a distinctive individuality.

There was, as such, historical variety to be explored within the broader historical unity of Europe. Beside the general history of Europe we have been exploring, Guizot in the 1820s also wrote national-level histories focused on England and France. The pairing of these two kinds of studies points us toward the range of work pursued within the historicist tradition. Intellectuals in this tradition did not all stress national individuality to the same extent, and few, if any, pushed national exceptionalism to the point of eliminating any interest in a nation's participation in the general movement of European history. In the aggregate, what historicism promoted was a vision of embedded exceptionalisms. It elaborated upon (and celebrated) the individuality of nations as historically emergent unities situated within the ongoing development of a European civilization that had its own unity and individuality. The basic two-level structure of this vision was, in turn, refined by studies pitched below, between, or above, national and European levels. The vision of embedded exceptionalisms could encompass a role for everything, from detailed studies of local history, to the pursuit of a "universal history" that would situate the "general history" of Europe as a sub-movement (albeit the most important one) within the overall march of human history.

A synthetic aspiration thus held out the promise of integrating the historicist tradition. It would continue to do so until the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, when it began to lose its sway among historicist scholars across multiple countries (in

Germany, it faced a direct philosophical challenge in the “crises” of historicism).¹⁰ In Chapters Three and Four I will attend to this transition and its consequences as seen in American scholarship. But my present concern is to sum up the synthetic aspiration in nineteenth-century historicism. That aspiration was interwoven with a developmental orientation, and we can hence distinguish the historicism it infused from later intellectual currents by naming it “developmental historicism.” Developmental historicists did not all share in the tendency to equate development with progress prominent in Guizot’s work. But all focused on past events as these drew upon, extended, and reshaped broad developments seen as giving history overarching structure and direction. The synthetic aspiration of developmental historicism was guided by—and, indeed, depended for its very plausibility upon—a selective approach to the past; events that did not participate in developmental movements were not part of “history,” properly conceived.

Perhaps the most illuminating question we can ask of developmental historicists is: the development of what? Answers to this question varied within nineteenth-century historicism, but certain answers were especially significant for the tradition as a whole. We have already encountered two such answers in Guizot: civilizations and nations. These played a core role as historically emergent, concrete, and complex unities around which developmental historicist studies could center. But they were not alone sufficient. It was also necessary to specify what developed during the development of a civilization and/or a nation. Returning to Guizot’s work, we find the lead role here played by “institutions.” What Guizot thus offered was primarily a general institutional history of

¹⁰ On the crises of historicism, see Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), Chaps. VI-VII.

Europe, with special attention to political and religious institutions.¹¹ In focusing on institutions Guizot once again exemplified a broad feature of developmental historicism. The most pervasive and enduring interests among nineteenth-century historicists clustered around the development of institutional frameworks of governance: studies in the history of political and church institutions overlapped with legal and constitutional history to constitute the leading substantive foci of the tradition.

This institutional orientation was not, however, the only candidate to flesh out the substance of developmental historicist inquiry. The interplay between continuity and change that enabled institutions and laws to serve as focal points for synthetic narratives extending through decades, centuries, or even millennia, could also be found in the history of ideas. Guizot argued exactly this point. The development of civilization could, he noted, be studied from either of two points of view. While he had, in his own general history, taken a “stand in the external world,” he might alternatively have entered “the interior of man” and made the history of “ideas” and “sentiments” his focus. These were not competing points of view. The developmental histories that would be told from either standpoint were “strictly connected” as “the reflected image of one another.”¹² The postulated connection here was, indeed, displayed to some extent in Guizot’s own study. While his choice of an institutional focus prioritized one of the two standpoints, ideas played a recurring secondary role in his study. The sketches Guizot elaborated of

¹¹ For a rounded picture of Guizot’s work as an institutional historian, it is essential to read, alongside his famous general history, the study of representative government he prepared as a series of lectures in 1820-22. The general history surveys a wide range of European institutions while stepping back from variety found within any one kind of institution. In contrast, Guizot’s earlier lectures, by focusing on a single kind of political institution as it had developed (or decayed) in France, Spain, and England, brought just such variety to the fore. See François Guizot, *The History of the Origins of Representative Government in Europe*, trans. Andrew R. Scoble (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2002).

¹² Guizot, *Civilization in Europe*, 21-23.

various sorts of institutions were thus usually accompanied by passing remarks on the ideas that he saw as associated with those institutions.

In framing institutional history and the history of ideas as two sides of one coin, Guizot expressed a perspective common in the historicist tradition. But endorsement of this perspective was compatible with varied views about the actual practice of inquiry. Indeed, questions that arise in unpacking these issues lay at the core of significant methodological fissures in the historicist tradition. Did this perspective entail that institutional history not only might, but should or must, be connected to the study of ideas? What could or should such a connection look like, and what would it imply about the relations between historicist inquiry and philosophy? Conflict around such issues presupposed a methodological self-consciousness (or, we might say, anxiety) foreign to Guizot. To engage with that self-consciousness, and its transformative impact on the historicist tradition, we must turn to the German academy, and more specifically, to the faculty of the University of Berlin.

*The University of Berlin and the Methodological Transformation of Historicism:
Academic Professionalization, Scientific Progress, and the State*

The University of Berlin was founded in 1810 by the Prussian state as a modern research university, aimed at making Berlin a major center of European intellectual life. The resources, research orientation, and academic freedoms of the pioneering institution created an environment in which this aspiration was amply realized, as faculty brought scholarship in their respective fields to new levels of self-conscious sophistication. The research-promoting setting—and the increasingly professionalized forms of knowledge

production it supported—was accompanied by a confident sense among the faculty that they were making major, even revolutionary, scientific advances. As the faculty's work was received elsewhere in the European academy this sense of intellectual progress would be endorsed and prominently incorporated in widely held narratives. Within the human sciences in particular, narratives of an early- to mid-nineteenth century dawn of a new scientific epoch would become prevalent in fields from law, history, and philology to theology and philosophy. In all these fields the pioneering of the new epoch was principally credited to members of the Berlin faculty.

We are dealing here with something qualitatively different from the sense of scientific advance we met in Comte and Spencer. From their naturalistic standpoint, progress in scientific studies of human and societal phenomena must center, by definition, on the pursuit of invariable natural laws. The extra-academic field of sociology they pioneered took its shape in light of that pursuit. By contrast, the modes and fields of academic scholarship in human and social inquiry pursued by the professionalizing scholars at the University of Berlin drew upon conceptions of science imbued with developmental historicism. To the extent Comte and Spencer would engage such historicist scholarship they judged it below the level of science, allowing it, at best, a role as a source of data for a genuine, i.e. naturalistic, science. But disdain here was far from one-sided. From the standpoint of the historicist conceptions of science that crystallized within the German academy, sociology would appear a hubristic unprofessional pseudo-science. The dominance these conceptions came to hold in the European academy would help ensure that sociology had to wait decades before it could win academic respectability. It began to do so only at the turn of the twentieth century—

not coincidentally, at the same time that the historicist tradition began to lose confidence in its earlier aspiration toward a developmental synthesis.

In exploring the historicist conceptions of science that the Berlin faculty did so much to forge and propagate, it is useful to address up front a question of translation. Why translate the German *Wissenschaft* as “science” rather than “scholarship”? What is crucial here is that the figures we are preparing to engage in later chapters—i.e. the pioneers of American academic research in history and politics—favored this translation. In doing so, they gave expression to an understanding of their own endeavors that they inherited as part of the methodological legacy of the “Historical School” at the University of Berlin (which centered on the figures of Barthold Niebuhr, Friedrich von Savigny, and Leopold von Ranke in the faculties of history and law).

This legacy can be illuminated by a contrast between the Historical School and Guizot. The French scholar and his German counterparts were all developmental historicists. But they diverged in their understanding of how their own work stood in relation to the historical writings of earlier generations. The Historical School saw a qualitative difference and interpreted it in terms of a scientific advance toward a more accurate view of the past made possible by more demanding methodological practices. Guizot also saw a qualitative difference, but he interpreted it as largely due to the impact of the dramatic social and political change of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic decades. In introducing the lectures on the institutional history of representative government that he gave in 1820-22, Guizot suggested that such dramatic changes

take possession of all that exists in society, transform it, and place everything in an entirely new position; so that if, after such a shock, man looks back upon the history of the past, he can scarcely recognize it. That which he sees, he had never

seen before; what he saw once, no longer exists as he saw it; facts rise up before him with unknown faces, and speak to him in a strange language. He sets himself to the examination of them under the guidance of other principles of observation and appreciation. Whether he considers their causes, their nature, or their consequences, unknown prospects open before him on all sides. The actual spectacle remains the same; but it is viewed by another spectator occupying a different place—to his eyes all is changed.¹³

The alternative interpretations of intellectual change on display here are not incompatible. But the self-understanding of scholars acquires a different tenor depending on which gets more emphasis when they situate their work relative to their predecessors. A self-understanding as the agents of intellectual advances made possible by rigorous methods forms the core of what I have in mind in treating approaches pursued by faculty at Berlin as offering conceptions of historicist *science*. It was this self-understanding that would infuse the widespread belief among pioneering American academic researchers in history and politics that they were extending the methods and aspirations of a scientific approach that had crystallized in Berlin.

The emphasis upon scientific progress fuelled by methodological advance marks off the more self-consciously scientific strands of the historicist tradition. The tradition's trajectory in the nineteenth century was marked, in the aggregate, by the rise and diffusion of this emphasis. But the story was far from monolithic. A growing stress on method was accompanied by lively contention regarding what specific practices were essential for scientific advance. Debate on this issue had already become pointed at the University of Berlin by the 1820s. Among faculty who took part in the transformation of

¹³ Guizot, *Origins of Representative Government*, 4.

historicism, minor varieties of methodological opinion paled before the dispute between the Historical School and the philosophical school of Hegel and his disciples.¹⁴

The Historical School looked to the critical treatment of source materials as a foundation of historicist science. What made scientific advance in knowledge of the past possible was not just the discovery and use of new source materials (though the School excelled at this), but the critical analysis of sources to assess in what respects, and to what extent, they could be relied upon. Scientific scholars would carefully and remorselessly interrogate the authority and veracity of the sources, primary and secondary, which they used. The attitude to be taken here was exemplified in the way that Niebuhr treated the work of the Roman historian Livy in the lectures he gave at the University of Berlin shortly after its opening. Published in 1811-12 (and in a revised edition in 1827-32), Niebuhr's *History of Rome* would be canonized within the self-narrative of the Historical School and its offspring as the founding work of scientific history. For his "critical method" Niebuhr drew guidance and inspiration from approaches that philologists had forged as part of their historical study of languages and texts. This method was subsequently refined and applied to early-modern materials by Ranke. He, in turn, taught it to two generations of future scholars in the research seminar

¹⁴ For a more detailed discussion of this dispute, see Iggers, *German Conception of History*, Chap IV. The way the dispute can play into retrospective accounts of "historicism" is evident in the contrast between Meinecke and Croce. Meinecke narrates historicism from a standpoint that judged it to have reached its climax in Ranke's works (whose legacy he saw himself continuing). Croce, by contrast, assaults Ranke from a stance that owes more to Hegel's side in this controversy. Meinecke, *Historism*. Cf. Benedetto Croce, *History as the Story of Liberty* (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), Part II. My own standpoint is to approach neither side as having a better claim than the other (or Guizot for that matter) to embody a relatively "truer" or "fuller" historicism.

that he (drawing on the model of his own professional training in philology) offered at Berlin for decades after his appointment in the mid-1820s.¹⁵

The critical method foundational for the science of the Historical School struck Hegel, however, as profoundly lacking. He used the occasion of his inaugural address as Professor of Philosophy at the University of Berlin in 1818 to make a cutting allusion to German scholars who studied history “in a *critical* and *learned* matter” but believed that “its content *cannot be taken seriously*.” He also firmly asserted the claim of philosophy, if properly construed and pursued, to constitute “the *centre* of all spiritual life and of all science and truth.” Philosophy, as Hegel expounded it, grew out of “the *freedom of disinterested scientific activity*” while standing in contrast to “*purely critical drudgery with no content*.”¹⁶

The content of Hegel’s jibes about a lack of “content” would soon be made clearer (in a somewhat moderated tone) in the introduction to his *Philosophy of Right*. Here he distinguished between “historical” and “philosophical” approaches to the laws and institutions through which determinations about what is “right” are reached. An

¹⁵ For brief overviews of, and selections from, Niebuhr and Ranke, see Fritz Stern, ed., *The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 46-62. Since I am principally interested in how the Historical School played into the self-understanding of later scholars, I skip much nuance and detail here. Let me just note two key points. First, the emphasis on sources and their criticism had predecessors (and contemporaries). To narrate the School as if the critical method was born there, and only there, is a simplification, at best. But what matters for my study is how the School saw itself and how this self-understanding fed into a narrative of scientific progress widely told by subsequent generations of academics. Secondly, the critical method was, for the Historical School, a *necessary*, but not a *sufficient* basis for historical scholarship. It was a preliminary that, by rejecting false or dubious sources, opened the way to constructing more accurate histories. When reflecting on that additional constructive moment in its work, the School stressed sympathetic identification and piercing beyond the surface of events to capture the dynamic movements of an underlying reality. It was, however, the stress upon critical method that principally made the Historical School stand out as a self-consciously “scientific” variant of historicism.

¹⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Political Writings*, ed. Laurence Dickey and H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 181-85 (italics in original). Hegel’s attack may have been motivated in part by political opposition to the conservative views especially associated with Savigny, the leading Historical School figure in the study of law. But he carried out his critique principally via the medium of methodological dispute.

historical approach traced the emergence of laws and institutions by studying “circumstances, eventualities, needs, and incidents which led to their introduction.” But the approach could not, by itself, evaluate if those “determinations of right” were truly “rightful and reasonable.” The object of Hegel’s hostility here was less this approach than practitioners of it who held that “this kind of historical demonstration is all—or rather, the one essential thing—that needs to be done in order to *comprehend* the law or a legal institution.” As Hegel saw it the “truly essential issue” was the evaluative one, and this could not be pursued so long as studies of the emergence of laws and institutions did not draw on a rational “concept,” which it was the task of philosophy to craft and refine. Hegel did not deny that history could proceed without drawing on “philosophical insights,” but he suggested it would be “more profound” if it did so.¹⁷ Only historical studies that drew on philosophy—which was, for Hegel, as we saw in his inaugural address, the very center of “all science and truth”—would have the “content” whose lack Hegel asserted in his address. Thus he saw engagement with philosophy as a crucial foundation of genuine scientific progress in historicist inquiry (for science sought truth, and pursuit of the truth in the study of human and societal phenomena could not, Hegel believed, evade the question of what was truly right).

The response of the Historical School to Hegel’s line of argument received its most developed articulation from Ranke during the 1830s. Ranke identified history and philosophy as the “only two ways of acquiring knowledge about human affairs,” and associated each with its own distinctive “method.” Contra Hegel, however, he strove to

¹⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 29-32 (italics in original).

defend the autonomy and sufficiency of the historical method. Ranke's defense ran along two tracks. First, he attacked the "immature philosophy" of the "philosophy of history," which focused on "*a priori* ideas"—such as the idea that “the human race moves along a course of uninterrupted progress, in a steady development towards perfection”—and “set out to find them reflected in the history of the world.” Secondly, he held that historians could, and should, pursue the synthetic goal of developmental historicism independently of philosophy. Ranke saw it as the “highest” goal of the “discipline of history . . . to lift itself in its own fashion from the investigation and observation of particulars to a universal view of events, to a knowledge of the objectively existing relatedness.”¹⁸

What would it mean for history to seek a synthetic view “in its own fashion”? Ranke held that historians should approach “the development of the world in general” from a starting point, not in the “preconceived ideas” of philosophers, but in reflection “on the particular.” From this point they would move toward the general, not by relating particulars via “universal concepts,” but by relating them via historical interactions between them. This broad methodological insight about historical synthesis might, however, be unpacked in a variety of directions. Ranke himself located the principal interactions to focus upon in the contacts and conflicts between peoples as collectively embodied in states. While states were prominent in Hegel's view of world history to the

¹⁸ The quotes in this and the next paragraph are from Stern, ed., *Varieties of History*, 58-60. A basic methodological issue at stake here concerned the relation between historical synthesis and evaluative judgment. For Hegel, the two were closely interwoven with philosophically articulated rational concepts a prerequisite to carrying through either endeavor. Indeed, the very move of separating them as I just have is itself rather un-Hegelian. But for Ranke (as later for much of twentieth-century social science) a gap could and should be made here. His famous line about writing a history that “wants only to show what actually happened (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*)” incorporated an aspiration to synthesis, but disavowed “the office of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of future ages.” *Ibid.*, 57. In recalling Ranke's line we must remember that he saw history as a meaningfully structured whole. His endeavor to show what “actually happened” did not stop at the surface of events, but aspired beyond it toward a grasp of the underlying developing reality that gave structure to history as a meaningful whole.

extent that he saw them instantiating stages within the development of the Idea of Freedom, in Ranke's alternative approach their prominence depended on the extent to which they shaped the course of world history through their power and influence upon other states. Ranke's famous emphasis on great power politics was thus closely interwoven with his methodological vision of a historicist science that would advance toward synthesis without appealing to "*a priori* ideas."

The heated conflict between the Historical School and Hegel should, however, not lead us to overlook their commonalities. Each side extolled different methodological practices, but both gave shape to strands of developmental historicism sharing a self-consciously scientific aspiration infused with academic erudition. Notable parallels also existed on a substantive level. These are highlighted when we contrast Hegel and Ranke to Guizot. In their treatments of European history, Hegel and Ranke both used the state, rather than Guizot's "nation," as their principle sub-European organizing unit. Guizot's focus on English and French history led him to conceive nations as, at once, cultural and political unities. But from this viewpoint central European history appeared as simply confused, or as exemplifying a hindered development relative to France or England. By emphasizing states—seen as historically emergent political unities that may or may not follow the boundaries of nations—Hegel and Ranke could take a more sympathetic attitude toward the past and present situation of the central Europe in which they lived.

Hegel's and Ranke's emphasis on states also opened a space in which both, albeit to a limited extent, engaged other types of historical units more cultural in character. Neither avoided the talk of "nations" prominent in Guizot. But they gave it a specifically cultural content. Thus neither saw Germany, even though it crossed state boundaries, as

any less a nation than France; and neither advocated that states and nationalities in central Europe be brought into one-to-one alignment.¹⁹ Ranke and Hegel further paralleled one another in referring to cultural units pitched between the level of European civilization as a whole, and that of particular nations. In doing so they relied on synthesizing possibilities suggested by the study of linguistic heritage, which contemporary philologists were bringing to a new level of sophistication. Thus, we find both Ranke and Hegel in the 1820s employing a differentiation between Romance (or Latin) peoples (e.g. the French, Spanish, and Italians) and Germanic (or Teutonic) peoples (e.g. the Germans, English, and Scandinavians). In a usage foreign to us, these groupings passed over, at points in Ranke's work, to a language of "race" that would become increasingly prominent in the historicist tradition later in the century.

¹⁹ Complex issues of interpretation here center upon usage of the terms *Volk* and *Nation*. Hegel uses both terms, but not synonymously. It is *Volk* (not *Nation*) that is his key term when engaging commonalities among people that take shape in relation to, and give life to, political/legal institutions that they share. Nuances in his and the Historical School's thought important for assessing their attitude to the politically sub-divided Germany of their day are lost when phrases such as *Volksgeist* and *das Volk als Staat* are translated as "national spirit" and "nation-state." Advocacy of German national unification would become a central feature of German historicism in later decades, but it was not so at the University of Berlin during the methodological departures and debates that I am addressing. On the later ascendance of nationalist views, see Iggers, *German Conception of History*, chap. V.

Historicism in the 1850s-70s: Methods, the Aryan Synthesis, and Liberalism(s)

As we move forward from the 1810s-30s to the 1850s-70s, several intertwined trends in the broad European historicist tradition stand out. First, there was diffusion inside and beyond Germany of the methodological departures and debates we explored at the University of Berlin. Second, the grouping of peoples in terms of linguistic/racial inheritance hinted at in Hegel and Ranke in the 1820s acquired increasing prominence.²⁰ This trend was fuelled by the successes of philologists, whose studies of linguistic heritage identified the Indo-European language family and sought to reconstruct its branching development through time (yet another Berlin faculty member, Franz Bopp, was the leading figure in this effort). Third, the situating of the Germanic languages, classical Greek, and Latin, within Indo-European linguistic genealogy suggested new vistas on European history. The history of ancient Greece and Rome, and the history of Europe since the Germanic conquest of the Western Empire, could now be viewed as the histories of kindred peoples, and situated as sub-movements within the overarching synthetic unity of the developmental history of the Indo-European peoples. Finally, the term “Aryan” was coined as an alternative to “Indo-European” and gained growing use among scholars. Self-consciousness about scientific methods and what I will call “the Aryan synthesis” thus advanced together to become common features of historicist scholarship in the later half of the nineteenth century.²¹

²⁰ Nineteenth-century work in the historicist tradition frequently distinguishes “races” with reference to cultural (and especially linguistic) distinctions. Such distinctions were, however, easily and frequently—and ever more so later in the century—interwoven with distinctions based on physical traits. Our own tendency to conceptualize physical and cultural inheritances in dichotomous terms reflects an understanding of genetics that did not then exist.

²¹ In using a term that twentieth-century events would make taboo, I follow the lead of Martin Bernal’s study of the impact of the “Aryan model” on classics scholarship. As Bernal makes clear, the

These broad trends in the historicist tradition provide a backdrop against which we can engage the specific historicist scholars who exercised the greatest immediate influence on the American science of politics as it emerged beginning in the mid-1870s. Three individuals were especially prominent in this regard: Johann Bluntschli, Henry Maine, and Edward Freeman. They each pursued historical and comparative inquiry as developmental historicists drawing on legacies of the methodological transformation of their tradition, and they each proceeded from a liberal theoretical standpoint. Their interweaving of liberal visions with a confident sense of helping to further advance historicist science would prove to be a combination especially attractive to American academics.

Bluntschli: The Theory of the State and German Liberalism

From the 1850s through the 1870s, the Swiss-German Bluntschli was one of the leading figures involved in the research and teaching of the sciences of the State (*Staatswissenschaften*) in German universities, working first at Munich and then at Heidelberg.²² His scholarly interests encompassed institutional history, constitutional and international law, and idealist philosophy as applied to political phenomena. He had attended the University of Berlin in the 1820s, and his thought reflected debts both to the Historical School and to Hegelian philosophy. As Bluntschli saw it, the heated conflict

linguistic/racial focus of this model did not so much create a synthesis when none previously existed, but rather supplanted an earlier synthesis stressing (as Comte still did firmly, and Hegel did to some extent) inheritances linking ancient Greece to non-Aryan societies of North Africa and the mid-East. Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization. Vol. 1: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

²² For an overall characterization of the *Staatswissenschaften*, and their changing shape in the nineteenth century, see the scrupulously researched work of David F. Lindenfeld, *The Practical Imagination: The German Sciences of the State in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

between these two strands of developmental historicism had, since 1840, given way in the German academy to an outlook that sought to carry forward the scientific methods of both schools.²³ At its most ambitious, this outlook aspired beyond a truce, in which each strand was extended in an atmosphere of mutual acceptance, to an effort to integrate them. What this might entail was nowhere more evident than in Bluntschli's *Lehre vom modernen Stat*, published in the mid-1870s as the culmination of over two decades of expansions and revisions of a work he first published in 1852.²⁴

Bluntschli's *Lehre* was an ambitious synthetic work pursuing a "general" science of the State based on "universal history." What Bluntschli had in mind here involved a more focused scope than, for example, Spencer's treatment of political institutions in *The Principles of Sociology*. Universal history need not, from a developmental historicist viewpoint, encompass all the human past, but rather only the elements of the past judged to have contributed to the march of human history taken as a developing whole. For Bluntschli's work what was of concern were historical developments that contributed to the "progress of political civilization." These were, he believed, concentrated in the history of branches of the Aryan family that had made their way to Europe. His basis in "universal history" thus turned out to center around how the Aryans' "manly genius for politics" had "unfolded and matured" in the course of European history. The leading Aryan agents of "a high and conscious political development" included the Greeks and Romans in antiquity, and the invading Teutonic tribes who gave shape to the Middle

²³ J. C. Bluntschli, *The Theory of the State* (Kitchener, ON: Batoche Books, 2000), 15-18, 70.

²⁴ J. C. Bluntschli, *Lehre Vom Modernen Stat*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta, 1875-76). In citing the unusual spelling of *Stat* I cite directly from the title page of Bluntschli's book. The first volume of this work was translated in the 1880s by a team of faculty who taught modern history at Oxford. In the text I draw mostly on a recent republication of that translation. For the initial work that the *Lehre* developed from, see J. C. Bluntschli, *Allgemeines Statsrecht Geschichtlich Begründet* (München: J.G. Cotta, 1852).

Ages; “modern political civilization” had, in turn, developed out of “the mixture of Greco-Roman and Teutonic elements.” With regard to recent centuries, which were his core concern, Bluntschli highlighted the English (and their North American offspring), the French, and the Prussians as playing major roles in “modern political development.”²⁵

Embedded exceptionalism thus combined with the Aryan synthesis to shape the scope of Bluntschli’s general science of the State. But this scope still encompassed a significant amount of comparative and historical material. In treating this material Bluntschli sought to avoid being “oppressed by the weight of the material, overwhelmed by the mass of historical experience, and above all, attracted and enchained by the past.” He hence drew upon idealist philosophy of the State, as developed above all by Hegel, to articulate concepts and distinctions that he used when arranging and interpreting his material. But Bluntschli was no less concerned that, by bringing philosophy to engage with “the rich content of actual existence,” he might succeed in checking its tendencies toward “barren formulae, empty husks” and “the delusions of ideology.” He saw himself uniting the “two sound methods of scientific enquiry”—the “historical method” and the “philosophical method”—in such a way that each would keep the other from the “one-sided perversions” of “*mere empiricism*,” on the one hand, and “*Abstract Ideology*” on the other.²⁶ The result was a mode of inquiry—which I call “the theory of the State”—that drew on institutional history and idealist philosophy to produce something that was itself neither one nor the other.

²⁵ Bluntschli, *Theory of the State*, 19-20, 54-55, 76-77.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18, 15 (*italics in original*).

The exemplary interest of Bluntschli's work in the theory of the State lay not only in its methodological but also in its political theoretical orientation.²⁷ The *Lehre vom modernen Staat* exemplifies a distinctive liberal vision most fully developed in the early- to mid-nineteenth century among German thinkers. This German liberalism shared the general theoretical standpoint on politics, society, and history that I identified with "liberalism" in my introduction. But it also drew on the ethical conception of the State prevalent in German political thought (conservative as well as liberal) in a way that set it apart from classical liberalism, whether of Spencerian or more Whiggish varieties. The significance of this alternative liberal vision for my study lies in the way that it looks forward to elements of the progressive liberal views favored among those American scholars of politics who, beginning in the 1880s, departed from classical liberalism.²⁸

Bluntschli's participation in the general outlook of liberalism is highlighted in the way he (like Constant and Guizot) stressed qualitative differences between the ideals and institutions of classical antiquity and those of modern States. The critical feature of the modern State was, for Bluntschli, its recognition of a right of individual freedom in all its inhabitants. Such freedom was incompatible with slavery or serfdom. It entailed, moreover, a sphere of private life in which individuals were free to believe and act independently of State infringement. The modern State was "essentially a legal and political community." It dropped any claim to "dominate religion and worship" and

²⁷ In tracing intellectual legacies it is important to recognize that these two dimensions of Bluntschli's work are not inextricably interwoven. Among American scholars later in the century there were figures indebted to Bluntschli who took forward one dimension of his work without the other, as well as others who combined them.

²⁸ Parallels between American progressive liberalism and German liberalism should not blind us to distinctions. For example, we might note that German liberals were favorable to constitutional monarchy in a way largely alien to the democratic doctrines that would play a central role in the theoretical amalgam of American progressive liberalism.

supported “freedom of scientific enquiry and of expression of opinion.” From Bluntschli’s liberal standpoint, a State had to be limited if it was to be “modern,” and these limits were to be embodied in a constitution.²⁹

Bluntschli’s interest in engaging comparative materials was evident when he considered in more detail the political institutions of a modern State. Such a state had to have a representative government, i.e. a government in which a representative assembly chosen by citizens had a significant share in the legislative power. But Bluntschli saw a variety of specific institutional arrangements, falling under two broad “forms of the State,” as meeting this criterion. First, there was constitutional monarchy. While this form of State had fully developed earliest in England, its roots and applications were much broader. Bluntschli saw it as “the end of a history of more than a thousand years, the completion of the Romano-Germanic political life, the true political civilization of Europe.” A second modern form of the State had, however, also originated from “the political genius of the Anglo-Saxon race.” Where England pioneered constitutional monarchy, so “representative democracy, or the modern form of Republic, as the Americans prefer to call it, was developed in North America.” The merit of this modern form of democracy over classical predecessors was that it replaced mass citizen assemblies with elected representative bodies. It was an advance over direct democracy exactly, but only, to the extent that it met “the great difficulty” of arranging elections “so as to secure that the best men both in intellect and character shall be chosen.”³⁰ For

²⁹ Bluntschli offers a summary of what he takes to be the distinctive features of the modern State in Bk I, Ch 6, and I take my quotes here from that overview. The limits recognized by a modern State were, for Bluntschli, external as well as internal; a modern State was willing to be limited in its actions by international law. Bluntschli was a pioneer in the study (and a strong proponent) of international law.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 319, 370, 378-79.

Bluntschli, political modernity thus did not rule out, and indeed even required, roles for monarchy or a natural aristocracy of “the best men.” In keeping a firm distance from democratic doctrines unleavened by such tempering elements, Bluntschli expounded a teaching about *forms* of the State that was commonplace among classical liberals.

It is when we turn to his teaching about the *end* of the State that it becomes evident that we are, however, dealing here with a liberal vision at some remove from classical liberalism. In framing the question of the end of the State, Bluntschli again employed an ancient vs. modern distinction. But rather than a contrast exalting the latter, the distinction here identified opposing one-sided views to be transcended by a stance integrating elements of both. Bluntschli rejected the “ancient theory of the State” in which the “welfare of private men” was “unhesitatingly sacrificed to that of the State.” But he also rejected the “modern” view, “often maintained by English and American writers,” which went to opposite extreme of regarding the State

simply as an institution or machine which gives to individuals security for their life, their property, and their personal freedom, or at most as an artificial creation designed to raise and promote the welfare and happiness of all individuals, or at any rate of the greater number.

Against the ancient theory Bluntschli propounded, as we have seen, a sphere of liberal private freedom and associated limits on the State. But he also argued, in response to the modern view, that any satisfactory political theory had to engage the fact that “every now and then, the State is compelled, either for its own preservation, or in the interest of future generations, to make heavy demands from its present members.” To take such

situations seriously would, he thought, require recognizing “that the State is something better and higher than a mutual assurance society.”³¹

A view of the State as “something better and higher” bring us into the realm of the ethical conception of the State so prominent in nineteenth-century German political thought as a whole, in German liberalism, and in Bluntschli as an exemplar of this liberalism. Bluntschli’s account of “the true end of the State” ascribed it a high ethical purpose. It was to promote the development of the capacities and life of its people. The State was to pursue this end, not only by providing military security against external threats and a legal system securing persons, private liberties, and property, but also by playing positive roles in the economic and the educational/cultural spheres. Bluntschli stressed all four tasks, and made a point of noting the harm entailed in overemphasizing any one of them at the expense of the others.³²

Ascribing the State an ethical end, and a range of positive tasks to undertake in pursuit of this end, brought with it a significant rethinking of the division of powers. Bluntschli took as his starting point Montesquieu’s classic division of legislative, judicial, and executive powers. But he stepped back from Montesquieu’s justification of why powers should be divided across institutions. The most important justification was no longer grounded in a doctrine about checks and balance hindering a concentration of power. Bluntschli instead blended a division of labor view of specialization with organic imagery to suggest that division of powers facilitated, rather than hindered, efficacious action. The “decisive reason” for dividing powers was thus not the “practical security of

³¹ Ibid., 250-53. Regarding limits on the State, see also 265-66.

³² Ibid., 257-65.

civil liberty,” but “the organic reason that every function will be better fulfilled if its organ is specially directed to this particular end.”³³

Having shifted the underlying justification for division of powers, Bluntschli went on to propose changes to the details of Montesquieu’s canonical account. First, he argued that the label “executive power” obscured the range and significance of the independent decision-making that was, and ought to be, undertaken by those exercising this power. As a replacement he favored the label “governmental power.” His argument here exuded a view of power holders less distrustful than that usually found among classical liberals. The second change Bluntschli introduced was to add two further “groups of organs and functions” to the three-fold scheme. These reflected his emphasis on positive State roles in education and the economy. He summed up these additional powers as: 1) “superintendence and care of the intellectual elements of civilization”; and, 2) “administration and care of material interests.”³⁴

In adding these powers to the traditional three, Bluntschli sought to do more than capture the full set of roles he ascribed to the State. He framed them as distinct powers because he believed that the way in which they should be exercised was distinctive. His conception of the “functions of the State” distinguished between functions to be pursued in a “commanding” mode, and those better pursued in an alternative “fostering” mode. State activity in relation to education and the economy was to have the latter character. It should avoid “the employment of force,” and rely “not so much on the authority of the State, as on technical knowledge and experience.” The key was “a spirit of scientific and

³³ Ibid., 407.

³⁴ Ibid., 409-12. The latter power of “Public Economy” includes “administration of the income and expenditure of the State,” “maintenance of the economic welfare of the citizens,” “support of commerce,” “management of public works,” and “control of local government.”

technical care” directed toward serving “the interests at once of the welfare and the freedom of the community.”³⁵ Bluntschli’s concern to highlight freedom as an end alongside welfare must be noted because it sets his conception of technocratic State activity apart, in principle, from that of the illiberal Comte. Disagreement about how far this distinction can be carried through in actual practice is, of course, critical to the contrast between classical liberalism and German liberalism (along with later American progressive liberalism).³⁶

The confidence of German liberalism in this regard must be understood in light of who was expected to exercise such functions. A large swath of the activities attributed to the State by Bluntschli were, in his view, best handled by a professionalized cadre of officials selected on the basis of exams or other meritocratic criteria without reference to their social class.³⁷ These officials were to handle not only the educational and economic functions of the State, but also the judicial power and a portion of the “governmental power”—which Bluntschli subdivided between “*administration (Verwaltung)* in reference to details,” and “*political government (politische Regierung)* in the general conduct of the State.”³⁸ His theoretical push here was to distinguish between, on the one hand, the legislature and leading figures within the government, and on the other, the occupants of state offices that ought to be professionalized. The ideals and institutions of “modern” government with regard to the more strictly “political” actors may have been

³⁵ Ibid., 411-12.

³⁶ Of course, this issue is further problematized by rival conceptions of what “freedom” (or “liberty”) is.

³⁷ Training such officials was the main practical goal of university teaching in the *Staatswissenschaften*. Bluntschli’s theory of the State thus should be seen, at least in part, in light of whom he was teaching, and to what end. More broadly, to the extent that liberalism had a basis of support within any social class in Germany, it was less in a rising capitalist class than inside the interwoven world of German academics and state officials.

³⁸ Ibid., 410.

pioneered overseas. But, Bluntschli proudly believed, when it came to recognizing a sphere of professionalized offices, organizing those offices, and selecting and training individuals to fill them, it was among the German States that the leading ideas and institutions had been developed. An “admirable organization of professional offices” thus secured the German State(s) a “capable and trustworthy class of officials.” Looking across the Atlantic with evident distaste, Bluntschli identified the spoils system of democratic America as the polar opposite of the modern progressive approach to government administration pioneered in Germany.³⁹

A professionalized organization of public offices was, for Bluntschli and for German liberals in general, a central part of the modern political and social order toward which progress moved. For the State to fulfill its ethical end in a way that promoted both the welfare and the freedom of its people, it needed a professional administrative apparatus. The relative optimism of German liberals about the potential of State activity is inseparable from their confidence in the possibility of securing capable and trustworthy officials to carry out much of that activity. This distinctive feature of German liberalism explains why, for Bluntschli, the “modern epoch” dated from 1740. That was the beginning of the reign of Frederick the Great, under whom Prussia’s administrative apparatus was reformed along the lines admired by German liberals. For this, among other reasons (including a policy of religious toleration, and a view of himself as “first servant of the State”), Frederick was declared by Bluntschli to be “the most significant representative of the modern State and the modern view of life.” While

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 418-20 (italics and German in original). For Bluntschli’s views regarding a broader set of issues associated with professionalized public administration, see 413-30.

Bluntschli's view of modern government gave leading historical roles to the English and Americans, it thus saved a major role for Frederick, in whose person "the liberal philosophy of the eighteenth century" had "ascended the throne of a rising State."⁴⁰ As an expression of the most German element in Bluntschli's liberal vision, such comments had, needless to say, no parallels in narratives of progressive institutional development crafted by French and British classical liberals.

Maine and Freeman: Liberal Progress, Institutional History, and "the Comparative Method"

Alongside Bluntschli, the two other participants in the European historicist tradition who would exercise the most immediate influence on the emergent American science of politics were the English liberal historians Henry Maine and Edward Freeman. Like Bluntschli they pursued a developmental historicism that saw itself in the vanguard of scientific advance and eagerly took up the Aryan synthesis. But against this shared background there were notable differences. In the closing half of this section, I explore methodological traits that marked the institutional history of Maine and Freeman as a strand of historicist science quite distinct from the theory of the State exemplified in Bluntschli. Before taking up these methodological issues, however, I first explore a difference regarding the substantive interpretation of European history as reflected in Maine's arguments about progress. Where continental liberals (whether French classical liberals, such as Constant and Guizot, or German liberals like Bluntschli) tended to highlight contrasts between ancient and modern Europe, Maine and Freeman drew out

⁴⁰ Ibid., 53, 318.

legacies and parallels.⁴¹ They produced institutional histories in which changes within the many centuries of Greek and Roman history supplemented, without entirely supplanting, the ancient versus modern contrast. In the hands of Maine and Freeman the laws and institutions of the Aryan peoples—from the farthest reaches of the past up to recent centuries—were studied with an English Whig’s affection for continuity leavened by tempered progressive change.

In his first and most famous book, Maine advanced a claim that has, in the memory of posterity, overshadowed all other aspects of his thought. In the middle of his 1861 *Ancient Law*, Maine proposed “movement *from Status to Contract*” as a “formula” summing up the process of social change he was investigating. This process led “from a condition of society in which all the relations of Persons are summed up in the relations of Family . . . towards a phase of social order in which all these relations arise from the free agreement of individuals.” Such a process could be traced, Maine argued, through a millennium of Roman social history, as refracted in changes in Roman law. But he had more in mind than Rome. Maine believed he had identified the “one respect” in which the development of “the progressive societies has been uniform.” Movement from status to contract was not only a process evident in ancient Rome; it was also ongoing in contemporary Western Europe. A society based on “the free agreement of individuals” was the endpoint toward which progressive social change moved, both in the present and

⁴¹ This contrast in approaches to the past should be situated in light of the different political situation facing liberals in Britain versus on the continent. Continental liberals had to wage battle both against the ways in which the Roman Empire had been invoked to support absolute monarchy (and the First and Second Napoleonic Empires), and against the ways the republics of earlier Rome and Greece were invoked by radical republicans. Since these illiberal uses of the ancient past were far less relevant for contemporary British politics, liberals there could comfortably expound on continuities and parallels with the classical world to a much greater extent.

in the past.⁴² In envisioning this endpoint Maine exemplified Victorian classical liberalism in its mid-century heyday. His choice of “Contract” to sum up a liberal end of history enshrined as the embodiment of progress the ability of responsible individuals to settle the terms of their relations with one another by private law contracts, which they were free to make and enter into based upon their own judgment of their own interests.

Maine’s argument about the movement of progressive societies was framed by the well-established conceptual contrast between “progressive” and “stationary” societies or civilizations (among earlier historicists, both Guizot and Hegel had used it). But Maine reworked this contrast by combining it with a focus on law and its change over centuries as exemplified in the work of Savigny of the Berlin Historical School. Maine argued that in progressive societies, there were mechanisms through which law developed to keep up with the changing “social necessities” and “opinion” of an advancing society. In stationary societies, by contrast, law resisted change and thus stifled advance. Maine also, however, stepped back from this contrast to integrate its two sides as branches within a single synthetic vision. In this branching vision a line of early social development ran up to the point at which legal codes were drafted, and then divided into two. On one side were stationary societies, whose subsequent history encompassed only limited further development in the institutional order of society. On the other side were progressive societies in which such development was extensive. Only

⁴² Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law: Its Connection with the Early History of Society, and Its Relation to Modern Ideas* (New York: Scribner, 1864; first published 1861), 163-65 (italics in original).

here did later advances in “material civilization” remake the law, rather than being limited by it.⁴³

Maine’s famous formula summed up the *direction* of social development in progressive societies, and his branching vision situated those societies within a broader synthesis. But neither of these aspects of his thought constituted an account of the *dynamic* that drove progress. A key point to recognize here is that Maine’s approach to law reflected classical liberal concerns about the conditions that make possible or hinder a progressive dynamic seen as based within society. Law could stifle this dynamic, but they could not drive it. To the extent that Maine explored the sources of progress, he tended to make intellectual change its agent. He pictured a dynamic in which new ideas fed into new technologies and outlooks on life.⁴⁴ These, in turn, propelled the changes in laws and institutions that his famous formula suggested would cumulatively track a line of advance toward a social order prioritizing free agreement of individuals.

Maine approached this progressive dynamic as something unique and rare. He believed that modern western Europeans too often failed to understand that the dynamic at work in their civilization made their societies “a rare exception in the history of the world.” Stepping away from European experience to consider the “totality of human life” would show that most human beings in world history lived in stationary societies in

⁴³ Ibid., 20-24. There is ambiguity in *Ancient Law* about just what Maine was claiming about the line of early social development that he portrayed running up to the branching point when codes are written. At points he implied that this was common to all mankind. At other times he suggested that he was portraying early social developments common to “all branches of the Indo-European family of nations,” but that he did not have the evidence to assess whether his claims applied beyond that family. Ibid., 11, 117. In his later books this ambiguity was resolved and Maine made clear that the branching vision he was fleshing out through the course of his studies was a synthetic vision of Aryan institutional history.

⁴⁴ In a later work, Maine suggested that the “only intelligible meaning” of Progress was “the continued production of new ideas,” and proceeded to specifically identify “scientific invention and scientific discovery” as “the great and perennial source of these ideas.” Henry Sumner Maine, *Popular Government* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1976; first published 1885), 154.

which the prevailing temperament was conservative hostility to change. Indeed it was, Maine contended, “indisputable that much the greatest part of mankind has never shown a particle of desire that its civil institutions should be improved since the moment when external completeness was first given to them by their embodiment in some permanent record.”⁴⁵

While Maine’s understanding of progress shared Guizot’s stress on European exceptionalism, it gave this exceptionalism a different content. Where Guizot saw the barbarian invasions of the fifth century setting Europe onto a unique historical path, Maine looked back beyond them to embrace ancient Europe as sharing in, indeed as the principal source of, the exceptionality of modern Europe. Exactly what had set the progressive societies of Europe (ancient and modern) on their shared path was, Maine allowed, “one of the great secrets which inquiry has yet to penetrate.” But a partial explanation might, he suggested, draw upon his identification of the drafting of law codes as a developmental turning point, and his comparison between Rome’s early code (the famous Twelve Tables) and the legal codes of ancient societies elsewhere in the world. A fuller explanation would, however, also incorporate a key role for the influence that Greek philosophy, and specifically “the theory of Natural Law,” exerted on Rome. It was, Maine pointed out, only *after* this Greek “stimulus was applied” that the “progress of the Romans in legal improvement” became “astonishingly rapid.”⁴⁶

In his 1875 Rede Lecture Maine would extend this claim about the importance of Greek thought. He here enthroned Greece as the original spark of progress whose legacy

⁴⁵ Maine, *Ancient Law*, 21-22.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 22-23, 13-19, 54-55.

diffused to shape not only Roman law, but also, in turn, the intellectual achievements of modern progressive European societies. To capture the central role of the intellect and of cross-societal diffusion in Maine's view of progress, it is worthwhile quoting him at some length on this point:

Whatever be the nature and value of that bundle of influences which we call Progress, nothing can be more certain than that, when a society is once touched by it, it spreads like a contagion. Yet, so far as our knowledge extends, there was only one society in which it was endemic; and putting that aside, no race or nationality, left entirely to itself, appears to have developed any very great intellectual result, except perhaps Poetry. Not one of those intellectual excellencies which we regard as characteristic of the great progressive races of the world—not the law of the Romans, not the philosophy and sagacity of the Germans, not the luminous order of the French, not the political aptitude of the English, not that insight into physical nature to which all races have contributed—would apparently have come into existence if those races had been left to themselves. To one small people, covering in its original seat no more than a handbreadth of territory, it was given to create the principle of Progress, of movement onwards and not backwards or downwards, of destruction tending to construction. That people was the Greek. Except the blind forces of Nature, nothing moves in this world which is not Greek in its origin. A ferment spreading from that source has vitalised all the great progressive races of mankind, penetrating from one to another, and producing results accordant with its hidden and latent genius, and results of course often far greater than any exhibited in Greece itself.⁴⁷

As the close of this quote suggests, Greek thought was for Maine the starting spark, but not the be all and end all of intellectual progress. To be true to the “ferment” born in Greece was to strive “onwards and not backwards,” to recognize when “destruction” was necessary for new advance. This attitude underlies the critical intellectual agenda of *Ancient Law*. While venerating the role natural law theory played

⁴⁷ I quote from the lecture's republication as part of the appendix of addresses included in Henry Sumner Maine, *Village-Communities in the East and West*, 3rd ed. (New York: Henry Holt, 1876), 237-39. The belief in Greece's critical import for progress was not Maine's alone. For example, we find John Stuart Mill declaring that the events of classical Greece “decided for an indefinite period the question, whether the human race was to be stationary or progressive.” John Stuart Mill, “Grote's History of Greece [2],” in *Collected Works, Vol. 11: Essays on Philosophy and the Classics*, ed. J. M. Robson (London: Routledge, 1996; review first published in 1853), 313.

in the past, Maine set out to consign it *to* the past. It had done yeoman work in the service of progress in the ancient world, and in shaping modern international law. But by the mid-eighteenth century it had gone awry. The “remedial” function it played at its best gave way to a “revolutionary or anarchical” role. From Maine’s viewpoint, the great tragedy of eighteenth-century intellectual life was that natural law thinking in this degenerate vein surged into the popular imagination through the eloquence of Rousseau at just the time when natural law theory and its associated ideas should, on intellectual grounds, have been dying out. A new more advanced approach to law and institutions—that of the “Historical Method”—had already been pioneered by Montesquieu. But its influence paled beside that of Rousseau. More recently the intellectual star of the Law of Nature, and its offspring the State of Nature, had indeed begun to fade. The battle to progress beyond them was, however, still not complete.⁴⁸

Ancient Law was intended to be a compelling new contribution to the effort to supersede natural law theory and its associated ideas. Maine’s attack was three-fold. First, he took on the theory frontally by applying the historical method to the Law of Nature itself, and to the issue of the origins of society so central to the State of Nature. Secondly, he sought to exemplify how the historical method could positively remake the study of Roman law (i.e. the academic field that had, in recent centuries, helped to revitalize, and long sustained, the prominence of natural law theory). Thirdly, he contended that what he was doing in making these substantive moves was to take a

⁴⁸ This paragraph summarizes Maine’s arguments in his chapter on “The Modern History of the Law of Nature.” See Maine, *Ancient Law*, Chap. IV. For Maine’s specific use of terms and phrases I quote, see pages 74, 83, 87.

properly scientific approach to law and institutions. This third strand of Maine's attack brings us to the methodological issues that will concern us for the rest of this chapter.

Maine's methodological outlook paralleled in significant respects that of the Historical School, which in the person of Savigny had itself battled natural law thinking in legal scholarship and teaching. We again find in Maine the belief that using a correct method is key to scientific inquiry; the belief that this method involves careful attention to getting the historical facts right; and a tendency to charge opponents with the heresy of allowing *a priori* theories to predetermine their findings. As the last point suggests, Maine did not partake of the rapprochement expounded in Bluntschli's portrayal of "historical" and "philosophical method" as equally scientific methods that work best if combined. While wedded to pursuing broad developmental historicist syntheses, Maine was, like the Historical School, confident that this pursuit could succeed without turning to philosophy for articulated abstract concepts. Where Bluntschli pursued a theory of the State that strove to combine institutional history with Hegelian idealist philosophy, Maine pursued a freestanding institutional history wary of, or outright hostile toward, any such combination.

We cannot, however, view Maine's *Ancient Law* as simply picking up a methodological stance from Germany and bringing it to the study of law and institutions as pursued in Britain. In advocating historical method in his most famous work Maine employed empiricist tropes foreign to both sides in the earlier German debate. The interpretive nuances of textual criticism stressed in German discussions were replaced by a generic praise of "sober research" that allowed Maine to analogize his own approach to practices in the physical sciences. During the opening pages of *Ancient Law*, he

compared his work to that of a geologist while charging his field more broadly with being methodologically laggard. The study of law was, Maine bemoaned, still “prosecuted much as inquiry in physics and physiology was prosecuted before observation took the place of assumption.” Maine’s empiricism was, moreover, a naïve rather than a sophisticated empiricism. He had not reflected on actual practices in the physical sciences, and unlike those who had, such as Mill, he had no sense for the role played in them by hypothesis and deduction. In his image of a methodological advance from “assumption” to “observation,” Maine offered a caricature of the physical sciences, but one rhetorically well suited to claiming the mantle of scientific advance for his attack on “[t]heories, plausible and comprehensive, but absolutely unverified such as the Law of Nature or the Social Compact.”⁴⁹

While it is one of the more slipshod aspects of *Ancient Law*, there are two reasons why it is important to call attention to Maine’s suggestion that, in using the historical method, he was paralleling a revolutionary turn to observation pioneered in physical science. First, it exemplifies the appeal of a naïve empiricist conception of science among Anglo-American historicists. Such a conception was not what German academics had in mind when they reoriented the historicist tradition on “scientific” lines in the early-to-mid nineteenth century. But it would be a common conception among American scholars who later saw themselves as carrying forward the march of this historicist science. A second reason to note Maine’s belief is that it helps us make sense of some methodologically confusing moves in *Ancient Law*. For example, Maine set up

⁴⁹ Ibid, 3. See also 115. The naïve empiricism characteristic of *Ancient Law*’s methodological rhetoric was again evident in an address that Maine gave at the University of Calcutta in 1865. There he portrayed recent intellectual changes in the study of language and history as resulting from applying “scientific modes of inquiry” pioneered in the physical sciences. Maine, *Village-Communities*, 264-69.

his claim about movement from Status to Contract, as “a formula expressing the law of progress.” Such phraseology is reminiscent of Comte’s evolutionary naturalism. But the character of Maine’s claim is qualitatively different. For Comte, a “law of progress” was an invariable natural law displayed in social change at all times and places. What Maine advanced, by contrast, was a descriptive generalization about the course of past social development within a cluster of interconnected societies. This development was, moreover, understood to be the result of a unique progressive dynamic that had diffused through these societies and marked them off as something exceptional in world history. What we have in Maine is a developmental historicist argument packaged in a naturalistic rhetoric that, if we are not careful, might obscure just what it is that Maine is, and is not, arguing.⁵⁰

Ancient Law captures, however, only one of two methodologically noteworthy moments in Maine’s intellectual career. After making his reputation with his first book, Maine spent most of the 1860s in India serving as a Law Member of the Governor General’s council. On returning to England in 1869 he was appointed to a new Chair in Comparative Jurisprudence at Oxford. In his earlier *Ancient Law* Maine had specifically extolled the Historical Method, but in the works that developed out of his lectures at Oxford he began to promote “the Comparative Method” as an exciting new approach

⁵⁰ In identifying Maine as standing apart from the approach of evolutionary naturalism (despite surface similarities), I am extending a point previously emphasized by Kenneth Bock and John Burrow. Kenneth Bock, “Comparison of Histories: The Contribution of the Henry Maine,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16, no. 2 (1974): 232-62; John Burrow, *Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), chap. 5; Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), chap. 7. Bock, “Comparison of Histories: The Contribution of the Henry Maine,” 232-62. Burrow, *Evolution and Society*, Chap. 5. Collini, *Noble Science*, Chap. 7.

offering opportunities to extend and refine findings of the Historical Method.⁵¹ At the same time, Maine's friend Edward Freeman also began to promote this method and together they sparked a surge of excitement about it that would spread to the other side of the Atlantic. Wide use of the phrase "comparative method" among scholars of law and institutions in Britain and America begins with the works of Maine and Freeman in the early 1870s. Perhaps most interestingly for political scientists today, it was Freeman who, in naming a lecture series that he gave in 1873, coined "Comparative Politics" as a label for inquiries specifically applying this method to political institutions.⁵²

For Maine and Freeman the original and paradigmatic use of the comparative method had been in the hands of German scholars who revolutionized the field of philology during the early-to-mid nineteenth century. It was by closely comparing languages that philologists came to group diverse languages in a single Aryan linguistic family.⁵³ It was, moreover, through comparisons that philologists sought to extend the genealogical reach of their inquiries and reconstruct stages in the development of this linguistic family for which direct written evidence was fragmentary or non-existent. These endeavors had fleshed out the inspiring synthetic image of an original Aryan

⁵¹ Maine first waved the banner of "the Comparative Method" in the opening pages of the 1871 first edition of the book, *Village-Communities East and West*, that grew out of his initial set of lectures after his appointment at Oxford.

⁵² Edward Freeman, *Comparative Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1873). While declaring his openness to other labels, Freeman pointedly noted that he would rather the field "go nameless than bear the burthen [*sic*] of such a name as, for instance, sociology." *Ibid.*, 19, 343. Spencer would, for his own part, argue in the preface to the 1876 first volume of *Principles of Sociology*, for the superiority of "sociology" over "politics" as a label. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1: ix.

⁵³ The terminology used to talk about this common descent—whether used to label languages, peoples, practices, or societies—was a matter of some debate. While Maine used the now prevalent term Indo-European in *Ancient Law*, by the 1870s he had adopted the term Aryan, which Freeman also favored. Both seem to have followed the lead of the Oxford faculty member, Max Müller. This German scholar of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology advocated Aryan as an alternative to Indo-European, which he found problematic because it might suggest that all languages and peoples in India and Europe have a common ancestry. Max Müller, "Aryan, as a Technical Term," in *Selected Essays on Language, Mythology, and Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1881), 1: 204-15.

mother tongue that, through centuries of branching and sub-branching development, gave rise to the many historical and contemporary Aryan languages. Pioneered in the study of language, the Aryan synthesis and the comparative method that produced it had been extended into studies of mythology and culture. Maine and Freeman saw themselves extending this intellectual tide one step further by bringing it into studies of institutional history. Freeman expressed the sense of new possibilities associated with these developments most grandly:

On us a new light has come. I do not for a moment hesitate to say that the discovery of the Comparative method in philology, in mythology—let me add in politics and history and the whole range of human thought—marks a stage in the progress of the human mind at least as great and memorable as the revival of Greek and Latin learning. The great contribution of the nineteenth century to the advance of human knowledge may boldly take its stand alongside of the great contribution of the fifteenth. Like the revival of learning, it has opened to its votaries a new world, and that not an isolated world, a world shut up within itself, but a world in which times and tongues and nations which before seemed parted poles asunder, now find each one its own place, its own relation to every other, as members of one common primæval brotherhood.⁵⁴

Maine and Freeman thus envisioned a comparative institutional history following the methodological lead of comparative philology. The underlying premise of their aspiration was that not only languages, but also some institutional phenomena, had common Aryan precursors that existed at a point in time before written records begin. They set out to use comparisons to craft synthetic accounts of institutional development connecting reconstructed origins in these ancient Aryan proto-institutions, down through branching and sub-branching lines of historical descent, to the institutions found in

⁵⁴ Freeman, *Comparative Politics*, 301-02. Maine is far more moderate in tone when he talks about the comparative method. But in actual practice he stretched the possibilities of the method just as far, if not further, than Freeman.

historically-documented and contemporary societies peopled by speakers of Aryan languages. In doing so, they employed two interrelated practices.

The first practice, stressed particularly by Maine, sought out traces of older institutions surviving in the present day. Maine's excitement about this practice built on the combination of his earlier work and his own experience. In analyzing early legal codes in *Ancient Law* he had briefly compared ancient Indian laws to Rome's early code to try to parse the exceptionalism of progressive societies by asking what made Roman law different from that of "stationary" India. In doing so, he had already pointed out that the two sides of this contrast "sprang from the same original stock" and that there was "a striking resemblance between what appears to have been their original customs."⁵⁵

Maine was thus prepared to approach India during the years he spent there as a potential reservoir of survivals of a common Aryan past preserved by the stationary character of its society. He returned from India convinced that, as he put it in his 1875 Rede Lecture, the country contained "a whole world of Aryan institutions, Aryan customs, Aryan laws, Aryan ideas, Aryan beliefs, in a far earlier stage of growth and development than any which survive beyond its borders."⁵⁶ Setting observation of these survivals alongside knowledge about the past histories of Aryan societies in Europe provided a basis for mutually informing comparisons in which "observation comes to the aid of historical enquiry, and historical enquiry to the aid of direct observation."⁵⁷ Hence, the observation of India offered, Maine suggested, a critical resource to draw upon in reconstructing Aryan institutional history. The methodological practice that he promoted principally

⁵⁵ Maine, *Ancient Law*, 18.

⁵⁶ Maine, *Village-Communities*, 211.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

with regard to India was, however, a broader practice that might also be applied to some extent with phenomena directly observed in Europe. Freeman, for example, believed that in the self-governing villages and cantons of Switzerland, he had observed survivals of institutions once found throughout the Teutonic sub-branch of the Aryan peoples.⁵⁸

The second practice associated with the comparative method of Maine and Freeman also presupposed branching lines of development running forward from a shared historical origin. But it compared institutions across past societies, rather than comparing institutions from the past of one society with institutions observed in another society today. Freeman's *Comparative Politics* centered upon this practice. It compared political institutions of ancient Greece, of ancient Rome, and of the Teutonic (a.k.a. Germanic) peoples who invaded the Roman Empire. His study built from the presupposition that Greek, Roman, and Teutonic societies descended from a common predecessor, and that a developmental perspective on their political institutions was the key to a general synthetic account of the political history of Western Europe. Freeman used comparison (1) to support claims about the political institutions of the asserted common predecessor society; (2) to highlight shared and distinctive elements of subsequent political development as it took shape in Greece, Rome, and among the Teutonic peoples; and (3) to situate these developments relative to the general political history of Western Europe. Freeman's work did not extend to the full range of Maine's studies, which swept chronologically from reconstructed institutions of a postulated long-ago ancestor society of all Aryan peoples up to the present, and geographically from India to Ireland and European settlements in North America. But with Freeman's

⁵⁸ Freeman, *Comparative Politics*, 238-40.

work we find, as in Maine's, an extended view of history and cross-societal comparison combined in the pursuit of a developmental historicist agenda. Freeman and Maine each sought to synthesize the particular histories of multiple Aryan societies in a general narrative in which the institutions of the contemporary West appeared as cumulative products of a developmental process stretching back over millennia to a time before recorded history began. And both approached this process not as exemplifying universal laws of social evolution, but as a self-contained, exceptional, and uniquely valuable historical movement.

The distinctive features of the historicist comparative method expounded by Maine and Freeman stand out perhaps most clearly when contrasted against the naturalistic practice that Comte labeled with the same phrase. Comte emphasized, as we noted in Chapter One, that the practice he labeled the "comparative method" required that the compared societies should, in principle, be "completely independent of each other." By contrast, the practices employed by Maine and Freeman made comparisons between branches of a single, if extended, developmental family of societies: they presupposed historical linkage via a shared origin, albeit one potentially far removed in time. Moreover, where Comte propounded comparing "states of human society" conceived as sociological wholes, what Maine and Freeman compared were institutions. Their comparisons were between specific institutions that they viewed as the product of extended paths of historical development starting from the same institution in a common ancestor society. Given such fundamental divergences, it would be superficial to hold that, just because Comte's practice and one of the two pursued by Maine and Freeman compare less developed societies, observed in the present, to more developed societies

earlier in their history, they therefore practice the same “comparative method,” or even fall within the same broad methodological tradition. To do so is to abstract practices of comparison from the background of beliefs shaping their use. It is only by situating practices in relation to such beliefs that we can explain why evolutionary naturalists might direct their study toward aboriginal societies of the Pacific Islands, Africa, or America, while developmental historicists would rather look to Indian villages, Swiss cantons, or New England townships.

**CHAPTER THREE. THE LIBERAL SCIENCE OF POLITICS IN THE AMERICAN
ACADEMY: FROM INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY TO POLITICAL SCIENCE**

Between 1870 and the early 1900s, the American academy was transformed. New schools such as the Johns Hopkins University and the University of Chicago opened their doors and swiftly advanced to the forefront of academic prestige. Older schools such as Harvard and Columbia were revamped. The keynote of change was the same throughout: the reception from Europe, and adaptation to American conditions, of institutions and ideals of the research university. This transformation brought a new actor to the American intellectual stage: the academic supported, and even expected, by his university to pursue research and write. The proliferation of such actors fuelled the growth of academic discourses whose producers aspired to share or supplant the intellectual authority and influence of popular writers and independent inquirers outside the academy. A new era in intellectual life had come to America.

The American science of politics was a product of this new era. A growing number of academics published a steadily increasing number of books, founded journals, began graduate programs, and trained future scholars of politics. When it took root in the 1870s and early 1880s, this nascent academic science was largely an offshoot of intellectual currents among liberal thinkers and professors in Europe. But by the turn of the century, expansion of its practitioners and output, and a growing internal momentum and intellectual independence, put the American science of politics on par with anything comparable in Europe. No longer on the intellectual periphery, the American academy was on its way to becoming a new metropole for the evolving liberal science of politics.

American liberal scholars, like their European intellectual exemplars, made historical and comparative inquiry a guiding element in their science of politics. In doing so they took up practices and premises drawing on developmental historicism and evolutionary naturalism. But, paralleling the situation in Europe, the historicist tradition initially received a warmer and wider welcome inside the American academy. The reception of three strands of work in this tradition—in institutional history, the theory of the State, and comparative legislation—provided the starting points for the academic conversations that would feed into the 1903 founding of the American Political Science Association. In this and the next chapter I follow the reception of these three historicist strands and highlight the intellectual departures that spurred the emergence of political science as a distinct academic discourse, and in turn, a discipline—a move in which American scholars left European predecessors decisively behind. Then, in Chapter Five, I then explore the entry into the American academy of the naturalistic tradition in the study of politics, a move that lagged the reception of the historicist tradition and which took place largely outside of the bounds of the emergent political science discipline, being centered instead in the emergent field of sociology.

These pathways of reception and development involve plural conversations distinguished by different methodological practices and premises, but a shared dynamic characterizes them at the level of political theory. The American science of politics was, across its methodological and emergent disciplinary borderlines, liberal in its political theory, and its various practitioners thus faced a common theoretical puzzle in the late nineteenth century. The classical liberal vision of progress was increasingly at odds with broad political and economic trends. Though not limited to a single country, these trends

were most fully developed in the era's rising power, Imperial Germany, which was charting a course of political and economic development different from, and even proudly opposed to, the earlier British developments that had helped shape the classical liberal vision of progress.

The growing discrepancy between the classical liberal vision and contemporary trends challenged liberals to rethink the processes of change against which they envisioned the present and compared societies. Alternative responses to this challenge gave rise to a divergence both in liberal politics and in the liberal science of politics. On the one hand, beginning in the 1880s, progressive liberals reformulated liberalism to expand the role given to government in promoting social progress.¹ On the other hand, liberals more wedded to classical liberal beliefs responded with disillusionment. They worried that an expanding range of government activities embodied a break with, rather than a new stage in, the path of liberal progress. We have earlier seen a British example of such disillusionment in the late works of Spencer. In this and the following two chapters we will see American scholars in both the historicist and naturalistic traditions working out their own variants of disillusioned classical liberalism as the nineteenth century drew to its close and the new century began. But theirs was a minority voice. In the burgeoning American science of politics, the forging and diffusion of a progressive liberal vision was the prevailing theoretical trajectory across methodological traditions and disciplinary boundaries.

¹ The label "progressive" is chosen as the one best suited for the American context on which I focus. In the British context a more standard label for this emergent strand of liberalism is "new" liberalism, and this kind of liberalism has also been discussed as "social" liberalism.

The Reception of Institutional History in the American Academy

Of the strands of European developmental historicism that fed into the American science of politics, institutional history was the most autonomous. The other two strands whose reception I address in the next chapter—in comparative legislation and the theory of the State—were each interwoven with institutional history. But institutional history was often pursued independently of them. This strand of historicist scholarship was, moreover, at the peak of its reputation and ambition in the 1860s and 1870s. The Aryan synthesis provided a framework in which European scholars, such as Maine and Freeman, combined attention to sources and reconstructions of early institutions with synthetic and comparative moves that sketched extended movements of institutional development and drew out historical generalizations and practical implications.

This line of European scholarship was enthusiastically received in America. In addition to a synthetic framework and engaging results, institutional history offered exemplars of liberal scholars whose work met a historicist conception of science while maintaining wide intellectual appeal. Such examples encouraged the uptake of institutional history in the American academy in the 1870s and 1880s. This reception in turn provided the departure point for later intellectual developments and disciplinary differentiation. In the 1890s, as institutional history began to lose cutting edge status, the discourse forged during its American reception diverged, with political science emerging as an academic conversation increasingly distinct from that of history. As a starting point from which to follow this emergence, I recount here some major moments in the reception of institutional history within America's transforming academy.

Institutional History at Harvard

The late-nineteenth century transformation of the American academy is usually seen as beginning with the appointment of Charles Eliot as president of Harvard in 1869. During Eliot's forty-year presidency, the traditional institutions of America's oldest college were revamped and supplemented by those of a modern research university. One of the reforming president's earliest moves was to be a turning point for the academic reception of institutional history: in 1870 Eliot persuaded a reluctant Henry Adams to take a professorship of history at Harvard.

Henry Adams was excited by European scholarship in institutional history, especially the works of Maine.² At Harvard, he started from this strand of scholarship as he experimented with introducing seminar instruction and training students in historicist science. For example, working with a small class of advanced students, he charged them with selecting parts of Maine's studies to evaluate in light of the best independent evidence they could find. Adams put special emphasis on the Teutonic branch of institutional history, encouraging students to learn Anglo-Saxon and leading a group of them (including the future U.S. senator Henry Cabot Lodge) in research on law and institutions in England in the centuries following the Germanic invasions of the late fifth century. This led to the 1876 publication of a joint work, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon Law*,

² The interest in Maine among Cambridge intellectuals is also evident in the work of Oliver Wendell Holmes, who was encouraged by Henry Adams to apply Maine's approach to Anglo-American common law. Holmes's resulting classic, *The Common Law*, took as its guiding thesis that slow and steady progressive development toward external standards marked the history of common law, from origins among the early Germans, through medieval England, to current day America. Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Common Law* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1881).

dedicated to Eliot as a “fruit of his administration,” and welcomed on both sides of the Atlantic as a serious new contribution to the scientific study of institutional history.³

Henry Adams left the professoriate in 1877, never to return. In his famous autobiography he would discuss his teaching at Harvard in a chapter pointedly entitled “Failure.”⁴ But others saw his efforts very differently. Faculty who followed in Adams’s footsteps at Harvard looked back on his introduction of institutional history as a founding moment in developments leading up to the later departments of both history and government.⁵ They saluted Adams as “the most vigorous intellect that has yet arisen among professional American historians,” and as, “more than any other individual, the creative agent” in the emergence of “an academic profession of history.”⁶ For these laudatory retrospectives it was critical that Adams had not only introduced students to the findings of institutional history, but had also taken up and taught methods which, from the standpoint of the historicist tradition, had to be used by anyone aspiring to make a new scientific contribution. Though Adams himself had little inclination toward—and indeed over time became increasingly hostile to—the self-legitimizing ethos of professionalized research academics, scholars who did embrace that ethos found it all too easy to overlook this when remembering him as a founding father of historical science in America.

³ Herbert Baxter Adams, “New Methods of Study in History,” *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, ser. 2, no. II (1884): 87-89. Henry Adams, Henry Cabot Lodge, Ernest Young, J. Laurence Laughlin, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon Law* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1876).

⁴ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), chap. 20.

⁵ Ephraim Emerton, “History,” in *Development of Harvard University*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), 150-77; Albert Bushnell Hart, “Government,” in *Development of Harvard*, 178-86.

⁶ Hart, “Government,” 179; Emerton, “History,” 154-55.

“Historical and Political Science” at Johns Hopkins

The transformation of the American academy accelerated significantly after the Johns Hopkins University opened its doors in 1876. The new institution was consciously founded to be a research university rather than a college, and its faculty and fellows soon began to set the pace for the rise of academic research, PhD education, and a professional conception of intellectual endeavor throughout the human and social sciences in America. Hopkins faculty led the way in founding the Modern Language Association in 1883, the American Historical Association in 1884, and the American Economics Association in 1885. By the time Hopkins’s leadership role began to pass to other schools in the 1890s—especially to a revamped Columbia, and in turn, to the new University of Chicago—the research university and the professionalizing dynamic at home within it were securely on their way to ascendancy in the American academy.

In the professionalizing environment at Hopkins the reception of institutional history already begun at Harvard was quickly taken up and extended. The main role here was played by Herbert Baxter Adams, who returned from graduate study in Germany, where he had earned his PhD under Bluntschli, to become a postdoctoral fellow at Hopkins in 1876. First introduced to institutional history while studying in Germany, H.B. Adams really made the field his own during his postdoctoral research. With encouragement from Henry Adams (no relation), he devoted this research to pursuing primary sources and observation in New England. He sought to document Teutonic institutional inheritances using the latest historicist methods, and thereby to situate New England towns in the comparative history of Aryan local institutions as charted in the recent research of Maine and other European scholars. Adams thus developed a newly

scientific take on an old American Whig narrative: the self-governing popular assemblies of New England towns were an “offshoot” of the “tree of liberty” reaching back through medieval England to institutions of self-government among the Teutons of ancient Germany.⁷

While pursuing his research on New England, Herbert Baxter Adams was also assuming growing responsibilities in the program of “historical and political science” then taking shape at Hopkins. He was appointed to the faculty, and by 1881 had become the program’s leading figure. Taking charge of the Seminary in Historical and Political Science—the core of PhD instruction and research training—he focused the seminar on extending research in American local history. Adams saw this agenda as a way to train “a generation of specialists” who would “realize that History is past Politics and Politics present History.”⁸ He took his motto here from Freeman, who warmly endorsed Adams’s efforts when visiting Hopkins in late 1881. That endorsement then took on published form in the glowing introduction Freeman wrote for the opening issue of the *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, a journal of monographs begun by Adams in 1882 to publish research from the Hopkins program and related work by other American scholars.⁹ Each issue of the *Studies*, in turn, carried the motto from Freeman on its title page. The intellectual lineage that Adams saw himself and his program taking up is well captured in a letter he later wrote to the president of Hopkins:

⁷ Herbert Baxter Adams, “The Germanic Origins of New England Towns,” *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, ser. 1, no. II (1882): 23.

⁸ Herbert Baxter Adams, “Cooperation in University Work,” *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, ser. 1, no. II (1882): 49.

⁹ Edward Freeman, “An Introduction to American Institutional History,” *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, ser. 1, no. I (1882): 13-39.

What I really represent in this University is the practical union of History and Politics. That combination is the main strength of my department. The spirit of my work and of our University Studies in History and Politics has been commended in this country and in Germany because it illustrates precisely that blending of historical and political science which Bluntschli and Lieber, Arnold and Freeman regarded as inseparable. The term “Institutional History” or “Historical Politics” fairly expresses the spirit of the motto printed upon our University Studies and Seminary Wall.¹⁰

The range of exemplars that Adams looked to should not lead us to skip over relevant contrasts. There was one major intellectual trait—sympathetic engagement with German developmental historicist economics—that Adams and the Hopkins program shared with only Bluntschli out of the figures invoked in this letter. Bluntschli ran a joint seminar at Heidelberg with Karl Knies, a pioneering figure of the German historical school in economics, and Adams was introduced to Knies and the school’s teachings while earning his PhD under Bluntschli in the mid-1870s.¹¹ This background helps explain perhaps the most distinctive feature of Adams’s work on New England towns: where Freeman framed the Teutonic heritage in terms of political institutions, Adams attended to the interplay of government and economics. He emphasized not only the institutions of self-governing popular assemblies, but also their exercise of communal controls over land and agricultural practices. It was in this specific feature of communal self-governance that Adams believed he found especially strong evidence of a Teutonic legacy in New England.¹²

¹⁰ HB Adams to Gilman, December 19, 1890. Quoted in Dorothy Ross, “On the Misunderstanding of Ranke and the Origins of the Historical Profession in America,” in *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, ed. Georg G. Iggers and James M. Powell (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 158.

¹¹ On Adams’s studies in Germany see Raymond J. Cunningham, “The German Historical World of Herbert Baxter Adams,” *Journal of American History* 68, 2 (1981): 261-75.

¹² Adams, “Germanic Origins.”

The pursuit of economic history beside institutional history (which traditionally focused on law and government) was a distinctive characteristic of Hopkins's historical and political science program as a whole. Thus when Adams summed up the remit of the *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, he explained that the new journal was to publish "a series of monographs, each complete in itself, but all contributing toward a common end,—the development of American Institutional and American Economic History."¹³ The program of historical and political science that flourished at Hopkins in the 1880s thus brought together two currents of training and research in historicist science—one in institutional history, and one in historical economics. Adams was the most important faculty member for the first current, while the second was headed up by his colleague Richard T. Ely, who had earned a PhD at Heidelberg shortly after Adams, working with Knies as a principal advisor and also with Bluntschli.¹⁴

Founding National Associations

Once their own program was established, the Hopkins faculty in historical and political science turned their organizational energies toward promoting intellectual exchange on a nationwide basis. They were central actors in the founding of two national associations, each of which focused on one of the currents of developmental historicist science taken up at Hopkins. In 1884 Herbert Baxter Adams helped lead the founding of

¹³ Adams, "Cooperation," 39.

¹⁴ The intellectual debt of the Hopkins program to Bluntschli gained a new dimension after his death in 1881. The deceased scholar's library was purchased by German citizens of Baltimore and given to Johns Hopkins, where it formed a large part of the in-house library of the seminary of historical and political science. As a gift to accompany the library Bluntschli's widow also gave her husband's papers to the seminary library.

the American Historical Association (AHA). In 1885, at the second annual meeting of the AHA, Richard Ely in turn led the founding of the American Economics Association (AEA). There was initially a large overlap in the membership of the two associations and their annual meetings would frequently be scheduled to take place together so that members could attend both easily.

For scholars of politics, the AHA was the more important of the two new associations. It was principally intended to promote history as Adams and his fellow founders understood it: that is, as a science of institutions, especially but not exclusively government institutions. Following in the historicist methodological tradition as developed in nineteenth-century Europe, they understood their science as resting upon critical work with sources and building from that foundation toward a synthetic and comparative study of broad historical developments and the practical lessons to be learned from them.¹⁵ Andrew Dickson White, the president of Cornell University (and recent US minister to Germany), expounded upon this “connection between general and special investigation” in the first presidential address of the new association. It was, he declared, the “highest effort and the noblest result” of “special historical investigations” to contribute to a “philosophical synthesis of human affairs,” and the pursuit of such

¹⁵ Ross, “On the Misunderstanding.” The commitment of founders of the AHA to general history alongside critical work with sources must not be overlooked. As Ross shows, Holt’s influential account, by taking praise of the critical use of sources out of the overall structure of views about the character of historical science, misleadingly assimilated these figures to an anti-generalizing position more common among later historians. Cf. W. Stull Holt, “The Idea of Scientific History in America,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1 (June, 1940): 352-62.

synthesis by American scholars was, in turn, to serve “as a means for the greater enlightenment of their country and the better development of mankind.”¹⁶

This aspiration toward a synthesis that could enlighten the public and promote progress was common among liberal intellectuals. But White’s address testified to conflicting views about how (and by whom) such a synthesis was to be achieved. He responded in particular to Spencer’s rejection of narrative synthesis in favor of a naturalistic science that would rest on the tabulation and analysis of a wide range of sociological facts.¹⁷ Though allowing that there could be occasions on which such tabulations might be illuminating, White argued that they would often be misleading. He put his argument not in narrowly methodological terms, but also in terms of the moral and political enlightenment that a liberal science was supposed to provide. Moral facts and lessons of grave political significance were, he held, best grasped and taught through compelling historical examples of individual action and events. To try to meet “our ethical necessity for historical knowledge with statistics and tabulated sociology entirely or mainly” would be “like meeting our want of food by the perpetual administration of concentrated essence of beef.”¹⁸

White’s AHA address thus marked out turf for the new association’s historicist science—encompassing not only the study of specific facts, but synthetic narrative form, and moral and political education—and defended it from a challenge that White saw emanating from the naturalistic methodological tradition. The talk suggests the arrival in American intellectual life of a competitive tension long known in Europe: testy relations

¹⁶ Andrew Dickson White, “Studies in General History and the History of Civilization,” *Papers of the American Historical Association* 1, no. 2 (1885): 6, 28.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13-22.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

between institutional history, which was well on its way to securing itself in America an academic home such as it had long enjoyed in Europe, and evolutionary naturalistic sociology, which in the mid-1880s still remained, on both sides of the Atlantic, an almost entirely extra-academic intellectual current.

Woodrow Wilson: Institutional Comparisons and the Forging of Progressive Liberalism

The reception of institutional history in the American academy provides a context and a departure point from which to explore the intellectual inheritance and innovations of the most famous graduate of Hopkins's program in historical and political science, Woodrow Wilson, who received his PhD under Herbert Baxter Adams in the mid-1880s. Even if Wilson had not gone on to win fame (and, for some, infamy) as president of Princeton, governor of New Jersey, and one of the most transformative American presidents, the works that he wrote as a student and young professor in the mid- to late-1880s would still be central to this chapter's narrative. They take an initial step on the intellectual path leading from institutional history toward political science as a freestanding field. At the same time, and most importantly for my discussion in this section, they illustrate the forging of American progressive liberalism. While Wilson certainly did not single-handedly pioneer the progressive liberal vision, his works in the 1880s capture that vision at the time of its genesis among American academics, and they suggest how it would shape, and be furthered through, the comparative study of political and administrative institutions.

Wilson's "Practical" Study of Political Institutions: America vs. England

Herbert Baxter Adams was not doctrinaire about the focus on local institutions into which he had led the Hopkins Seminary of Historical and Political Science. He saw this agenda only as a starting point for a school of American historicist scholarship that would cumulatively build on itself, and would extend over time to an expanding set of topics.¹⁹ Hence he welcomed the initiatives of students who wanted to pursue other topics, and as the Hopkins graduate program grew in size through the 1880s, so did the range of the work done there. A pioneering initiative came from Wilson, who entered graduate study at Hopkins in 1883 with a well-developed interest in national political institutions.²⁰ The seminar was soon discussing drafts of his work on America's national government. The engaging style and provocative substance of the work gave it a smooth and quick path to publication; it appeared as *Congressional Government* in 1885.²¹

In *Congressional Government* Wilson worked with certain methodological premises and substantive views characteristic of institutional history. He approached institutions of American national government as products of steady growth, highlighted broad trends in their development over time, and situated them in cross-societal perspective, drawing especially on comparisons to English institutions. Employing the branching perspective favored by institutional historians, he treated the federal constitution as an adaptation from the eighteenth-century English constitution, which

¹⁹ H.B. Adams, "Cooperation," 49-50. Adams' primary commitment and interest was the training and propagation of historical science, not any one topical area of study. He would later openly question whether the study of local institutions was as good a starting point for historical education as he had once thought. Herbert Baxter Adams, "The Teaching of History," *Annual Report of the AHA for the Year 1896* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1897), 1: 248-49.

²⁰ John Higham, "The Intellectual Legacy of the Johns Hopkins Seminary of History and Politics," *Studies in American Political Development* 8 (Fall, 1994): 386-88.

²¹ Woodrow Wilson, *Congressional Government: A Study in American Politics* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1885).

provided in turn a shared origin against which to interpret subsequent divergence between national political institutions in the two countries. This is the same method as Maine used when discussing the US Constitution in his *Popular Government*, also published in 1885.²²

Much of what was novel about *Congressional Government* came from the stress Wilson put upon taking a “practical” perspective. This involved two intellectual moves, one with regard to the subject matter of his study, the other with regard to its purpose. Emulating Walter Bagehot’s *The English Constitution*,²³ Wilson set out to focus on “the practical in politics”²⁴—that is, how political institutions worked in practice. He sought to identify the “real depositories and the essential machinery of power,” and to highlight how this “‘living reality’” differed from “the ‘literary theory’ of the Constitution” offered in legal treatises and celebratory accounts. Wilson stressed that the century since adoption of the US Constitution had witnessed major institutional change. The status of the states and the power of the presidency had, he suggested, waned to the point that the institutional balances laid out in the text and theory of the constitution did more to obscure than to reveal the “actual form of our present government.” A student of American government thus had to “escape from theories and attach himself to facts.” Doing so would lead, Wilson held, to the discovery that, in the current day, “the predominant and controlling force, the centre and source of all motive and of all

²² On the US Constitution see Wilson, *Congressional Government*, 306-15; cf. Henry Sumner Maine, *Popular Government* (London: John Murray, 1885), essay IV.

²³ Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867).

²⁴ Wilson, *Congressional Government*, v.

regulative power, is Congress.”²⁵ In its actual practice, American government had become “congressional government.”

The second aspect of Wilson’s “practical” approach concerned the purpose of his study. Taking the traditional interest of institutional historians in practical implications to a new level, Wilson made it his goal to give an “outspoken presentation of such cardinal facts as may be sources of practical suggestion.”²⁶ His outspokenness was especially notable because he sought not only to criticize American government in his own day, but also to challenge guiding tenets of American political thought. Wilson saw himself as a member of a new generation freeing itself from the “unquestioned prerogative of the Constitution to receive universal homage.”²⁷ Rather than bemoaning a fall away from hallowed constitutional principles, he took aim at those very principles. The effort to divide political power institutionally that lay at the heart of the American constitution was, he held, “a radical defect.” Wilson pay homage to the founding fathers, but understood himself as honoring them in spirit precisely by rejecting the letter of their teaching. He saw their wisdom as residing not in the truth of their principles, but in their practical ability to learn from experience—an ability such that, if they could be reconvened to study “the work of their hands in the light of the century that has tested it, they would be the first to admit that the only fruit of dividing power had been to make it irresponsible.”²⁸

²⁵ This paragraph sums up the argument of chapter 1 of *Congressional Government*. Specific quotes are drawn from pp. 6 and 10-12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, v.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 284. See also 332-3.

The lessons of experience as Wilson taught them were based not only on historical trends he saw in American institutions, but also on comparison with England. For Wilson, following Bagehot, America and England exemplified two alternative types of government, the difference between which should be carefully studied by “the modern student of the practical in politics.”²⁹ Both types—in Wilson’s phrasing, “congressional” versus “parliamentary government”³⁰—were species of representative government, and each had taken shape in connection with a parallel long-run historical tendency “to exalt the representative body.”³¹ But this tendency had produced contrasting results in different institutional settings. In America, where the executive was kept apart from the legislature by a fixed constitution based on the principle of institutionally dividing political power, the government that emerged could, Wilson thought, be summed up in a single phrase: “government by the chairmen of the Standing Committees of Congress.”³² In England, by contrast, a flexible constitution allowed the cabinet to serve as “a device for bringing the executive and legislative branches into harmony and cooperation.”³³ This, in turn, provided the basis for the “scheme of responsible cabinet government which challenges the admiration of the world today.”³⁴

Wilson left little doubt that he saw England’s current form of government as superior to America’s “congressional government.” While shaped by, and expressed through, a comparison rooted in the methods of institutional history, this judgment also

²⁹ *Ibid.*, v.

³⁰ In adopting “congressional government” as his label for America’s type of government, Wilson was deliberately breaking with Bagehot’s talk of American government as “presidential government.” From Wilson’s perspective, such talk erred by focusing attention away from where the locus of real political power lay in America in his day.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 311.

³² *Ibid.*, 102-03.

³³ *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 307-08

reflected a distinctive tenet of Wilson's political theory. The import of this tenet is suggested by the contrast between Wilson's use of the England-America comparison and that made by Maine, the elder statesman of English-speaking institutional historians, whose classical liberalism was, in the 1880s, taking on a newly disillusioned tone. Wilson believed institutions designed to divide political power were inimical to "the essential constituents of good government," which were "power and strict accountability for its use."³⁵ It hence appeared as a merit of England's government that political power was more concentrated than in America, and that the locus of this concentration was better grasped by the public, and (at least in Wilson's view) more responsive to their opinion. Such contrasts appeared to Maine, however, not as merits, but as reasons for growing worry about the political future of England. Maine took the ability of a political system to curb "popular impulses" as a key criterion of its merit. On this theoretical ground he saw much to praise in America, while fearing that the concentration of power and responsibility which Wilson admired in England, would—as franchise extension made the English system more popular—lead to governments increasingly pursuing ill-considered courses of action.³⁶

This disagreement embodied a critical contrast between the liberal political theories of Maine and Wilson. In Maine's Whig-inflected variant of classical liberal theory, liberalism remained distinct from, and even openly hostile to, democratic doctrines promoting the rule of the people. By contrast, in Wilson's progressive liberal theory, potential tensions between liberal and democratic doctrines were eased by a

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 284.

³⁶ Maine, *Popular Government*, 24-26, 230-47.

distinction between democracy as a historical phenomenon and “modern democracy.” Modern democracy was representative rather than direct in form, it rejected slavery and class government, recognized personal rights, and saw the State as existing for the sake of the individual rather than vice versa.³⁷ Under such conditions, the responsibility of political power to public opinion would serve to sustain, or even improve, a liberal political and social order, while political institutions designed to divide power were at best superfluous, and at worst an outright obstacle to such outcomes. Wilson thus conceptualized “modern democracy” in such a way as to make popular support for a liberal order a component of (modern) democracy itself, thereby making possible a hybridization of democratic and liberal doctrines and institutions. This hybridization—with democracy coming to be conceived in liberal terms, and liberalism in democratic terms—was a core feature of Wilson’s political thought, and more broadly, one of the most characteristic traits of American progressive liberalism. To use this hybridization to conceptually frame study of the contemporary world, and claims about the best form of government, was to approach the world as a “modern” and “progressive” scholar. During the progressive era this approach would become, as it remains to this day, the dominant tendency among scholars of politics in the American academy.

³⁷ Woodrow Wilson, *The State: Elements of Historical and Practical Politics* (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1889), 603-05. Many of the phenomena that Maine considered part of “popular government”—such as the plebiscitary Napoleonic regimes in France, and unstable republics in Latin America—were, by Wilson’s conceptualization, simply not part of “modern democracy.” Under Wilson’s conceptual scheme such phenomena—if paid any attention at all—would be framed as outdated revivals of certain dynamics of “ancient democracy,” rather than as the integral and recurring features of modern political life that Maine took them to be.

Wilson on Administration: Looking to Continental Europe

Wilson's critical stance toward traditional Whig teachings about the division of political power was but one element in his progressive liberal outlook, the broader shape of which comes more into focus when we consider how he viewed the major powers of continental Europe. While classical liberals debated the relative merits of American and English institutions, they agreed on their shared superiority to those found in major continental European countries. The novelty of the emerging current of American liberalism expressed in Wilson's writings of the mid- to late-1880s is thus highlighted when we note that his self-identification as part of a new American generation—"the first to entertain serious doubts about the superiority of our own institutions as compared with the systems of Europe"—involved critical comparisons, not just to England, but also to France and Germany.³⁸ Wilson's concern here lay specifically with the administrative institutions of government. Broached in *Congressional Government*, this concern was more fully expounded in his 1887 article, "The Study of Administration."³⁹

In this article Wilson drew upon a key contrast of institutional history: the divergence, from the early-modern period forward, between the path of institutional development followed by governments in the major nations of the European continent versus in England and America. Wilson's framing of this divergence set him apart from those who treated the history of modern continental Europe as little more than a negative foil. While endorsing the classical liberal view that England and America enjoyed "vast advantages in point of political liberty," Wilson spliced something new alongside the old

³⁸ Wilson, *Congressional Government*, 4-5.

³⁹ Woodrow Wilson, "The Study of Administration," *Political Science Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1887): 197-222.

by contending that the “English race” had consistently neglected “the art of perfecting executive methods” and, as a result, made no “progress in governmental organization.” Such progress had instead been made on the continent: especially Germany, but also France, were well ahead “in administrative organization and administrative skill.”⁴⁰ There had been, as such, two separate lines of progress in government during recent centuries—one followed in England and America, and the other in France and Germany—and the task of the contemporary era was to combine the best results of both. While taking evident pride in the Anglo-American heritage, Wilson thus also suggested that America had lessons to learn from the professionalized administrative bureaucracies of continental Europe.

Wilson’s view of institutional history was framed by, and gave support to, the conception of a distinctive sphere of professionalized administration that we saw expounded by Bluntschli in Chapter Two. Extending the theoretical lineage of his advisor’s German advisor, Wilson took up the belief that this sphere should be institutionally separated from the domain of “politics”—a belief which he credited as a standard teaching of “eminent German writers,” naming Bluntschli as a specific authority.⁴¹ The practical implication for aspiring reformers of American institutions was that they should combine looking to England as an exemplar in the political sphere with looking to Germany and France for “instruction and suggestion” in the administrative sphere. Wilson was, however, well aware that his American readers might be reluctant to

⁴⁰ Ibid., 206. The idea that Germany, while lagging in “political development,” displayed an admirable excellence in administration had earlier been put forward by Andrew Dickson White in an address he gave at Hopkins in 1879. Andrew Dickson White, *Education in Political Science: An Address* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1879), 21.

⁴¹ Ibid., 210-11.

draw lessons of any sort from continental European nations whose history (and in Germany, the existing form of government) exemplified undemocratic or illiberal tendencies. To address this reluctance Wilson assured his readers that “comparative studies in government” showed there to be “but one rule of good administration for all governments alike.” Commitment to modern liberal democracy as a form of government was a matter of the political sphere: it need not entail rejecting technocratic lessons about professionalized administration that might be drawn from France and Germany.⁴²

The Role of Government in the Industrial Age

In promoting the professionalization of government administration in America, Wilson framed reform as a way of meeting practical needs specifically associated with the contemporary era. In doing so he looked principally to the character and impact of ongoing economic changes. Industrialization in America was, Wilson contended, giving rise to problems—such as “giant monopolies” and “ominous” labor tensions—that government needed to address. But the “fast accumulating” and “enormous” burdens presented by “the needs of this industrial and trading age” could only be met if America’s administrative apparatus was reformed to become more like the professional government bureaucracies of continental Europe. Wilson did not favor following the French and German lead in all areas; for example, he rejected government ownership and management of railroads and telegraphs. But the core of his argument was that industrialization was giving rise to new tasks whose need “no one can doubt”—for example, government acting to “make itself the master of masterful corporations”—and

⁴² Ibid., 209-212, 217-21, quotes from 218.

whose successful pursuit by American government required a professional administrative apparatus with skilled experts on its staff.⁴³

Wilson's view of industrialization and its implications for government should, like his distinction between administration and politics, be situated in light of the reception of German historicist science. At Hopkins Wilson was taught to take a historicist perspective on questions of political economy by Richard Ely, who was not only a protégé of the German historical school of economics, but also a sharp critic of English classical political economy. Relying on historicist methodological premises, Ely charged that classical political economy was scientifically out of date.⁴⁴ But the debate he fostered was not restricted to methodological matters. It was interwoven with issues of political theory because classical liberalism had drawn its views about the proper relation between government and the economy principally from classical political economy. To discredit classical political economy was to clear ground for an alternative liberalism that would approach this relation in a different way. Wilson and other progressive liberals took advantage of the opening to reinterpret past overlap between support for a liberal political and social order and support for *laissez-faire* maxims of political economy as a historically contingent juxtaposition, rather than a necessary component of liberal political thought. From their historicist perspective, they could allow that such overlap might have made sense in some times and places, while also believing that it was now outdated and thus should not constrain contemporary liberals

⁴³ Ibid., 199-201, 218.

⁴⁴ See Ely's provocative manifesto, "The Past and Present of Political Economy," *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, ser. 2, no. III (1884): 5-64. The "war among the political economists" is the starting point for Wilson's essay, "Of the Study of Politics," *New Princeton Review* III, no. 2 (1887): 188-99.

as they addressed the issue of government's role under the conditions of a modern industrial economy.⁴⁵

In taking up this issue in the concluding chapter of his 1889 textbook *The State*, Wilson exemplified the general thrust of progressive liberalism. He sought “a middle ground” between “the extreme views,” on the one hand, of *laissez-faire* proponents, and on the other, of socialists who challenged guiding principles of the existing economic order. While crediting socialists for highlighting problems associated with “modern industrial organization,” Wilson argued that they went astray in contemplating a fundamental break with the principles of competition and private ownership. It was not competition per se that was the problem, but only “unfair competition, the pretence and form of it where the substance and reality of it cannot exist.” Areas of the economy in which there were “natural” monopolies had to be recognized as such. Government control, or private ownership and management under state regulation, were both possible options here, but the latter ought to be favored “in every case” where it could be “made effectual.” Elsewhere in the economy, government could legitimately regulate the conditions and hours of labor, and test goods. These actions became desirable when “unconscientious” rivals forced businessmen with principles to face “the choice of denying their consciences or retiring from business.” Under such conditions, government

⁴⁵ On the reception of the German historical school of economics, its relation to shifts within American liberalism, and the role played by scholars—such as Henry Carter Adams and Richard T. Ely—associated in various ways with the program of historical and political science at Johns Hopkins, see Dorothy Ross, “Socialism and American Liberalism: Academic Social Thought in the 1880s,” *Perspectives in American History* XI (1977-78), 5-80.

regulation was justified as a way “of making competition equal between those who would rightfully conduct enterprise and those who would basely conduct it.”⁴⁶

In thus articulating his middle ground stance on the role of government in an industrial economy, Wilson repeatedly performed the same theoretical move. Taking up an established principle of classical liberalism—the desirability of competition—he reformulated the specific content of this principle—by emphasizing *fair* and *equal* rather than *free* competition—and appealed to it to justify, rather than oppose, government action. The blend of inheritance and remaking involved here was broadly characteristic of Wilson’s progressive liberalism. This was strikingly evident when, in the closing chapter of *The State*, he stepped back from specifically economic issues to address more generally the “natural and imperative limits to state action.” In using this language and declaring that no serious student of society could doubt that there were such limits, Wilson illustrated the classical liberal inheritance on which he drew. But when spelling out the content of this affirmation, he exemplified his progressive liberal departure from that inheritance. Wilson declared state action to be legitimate when

it is indispensable to the equalization of the conditions of endeavor, indispensable to the maintenance of uniform rules of individual rights and relationships, indispensable because to omit it would inevitably be to hamper or degrade some for the advancement of others in the scale of wealth and social standing.⁴⁷

The emphasis on uniform rules in the second clause of this statement was thoroughly classical liberal. But both the first and third clauses offered grounds on which to potentially justify an extensive role for government in domains, such as the funding and

⁴⁶ Wilson, *The State*, 656-64.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 664-65.

provision of education, that classical liberals had often seen as lying mostly or entirely beyond the sphere of legitimate state action.⁴⁸ The egalitarianism that motivated both clauses again spoke to the role of democratic doctrines—in this case doctrines about the nature of a democratic social order—in the forging of American progressive liberalism.

Wilson's progressive liberal view of legitimate state action constituted a core theoretical commitment in relation to which we can see how the elements we have been tracing in his works fit together. For Wilson, political institutions that concentrate power and responsibility fit beside a professionalized administrative apparatus as the two parts of a modern system of government able to formulate, and to effectively carry out, actions on behalf of such progressive liberal goals as "the equalization of the conditions of endeavor." In comparing American with English and continental European institutions he was diagnosing the ways American government differed from such an ideal system, and calling into question traditional American beliefs (such as reverence for the principle of dividing political power, and hostility to professional administration) that stood in the way of reforms that would move American institutions closer to that system. Wilson believed such reforms were made increasingly imperative by the dynamics of industrialization. Rising levels of economic consolidation and poor labor conditions ran counter to his progressive liberal ideal of a society that was both liberal—being based on individual merit and competition—*and* democratic—with all enjoying equal opportunities to succeed. In an industrial America, such a social order was neither

⁴⁸ The extent to which government actions justified by the first and/or third clause can potentially conflict with the second clause's demand for "uniform rules," and what should be done if conflict does indeed arise, lies at the core of much disagreement about how "liberal" progressive liberalism is.

self-emergent nor self-sustaining; rather it required positive support from a government capable of acting in a coordinated, coherent, and effective manner.⁴⁹

Government Action and Individual Freedom: A New Liberal Narrative of Progress

Wilson's view of the need for government action in the modern industrial era was at odds with the concept of progress favored by classical liberals, such as Spencer, for whom a lessening of the range of government action was a key component of progressive change. Yet Wilson was firmly wedded to conceiving of the broad trajectory of history in terms of progress, and he, just as did classical liberalism, put change in the status and circumstances of the individual at the core of this concept. To situate his view of government's role in the contemporary era as the next step in liberal progress, rather than a turn away from it, Wilson had to break apart the link that classical liberalism drew between advances in individual freedom and reductions in government's role. In *The State* he advanced a line of argument that did exactly this, and in doing so, laid historical and theoretical foundations for a new liberal narrative of progress. Such a narrative was essential if the progressive liberalism that Wilson exemplified was to be able to justify its self-conception as an agent of progress.

Wilson's argument took shape in the substantive and methodological shadow of Aryan institutional history. He approached the issue of progress specifically in terms of

⁴⁹ Wilson's support for specific government actions was conditional upon whether he saw them serving the end of defending or deepening a liberal democratic society. Over time the range of activities that he saw as justifiable in these terms increased significantly. The expansion of government's role that he oversaw as president after 1912 (including such initiatives as setting up the Federal Reserve system) went beyond the measures broached in his writings in the 1880s. This shift involved, however, no change to the underlying theoretical structure of the progressive liberal perspective on government action developed in those earlier writings.

changes over time in the institutions of the western Aryan peoples. The bulk of *The State* was made up of a historical survey, running from reconstructed early Aryan institutions, through ancient Greece and Rome, to the medieval fusion of Roman and Teutonic institutions, followed by nation-by-nation chapters on the emergence and contemporary character of modern systems of government in continental Europe, England, and the US. The challenge Wilson posed to the classical liberal narrative of progress came out in the closing chapters of the work when he offered summary conclusions about the material covered in the earlier chapters.⁵⁰

In presenting his conclusions, Wilson distinguished change in “conceptions of the nature and duty of the state” from change in the “functions” governments undertake.⁵¹ He interpreted the historical advance in individual rights and individual liberty celebrated by classical liberals specifically in terms of a transformation in the former respect, i.e. in the conception of the state.

The modern idea is this: the state no longer absorbs the individual; it only serves him: the state, as it appears in its organ, the government, is the representative of the individual, and not his representative even, except within the definite commission of constitutions; while for the rest each man makes his own social relations.⁵²

This “modern idea” involved, at the institutional level, the rise of the liberal political order of constitutional representative government. But classical liberals were wrong to think that it also involved a major reduction in the functions undertaken by government. The history of institutions showed, in Wilson’s interpretation, that no qualitative shift

⁵⁰ Ibid., chaps. XV-XVI.

⁵¹ Ibid., 640.

⁵² Ibid., 645-46.

had occurred in this regard. It was thus the case that “even under the most liberal of our modern constitutions we still meet government in every field of social endeavor.”⁵³

While suggesting that modern individual freedom was not historically linked to a major reduction in government’s role, Wilson did not deny that historical change had taken place with regard to the functions of government. Instead he offered an alternative interpretation of what it involved: what changed was “not the activities of government,” but “*the way in which it does them.*” The “ultimate standard of conduct” for government was to serve “social convenience and advancement.” Modern government was different because the rise of “new ideas” about what this standard involved led it to undertake endeavors “to aid the individual to the fullest and best possible realization of his individuality,” and to reject “administration of the individual by the old-time futile methods of guardianship.”⁵⁴

Wilson sketched here the basis for a narrative of liberal progress in which the relation between government action and individual freedom was not fixed as positive or negative, but changed as part of the forward march of progress, moving from conflict toward reconciliation and mutual support. Within the historical framework provided by such a narrative, the vanguard of progress in the contemporary world was occupied by those who held to Wilson’s “middle ground” doctrine that government should give “wide freedom to the individual to pursue his self-development,” while acting positively to provide “mutual aid” to this self-development, to guard it “against the competition

⁵³ Ibid., 646.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 646-47 (emphasis in original).

that kills,” and to reduce “antagonism between self-development and social development to a minimum.”⁵⁵

Wilson’s vision of an emergent supportive relation between government and individual freedom exemplified, once again, his remaking of liberal political thought through a blend of inheritance and departure. His progressive liberalism embraced the classical liberal belief that individual freedom and desirable social change are, at least in societies beyond a certain level of advance, mutually supporting. Wilson thus declared:

The hope of society lies in an infinite individual variety, in the freest possible play of individual forces: only in that can it find that wealth of resource which constitutes civilization, with all its appliances for satisfying human wants and mitigating human sufferings, all its incitements to thought and spurs to action.⁵⁶

Where Wilson departed from classical liberalism was in his view of the relation of government action to this “individual variety” and free “play of individual forces.”

Classical liberals treated government activities in a limited domain—ensuring a peaceful stable environment for social interactions by securing against foreign attack and domestic unrest, and providing an effective and uniform administration of justice—as necessary supports of a society characterized by such liberal traits. But they saw most government activities beyond that domain as undermining this kind of society. By contrast, Wilson believed, as we have seen, that a more extensive range of government action—reaching into areas like education and economic regulation—was necessary to support a liberal individual-centered society, especially in light of the challenges posed by an modern industrial economy. It bears emphasis, however, that as Wilson expanded the range of government action seen as necessary, he did so within a framework that still

⁵⁵ Ibid., 660.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 660.

treated government's role as one of securing preconditions for an autonomous process of social progress driven by the independent actions of diverse individuals. It was not until the economic crises of the Great Depression that American progressive liberals (and the mainstream of American political science) would envision a role for government as actively planning and directing social change.

Beyond Institutional History: Wilson, Bryce, and the Birth of Political Science

Wilson's works of the mid- to late-1880s contained varied patterns of inheritance and innovation. In his political theory innovation was the leading motif. The situation was, however, reversed with regard to methodological practices and premises. The agenda of uncovering how political institutions worked in actual practice, which he espoused in *Congressional Government*, did look forward to what would come to be known as political science. But it was debatable how far Wilson went toward fulfilling this agenda. Seen from the standpoint of political science as it subsequently developed, the minimal attention he gave to the role of political parties in American government appears incongruous. This inattention was but one indicator of the extent to which he remained within the methodological outlook of institutional history. Where Wilson's progressive liberal political theory heralded things to come, his methodological practices and premises spoke more to the intellectual heritage upon which he drew than to the future trajectory of American scholarship.

A key point of divergence here concerned the question of to what extent inquiry into present-day governments, how they worked in practice, and lessons to be learned from their comparative study, needed to draw on knowledge of lines of institutional

history reaching back centuries or even millennia. Wilson believed such knowledge to be essential. He declared: “We may study modern governments as they are; but in order to understand modern governments as they are it is necessary to know ancient and medieval governments in all their successive periods of development.”⁵⁷ From this perspective, inquiry into contemporary governments was best pursued as part of, or at most an extension of, institutional history. In presenting *The State* as a textbook of “comparative politics” Wilson took up the historian Freeman’s phrase, and in line with this inheritance, he devoted, as discussed above, a large part of the work to “the main facts of general institutional history.”⁵⁸ A historical perspective running from early Aryan institutions up to modern systems of government was, for Wilson, essential to “a thorough comparative and historical method” that could identify “wide correspondences of organization and method in government” while also highlighting differences and tracing these back “to their true sources in history and national character.”⁵⁹

The methodological vision of Wilson’s textbook was, however, out of step with rising intellectual trends. Wilson followed Herbert Baxter Adams and Freeman in seeing continuities connecting present institutions back through centuries, even millennia, of steady development to ancestor institutions deep in the past. But by the 1890s the trend of historicist scholarship was moving away from this older developmental historicism toward a new, more radical historicism skeptical about the extent and importance of such continuities. Increasingly scholars found that historical research no longer gave them a sense of the living presence of the past in the present. Instead it reinforced a deepening

⁵⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁸ Ibid., xxxv.

⁵⁹ Ibid..

sense of qualitative difference between past and present. The balance between continuity and change in historical narratives was shifting in favor of the latter. Where an emphasis on continuities structured narratives that swept through the centuries, and in doing so often implied practical lessons for the present, a deepening sense of the novelty of the present undermined the blending of historical research with practically-engaged concerns about contemporary issues in law and government that characterized most institutional histories. By the end of the century, the cutting edge of academic history was moving toward other substantive areas, while the range and amount of history drawn on by scholars engaged with practical issues of politics and governance was narrowing. Overlap did not disappear entirely, but when Herbert Baxter Adams died in 1901, his favorite motto—“History is past Politics and Politics present History”—had become more of a relic than a rallying cry. After his death, new departments of political science and of political economy were formed independent of history at Hopkins, and his successors as editors of the *Johns Hopkins University Studies* quickly dropped the old motto from their title page.⁶⁰

The Birth of Political Science: Bryce's American Commonwealth

These broad intellectual shifts help to illuminate how, as the assumptions and aspirations of institutional history lost appeal toward the close of the nineteenth century, political science began to emerge as an academic conversation distinct from that of

⁶⁰ On shifts in historical scholarship at the close of the nineteenth-century and their consequences for the divergence between historians and political scientists, see Ross, “On the Misunderstanding,” as well as the treatment in Ross’s later book. Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), chap. 8. I have previously explored these issues at somewhat greater length in Robert Adcock, “The Emergence of Political Science as a Discipline: History and the Study of Politics in America, 1875-1910,” *History of Political Thought* 24, no. 3 (2003): 459-86.

historians. But the growing sense of difference between past and present involved in the radicalization of historicism does not suffice to explicate the character of this emergent discourse. Political science departed from institutional history, not only in the range and amount of history upon which it drew, but also in its substantive concerns: temporal narrowing was accompanied by expansion in the contemporary phenomena studied. Political science took shape as a distinct conversation as scholars began to supplement their longstanding focus on government institutions through the study of mass-based political parties, and to a somewhat lesser extent, public opinion. Such phenomena had come to prominence in political life following on the extension of suffrage to the mass of the population: the birth of political science was, in effect, a reorientation of scholarship to catch up with the distinctive dynamics of politics in modern mass democracies.

Mass democracy had been inaugurated as an ongoing system of modern governance in America, and political science was in turn forged through the study of America's democratic polity. Tocqueville had written *Democracy in America* at the dawn of Jacksonian democracy, but the system was as yet so new that he failed to foresee characteristic phenomena, such as mass-based political parties, that would become central to its ongoing operation. Half a century later those phenomena were, by contrast, well developed, and it fell to another foreign observer to inaugurate political science with a pioneering study of them. The British scholar and Liberal Member of Parliament, James Bryce, made America his object of study in the 1880s—just as suffrage extension and Gladstone's remaking of the Liberal Party as a mass membership organization were transforming Britain into a modern mass democracy. Bryce spent several visits traveling in America and meeting scholars and politicians. It was, indeed,

in a visit to the young Johns Hopkins seminar of historical and political science in November 1883 that he laid out the critical reflections on Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* that were a starting point of work on his classic, *The American Commonwealth*, first published in 1888.⁶¹ While it took a foreign observer to crystallize it, the political science agenda pioneered in this book would fare better in the young, rapidly growing American academy than in Europe. Anticipating changes in intellectual boundaries and identities that would develop among American scholars over the next two decades—and to which Bryce's example contributed in no small measure—we might, somewhat ironically, credit *The American Commonwealth* as the founding work of American political science.

Bryce's book took up, as had Wilson's *Congressional Government*, the question of how American institutions worked in practice. In doing so, it also regularly employed comparison, most commonly to England but also to continental European nations, to illuminate major claims. But a methodological departure of signal import set *The American Commonwealth* apart. While Bryce had earlier made his reputation as an institutional historian,⁶² he decided that in his study of the American polity, he should resist the "temptation" toward "straying off into history." He presented this move rather defensively, granting that it had downsides, but holding that it was necessary "to bring within reasonable compass a description of the facts of to-day."⁶³ Bryce's defensiveness suggests that he perhaps recognized the challenge his statement posed to the belief in the

⁶¹ HB Adams, "New Methods," 105-06; James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1888).

⁶² In particular, Bryce established his intellectual reputation with an institutional history of the Holy Roman Empire. See James Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire* (Oxford: Shrimpton, 1864).

⁶³ Bryce, *American Commonwealth*, 1: 6.

inseparability of historical and political science cherished among institutional historians. Certainly it cut against the grain of Wilson's methodological vision—as was made clear when Wilson reviewed *The American Commonwealth*. While hailing Bryce's concern with the practical realities of American government, Wilson registered disappointment on the level of method, protesting that the book offered “an invaluable store-house of observations” but failed to reach the “guiding principles of government” that might have been obtained with “a much freer use, a much fuller use, of the historical method.”⁶⁴

The methodological break between Wilson and Bryce was a turning point in the emergence of political science out of the historicist tradition. The older approach of institutional history was passing over into a recognizably new approach to the study of government. The agenda that Wilson extolled, of uncovering how contemporary institutions worked in practice, was paralleled in Bryce's emphasis on looking beyond the “framework and constitutional machinery” of government to explore “the methods by which it is worked” and “the forces which move it and direct its course.” But for Bryce, exploring these “methods” and “forces” entailed studying a range of phenomena that went far beyond the institutional focus of *Congressional Government*. Close study of the organization and operation of parties was, Bryce emphasized, “a necessary complement to an account of the Constitution and government,” because the “spirit and force of party” was, in America, “as essential to the action of the machinery of government as steam is to a locomotive engine.” Moreover, beyond the parties there lay the force of public opinion, which Bryce saw as the “central point of the whole

⁶⁴ Woodrow Wilson, “Bryce's American Commonwealth,” *Political Science Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (1889): 162-63.

American polity.” To try to study it—“to sketch the leading political ideas, habits, and tendencies of the American people, and show how they express themselves in action”—was, he emphasized, “the most difficult and also the most vital part” of his work.⁶⁵

Study of government institutions was a necessary part of, but not sufficient to constitute, political science as pioneered by Bryce. To understand how government institutions functioned in a mass democratic polity the political scientist had to situate them in relation to broader political dynamics. Formal institutions, political parties, and public opinion were to be approached as interacting parts of a “political system.” In supplementing his study of America’s institutions with pioneering accounts of its parties and public opinion, what Bryce aspired to do was to portray “the whole political system of the country in its practice as well as its theory.”⁶⁶

With its organizing notion of the political system, and its account of parties and public opinion, Bryce’s study of the American polity brings us to a point where we can begin to identify political science as a form of inquiry differentiable from institutional history. While Bryce did present a significant amount of historical information, *The American Commonwealth* was not intended to be a contribution to institutional history.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 1: 7-8, 2: 321. At the same time that Bryce was working on his pioneering account of American political parties, Moisei Ostrogorski had independently taken up the same topic. This Russian intellectual had, earlier in the 1880s, pursued graduate work at the Free School of Political Science at Paris (which will be discussed briefly in the next chapter). Ostrogorski’s first work on the topic was published in 1888-89 as a series of articles in the journal of the Free School, *Annales des Sciences Politiques*. These articles were then grouped together as a short booklet in 1889. Ostrogorski subsequently expanded on his earlier research, and brought it together with a detailed inquiry into political parties in England, leading up to the classic 1902 comparative work, *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties*, for which he is principally remembered. Published first in English rather than French, the work appeared with a preface by Bryce that emphasized the importance of public opinion being critical and powerful enough to hold in check the tendencies of party organizations that Ostrogorski emphasized. Moisei Ostrogorski, *De l’organisation des parties politiques aux États-Unis* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1889); Moisei Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties*, trans. Frederick Clarke, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1902).

⁶⁶ Bryce, *American Commonwealth*, 1: 3.

Past changes were usually sketched on a scale of decades rather than centuries, and these historical sketches served principally to introduce more detailed accounts of present-day phenomena. A chapter on the history of political parties in America thus set the stage for an extended set of chapters on the contemporary character of American parties, their members and organization, their role in local, state, and national elections, their role in legislation and administration, and the rising tide of reform efforts aimed at them.

The treatment of historical material in Bryce's book was, moreover, fragmented. His sketches of change over time in various facets of the "political system" served as stand-alone snapshots, rather than as parts of a synthetic historical trajectory. By contrast, while Wilson had conveyed little, if any, additional historical information when sketching institutional changes in *Congressional Government*, these sketches added up to an overarching historical narrative—the rise of congressional government—which integrated and guided his analysis of the present day.

Bryce's political science did not seek to reject or replace institutional history, but rather to supplement it by pursuing a new methodological angle of inquiry. Where institutional history situated contemporary institutions in relation to earlier institutions, in lines of descent running back to an often-distant past, the new angle of inquiry situated those institutions in relation to a broad set of present-day phenomena seen as interacting parts of a larger political system. Pursuit of this approach was entirely compatible with accepting both specific findings, and the synthetic historical edifice, of institutional historians. Bryce thus held, as did Wilson, to the Teutonic view of the historical origins of American institutions. More generally, when comparing America to other countries, Bryce emphasized broad lines of contrast inherited from the synthetic

branching framework of institutional history: the contrast of the “progressive” West versus the primitive or static societies found elsewhere; and, among progressive nations, the contrast between the path of political development taken in England (and inherited by its colonial offspring) versus that taken in continental Europe. Bryce had pioneered a new methodological approach to studying contemporary government and politics. But practitioners of this new, more present-oriented, approach could, and long would, continue to draw on and transmit views of past institutional changes and framing comparative contrasts inherited from the work of institutional historians. The political science born during the closing years of the nineteenth century thus involved a departure from, but no rupture with, its most significant intellectual predecessor within the nineteenth-century historicist tradition.

A. Lawrence Lowell: Extending Bryce in the Service of Disillusioned Classical Liberalism

While credit for pioneering modern political science lies with the British Bryce, it was in the American academy that the approach exemplified by *The American Commonwealth* received its warmest reception. Harvard’s A. Lawrence Lowell led the way in taking up, and innovatively extending, the emergent political science conversation. In the 1890s and early 1900s he extended the application of the new approach beyond America by using it to study contemporary political developments in continental Europe and Britain. His works are of central interest as a landmark contribution to the development of political science within the American academy. But they call for attention on more than just methodological grounds. Where Wilson’s works

exemplified the progressive liberalism propounded by growing numbers of American scholars as the Gilded Age gave way to the Progressive Era, Lowell's works provide us with a first American example of the alternative, less common, theoretical trajectory of disillusioned classical liberalism.

A Bostonian Defender of American Institutions

Lowell was a Boston Brahmin and a Harvard man. His family had been connected to the school for generations and he spent much of his adult life associated with it in various capacities. This association began when Lowell attended Harvard as an undergraduate in the 1870s during the first decade of the reforming Charles Eliot's forty-year presidency. It culminated in Lowell's selection to succeed Eliot as Harvard President in 1909 (a position that he held until 1933). As an undergraduate Lowell found Henry Adams, with whom he studied institutional history, to be one of his most (and few) inspiring teachers.⁶⁷ After going on to Harvard's Law School, he practiced law in Boston for almost two decades before joining the Harvard faculty in 1897 to teach on "Existing Political Systems."⁶⁸ As a lawyer Lowell had been no great success. But the job had given him time to establish his intellectual reputation as a student of the "actual

⁶⁷ This and subsequent biographical details about Lowell are taken from Henry Aaron Yeomans, *Abbot Lawrence Lowell, 1856-1943* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948).

⁶⁸ While there was a single department of history and government at Harvard until 1911, courses were separated under these two headings in the catalog from 1892 on. Lowell was brought in to teach in the government side of the department, and did much to further the emphasis on "the actual performance of government in modern countries" stressed by AB Hart in his later retrospective on the field's development at Harvard. Hart, "Government," 181-82.

working” of modern governments with his 1889 collection *Essays on Government*, and even more so, his 1896 book *Government and Parties in Continental Europe*.⁶⁹

Essays on Government addressed a range of topics, but it was, in good part and most significantly, a critical response to Wilson’s *Congressional Government*. Lowell contended that Wilson’s assertion of a historical transformation in America’s institutions overstated the facts. Changes had occurred but the institutional division of powers was alive and well, not only as a theory but as a practical reality: the independence and strength of the states, the presidency, and especially the judiciary were all greater than Wilson’s rise of congressional government thesis allowed for.⁷⁰ Lowell’s criticism of Wilson framed these issues in light of an empiricist standard of getting the historical facts right. But this criticism took place against a backdrop of theoretical disagreement. Where Wilson questioned the worth of the institutional division of political power, Lowell paralleled Maine in embracing a Whiggish view of it as a salutary curb on democracy. The second essay in his collection (which was entitled “Democracy and the Constitution”) paralleled the theoretical thrust of Maine’s *Popular Government*. It stressed the distinction and the tension between the principle of “democracy” and the principle of protecting “private rights” and “personal liberty” through “limited government.” Lowell here also expressed, like Maine, the view that in England the

⁶⁹ A. Lawrence Lowell, *Essays on Government* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1889); A. Lawrence Lowell, *Governments and Parties in Continental Europe*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1896). The phrase “actual working” carries much weight in the opening paragraphs of both works. *Essays*, 2; *Governments and Parties*, v.

⁷⁰ Lowell, *Essays*, 46-57.

principle of limited government had begun to lose its sway, while in America it was still holding its ground in the 1880s, and hopefully would continue to do so.⁷¹

Lowell stood out from Maine, however, for the role he gave to the concept of the “political system” in his arguments. In the *Essays* Lowell argued that the hope of Wilson and other reform-minded writers that American institutions might be improved by introducing certain elements of parliamentary government failed to grasp that the forms of government in America and England were alternative *systems*, each constituting a complex equilibrium of interrelated parts. It was rarely possible to adjust one aspect of institutions in such a system without creating a chain of consequences that was hard to predict, and which could, on balance, produce harm than good. For Lowell, a scientific comparative study of the actual working of such systems should teach American reformers to target and temper their hopes. Such inquiry could differentiate “abuses”—for example, the spoils system in American administration—that lacked a “necessary connection” with the form of government (and thus could be addressed by reform), from “defects inherent in the system itself.” Lowell allowed that there were prominent flaws in the American political system. But he stressed that the English system involved its own blend of inherent “merits” and “faults,” and he suggested that this blend did not, on balance, make that system as self-evidently superior as Wilson and progressive liberals took it to be. Steering clear of passing judgment upon the general superiority of either

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 60-124. These themes are further developed in Lowell’s third essay, “The Responsibility of American Lawyers,” which charged lawyers with the task of explicating and defending the “excellence of the principles” on which the American constitution was built. See *Ibid.*, 125, 127-28.

system, what Lowell instead offered was his conviction that “our system is still the best for us.”⁷²

Embracing and Extending Bryce’s Political Science

In his empiricist appeal to the facts, his use of the concept of a “political system,” and his equanimity about the merits of American and English systems of government, Lowell paralleled distinctive features of *The American Commonwealth*. This classic work had come out too late to have a major impact on his *Essays*, but the parallels helped to make Lowell one of Bryce’s most receptive and acute American readers. In his subsequent work Lowell would follow Bryce’s lead by combining the study of legal and governmental institutions, as emphasized in the *Essays*, with the study of political parties and public opinion. Brought into contact by their intellectual work, Lowell and Bryce in time became personal friends. In the preface to his *Government of England* of 1908—which sought to do for England what Bryce had done for America—Lowell would, in warmly thanking Bryce (then British ambassador to America) for encouragement and assistance, hail his friend as “the master and guide of all students of modern political systems.”⁷³

During the years of work that led up to the *Government of England*, Lowell published a 1901 study in which he collected and analyzed quantitative data to compare

⁷² Ibid, 58. When Lowell returned to US-UK comparisons in later work he would again strike a note of equanimity, suggesting that each system had its own distinctive pros and cons and emphasizing that it was not his concern to pass a general judgment on their relative merit, but to discover the facts. A. Lawrence Lowell, "Oscillations in Politics," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* XII (1898): 96-97. A. Lawrence Lowell, "The Influence of Party Upon Legislation in England and America," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1901* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1902), 1: 350.

⁷³ A. Lawrence Lowell, *The Government of England*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1908), 1: vii.

the influence of parties over legislation in England and America.⁷⁴ To the extent that he is remembered among American political scientists today, it is principally for this pioneering venture into quantitatively-based research. But that study was but a small element in the long line of research and reflection that went into the *Government of England*. Lowell's approach was on the whole, like Bryce's, that of a gentleman scholar: drawing together the results of wide reading, travel in the country under study, and, most importantly, conversations and letter exchanges with both scholars and political actors there.⁷⁵ In an era predating research funding from foundations or government, it was an approach to comparative political science principally open to elite individuals who, like Lowell and Bryce, could afford the time and expense, and had, or were skilled at forging, good connections with members of intellectual and political elites in other countries.

The *Government of England* has a fair claim to be Lowell's best book, but his most trail-blazing and influential contributions to the development of American political science had been made earlier in works he published between his 1889 *Essays on Government* and this 1908 tome. In the early- to mid-1890s Lowell undertook a comparative study of France, Italy, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Switzerland that extended to these countries Bryce's call to supplement the study of government institutions with inquiry into the character and dynamics of political parties. In the

⁷⁴ Lowell, "Influence of Party."

⁷⁵ In the preface of the *Government of England*, Lowell declared: "The forces to be studied do not lie upon the surface, and some of them are not described in any document or found in any treatise. They can be learned only from men connected with the machinery of public life. A student must, therefore, rely largely upon conversations which he can use but cannot cite as authorities, and the soundness of his conclusions must be measured less by his references in footnotes than by the judgment of the small portion of the public that knows at first-hand the things whereof he speaks." *Ibid.*, 1: vi.

preface to his resulting 1896 book, *Governments and Parties in Continental Europe*, Lowell succinctly spelled out his approach: “The treatment of each country begins with a description of its chief institutions, or political organization; this is followed by a sketch of its recent history, in order to show how the parties actually work; and, finally, an attempt is made to find the causes of the condition of party life.”⁷⁶

Lowell’s attention was caught and focused by the absence in the countries he studied of the “division into two great parties” that existed in most “Anglo-Saxon countries.”⁷⁷ The line of contrast here—the UK and its colonial offspring versus continental Europe—had, of course, long been a core concern of institutional history. But in taking up this line of contrast Lowell was also updating its content to better suit a transformed political world. Most European countries had, in recent decades, established elected representative assemblies based on widespread suffrage. By directing attention toward differences in the character and dynamics of political parties Lowell was, in effect, revitalizing the traditional line of contrast by expanding its substantive content beyond formal institutions. In an era in which modern “progressive” nations all had political institutions formally incorporating a significant element of mass-based electoral politics, the new angle taken by political science promised, by directing attention toward phenomena distinctively associated with such mass-based politics, to make up for the declining payoff of attending to formal institutions as a way of highlighting and explaining cross-national contrasts.

⁷⁶ Lowell, *Governments and Parties*, 1: vii.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

The potential of Lowell's redirection was illuminated by his contention that differences in the domain of political parties play a significant role in shaping the actual working of political systems. A key example for Lowell here was France. Under the Third Republic, France now had institutions of parliamentary government similar in general form (if not in all specific details) to those of England.⁷⁸ But the actual working of its political system differed greatly from that of England. In Lowell's analysis the multiplicity and unstable contours of French political parties played a major role in shaping and perpetuating this difference.

Even as Lowell reoriented the content of the England versus France comparison, he carried forward its traditional evaluative weight. England served Lowell, as it had served earlier institutional historians, as a standard against which France fell short. Indeed Lowell took the contrast between them as illustrating a general principle: the institutional framework of parliamentary government needs, if it is to consistently function well, to be paired with a two-party system.⁷⁹ Lowell did however hold out a cautious optimism that France might be moving toward the "normal" kind of parliamentary government exemplified by England. He suggested that a consensus in support of the existing form of government might finally be taking hold—a consensus the absence of which had helped make France a poster-child of instability and revolution for a century. The lack of consensus had, Lowell believed, been one major cause of the multiplicity of political parties in France; thus the emergence of a consensus might open the way to two-party politics as found in the Anglo-Saxon world.⁸⁰ Notably Lowell here

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1: 2-7.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1: 69-74.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1: 101-05, 137-42.

looked, as did Bryce when dealing with America, behind the party system to phenomena of public opinion as an even more basic driver of the shape of political life under the institutional conditions of a modern mass democracy.

While the traditional contrast between Anglo-Saxon and continental European nations was the starting point for Lowell, his study did more than just rework that old contrast in new political science terms. As he looked beyond France to the other nations of continental Europe Lowell drew out and emphasized a second line of contrast that cut across the contrast between Anglo-Saxon and continental European nations. Although he portrayed France and Italy's governments as parliamentary systems that did not function as well as England's, Lowell did categorize them, alongside the UK and United States, as cases of "popular government." This was a category from which he, by contrast, pointedly excluded Germany and Austria. He did so on the grounds that monarchs in Germany and Austria retained, and had indeed recently increased, their control over governments that were not in practice responsible to the elected assemblies or public opinion found in those countries.

This second line of contrast was interwoven with differences in the way Lowell judged the future political prospects of the continental European nations he studied. He had a cautious optimism about the long-term prospects for stable and successful popular government in France and Italy.⁸¹ But there was no such optimism in his reflections on Germany and Austria.⁸² The prospect of popular government in Germany was, he contended, vitiated by a party system that cut along rather than across class lines. The

⁸¹ Ibid., 1: 137-45, 229-31.

⁸² Ibid., 2: 52-69, 119-23.

situation was, moreover, getting worse rather than better due to the growing divide between, on the one hand, supporters of the expanding socialist party, and on the other, supporters of a rising “new monarchical theory” hostile to universal suffrage and celebrating “military monarchy” as “the best possible form of government.”⁸³ In Austria, it was a division of political parties along ethnic lines that ruled out popular government as a viable option. In Lowell’s foreboding judgment, political division along these lines marked out the kingdom as the place where tides of “race feeling” on the rise throughout Europe cast their darkest “shadows.”⁸⁴ With benefit of hindsight, it is easy to see Lowell’s mid-1890s reflections upon the distinctive and problematic character of the governments of Germany and Austria as displaying a prescient insight about political tensions that would feed into the shattering calamities of twentieth-century Europe.

Lowell’s Disillusioning Political Science

Lowell’s reflections on Germany and Austria exemplified a hard-edged realism that pervades his scholarship. Even when offering cautious optimism about the Third Republic, what Lowell appreciated was the possibility that French politicians might give up passionate commitments to ideal visions of a transformed social and political order, in favor of a disillusioned willingness to work with a system that was far from realizing the high hopes that attended its formation.⁸⁵ Such disillusionment was not only Lowell’s prescription for France; it was central to his view of the proper character and purpose of

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2: 54; see also 1: 376-77 on the “vitality of the monarchical principle” at the level of the individual states making up the German federation.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 2: 122-23. For Lowell, as for many other thinkers of his time, talk of “race” and “race feeling” played roles that have since been almost entirely subsumed by talk of “nations” and “nationalism.”

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1: 137-41.

political science, at least when practiced within the context of a liberal order. As pursued and propounded by Lowell, political science was a science of detached realism offering cold doses of “the facts” that might dampen enthusiasm for implausible and potentially disruptive schemes of social and political change. His science did not reject all proposed changes out of hand, but it set out to adjudicate whether proposed changes were premised on assumptions insensitive to, or even contradicted by, the facts (as Lowell saw them) concerning the actual working of political systems.⁸⁶

This conception of political science held up a standard that, in Lowell’s judgment, his fellow American scholars of politics failed to meet. In the late 1880s, his *Essays on Government* had charged Wilson’s *Congressional Government* with falling short of its proclaimed aspiration to uncover the facts of how American institutions operated in practice. Two decades later, we find Lowell declaring, in his address as the fifth president of the American Political Science Association, that the emergent discipline was doing little to live up to the agenda of studying the actual working of government.⁸⁷ It was this critical, almost disdainful, attitude that forms the backdrop to Lowell’s oft-cited 1901 study of the influence of parties upon legislation in England and America. While that study was a part of the research leading up to Lowell’s *Government of England*, it was also, more immediately, a rebuttal of some key premises of American scholars and progressive reformers who unfavorably compared parties in America with their supposedly less despotic counterparts on the other side of the Atlantic. Lowell

⁸⁶ The fullest statement of Lowell’s views on the proper character and purpose of political science is found in the Presidential Address he gave to the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in December 1909. A. Lawrence Lowell, “The Physiology of Politics,” *American Political Science Review* 4, no. 1 (1910): 1-15.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

argued that such comparisons were confused by their failure to distinguish control over patronage from control over legislation, and he sought to document, via a studious collection and analysis of facts, that American parties actually had significantly *less* control over legislation than parties in England. By thus calling into question a common belief presupposed in the political reform proposals favored by some progressive liberal scholars and activists, Lowell's study exemplified the kind of disillusioning work that he thought political science could and should perform.⁸⁸

Lowell's Disillusioned Classical Liberalism

Lowell's aspiration to what we might call a "disillusioning science" was accompanied by a disillusioned interpretation of the broad tendencies of ongoing change in his day. It is in light of this interpretation that the specific character of Lowell's liberalism comes to the fore, and this in turn, explicates the manner in which he saw a disillusioning political science serving the ends of liberal order and progress. While Wilson exemplified the theoretical trajectory of progressive liberalism, Lowell exemplified the alternative liberal response to an era in which the direction of ongoing changes seemed increasingly at odds with a classical liberal vision of government's role.

In the mid- to late-1880s, as Wilson was articulating a progressive liberal reconfiguration of the relation of government action to individual freedom, Lowell was, by contrast, steadfastly reaffirming classical liberal tenets in the essays that comprised his 1889 *Essays on Government*. Endorsing much of the critical view of contemporary trends offered by Spencer's 1884 *The Man versus The State*, Lowell interpreted recent

⁸⁸ Lowell, "Influence of Party."

events in terms of a historical reversal: after decades on the defensive “the paternal theory of government” was now “gaining ground rapidly in all countries.”⁸⁹ This reversal had begun in Europe, but it was beginning to make its way even in America, bringing the country to a crossroads in its history. In the introduction to his *Essays*, Lowell put aside a scientific tone so as to “speak freely” about the situation as he then saw it. Blending the image of a reviving paternalism with Maine’s conception of progress as movement from status to contract, he rang an alarm bell for the future: “We are placed to-day [*sic*] between individualism and paternal government, which deals with men as rigid masses; and to accept the latter would be a step backward from contract toward status, not an advance in the direction which the world has followed hitherto.”⁹⁰

The sharp edge evident at times in Lowell’s 1889 *Essays* would be tempered in his later works in favor of a more matter of fact tone, but he retained throughout his interpretation of the late-nineteenth century as an era of revived paternalism. In the mid- to late-1890s we find him discussing the ongoing “drift toward paternal government” as coupling a “great increase in the functions of the state” with a “widespread faith in the possibility of regenerating the world by legislation.”⁹¹ While recognizing that this trend

⁸⁹ Lowell, *Essays*, 68.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19. The combination of Spencerian criticism of present trends and the idea of regression from “contract” toward “status” was not novel to Lowell. While in Chapter One we focused on the crystallization of Spencer’s critical views during the 1870s, in refining these views during the 1880s Spencer integrated Maine’s language into his sociology by taking up the “contract” vs. “status” distinction as a way of further explicating his “industrial” vs. “military society” contrast. The two dichotomies reinforce one another, not only in *The Man Versus The State*, but also in the part of *The Principles of Sociology* on “Political Institutions” that Spencer initially published in 1882. Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, 3 vols. (New York: Appleton, 1898), II: part V; Herbert Spencer, *The Man Versus the State, with Six Essays on Government, Society, and Freedom* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1992; first published 1884).

⁹¹ Lowell, “Oscillations,” 95.

had developed further in some countries than others, he identified paternalistic efforts “to restrain the liberty of the individual and subject him to governmental supervision and control” as a “general tendency” on display in all advanced countries.⁹² It is of note here, however, that in discussing this trend Lowell also chose to characterize “Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, and the English political economists of the earlier school” as preachers of “extreme *laissez-faire* doctrines.” His doing so seemed, perhaps, to imply a growing distance on his part from such doctrines (as well as a rather superficial understanding of these thinkers).⁹³

The position that Lowell moved towards is on display in the “Reflections” chapters that conclude his 1908 *Government of England*. In a chapter on “The Growth of Paternalism” he returned to his familiar theme, but without the same hostile edge found in his earlier *Essays*. He granted that a good part of the “paternal, perhaps even grandmotherly, legislation” passed in recent decades in England had been beneficial in important respects, and suggested that the turn in this direction taken in all advanced countries “might have been expected, for unless one adopts the principles of *laissez-faire* in their most absolute form, more or less regulation of economic and social relations is always necessary.”⁹⁴ There was no longer the sense here of an unyielding proponent of *laissez-faire* bemoaning a world gone awry. Yet Lowell had, on the other hand, certainly not become a cheerleader for the reform enthusiasms of the new progressive liberalism. He worried that the “modern world” was “prone to deal only with the things that are

⁹² Lowell, *Governments and Parties*, 1: 34.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Lowell, *Government of England*, 2: 526.

pressing and obvious, and therefore to treat symptoms rather than causes.”⁹⁵ His classical liberal anxieties had not so much disappeared as become more focused—general hostility to paternal government had given way to a specific fear of legislation conferring “special rights” on certain classes. A move toward such “class legislation” in Britain was, he held, evident in the Trade Disputes Act of 1906 exempting trade unions from legal liabilities that had hampered their activities. For Lowell this Act exemplified the frightening potential that British parties, in power-hungry bids to sway classes of voters, would put aside principles and enact a wave of such legislation. This was, he warned, “probably the most serious menace to which British institutions are exposed.”⁹⁶

Lowell’s views provide us with a first American example of the disillusioned species of classical liberalism forged in the late-nineteenth century in response to the growing discrepancies between earlier classical liberal hopes and the direction of ongoing social and political change. The disillusionment of classical liberalism was evident in England in the swing of Maine and Spencer away from earlier optimism toward bleak views of the contemporary era and immediate future. It was, in turn, evident in America in the somber tones of Lowell as discussed here. Faced with a world that seemed to be moving away from the classical liberal path of progress, liberals who recognized this shift, but who were uninterested in rethinking individual freedom in the way that progressive liberalism did, instead rethought progress and its relation to their

⁹⁵ Ibid., 2: 529.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 2: 534. In Lowell’s fear it is easy to hear advance echoes of the later classical liberalism of Hayek, for whom the 1906 Act was “the most fateful law in Britain’s modern history,” marking as it did, for him, the moment when British Liberals sold out the core liberal principle of a social order without special privileges for short-term political gain, with disastrous long-run economic consequences. See Friedrich A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*, Vol. 3: *The Political Order of a Free People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 31-32.

own day. For disillusioned classical liberals, progress largely ceased to be seen as something immediately tangible in contemporary events. The liberal end of history retreated from the present and near future into a more distant time frame, and in the most extreme cases of disillusionment, hopes were cast aside entirely as the very concept of progress was dismissed as an outdated illusion.

We will engage with an American example of this extreme disillusionment when we deal with William Graham Sumner in Chapter Five, but it was a considerably more moderate stance that Lowell had come to settle upon by the early 1900s. He retained the idea of progress as a long-run tendency, but had dropped his earlier conception of it in such terms as those of status and contract, instead leaving its specific content elusive. This elusiveness was paralleled, in turn, by vagueness about the trajectory of progress, now seen by Lowell as tracking a path that was far from clear or straight. In his “Reflections” in the *Government of England*, he turned to a metaphor to articulate the view he had reached: “Human progress is like beating to windward, a tack to starboard and then a tack to port, for mankind, unable to discern absolute truth in shaping its course, moves forward by over-accentuating one principle at a time.”⁹⁷

It is in light of this view of progress that we should see Lowell’s aspiration for a political science that would temper excessive or misguided enthusiasms for change. Lowell was, in effect, charging political science with helping to prevent prevailing enthusiasms from leading the ship of state so far in one direction as to lose the long-term track of progress. A disillusioning science was not justified for Lowell as an end in itself or an agent of reaction, but as something that, via its moderating effects in the short-

⁹⁷ Lowell, *Government of England*, 2: 521.

term, might serve the longer-term interests of liberal progress. This view of the character and purpose of a liberal science of politics was, however, a minority view among American scholars, just as was the disillusioned classical liberalism with which it was paired in Lowell's thought. Progressive liberalism charted a very different view of political science as a science advocating the need for reform in America and using overseas comparisons to suggest the best direction for such reform to take. The character and purpose of such a reform science has already been hinted at my discussion of Wilson's works, and in the next chapter we will see it more fully fleshed out as the leading agenda in the new discipline of political science.

**CHAPTER FOUR. ROUNDING OUT A NEW DISCIPLINE: FROM THE
COLUMBIA SCHOOL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE TO THE
AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION**

In the last chapter, I explored the reception of institutional history in the transforming American academy and charted how methodological departures from this intellectual starting point began to give shape to political science as a field of scholarship increasingly distinguishable from that of academic history. Institutional history was the single most important current of European liberal historicist science to cross the Atlantic and feed into the emerging new conversation of American political science. But two further strands of scholarship in the historicist tradition—in comparative legislation, and in the theory of the State—also need to be considered to round out an account of how political science developed out of the currents of liberal historicist science received into the young American academy. Both of these strands were, among their leading European exemplars, pursued alongside institutional history, but each was also methodologically different enough to stand somewhat apart from the historical works of figures like Maine and Freeman. The study of comparative legislation and the theory of the State thus each warrant a freestanding consideration of their reception and role within the developing conversation of the liberal science of politics in America.

To follow the reception of these strands of historicist science it is necessary to extend our exploration of the study of government and politics within the transforming American academy beyond Harvard and Johns Hopkins. The taking up of ideals and institutions of the research university that began in the 1870s with Eliot starting to

reform Harvard, and the founding of Hopkins, soon gathered broader momentum. The last two decades of the nineteenth century saw a nation-wide wave of reforms and foundings. Amid this broad transformation, one beginning in particular was of especial import for the science of politics: a graduate-level School of Political Science opened its doors at Columbia in New York in 1880. Growing in size and prestige through the 1880s and 1890s, the school led the transformation of Columbia College into Columbia University, and it had become, by the close of the century, the leading American center for academic research and training in the liberal science of politics. Institutional history was taken up here as at Harvard and Hopkins, but the overall orientation of the science of politics at Columbia had a distinctive sheen because institutional history was there received alongside (and, in certain respects, subordinated to) the study of comparative legislation and the theory of the State.

I pursue three objectives in discussing in this chapter the development of the science of politics at Columbia. First, by exploring further strands of European liberal historicist science taken up by American scholars, I round out my account of the intellectual starting points for the conversations that fed into the emerging field of political science. Second, by explicating the distinctive pattern of European debts drawn on at Columbia, I illuminate a major methodological divide within this emergent field. The theory of the State helped give shape to a conception of the proper character and purpose of political science infused by the legacy of idealist philosophy and at odds with Lowell's disillusioning empiricism. However, the distinctiveness of Columbia's School of Political Science in this and other respects should not lead us to overlook the broad intellectual trajectories that were as evident there as elsewhere in the American academy.

My third objective is thus to show how developments at Columbia further illuminate methodological and theoretical trajectories explored in Chapter Three: the movement towards more present-focused, practically-oriented studies, and, cutting across this common methodological trajectory, the alternative theoretical trajectories charted in the forging of progressive liberalism versus the disillusionment of classical liberalism.

A French Model: Comparative Legislation and the Free School of Political Science

Much of the European heritage most important to education and scholarship in politics and government at Columbia was discussed in Chapter One's survey of early- to mid-nineteenth century exemplars of institutional history and the theory of the State. But I have waited until now to introduce a third strand of European liberal scholarship—the study of comparative legislation—which is specially relevant here because of its centrality to inquiry and instruction at the *École Libre des Sciences Politiques* (the Free School of Political Science) founded in Paris in 1872. The Free School was, as I will discuss in the next section, looked to as a model during the founding of the School of Political Science at Columbia.

The character of inquiry in comparative legislation is suggested by a contrast that Maine took pains to make when he first waved the banner of “the Comparative Method” in his *Village Communities East and West*. This book put in print a series of lectures that Maine gave at Oxford after being appointed to its Chair in Comparative Jurisprudence in 1869. In opening his lectures Maine contrasted the institutional history he was presenting with the kind of inquiry he expected his listeners to associate with “comparative jurisprudence.” Such inquiry undertook comparisons with an eye toward facilitating

“legislation and the practical improvement of law,” rather than, as Maine did in his lectures, “to throw light upon the history of law.”¹ While Maine did not identify exemplars of the practically-oriented line of inquiry from which he sought to distinguish himself here, he could have looked across the English channel for contemporary illustration. In the same year as Maine’s appointment at Oxford, the Société de Législation Comparée was founded in France. The society brought academics together with political, administrative, and judicial elites in practically-oriented discussions of matters of contemporary public concern. Its first president was Edouard Laboulaye, Professor of Comparative Legislation at the Collège de France, and a prominent liberal opponent of Napoleon III’s regime. In his own works and lectures, Laboulaye pursued the study of comparative legislation alongside institutional history, with special attention (following in the intellectual and political lineage of Tocqueville) to the United States as a model of the institutions and potential of liberal freedom under modern democratic conditions.²

The new society was a harbinger of efforts to create a practically minded liberal elite that gained additional impetus after France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, with its dramatic domestic reverberations in the downfall of Napoleon III, and the subsequent conflict between the newly established Third Republic and the Paris

¹ Henry Sumner Maine, *Village-Communities in the East and West*, 3rd ed. (New York: Henry Holt, 1876), 3-7.

² Laboulaye’s admiration for America was most perhaps famously captured in his proposal—first made at a dinner party in 1865 when he and other liberal opponents of Napoleon’s III Second Empire were celebrating the North’s victory in the American Civil War—that the French should fund by popular subscription a monument to American independence and liberty. The proposal led to the design of the Statue of Liberty and its eventual erection in New York Harbor. For more on Laboulaye, see Walter D. Gray, *Interpreting American Democracy in France: The Career of Edouard Laboulaye, 1811-1883* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994).

Commune. In the aftermath of these tumultuous events, the Free School of Political Science was founded by a group of intellectuals (Guizot lived just long enough to be one of those giving support), politicians, and businessmen. Their goal was to create an institution offering advanced instruction suited to training a political and administrative elite for the new Republic. At the Free School, academic subjects were to be studied from a principally practical point of view, with an emphasis placed on comparative study of foreign countries and the lessons to be drawn from them. The head of the school was Émile Boutmy, whose own scholarship focused on institutional history and the comparative study of English, French, and American constitutional law.³ The curriculum of the Free School brought together a range of subjects—including history, public law, administration, political economy and finance, diplomacy and colonial policy—with specifically comparative courses being offered in topics ranging from constitutional law and civil legislation, to administrative organization and financial systems.⁴

The practically-oriented mode of inquiry pursued in the study of comparative legislation, and applied to an expanded range of subjects at the Free School, was intellectually rooted in the historicist tradition. This was evident in Laboulaye's and Boutmy's commitment to institutional history alongside study of comparative legislation. But it was *modern* institutional history that they predominantly emphasized. Following in line with this emphasis, inquiry and instruction at the Free School had a notably delimited comparative scope: it focused principally on the recent history and contemporary character of political and administrative institutions, laws, and policies in

³ See, for example, Émile Boutmy, *Études De Droit Constitutionnel: France—Angleterre—États-Unis* (Paris: Plon, Nourrit, 1887).

⁴ Andrew Dickson White, "European Schools of History and Politics," *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, ser. 5, no. 12 (1887): 14-15.

the major powers of Europe and in the United States. This focus reflected more than just a practical orientation. It was supported by the belief that France and these other nations were so shaped by their participation in a qualitative historical transformation, which forged distinctively “modern” societies, as to make institutions, laws, and policies from other times and places at best irrelevant as practical examples for contemporary reforms and governance.⁵

This belief had, in one form or another, been a core tenet of French liberalism ever since Constant diagnosed ills of the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras in terms of a failure to grasp and respond to the novel character and needs of modern society. This belief had, in the thought of Guizot and Tocqueville, been reframed in terms of the rising field of institutional history. The result was a French variant of liberal historicism whose emphasis on the novelty of the “modern” placed it somewhat at odds with the Whiggish stress on institutional continuities and the unity of history propounded in England by Maine and Freeman, and taken up in America by Herbert Baxter Adams.

The French liberal belief in a qualitative break setting apart “modern” societies had been offered fresh validation from the cutting edge of historicist science in Fustel de Coulanges’ 1864 *The Ancient City*. In introducing his comparative historical study of ancient Greek and Roman institutions, Coulanges stressed his concern “to set in a clear light the radical and essential differences which at all times distinguished these ancient

⁵ The outlook that I am explicating here specifically with reference to the French context also appears in Bluntschli’s work. The title of his *Lehre vom modernen Stat* (translated in English as “The Theory of the State”) flags the belief in the qualitatively distinctive character of the “modern” propounded in the book. Moreover, we might note that, at the one point where Bluntschli in passing uses the phrase “comparative method,” he does so in reference to the kind of comparative study I am discussing here. He says that this method “considers the most important states alongside of one another.” J. C. Bluntschli, *The Theory of the State* (Kitchener, ON: Batoche Books, 2000), 70-71.

peoples from modern societies.” He also made clear the practical ramifications of this concern. In words echoing Constant, he declared that “liberty among the moderns” had been “put in peril” and “the march of modern society” impeded during the “last eighty years” by the still all too common tendency of looking to ancient examples when pursuing practical action in a modern social setting. But the liberty and institutions of the ancients were, Coulanges contended, irretrievably interwoven with social beliefs and practices rooted in ancient religion and radically different from those found in modern societies: the study of ancient Greece and Rome must hence be a purely historical exercise in reconstructing two “entirely foreign” societies and their institutions using the latest methods of historicist science, not a source of practically relevant examples.⁶

The European historicist tradition in the mid-nineteenth century thus housed competing interpretations of the course and character of institutional history. Interpretations that stressed the novelty of “modern” societies provided a basis in historicist science for the present-focused line of practical inquiry and instruction pursued at the Free School after its founding in 1872. Initially strongest in France (due in good measure to the specific political situation facing liberals there), this interpretation would gain wider sway in the closing decades of the century as the center of intellectual gravity among academic historians in Germany, England, and America moved away from developmental historicism towards a more radical historicism. This intellectual shift took place against a background of dramatic social and economic changes, and associated calls for political, legal, and policy reforms to keep up with the needs of a

⁶ Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City*, trans. Willard Small (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), 11-13. First published in French as *La Cité antique* (Paris: Hachette, 1864).

“modern” democratizing and industrializing (and imperializing and militarizing) age. Taken together with the success of the Free School in its elite training efforts, these shifts created contexts outside of France amenable to the diffusion of the practical, present-oriented inquiry and instruction pursued at the School. French developments discussed in this section would thus come, for example, to be taken as a model in 1890s Britain during the founding both of a Society for Comparative Legislation, and of the London School of Economics and Political Science.

The Columbia School of Political Science: Its Founding and Methodological Orientation

The approach developed in the study of comparative legislation by such scholars as Laboulaye and Boutmy, and extended at the Free School in the 1870s into a wide-ranging model of inquiry and instruction, would prove attractive to pioneers of the liberal science of politics in the American academy. This French model especially caught the attention of Andrew Dickson White (president of Cornell University and future inaugural president of the AHA), for example, in the late 1870s when he surveyed European advanced education in history and politics seeking lessons for future American programs.⁷ The School of Political Science founded at Columbia in 1880 under the leadership of John Burgess stands out, however, as embodying the most extensive set of

⁷ Andrew Dickson White, *Autobiography of Andrew Dickson White*, 2 vols. (New York: Century, 1905), chap. LVII. Drawing his findings together in an address at Johns Hopkins in 1879, White argued that the study of comparative legislation should join institutional history and political economy as a key part of an education in “political science.” Andrew Dickson White, *Education in Political Science: An Address* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1879), 17.

institutional and intellectual debts to this French model to take shape within the transforming American academy.

After earning his PhD in Germany, Burgess had taken up a post at Amherst (his own undergraduate college) as Professor of History and Political Science in 1873. Imbued with ideals of the German research university, he sought to set up a graduate program there, but was rebuffed and subsequently left for Columbia in 1876. Burgess's aspirations there were met and even exceeded early in 1880, when Columbia's trustees invited him to found not simply a program, but a new faculty and school of graduate instruction. Seeking a model on which to draw on in his founding efforts, Burgess visited Paris in the late spring and summer to learn about the Free School of Political Science. He spent two months discussing with Boutmy the "organization, methods, and aims of his school," and would visit again in 1881 and 1882 to learn more.⁸

The Columbia School of Political Science opened its doors on October 4, 1880 with Burgess at its head, assisted by three colleagues who had earlier been his students at Amherst. The term "Political Science" in the new school's name served, as it did in the name of the Free School, as a collective label under which a range of subjects were brought together. While not a direct copy, the curriculum at Columbia bore significant parallels to that at the Free School: the focus was on the historical development and contemporary character of modern public law, political and administrative institutions, and economic institutions and policies in England, the United States, and the major states of continental Europe.

⁸ John W. Burgess, *Reminiscences of an American Scholar: The Beginnings of Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 189-94, 219.

With firm control over the Columbia school at its founding, Burgess was able to give its initial curriculum a structure that reflected his historicist methodological beliefs. Historical courses came earlier and prepared students to then study contemporary laws, institutions, and policies. Thus, courses in political and constitutional history preceded courses in comparative constitutional and administrative law; the history of politico-economic institutions led into a course on taxation and finance; the history of Roman law led into a course on European civil law; and the history of diplomacy preceded the course on international law.⁹ As Burgess put it in 1883 when surveying the “methods of historical study and research” at Columbia: “With us history is the chief preparation for the study of legal and political sciences. Through it we seek to find the origin, follow the growth and learn the meaning of our legal, political, and economic principles and institutions.”¹⁰

The Methodological Orientation of the Columbia School

The initial curriculum of the School of Political Science, and Burgess’s comments on the role of history in that curriculum, speak to the historicist basis of the methodological orientation that developed there. To explore further this orientation—to consider, for example, how inquiry in comparative legislation was treated—we can turn to the journal *Political Science Quarterly*, which the school began to publish in 1886. In the introductory article of the inaugural journal, Burgess’s colleague and former

⁹ R. Gordon Hoxie, ed., *A History of the Faculty of Political Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), Appendix A: Course of Study in the School of Political Science, 1880-87. See also Anna Haddow, *Political Science in American Colleges and Universities, 1636-1900* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1939), 180-81.

¹⁰ John W. Burgess, “The Methods of Historical Study and Research in Columbia College,” in *Methods of Teaching History*, ed. G. Stanley Hall (Boston: Ginn, Heath & Co., 1883), 188.

Amherst student Munroe Smith set out to explicate in a structured way the range of studies pursued at the school and their relations to one another. Smith differentiated three principal “social sciences”—political science, law, and economics—conceptualized as investigating distinct, but overlapping, substantive domains; and three “auxiliary sciences”—comparative legislation, statistics, and history—conceptualized as “methods of collecting, testing, shifting, and using facts” drawn upon by the three substantive social sciences.¹¹ Two points about Smith’s discussion are especially notable for our purposes.

First, Smith departed from the use of “political science” as a collective label found in the name of the Free School and of the Columbia school. He instead began to use “social sciences” (and explicitly rejected the option of a plural “political sciences”) as his collective term while using “political science” in a differentiating sense to single out one of these “social sciences.”¹² Novel in 1886, this differentiating usage would coexist alongside the collective usage for some time before becoming the predominant usage within the American academy during the decades following the 1903 founding of the American Political Science Association.¹³ This process of conceptual change from the mid-1880s onwards is an integral part of the emergence in America of political

¹¹ Munroe Smith, “Introduction: The Domain of Political Science,” *Political Science Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1886): 3-5.

¹² Political science should be conceptualized, Smith argued, as a single science—“the science of the state”—whose substantive domain could be subdivided between the “relations of states one to another” (“international relations”) and internal “questions of state organization and state action,” with the latter in turn further sub-dividable in terms of “the various functions of the state.” *Ibid.*: 3.

¹³ The intermediate dual usage of “political science” is found, for example, in the uses of the term associated with a short-lived organization of Midwestern scholars founded in 1895. The term was used in the collective sense in the organization’s name: the “Political Science Association of the Central States.” Yet, in its statement of purpose, the association also identified “political science” as one of four different fields—“history, political science, economics and sociology”—that it would encompass. George W. Knight, “The Political Science Association of the Central States,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 5 (March, 1895): 144-45.

science as a differentiated field of scholarship, and, subsequently, its establishment and propagation as an institutionally autonomous discipline.

The second noteworthy feature of Smith's article is his conceptualization of history and comparative legislation as "scientific methods" and his framing of their relation to one another. While construing history as a method auxiliary to the substantive social sciences, rather than a substantive science in its own right, Smith did single it out as the "most important" of the three methods he discussed. History brought out the "interdependence" of politics, law, and economics that needed to be understood when using other methods, and as such, it provided a foundation for their successful use. Thus, in relation to work employing the method of comparative legislation, history offered contextual knowledge "of the political and economic conditions of the country in which each particular law was made" without which scholars could not make an "intelligent use of foreign legislations."¹⁴

The foundational role Smith gave to history situated the methodological orientation of the Columbia school within the same broad tradition of historicist science taken up at Harvard and Johns Hopkins in the 1870s and early 1880s. But while recognizing this broad overlap in orientation, we should also recognize the distinctions which set the School of Political Science apart. First, there was a greater emphasis on law, evident both in the inclusion of law as a substantive science alongside political science and economics,¹⁵ and in the attention to comparative legislation as an auxiliary

¹⁴ Smith, "Domain of Political Science," 4-6.

¹⁵ The emphasis on economics at Columbia paralleled the situation at Johns Hopkins discussed in Chapter Three. It is worth noting that inquiry and instruction in this area was, at both schools, pursued primarily on the historicist basis developed by the German historical school of economics, rather than the naturalistic basis prevalent within English classical political economy.

science. Second, the conceptualization of history as one of the “auxiliary sciences” serving substantive fields such as “political science” framed the relation of history and political science in more methodologically specified, and less equal, terms than the talk of “historical and political science” found at Hopkins under Herbert Baxter Adams.

The role of “historical method” at Columbia thus rested on the belief that it provided a foundation for successful use of other “scientific methods,” not a contention that it was, in itself, sufficient for scientific study of politics. What this entailed is well illustrated in the substantive article by Burgess that followed Smith’s introduction to the inaugural issue of *Political Science Quarterly*. Burgess here used institutional history to provide background to, and a basis for, his study of the changing relation of America’s states (which he, for theoretical reasons, preferred to call commonwealths) to the American nation. He turned, however, to a systematic comparison of provisions across state constitutions—i.e. the method of comparative legislation—to clinch his argument.¹⁶

The points which I have emphasized so far concerning the distinctive orientation of the School of Political Science fall largely in line with its debts to the strand of inquiry and instruction most fully developed at the Free School in Paris. But Columbia’s school was also distinguished by its debts to German scholarship in the theory of the State, and to the idealist philosophy with which that scholarship was infused.¹⁷ As we

¹⁶ John W. Burgess, “The American Commonwealth: Changes in Its Relation to the Nation,” *Political Science Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1886): 9-35.

¹⁷ While I emphasize the legacy of this German intellectual backdrop for the methodological orientation of scholars at Columbia, the theory of the State had additional legacies. Most significantly, it promoted coursework in the history of political theories, seen as a way of preparing scholars to think clearly and to grasp how the conceptual framework of the academic science of politics in which they were being initiated was the latest, most modern and sophisticated, refinement of ideas about political order progressively developed in the Aryan west over the course of the centuries. On the impact of the theory of the State on political theory at Columbia, and the development of the political theory subfield more generally, see John

saw when contrasting Bluntschli and Maine in Chapter One, idealist philosophy supported a variant of historicist science that stood in some contrast to the empiricist notion of science also found within the historicist tradition. Idealism particularly stood out as promoting the importance for properly scientific inquiry of an articulated framework of carefully defined and consistently deployed concepts. In the theory of the State this emphasis supported in turn the more specific belief that a theoretically sophisticated conception of the state was critical for properly scientific study of politics and government.

The legacy of this intellectual perspective was brought into the Columbia school through the explicit efforts of Burgess, who had immersed himself in the theory of the State and idealist philosophy during his German PhD training, and who in turn taught these beliefs to his American students. It is in light of this legacy that we can best grasp why Munroe Smith was so concerned, in the introductory article of *Political Science Quarterly*, to articulate a “more exact” definition of “political science” (which literally meant, he held, “the science of the state”) and other terms. Smith’s article started out from the belief, stated as a given, that “[t]echnical terms should have a limited and exact meaning.”¹⁸ The significance of this belief for the methodological orientation of Columbia scholars would show through recurrently in reviews that Burgess and his colleagues wrote for *Political Science Quarterly*. Thus, for example, when Burgess

Gunnell, *The Descent of Political Theory: The Genealogy of an American Vocation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

¹⁸ Smith, “Domain of Political Science,” 1-2. The idealist philosophical background to this belief becomes quite explicit when Smith explains, in his second paragraph, that a good definition is “the condensed result of a great deal of hard thinking; but to understand it, to appreciate what it includes and what it excludes, the thoughts of the definer must be thought over again until the disciple has gained the same outlook over the subject as the master.”

reviewed Lowell's 1896 comparative study of European governments and parties, he bemoaned its lack of "any consistent and scientific nomenclature" and suggested that it was "a book for the general reader rather than for the professional student of the subject it treats."¹⁹ Viewed in trans-Atlantic perspective, we can see that Burgess's review carried forward a conception of science infused with the philosophical idealism that earlier set apart Bluntschli's marriage of institutional history and the theory of the State from the empiricism of Maine's freestanding institutional history—the legacy of which was itself carried forward in Lowell's empiricist political science.

Comparative Inquiry at the Columbia School: Contributions to the "Systematic Series"

The inheritances that I have been tracking were further evident in the two major works of comparative inquiry published by Columbia faculty early in the 1890s: *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law* by Burgess, and *Comparative Administrative Law* by Frank Goodnow (another of Burgess's former Amherst students now turned colleague). These hefty multi-volume books were written as the inaugural contributions to a "Systematic Series edited by the University Faculty of Political Science," which was planned as the next major step forward in the development of the Columbia school. The goal of the series was, as Burgess would later explain, nothing less than "to create a school of American political philosophy and a distinct American literature of these [historical, political, and social] sciences."²⁰ The contributions Burgess and Goodnow made to the series would, however, share a fate similar to that of

¹⁹ John W. Burgess, "Review of Government and Parties in Continental Europe," *Political Science Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1897): 161-63.

²⁰ Burgess, *Reminiscences*, 201-02.

Woodrow Wilson's textbook, *The State: Elements of Historical and Practical Politics*. They turned out to be less forerunners of the methodological trajectory of future American scholarship, than late eloquent testimonials to the starting points within the European historicist tradition from which scholars departed during the emergence of political science as a field differentiable from history, law, and philosophy. While Wilson's 1889 textbook consisted largely in a synthetic comparative survey of Aryan institutional history, Burgess's and Goodnow's comparative works of the early 1890's offered studies in comparative law conducted within an analytical framework based on a liberal (and philosophically idealist) theory of the State.

In his preface to *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, Burgess credited "the German publicists," Boutmy, Bryce, Wilson and others, as his predecessors in comparative scholarship on "Political Science and Jurisprudence." But he hoped that with his book, "some slight advance has been made in the development of the comparative method in the treatment of this domain of knowledge." Burgess believed that a major part of the "advance" he made came from his effort to formulate and deploy a "political and legal nomenclature" that was "exact and scientific."²¹ Taking German scholarship as his principal intellectual reference point, he set out to define his core concepts—the Nation and the State—to explicate these definitions, to develop classification schemes in accord with them, and to show how his definitions and classifications improved upon those offered by earlier theorists of the State. Burgess was particularly emphatic about the firm conceptual distinction between "the state" and "the

²¹ John W. Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, 2 vols. (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1891), 1: v-vi, 1.

government.” He saw this distinction as a crucial basis for a properly scientific treatment of the individual liberties and limits upon governmental powers so central to classical liberal political thought.²² Burgess’s conceptual labors in the theory of the State, concentrated in the “political science” section which opened his book, laid the analytical basis for the substantive comparative study of the constitutional law of Britain, the United States, Germany, and France that then took up the bulk of his two volumes. This substantive study proceeded via an analytically ordered series of topics that presupposed the prior conceptual work. One consequence of approaching comparative study in this way was that Burgess turned to nation-by-nation presentations only as a secondary principle to order material within subsections of his overarching analytical ordering.

The distinctive methodological features of Burgess’s approach were replicated in the second book in the “Systematic Series,” Frank Goodnow’s 1893 *Comparative Administrative Law*.²³ After studying with Burgess as an undergraduate at Amherst, Goodnow had gone on to Law School at Columbia, and then graduate work at the Free School in Paris and the University of Berlin, before joining Columbia’s faculty in 1885. Like Burgess, Goodnow began his book with conceptual work. Presupposing as a basis the conception of the state articulated by Burgess, he focused these labors on articulating definitions and classifications to limit and structure the specific sphere of administration. In his substantive comparative study of national and local administration Goodnow then addressed the same four nations as Burgess had, and did so, again like Burgess, through

²² For Burgess’s emphasis on this distinction as an advance over prior literature in the theory of the State, see *ibid.*, 1: 57, 68-71. For his use of it to ground a theory of individual liberty and limited government, and to interpret (and celebrate) the constitutional system of the United States, see *ibid.*, 1: 174-252, 264.

²³ Frank J. Goodnow, *Comparative Administrative Law: An Analysis of the Administrative Systems, National and Local, of the United States, England, France and Germany*, 2 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893).

an analytically ordered series of topics to which nation-by-nation presentation was subordinated.

The twin moves of explicitly articulating concepts and comparing substantive material within a guiding analytical order set Burgess's and Goodnow's paired works of the early 1890s methodologically apart from contemporary comparative works by other American scholars. Both Wilson's *The State* and Lowell's *Governments and Parties in Continental Europe* were instead organized principally or entirely as nation-by-nation surveys. Moreover, while these books did adhere to a quite consistent topical order across each of their national surveys, neither incorporated anything akin to the explicit conceptual labors and guiding analytical order that distinctively characterized the contributions of Burgess and Goodnow to the Columbia "Systematic Series."

If parallels between the paired works of Burgess and Goodnow were extensive, especially when contrasted with other comparative works of the period, there were nonetheless also telling differences. Burgess differed from Goodnow, for example, in taking pains to justify his selection of the United States, Britain, Germany, and France for study. Political science should, he argued, focus on the "national popular state" since it was the highest stage yet reached in the progressive development of political institutions, and as such, furnished "the objective reality upon which political science can rest in the construction of a truly scientific political system."²⁴ Substantive studies were thus to center upon the Aryan nations of Europe and North America (and especially the Teutonic sub-branch of them) because they had most fully realized the national

²⁴ Burgess, *Political Science*, 1: 58. Burgess's view of the "national popular state" situates it in relation to Aryan institutional history as interpreted in light of a Hegelian idealist philosophy of history, see 1: 1-89.

popular state. Burgess in turn justified basing his substantive study of constitutional law on the constitutions of the four specific Aryan nations he selected by stressing that his goal was “to be systematic, not encyclopaedic.” In light of this goal, he held that “these constitutions represent substantially all the species of constitutionalism which have as yet been developed,” and suggested that studies seeking, as his did, “general principles of public law . . . will be more trustworthy if we exclude the less perfect systems from the generalization, disregard the less important states, and pass by those species which are not typical.”²⁵

Whether or not Burgess’s points are persuasive, their framing is noteworthy. They stress a concern, which pervaded his book from start to finish, to be “systematic” and “truly scientific” (as conceived from a standpoint rooted in idealist philosophy), and to derive “general principles” from a methodical pursuit of comparisons. This concern was, by contrast, less fully developed in Goodnow’s book. While careful in his conceptual labors, Goodnow used comparison principally in the form of illustrative or suggestive one-time contrasts, rather than systematically comparing all his cases. This reflected the different purpose motivating his comparisons. Where Burgess proudly claimed in his preface to be following the model of natural science in his systematic use of “comparative method,”²⁶ Goodnow worked with a more immediately practical purpose. In his own preface, Goodnow thus framed the use of comparison in the following terms:

[T]he present age is one of administrative reform. Our modern complex social conditions are making enormous demands of the administrative side of the

²⁵ Ibid., 1: 90-91.

²⁶ Ibid., 1: vi.

government, demands which will not be satisfied at all or which will be inadequately met, unless a greater knowledge of administrative law and science is possessed by our legislators and moulders of opinion. This knowledge can be obtained only by study, and by comparison of our own with foreign administrative methods.²⁷

In the differences between Burgess and Goodnow we begin to see echoes at Columbia of the methodological and political trajectories charted in Chapter Three. In methodological terms, the contrast between Burgess and his younger colleague speaks to the movement of scholars of politics towards studies with an explicitly and directly practical orientation. At the same time, when looked at in theoretical terms, Goodnow's stress on "administrative reform" as necessary to meet "enormous demands" imposed by "modern complex social conditions" is highly suggestive of the progressive liberal beliefs we earlier explored in Wilson's work. Indeed, Goodnow's framing of the comparative study of foreign nations as an aid to domestic reform takes up exactly the questioning progressive liberal attitude toward American institutions that Wilson helped forge in his comparative works of the mid- to late-1880s.

In the next section, I explore Goodnow's scholarship through the turn of the century as, among other things, an embodiment of the rising tide of progressive liberalism. But before turning away from Burgess, we should note his divergence from the theoretical trajectory of his student. By 1891, Burgess was already looking anxiously on progressive reform hopes, warily advising at one point in *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*:

[W]hile we feel the pressure upon all sides to expand the powers of government in accordance with European practice, let us never forget that constitutional civil liberty is the peculiar product of our own political genius; and let us sacrifice no

²⁷ Goodnow, *Comparative Administrative Law*, 1: iv.

part of it, until the evidence becomes indisputable that, as to that part, individual autonomy has become either dangerous to the public security or detrimental to the general welfare.²⁸

Over the next two decades, the theoretical divergence hinted at in contrasts between Burgess and Goodnow's paired works of the early 1890s would develop into very different interpretations of the broad historical trend of Progressive Era changes. Rather than welcoming political and constitutional changes of the era as necessary pragmatic adaptations to new conditions, Burgess would interpret them, especially after the Spanish-American War of 1898, as a series of sacrifices of principles of individual liberty and limited government—sacrifices that together added up to a disastrous turning away from the path of liberal progress America had followed until the closing years of the nineteenth century.²⁹

The Progressive Liberal Political Science of Frank Goodnow

Most of the intellectual developments I have been charting in this and the last chapter all came together in the 1890s in the work of Frank Goodnow. We have already seen how currents in the study of comparative legislation and the theory of the State fed into his 1893 *Comparative Administrative Law*. But this contribution to Columbia's "Systematic Series" does not fully represent Goodnow's engagements. Looking at his corpus of scholarship through the turn of the century, two points come to the fore. First, a progressive liberal belief in the imperative necessity of reforming America's political

²⁸ Burgess, *Political Science*, 1: 264.

²⁹ See the closing chapter, "The New United States of America," in John W. Burgess, *The Reconciliation of Government with Liberty* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915). For the contrast with Goodnow, compare this chapter with Frank J. Goodnow, *Social Reform and the Constitution* (New York: Macmillan, 1911).

and administrative institutions to meet perceived new needs of “modern” industrial society consistently played a central role in orientating and motivating Goodnow’s work. Second, on a methodological front, we find a deepening engagement with the agenda, pioneered by Bryce and Lowell, of looking beyond institutions and laws to other contemporary phenomena to develop a broader account of the “political system.” In Chapter Three I identified this agenda as being at the cutting edge in the emergence of political science as a distinctive field of scholarship; Goodnow’s engagement with it in the late 1890s brought him to the forefront of the developing field. If *Comparative Administrative Law* appears in retrospect largely as a testimonial to major strands of the nineteenth-century European historicist tradition out of which political science emerged, the opposite judgment applies to Goodnow’s *Politics and Administration* of 1900. Here the various currents in his scholarship cross-fertilized to give shape to a veritable political science classic: its methodological orientation, progressive liberal theoretical stance, and substantive concerns all foreshadowed common features of the mainstream of the American political science discipline, from its early twentieth-century institutional founding until the behavioral revolution of the post-World War Two decades.

Goodnow’s progressive liberal reform beliefs came fully to the fore in the works that he wrote after dutifully completing his contribution to the “Systematic Series” begun by his mentor. His next two books were devoted to municipal governance and reform. Here Goodnow returned to topics he had previously engaged in a special chapter on “The Tweed Ring in New York City” included in the first edition of Bryce’s

American Commonwealth.³⁰ Controversial enough to spur litigation leading to its omission from Bryce's second edition,³¹ that chapter testified to reform commitments that Goodnow further developed during the mid-1890s as a leading participant in the conversation of progressive liberal scholars investigating and promoting municipal reform.³²

Goodnow, like others in this conversation, believed that trans-Atlantic comparisons could help American municipal reformers learn from "the teaching of the experience of the world." Comparison to England showed, for example, that the system of municipal governance America inherited in its colonial days had recently "been discarded by the country which gave it birth," and thereby suggested, to Goodnow's progressive liberal eye, that Americans ought to catch up with the modernizing English and recognize "the unwisdom of our present system."³³ England was, however, just one of several European countries from which Americans were urged to draw lessons about responding to problems of the modern city.³⁴ A critical methodological question here was what reform-oriented studies should focus on. Goodnow's fellow scholar of politics, Albert Shaw, had undertaken a detailed survey of recent reforms and contemporary

³⁰ Frank J. Goodnow, "The Tweed Ring in New York City," in *The American Commonwealth* (London: Macmillan, 1888), 3: 173-98. In the late 1880s Goodnow had published articles on local government in England and Prussia, and he in turn devoted a significant portion of *Comparative Administrative Law* specifically to local administration. Frank J. Goodnow, "Local Government in England," *Political Science Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1887): 638-65. Frank J. Goodnow, "Local Government in Prussia," *Political Science Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (1889): 648-66. Goodnow, *Comparative Administrative Law*, 1: 186-362.

³¹ James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1891), 1: ix.

³² For more on the role played by scholars of politics in the municipal reform movement, and the role, in turn, of these efforts in shaping personal connections important for the later formation of the APSA, see Helene Silverberg, "A Government of Men: Gender, the City, and the New Science of Politics," in *Gender and American Social Science: The Formative Years*, ed. Helene Silverberg (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

³³ Frank J. Goodnow, *Municipal Home Rule: A Study in Administration* (New York: Macmillan, 1895), 265-72.

³⁴ See the closing chapter on European examples. *Ibid.*, 233-72.

institutional arrangements in selected exemplary cities in various European nations.³⁵

But Goodnow set out in his *Municipal Problems* of 1897 to redirect the developing conversation. Arguing that a focus on the internal organization of cities was insufficient, he held that, in considering practical lessons to be drawn from European examples, municipal institutions also had to be seen in light of the varying positions that cities occupied within the “governmental system” of different nations.³⁶

Goodnow’s analysis here began to take on the language of “system” that we earlier saw employed by Bryce and Lowell. In the late 1890s he further deepened his engagement with the methodologically pioneering agenda of relating contemporary phenomena within a given nation as parts of a “system.” The result was his *Politics and Administration* of 1900, which would become probably the single most important and influential contribution in the emerging field of American political science. Goodnow here supplemented the study of local and central government as interrelated parts of a “governmental system” (as propounded in his 1897 book), by also relating these formal institutions to the “party system,” thereby crafting a picture of the American “political system” as a whole. On the basis of this holistic view of relations between the local and central, the formal and informal, he in turn developed arguments about the ramifications of changes within different parts of the American political system for one another. Throughout, Goodnow illuminated his picture and arguments with comparisons to England, Germany, France, Switzerland, and Italy, drawing heavily on Lowell’s 1896

³⁵ Albert Shaw, *Municipal Government in Great Britain* (New York: Century, 1895); Albert Shaw, *Municipal Government in Continental Europe* (New York: Century, 1895).

³⁶ Frank J. Goodnow, *Municipal Problems* (New York: Macmillan, 1897), v, 19-20.

work for claims about the relationship between the party system and governments in continental Europe.³⁷

Goodnow's approach differed from Lowell's, however, in two major respects. He was, first of all, interested in comparative study principally for the way it could inform a progressive liberal critique of American institutions and help promote "concrete remedies" for their reform.³⁸ His comparisons were, as a result, limited to suggestive examples illuminating selected features of European political systems: positive features he believed progressive reformers should try to move America toward, and negative features they should seek to avoid. Secondly, in line with the methodological orientation of the Columbia school, Goodnow pursued his study within an articulated theoretical framework grounded upon a refined conceptualization of the state.

Both of these elements of Goodnow's approach were linked with the conceptual duality of "politics" and "administration" which lay at the heart of his book. On the one side, Goodnow grounded this duality theoretically in a contrast between the "expression" and the "execution" of the "will" of "the state."³⁹ On the other, he used it to organize his substantive material and give shape to concrete reform proposals. The duality served, in effect, as a bridge between the ideal and the actual. It identified two institutional spheres that ought, as an ideal of good government (according to Goodnow's theory of the State), to be distinguished; when then used in the analysis of actual institutions it spotlighted how the institutions fell short of realizing this ideal, and what direction reforms should to take to address these shortcomings.

³⁷ Frank J. Goodnow, *Politics and Administration: A Study in Government* (New York: Macmillan, 1900).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, preface.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, chap. 1. Goodnow had initially propounded the expression/execution contrast within the theory of the State in Goodnow, *Comparative Administrative Law*, 2: bk. V.

Goodnow thus continued the legacy of idealist historicist science, though with rather less philosophical self-consciousness than had Burgess.⁴⁰ For such a science a conceptual framework should incorporate ideals in such a way that, when used in analyzing actual institutions, it leads to interpretations that can help move those institutions towards a fuller realization of these ideals. But the incorporated ideals have to be more than mere aspirations: they should present in thought ends historically immanent in the development of those institutions that best actualize progress.

This idealist historicism found its echo in the way that Goodnow's conceptual duality of politics and administration was interwoven with a specific interpretation of institutional history. In this interpretation—which we previously encountered in Wilson—progressive developments in government institutions during recent centuries were seen as having taken shape in two largely separate historical channels: one in England and its American offspring, the other in continental Europe. Thus, Goodnow noted in 1897

[W]hile the Anglo-American race has taught the world a valuable lesson in showing them how government should be organized in order to secure civil liberty and provide for the expression of the will of the people, it is certainly true that continental Europe, with its Roman legal traditions, has done much towards the solution of purely administrative problems.⁴¹

Against the backdrop of recent institutional history seen in this way, the task of the present era appeared, for Goodnow as for Wilson, to be pursuing progressive liberal reforms that would move America toward a set of institutions in which the ideal of

⁴⁰ A succinct statement up of a philosophically self-conscious idealist conception of the character and project of a historicist science of politics can be found in Burgess's address at the 1896 AHA annual conference. See John W. Burgess, "Political Science and History," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1896* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1897), 1: 203-11.

⁴¹ Goodnow, *Municipal Problems*, 86.

“popular government” immanent in Anglo-American history, and the ideal of “efficient administration” immanent in continental European history, would be realized together. The import and merit of the conceptual duality of politics and administration lay in the role it promised to play in promoting this dual realization and identifying specific reforms that would bring America closer towards this goal.⁴²

In his interpretation of recent institutional history and the goal of contemporary reforms, Goodnow embraced the same theoretical hybridization of democratic and liberal ideals that we earlier saw in Wilson’s works and identified as a central trait of American progressive liberalism. This hybridization is evident in the prior quote when Goodnow, in summing up the institutional achievements of the “Anglo-American race,” stressed both securing “civil liberty” and providing for the “expression of the will of the people.” Little, if any, theoretical space was left for exploring potential tensions between these achievements and explicitly considering which should be favored if a trade-off were necessary.

It is, as a result, unclear what we are to make of the shift between this 1897 formulation and Goodnow’s subsequent *Politics and Administration*, where the stress on the “expression of the will of the people” carried forward into his emphasis on “popular government,” but “civil liberty” dropped from view. Did Goodnow’s treatment of popular government as an unalloyed ideal in *Politics and Administration* presuppose a belief that popular government is, in practice, usually (or even necessarily) coexistent with civil liberty, or did it allow for conflict between them and prioritize popular

⁴² *Politics and Administration* is pervaded by discussion of “popular government,” “efficient administration,” and what it takes to realize each of them, and both of them together, in a system of institutions. For specific examples, see Goodnow, *Politics and Administration*, 24, 36-38, 43-44, 72, 77, 82-93, 131, 136-37, 148-152, and 255-63.

government in such situations? These are two significantly different bases from which the theoretical hybridization of liberal and democratic commitments central to progressive liberalism might proceed. It is, however, precisely in its ambiguity on this issue that Goodnow's foundational classic of American political science perhaps most fully embodied and promoted the broad tendencies of progressive liberalism.

A Substantive Debate: Popular Government and Political Parties in England and America

We have seen how, in its progressive liberal stance and conceptual duality of politics and administration, Goodnow's scholarship expressed theoretical tendencies that we earlier explored in Wilson's works of the mid- to late-1880s. But this parallel in theoretical stance co-exists with differences in substantive emphases. These reflect both specific insights that Goodnow's own work gave him into administrative organization and local government, and his engagement with the new agenda of scholarship addressing political parties as a key part of the "political system." Of particular interest is the way that the second of these influences played into the substance of Goodnow's comparisons between America and England in *Politics and Administration*.

Like Wilson, Goodnow saw the English form of government as politically exemplary and as a source of lessons for American reformers. But while he was no more enamored than Wilson with the Whig principle of dividing political power, Goodnow went beyond Wilson's substantive focus on institutional separation of the legislature and executive; he also propounded substantive arguments about how this separation related

to the particular way political parties were organized and operated in America.⁴³ In the details of the American party system, Goodnow saw egregious hindrances to popular government. Indeed these hindrances were such, he believed, that popular government was more fully realized in England, despite its less extensive suffrage, than it was in America. Goodnow drew upon this contrast in arguing that reforms to more fully realize popular government in America should center on modifying the organization and operation of parties to bring them closer to the exemplary model of parties “responsible” to public opinion found (he believed) in England.⁴⁴ This responsible-parties model for reform of the American party system would echo through the mainstream of American political science for half a century before finally falling out of favor after 1950 as part of the reorientation of the discipline brought about by the behavioral revolution.⁴⁵

In his progressive liberal contention that popular government was more fully realized in England than America, Goodnow provocatively reversed the substantive comparative judgment of Bryce in *The American Commonwealth*. Both scholars conceptualized popular government in the terms of the relation of government to public opinion. But Goodnow argued that this relation was short-circuited in America by parties

⁴³ Ibid., chaps. 2, 5-6. In propounding the ramifications of separation of the executive and legislature for American political parties, Goodnow drew on arguments developed in an 1898 book by the journalist (and later professor of political science) Henry Jones Ford. See Henry Jones Ford, *The Rise and Growth of American Politics: A Sketch of Constitutional Development* (New York: Macmillan, 1898).

⁴⁴ Goodnow devotes the last four chapters of *Politics and Administration* to his critical comparison of America with England as regards popular government and parties, to articulating proposed reforms to the party system in America that grow out of this comparison, and then, finally, to arguing that these proposed reforms in the political sphere will only be a success if pursued alongside reforms he also proposed for the administrative sphere. Ibid., chaps. 7-10.

⁴⁵ A final flourish—or perhaps debacle—of the persistent responsible parties model is found in the report and reform proposals developed in the 1940s under the auspices of the APSA Committee on Political Parties. See “Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System: A Report of the Committee on Political Parties,” *American Political Science Review* 44, no. 3, suppl. (1950). On the relation of critical reaction against this report to the behavioral movement, see Robert Adcock, “Interpreting Behavioralism,” in *Modern Political Science: Anglo-American Exchanges since 1880*, ed. Robert Adcock, Mark Bevir, and Shannon Stimson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

that controlled government, but were organized and operated in a way that made them less responsible to public opinion than parties in England. By contrast, Bryce judged the power of public opinion to be greater in America—indeed so much greater as to produce a form of government qualitatively different from those of other “free countries,” such as France and England, where elected representatives had more room to act independently of public opinion.⁴⁶ In his treatment of American parties Bryce had offered plenty of dark details and critical asides, but he saw them as parts of a political system in which public opinion was ultimately “the great source of power, the master of servants who tremble before it.”⁴⁷ The view Goodnow that later propounded in *Politics and Administration* had, indeed, been firmly put aside by Bryce in his introduction:

The parties, however, are not the ultimate force in the conduct of public affairs. Behind and above them stands the people. Public opinion, that is the mind and conscience of the whole nation, is the opinion of persons who are included in the parties, for the parties taken together are the nation; and the parties, each claiming to be its true exponent, seek to use it for their purposes. Yet it stands above the parties, being cooler and larger minded than they are; it awes party leaders and holds in check party organizations. No one openly ventures to resist it. It determines the direction and the character of national policy. It is the product of a greater number of minds than in any other country, and it is more indisputably sovereign. It is the central point of the whole American polity.⁴⁸

There was, needless to say, a great deal at stake in these contending substantive claims. Contrasts between England and America had long been a topic of ongoing trans-Atlantic exchange and debate among liberal intellectuals. This comparison had always been rich in its implications regarding what liberals in England and America could and should push for or fear. Moreover, it had, during the 1880s, become intertwined with the developing divergence between progressive liberalism and disillusioned classical

⁴⁶ James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1888), 3: 14-33.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3: 25.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1: 7-8.

liberalism as alternative theoretical trajectories within late-nineteenth century liberal thought. This had been exemplified among American liberal scholars of politics in Lowell's argument that the progressive liberal Wilson's *Congressional Government* went beyond what the facts would bear in its critical portrait of American government.

In light of that earlier exchange, it is perhaps no surprise that key premises of Goodnow's provocative view of the operation of American parties also came rapidly into the crosshairs of Lowell's disillusioning empiricism. Goodnow's views were a specific target of Lowell's 1901 "The Influence of Party upon Legislation in England and America."⁴⁹ As discussed in Chapter Three, this study was an exacting (for its time) empirical analysis that undermined unfavorable contrasts between American parties and their supposedly less despotic English counterparts. In challenging the soundness of basic premises of Goodnow's view of parties in America, Lowell was, in effect, also suggesting a need for wariness about reforms of the party system promoted in *Politics and Administration* on the basis of that view.

While Lowell's "Influence" should be read as the response of a disillusioned classical liberal to a reform-oriented work infused with progressive liberalism, it should not be interpreted only in relation to these divergent theoretical currents of late-nineteenth century liberalism. It should also be read in light of the methodological divergence between the ways that Lowell and Goodnow perceived and pursued the emergent scholarly field of political science. The idealist science whose legacy lingered on in Goodnow's political science carried with it a very different view of what being

⁴⁹ A. Lawrence Lowell, "The Influence of Party Upon Legislation in England and America," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1901* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1902), 348-49na.

scientific did (and did not) involve than Lowell's disillusioned empiricism. If Goodnow fell short of an empiricist standard, so Lowell had himself been open to criticism from an idealist methodological position, as was evident earlier in Burgess's review of Lowell's work on continental Europe. While Goodnow and Lowell were both leading players in the emergence within the American academy of a liberal political science that gave a central role to comparative study of contemporary America and Europe, they diverged in the specific character both of their liberalism and of their conceptions of science. To interpret their scholarship in relation to their theoretical or to their methodological divergence alone is to miss more than half the story.

The Founding of the American Political Science Association

In engaging the dual divergences between Goodnow and Lowell we must not lose sight of the overlapping beliefs and points of reference that they shared. This shared background was, specifically, a matter of their common participation in the field of political science taking shape within the American academy. Lowell and Goodnow were participants in an emerging scholarly conversation, who recognized each other's works as major contributions to the development of that conversation. There was significant overlap in works they admired, the concepts they used, the questions that engaged them, and the types of institutions and other phenomena they studied and compared in addressing those questions. Both worked with similar assumptions about the nations and time periods from which institutions and phenomena relevant to their concerns were to be drawn. Both drew upon institutional history (especially of recent centuries) and inherited its focus on the "progressive" nations of Europe and their offspring. But neither

was an institutional historian. Lowell and Goodnow each embodied, and added momentum to, the rising interest of scholars of politics in relating an expanded range of contemporary institutions and phenomena to one another, rather than relating a institution or set of institutions to its historical antecedents. By the end of the nineteenth century, they were both, to put it simply, doing political science.

The broad methodological shift in which Lowell and Goodnow participated involved the rise of new research agendas that increasingly fell outside the domain of those scholars who saw themselves first and foremost as historians. Research and scholarly exchanges focused on topics such as parties, municipal politics, and administration were principally concerned to understand the current character and possible future of institutions and related phenomena in contemporary Europe and the US. They were too concerned with the present to constitute history. Moreover, in concentrating on government and politics these topics lay at some remove from the concerns in social, economic, and cultural history that were, by the early twentieth century, increasingly seen as cutting edge in academic history. The new political science agendas were, finally, too “political” for academic historians in the further sense that they engaged topics that were live subjects of, or not far removed from, ongoing political debate. Such engagement was antithetical to the temporally and politically distanced stance that turn-of-the-century historians increasingly saw as a prerequisite for achieving the kind of scientific objectivity to which they aspired.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ For this characterization of trends among academic historians, and their concomitant sense that the emerging new concerns of scholars of politics moved outside the domain of history, I draw on the work of Ross. See Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), chap. 8. On these trends, especially with regard to the pursuit of objectivity, see also Peter

The American Historical Association had served since its 1884 founding as the national association under whose aegis scholars interested in government and politics came together. But the AHA was principally attuned to trends among those of its members—the bulk of them—who fell on the history side of the intellectual divisions that had emerged by the end of the century. As a consequence, the agendas and exchanges most central to the emergence of political science as a distinctive field found little space in the meetings of the association. Charles Francis Adams summed up the state of affairs in his 1901 AHA presidential address: “That politics should find no place at its meetings is, I believe, the unwritten law of this Association; and by politics I refer to the discussion of those questions of public conduct and policy for the time uppermost in the mind of the community.”⁵¹

The opening of the new century thus saw, among scholars of politics, a growing sense that they lacked a national associational space within which to discuss their developing concerns. There was, as a result, a rising interest in forming new organizations, whether inside the bounds of the AHA or in the form of a new national association.⁵² The specific initiative that would lead to the founding of the American Political Science Association began in 1902 with circulation of a “call for a National

Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), part I.

⁵¹ Charles Francis Adams, "An Undeveloped Function," *American Historical Review* 7, no. 2 (1902): 203.

⁵² C.F. Adams's attempt to persuade historians to be more welcoming of discussions of contemporary political matters seems to have had little effect. The failure of historians to grasp the growing discontent among scholars of politics is captured in the *American Historical Review's* report of the 1902 AHA meeting. It notes the existence of a movement for a special section devoted to “matters of diplomatic history and current problems of international law,” as well the voicing of sentiment in the association's business meeting in favor “of finding some means for the more intimate association of those especially engaged in the study of political science and kindred subjects.” The report, however, complacently concluded that there was “no danger of disruption of the larger body.” “The Meeting of the American Historical Association at Philadelphia,” *The American Historical Review* 8, no. 3 (1903): 411, 20-21.

Conference on Comparative Legislation.” Signed by Munroe Smith, Burgess, and Goodnow of Columbia, and a varied group of other scholars, the call announced an informal conference to be held that December. The main declared object of the conference was “to obtain a representative expression of opinion as to whether it will be possible for existing institutions to do the work imperatively demanded” in the field of comparative legislation, or whether, instead, an “American Society of Comparative Legislation” should be founded.⁵³

Given the role of the three Columbia scholars in issuing this call, and the familiarity each had with intellectual currents in Paris, it seems likely that the authors of the call had in mind, at least in part, the example of the French Société de Législation Comparée. That society brought academics together with judges, politicians, and government administrators in just the kind of conversations largely absent from the AHA. Promoting such exchange would be an explicit goal of the APSA at its founding. In addressing the new association as its first president, Goodnow would thus declare the hope that annual APSA conferences would constitute a “common meeting ground” providing “an opportunity for those whose work savors somewhat of the closet, to meet those engaged in the active walks of political life.”⁵⁴ The French society had, moreover, recently served as an exemplar for new associations in other countries. In the mid-1890s, a Society of Comparative Legislation was founded in London, and in Berlin an International Association for Comparative Jurisprudence and Political Economy was organized. Reviewing the journals of these new associations for *Political Science*

⁵³ "The Organization of the American Political Science Association," *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association* 1 (1904): 5.

⁵⁴ Frank J. Goodnow, "The Work of the American Political Science Association," *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association* 1 (1904): 45-46.

Quarterly in 1897, Munroe Smith had welcomed the associations, situated them and their publications relative to the “aims and labor” of the older French society, and surveyed the uses of “the comparative method” in contemporary European studies of comparative law and jurisprudence as a whole.⁵⁵

While the extent to which such European models were looked to at the beginning of the American initiative is uncertain, it is clear that the initiative soon broadened in scope to take on a character without European precedent. Attendees at the informal conference in December 1902 agreed that a new organization was needed. But in an expansive move, they decided that “instead of the establishment of a Society of Comparative Legislation a National Association should, if possible, be created, whose province should embrace the whole field of Political Science, and thus include Comparative Legislation as one of its special topics.” Via subsequent group letters and meetings, the developing initiative would, over the next year, carry these ambitions through to their culmination in the founding of the American Political Science Association on December 30, 1903, at a special session held during the overlapping annual conferences of the AHA and the American Economics Association.⁵⁶ As its first president, the new association elected Frank Goodnow, who would serve a rare two-year term, and then be succeeded by Albert Shaw, his fellow participant in the conversation about municipal institutions and their reform in Europe and America. Shortly thereafter Bryce, Lowell, and Wilson would each be elected, in succession, as presidents of the young association.

⁵⁵ Munroe Smith, "Review of Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation," *Political Science Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (1897): 537-43.

⁵⁶ "The Organization of the American Political Science Association," 6-14.

The election of the figures we have been focusing on in this and the previous chapter spoke to the centrality and prestige of comparative inquiry among the scholars who came together in the APSA. Just as comparison was a major element in the strands of nineteenth-century historicist science that were the departure points from which political science developed—institutional history, theory of the State, and comparative legislation—so it was again a major element of the practically-oriented agendas—administration, political parties, and local governance—which pointed the way to the emergence of political science as a distinctive field. Scholars who pursued these agendas had been among the first to perceive themselves and their work as falling outside the scope of existing national associations. While scholars still working in long-standing currents of historicist science also made up a good part of the APSA membership, the impetus to form the association arose from the newer agendas. The world's first political science association was founded and thrived in America because it was among American academics that a practically oriented focus on the present, and on political phenomena beyond constitutions and laws, was most thoroughly welcomed and extended.

Why was the American academy a receptive environment for the emergence of political science as a distinctive field and discipline? We might note, first, that the ongoing wave of rapid change and expansion. This provided room and resources for new intellectual agendas to take shape and become institutionally established. Second, as inhabitants of the world's first modern mass democracy, American scholars were the direct spectators of and sometime participants in political phenomena—such as the modern mass-based political party—with which the emergent new field was especially concerned. Third, to the extent that political science studied institutions, such as a

professionalized administrative apparatus, not yet prominent in America, it addressed features of modern continental Europe that American scholars saw their own country beginning to take up. If a few disillusioned classical liberals worried about this trend, American scholars of politics usually tended to be progressive liberals eager to see (and help) their compatriots learn from European examples as they sought to address local and national problems shaped by the dynamics of a “modern” industrializing society.

Conclusion: The Legacy of Historicism and the Scope of Comparison in Political Science

We have seen the importance that comparative study had for scholars who came together under the aegis of the American Political Science Association. The examples of such inquiry that we have considered in this and the last chapter all share a scope of comparison limited to the US and Europe. Comparative inquiry in the emerging field of political science still proceeded, (if with decreasing explicit attention to this fact), in the shadow of the Aryan synthesis of mid-nineteenth century developmental historicism. While comparative studies by political scientists were more focused toward the present day than had been those of their historicist predecessors, the scope of comparisons, and major lines of contrast that were drawn among the nations compared—such as between Anglo-American nations and continental Europe—carried forward much from these predecessors. Even those works of political science most firmly infused by a present and future-oriented concern with reforms seen as necessary to meet the needs of a “modern” industrial society still presupposed and reinforced the view of developmental historicists

that it was in the European Aryan nations (and their offspring) that the cutting edge of progress in government was found.

A delimiting of the scope of comparison by an Aryan exceptionalism—whether explicit or transmuted into talk of “the West” or “the modern”—was thus a prevalent characteristic of the new American political science discipline. While some political scientists in the early twentieth century did look beyond America and Europe, in doing so they usually extended rather than transcended Aryan exceptionalism. The use of comparative study to draw practical lessons from the way “progressive” Europeans governed themselves was thus extended, in a briefly vibrant literature on “colonial administration,” into study of how Europeans governed other races in their colonies. If much of comparative political science spoke to issues of American domestic reforms, this extension of comparative study was no less practical in orientation: it spoke to debates about how America should govern territories it had acquired in the Spanish-American War of 1898.⁵⁷

Challenges to the prevailing scope of comparative inquiry were not, however, entirely absent even in the founding era of American political science. A critical paper on “The Scope of Political Science” was delivered at the second annual meeting of the APSA in 1905 by Henry Jones Ford, then a non-academic scholar of politics, but soon thereafter to become a professor at Princeton, and later president of the APSA. Ford argued that political science limited in scope in the manner of Burgess and others could not produce principles useful for the practical guidance of contemporary statesmen. It

⁵⁷ For an overview of this literature on colonial administration, see Brian C. Schmidt, *The Political Discourse of Anarchy: A Disciplinary History of International Relations* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), chap. 4.

failed in this task because, by not studying such states as China, Russia, and Turkey (which were neither peopled by Aryans nor governed by them), it excluded “the very states whose activities are the chief centers of disturbance in world politics.” Moreover, this kind of political science also fell short with regard to states inside its scope when it treated certain institutions in Europe and America as if they were the endpoint of political development. Institutions such as representative assemblies might, Ford noted, be only local and “transitory”; destined to pass away in the “social and political transformations” that would accompany further development of already discernible “processes of change in industrial organization.”⁵⁸

Ford contended that, in order to take this possibility seriously, and to engage with states around the globe, a different kind of science of politics was called for. Rather than centering on “the race-experience of a group of peoples whose culture rests upon Greco-Roman foundations,” such a science would take “all forms of public authority” as its subject matter and seek “general principles . . . universal in their application.” Ford envisioned an evolutionary naturalist science based upon a “natural history” of politics. Such a science would explore the full range of types of public authority found in all times and places, arrange them in a universal classification scheme on the basis of their “genetic order,” and identify “the laws of their growth and development.”⁵⁹

Over the next ten years, Ford sought to puzzle out the intellectual foundations for such a science, eventually summing up his rather brief and tentative conclusions in *The Natural History of the State*. At the start of this book Ford singled out the English figures

⁵⁸ Henry Jones Ford, “The Scope of Political Science,” *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association* 2 (1905): 200-02.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: 203-6.

of Bagehot, Spencer, and Seeley as pioneering exemplars of a “naturalistic” approach to the study of politics, and he lamented that their approach had been “abandoned” in political science and left to be “taken over by sociology.”⁶⁰ Ford made clear, moreover, his hostility to the way that sociologists had developed this approach. He believed that an evolutionary naturalistic science of politics must take the state, rather than society, as its universal basic unit of analysis.⁶¹

Ford’s book had little impact, but this only reinforces the point he highlights. Within the American academy, a naturalistic approach to the science of politics took shape almost entirely outside of political science. Such an approach developed instead as a significant element in the conversation of sociologists, whose sociological reflections upon political phenomena were no less important a part of the new American liberal science of politics—construed broadly in terms of intellectual rather than institutional boundaries—than the studies emerging from the historicist tradition which we have explored during the last two chapters. It is to this evolutionary naturalist sociology of politics that we will now turn in Chapter Five.

⁶⁰ Henry Jones Ford, *The Natural History of the State: An Introduction to Political Science* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1915), 2-6.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, chaps. 8-9. For Ford’s hostility to sociology and responses from sociologists, see the following exchange in the *American Journal of Sociology*. Charles A. Ellwood, “The Science of Sociology: A Reply,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 15, no. 1 (1909): 105-10; Henry Jones Ford, “The Pretensions of Sociology,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 15, no. 1 (1909): 96-104; Henry Jones Ford, “The Claims of Sociology Examined,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 15, no. 2 (1909): 244-59; Albion W. Small, “The Vindication of Sociology,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 15, no. 1 (1909): 1-15; Lester F. Ward, “Sociology and the State,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 15, no. 5 (1910): 672-80.

**CHAPTER FIVE. EVOLUTIONARY NATURALISM ENTERS THE ACADEMY:
WARD, SUMNER, AND THE PLACE OF SOCIOLOGY
IN THE AMERICAN SCIENCE OF POLITICS**

The American reception of evolutionary naturalistic social inquiry began largely outside the academy. This was in line with its European origins in the work of Comte and Spencer. While the strands of historicist science that fed into American political science were largely rooted in the European academy, sociology's remaking of the naturalistic methodological tradition had originated as an extra-academic intellectual project. It remained distinctively, even proudly, so through much of the nineteenth century. But in the closing decades of the century it began to penetrate the academy on both sides of the Atlantic. The late 1870s and the 1880s saw a handful of sociology classes offered by maverick faculty at a few American colleges. It was, however, only in the 1890s that sociological inquiry gained a clear foothold inside the intellectual citadel of the expanding research universities: the first faculty specifically appointed as sociologists were hired at Columbia and the new University of Chicago in 1892; a first professional journal, *The American Journal of Sociology*, was begun in 1895, based out of Chicago. A decade later, following on the heels of the 1903 founding of the APSA, sociologists in 1905 founded their own association, the American Sociological Society (ASS).

These two additions to the growing roster of American national professional associations in the social sciences had much in common. The significant attention given by Comte and Spencer to matters of government and politics continued to characterize sociology in its latest incarnation. As a result, the works of American sociologists testify

to the need to look beyond the emergent political science discipline when we explore the developing American science of politics. In their political theory, members of the new ASS were, like members of the APSA, broadly liberal in orientation. The parallel here carries through, moreover, when we differentiate varieties of liberalism. Like the APSA, the ASS was characterized by divergence between a progressive liberal mainstream and a minority stance of disillusioned classical liberalism. In this chapter, I explore the mainstream theoretical perspective as presented in the work of the ASS's inaugural president, Lester Frank Ward, and the minority stance as taught by the association's second president, William Graham Sumner. Ward and Sumner each expounded a variant of their theoretical standpoints more strident than that of their respective counterparts in political science such as Goodnow and Lowell, but the same broad pattern of divergent currents within American liberalism was on display among the sociologists as among the political scientists.

The new professional associations could encompass this theoretical divergence because political contentions that might arise from it were doubly contained. Such contentions were, first of all, contained in potential extent by the backdrop of shared liberal beliefs against which they would take place. Secondly, the likelihood of explicitly political contentions was mitigated, or their character redirected, by common beliefs about the purpose of the new associations. In the emerging disciplines of political science and sociology, liberal scholars of both major theoretical tendencies were equally committed to pursuing a scientific objectivity that would, they believed, mark off their contributions and exchanges as a professional domain autonomous from partisan politics. Whether we look at Goodnow or Lowell, Ward or Sumner, we find this

commitment. The APSA and the ASS were each founded to house and promote engaged liberal conversations whose participants hoped to merit, and to win, practical influence precisely because of the non-partisan professional objectivity to which they aspired.¹

Such theoretical and professional parallels should not, however, obscure the distinctive internal dynamic of conversations in political science and sociology. Each discipline developed out of the reception of a different European methodological tradition. As I suggested in concluding the last chapter, this difference was evident in the scope of inquiry. In contrast to the racially/culturally bounded scope that political scientists carried forward from the historicist tradition, the naturalistic premises of sociology supported a universal scope: all societies, in all times, and all places, fell potentially within the reach of its claims. The development of American sociology here carried forward a major methodological legacy from its European pioneers.

There was, however, a methodological shift during the decades of sociology's entry into the academy. The trend of inquiry moved away from philosophical endeavors that constructed a naturalistic sociology as part of a framework integrating all science. Premises and practices that followed from approaching societies naturalistically—such as a universal scope—largely carried forward, but the synthetic philosophical ambitions alongside which they had been pursued by Comte and Spencer faded. We might label this methodological trajectory the “disciplining” of sociology. In exploring sociology's entry into the American academy via the figures of Ward and Sumner I am concerned to

¹ For more on this aspiration in relation to the APSA's founding, see Robert Adcock, "The Emergence of Political Science as a Discipline: History and the Study of Politics in America, 1875-1910," *History of Political Thought* 24, no. 3 (2003): 459-86; John Gunnell, "The Founding of the American Political Science Association: Discipline, Profession, Political Theory, and Politics," *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 4 (2006): 479-86.

situate their works relative to this trajectory, in addition to exploring how they expressed divergent currents within American liberalism.

Lester Frank Ward: Evolutionary Science, Social Progress, and Progressive Liberalism

When Lester Frank Ward gave the ASS's inaugural presidential address in 1906, he was a professor of sociology at Brown University, had been a regular contributor to *The American Journal of Sociology* since its first issue in 1895, and had just published *Applied Sociology*, the last in a series of major books of sociology inaugurated over two decades earlier with the 1883 appearance of his *Dynamic Sociology*. Yet although such details might suggest that Ward had been a quintessential professionalizing academic, he had, in fact, been a professor for only a matter of months. Ward received his faculty post at Brown after retiring from a forty-year career with the federal government. Wounded fighting for the North in the Civil War, he had, after the war, secured a job with the Treasury Department. Ward's interests were, however, scientifically oriented and in time he secured a post with the US Geological Survey (USGS). He worked at the USGS as a specialist in plant paleontology from 1882 until his retirement in 1905, and he served simultaneously as curator of the Department of Fossil Plants at the Smithsonian. From the mid-1870s onwards Ward was a regular contributor to journals such as *Popular Science Monthly*, *The American Naturalist*, and *Science*. Even as sociological pieces came by the late 1880s to make up the bulk of his articles, Ward would continue publishing on topics such as "Paleozoic Seed Plants" up into his retirement.

Synthetic Evolutionary Philosophy and the Establishment of Sociology

The trajectory of Ward's career exemplifies the shift from sociology as a philosophically ambitious extra-academic pursuit, whose practitioners were steeped in the natural sciences, to a freestanding academic discipline. His work as a government scientist provides a key backdrop to Ward's sociology. As a specialist in the evolutionary history of plants Ward was a close reader of Darwin's works. He worked, moreover, within an agency whose researchers engaged a wide range of scientific areas. John Wesley Powell, the head of the USGS, was also the head of the Bureau of Ethnology of the Smithsonian, and under his leadership government scientists studied everything from the geology of the American West, to its flora and fauna, to the societies of the Native Americans living there. Ward's own specialized research, the work of his colleagues, and his reading in the generalist scientific journals of his day all fed into his effort to follow the lead of Comte and Spencer, in striving to craft a philosophical synthesis that would draw the natural sciences together in an integrative framework and lay the basis for a naturalistic science of society.

The starting point for Ward's 1883 *Dynamic Sociology* was the vision of sociology as the culmination of a unification of the natural sciences. He began the book with chapters surveying the works of Comte and Spencer

because they alone, of all the thinkers of the world, have the merit of having carried their generalizations from the phenomena of inorganic nature up to those of human action and social life. Of all the philosophers that humanity has brought forth, these two alone have conceived and built upon the broad principle of the absolute unity of Nature and her laws throughout all their manifestations,

from the revolutions of celestial orbs to the rise and fall of empires and the vicissitudes of social customs and laws.²

Ward embraced Comte's classification of the sciences in a hierarchy of complexity, culminating in sociology, as the foundation of his unifying project. Building upon this basis he also endorsed Spencer's integrating approach of seeing evolution at work in all domains as a key step toward "the complete unification of science."³ Much of the first volume of *Dynamic Sociology* was thus devoted to a synthetic evolutionary overview of the natural sciences that found the "struggle for existence" leading to "selection" under the "law of the 'survival of the fittest'" at work in the development, for example, of molecules and organic compounds, as well as plants and animals.⁴

Ward was, however, convinced that Spencer's synthetic evolutionary philosophy failed to capture the extent to which the dynamics of evolution varied across different domains. He had sought in an 1877 *Popular Science Monthly* article to refine Spencer's framework to expound more fully differences between evolution in the cosmic and the organic domains, while remaining devoted to the endeavor of integrating these domains within a unifying framework.⁵ A parallel effort took shape as Ward engaged the social domain in *Dynamic Sociology*. On the one hand he was wedded to conceptualizing social change in evolutionary terms, since this move was critical to the project of locating sociology as the culminating science in a naturalistic synthesis. Such a project seemed to offer a basis for the methodological belief that students of social phenomena should employ notions of law and generalization akin to those used in the natural

² Lester F. Ward, *Dynamic Sociology, or Applied Social Science, as Based Upon Statical Sociology and the Less Complex Sciences*, 2 vols. (New York: Appleton and Co., 1883), 1: 142-43.

³ *Ibid.*, 1: 8.

⁴ See, for example, *Ibid.*, 1: 233-34, 315-16.

⁵ Lester F. Ward, "Cosmic and Organic Evolution," *Popular Science Monthly* 11 (1877).

sciences. But while securing his methodological beliefs, Ward also wanted to give much fuller play than Spencer to differences that he believed set change in human societies apart from change in biology.

Ward's belief about these differences was closely connected with his progressive liberal political theory. As Spencer's publications during the 1880s and 1890s railed with deepening classical liberal disillusionment against trends toward greater state regulation and control, Ward grew ever more exasperated. What had begun in the 1870s as a polite effort to refine Spencer's views of cosmic and organic evolution developed into a charged antipathy. Concluding an 1894 article on Spencer's political and ethical views, Ward declared,

[J]ust as he [Spencer] failed to perceive the fundamental difference between cosmic and organic evolution . . . so he has likewise failed to perceive the equally fundamental difference between vital and psychic evolution, in the latter of which the power of feeling under the direction of thought has furnished to the evolutionary process an entirely new dispensation. In seeking to bring all the products of evolution—worlds, plants, animals, man, society—under one uniform law adequate only to the lowest, and ignoring the new and powerful principles that come forward at the several successive cosmical epochs, he has dwarfed the later of these into relative insignificance, and instead of carrying his system up symmetrically and crowning it with the science of man, he has tapered it off and flattened it out at the summit, degrading the noblest department to the level of political controversy and wholesale personal censure.⁶

Ward's own synthetic system thus took shape at the intersection of two endeavors. On one side was the philosophical endeavor, carried forward from Spencer, to articulate a universal evolutionary system. This promised, among other things, to justify the methodological standpoint of a naturalistic sociology. On the other side was Ward's progressive liberal endeavor, reacting against the *laissez-faire* classical

⁶ Lester F. Ward, "The Political Ethics of Herbert Spencer," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 4 (1894): 126-27.

liberalism of Spencer and others, to understand social progress in a manner more amenable to expanding government regulation and control. The first endeavor aimed at integrating diverse phenomena through a naturalistic philosophical system applying concepts of law and evolution across all domains. The second pushed toward differentiating the dynamic of evolution in the social domain from its character in other domains. Ward's effort to satisfy both endeavors at once gave shape to a tripartite system differentiating cosmic, organic (a.k.a. vital), and social evolution (which Ward based, we shall see, on what he called "psychic" evolution) as dynamics arising successively during movement along an integrated series of ever more complex phenomena, starting with simple matter and culminating in social phenomena.

In forging sociology as part of an all-encompassing philosophical synthesis, Ward carried forward an agenda Comte had given shape to some sixty years before. His was, however, the last major contribution to this effort. The next generation of sociologists would inherit the naturalistic methodological tradition in the study of social phenomena, with its claim to be a natural science, its associated concepts of law and generalization, and its concern with social evolution. But they would have little interest in, or be outright hostile toward, the nineteenth-century effort to situate sociological inquiry as part of an overarching philosophical synthesis. This shift was interwoven with the academic acceptance of sociology. The founding of chairs and departments of sociology created an institutional home for professionalizing scholars who perhaps knew more about social phenomena than did Comte, Spencer, or Ward, but who also knew and cared much less about natural science. After sociology won an academic home, its practitioners increasingly came to feel little need to philosophically justify their

naturalistic methodological stance. With a secure institutional basis, sociology no longer seemed to need a philosophical foundation. Moreover, with the dawning of pragmatism in American philosophy, academic sociologists would soon be able to look to their philosophical colleagues to congratulate rather than to chide them for leaving the foundational endeavors of the nineteenth-century pioneers of sociology behind.

The new institutional and intellectual situation in which sociology found itself by the late 1890s was evident in the preface Ward wrote for the second edition of *Dynamic Sociology*. Here he celebrated the major change since 1883, when his book first appeared and “there was not a chair of sociology in any university in the world.” He declared that now (this new preface was written in 1896), “there is no higher institution of learning in which sociology is not taught, and in many it is taught by that name, while a number of the leading ones have special chairs of sociology.” Buoyed by the “rapid rise” of his once lonely field, Ward suggested that sociology was likely to “become the leading science of the twentieth century, as biology has been of the nineteenth.” He then went on to advise his readers that much of the first of *Dynamic Sociology*’s two volumes contained “preparatory and explanatory matter which, though necessary then, could be dispensed with now.” That matter sought to ground a naturalistic approach to society which was now increasingly taken as given within the expanding ranks of academic sociologists. Ward suggested that readers might jump from his introduction straight to the seventh chapter, skipping over his surveys of Comte and Spencer, and the synthetic naturalistic treatment of the genesis of matter, organic forms, mind, and man presented

in his chapters surveying cosmology, chemistry, biology, brain psychology, and physical anthropology.⁷

Social Progress, Evolution, and the Intellect

The evolutionary approach to social progress that Ward laid out in *Dynamic Sociology* contrasted two alternative modes of progressive social change. Progress in the social domain, as in others, arose from evolutionary adaptation. But such adaptation could, because human agents were involved, take either a passive or an active form. The psychic faculties of humans opened up the possibility of using foresight to redirect evolution. This ability was evident when humans used artificial selection to develop plants and animals better suited to human needs. Biological evolution was in such cases redirected and its rate accelerated to develop organic forms different from those that would exist if natural selection were passively left to take its course. The core tenet of Ward's sociology was that, just as humans could advance their welfare by actively intervening in the evolution of biological species, so also could they do so by intervening in the evolution of society and its institutions. Progressive social change had to date been a passive genetic progress produced through natural selection under the pressure of the struggle for existence. But operation of this dynamic in the social domain involved, as it did in the evolution of animals and plants, enormous waste, and resulted only slowly and haphazardly in progressive change. Ward taught that the advance of natural science into the social domain, i.e. sociology, held out the promise of a new active (artificial or

⁷ Lester F. Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton, 1897), viii-ix.

teleological) mode of social progress that would be more rapid, more efficient, and far more productive of aggregate human happiness.⁸

Ward's evolutionary naturalism approached human beings as a species of animal driven, as were other animals, by desires. Efforts to fulfill these desires were the causal force behind all human actions, and as such, the basis of all social phenomena, progressive or otherwise, in all times and all places. The dawning of a new era of active social progress would entail no change in this or any other aspect of human nature. It depended instead upon working out the ultimate possibilities of a change within the human mind produced by natural selection before the dawn of civilization. What set humans onto a path of development different from that of other animals was the adaptive evolution of the capacity for thought. The first and most fundamental faculty of human thought was intuition. In subsequent psychic evolution it was supplemented by foresight, the faculty of invention, and, rounding out the intellect, the faculties of creative and speculative thought. But at no stage in its development did, or would, the intellect supplant the evolutionarily much older psychic factor of desire as the causal motor of human actions. What the intellect did was to alter the way desires were pursued. It redirected human energies away from unthinking efforts that directly pursued desires into intermediate pursuits expected—not always accurately—to ultimately yield a greater satisfaction of desires (a goal equivalent, in Ward's explicitly utilitarian perspective, to increased happiness). The causal forces rooted in the desires, together with the directive faculties of the intellect, formed the basis of Ward's account of social

⁸ Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, Introduction.

progress, both in the passive mode it had taken, and in the active mode that was, he believed, becoming possible.⁹

Ward's distinction between passive and active social progress presupposed an analogy between intellect at the level of individuals and at the level of society. The individual intellect was the model for Ward's idea of a social intellect redirecting social forces (ultimately rooted in individual desires) to increase the aggregate happiness of a society's members. Such an increase was, for Ward, the defining characteristic of social progress. But the possibility of a society in its corporate capacity consciously and successfully directing its own progress was currently only an incipient ideal.¹⁰ I consider Ward's arguments about what its realization would entail in the next sub-section, when I explore his progressive liberal vision of "sociocracy." But before doing so, I survey his analysis of the way societies and their institutions had evolved to date. For Ward this evolution had produced notable progressive accomplishments opening the way for sociocracy. But it also had major and ever-deepening flaws that had brought civilization to a crisis point. The passive mode of progress had exhausted its possibilities and a turn to active social progress was, Ward warned, the only way to avert the onset of a "night

⁹ The twin psychic faculties of desire/feeling and thought/intellect were the explanatory basis of all Ward's evolutionary sociology. In Ward's accompanying evolutionary psychology, these twin faculties were explored and explained as products of natural selection. While this psychology is briefly treated within the general evolutionary synthesis of *Dynamic Sociology*, Ward felt the psychological basis of his sociology had been widely misunderstood and set out to give a much fuller presentation a decade later. The clearest presentation of the arguments summarized in this paragraph can thus be found in Lester F. Ward, *The Psychic Factors of Civilization* (Boston: Ginn, 1893).

¹⁰ The idea of a "social intellect" is best developed in *Psychic Factors*. But the general vision of a society taking up conscious direction of its progress pervades Ward's sociology. His last work explores this vision most fully. Lester F. Ward, *Applied Sociology: A Treatise on the Conscious Improvement of Society by Society* (Boston: Ginn, 1906).

of reaction and degeneracy ... never again to be succeeded by the daylight of progress.”¹¹

In *Dynamic Sociology* Ward treated the past evolution of society from two perspectives. First, he surveyed this evolution as a whole, exploring the dynamics driving it and outcomes it had produced. The starting point of this treatment was the tenet that all social change—good and bad—was the aggregate result of actions taken by individuals striving to satisfy desires. Humans egoistically sought to control inorganic nature, other animal species, and one another, in such a way as to maximize their individual desires (which might include desires to protect and provide for their kin). Ward held that nearly all such actions had taken place in a competitive setting, and could hence be understood in terms of natural selection and the law of survival of the fittest. But this evolutionary dynamic was, he stressed, slow and wasteful as a way of producing progressive change. It did little to increase human happiness in the aggregate since, as societies evolved to become larger and more internally complex, they also became more unequal. The benefits from material and intellectual advance accrued to a small elite and the masses gained little. Moreover, those who came out ahead did not deserve to do so in any moral sense. At the level of social classes, the “non-productive” classes—i.e. those engaged in distribution, exchange, and finance, or in the “parasitic” activities of religion, war, government, and creating monopolies—were much better off than the mass of humanity who were economically engaged in production. At the level of individuals, personal success was explained partly by shrewdness and skill in deception. But,

¹¹ Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, 1: 16.

especially in complex societies, it was due above all to the circumstances in which an individual happened to be born.¹²

The second perspective from which Ward treated the evolution of societies sought out the specific source of whatever social progress had been achieved to date.¹³ Human actions fell into two broad categories, distinguished by whether desires were pursued directly or indirectly under guidance from the intellect. Ward argued that all progressive change had been a consequence of a subset of the actions guided by the intellect. It resulted, in particular, from acts of invention and discovery that either facilitated the communication of ideas among humans, or increased their ability to use inanimate and organic objects and forces to more abundantly and efficiently meet their needs. A long line of progressive steps led from the earliest developments of language and tools up to the latest advances of natural science and technology. A reverse story was presented, however, by actions guided by the intellect in light of religious beliefs. Ward argued that such actions had never made a positive contribution to social progress, and indeed had all too often, undermined or hampered it.

Alongside these contrasting accounts of science and religion, Ward also considered the relations of government to progressive change. While ascribing government an “ameliorative” function of promoting “the improvement of society,” he held that it had “hitherto nearly or quite entirely failed” at this. “[G]overnment as an active progressive agent” was thus a matter of future possibilities, not of past or present actualities.¹⁴ The ameliorative function was, however, only one part of Ward’s account,

¹² *Ibid.*, chap. 7.

¹³ This and the next paragraph summarize Ward’s arguments in *ibid.*, chap. 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2: 216.

which took on a more nuanced hue as he turned to government's "protective" function. The object of government in this role was to maintain peace and secure persons and property from conflicts and injustices potentially arising as individuals pursued their desires. In fulfilling this function governments had created conditions favorable to "the really progressive elements of society," i.e. the activities of discovery and invention. They had, as such, been "indispensable to progress," without directly contributing to it. Ward took care, however, to pair this indirect positive result with attention to the dark side of the protective function. In the name of this function governments had acted "directly and powerfully" against social progress by "restraining human liberty" and thereby "diminishing human happiness."¹⁵ In considering the relations of government to progress, Ward thus presented a multi-faceted mix of indirect benefits and direct costs that stood in contrast both to his uniformly negative remarks on religion, and to his uniformly positive account of inventions, discoveries, and the rise of modern natural science.

Ward's Progressive Liberalism: The Promise of "Sociocracy"

A multi-faceted mix of pros and cons was not the only distinctive trait of Ward's account of government. While scientific and religious activities stood, for him, in fixed relations to social progress, his view of government had an important dynamic dimension. He saw a historical trend of political change mitigating the negative impact of government on its subjects' liberties, and he supplemented his claims about what government had been so far with claims about what it could and should become. If we

¹⁵ Ibid., 2: 243.

bring Ward's most extended discussion of government (in *Dynamic Sociology's* chapter on "Progress") together with additional arguments scattered through this and his other works from the 1880s and early 1890s, we find an overarching theoretical vision of the political past, present, and future. Despite the perhaps ominous, certainly distinctive, overtones of Ward's label of "sociocracy" for the future he promoted, his theoretical vision exemplifies the same emergent American progressive liberalism that we previously explored in Chapter Three in Wilson's works of the mid- to late-1880s. Selected liberal and democratic commitments were again interwoven in support of a more active government with a professionalized and expanded administrative apparatus. As a progressive liberal Ward broke with classical liberalism without ceasing to be liberal, and in doing so, carried forward a faith in progress with which intellectuals more wedded to classical liberalism struggled as the nineteenth century drew towards its close.

Ward's view of past political history centered on the rise of representative government during the prior two centuries. As for liberals of all stripes, this rise was, for Ward, something to be celebrated. He consigned everything prior to it to a political dark age in which ruling classes, under cover of government's protective function, wielded political power in their own interests and oppressively interfered with the liberties and rights of their subjects. There was, however, little point censuring such rulers since their behavior was "only human nature acting itself out." Effective action against oppressive government presupposed a people "enlightened" enough to have learned "the great truth" that "no dependence can be placed upon the *sentiments* of rulers." For Ward, a turning point in a nation's political history was reached when its people came to a belief that he took as axiomatic: without representation their liberties and rights would never be

secure. Resistance to oppressive governments had occurred throughout world history. But it took the growing “intelligence of the governed classes” to direct such resistance into demands for the “popular representation” which offered the only way to meet the age-old desire of the people to defend their liberties and rights.¹⁶

Three features of Ward’s view of representative government were especially noteworthy. First, as we saw earlier in Wilson, the once prominent conceptual distinction between democracy and representative government largely disappeared. From the early 1880s to the early 1890s talk of democracy increasingly supplanted talk of representative government in Ward’s work. At no point did he contrast these phrases, and he used both to discuss a single transformative change that he saw in the political history of all enlightened nations. The second noteworthy feature lay in the way Ward presented the character of this change. Representative government had been, in his judgment, not only necessary but also sufficient to secure the people against the oppression they suffered from earlier governments. Its rise was thus concomitant with the end “throughout all the most enlightened states of the world” of “all real governmental oppression.” The modern representative system had put limits upon “the violation of law, the perpetration of fraud, or the abuse of power” that were “so great and effective” as to make government “a very different thing from what it formerly was.” Third, Ward notably stressed the persistence, despite this change, of the distrust of government that had fuelled the rise of the representative system. He declared:

So deep-seated had become the fear of governmental oppression, and so firmly had this sentiment taken root in the constitution of man, that not even the

¹⁶ Ibid., 2: 225-26. See also 1: 517 where Ward declared that “[i]f history and experience ever taught any thing” it was “the principle that in matters of government an unrepresented class is always deprived of its rights.”

complete revolution which it wrought throughout the civilized world has sufficed to eradicate it. It still exists, and permeates the entire body politic. The most representative forms of government are still feared, watched, and suspected as if they were self-constituted despotisms.¹⁷

Ward departed firmly from classical liberalism in his evaluation of this persistent fear. While it had done salutary work in the past, the fear of government oppression had, Ward held, been made obsolescent by the political changes it had produced. Under democratic representative systems it was not only outdated, but also irrational. It now distracted the people from the major contemporary threats to their liberty and happiness. These came not from the government, but from the evolving organization of economic life. A shrewd elite dominated an economic system that secured them vast rewards while depriving the laboring masses of any share in the fruits of civilization. Ward believed that a further stage in the refinement of this inequitable system was taking shape as business leaders came to understand the waste involved in competition. On the basis of this insight they were cooperating to create ever larger corporations that made enormous gains by supplanting competition, and directed these into the hands of a lucky few. For Ward, an effective response to the evils of the present day required applying insights about the merits of organized cooperation underlying such economic trends to the level of society as a whole. It would involve the inauguration of a new and higher form of cooperation in which society acted consciously through its government to intelligently

¹⁷ Lester F. Ward, "False Notions of Government," in *Glimpses of the Cosmos*, vol. IV (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1915; first published in 1887), 65-66.

govern its conduct in the ways best suited to advance the aggregate happiness of its members.¹⁸

This essential step forward was, however, impossible so long as popular anxieties about government as an oppressor persisted. The modern representative system produced governments “so intensely deferent to the public will that every new step is tardily taken and only after it has become certain that it will be gladly welcomed and generally approved.” The elite, with interests in maintaining an inequitable economic system, were well aware of this. They relied upon popular distrust to keep the government from interfering with their all too successful efforts to forge a “plutocracy” in which their class wielded, via its economic powers, an ability to extort wealth from the people far greater than had been wielded by the government in the autocracies and aristocracies of old. The continuing advance of plutocracy thus required sustaining fears of government that were irrational under a modern representative system. The “outrages committed by government in their autocratic and aristocratic stages” were constantly being summoned up to perpetuate popular anxieties about the imminent recurrence of such outrages.¹⁹

Looking to the future, Ward did not expect any break with the institutional framework of representative democracy. But that framework was compatible with either of two very different social and political trajectories. One trajectory was the continuing advance of plutocracy. The other trajectory offered the only way to escape plutocracy: a turn toward “sociocracy” and a new era of active social progress.²⁰ It was against this

¹⁸ Ward stressed the inequities of complex economies unrestrained by government regulation throughout the 1880s, but it was in the early 1890s that he elevated issues raised by monopolies and trusts to the center of his analysis. For this stage of his argument, see Ward, *Psychic Factors*, chap. 23.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 303-04, 319-23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 323-24.

perception of the perils and possibilities of his day that Ward gave shape to his evolutionary sociology and his associated vision of the future of government. In doing so he sought, first, to rebut the *laissez-faire* belief that government efforts to aid society would be ineffectual or even outright harmful in their net effects. Secondly, he explored what sociocracy would involve. He believed it required remaking and extending, rather than superseding, existing institutions in a way that would draw upon and diffuse the findings of modern naturalistic science, and above all, of evolutionary sociology.

Ward challenged *laissez-faire* beliefs about the inability of government to aid society. Ward here distinguished administrative from legislative action and offered lines of argument for each. With regard to administration, he focused as an example on recent moves by continental European governments to take over and run the railroads. These had been, Ward argued, a great success, especially in contrast to the “wasteful policy of competition” still pursued in America. The example served to illustrate a broader principle: the “superiority of governmental administration over private management, in large enterprises of a general public character.” Bringing the railroads under government administration was, as Ward saw it, only the latest step in an “expansion of the jurisdiction of the state” that had “been going on steadily from the earliest ages of political history.” In the past this expansion brought criminal jurisprudence, the collection of state revenues, customs, and the post under government administration. In the present it was extending to encompass railroads, telegraphs, education, and scientific research. And in the future, it was “destined” to continue its advance to further “social operations.” Ward was well aware that such a historical vision was, as of 1883, a relative oddity in America. He hence warned his readers against the “fashionable” tendency to

“declaim against the so-called ‘bureaucracy’ of modern times.” Such declamations were, Ward asserted, “only a part of the attempt of sagacious capitalists to manufacture public sentiment to counteract the steady current of rational conviction toward the conclusion that society must arouse to its own interests, and take the welfare of its members more directly into its hands.”²¹

While scathing about *laissez-faire* attacks on government administration, Ward was more sympathetic to criticisms of legislative activity. He held the actions of legislatures to be generally far less enlightened than those of administrators, and he attributed this to the way “partisanship” prevented legislators from engaging in “true *deliberation*.” As a result the “aggregate wisdom of legislative bodies” actually fell “below the average wisdom of their members.” And, Ward also noted, the members themselves did “little more than represent the average intelligence of their constituencies.”²² There was thus no lack of legislative examples that advocates of *laissez-faire* could use to show government failing “as a promoter of the social welfare.” But such examples did not, Ward insisted, suffice to establish that legislative activity could never effectively serve social welfare. Legislators to date had been “mere bunglers” who “knew nothing of the laws of society.” Successful forging of genuinely “progressive legislation” would become possible when legislators mastered sociology. A

²¹ Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, 2: 576-85. See also Lester F. Ward, “Politico-Social Functions,” *Penn Monthly* 12 (1881). Ward’s arguments about government administration assumed a professionalized apparatus rather than the spoils system prevailing in the America of his day. He insisted that the spoils system was “in no sense a democratic idea,” but only “a relic of past ages of abuse of power, when kings and despots made and unmade the fortunes of men.” The “adoption by government of business principles in conducting the affairs of the people” was, Ward held, actually a key component of “progress toward true democracy.” Such comments illustrate both Ward’s belief that he was promoting democracy, and the remaking (or, we might say, taming) that this concept underwent in the hands of progressive liberals. Ward, “False Notions of Government,” 67.

²² Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, 2: 395-96, 572-74.

successful legislature would, in effect, resemble “a laboratory of philosophical research into the laws of human society and of human nature.”²³ Ward summed up his belief in “the high expediency of a thoroughly learned legislature” in the following terms: “The legislature is the voice of society. To speak for it, it must represent it; to represent it, it must understand it. To understand society is to be acquainted with the science of sociology.”²⁴

Ward’s vision of a legislature whose members were essentially applied sociologists is one of the most distinctive moments of his thought, and one which well captures why he adopted the term “sociocracy.” But how could such a legislature come into being? Ward’s response to this puzzle testified eloquently to his liberalism. He firmly rejected the Comtean vision in which the institutional precondition of sociology holding sway over government acts was the replacement of representative legislatures by an unelected technocratic elite. Giving power to an intellectual elite irresponsible to the people was unacceptable because, by the “fundamental law of human nature,” any such elite would inevitably wield its power for “self-aggrandizement.”²⁵ There was, for Ward, no going back on the belief that a representative system was the only way to prevent government oppression. Besides being untenable due to Ward’s theoretical commitments, any break with the framework of representative democracy was, by his judgment, also implausible in light of prevailing trends. A response to the puzzle of how

²³ *Ibid.*, 1: 36-38. Ward also advocated changes in the way legislatures worked. He stressed the merits of committee work and listening to recommendations formulated by government administrators, as well as the need for knowledge of what other modern nations had done and descriptive statistical data. Ward, *Psychic Factors*, 309-12.

²⁴ Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, 1: 136.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1: 19-20. See also *Ibid.*, 2: 367 where Ward argues that “the fundamental law of human nature—the egoistic character of human actions . . . shows why it is that in matters of legal rights or political influence, Bentham’s dictum, ‘everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one,’ should apply.”

to get a legislature of sociologists had to accept “the irresistible tendency of governments towards popular representative character, in which the legislature can at best represent the intelligence of constituencies.” A change in the character of legislatures thus depended upon a change in the character of the citizenry. What was needed was to put the people themselves “upon the highway to a condition of intelligence which, when attained, will in turn work out the problem of inaugurating a scientific legislature and a system of scientific legislation.”²⁶ The precondition of a legislature made up of sociologists was a citizenry which grasped for itself the merits of sociology.

We thus come to the linchpin of Ward’s vision of sociocracy: the scientific education of the people. In the introduction of *Dynamic Sociology* Ward had singled out “*popular scientific education*” as “the first element of a truly progressive system.”²⁷ Over a thousand pages later, his book culminated in a chapter advocating a state system of universal compulsory education that would diffuse true and useful scientific knowledge to all members of society. The culmination of such knowledge came for Ward, as we have seen, in sociology. In this system of education there would be, by contrast, no room for teaching anti-progressive religious beliefs, and little if any for “ornamental” knowledge of culture.²⁸ The ultimate end of society was to increase the aggregate happiness of its members, and the immediate means to this was social progress. But all progress resulted from actions guided by the intellect in light of opinions reflecting knowledge of how the world actually worked. Ward singled out the universal diffusion of such knowledge as the initial means toward which a push to

²⁶ Ibid., 2: 398-99.

²⁷ Ibid., 1: 22 (*italics in original*).

²⁸ Ibid., chap. 14.

improve society could most productively direct its efforts. Popular scientific education would give all people a basis of knowledge on which they could draw on to form correct opinions. If their actions were directed by such opinions, rather than by entirely or largely false beliefs, individuals would pursue their happiness more effectively. At the aggregate level, the result would be a rise in the overall amount of effort directed into progressive activities, and a concomitant acceleration of social progress, and increase in the combined happiness of society's members.²⁹ Ward thus declared:

If society ever collectively realizes what the ultimate end of its being is, and comprehends the true relations of means to that end, it will necessarily regard the distribution of knowledge as the one great function, outside of its regulative functions, which it is specially constituted to perform. It will concentrate its entire dynamic energy upon it.³⁰

The expansion of government's administrative activity to include educating every citizen in useful scientific knowledge would mark a turning point on the path to sociocracy. Through its educational activity (in combination with taking up the lead in the conduct of scientific research) government would at last begin to fulfill its ameliorative function as an active agent of progress. No longer merely a protector of the progressive activities of scientific discovery and invention, government would now "increase and intensify them and their influence."³¹ Beside its effect in promoting the advance and application of science, a state administered education system would also

²⁹ This chain of reasoning from the ultimate end back through an extended series of means guides the entire course of *Dynamic Sociology's* second volume. Ward summarizes this chain of reasoning in the overview of his argument, "definitions," and "theorems" at the end of the volume's first chapter. Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, 2: 108-09.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2: 591.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2: 216-17, 249-50, 583-84.

have positive feedback effects on government administration itself.³² Citizens educated in the sciences—including, of course, sociology—would better understand the character and purpose of government administration. They would thus become more aware of their interest in its effective management, and approach it not as a “master,” but instead as a “servant of society,” in whose instruction all had a voice.³³

The positive feedback effect from the educational activities of government would extend to its legislative as well as its administrative activities. Ward saw most legislation to date as directed toward blocking certain lines of human action via prohibition and punishment. He contended that the scientific future of legislation lay, by contrast, in pursuing an alternative agenda of “attractive legislation.” Such legislation would, rather than “damming the stream of human desire,” instead “direct it into channels not only innocent but useful.” It would achieve this end indirectly through adjustment—based on sociological knowledge—of the circumstances and incentives shaping the way individuals act in pursuit of their desires.³⁴ Ward saw popular scientific education aiding the onset of attractive legislation in two ways. First, such education was, as we have already seen, a precondition to the election of legislatures whose members would act as applied sociologists. It was such legislators who would understand the natural science of

³² In addition to the assistance to improved administration accruing from the universal education, Ward also saw a key role for a more advanced, selective education. He envisioned the federal government founding a national university whose “leading feature and true reason for being” would be “its course of instruction in the science and art of government.” Students of the university would be selected by competitive examination, but with provisions to secure students from throughout the country in proportion to regional representation in congress. Administrative offices of the government would be, as soon as possible, filled by graduates of the university, so that, in time, “the civil service force of the United States should consist exclusively of persons who have had a through training in the theory and practice of government.” Lester F. Ward, “A National University, its Character and Purpose,” in *Glimpses of the Cosmos*, vol. IV (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1915; first published in 1892), 324-25.

³³ Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, 2: 242-43.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1: 37-45.

society well enough to craft attractive legislation. Second, popular scientific education would have a direct effect through its impact on the opinions of individuals, and thereby, their actions. Such education would “extract the fangs from nearly all human propensities” and thereby “reduce the problem of attractive legislation to its lowest terms.”³⁵ In both of these ways, education was essential to the project of attractive legislation. Ward confidently predicted that when laws began to take this new form, it would be “found that the degree of liberty necessary to be surrendered for the good of society is far less than had been supposed.”³⁶

The rise of representative democracy had lowered the negative impact of government on human liberty, but there was, Ward taught, still ample room for further advance. If this political system was leavened by the diffusion of scientific knowledge—among citizens, their legislators, and their administrators—the liberation of individuals to act freely and effectively in pursuit of their happiness could be taken to a whole new level. Ward’s sociocracy would ally representative democracy with naturalistic science to pursue a reformulated vision of liberal progress in which expansive government would be an aid to, rather than an opponent of, a transformative step forward in the advance of individual liberty and happiness.

³⁵ Ward, *Psychic Factors*, 306-08.

³⁶ Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, 1: 41.

William Graham Sumner: From Liberal Moralism to the Disillusioned Science of Society

In turning from Ward to William Graham Sumner, we meet an alternative route through which naturalistic sociology entered the expanding American academy. Ward was a sociologist who became an academic only after his retirement from the federal government. Sumner, by contrast, spent nearly his entire adult life at Yale—as a student, a postgraduate tutor, and, most importantly, a professor for almost forty years. He was an independent-minded thinker who became excited about sociology well before it acquired academic respectability. Sumner first articulated his conception of sociology in the early 1880s just prior to the publication of Ward's *Dynamic Sociology*. He conceived of sociology, as did Ward, as a naturalistic science of society on the brink of intellectual advances as revolutionary as any made in the physical and organic sciences. But beyond this, Sumner and Ward disagreed. Sumner was a classical liberal who had embraced sociology in light of Spencer's example. He expected sociology to undermine just the kind of vision of consciously guided social progress that Ward's variant of the science so ardently propounded. The firm, indeed strident, classical liberal moralism of Sumner's writings in the 1880s—above all his 1883 book *What Social Classes Owe to One Another*—made him a *bête noire* of progressive liberalism in its formative decade. In an 1884 article Ward pointedly singled out Sumner's book as the “most extreme statement of the *laissez-faire* doctrine” against which he was battling.³⁷ The notion that he would one day succeed Ward as president of the same national association would, in the mid-1880s, have seemed absurd to them both.

³⁷ Lester F. Ward, “Mind as a Social Factor,” *Mind* 9, no. 36 (1884): 565n.

By time Sumner was elected to the presidency of the American Sociological Society for 1908-09 he was, however, a significantly different thinker with a changed conception of sociology's character. He had, like Spencer, undergone a disillusioning movement away from his classical liberal starting point. In the process, the moralizing prominent in his earlier writings and lectures had been replaced by a detached matter-of-fact realism bordering on moral relativism, or, we might say, value-free social science. In the last part of this section, I consider Sumner's disillusionment and compare it to Spencer's. But before doing so I treat his earlier intellectual development at some length. I first explore the central components of his political thought. These emerged from the Whig institutional history and classical political economy that were Sumner's earliest areas of research and teaching, and they persisted through all his subsequent thought. I then turn to Sumner's engagement with sociology, and show how it situated his political thought within a broad naturalistic vision of social forces that was, at first, interwoven with a preexisting moralizing current in his lectures and writings.

Teaching Civil Liberty

When Theodore Dwight Woolsey stepped down as the president of Yale College in 1871, it was decided that senior-year instruction in "political philosophy"—which he had given for the past quarter of a century—should come under the purview of a new Chair of Political and Social Science. The chair was, after some debate, offered to Sumner, who had graduated from Yale in 1863, and after advanced studies in Europe,

had returned to the college as a tutor in 1866-69.³⁸ Without hesitation, Sumner left his briefly held position as an Episcopal minister to take up the new chair at his alma mater, which he would occupy from 1873 until he retired in 1909.

Following Woolsey's example, Sumner initially taught Francis Lieber's *Civil Liberty and Self-Government* (which Woolsey had assigned since the mid-1850s³⁹), international law (using Woolsey's textbook in this area), and classical political economy. After a few years, he began to concentrate his instruction on political economy, and in turn, sociology.⁴⁰ But his engagement with the Whig institutional history expounded in Lieber's book was far from superficial. Indeed, it helped give conceptual shape to a standpoint that would persistently frame Sumner's political thought. At the core of this standpoint was the concept of civil liberty construed in a historical and institutional sense that Lieber—like British and other American Whig thinkers before him—had given it.

Civil liberty was for Sumner, as for Lieber, a specifically modern achievement. It was the “status of a freeman in a modern jural state.” This status was embodied in, and guaranteed by, an array of institutions built up over multiple centuries. It hence had to be defined “in terms drawn from history and law.”⁴¹ Developed in England as the product

³⁸ Harris E. Starr, *William Graham Sumner* (New York: Holt, 1925), 161-67.

³⁹ Theodore D. Woolsey, introduction to *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government*, by Francis Lieber, ed. Theodore D. Woolsey, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1874).

⁴⁰ Anna Haddow, *Political Science in American Colleges and Universities, 1636-1900* (New York: Appleton-Century), 177-78. The courses offered by Sumner in 1873-74 are outlined along with his conception of the purview of his chair at this time in his 1873 “Introductory Lecture to Courses in Political and Social Science,” reprinted in William Graham Sumner, *The Challenge of the Facts and Other Essays*, ed. Albert Galloway Keller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1914), 391-403. Bruce Curtis, *William Graham Sumner* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1981), 391-403.

⁴¹ William Graham Sumner, *Earth-Hunger and Other Essays*, ed. Albert Galloway Keller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1913), 116. Cites to this collection in the current sub-section all draw on a

of centuries of political struggle, civil liberty had, in turn, been “inherited by all the English-speaking nations, who have made liberty real because they have inherited it, not as a notion, but as a body of institutions.” Efforts to imitate it had been made in continental Europe. But these “realized it only imperfectly” since, without “local institutions or traditions” to support it, civil liberty remained only “a matter of ‘declarations’” rather than something “positive, practical, and actual.”⁴²

In connection with this standard Whig interpretation of Anglo-American history, Sumner also expounded a classic Whig view of abusive political power as the core threat to civil liberty. All political history was marked, he held, by “a tiresome repetition of one story”—the story of “persons and classes” pursuing “possession of the power of the State in order to live luxuriously out of the earnings of others.” Rooted in the “vices and passions of human nature,” to which “no nation, class, or age” are an exception, this pursuit fueled recurring cycles of regime change in which power passed between persons or classes without ever ceasing to be arbitrary. To break out of this “delusive round” and establish liberty, barriers had to be set “to selfishness, cupidity, envy, and lust in *all* classes, from highest to lowest, by laws and institutions,” and “great organs of civil life” had to be created which would “eliminate, as far as possible, arbitrary and personal elements from the adjustment of interests and the definition of rights.”⁴³

Anglo-American success in limiting arbitrary power was, according to the Whig narrative Sumner inherited, a historical exception rooted in a complex framework of

pamphlet and series of essays first published in 1887-89, and reprinted as the “Liberty” section on pp. 109-203 of *Earth-Hunger*.

⁴² William Graham Sumner, *What Social Classes Owe To Each Other* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1989; first published by Harper & Brothers, 1883), 26, 29-30.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 27-29.

laws and institutions. But there had been much debate and change over time in Whig interpretations of the details of this framework, and of the general principles it did or should embody. The specifically classical liberal character of Sumner's standpoint was evident in the way he interpreted the institutional heritage of civil liberty. As notable as the Whig legacy in Sumner's standpoint was, his views were a far cry from aristocratic Whiggism of the kind Burke espoused, with its defense of class and religion-based privileges and paternalisms as hallowed by the ages.

For Sumner equality before the law was a core principle of civil liberty, and this principle was to be understood in terms of a classical liberal view of the state. In an 1880 essay, he spelled out his understanding of this principle:

The object of equality before the law is to make the state entirely neutral. The state, under that theory, takes no cognizance of persons. It surrounds all, without distinctions, with the same conditions and guarantees. If it educates one, it educates all—black, white, red or yellow; Jew or Gentile; native or alien. If it taxes one, it taxes all, by the same system and under the same conditions. If it exempts one from police regulations in home, church, and occupation, it exempts all.

Sumner allowed that perfect realization of this principle was “impossible.” But by appealing to it he singled out the granting of “exceptions and special cases” as an activity rife with “chance for abuse.”⁴⁴ Defenders of civil liberty should limit the extent of all such activity—by, for example, favoring a uniform rule of free trade over the discretionary decision-making involved in a system of individual protective tariffs and exemptions.⁴⁵ Even if discretionary power might not always be abused, the potential for

⁴⁴ William Graham Sumner, *On Liberty, Society, and Politics: The Essential Essays of William Graham Sumner*, ed. Robert C. Bannister (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1992), 177.

⁴⁵ Sumner is perhaps best remembered for his defense of free trade, the gold standard, and a general presumption of *laissez-faire* in the relation of government to economics. While it is fair that his economic arguments in defense of these views are remembered as some of the more dogmatic applications of

abuse was always there. Such power should thus, whether held by politicians or administrators, be constrained and watched over vigilantly. Civil liberty was, in Sumner's view, "unfriendly to all personal control, to officialism, to administrative philanthropy and administrative wisdom, as much to bureaucratic despotism or monarchical absolutism."⁴⁶ While strongly favoring reform to end the spoils system in American government administration, Sumner also firmly rejected the optimistic vision of administration's potential that accompanied such advocacy on the part of progressive liberals like Wilson, Goodnow, or Ward.

A second major feature of civil liberty for Sumner lay in its intertwining with personal liberty, which he, as a classical liberal, understood in terms of a socio-economic order centered on self-reliance and self-improvement. Laws and institutions embodying civil liberty secured the "personal liberty of individuals" by guaranteeing a free man "that, in doing his best to learn the laws of right living and to obey them, to the end that his life may be a success, no one else shall be allowed to interfere with him or to demand a share in the product of his efforts."⁴⁷ If a state guaranteed its citizens any less, or any more, than this, it did so at a cost. While granting that the "Prussian bureaucracy can do a score of things for the citizen which no governmental organ in the United States can do," Sumner contended that if Americans wanted "to be taken care of as Prussians and Frenchmen are," they would have to sacrifice some of their personal liberty.⁴⁸

classical English political economy, it is worth emphasizing that his views did not stand on economic grounds alone and that his political arguments also deserve attention. Some of the issues involved here will come out more fully in the discussion of plutocracy below.

⁴⁶ Sumner, *Earth-Hunger*, 160.

⁴⁷ Sumner, *Earth-Hunger*, 169-70, 198-99. See also 165 and 182 in the same series of essays, as well as Sumner, *Social Classes*, 30.

⁴⁸ Sumner, *Liberty, Society, and Politics*, 212.

Alongside equality before the law and personal liberty, Sumner's interpretation of civil liberty also highlighted the relation of rights to duties. He noted that no one could hold a right as a positive reality without others having a correlative set of positive duties to respect and sustain that right. A key question to ask of a society was how rights and duties were distributed among its members. Anyone whose rights exceeded his duties held a privileged status that could exist only if other members of society were in a status of servitude in which their duties exceeded their rights. But between these two positions there lay a "middle point or neutral point, where there is neither privilege nor servitude, but where the rights and duties are in equilibrium, and that status is civil liberty." The aim of "the modern jural state, at least of the Anglo-American type" was to realize and sustain this status by rejecting both "privileges and servitudes." This dual rejection was essential to the equilibrium of rights and duties, to equality before the law, and to securing personal liberty. Each of the three elements in Sumner's interpretation of civil liberty thus led into a single overarching conception of liberty: a classical liberal conception that, he declared to his fellow Americans, "fills our institutions at their best, and . . . forms the stem of our best civil and social ideals."⁴⁹

Sumner taught that civil liberty was not an inheritance Americans could take for granted, but a sacred charge in need of their ongoing support. Forged through "centuries of experience" at a great cost in "blood and labor," laws and institutions that sustained civil liberty would never be free from new threats of being overridden or perverted. The "only real guarantee of civil liberty" ultimately lay in the "prejudices" and "instincts" of the citizenry. What was essential was "the jealous instinct" that was "quick to take

⁴⁹ Sumner, *Earth-Hunger*, 126-28. See also 165.

alarm” and would “not, at any time or under any excuse, allow even a slight or temporary infringement upon civil liberty.”⁵⁰ Sumner hence extolled the instinctive fear of government oppression that Ward believed to be outdated and pernicious. The exhortatory tone so common in Sumner’s earlier works must be seen in light of his wish to foster instincts that he held to be valuable. Writing and teaching as a classical liberal moralist, the early Sumner offered not only intellectual arguments pointing out the role of a citizenry with a certain temperament in sustaining civil liberty; he also rhetorically sought to motivate his audience to embrace that temperament.

Contemporary Threats to Civil Liberty: Democracy and Plutocracy

The need for never-ending vigilance was, for Sumner, rooted in his belief that threats to civil liberty grow out of passions and vices that are part of human nature in all times and places. But he saw the form that those threats take as historically variable. In particular, he singled out the major threats to civil liberty in his own day and age as arising in connection with two modern trends, most fully developed in America but present also in Europe: first, the rise of democracy, and secondly, the rise of plutocracy.

Like so many others at this time, Sumner saw his era as characterized by a general trend away from monarchical or aristocratic toward democratic governments. Unlike Ward, however, he believed that this trend did not mitigate the threat of persons or classes using political power to oppressive ends. The record of past abuses was

⁵⁰ Sumner, *Liberty, Society, and Politics*, 91-92. While Sumner’s emphasis on the need for a vigilant citizenry has republican strains, it is critical to keep in mind the modern, individualized, classical liberal conception of “liberty” (and of “virtue” when he invoked this term) he worked with. To discuss Sumner as a “republican” has merits only so far as such talk is not premised on the often confused (and confusing) contrast of “republicanism” vs. “liberalism.”

dominated by “kings and nobles and priests” simply because they had been the ones with power. But “vice and passion” were not “limited by class.” The lower classes would, Sumner warned, abuse power “just as all the others have done unless they are put under checks and guarantees.” It was thus a matter of great contemporary import for people to realize that civil liberty did “not consist in majority rule or in universal suffrage or in elective systems at all.” The relation of these democratic “devices” to civil liberty was an open question, the answer to which was not fixed by any inherent affinity. These devices should be looked upon no differently from the devices of aristocratic and monarchical government: they were not to be valued in and of themselves, but judged as “good or better just in the degree to which they secure liberty.”⁵¹

In reflecting on the relation of civil liberty to an extended suffrage and majority rule Sumner put special emphasis on rights and duties as discussed earlier. To be given political rights was to be granted a share in the power to alter laws and institutions, and hence the power to shift arrangements of positive rights and duties across the full range of social interactions. For Sumner the “danger of democracy” lay in the possibility of lower classes using political power to acquire positive rights and alter duties in ways inconsistent with civil liberty. But such an outcome was not inevitable. Democracy could constitute “a sound working system” if those to whom it gave political rights would “oppose the same cold resistance to any claims for favor on the grounds of poverty, as on the ground of birth and rank.”⁵² Such opposition would embody just the kind of classical liberal view of equality before the law stressed by Sumner. The

⁵¹ Ibid., 204-207.

⁵² Sumner, *Social Classes*, 32.

soundness of an extended suffrage and majority rule came down to the question of the extent to which those given political rights were committed to self-reliance. In his moralizing style, Sumner thus held forth, in an 1877 speech, that “the only man who is fit to help govern the community is the man who can govern himself.”⁵³

The form of government Sumner had in mind with regard to the possible co-existence of civil liberty and democracy was the “democratic republic.” This hybrid form had taken shape in nineteenth-century America via the democratization of a “constitutional republic” whose framers had been, Sumner reminded his audience, hostile to democracy. To understand, maintain, and possibly even improve the American democratic republic, it was essential to distinguish between its republican and its democratic elements. In Sumner’s view, “republican government” took “civil liberty” as its “first aim.” But civil liberty was, by contrast, no aim of “democracy.” The core doctrine of democracy was equality—understood in terms different from, and at odds with, the classical liberal conception of equality before the law—and, on this basis, the further doctrine was, in turn, erected that sovereignty should reside in “the people.”⁵⁴

In making tension between liberal and democratic doctrines a centerpiece of his political analysis, Sumner’s thought stood in contrast to the theoretical hybridization of these doctrines prominent within American progressive liberalism. Where progressive liberal intellectuals like Wilson or Ward took a liberal-democratic hybrid to be the normal form of modern democracy, Sumner took it to be exceptional. He saw democratic doctrines as instantiated across a variety of forms of government. If

⁵³ Sumner, *Liberty, Society, and Politics*, 85.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 83-84, 177. See also William Graham Sumner, “Politics in America, 1776-1876,” *North American Review* 122 (Jan., 1876): 49-52.

America's republic was an embodiment of democracy in one of its most attractive (to a classical liberal) variants, this was because laws and institutions integral to civil liberty had, so far, survived the democratization of American politics. But to study democracy as a general trend in modern history—and to become aware of, and on guard against, the civil liberty destroying potential of democratic doctrines—it was necessary to also consider illiberal political forms that embodied these doctrines. A motley parade of these was on display in French history since 1789. “Jacobinism,” “Sansculottism,” and the plebiscitary despotism of Napoleon III's Second Empire were, for Sumner, all examples of the darker side of democracy, and they had, as such, to be incorporated into any general understanding of this rising trend of the modern age.⁵⁵

When framing the rise of democracy in terms of a tense relationship between it and the institutional order propounded by classical liberalism, Sumner carried forward a line of analysis with a long vintage. But he was also closely engaged with the latest events of his own day. It was in response to these that he supplemented and integrated his view of the rise of democracy with a second broad modern trend: the rise of plutocracy. During the 1880s Sumner came to believe that the “really new and really threatening” trend was a movement toward “a political form in which the real controlling force is wealth.” The “advance of plutocracy, and its injurious effects upon political institutions” was, he argued, evident in the “recent history of every civilized state in the

⁵⁵ Lieber's *Civil Liberty and Self-Government* had been written against the backdrop of the establishment of the French Second Empire. The rise to power of Napoleon III—endorsed by the French people in a universal suffrage plebiscite—was a preoccupation in the work, central to the comparative stance it offered and to the moral lessons it taught via this stance. Sumner specifically discusses Napoleon III in the 1877 essay on “Republican Government” on which I have principally been drawing in the last two paragraphs. Sumner, *Liberty, Society, and Politics*, 83. I take the phrases “Jacobinism” and “Sansculottism” from some of Sumner's later essays, which continue to conceptualize democracy in the way I summarize here. Sumner, *Challenge of the Facts*, 305-306; Sumner, *Liberty, Society, and Politics*, 381-82.

world.”⁵⁶ The age-old threat to civil liberty—people or classes striving to “get the power of the State into their hands, so as to bend the rights of others to their own advantage”—here appeared in the specific form of plutocrats seeking privileges. While the rise of plutocracy was a general trend, it was of gravest importance in America, where the danger was at its most “formidable,” and raised “nothing less” than the question of whether “free self-government under the forms of a democratic republic” was still possible.⁵⁷

We have already met the view of plutocracy as a rising danger in Ward. But Sumner’s analysis was sharply at odds with Ward’s. The contrast here exemplifies just how differently current trends could appear when interpreted from the stance of classical versus progressive liberalism. Sumner favored a narrow conception of plutocracy focused on a particular way of using and increasing wealth. Plutocrats were those who “buy their way through elections and legislatures, in the confidence of being able to get powers which will recoup them for all the outlay and yield an ample surplus besides.” They thus used political means to economic ends, and the key to their success was acquiring power to operate “upon the market by legislation, by artificial monopolies, by legislative privileges.”⁵⁸ For Sumner, the rise of plutocracy could not be explained as a consequence of *laissez-faire* government letting industrial capitalism develop free of control. Rather what American history actually showed—from the protective tariff, to management of the currency, to the way corporate charters and government contracts had been handed out—was the extent to which economic development had been shaped

⁵⁶ Sumner, *Liberty, Society, and Politics*, 143, 146.

⁵⁷ Sumner, *Social Classes*, 94-95, 92-93.

⁵⁸ Sumner, *Liberty, Society, and Politics*, 144, 146.

by the discretionary decisions of political actors who understood little about classical political economy and civil liberty. Their actions had created privileges that supported the growth of economic interests whose continuing profitability then depended, in turn, upon whether these privileges would be renewed or altered. For Sumner, the plutocratic dynamic of increasing intervention in politics by the wealthy found its roots in deviations from, rather than adherence to, a *laissez-faire* policy.⁵⁹

Sumner's interpretation of the character and roots of plutocracy led into views about the best response to it that reiterated rather than overturned teachings of classical liberal political economy. He suggested that "uncritical denunciations of capital, and monopoly, and trust" only tended "to help forward plutocracy." Such denunciations fuelled popular demands for politicians to legislate expanded government control over various aspects of the economy. But invoking legislation was "the fatal step." Plutocrats were—due to their motivation, organization, and discipline, their explicit and illicit ties to politicians, and the skills of their well-paid lawyers—all too capable of responding. They could shape legislation under debate or get it revised later, influence its application and interpretation by the executive and courts, or devise new modes of operating their businesses to circumvent the intended effect of a law, or even turn it to their own advantage. Efforts to assert government control would, by producing new laws and regulatory bodies, create a machinery that would only end up furthering plutocracy. Far from identifying *laissez-faire* as a policy that had been tried and failed, Sumner's

⁵⁹ American economic and political history, and the interplay between them, was the main area of most of Sumner's early research. In addition to sources already cited, see William Graham Sumner, *A History of American Currency* (New York: Holt, 1874); William Graham Sumner, *Lectures on the History of Protection* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1877); William Graham Sumner, *Andrew Jackson as a Public Man* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1883).

analysis called for a much fuller embrace of it. The only viable way to hinder the ongoing rise of plutocracy was, he declared, “to minimize to the utmost the relations of the state to industry.”⁶⁰

Sumner as a Sociologist

As divergent as Sumner’s take on plutocracy was from Ward’s, they were employing the same concept and addressing similar, if not entirely identical, phenomena. The contrast between them was a contrast within a tradition. The situation here parallels that noted in Chapter Four with relation to disagreements between Lowell and Goodnow, but the tradition picked out is the naturalistic rather than the historicist one. The combination of institutional history and classical political economy infusing Sumner’s thought at the start of his academic career in the 1870s had incorporated historicist and naturalistic moments without either assuming precedence. But his analysis of plutocracy during the 1880s came after his embrace of sociology and its confident naturalism. Sociologists worked within an intellectual cluster of exemplars, concepts, and concerns different from—though overlapping at the edges—those of the historicist conversations out of which political science would emerge. When sociologists studied politics, they did so in light of general social forces and trends conceived in naturalistic terms, which they saw underlying politics just as much as any other aspect of human societies.

In considering Sumner as a sociologist perhaps the best place to start is the account he gave of his new intellectual interest in an 1881 letter to members of governing board of Yale:

⁶⁰ Sumner, *Liberty, Society, and Politics*, 145, 139-41, 147-48. See also 259, 391.

I am a professor of political and social science. Four or five years ago my studies led me to the conviction that sociology was about to do for the social sciences what scientific method has done for natural and physical science, viz.: rescue them from arbitrary dogmatism and confusion. It seemed to me that it belonged to me to give my students the advantage of the new standpoint and method just as fast as I could win command of it myself, just as every competent professor aims to set before his students all the speculations, anticipations, efforts, extensions, reconstructions, etc., etc., which mark the growth of the sciences.

Sumner's belief in the potential of sociology had been spurred by a burst of work appearing from Spencer. Between 1872 and 1876 Spencer's argument for a natural science of society in *Study of Sociology* was followed by the tabulated data of the first volume of *Descriptive Sociology*, and in turn, the arguments of the opening volume of the *Principles of Sociology*. Eager to introduce his students to the incipient scientific breakthrough he believed was taking shape, Sumner assigned the *Study of Sociology* to his senior class in 1879-80. Given sociology's extra-academic and intellectually controversial character, this was a maverick move sure to spur talk on campus. It came to garner national attention after Yale's president, Noah Porter, objected to the assigning of the text on the grounds that it would "bring intellectual and moral harm to the students." In his 1881 letter to the Yale board quoted above, Sumner gave his side of the story, and suggested that he would rather resign than "submit to interference" in his work.⁶¹

The conflict at Yale is a compelling moment in the entry of sociology into the American academy. But we are misled if we approach Sumner's actions as those of an ardent disciple of Spencer. When we pause to consider the arguments advanced by each

⁶¹ My quotes here and discussion below draw on letters of Spencer and Porter reproduced in Starr, *Sumner*, chap. 15. Starr's comments on the controversy are, however, thoroughly one-sided in Sumner's favor. For more balanced discussions see Burton J. Bledstein, "Noah Porter versus William Graham Sumner," *Church History* 43, 3 (1974): 340-49; John D. Heyl and Barbara S. Heyl, "The Sumner-Porter Controversy at Yale," *Sociological Inquiry* 46 (1976): 41-49.

side in the conflict at Yale, we find that a basic methodological question about sociology was raised, and that Sumner took a decidedly un-Spencerian position on it. Spencer saw his sociology as presupposing the synthetic evolutionary philosophy he had crafted as the integrating naturalistic foundation of all his more specific studies, whether in biology, psychology, sociology, or ethics. Porter agreed. His most significant objection to the assigning of the *Study of Sociology* arose from his belief that having students take the work seriously connoted a tacit endorsement of Spencer's philosophy and of the rejection, which followed from it, of all theistic interpretations of social life. For Porter such a stance was not only morally baneful. It was intellectually untenable, and could be shown to be so if met directly in philosophical terms. Indeed, he had himself assigned Spencer's *First Principles* to Yale students in order to teach them the flaws he saw in the philosophy propounded there.

The stance Sumner took in the conflict at Yale involved a very different interpretation of Spencer's sociology. Pulling Spencer's "non-philosophical works" apart from his philosophy in a way that neither Porter nor Spencer could have accepted, Sumner insisted that teaching the *Study of Sociology* implied no judgments on the merits of Spencer's philosophy. Sumner was not being disingenuous here. He had no interest in, and indeed actively disliked, philosophy of all varieties, Spencerian or not.⁶² In his incipient conception, sociology was a freestanding empirical science, and as such could

⁶² Sumner's former student and later faculty colleague, William Lyon Phelps, recalled him declaring at a Faculty meeting about appointing a new professor of philosophy: "Philosophy is in every way as bad as astrology. It is a complete fake. Yale has a great opportunity now to announce that she will take the lead and banish the study of philosophy from the curriculum on the ground that it is unworthy of serious consideration. It is an anachronism. We might just as well have professors of alchemy or fortune-telling or palmistry." William Lyon Phelps, "William Graham Sumner," in *Folkways*, by William Graham Sumner (New York: Mentor Book, 1960; first published in 1907), xiii.

and should develop and debate its claims without appeal to philosophy. It was in Ward's variant of sociology, not Sumner's, that synthetic evolutionary philosophy retained the pivotal role Spencer had given it. Sumner, by contrast, foreshadowed the divorce from synthetic philosophy that would increasingly characterize sociology as its academic status passed from a maverick interest to a recognized field of professionalizing scholarship. Sumner's lack of interest in Spencer's philosophy was reflected in the relative rarity with which the integrating concept of that philosophy—evolution—appeared in his writings. The main conceptual burden in framing broad directions of social change was left, by Sumner, to the venerable terms “civilization” and “progress,” along with his favorite newer term, “organization.” It was Ward, not Sumner, who put evolution at the center of his sociology, and proudly saw himself an “evolutionist.”

A second feature setting Sumner's incipient sociology in contrast to Ward's arose from the way he related the new science to the field of political economy. Sumner's commitment to English classical liberal political economy predated his embrace of sociology. Its teachings had been a dominant influence on his earliest scholarly projects, and his main intellectual reputation was, and long remained, as a defender of these teachings. It is thus no surprise that, where Ward conceived of sociology as refuting and supplanting classical political economy, Sumner saw it incorporating the older field. In an 1881 article, “Sociology,” articulating his conception of the young science, Sumner identified political economy as “the first branch of sociology which was pursued by man as a science.” By studying “the industrial organization of society” in abstraction “from the organism of which it forms a part” political economy had, however, opened the door to “endless wrangling.” Its future now lay, Sumner suggested, in finding “its field and

relations to other sciences fairly defined within the wider scope of sociology.” Since sociology studied “the industrial organization in combination with the other organizations of society,” it could carry forward “essential elements of political economy” while also rejuvenating them as “corollaries or special cases of sociological principles.” Sumner singled out, in particular, the “Malthusian law of population and the Ricardian law of rent” as “cases in which by rare and most admirable acumen powerful thinkers perceived two great laws in particular phases of their action.”⁶³

When Sumner first formulated his sociology around 1880 he established it on Malthusian foundations from which he would never waver. At no point would he depart from the orienting belief presented as a dictum in his 1881 article: “Let him, therefore, who desires to study social phenomena first learn the transcendent importance for the whole social organization, industrial, political, and civil, of the ratio of population to land.” The importance of this ratio for Sumner centered on its relationship to the “struggle for existence.”⁶⁴ The maintenance of human life involved a struggle against nature to acquire and rework materials to meet human needs. But the struggle for existence involved more than efforts against nature. It also involved struggles men waged against one another to win control over materials. For any human society, the ratio of its population to the supply of materials available to meet the needs of its

⁶³ Sumner, *Liberty, Society, and Politics*, 192-93.

⁶⁴ In his early 1880’s writings Sumner wielded the phrase “survival-of-the-fittest” in connection with the “struggle for existence” in a loose way that attracted criticism at the time, and did much, in the longer term, to earn him his poorly fitting reputation as America’s premier social Darwinist. After a passing effort in 1884 to clarify this phrase, Sumner subsequently dropped it entirely. But his orienting conception of the relation of population and resources to the intensity of struggle and the character of social relations was unaffected by this change. This conception derived principally from Malthus, while the “survival-of-the-fittest” was an easily dispensed with flourish that Sumner had, moreover, almost certainly picked up from Spencer rather than from Darwin. On Sumner and this phrase, see the essay “Survival of the Fittest” and the accompanying information provided by the editor by Robert C. Bannister. Sumner, *Liberty, Society, and Politics*, 223-26.

members was key to the intensity, or lack thereof, of internal struggle between its members, and hence the character of their social relations.

If the actual number present is very much less than the number who might be supported, the condition of all must be ample and easy. Freedom and facility mark all social relations under such a state of things. If the number is larger than that which can be supplied, the condition of all must be one of want and distress, or else a few must be well provided, the others beings proportionally still worse off. Constraint, anxiety, possibly tyranny and repression, mark social relations.⁶⁵

Sumner's commitment to the outlook that he stated here in terms of a general relationship grew out of more, however, than reading Malthus. He embraced the outlook because he believed in its explanatory efficacy, and this belief had been established in his previous work on American political and economic history. It was evident, for example, in Sumner's analysis of democracy in an 1876 article surveying American politics since the Declaration of Independence. Sumner here looked to "physical and economic circumstances" to explain why "constitutional barriers" the nation's founders set up against democracy had "proven feeble and vain." From America's character as "a new country ... with unlimited land" it followed as an "inevitable" consequence that there would be "substantial equality of the people in property, culture, and social position." From such social equality, "political equality" had followed "naturally." American political history so far was marked by "a great democratic tide" that "obliterated all the traditions and prejudices which were inherited from the Old World," and "crushed out the prestige of wealth and education." At a more specific level, Sumner

⁶⁵ Ibid., 187-89. Sumner discussed the denominator in his ratio both as "land" and "the supply of materials." He was, moreover, as should be evident from the discussion in the next few pages, very aware that the materials available to sustain a given population living on a given amount of land was affected by technology. His specific comments on land are thus best read as a placeholder and starting point for what it is, in substance, a considerably broader consideration of factors shaping the supply of materials available to be consumed in a given society.

situated the advance of democracy in the Jacksonian era as following on a “great series of inventions” that opened up the “continent to mankind” to extent never before possible. Based in material and economic circumstances, the democratic tide in American politics would last until these circumstances changed. Efforts to sustain or advance “political aristocracy” would become possible “only when the pressure of population, and the development of a more complex social organization” began to produce a rising “inequality in the circumstances of individuals” and a concomitant “social aristocracy.”⁶⁶

Explanatory links that Sumner proposed in the specific context of American history were, as part of his embrace of sociology, reformulated as general relationships. This reformulation implied an ability to explicate outcomes, such as the rise of democracy, not only in America but elsewhere (and indeed everywhere). How could an outlook that linked America’s democracy to its open frontier explain democratic tendencies in Europe? Sumner addressed this challenge in his 1881 “Sociology” essay by connecting the economic and material situation of Europe to that of America and other European settlements, such as Australia and South Africa. He pointed to “advances in the arts and sciences” as having, in the last century, vastly improved “transportation and communication.” These improvements had facilitated emigration from Europe, and the flow back into Europe of large amounts of staple goods, such as meat and grain. Because emigration lowered the number of people in Europe, and staple imports decreased the cost of living for those there, both acted to “relieve” the intensity of the

⁶⁶ Sumner, “Politics in America,” 52-53, 64-65, 78. What Sumner argued specifically about America in this earlier essay is restated as a set of general claims about economics, society, and politics in “under-populated” countries in his 1881 essay. Sumner, *Liberty, Society, and Politics*, 194.

“social pressure and competition” existing in the “great centers of population.” Just as this relief followed from technological improvement, so its own consequences could be followed out. To do so would be to give a sociological account of “the general tendency towards equality, the decline of aristocratic institutions, the rise of proletariat, and the ambitious expansion” characteristic of “modern civilized society.”⁶⁷

Sumner’s analysis here exemplifies the way in which his embrace of sociology situated his political thought within a naturalistic framework. This entailed less an alteration in the content of his political thought than the fuller and more explicit articulation of a sociological substratum for that thought. The general modern trend toward democracy was not just to be noted as a historical fact, but analyzed as a product of underlying social forces and pressures whose relationships to one another followed fixed natural patterns. To the extent that sociology succeeded in such analyses, it would be able to formulate universal propositions about conditions under which democracy (or civil liberty, plutocracy, etc.) naturally tends to thrive, and those under which it tends to decline. The knowledge produced by such a naturalistic methodology would, in turn, offer a scientific foundation on which to potentially look forward to future social tendencies and situations.

Looking Forward: Naturalism, Morality, and the Disillusioned “Science of Society”

The agenda of projecting future tendencies and situations excited Sumner’s interest from his earliest engagements with sociology up until his inquiries were cut short by his death in 1910. But, unlike Ward, he never envisioned a fundamental

⁶⁷ Sumner, *Liberty, Society, and Politics*, 196-98.

transformation to a new era of accelerated social progress and a vast increase in human happiness. All such visions were, in Sumner's view, ideals disconnected from facts, and beyond the scientific purview of sociology. Even when most comfortable using the concept of progress—and by his late work he was far from comfortable with it—Sumner understood it in terms of small improvements, slowly and laboriously won, and all too easily lost. When he made his recurrent forays into projecting the future, threats occupied the center of his attention. But the character of Sumner's forays changed significantly between the 1880s to the opening decade of the twentieth century. Evocative glimpses of distressing possibilities to be averted gave way to a matter-of-fact anticipation of tendencies that might, at best, only be tempered. The change in this aspect of Sumner's work offers one of the best entry points to the disillusionment that made the "science of society" he pursued late in his life so different from sociology as he initially conceived of it in the early 1880s.

A distinctive move in Sumner's work in the early 1880s was to juxtapose a narrative of classical liberal progress with anxious glimpses of possible future decline. Mankind was seen as currently enjoying great benefits that derived from scientific and technological change, growing international economic exchange, and competitive individualism operating in the context of institutions supporting the classical liberal civil liberty we have earlier seen him expound.⁶⁸ The combined result had been an epoch of relaxed social pressure for populations in Europe and their offshoots around the globe, and, as a result, movement toward a more democratic social and political order. A

⁶⁸ See the essays from 1880-83 ("Socialism," "Sociology," and "The Forgotten Man") collected in Sumner, *Liberty, Society, and Politics*, 159-222. The same line of argument similarly pervades Sumner's 1883 *What Social Classes Owe To Each Other*.

consideration of these moves led Sumner, in turn, to his projections of the future. But here an anxious tone came to the fore. Power was passing to the majority, who might be misled by “socialists” and “sentimentalists” into actions challenging the classical liberal order. In an 1880 lecture, for example, Sumner predicted that gains “won in the way of making government an organ of justice, peace, order, and security without respect of persons” would “have to be defended, before this century closes, against popular majorities, especially in cities, just as they had to be won in a struggle with kings and nobles in the centuries past.”⁶⁹ Similarly, the analysis of contemporary trends in Europe in his “Sociology” essay led into discussion of the possibility that where classical civilization had fallen due to “an irruption of barbarians from without,” modern civilization might “perish by an explosion from within.”⁷⁰

These glimpses of the future were, in effect, rallying cries. They suggested that a critical juncture was approaching when the ongoing progress of society might be derailed. But this was only a possibility, and it could be averted. The take-home lesson was that a vigorous defense of classical liberal institutions and the moral values of self-reliant individualism might keep society on the right path. When Sumner looked toward the future in his early sociology, his naturalistic science thus passed over into a liberal moralism. But there was no contradiction here. Sumner’s naturalism aspired to explain how present-day trends arose and project situations they might lead into. His moralism strove to motivate his audience to support values and institutions, which his naturalism identified as key to sustaining liberal progress, and thereby to avert distressing threats to

⁶⁹ Sumner, *Liberty, Society, and Politics*, 178.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

that progress. Sumner's early sociology was, as such, infused with a sense of a public purpose it was to serve, and a vision of how it was to serve that purpose.

This blend of naturalism and moral exhortation in Sumner's early sociology came with certain premises. His naturalistic science had, for example, to view the virtues and institutions being promoted as having a significant enough influence on social outcomes to serve the saving role ascribed to them. When initially forging his sociology, Sumner was, indeed, committed to just such a viewpoint. In an 1880 lecture, he thus robustly declared:

The sound student of sociology can hold out to mankind, as individuals or as a race, only one hope of better and happier living. That hope lies in an enhancement of the industrial virtues and of the moral forces which thence arise. Industry, self-denial, and temperance are the laws of prosperity for men and states; without them advance in the arts and in wealth means only corruption and decay through luxury and vice. With them progress in the arts and increasing wealth are the prime conditions of an advancing civilization which is sound enough to endure.⁷¹

The distinctive Whig mode of moralism that Sumner employed brought with it a further premise. In his moralizing moves, Sumner presented classical liberal institutions and values as a tried and true heritage to be carried forward. The effectiveness of this framing—and with it, the possibility of his sociology serving the purpose with which it was initially infused—presupposed, however, an audience responsive to Sumner's appeal. Classical liberal institutions and values would have to already have a reservoir of support in his listeners if Sumner's Whig rhetoric was to move them and summon them to recommitment.

⁷¹ Ibid., 181-82.

These premises reflect a point of intellectual departure that Sumner, over the course of succeeding decades, left ever farther behind. The content of, and reasons for, the changes in his thought from the 1880s to the opening decade of the twentieth century are multi-faceted. But perhaps the single most important point to note is that Sumner lost faith in the American people. His early sociology still bore the impress of a belief that Americans had (or could be recalled to, with some prompting) the commitment to individual self-reliance, and the instinctual fear of government, central to his account of what was necessary to sustain a classical liberal order. But Sumner's commitment to this belief was less firm in the 1880s than it had been in the 1870s, and it continued to weaken over time. It ended once and for all with the Spanish-American War of 1898. Sumner fervently opposed the war, which he saw as a turning point in American history. The nation born of a revolt against empire had begun to acquire its own foreign dependencies to which it refused to extend its domestic constitution. In the widespread popular excitement about the war, and pride in America's victories and acquisitions, Sumner saw the death knell of the ideals that had made his nation "something unique and grand in the history of mankind."⁷²

What the war did for Sumner was to move America firmly into the same broad current of contemporary tendencies found among the developed nations of Europe. Sumner had long made use of Spencer's militarism vs. industrialism contrast, and he shared Spencer's judgment that the former was on the rise in contemporary Europe. Like Spencer he viewed militarism as moving in parallel to domestic trends that were extending the efforts of government well beyond the comfort zone of classical

⁷² Ibid., 297.

liberalism. In the aftermath of 1898, Sumner saw America no longer as an exception, but as one more example of these interwoven general tendencies. In his 1907 *Folkways*, Sumner summed this up as a “drift towards state regulation, militarism, imperialism, towards petting and flattering poor and laboring classes, and in favor of whatever is altruistic and humanitarian,” and he underlined his negative judgment of it by adding:

We have no grounds for confidence in these ruling tendencies. They are only the present phases in the endless shifting of our philosophical generalizations, and it is only proposed, by the application of social policy, to subject society to another set of arbitrary interferences, dictated by a new set of dogmatic prepossessions that would only be a continuance of old methods and errors.⁷³

The shift in Sumner’s viewpoint thus paralleled the deepening disillusionment in the face of contemporary events characteristic of Spencer’s mature sociology. Sumner, moreover, drew directly from Spencer a conceptual framework via which this disillusionment found sociological expression. Parallels and debts here extend also to a second major factor shaping changes in Sumner’s thought. The belief in sociology’s potential that Sumner took from reading Spencer in the 1870s had, we have seen, nothing to do with the evolutionary philosophy within which Spencer had forged his sociology. What excited Sumner was a second side of Spencer’s methodology: the inductive vision of a science drawing upon facts about a sweeping variety of societies. Sumner’s early sociological writings were more a promissory note than a claim to be practicing such a science. He began his own endeavor to collect and organize facts about a wide array of societies while preparing lectures in the late 1880s, and he pursued it for over a decade before deciding, in 1899, that he was ready to articulate a mature system

⁷³ Sumner, *Folkways*, 98.

of sociology. Sumner labored on his magnum opus, entitled *The Science of Society*, through the next decade, but it remained incomplete at his death in 1910.⁷⁴

The character of Sumner's inductive aspiration, and its impact on his thought, is evident in the study of the "mores,"⁷⁵ which he split off from his main project and published as *Folkways* in 1907. Readers of the book are overwhelmed by examples from across the globe and throughout history. Sumner, moreover, took pains in his preface to assure readers that the examples given were "not subsequent justification of generalizations otherwise obtained," but only a "selection from a great array of facts from which the generalizations were deduced."⁷⁶ While events in his own society distanced Sumner from his former confidence in the American people, his study of social practices and values across a sweeping array of diverse societies distanced him from his former confidence in the moral rightness of classical liberal practices and values. *Folkways* expounded and exemplified Sumner's generalization that "'immoral' never means anything but contrary to the mores of the time and place," and his belief that this implied that there is "no permanent or universal standard by which right and truth in regard to these matters can be established and different folkways compared and

⁷⁴ Albert Galloway Keller, who had been Sumner's student and then his faculty colleague at Yale, took the research Sumner had done and material he had written as a starting point for a four volume encyclopedic work that was later published under both their names. William Graham Sumner and Albert Galloway Keller, *The Science of Society*, 4 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927). While the imprint of Sumner's ideas is clear in this work, so also is the distinctive imprint of Keller. Since the extent to which the final work remains true to Sumner's projected science of society is not always clear, I do not draw on it in my characterization.

⁷⁵ Sumner took up this Latin term as the best he could find for his purposes. He meant by it "the popular usages and traditions, when they include a judgment that they are conducive to societal welfare, and when they exert a coercion on the individual to conform to them, although they are not coordinated by any authority." Sumner, *Folkways*, v.

⁷⁶Ibid., vi. Keller later estimated that in his preparation for the *Science of Society* Sumner had collected, filed, and cross-referenced "more than 150,000 notes from sources in the dozen languages that he read." Bruce Curtis, *William Graham Sumner* (Boston: Hall & Co., 1981), 49.

criticized.”⁷⁷ With this later belief he departed from Spencer, whose philosophy structured and sustained a liberal vision of the “absolute ethics” that would characterize the ideal society that lay at endpoint of evolution.⁷⁸ Sumner’s *Folkways* was very different from Spencer’s *Principles of Ethics*, which also discussed a sweeping variety of cases, because Sumner’s use of induction was, for better or worse, proudly divorced from any philosophical system.

Sumner’s rejection of the possibility of a moral standpoint from which to compare and criticize did not, however, rule out all criticism. Moral criticism was, instead, to give way to a disillusioned scientific criticism detached from moral judgment. The naturalistic sociologist studying mores in a society could criticize them relative to material conditions of that society: the standard of assessment was the degree to which mores shaped behavior in a way conducive to serving the needs of a society living under those conditions. Such criticism was a far cry from the blend of naturalism with Whig moral exhortation through which Sumner had once called on readers to defend institutions and virtues framed as a cherished heritage. A disillusioned science of the mores might still play a useful purpose, not in using naturalism to bolster a received tradition but instead in critically exposing “the operation of traditional error, prevailing dogmas, logical fallacy, delusion, and current false estimates of goods worth striving for” within the mores of the existing society.⁷⁹

Thus the science of society that Sumner was pursuing when he became ASS president in 1908 had a very different character than sociology as he conceived of it in

⁷⁷ Sumner, *Folkways*, 355.

⁷⁸ Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Ethics*, 2 vols. (New York: Appleton), 1: 258-80.

⁷⁹ Sumner, *Folkways*, 99, 101, 44-45.

the early 1880s. It was charged with dispensing a matter-of-fact knowledge with no room or role for moral exhortation. This science sought to analyze “realities, forces, laws, consequences, facts, conditions, relations” while having “nothing at all to do” with “motives, purposes, hopes, intentions, ideals.”⁸⁰ When projecting the future Sumner no longer presented evocative glimpses of distressing possibilities to be averted by a virtuous people. Now he projected tendencies to be expected, adapted to, and mitigated (if any mitigation was possible) by a competent elite aided by a disillusioned science. Projections of the future were to combat optimistic illusions—such as the belief of the “reading public” that “the world is advancing along some line which they call ‘progress’ toward peace and brotherly love”—with cold dashes of realistic knowledge about where the world had been and was going. The lesson to be taught was that in “the century now opening,” what was “rationally to be expected” was “a frightful effusion of blood in revolution and war.”⁸¹

The expectations with which Sumner looked out upon the dawning century were dark and all too prescient. Here he was, once more, in the company of Spencer, who was also one of the few intellectuals to expect the bloodbath of wars and political upheavals that would scar the first half of the twentieth century. But Sumner did not share Spencer’s belief that, at some point in a more distant future, there would be a turn back toward social and political trends embodying the classical liberal vision of progress. Sumner’s projections were limited to the nearer term future. Spencer’s claims about the eventual promise of bright new dawn of liberal progress would, to Sumner, have seemed

⁸⁰ Ibid., 328.

⁸¹ William Graham Sumner, *War and Other Essays*, edited by Albert Galloway Keller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1911), 29-30.

a plaything of ideals and well beyond the domain of sociological science. Spencer's continuing belief in liberal progress—albeit one delayed and interrupted by downturns in a way he had not envisioned back in the 1850s—had, indeed, only the thinnest of groundings in his inductive sociology. It was, like his liberal ethics, structured and sustained by the synthetic evolutionary philosophy for which Sumner—and nearly all his colleagues in the American Sociological Society—saw no room in a scientific sociology.

CONCLUSION. LIBERALISM ON AND IN HISTORY

Liberalism offers more than a theory of government. It also offers a theory of society. And it situates both government and society in a theory of history. Liberalism is wedded to a vision of processes of transformative historical change—whether called civilization, progress, evolution, or development—that make the emergence and maintenance of a liberal social and political order possible and desirable. This aspect of liberalism receives little attention in contemporary analytical liberal philosophy. But it has always been at the core of liberal social science, and especially prominent in wide-ranging historical and comparative inquiries. In studying an episode in the history of social science—how a liberal science of politics developed in America through the reception and remaking of European traditions—I have sought to bring this aspect of liberalism to the fore.

I have approached the liberal science of politics from two angles. On the one hand, I looked at methodological traditions shaping the way its practitioners formulate and flesh out views of transformative change. On the other, I looked at theoretical visions that frame and are influenced by the pursuit of these views. To give narrative structure to my historical material I gave one of these angles of approach the lead role in organizing my study. I thus framed my chapters around methodological traditions: Chapters One and Five followed an evolutionary current in nineteenth-century naturalism from Europe to America; Chapters Two through Four followed the historicist tradition, specifically focusing on three strands within this methodological tradition (institutional history, the theory of the State, and comparative legislation). This structure allowed my narrative to closely follow intellectual lineages. But it also meant that

parallel reactions of individuals in different lineages to events and trends in the social and political world were parceled out across different chapters. To conclude my study, I step back and draw out four overarching themes—one methodological and three theoretical—that cut across my structuring scheme by arising in both the naturalistic and the historicist traditions. Each highlights ways in which the views of liberal scientists of politics are shaped by their responses to the ebb and flow of the social and political world.

Philosophy and the Science of Politics: From Moral to Technocratic Science

In studying the naturalistic tradition in the American science of politics in Chapter Five, I gave especial attention to one methodological topic: the separation of sociology from the philosophical endeavors in connection with which it had been crafted by Comte and Spencer. In particular, we saw that while Lester Frank Ward reworked Spencerian synthetic evolutionary philosophy, William Graham Sumner rejected all philosophical pursuits. In this respect (as opposed to in their varieties of liberalism), it was Ward who was the more Spencerian, while Sumner better anticipated the methodological direction American sociology would pursue in subsequent decades.

This contrast within the American reception of the naturalistic tradition is but one example of an issue equally important in the historicist tradition: the dependence versus the autonomy of the science of politics (however methodologically construed) relative to philosophy. In Chapter Two we recalled the classic controversy over this issue at the University of Berlin. On one side, Hegel contended that the scientific study of political phenomena should draw on philosophy for orienting concepts that could ground rational

evaluative judgments. On the other side Ranke argued for a historical science of politics autonomous of philosophy. Looking to explicitly liberal historicists, we find figures like Guizot—who believed that the political needs and the intellectual possibilities of his age called for the combination of history and philosophy—and Bluntschli, who articulated a similar view in more professionalized terms when he advocated combining “the historical method” and “the philosophical method.” Against such views we find institutional history in the hands of British intellectuals like Maine propounding a naïve empiricism in which the very phrase *a priori* was a slander. Bryce in turn diagnosed an excess of philosophy in Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* and made his own *American Commonwealth* an encyclopedic survey of facts about the contemporary American polity. Perhaps nothing is more methodologically revealing about the political science that took shape in America as the nineteenth century drew to a close than the widespread belief of its practitioners that Bryce’s book constituted a major scientific advance over Tocqueville’s.

There was a philosophical dimension that entered the emergent American political science through the idealist theory of the State. But the fullest exponent of this strand of historicism, Burgess, was exceptional in the consciously philosophical aspect of his work. The use of ideals in ordering a scientific framework continued in the hands of his student Goodnow. But it was an atrophied legacy whose implications and premises were not as well understood by Goodnow as they had been by Burgess. Perhaps most interestingly, we find Lowell occupying a position in political science similar to that of Sumner in sociology. Lowell, like Sumner, exemplified a minority current in his political theory. But his method embodied a matter-of-fact empiricism that

would increasingly prevail over legacies from philosophical idealism. While Lowell was—again like Sumner in his mature sociology—exceptional in the extent to which he carried his methodological orientation through into an actual practice of extensive fact gathering, early American political scientists were largely committed to this orientation in principle. In the interwar decades they would live up to it better, and by doing so, eventually spur charges of “hyperfactualism” that should be (but alas are not) central to conceptions of what political science’s post-World War Two behavioral revolution was reacting against.¹

What take-home points in this area might be drawn from my study? A parallel trajectory characterizes both the naturalistic and the historicist tradition through the eight decades or so I have studied. In both traditions approaches to the science of politics with explicit philosophical components lost sway relative to approaches that were content, and often proud, to be autonomous of philosophy. The legitimating disciplinary self-narrative of political science would celebrate winning autonomy from philosophy (as well as from history and law). Likewise, American academic sociologists would celebrate the escape of their field from the clutches of the “philosophy of history.”

A key implication of this shift is captured in the intellectual evolution of Sumner. Sumner’s initial conception of sociology treated it essentially as a moral science. But his later disillusioned science of society remade it as a technocratic science that was to put aside moral judgment and limit itself to questions about the efficacy of means to realizing ends. A science that was objective and professional was to find its utility in

¹ I have developed this point about the later history of political science elsewhere. See Robert Adcock, “Interpreting Behavioralism,” in *Modern Political Science: Anglo-American Exchanges since 1880*, ed. Robert Adcock, Mark Bevir, and Shannon Stimson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

answering such questions, while accepting that moral evaluation and education fell beyond its scope. Sumner's position parallels that independently and much more famously (and carefully) articulated at the same time by Max Weber in Germany. What changed Sumner's view? His early moralism was interwoven with the belief that America had been following a progressive path, and that sociology could help keep it on that path in the future, in part through moral education. Since Sumner's moralizing was rooted in beliefs about the world around him, rather than in a philosophy standing at some remove from that world, it did not survive his growing disillusionment. Spencer offers a crucial contrast here. His disillusionment with the late nineteenth century was longer standing and even deeper than Sumner's. But his philosophy sustained his belief in an absolute standard of moral right and wrong. Spencer was, to the end, a thoroughly nineteenth-century liberal. In Sumner, by contrast, we follow the tentative groping toward a morally non-evaluative technocratic science. The late Sumner was, for better or worse, an American scientist of politics of a recognizably twentieth-century stamp.

The evolution of Sumner's thought can be used to shed broader light on the turn-of-the-century character, and subsequent trajectory, of the American science of politics. The early twentieth century found that endeavor, on the whole, in an intellectual position rather similar to that Sumner initially occupied. While proud of its increasing autonomy from philosophy, and confident in its scientific potential, it also had a moralizing side. Its moral standpoint reflected, however, a progressive liberal vision of progress, rather than a classical liberal one. Its teaching of ideals was interwoven with a belief that these ideals represented the way events could, should, and would—with some help from progressive liberal intellectuals—develop. In the early twentieth century, widespread

belief that a value-free standpoint was a necessary basis of objectivity still lay in the future of the American science of politics. No commitment to value-neutrality followed immediately from the science's growing autonomy from philosophy. Movement in this direction was stayed so long as the progressive ideals of the science's theoretical mainstream seemed relevant to, and buttressed by, contemporary events. But the lingering moralizing tendency in the young American liberal science was fragile because it was dependent upon the ebb and flow of the world. By mid-century, the successive shocks of the American people embracing the "return to normalcy" of the 1920s, and the sweeping challenges to liberalism of all stripes during the dark decade of the 1930s, shattered the confidence that had supported the initial moralizing moment of progressive liberal scholars. By mid-century they had increasingly defaulted to a technocratic vision, just as had Sumner decades earlier.

The Parallel Divergence in Liberalism

We now turn to the theoretical domain. The American science of politics was, across its methodological and disciplinary subdivisions, liberal in political theory. Its practitioners thus faced a common intellectual puzzle in the late nineteenth century, as ongoing social and political change moved in directions that jarred against the hopes of classical liberalism. This discrepancy spurred a widespread rethinking of liberal views of past and ongoing processes of qualitative change. Progressive liberals forged views that presented a more active state as essential to sustain and extend liberal progress. Scholars more wedded to classical liberalism responded via disillusionment.

In Chapter Three through Five we followed this divergence in two settings: first among scholars whose reception and remaking of European historicism gave shape to the new political science discipline, and then in works of the first two presidents of the American Sociological Society. What have we gained by considering this divergence twice? If we had followed it only in the historicist tradition, we might overstate the influence of earlier German liberalism on American progressive liberals. In Chapter Two I sketched German liberalism as exemplified by Bluntschli. In Chapter Three I turned to Woodrow Wilson's works of the mid- to late-1880s to illuminate the forging of American progressive liberalism. A lineage of intellectual legacies ran from Bluntschli in Heidelberg, through his PhD students Herbert Baxter Adams and Richard Ely, who became the principal faculty in the program of historical and political science at Johns Hopkins, to Wilson as one of the first PhDs from that program. But when we also consider the naturalistic tradition, we find progressive liberal views articulated by Ward outside of any intellectual inheritance from Bluntschli or other German liberals. In the 1880s, Wilson and Ward were independently responding in parallel, though not identical, ways to the growing discrepancy between ongoing trends and the vision of classical liberalism.

This is not a chance example. Late in Chapter Five we saw the Spanish-American War of 1898 bring to a final close Sumner's earlier belief in the underlying virtue of the American people. While I mentioned it only in passing, we should note that Burgess also saw the war as a decisive event marking a grave turn for the worse in the history of the American republic. Later in his life Burgess went on to craft a narrative of recent American history which grouped together domestic and international trends in a

way rather similar to that employed by Sumner (and Spencer): this narrative grouped events such as the Spanish-American War and the introduction of an income tax as parts of a general movement away from America's former commitment to individual liberty (understood in classical liberal terms). Sumner and Burgess could not have been more different in their methodologies. But they nevertheless independently reacted to similar events in a broadly parallel theoretical fashion. The cases of Wilson-Ward as progressive liberals, and Sumner-Burgess as disillusioned classical liberals, make clear that we cannot understand changing liberal views of social and political change if we do not put current events and trends, and intellectual dilemmas they posed for liberals, at the center of our account of the making of the American science of politics.

The take-home lesson here is not, however, that dilemmas that challenge liberal theoretical visions matter much more than intellectual lineage. Rather, my study suggests that—among liberal scientists of politics—intellectual legacies come to the fore with regard to methodological moves, but they recede relative to the politics of the day when we deal with changing theoretical visions. In following lines of intellectual descent I have been struck by the fact that scholars seem far more likely to diverge from their intellectual mentors in theoretical than in methodological matters. For example, while Goodnow carried forward methodological legacies from the idealist theory of the State expounded by Burgess, his progressive liberalism put events of the progressive era in a very different light from that shed by the disillusioned classical liberal narrative that Burgess developed late in life.

Let me close this section with one speculative point about the interplay between theoretical visions and methodological commitments. I have been stressing the parallel

divergence of progressive liberalism versus disillusioned classical liberalism among participants in the naturalistic and historicist traditions. But there is one notable contrast here. The two naturalistic sociologists I have dealt with both exemplified a more strident version of their respective theoretical visions than their counterparts in political science. Ward was a more *progressive* progressive liberal than Goodnow or Wilson. Sumner was a more *disillusioned* disillusioned classical liberal than Lowell. This raises the question of whether there was some kind of inherent intellectual affinity between naturalistic methodological beliefs and more extreme theoretical views, and between historicist beliefs and more tempered views.

Progressive Liberalism: The Administrative State and Representative Democracy

Progressive liberals offered a new vision of social and political modernity, and hoped by doing so to help move America toward a fuller realization of this vision. They interpreted the industrial economy as creating needs that could only be addressed if government played a greater role than classical liberalism allowed for. In an industrial age a liberal social order rewarding individual merit was neither self-emergent nor self-sustaining; it required positive support from a government capable of effective action. Such a government had to have a professionalized administrative apparatus with skilled experts on its staff. Progressive liberals might disagree on specific policies (Ward and Wilson differed, for example, over the merits of state-administered railways). But all agreed that an expanded and rationalized bureaucracy was essential. Progressive liberal views of progress thus prominently incorporated a dimension along which the traditional

model countries for classical liberals—England or America—were seen as lagging major nations of continental Europe.

If we look at this dimension alone, progressive liberalism might appear to have simply inherited the vision of progress taught by German liberals like Bluntschli. Indeed Wilson's rethinking of individual freedom as potentially aided, rather than undermined, by an active government is found decades earlier in Germany. But in regard to political institutions, progressive liberals held views far removed from the ambivalence (at best) about democracy and inclination to constitutional monarchy of figures like Bluntschli. In this respect it is German and classical liberalism that are more similar, while progressive liberals charted new territory with their vision of democracy—albeit of a modern variety believed to be no threat to liberalism—as the form of government toward which political progress moved (and which in turn helped sustain and enhance social progress).

The commitment of progressive liberals to democracy rested upon rethinking its relation to representative government. As I stressed in my introduction, all liberals were committed to representative government. But classical and German liberals had not seen this form of government as bearing any necessary relationship to democracy, and some indeed set them in contrast to one another. Guizot made such a contrast and propounded the merits of combining a constitutional monarch with a representative assembly elected on limited suffrage. Progressive liberalism, by contrast, saw the future, if not the past, of representative government as lying in universal suffrage (at least of white men) and the restriction of monarchs to figurehead roles at most. Representative government that was anything less than democratic in this sense was, for progressive liberals, lagging on a key dimension of progress. Their tendency to conceive of representative government

through the lens of a democratic teleology would have been an obfuscation of the facts earlier in the nineteenth century. But against the backdrop of suffrage extensions taking place in Europe in the era when progressive liberalism was forged, we should grant that it did pick up on political trends of the day, and indeed, on the shape of the future as far as representative government was concerned. This was more than a lucky guess.

American progressive liberalism and its European counterparts actively helped delegitimize the conception of representative government as anything other than a mass suffrage democracy.

The puzzle of progressive liberalism arises from the juxtaposition of the two sides of its vision of the ideal modern government. Combining representative democracy with a professionalized administrative apparatus based upon ideas of scientific expertise and efficient management was at once a novelty and a challenge. Early progressive liberals stand out for their awareness that this combination was not as unproblematic as it would come to seem to some scientists of politics in the twentieth century. There were specific conditions that had to hold if a modern administrative state was to develop in America while respecting, or even deepening, the democratic character of the American polity. Put simply, the people had to want an administrative state, and once they had one, they had to be able to direct it.

The progressive liberals I have focused on—Ward, Goodnow, and Wilson—each favored reforms to help bring about these conditions, with Ward focusing on educational reforms, and Goodnow and Wilson on political reforms. Popular scientific education was, for Ward, the *sine qua non* of realizing the progressive liberal vision in America. So long as the people lacked such an education they could be—as Ward believed they

were in his day—misled by fear-inducing tactics of economic elites to oppose rational extensions of government's administrative activities. A scientific education (of which sociology would be a key part) would diffuse to the people knowledge on the basis of which they would come to see how an expanded and professionalized administrative state would advance the progress and aggregate happiness of society.

Goodnow and Wilson focused on a different aspect of the puzzle of progressive liberalism. If an administrative state was created how was it to be made responsible to the democratic will of the people? Goodnow and Wilson both stressed that America's system of divided powers frustrated the clear expression of the popular will (as, indeed, it had been intended to do). Such an expression was, they believed, necessary in order to give democratic direction to an administrative apparatus. Hence, they argued that it was time to put aside the fears of the nation's founding fathers and forge a coordinating element in the political system that would help create and express a unitary popular will. Goodnow emphasized reforms to the party system as a means to this end. Wilson was also attracted to such reforms. But he came—both in academic writings and in his own political practice—to put a distinctive emphasis on the executive as a potential focal point of the people's will. This was not a new idea. Among classical liberals of a Whiggish stripe it had been known as Caesarism and seen as one of the most illiberal tendencies of democratic doctrines. At the beginning of the twentieth century there were still some American scientists of politics who would have understood and used such language. But their voices were fading to the margins as progressive liberalism became steadily more dominant in the young science.

Disillusioned Classical Liberalism: Whither Progress?

Let me close this study by turning to the disillusioned classical liberals whose minority view would largely disappear from the American science of politics in later decades. The common starting point of their theoretical trajectory lay in an anxious observation of trends in the contemporary world that were increasingly at odds with a classical liberal vision of progress. Uninterested in rethinking individual liberty to reconcile it with trends toward expanding government's role, disillusioned classical liberals instead rethought progress and its relation to their own day. In the figures of Spencer, Sumner, and Lowell we have seen three alternative ways of working out the details of this theoretical trajectory.

Spencer's response stands out for its persistent commitment to a classical liberal vision of an ideal social and political order. In closing the final volume of *The Principles of Sociology* Spencer reaffirmed the belief, articulated almost half a century earlier in his 1851 *Social Statics*, that such an order was the endpoint of social evolution. The shifts in Spencer's thought during the closing decades of the nineteenth century concerned his view of current events and the road to his classical liberal endpoint, while they left the endpoint itself unaffected. His concept of progress did not change because it was yoked to that endpoint. A key political feature of progress was a declining role for government in society. But this decline could go forward no faster than the moral advance through which humans became less eager or willing to infringe upon the individual rights and freedoms of others, and thus better adapted to live together in society without needing the coercive hand of government to protect them from one another. Larger societies, more division of labor and economic exchange within and between societies, and

improving technology made this moral advance possible by increasing the net amount of resources available to support humans so that conflict was no longer necessary.

The major shift in Spencer's thought concerned the relation between the material substratum of his sociological analysis of qualitative change and the moral and political changes at the core of his concept of progress. Living through the latter half of the nineteenth century led him to stress that increased resources due to material changes did not automatically feed into moral and political progress, and to argue that they had, in practice, stopped doing so in recent decades. He located the source of this disconnect in growing international antagonism, fuelling war and preparations for war among the most industrially developed nations. Nations were turning away from the liberal vision of peaceful cooperation in a global economic order of freely moving goods, people, and capital. Where in the mid-century Spencer saw progress around him and looked forward to a rapid realization of his classical liberal ideal, as the century marched on he came to believe that progress had given way to an era of retrogression. Spencer now saw little if anything positive going on in the world. But he never doubted that periods in the past—such as the era of his youth—had been periods of progress. Most importantly, he held that progress would return in the future since history was marked by a cycle between progress and retrogression. Moreover, the retrogressive side of the cycle did not cancel out all gains from the progressive side, and history on the whole had an upward path that would eventually lead to a classical liberal social and political order of free individuals living under a minimal government. Disillusionment with his times led Spencer to postpone this end of history to a distant future, and to see the road toward it as much bumpier, but it did not shake his faith in it.

When Spencer first published his vision of social evolution leading to a classical liberal utopia in his *Social Statics*, Sumner was a child and Lowell not yet born. These American figures came to classical liberalism not when it was a young doctrine on the rise, but when it was an established body of thought increasingly under challenge. While both took up classical liberalism as a theoretical starting point, neither was wedded to it as firmly wedded as Spencer, and neither unpacked it at any point in terms of a classical liberal end of history. In responding to increasing discrepancies between classical liberal views and contemporary trends, Sumner and Lowell each combined some of Spencer's despair at those trends with departures from selected classical liberal tenets. If Spencer concentrated all his disillusionment onto the world around him, they divided it between disillusionment with the world and disillusionment with classical liberalism itself.

I have already dwelt on contrasts between Sumner and Spencer on moral matters. It is now worth calling more attention to a specific aspect of Sumner's late thought that followed from this. In his early work Sumner made ready use of the concept of progress. By contrast his late work was full of ambivalence toward it. Stray uses held over. But at other times he put the term in quotes and approached it as a subjective belief with only the loosest, if any, grounding in facts. At points he went so far as to treat "progress" as an illusionary idea to be directly combated. This conceptual shift is best considered alongside Sumner's use of the concept of "civilization." In his early work progress and civilization were close to synonyms. But in his late work they parted ways. Civilization continued to be used widely without any of the ambivalence or hostility now attaching to "progress."

What underlay this new differentiated usage was the break between the material and the moral in Sumner's thought. Talk of progress was, for him, always inseparable from moral judgment. It thus could have no utility for an objective science of society if there was no universal standpoint from which to objectively pass moral judgments. By contrast he came to see civilization in largely material terms and thereby retained it as a way to talk about a broad process of qualitative change. Civilization involved increasing the number of people who could be supported on the same amount of land. It was based on improving knowledge and associated technological change, and upon the efficient organization of people to direct and integrate their energies toward common tasks. There was no independent moral advance to be discerned here. Moral talk of better or worse was, for the late Sumner, just the language a given society used to enforce the behaviors it believed served the functioning of its internal organization(s).

Sumner's turn away from concept of progress in discussing qualitative change was paralleled by a growing emphasis on the concept of organization. The science of society had no business passing judgment upon whether trends toward larger and more complex organizations in the current era constituted "progress" or "retrogression." Thus, while Sumner remained enough of a classical liberal to stress that increased organization entailed decreases in the freedom of individuals to do as they wished, he did not make this relationship grounds to condemn organization. If organizations had competent leaders, the losses in individual liberty that their growth involved were traded off against increasing efficiencies. If the science of society could not judge if this was "progress," it could, however, identify inefficiencies and incompetent leadership. In this respect there was, Sumner suggested, a huge discrepancy between the economic and political domains

as the world entered the twentieth-century. The former showed ever-greater efficiencies achieved through the growth of larger organizations, more competent management, and the utilization of new technologies. Political organization was, by contrast, a mess and becoming ever more so. The rise of democracy had devalued political leadership and promoted mismanagement and waste. Elites and masses in the political domain were feeding off each other in a spiraling enthusiasm for war and imperialism. The increase in available resources achieved by advancing economic organization was being diverted into preparation for wars that could decimate the economy and hence undermine or even destroy civilization. Sumner thus offered a disillusioned picture of the dawning century without any of the lingering hope that came from Spencer's belief that "progress" would someday and somehow start again.

Just as Sumner was a generation younger than Spencer, so in turn his American compatriot Lowell was almost a generational younger than he. The trajectory that Lowell followed in wrestling with the concept of progress and its relation to his day moved in a contrasting direction from that of either Sumner or Spencer. In the late 1880s he offered a clarion call for Americans to hold the line for classical liberal individualism against a rising tide of "paternalism" that had spread through the principal countries of Europe and was crossing the Atlantic to threaten the homeland. This call echoed the moralizing style of the early Sumner and some specific views of Spencer's. But it was also the call of a young man whose beliefs were far from settled in a given track. Where the events of the dying century further deepened the disillusion of Sumner and Spencer, Lowell became, by the early twentieth century, less antagonistic to trends in the world around him.

Lowell's studious research on European governments during the 1890s and early 1900s led him to reformulate and reinforce the kind of exceptionalist perspective that the Spanish-American War of 1898 had ended once and for all for Sumner. Where Sumner had come to see America joining England and France on a militaristic path exemplified by Germany, Lowell singled out Germany (and Austria-Hungary) as on a distinctive path. The political systems of central Europe displayed systematic problems and trends that should worry any liberal lover of parliamentary government and peace. But he was less worried about Italy and France, and even less so about England and America. Rather than denouncing America's acquisition of overseas dependencies as a turn for the worse, he helped write a book on what America might learn from European colonial powers in relation to governing its dependencies. With regard to domestic policy, he still believed that a reversal of direction had taken place in the late decades of the nineteenth century, and he continued to talk about it in the language of "paternalism." But, at least for the country (England) to which he devoted his most extended study, Lowell came to grant that the paternal turn should be credited with having had some beneficial outcomes.

As Lowell became less antagonistic to ongoing trends in the turn-of-the-century world, his understanding of progress took on a distinctive shape. In the face of the ebbs and flows of events, he, like Spencer, came to see history as having a cyclic quality. But he did not identify one movement of the cycle as progress and the other as retrogression. Instead he suggested that progress was tracked in a haphazard way throughout the cycle. He approached an empiricist science of politics as a moderating force that might temper prevailing enthusiasms, whichever way they were happening to trend. It was a vague conception, but not without merits. Neither claiming knowledge of an absolute standard

by which progress was to be judged (as Spencer did throughout his life), nor denying the existence of any such standard (as Sumner did late in his life), Lowell inclined toward the belief that there was a standard, but that it lay beyond clear human comprehension.

When Lowell published his first book in the late 1880s, he was an exemplary case of disillusioned classical liberalism. But by the time he became Harvard president in 1909 his views had mellowed such that he must appear as a borderline case of this theoretical trajectory. He had, however, not become a progressive liberal. While he did not denounce out of hand any and all reforms in which governments sought to aid the working classes, he did not rethink his conceptual framework for talking about them. If some reforms were indeed beneficial, many missed their target by treating symptoms rather than causes, and either way they still were, in Lowell's mind, "paternalistic." He was far from rethinking individual freedom in a way that might envision government action as its aid or agent.

Passing through the generations from Spencer to Sumner to Lowell we have seen three different intellectual responses to the events of the late nineteenth century. If at the end we are still within the ambit of theoretical visions qualitatively different from those of progressive liberalism, we are also at some remove from Spencer's unwavering hostility to anything that threatens classical liberal individualism. Lowell allowed some tempered credit to paternalistic efforts by government. Sumner may have seen nothing but darkness in the political domain, but he had made his peace in the economic domain with a level of organization that was a far cry from the competitive market of individual economic actors idealized by classical liberalism.

In following the trajectory of disillusioned classical liberalism we find ourselves in a current of thought moving away from a common starting point toward an uncertain destination. The tone was different elsewhere in the young American science of politics where the new vision of social and political modernity offered by progressive liberalism was gaining supporters and giving them a common agenda and clear sense of meaningful purpose. It is not hard to see why progressive liberalism had become the mainstream stance, while disillusioned classical liberalism would disappear from the science during the decades ahead. But this does not mean that we should write disillusioned classical liberals out of our memory of the making of the American science of politics. They had, after all, moments of prescience about the bloody wars and political upheaval impending in the new century that have no counterparts in the work of the progressive liberals. As do their progressive liberal counterparts, they exemplify for us a dynamic interaction with the world through which liberal scientists of politics seek to integrate past and contemporary change within their scientific vision. All such efforts have eventually been frustrated by an ever-changing world. In studying the views about political and social change offered by liberal science, we observe not an ever-closer approach toward a fixed target, but periodic shifts that, at best, have not lost ground on their moving target. But to not lose ground requires continuing efforts even as we suspect that they too will fade in time.

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