

PERSISTENT OPTIMISM AND RECURRENT SKEPTICISM: HERBERT  
SPENCER AND THE UNITED STATES

by

STEPHEN R. ARMSTRONG II

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Date

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Chair of Examining Committee  
Morris Dickstein

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Date

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Executive Officer  
Steven Kruger

Marc Dolan

Jon-Christian Suggs  
Supervisory Committee

## Abstract

PERSISTENT OPTIMISM AND RECURRENT SKEPTICISM: HERBERT  
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by

Stephen R. Armstrong II

Adviser: Morris Dickstein

This work concerns the influence of Herbert Spencer's ideas on the United States in the post-Civil War nineteenth century. This study uses a history of Herbert Spencer's reception in the United States as a way to enhance the reading of Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Jack London, using them, along with Spencer's reception, in order to offer an insight into the economic, intellectual, and philosophical climate in the United States from 1865 to roughly 1905.

I claim that the three writers in this study suffered profound anxiety at the social consequences of Spencer's ideas. I do not argue that these reactions are rational or even necessarily consciously acknowledged, but the reactions are present in their work. I will show the paradoxical relationship Norris, Dreiser, and London had with Spencer's ideas. The novelists hastened the decline

in popularity of Spencer's thought because, while they found his attempts to unify human knowledge appealing, they inevitably found his philosophy unsatisfactory in its ability to convey actual human behavior. My overall point here is that novelists have different interests in creating imaginative fiction from philosophers and sociologists who offer comprehensive and empirical explanations for human behavior. The novelists were interested in some of the same questions that Spencer asked. However, they came to fundamentally different answers from him and his followers.

Spencer's impact on America in this period was immense and varied. He influenced economic, legal, political, sociological, and scientific thinking. Spencer's followers typically used evolutionary theory to support their own views of society. Therefore, one of the lessons of Spencer's popularity is that people clothe their intuitions with the fancy dressing of empirical science. Spencer's evolutionary teleology offered comfort to an American populace still wounded from the Civil War, both explaining and reinforcing Americans' initial faith in laissez-faire economics.

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FOR MY PARENTS: STEVE AND DOROTHY ARMSTRONG

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Introduction: The Function of Literary History at This Time

This work concerns the influence of Herbert Spencer's ideas on the United States in the post-Civil War nineteenth century. The approach falls somewhere between cultural studies and old historicism. In his nuanced and thoughtful book New Historicism and Other Old-Fashioned Topics Brook Thomas defines an "old-fashioned literary historian" as one who believes that examining the historical context of a literary work is essential in interpreting that work (151). Conversely, he says that cultural critics or new historicists appropriate a literary work in order to analyze culture (152). For them the culture is no longer "context," but is the central object of interpretation while the literary work becomes a mode through which to read the culture. Thomas asserts that new historicists are preoccupied with the way that the literary work enforces certain beliefs or reinforces certain discourses and institutions (160).

I make no such claims for my work. Instead, I hope to be both old fashioned literary historian and prudent social critic; I use "social" here instead of "cultural" in order to distinguish myself from the cultural critics. My goal is to offer both a history of Herbert Spencer's reception

in the United States as a way to enhance the reading of three novelists of the period and to use those novelists, along with Spencer's reception, in order to offer an insight into the economic, intellectual, and philosophical climate in the United States from 1865 to roughly 1905. I do not pretend to have THE insight into the period. My narrative will not be a rigid and totalizing statement of the dominant discursive powers in this period. Rather, I will interpret the significance of Spencer's rise and decline in popularity.

The new historicist mode of criticism first appeared in the late seventies with Stephen Greenblatt's essay "Improvisation and Power" and Louis Montrose's analyses of power in the English Renaissance. Greenblatt published his book Renaissance Self-Fashioning in 1980 and Representations was founded by a group of scholars including Greenblatt, Catherine Gallagher, and Walter Benn Michaels in 1982. The term first appeared in a Greenblatt essay in Genre in 1982 (Veese XIII). Thus, new historicism began in early modern studies; however, the new historicist approach has dominated the scholarship of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century United States over the last twenty years. One can go back to 1985 and June Howard's Form and History in American Literary

Naturalism as the beginning of this shift. However, she was still working in the relatively traditional arena of genre studies, trying to understand authorial intention.

The first radically new historicist work in this area was Michaels' The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism, published in 1987, in which he typically focuses on a literary work and some other aspect of culture and society. For example, he writes on Dreiser's Sister Carrie, a work on which I also focus, and consumer capitalism, demonstrating the way that Dreiser's novel participates in the discourse of consumer desire. He further examines Frank Norris's The Octopus, also the subject of this study, and corporate personhood. Michaels fits Thomas's definition of a cultural critic in that he appropriates the literary text in order to offer general pronouncements concerning discursive power in the Gilded Age.

Michaels' type of new historicism has been quite popular in this field. In 1988 Amy Kaplan's The Social Construction of American Realism followed, thus solidifying the importance of the new historicist project. Subsequently, Michaels' own student, Mark Seltzer, published an edited collection entitled Bodies and Machines, in 1992, in which he and the other authors analogize the literary

movement of naturalism to a machine that produces certain culturally constructed meanings. Since then many critics of this period, including this one, have felt it necessary to write about the literary works in combination with some aspect of American society and culture. After Michaels it is no longer tenable to merely examine the literature of this period on its own terms unless one were writing on Henry James or Mark Twain, authors deemed complicated enough to examine in and of themselves.

One crucial point that Kaplan, Michaels, and Seltzer all share is the notion that the author cannot transcend her culture or ideology in order to examine society.

Michaels states it best:

Although transcending your origins in order to evaluate them has been the opening move in cultural criticism at least since Jeremiah, it is surely a mistake to take this move at face value: not so much because you can't really transcend your culture but because, if you could, you wouldn't have any terms of evaluation left—except perhaps, theological ones. It thus seems wrong to think of the culture you live in as the object of your affections: you don't like or dislike it, you exist in it, and things you like and dislike exist in it too. (18)

Michaels asserts that one cannot transcend one's culture because one's tools of analysis come from that culture. Thomas directly rebukes Michaels here. He equates Michaels' point with the 1960's conservative slogan, "'America, love it or leave it.'" According to Thomas, Michaels offers a variation, telling us: "'America: Don't like it or dislike it, because you can't leave it'" (125). Like Thomas I take issue with Michaels' categorical disregard of individual agency. For him individual agency, which involves emotional, physical, and intellectual reactions, is constructed by our larger culture. However, emotional reactions derive from something intuitive and primal that cannot necessarily be captured and controlled by culture. People in all cultures express anger, fear, and sadness, along with other reactive behaviors. Also, the objects of their anger are often the same: sadness at the death of a loved one, anger at unfairness or cruelty, fear for their own lives. Michaels would argue that these reactions are so culturally ingrained that people are ignorant of their true cultural origins. However, such a view negates the effects of personal experience and intuitive emotion. To take a somewhat clichéd example, a child learns to fear fire through feeling the pain of

burning; there exists no cultural construction, at least, here.

I claim that the three writers in this study suffered profound anxiety, including fear and sadness, at the social consequences of Spencer's ideas. I do not argue that these reactions are rational or even necessarily consciously acknowledged, but the reactions are present in their work. While these reactions may be culturally constructed, their effect is to undermine certain ideological tendencies. For example, I argue in chapter three that Frank Norris indirectly criticizes corporate power in The Octopus, hence revealing the flaws in Spencerian evolution while Michaels describes the novel as one more pillar in the monolithic discourse of capitalism. Michaels asserts that corporate capitalism is so pervasive as to be almost beyond opposition.

Michaels' chapter on The Octopus in which he shows the legal and literary ways that corporate ideology are reinforced represents a form of opposition. In revealing the ways that corporate discourse subtly influences the way people think, Michaels tries to awaken his readers, as specific an audience as they may be, to capitalism's too powerful place in American society. Since most of Michaels' readers are fellow literary critics who share his

views of capitalism, the impact of his opposition is probably minimal; still, the effort is noteworthy. However, one of his bigger flaws shows in his suggestion that his form of criticism is the only viable form of opposition, thus abdicating any practical political action. Similarly, Michaels disregards specific forms of opposition, for example strikes and government regulations, which individuals used to blunt corporate power.

Michaels's disdain for such action shows both his utopian perspective and flawed historiography. He suggests that piecemeal institutional safeguards against corporate capitalism are inadequate as long as the discourse of corporate capitalism is still so prevalent. In Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity Richard Rorty accurately describes new historicists like Michaels as believing "that we are too far gone for reform to work - that a convulsion is needed, that our imagination and will are so limited by the socialization we have received that we are unable even to propose an alternative to the society we have now" (64). Such a view leads new historicists like Michaels to ignore the specific political responses to social inequality in the Gilded Age because those responses do not conform to their revolutionary view. Any institutional reform is

considered an ineffectual compromise with the dominant exploitative powers.

The novelists in this study represent one kind of political response. Being creative writers, they possess an imaginative sensibility that leads them to interrogate the dominant social ethos. Carl Grabo states that, "For the last two hundred years novelists and dramatists have been among the most effective critics of social ills, voicing articulately the consciences of man and elucidating, and to some unmeasurable extent, directing the course of human events" (62). Novelists create characters whose alienation from their surroundings leads to a critical commentary on the characters' environment. For example, Norris's Presley is both part of the elite class while simultaneously outside of it. Carrie succeeds by the end of the novel; yet her success flouts the moral values of the day. Hurstwood and Martin Eden are disaffected by the people and values around them. Because of their creative impulses, the writers occupied an emotional and intellectual space partly outside of the dominant cultural discourse.

This space provided the novelists with the means to critically engage with Spencerian evolution. Spencer's impact on America in this period was immense and varied.

Still, there existed many thinkers who consciously or unconsciously opposed Spencer's ideas, and wrote accordingly. Michaels and Kaplan would argue that the novelists' opposition was constructed by their own cultural influence. For them any perspective outside culture is illusionary. In her book Kaplan overtly states that the very idea that literary texts could be "responses to social change" places literature outside of social developments because such an idea implies that literature stands "outside the arena of social history, looking down and commenting upon it," thus reinforcing the split between the literary and the social (5). For Kaplan, like Michaels, this split is not valid.

At the time they published their works Michaels and Kaplan were responding to critics like Werner Berthoff and Jay Martin who Kaplan believes exaggerate creative writers' critical ability while ignoring the way those writers are conditioned by their social context. This is a fair point. However, Kaplan and Michaels err in the other direction, by completely disregarding creative writers' potential for searching criticism. While Berthoff and Martin accepted the novelists' keen viewpoint as a matter of faith, Kaplan, Michaels, and Seltzer take the opposite view with the same complete assurance. In constructing this work, I am

responding to Kaplan's and Michaels' blind spots. My goal is to be more skeptical and open in my approach to the writers, neither accepting any perspective on faith nor reflexively attacking what came before me. In short, I am striving for some critical middle ground between traditional literary historians and the new historicists.

I find Kaplan and Michaels' form of cultural studies too rigid. I prefer one that is more receptive, showing the diverse range of cultural practices that existed in any given historical period and the variety of reactions to those practices. Spencer's reception in the United States demonstrates that there were those who took his philosophy as a new faith, those who rejected it outright, and those who became disillusioned with it. In looking at reactions to Spencer's work, I focus more on specific ways that resistance to the prevailing discourse can occur rather than offering sweeping generalizations about how no such resistance can occur.

More specifically, I will show the paradoxical relationship some novelists of the period had with Spencer's ideas. I argue that the novelists hastened the decline in popularity of Spencer's thought because, while they found his attempts to unify human knowledge appealing, they inevitably found his philosophy unsatisfactory in its

ability to convey actual human behavior. My overall point here is that novelists have different interests in creating imaginative fiction from philosophers and sociologists who offer comprehensive and empirical explanations for human behavior. The novelists were interested in some of the same questions that Spencer asked. Nevertheless, they came to fundamentally different answers from him and his followers.

The key point here is that literary writing differs fundamentally from the type of writing found in other fields, such as economics and sociology. In effect, I am arguing for the necessary separation of disciplines based on their different approaches and goals. Philosophers, scientists, and sociologists typically seek to articulate some empirical truth. While a novelist could have this goal, often she does not, instead trying to focus on the mysterious complexities and contradictions of the individual person. The characters whom the novelist describes may act in inexplicable perhaps even self-destructive ways. However, the novelist attempts to encourage the readers to understand seemingly incomprehensible behavior that may not fit the social norm. In describing such behavior, literary writers could very

well resist the dominant discourse whether consciously or unconsciously.

Similarly, the writers in this study depict certain behavior that reveals the weakness in Spencerian evolution. Thomas cites those he calls "bourgeois critics" (read: "old-fashioned literary historians" such as Berthoff and Martin) who believe that literature's ability "to resist dogma" is grounded in the idea that "the function of art is to have no explicit social function." Similarly, Thomas follows up their point by claiming that "The primary purpose of a work of art is not to make statements about the world, but to be itself" (167). In "being" literary writers, as opposed to scientists or philosophers, Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, and Jack London showed the weaknesses of Spencer's attempt to define human nature too rigidly.

In arguing that literary writers can resist the dominant ideology, I am directly contradicting Kaplan and Michaels' idea that literature is not a privileged discourse. Thomas offers a deft way to deal with this debate over the ideological nature of the literary. He begins by arguing for the "transformative potential" of the literary text while denying that "literature transcends ideology." He further asserts, as I do above, that today's

critics, such as Michaels, who reveal that literature serves the ideology of capitalism are serving a necessary function in exposing an idea that was previously ignored. However, he argues, as I have, that this viewpoint can become reductive. He shows that written texts can have different ideological functions, perhaps even some that do not reinforce the dominant ideology (166).

As I stated above, I will argue in chapter three that Norris's The Octopus in fact contradicts Spencer's concept of evolution though laissez-faire which was very popular at the time. In doing so, I will examine past critics who believed that the novel was political. Michaels might say that these critics were, themselves, blind to the influence of corporate capitalism. However, they clearly saw elements in the novel that show the harm that corporations create. I will emphasize those elements which support my reading while simultaneously suggesting that Michaels uses the novel to reinforce his assumptions about culture and politics rather than offering a thorough analysis of the novel that considers Norris's actual text. In ignoring the specific reactions that writers like Norris have to specific social problems, Kaplan and Michaels fall into an oversimplified argument that all writers reinforce capitalism as the dominant system of their time. They need

the texts to make this point in order to reinforce their preconceived ideas about the power of discourse and the futility of individual action.

Thomas adds that if new historicists really wanted to be new and innovative, they would "take an interest in considering whether and how the literary can resist particular ideologies" (167). I would argue that if they really wanted to live up to the "historical" part of historicism, they would also focus on specifically empirical examples of the ways that individual writers respond to certain ideologies and institutions. Thomas concludes that the "Bourgeois critics may not have been completely wrong when they saw within the literary a capacity to resist dogma" (167). In this study I take up Thomas's statement of possibility and try to show that literary writers can resist dogma even unwittingly and in spite of their overt claims not to be politically engaged. Of course, for Michaels such a statement constitutes the writer's illusion that such a thing is possible.

Breaking disciplinary boundaries is also a key aspect of cultural studies. In examining Norris's The Octopus, Michaels also analyzes legal decisions, philosopher Josiah Royce, and lawyer Arthur Machen Jr., in order to demonstrate that a corporation is simultaneously existent

but intangible, thus making it one of the most powerful entities in society. In this study, I also will examine economic, legal, political, scientific, and sociological texts in order to investigate Spencer's influence on the intellectual environment of the period. Examining these texts is a very tricky endeavor. The literary critic is, in effect, treading on the intellectual territory of other scholars who have worked hard to learn the rules and terms of their field. While it may sound innovative and exciting to transgress disciplinary boundaries, literary scholars should do so with some trepidation. Thomas quotes Leo Spitzer as claiming that the type of literary history that circumvents disciplinary boundaries could become "the gay sporting ground of incompetence" (8). Spitzer indicates that, as trained professionals, literary scholars must comport themselves with expert skill. However, when literary scholars start examining other fields, they risk showing their ineptitude rather than expertise.

While Michaels' scholarship is intellectually dazzling in his ability to connect seemingly divergent texts, it veers dangerously close to Spitzer's vision of professional recklessness. While Michaels is definitely "new," his history is not so convincing. Moreover, he arrogantly informs thinkers in other disciplines of their intellectual

blind spots. He selects William James and Josiah Royce, two of the most thoughtful American philosophers who are conveniently dead and thus cannot answer him, to show the ways that they reinforced the dominant paradigms of their days. Thomas nicely articulates this problem when he says that "If ... the other discipline can be reduced to textuality, the most perceptive cultural critics turn out to be—lo and behold—readers of texts" (10). He further proceeds to claim that in such a schema literary critics happily trudge on to the other fields and tell "the naïve (but professionally trained) practitioners of those fields how those texts should be read" (10).

In performing such acts, the literary scholar often blindly ignores crucial empirical knowledge that might mitigate whatever point she is trying to make about the other field. Such blindness only serves to antagonize scholars in the other fields as well as making the literary scholar appear a bit foolish. A way to avoid such disciplinary arrogance is to articulate faithfully the main ideas in the other discipline's text, taking care to be fair to the text and the discipline, before appropriating the text for one's own use. Similarly, Thomas criticizes Michaels for misreading the history of legal definitions of a corporation before offering a concrete, credible, and

thorough history of corporate definition, showing that it is more complicated than Michaels says.

Today, Herbert Spencer is rarely read because, according to many, his ideas have become obsolete.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, some of his toughest critics tend to share his assumptions about the free market. However, as Richard Hofstadter has claimed, Spencer's philosophy "serves for later students of the American mind as fossil remains by which the intellectual body of the period may be reconstructed" (19). I will embark on such a "reconstruction" in order to argue that the eager reception of Spencer's work in the post-Civil War period reflects Americans' shift away from altruism and towards self-interest. Such a statement is somewhat general and reductive. However, as critics from George Fredericksen to David Shi have shown, Americans became frustrated with the high death rate and the government's corrupt and incompetent waging of the Civil War.

By 1865 the Union had won the war; however, the price was too steep for most Americans who, at the end of the war, wanted no more government led crusades for social equality. Thus, after some attempt to reconstruct the

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert J. Richards Darwin And The Emergence Of Evolutionary Theories of Mind And Behavior for examples of Gertrude Himmelfarb's, Charles Singer's and Derek Freeman's contempt for Spencer's theories. Also, see Talcott Parsons' The Social System.

south with racial equality, the federal government left, leading to a hundred years of racial inequality (Fredrickson 193). Americans wanted to focus on their own self-interest and while this led to a booming economy, it also created much suffering as workers were paid low wages and forced to work in dangerous conditions. The attendant protests and upheavals reflected the government's initial reluctance to intervene and regulate the workings of the free market.

Herbert Spencer justified this reluctance by offering Americans an optimistic version of evolution that is driven by laissez-faire and self-interest. Spencer posits that market society would progressively improve with a utopian end to the seemingly dark tunnel of the competition and social conflict that the United States experienced in the gilded age. Many middle and upper-middle class people approvingly read his version of evolutionary theory because he was reinforcing their intuitive desires to make money and ignore the suffering among the lower class that existed at the time. Appropriately enough, Andrew Carnegie was one of Spencer's biggest supporters because the philosopher justified Carnegie's business practices. However, the rich were not Spencer's only acolytes. As Hofstadter shows, Spencer was read by many self-educated people from the

middle-class, showing that Spencer represented Midwestern values. Hofstadter quotes John R. Commons saying that he was raised on "Hoosierism, Republicanism, Presbyterianism, and Spencerism'" (34). As Louis Menand points out, the Civil War did not transform the American government in any dramatic way. Elections were held during the war and the Constitution was never abandoned. However, Menand also accurately states that the nation was dramatically altered economically, intellectually, and philosophically (IX-X). I argue that Herbert Spencer offered the philosophical justification for many of these changes.

In order to establish a foundation, the first chapter will be a general description of Spencer's ideas, showing the dominant intellectual influences in his formation. Chapter two will involve a general survey on his varied American influence. In that chapter I will offer the point similar to the one above that many thinkers were predisposed to accept Spencer's thought because it essentially reinforced their own assumptions about the way society should work. Thinkers such as John Fiske, William Graham Sumner, and Edward Livingston Youmans believed that the market should remain unfettered and that self-interest was the path to social betterment. Spencer furnished them with a philosophy to support their personal preference,

cloaked in the legitimacy of evolutionary science. Thus, we learn the lesson that William James demonstrates in his book Pragmatism: that people create theories in order to codify and justify their own intuitions. Fittingly, I profile Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. who was both the architect of legal pragmatism, friend to William James, and one of Spencer's early adversaries. As a legal pragmatist, Holmes knew that people clothe their intuitions with the fancy dressing of empirical philosophy or science.

From that analysis, I shift to a focus on the novelists and the different ways that they wrestled and finally rejected Spencer's ideas. For the novelists this study moves chronologically, the first being a reading of Frank Norris's The Octopus. I argue that Norris wound up writing a political novel in spite of himself due to his subject matter, the monopolistic railroad, and his style, a melodramatic realism that focuses on the horrific tragedies of the main characters. In constructing this reading, I draw both from Norris's novel and from his own literary criticism in which he expresses a desire for a "romantic" fiction grounded in calamity and death. Because he chose the railroad as his subject and because he writes of horrific events, the novel inevitably communicates the venality of the railroad. Moreover, he paints a gallery of

vivid characters with whom the reader sympathizes thanks to the depth of Norris's portrayals. This is the only one of the three novels in which Spencer is not directly mentioned. However, his idea of a cosmic evolution through the unrestrained market capitalism is clearly at work here, especially at the interpretively troubling conclusion. Moreover, one of Norris's intellectual mentors while he studied at the University of California was the Spencerian disciple Joseph LeConte.

The next chapter follows with a focus on Dreiser's Sister Carrie which Norris read while he was a reader at Doubleday and recommended for publication. Again, I will examine both Dreiser's novel along with his editorials for a magazine called Ev'ry Month which his brother helped finance and for which Dreiser furnished much of the copy. The main theme of this chapter is ethics, something that has been a particularly knotty problem for evolutionary theorists, especially Spencer given his optimistic couching of brutal behavior. Evolutionary theory posits people behaving selfishly in struggling for their own survival. In such a schema, ethics have trouble fitting in unless one shares Spencer's vision that in the long view all will end well once the suffering has ended. Dreiser's editorials do not take such a long view. Instead, they reflect his deep

conflict over the moral consequences of Spencer's ideas. His editorials alternate between his direct celebration of Spencer's wide-ranging genius and his dejection over the plight of the working poor. Dreiser feels the moral quandary of letting so many people go hungry and homeless, even going so far as to recommend some form of poor relief, something that directly contradicts Spencer's ideas.

In chapter five I will focus on the way that Jack London's autobiographical novel Martin Eden serves to undermine Spencer's ideas of the survival of the fittest. Eden is a proud disciple of Spencer; London describes his reading of First Principles as a type of conversion. However, Eden's Spencerian beliefs mask his deep psychological and emotional conflicts. Spencer's thought leads him to consciously repudiate his fellow members of the working class; nevertheless, even after his conversion to Spencer, he continues his sense of fellowship with the working class, often empathizing with their dreary lives. In general, London demonstrates that Spencer's thought creates a type of blind idealism in Eden that makes him ill prepared for the way people actually behave. In fact, that idealism leads to his depression which inevitably leads to Eden's suicide, thus reflecting the destruction of the supposed fittest.

This work will conclude with a study of William James's complex relationship with Spencer's ideas. I conclude with James because he parallels the novelists in my study in some important ways. His conception of pragmatism grounds ideas in the realm of personal experience much as a novelist does. Moreover, just like the novelists, James exposes the weaknesses of Spencer's thought by showing its narrowness in describing the contradictions of humanity. Also, like the novelists, James was initially attracted to the great breadth of Spencer's synthetic philosophy when he was young. In fact, James's maturation as a thinker parallels his growing disregard of Spencer's thought. He argued that the philosophical pursuit of empirical truth inevitably consisted in the reinforcing of previously held biases. This criticism applies to Spencer who used scientific inquiry to justify his faith in a teleology grounded in laissez-faire economics.

In claiming that June Howard and Walter Benn Michaels were the first thinkers to investigate this period by connecting literature with writing in other fields, I have not been entirely accurate. Such attempts at teleological history often simplify in order to create the sense of historical movements. I am greatly indebted to Ronald Martin who published his American Literature and the

Universe of Force in 1981, not long before Howard or Michaels. Martin's study is a rich and nuanced analysis of Norris, Dreiser, London, and Henry Adams and their relationship to concepts of force. Martin's work is exhaustively researched and gracefully written, serving as a model for the type of thoughtful and objective literary historicism that Thomas believes should be practiced. The sheer quantity of research and Martin's handling of complex detail represent a substantial achievement that will help future scholars of this period. Martin helped me in understanding the science along with its influence on the novelists. Similarly, looking back at old-fashioned historians who comfortably worked in diverse fields, this study is influenced by Richard Hofstadter's Social Darwinism in American Thought. Critics like T.J. Jackson Lears and Louis Menand do not believe that social Darwinism as a coherent form of thought really existed or that it was as popular as Hofstadter maintains (Lears 20-1; Menand 301-2). This is often the case with a pioneering scholar: he points out a historical development and then other scholars critically respond to his work. Still, his exhaustive research and preponderance of evidence is not to be discounted even today and serves for many scholars of this period, including this one, as a rich resource.

Thomas, Martin, and Hofstadter are the three major influences in the formation of my own perspective on Spencer's American reception.

## Chapter One: Spencer's Life and Ideas

In order to make sense of Herbert Spencer's life and ideas, this chapter will be divided between a short survey of his life and an exploration of his general ideas, especially those relevant to this study. Being an evolutionary philosopher, Spencer was a contemporary of such scientific thinkers as Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley, and Alfred Russel Wallace during his lifetime. Of course, nowadays, scientists ignore Spencer because he did few experiments or tests to prove his theories. Moreover, his chief contribution to the biological aspect of evolution was his continued belief in the inheritance of physically acquired characteristics, an idea first promulgated by French biologist Jean Baptiste de Lamarck. However, August Weismann discredited this theory in 1889 by showing that lizards with cut off tails did not produce offspring with the same characteristic (Menand 382).

For this reason, David Wiltshire points out that Spencer should be viewed more as a political thinker than a scientist (1). Similarly, Stephen G. Brush distinguishes between Darwinian evolution and what he calls "the evolutionary world view" in the nineteenth century. He says that Darwinian evolution features: "random variation

and lack of any goal or purpose," "competition and natural selection," and "gradualism, denial that large variations or environmental catastrophes play a significant role in evolution" (249). Spencer subscribed to the last two. However, he believed that there existed a general pattern of evolution in which humans and society became progressively more ethical, peaceful, rational, and stable. When Spencer made his famous statement concerning the survival of the fittest, he meant more than a contextual fitness.

In examining Spencer's life and work in this chapter, I will focus on his unique position inside and outside of scientific analysis. When he began writing, most scientific inquiry was divided between a deistic and a Platonic explanation of the natural world. Therefore, Spencer's evolutionary theory, which was grounded in an *analysis* of the physical world, even though he did not test his theories, was still a somewhat radical empirical science for its time. Still, compared to Darwin, Huxley, Wallace, and even William James, who drew on evolutionary theory to build his psychological inquiry, Spencer was a woefully inadequate scientific thinker. This is such the case that his friend Huxley famously declared that, "Spencer's idea of a tragedy is a deduction killed by a

fact" (Spencer Autobiography I 467). Huxley is right that Spencer is a deductive thinker who maintained beliefs like the inheritance of physically acquired characteristics throughout his life despite evidence to the contrary. This contradiction will be the main subject of this chapter as will be Spencer's attendant determinism which leaves no room for individual agency.

In examining his ideas, I will also investigate Spencer's subjective interests underlying his supposed empirical evolutionary theory. Spencer believed that he was merely articulating universal and objective truths. However, he used science to support his faith in social progress through laissez-faire. His determinism served to reinforce his version of evolution because individual will could not alter the way organisms, even people, and societies develop; the development is predetermined by physical environment and biological makeup. The question, which remains unresolved today, is how much does people's biological makeup influence the formation of their personalities. Spencer like other doctrinaire evolutionists believe that evolution can explain every aspect of people's personalities while others, perhaps William James, believe that individual will cannot be reduced to biological processes.

Jack London's Martin Eden claims that Spencer's autobiography is "replete with romance as any novel" (232). However, George Eliot is more accurate in her assertion that, "The life of this philosopher, like that of the great Kant, offers little material for the narrator" (245). Spencer traveled, found friends, never married, and moved from various lodgings, never owning his own house. While doing all of this, he wrote his Synthetic Philosophy and battled mental illness. Herbert Spencer is known for his ideas rather than his actions. Thus, this biographical section will focus on certain important events that contributed to his creating the Synthetic Philosophy.

### Spencer's Life

Spencer was born in rural Derby to a school teacher father in 1820 (Spencer Autobiography I 71). In his Autobiography Spencer describes his father's family as intellectually independent. His father and uncles possessed a very strong individualist bent which led to "a greater tendency than usual to assert personal judgment in defiance of authority" (I 45). Moreover, his father and uncles consistently engaged in disagreements on topics such as politics, religion and science; these disagreements were

typically amiable and reasonable, thus indicating the family's tendency towards a rational oppositional attitude (Autobiography I 46). Spencer was heavily influenced by such an environment, mentioning that his father nurtured his anti-authority attitude in others and that "in me he did it very effectually, whether with purpose or not" (Autobiography I 101). Spencer carried his nonconformist family trait into his own life and work.

At thirteen he went to Hinton to be educated by his uncle Thomas who was the village curate (Autobiography I 105). It was here that Spencer received an early education in politics as well as in Euclid. Before Spencer arrived, his uncle was known as an advocate for poor laborers, establishing a clothing club for the poor and holding meat dinners on Sundays for certain laborers among other activities. However, with the introduction of the Poor Law Amendment Bill of 1834 which cut the amount of financial aid given to various parishes, his uncle's eyes were "opened" and he began to change his attitude (Wiltshire 20). Believing that such aid made people lazy and irresponsible, Spencer's uncle cut the government provisions to his parish from 700 pounds to 200 pounds a year (Autobiography I 31). Although in his autobiography Spencer remarked on his uncle's "somewhat too unqualified

belief" in individual responsibility, he learned his uncle's lesson well, spending parts of his intellectual career agitating against the Poor Laws (Autobiography I 114).

Spencer grew up at a unique moment in British political history. The British government at both the federal and local levels expanded tremendously from 1830 into the early 1850's. While the Poor Law Amendment of 1834 cut aid to the indigent, it greatly expanded both local administration of poor relief and federal supervision of the program (Lubenow 34). Also, the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 provided for the election of mayors and aldermen, thus expanding local administration (Lubenow 17-18). Legislation on public health and on work rules was enacted as well. In short, government grew exponentially in the early to middle nineteenth century due to the chaos and instability of industrialization (Lubenow 180). Such an environment certainly shaped Spencer's way of thinking about these issues.

William Lubenow claims that this expansion was incremental and limited (184). Still, Spencer channeled his own and his family's disrespect of authority into a strong skepticism of government activity. For Spencer, government in all forms represented a singular and

monolithic power that needed checking. The Poor Laws exemplified such government arrogance because the laws forced working people and landowners to pay taxes for maintaining the poor who couldn't, or, in some peoples' eyes, wouldn't work. Spencer's uncle Thomas involved him in these issues because young Spencer "was perpetually hearing social questions raised and commented on" (Autobiography I 118).

After leaving his uncle, he spent a brief time back at home with his parents before leaving for London to become a railway engineer in 1837 (Autobiography I 145). Spencer worked for the railway in various capacities: draughting, surveying, and engineering from 1837 to early 1841. During his tenure at the railway, Spencer began collecting fossils, resuming a habit he had as a boy. This hobby led to the purchase of Charles Lyell's Principles of Geology and a momentous discovery took place. In that book Spencer read Lyell's critique of Jean Baptiste de Lamarck's theory that humanity progressively developed "from a lower race." Despite Lyell's criticism, Lamarck's theory appealed to Spencer and he would spend much of his literary career promoting it (Autobiography I 201). He refused a permanent post with Birmingham and Gloucester because he wanted to pursue mathematical study and because he did not have the

ability "to persevere in labour which has not an object at once large and distinct" (Autobiography I 215).

While back with his parents at Derby, Spencer composed a series of letters that he sent to a periodical called The Nonconformist in 1842. He would carry his anti-government perspective into these letters which he titled The Proper Sphere of Government (Autobiography I 237-38). He would later in August 1843 issue the letters in pamphlet form to a somewhat disastrous effect. Spencer paid for the publication and lost nearly ten pounds in the process (Autobiography I 264). These letters amount to Spencer's first attempt at articulating a coherent political philosophy which would remain fairly constant for the rest of his intellectual career. As David Wiltshire claims, "Spencer's ... political thought was, thus, substantially formed at the age of twenty-two, and was to undergo little subsequent modification" (29). These letters were also written under the intellectual tutelage of his uncle Thomas to whom Spencer had returned in 1842 after employment with the railway (Autobiography I 237). His uncle introduced him to Edward Miall, the editor of The Nonconformist in 1842, thus paving the way for Spencer's first lengthy publication (Autobiography I 238).

As Spencer claims, these letters "opened the way" to his new career as a writer and thinker (Autobiography I 243). This longer work represented the first move towards thinking about political philosophy. He claims that without the letters, "Social Statics, which originated from them, would not have been thought of" (Autobiography I 242). At this time he was open to a new way of thinking because when he wrote the letters, he was at a certain crossroads in his young life. He had abandoned engineering as a permanent occupation and was searching for a new career opportunity. Therefore, the letters paved the way for what Spencer termed his "other kind of life" (Autobiography I 243).

In turning to this "other kind of life," Spencer was placing himself in the midst of some of the major political issues of mid-nineteenth century in England. In 1842 he became involved in the Chartist movement that agitated for: universal suffrage, triennial parliaments, vote by ballot, the abolishing of property qualification for voting and equal electoral districts among other reforms (Autobiography I 249). In looking back on this time, Spencer claimed in 1888 in An Autobiography that "The drift towards Socialism, now becoming irresistible, has resulted from giving to the masses not a due proportion of power but

the supreme power" (I 252). As England began to accept the reforms for which Spencer initially pushed, he began to reconsider his earlier stands on these issues. This change of heart shows that Spencer was not the ardent egalitarian he initially seemed to be. For him the people became too empowered, turning to the government for reforms that Spencer found intolerable.

In 1843 Spencer again traveled to London after having just published in the Nonconformist (Autobiography I 258-9). He is not clear; however, it seems as if these experiences in addition to his writing The Proper Sphere of Government led him to settle on writing as his career. He spent the next three years working various jobs. He briefly edited The Pilot, a suffrage movement periodical (Autobiography I 284); he did some work for the railway (Autobiography I 294,327); and he published another article in The Nonconformist in December 1846 (Duncan I 71). By this point, he was already preparing his first book on political theory which grew out of his dissatisfaction with The Proper Sphere of Government. Spencer thought that the ideas in his first long work were essentially valid, but that they lacked a solid foundation for support.

He would provide that foundation in Social Statics which was his attempt to discover "the common principle"

underlying his political observations in his first written work (Autobiography I 351). However, this book included certain radical sentiments concerning private property and the concentration of wealth that Spencer would later recant much as he renounced his position on working-class suffrage. This undermines Wiltshire's idea that Spencer's ideas were "substantially" formed at the age of 22. Like many thinkers, he advocated certain ideas in his youth which, as he grew older, he emphatically opposed. For instance, his opposition to the "monopolists" would disappear as his belief in individualism grew stronger.

Through his Economist connections, he found publishers for Social Statics who were sympathetic to his ideas; nevertheless, despite their support, he had to provide the financing for the publishing and printing himself (Autobiography I 411-12). Social Statics was issued to a generally positive if muted response. Spencer called the reviews "superficial" (Autobiography I 415). Despite this superficiality, Spencer acknowledges that the book "was more extensively, as well as more favourably, noticed than any one of my later books." It actually garnered him some celebrity to the extent that strangers started asking whom he was (Autobiography I 422). A second edition of Social Statics was issued in 1851 and Spencer began contributing

essays to the Westminster Review and the Leader along with his regular editorials for the Economist (Duncan I 83-87). Thus, he was becoming a writer of some renown.

In 1852 he began to write his one volume Principles of Psychology. He chose psychology as a subject because of a "general interest in mental phenomena ... which ... was increased by reading (G.E.) Lewes's Biographical History of Philosophy in the autumn of 1851" (Autobiography I 453). This would seem to be a rather glib explanation for attempting to write a book on a topic in which he had no formal training. Indeed, it would seem that his nervous system was not prepared for such an ambitious undertaking. While Spencer was finishing his book to make the printing deadline, he was solely focused on the topic, taking no breaks to clear his mind (Duncan I 100). Such fixation took its toll on his nervous system which gave out while he was secluded in Wales writing the last chapters. Spencer described this experience as "a sensation in my head—not pain, nor heat, nor fullness, nor tension, but simply a sensation, bearable enough but abnormal." This nervous disorder would plague Spencer for the rest of his life, severely limiting his ability to travel and work. When this first attack occurred, he immediately stopped working for three weeks in order to heal (Autobiography I 543-44).

It is difficult to explain Spencer's problem. When in London, he said that he needed quiet. However, it appears that the intense isolation in Wales—he admits that he was the only resident at his hotel in a secluded valley—caused his problem because he had no relief from the demands of his book. Either way, Spencer would spend the rest of his life suffering from a psychological condition. This condition would make him unprepared to balance consistent employment with writing (Autobiography II 28). Still, he published the Psychology in 1855. At its publication the book met with much hostility because as Spencer claimed “extremely few were prepared even to entertain its fundamental conception” that the mind grew out of evolution (Autobiography I 546). With the Psychology finished, he spent the next eighteen months on an unsuccessful search for health (Duncan I 104).

Beginning in 1850, Spencer began focusing on the concept of evolution. Social Statics included some reflections on social development. However, he had not directly explained how societies grow. Certainly, his belief in Lamarckian evolution spurred his interest. Moreover, J.D.Y. Peel suggests that Spencer's preference for evolution grew out of conversations with G.E. Lewes in 1850 (15). Also, in 1851 through his reading of William

Carpenter's Principles of Physiology, he learned about Karl Ernst von Baer's idea that every organism develops through "a change from homogeneity to heterogeneity" (Autobiography II 9). Although Spencer was familiar with the idea, von Baer's conception of progress inspired him to think more deeply about the way organisms evolve. In the quote that inspired Spencer, von Baer was referring to embryonic development; still Spencer believed that the idea had wider application (Richards 269). When he began writing the Psychology, von Baer's idea influenced his thinking on the way the mind develops. He recalls, "I had been led to trace the growth of definite reasoning, and the gradual formation of cardinal scientific ideas, as resulting from the accumulating experiences of mankind. Hence arose the thought of writing a Principles of Psychology" (Autobiography II 12). However, Spencer's ambition did not stop with psychology. He thought that the mind exemplified the way humanity and lower organisms grow. In short, Spencer's Synthetic Philosophy was gradually born; this idea gestated in his mind for nearly four years, "On glancing over these stages, it is indeed, observable that the advance towards a complete conception of evolution was itself a process of evolution" (Autobiography II 13).

Spencer set about to write his multi-volume opus on evolution. He created an outline that would start with the basic principles of development and then he would proceed to apply evolution to biology, psychology—he would expand his Psychology into two volumes—and morality (Autobiography II 16-19). However, Spencer was running low on money due to the eighteen months traveling, the cost of publishing his books, and his illness which limited his ability to work to some three hours a day. His essays and reviews had brought him some money. However, his savings were almost gone (Autobiography II 37). In March 1860, Spencer decided to “publish by subscription” a series of books dedicated to the “unification of knowledge.”

Spencer called this series the “System of Philosophy” or the “Synthetic Philosophy.” He solicited the most eminent thinkers in England including Thomas H. Huxley, Charles Darwin, Charles Lyell, and Henry Buckle, all of whom happily joined his list (Duncan I 126). Due to the influential people on the list, Spencer received 440 subscriptions. Similarly, through Edward Silsbee, Spencer met Edward Livingston Youmans who would help him penetrate the American market with great success as will be seen in Chapter Two of this study (Autobiography II 60-61). The two would embark on a mutually beneficial friendship that

would last until Youmans untimely death in January 1887 (Duncan I 371). Spencer published First Principles, volume one of the "Synthetic Philosophy," in the summer of 1862 (Autobiography II 84). Spencer was fairly prolific bringing out the second volume of his philosophy, The Principles of Biology, in April of 1863 (Duncan II 141). However, 1866 brought many problems, not the least of which was a decline in subscribers from 430 to 350 with many of those not keeping up payments (Autobiography II 154-55). Due to the financial problems, Spencer decided to end the Synthetic Philosophy. He sent out letters to the remaining subscribers announcing a cessation in his activities (Duncan II 165).

This announcement had an effect, intended or not. Friends such as John Stuart Mill and Thomas H. Huxley offered either to buy extra volumes or contribute money directly. Spencer rejected these offers, not wanting special gifts made on his behalf. However, the American market would immediately bear fruit for Spencer. When he heard of Spencer's decision, Youmans appealed to Spencer's American subscribers, collecting \$7,000. In July 1866 he brought the money to England along with letters from certain subscribers pleading with Spencer to accept the money and continue to publish his books. Spencer kept his

project afloat due largely to his American audience (Duncan I 166-69).

After re-editing First Principles in 1867, Spencer began to expand the Psychology as part of his Synthetic Philosophy. He had said that readers' hostility to the first edition in 1855 derived from the revolutionary nature of his thesis that the mind grew out of physical evolution. Spencer claims that such a view "roused not sympathy, but antipathy." He credits Darwin's Origin of Species and his own work with helping lay the groundwork for a positive reception of this idea in 1867 (Duncan I 184). However, Spencer did not finish the first edition of the Psychology until 1870 with the second edition following in 1872. These delays were caused by ill health (Autobiography II 282).

Another reason for the delay was his sense that he needed to write another book besides those in the original outline of the Synthetic Philosophy. In writing the Psychology, Spencer began to believe that "Psychology underlies Sociology; and there had to be specified a number of those more special truths in Psychology which have to be handed on to Sociology as part of its data" (Autobiography II 282). Moreover, Youmans had requested him to contribute a work for "The International Scientific Series," which he

was publishing at the time. Due to everything Youmans and the American audience had done for him, Spencer could not refuse (Autobiography II 283-4). When Spencer sent him the first chapter of the Study of Sociology, Youmans used it for The Popular Science Monthly, a magazine that he was starting with his brother (Autobiography II 286).

Spencer's life progressed generally on a pattern of trying to complete his Synthetic Philosophy while battling his mental illness to taking vacations with friends. The major, and perhaps the most traumatic, event of his life was his trip to the United States in August of 1882. This trip will be covered in chapter two. In general, Spencer was appreciative of all the support from the United States. However, he was mostly miserable during his trip due to his "shattered" mental condition (Autobiography II 462). He concludes his reflections on the trip thus: "Thus ended an expedition which I ought never to have undertaken. Setting out with an ill-founded hope that the journey and change of scene would improve my health, I came back in a worse state than I went: having made another step downwards towards invalid life" (Autobiography II 481).

Despite this invalid life, Spencer completed his Synthetic Philosophy with the publication of The Principles of Ethics in 1896. At that point, he was dictating his

work to his assistant. When the final sentence was thus transcribed, he and his secretary shook hands. The scene progressed thus: "I have finished the task I have lived for" was all he said, and then resumed his seat. The relation was only momentary and his features quickly resumed their customary composure" (Duncan II 95). Spencer published his final book Facts and Comments in 1902 and he died in December 1903.

#### Spencer's Ideas

In his Synthetic Philosophy Spencer sought to demonstrate the universal application of evolutionary theory. His famous sentence "the survival of the fittest" exemplifies his version of evolution. As I said at the beginning of this chapter, Spencer defines the fittest as the organism that is best adjusted to its environment. He believes that as the fittest keeps surviving and reproducing, human society is inexorably improving. The fittest represents the perfect specimen that can appropriately adjust to and thus transcend its environment. For Spencer the specimen's superiority is predetermined by its biological makeup. In offering an evolutionary process that is based on predetermined biology, Spencer becomes

vulnerable to the charge of vagueness because he neglects the specific dynamics of the actual process which can change depending on the context. However, Spencer was never a contextual thinker. Instead, he offered a universal theory with a few specific rules.

This would become a particular problem in conceiving of an evolutionary psychology. Spencer argued that the mind developed due to the gradual physiological changes to all of humanity, ignoring the thoughts, desires, and motivations of specific minds. Similarly, Spencer had to grapple with the amorality of the evolutionary process. This has been a knotty issue for most evolutionary scientists and philosophers. In the evolutionary schema the fittest is not necessarily the most ethical. Unlike Darwin and Wallace, Spencer offered an almost metaphysical brand of evolution, in which organisms become more complex and heterogeneous. For Spencer, this meant that they were becoming more sophisticated in their physiological structure as they evolve. When applying evolution to humanity, Spencer equated this sophistication with greater ethics, peace, and rationality. In short, Spencer equated evolution with improvement; of course, his model for improvement is a free market society where humans' more aggressive urges are transformed into market competition.

In addition to Lamarck's idea of the inheritance of physically acquired traits, and his reading of Karl Ernst von Baer, Spencer's chief model for this system of evolution was the nebular hypothesis. Stephen G. Brush argues that the nebular hypothesis as propounded by Marquis de Laplace and William Herschel strongly influenced Spencer towards thinking that evolution tends in a certain teleological direction. Brush points out that, "There was the abstract idea that everything is changing because of the action of physical laws on material atoms, with the nebular hypothesis providing a model from astronomy that could be carried over into other sciences" (255). The nebular hypothesis offered a model of the solar system moving from an undifferentiated chaos to an organized complexity as opposed to entropy theory that stated the exact opposite (Brush 268). Spencer published an article in The Westminster Review "defending and extending the nebular hypothesis," seeing it as the basis of evolution (Brush 259). Fittingly, the idea that life moves from an undifferentiated homogeneity to a definite heterogeneity would be a key tenet of Spencer's "evolutionary worldview."

Spencer's first long work is The Proper Sphere of Government which he wrote while participating in the Chartist movement to expand voting rights. In this work,

he defines the limits of governmental action, finding the Poor Law an especially egregious example of government intervention. He counters the criticism that even in prosperous times there are poor people by claiming that, "In nine cases out of ten, such miseries result from the transgressions of the individual or his parents: and are we to take away the just punishment of those transgressions?" (Proper Sphere 17) He considers poverty and starvation as ways of disciplining the immoral non-laborer. This type of argument begins to suggest the "social" evolutionism to which he would adhere throughout most of his career, "We are told that the sins of the wicked shall be visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation" (Proper Sphere 17).

He attempts to counter the argument that the children should not have to suffer for the parents' shortcomings by claiming that the parents' moral infirmities lead to a slow decay which, if not arrested, could last at least three or four generations. Ironically, Spencer, a convinced agnostic bordering on an atheist, invokes religious terminology with phrases like "the sins of the wicked," to make his point; however, he is not invoking religion in his argument. Although he does not assert a biological basis for this argument, he is positing a model where individuals

slowly starve and die over generations because their forbears are, in effect, morally and physically unfit. This argument appears harsh. Spencer does not merely accept the existence of suffering, he argues for the necessity of it. However, he believes that the suffering and death of the unfit are necessary because their end is a crucial mechanism of his evolutionary teleology.

Moreover, he believes that he is merely articulating natural truths: that the wicked, who just happen to be poor, must perish. In his letters, he does not consider that the "wicked" who are wealthy will most likely continue to thrive due to their wealthy cushion or, more importantly, that many poor people work hard but lack true opportunity given the inequalities of nineteenth century England. Because of his faith in the fundamental fairness of the free market, Spencer could not see the specific issues that might contradict his type of individualism. This point is another reminder that Spencer was an emphatically deductive thinker who was incapable of seeing the specific details that complicate his general theories.

Six years later Spencer continued to define the ethical foundations of his political theories. He begins Social Statics by criticizing the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham because his emphasis on "greatest happiness"

collapses happiness and morality, a move that Spencer finds too relativistic (5). He opposes this view of morality by claiming that a "moral sense" exists in all people "to dictate rectitude in our transactions with each other." Moreover, this moral sense "receives gratification from honest and fair dealing, and ... gives birth to the sentiment of justice" (20). Spencer uses the language of business to exemplify his definition of ethics, focusing on people's "transactions" that are "honest and fair dealing." He ignores a more private ethics between family members or lovers because this type of ethics is complicated by issues of love and desire, capricious emotions that Spencer's rigidly empirical analysis cannot consider. Theodore Dreiser would view this contradiction as a limitation to Spencer's analysis, depicting the subjective nature of morality in Sister Carrie.

Spencer offers the "moral sense" as a way to argue that morality is a physiological rather than a philosophical concept. In doing this, he suggests that there is no reason for people to act immorally because morality is built into people's physical constitution. The implications of such an argument are that people act immorally because either their "moral sense" is not significantly developed or they are just not exercising it.

In the first case, immorality is explained through a lack of evolution and in the latter case, it is a result of choice. Later in the book, Spencer overtly argues the first point when he claims that "ALL EVIL RESULTS FROM THE NON-ADAPTATION OF CONSTITUTION to conditions" (54). With such an argument, Spencer offers evolutionary ethics at their most rigid, connecting one's moral development to one's biological development. There exists no room for ambiguity or personal eccentricity in this analysis. Being a novelist, Dreiser found these dictates too rigid in capturing the many dimensions of people's behaviors. This assertion begins a chapter in the book called "The Evanescence of Evil" in which he argues that evil will inevitably disappear as people become more evolved.

In crafting his unification philosophy, Spencer would turn from political theory to scientific analysis. In the first book of his Synthetic Philosophy, First Principles, Spencer began the type of interdisciplinary analysis that would characterize the rest of his work. In his first two political books, Spencer employs certain evolutionary concepts to reinforce his political points. In First Principles he moves to more scientific analysis whose subtext is his belief in individualism and the free market.

As its title indicates Spencer would articulate the principles underlying his version of evolution in this work. Spencer begins the book by examining the conflict between science and religion, dividing his philosophy into "the unknowable" and "the knowable." Spencer used these labels to explain what he called "the absolute" which was the origin of all existence. While Spencer indicates that many religions contain "gross ... absurdities," he points out that all religions contain a general truth which consists in the idea that there exists something beyond human consciousness (13). For Spencer this thing is a "mystery" and thus he indicates that the value of religious thought consists in its revealing that the "existence of the world ... is a mystery calling for interpretation" (36). Spencer suggests that this existence is "unknowable" because it cannot be discovered through empirical evaluation.

Conversely, he calls science "a higher development of common knowledge" in which "scientific men throughout the world subject one another's results to searching examination, and that error is mercilessly exposed and rejected as soon as discovered" (14-15). Still, Spencer asserts that science expresses ideas whose ultimate truth cannot be known; he says that the scientist "truly knows that in its ultimate nature nothing can be known" (54).

Therefore, religion and science are both concerned with "the unknowable." While science can offer some insight into existence, the ultimate force governing reality cannot be known and therefore science too deals with "the unknowable." Spencer calls both religion and science symbolic conceptions of absolute truth (50).

Spencer's attempt to reconcile religion and science is one of his more famous (or infamous) projects. For example, in London's Martin Eden many of the characters respond to Eden's reverence for Spencer by claiming, "There is no God but the Unknowable, and Herbert Spencer is its prophet" (270). Most critics became repulsed by his assertion that religion does not offer any concrete verifiable truth, thus causing him trouble on both sides of the Atlantic. Creating an "unknowable" in place of a personal god, to which people could appeal for love and forgiveness, and pointing out inconsistencies and "absurdities," in religious theory, would inevitably alienate religious people. Still, Spencer attempted to find some mediation between two hostile perspectives at a time when that hostility would be at its peak.

Although Spencer was much maligned for his "atheistic" views, his analysis of religion in First Principles shows an appreciation for the benefits which religion can offer.

His analysis demonstrates that Spencer was aware of the contingent nature of scientific discourse despite its pretense to absolute truth. Such a viewpoint appears revolutionary during a period in which science was much revered. It is regrettable that he did not apply such a keen critical insight to his own theory. Still, while he was most often deductive in asserting the validity of general ideas, Spencer at least nominally grounded his ideas in an observation of the physical world. His definition of empirical observation often only went so far as his own personal logic; thus, he typically fell back into abstract generalization. Nevertheless, he saw himself as an empiricist, believing in the value of verification.

Moreover, he sympathetically argues that religion fulfills a certain human need, therefore, demonstrating that it is describing some ultimate, though "unknowable" truth. In claiming that religious experience did not require empirical truth to be taken seriously, Spencer freed the way for people to focus on their own personal experiences of faith rather than obsessing over their religion's verifiable truth. He also demonstrated a tolerance for an orientation that did not serve an overt evolutionary purpose. For someone who thought that he understood the way life was created and developed, his

appreciation for the mystery that religious faith explores reflects an almost visionary magnanimity.

In the second section of First Principles Spencer attempts to ascertain the "universal truths" which represent "the unknowable" (105). Spencer boils the rules down to "force" as the overall governing aspect of all life:

We come down, then, finally to Force as the ultimate of ultimates. Though Space, Time, Matter, and Motion are apparently all necessary data of intelligence, yet a psychological analysis ... shows us that these are either built up of, or abstracted from, experiences of Force ... Deeper down than these, however, are the primordial experiences of Force. A single impression or force is manifestly receivable by a sentient being devoid of mental forms ... Though no single impression of force so received, could itself produce a consciousness (which implies relations between different states), yet a multiplication of such impressions, differing in kind and degrees, would give the materials for the establishment of relations, that is, of thought. (146)

Not only does Spencer define force as an all-encompassing entity that underlies all life, he imbues it

with an active will that directs the order of even basic activities such as consciousness. Ronald Martin asserts that Spencer's conception of "*force* is an even broader notion than all causality (although causality is central to it); its nearest synonym is *reality*" (38). Spencer posits the individual as a passive entity at the whim of this force, helpless in trying to harness or direct it. In his novel The Octopus Frank Norris takes this Spencerian concept of force, equating wheat, natural and primal, with an omnipotent force that neither the farmers nor the financiers can control. Both Norris and Spencer also locate this force in market capitalism. Norris defines the market activities of growing, harvesting, selling, and buying of the wheat as the persistent, to use another Spencerian term, force. These market dynamics represent the primal force that cannot be harnessed. Similarly, Spencer claimed that the creation of market societies was a product of his force concept.

In First Principles Spencer applies his scientific theories, for example his force concept, to other subjects as he had previously used some scientific theorizing to support his political ideas in both The Proper Sphere of Government and Social Statics. He connects his concept of the transformation of forces to the development of

societies, revealing that once societies develop to a certain level, parts of them grow without the influence of human will. They grow based on inexorable force:

The network of roads and railways and telegraph wires—agencies in the formation of which individual labours were so merged as to be practically lost—serve to carry on a social life that is no longer thought of as caused by the independent doings of citizens. (197)

Spencer removes the rational human subject as the main catalyst for social growth by claiming that human will ceases to have much importance in the growth of certain elements of society. He adds stock prices, discount rates and product demand to the list of forces which transcend people's behavior (197). His deterministic force trumps individual agency even though, as he admits, human desire set in motion the creation of the roads and railways. However, Spencer argues that once they are enacted, his quasi-mystical force drives their creation and survival; thus individual choice becomes useless in trying to alter or stop that force. This reasoning underlies his opposition to reform efforts because they futilely and dangerously manipulate these natural forces.

He states that the real origin of these activities is the heat of the "Sun's rays." He further argues that

social development mainly depends on "animal and vegetal" products and that these rely on the sun for growth. He concludes this particular analysis by claiming that "but to this same reservoir are traceable those subtler and more complex manifestations of energy which humanity, as socially embodied evolves" (198). In this sentence Spencer suggests that even people's more analytical and creative powers derive from the sun. This argument would have a strong impact on American evolutionists like Joseph Le Conte, but would also find opposition in thinkers who opposed the idea that all human behavior can be reduced to indirect natural objects. This part of Spencer's argument is quite crucial to his evolutionary theory because the "independent doings of citizens," while important, are dwarfed by the inexorable "forces" of nature. In this analysis individual will is naturally subverted to nature's all consuming power. This argument is at least partly responsible for Spencer being labeled a "Social Darwinist" because his concept of evolution tended to blind him to the human misery wrought by the social dislocations of industrialism. In effect, if people are mere products of larger forces, then their lives will be less meaningful than those forces; moreover, the forces cannot be challenged.

In addition to positing force as the predominant element in the development of life, Spencer offered other rules for the way life develops. In his section on evolution Spencer subtly builds his conception of the development of life. He claims that life moves from "a dispersed, imperceptible state to a concentrated, perceptible state" (250). This suggests Spencer's belief in a teleological evolution which essentially moves from chaos to order. Spencer says that there exists "a change from a homogenous state to a heterogeneous state" (295). As the final piece in his evolutionary puzzle, Spencer overtly asserts his telos of chaos to order by arguing that evolution "is a change from the indefinite to the definite. Along with an advance from simplicity to complexity, there is an advance from confusion to order" (327). This last point is also very important in connecting Spencer's theories of evolution to his ideas of social growth.

This type of evolution shows the influence of the nebular hypothesis on Spencer. While that theory has scientific legitimacy, Spencer's brand of evolution is more theory than verified fact. In effect, it represents the way Spencer wanted to see the world more than the actual world described by science. This hope was shared by many, especially postwar American citizens that wanted to believe

that the world, especially their society is developing into a more definite and stable place. Definiteness implies a certain amount of stability and complexity suggests social development as towns grow more complex, the more businesses, residences, public spaces they have. In fact, the move from chaos to liberal democracies parallels Spencer's form of evolution which serves to prove that a theory shared and acted on by many can have some validity even if it is bad science. Although Spencer's type of evolution includes much suffering and inequality, more developed and peaceful societies can emerge out of it. Spencer's deterministic way of evolution can work; he just needed to acknowledge that people's contradictory desires, motivations and actions play a role in making it happen.

In working on the Synthetic Philosophy, Spencer returned to Principles of Psychology and published a two volume version in 1870-1872. In revising and expanding his earlier work, Spencer sought to define an evolutionary psychology. Therefore, early in volume one Spencer asserts that psychology does not merely focus on the connections between certain internal phenomena nor is it restricted to the connection between external phenomena; instead Spencer claims that psychology studies "*the connection between these two connections*" (I 132). Robert M. Young maintains

that previous to Spencer association psychologists only focused on the connections between mental activities. In contrast, Spencer would use his concept of adaptation to extend both the association psychology and his own theory of the development of life (2-3). With this in mind, in his Psychology he refers to his own Principles of Biology in asserting that life involves a "'continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations '" (I 293). Just before this assertion, Spencer declares, "The phenomena which those of Mind resemble in the greatest degree are those of bodily life" (I 293).

Here Spencer suggests that the mind is subject to the same rules as the physical body; for example, it evolves due to its adjusting to its external environment. However, the mind is the repository of reason, kindness, and will, among other more qualitative attributes. He attempts to explain that these characteristics exist due to the connections between the mind's various nerves and due to the connection between those nerves and the mind's environment; in effect, they are physical reactions rather than refined and cultivated qualities. Still, those nerves did not just materialize due to a spontaneous creation. Spencer believed that the mind initially develops due to the progressive inheritance from previous generations of

the race (Principles of Psychology I 422). The inheritance creates the structure of the mind and each generation "bequeaths an increased tendency" (Principles of Psychology I 439). Then, through evolutionary adaptations grounded in external interaction, the mind continues to evolve and develop. For Spencer, the adjustment of inner relations to outer relations is a crucial aspect of the evolutionary process and thus the mind's ability to adjust to its external environment would be the key subject of his evolutionary psychology.

Not all minds develop in the same way, however. According to Spencer, species evolve due to the complexity, heterogeneity, and multiplicity of adjustments between the mind and its environment (Principles of Psychology I 389). The deft mind is the one that can respond to a variety of stimuli. Robert J. Richards dubs Spencer's explanation "a dynamic principle of evolution, since the external conditions encompassed by an individual's experience continually changed" (285). This explanation is consistent with Spencer's evolutionary theory because the mind becomes stronger and more fit the more numerous and diverse its activity. In this analysis the mind becomes, in effect, one more muscle that requires strenuous and challenging exercise.

Previous to Spencer's Psychology, most psychologists were either preoccupied with observation or with deductive a priori explanations. Rick Rylance points out that Victorian psychologists treated the "traditional higher faculties," such as reason and will, as subjects of special study (216). Conversely Spencer called the psychological classifications of his day "superficial" (Principles of Psychology I 389). In terms of will, he asserts, "We speak of Will as something apart from the feeling or feelings which, for a moment, prevail over others; whereas it is nothing but the general name given to the special feeling that gains supremacy and determines action" (Principles of Psychology I 503). Spencer defines the will as one more nervous reaction among many nervous reactions that occur in the mind. These reactions are shaped not by the individual mind, but by "the experiences of antecedent organisms" (502).

Rylance asserts that the originality of Spencer's book lay in his creating a theory grounded in scientific, especially evolutionary, reasoning, thus combining the different approaches of Victorian psychology (215-216). However, given the deductive nature of Spencer's own theory of evolution, his scientific reasoning is somewhat of an artifice. Similarly, Rylance says that Spencer's work

"jettisoned the detailed analysis of mental contents that had been the task of associationists from Locke to Bain." Rylance further points out that Spencer's contemporary Alexander Bain was especially unmoved by Spencer's evolutionary psychology, paraphrasing Bain as asserting that Spencer ignored "the complexities of the mind's workings" (218).

If Spencer's analysis lacks the necessary details of an empirical science, his analysis can then also be criticized for its axiomatic materialism. In ignoring the specific working of the mind, Spencer also disregards the unique varieties of individual minds because he reduces all mental reactions to his evolutionary biology, thus ignoring individual thoughts and expressions of desire, reason, and will. Therefore, Spencer cannot explain desires and feelings that do not conform to his conception of psychological evolution. In his schema such feelings result from a lack of adaptation. However, that merely serves to stigmatize behavior that deviates from Spencer's narrow conception of psychological activity while, more importantly, offering no insight into the unique personality.

Moreover, Spencer situates the individual mind as a passive receptor of sensory data whose nervous system

merely reacts to that sensory data based on the mental structures that the mind passively inherited from its progenitors. In effect, the mind is a machine. Spencer ignores the individual personality, suggesting that such a thing does not exist. Rylance disagrees with this interpretation, claiming that Spencer's biological associationism gave the mind "*powers*" that it could use to "explore the limits of its own being through the experience of resistance and effort" (220). However, Rylance still works within a Spencerian definition of the mind as a physiological entity, disregarding an active individual consciousness. Also, the exploration that Rylance mentions is indeed limited by Spencer's reduction of thought to a certain set of physiological responses and past inheritances. John Offer more accurately captures Spencer's view of the mind when he declares, "Ultimately, it is as if a locomotive rather than its driver is described as being in charge of its train" (12). For Spencer the mind is akin to a narrow focused machine with limited imaginative qualities.

Towards the end of his Psychology, Spencer takes on ethics and morality, an even more difficult evolutionary issue given its ambiguous meaning. Spencer had dealt with this issue before in Social Statics when he conceived "the

moral sense" to explain that ethical behavior is essentially a physiological attribute that requires use in order to develop. Of course, this attribute requires the correct environment to be nurtured like any human muscle requires. In picking up the idea once again towards the end of his Psychology, Spencer focuses more on the evolution of ethical behavior, which he now labels altruism, leading him to emphasize the environment over the specifics of the moral sense. As previously demonstrated, Spencer believes that the internal specifics of any organ derive from an interaction of species inheritance, which creates the structure of the muscle, and the continued adjustment of inner to outer relations. Spencer states that "Sociality having thus commenced, and survival of the fittest tending ever to maintain and increase it, it will be further strengthened by the inherited effects of habit" (Principles of Psychology II 561). Sociality is the condition in which individuals feel a kinship with other individuals within their environment; this, of course, leads to altruistic feelings for others within the community. This explanation reflects Spencer integrating the idea of group identification which he says could include both "enmity and amity" into his idea of evolution (Principles of Psychology II 610). This is perhaps

Spencer's most intriguing analysis as he examines the interplay between the group and the ego and conceives of the idea of "ego-altruistic sentiments" in which "intelligent creatures that live in presence of one another, and are exposed to like causes of pleasure and pain, acquire capacities for participating in one another's pleasures and pains." This is largely a process of socialization in which the member of a group learns acceptable and unacceptable behavior within the group. To demonstrate this point, Spencer uses a young aborigine who hears tales of heroism and cowardice, thus learning the norms of society (599). Spencer maintains that the individual ego wants the affirmation of its fellows and thus internalizes the community ethics.

This type of inquiry reflects Spencer's increasing interest in social analysis. He is credited with helping to invent the field of sociology. Here he engages in a type of sociological analysis in order to articulate an evolutionary ethics. While the sociological insights are compelling, Spencer cannot account for the adoption of ethics outside of social norms. Once again Spencer's evolutionary analysis is too narrow to account for individuals who resist the socialization and, yet, whose ethics may transcend their environment. Similarly, as he

did in Social Statics, Spencer sees the model of an ethical society in industrial capitalism: "The industrial *regime* is distinguished from the predatory *regime* in this, that mutual dependence becomes great and direct while mutual antagonism becomes small and indirect" (II 609). Spencer believes that the human desire for destruction will be channeled into the more productive desire to compete in order to better one's wealth through buying and selling. Of course this sentiment blinded him to the costs of industrialization and thus he fought legislation to ameliorate its excesses.

In "Evolution and Ethics," Spencer's friend Thomas Huxley cautions against people "apply[ing] the analogy of cosmic nature to society" despite his own belief in evolutionary theory (82). As a biologist, Huxley pointedly resists the type of inferences that Spencer draws from evolutionary theory because they cannot be empirically verified. He appropriately contextualizes Spencer's phrase the survival of the fittest. Huxley mentions that the temptation exists to equate "fittest" with "'best,'" giving it "a moral flavour." However, he accurately states that "in cosmic nature...what is 'fittest' depends on the conditions" (81). These conditions often demand unethical behavior for survival. Therefore, Huxley asserts that "the

practice of that which is ethically best...involves a course of conduct which, in all respects, is opposed to that which leads to success in the cosmic struggle for existence"

(82). To clarify this point, Huxley refers to "the fanatical individualism" of his day that incorrectly uses evolution to support its morality (82). Throughout his writing, Spencer uses evolution to support his preference for industrial capitalism. In attacking "the propounders of...the 'ethics of evolution,'" Huxley clearly means Spencer (80).

Beginning with his first books, Letters on the Proper Sphere of Government and Social Statics, Spencer always included an analysis of the way societies grow and operate. Therefore, his unplanned move to sociology is consistent with his evolutionary philosophy. The above example shows that even in his Psychology, he integrates some insights into society, especially given that a major strength of his psychological analysis is his location of the mind in its physical environment. In his Study of Sociology Spencer states that he entered sociological study because of the fuzzy thinking about society that is leading to reckless legislation. Early in the book he asserts:

Minds in which the conceptions of social actions are thus rudimentary, are also minds ready to harbour wild

hopes of benefits to be achieved by administrative agencies. In each such mind there seems to be the unexpressed postulate that every evil in a society admits of cure; and that the cure lies within the reach of law. (2)

Spencer believes that a "scientific" approach to society, where level heads will rationally investigate social problems, will prevent people from thoughtlessly imposing foolish laws onto society. For Spencer the solution to social upheaval is evolution. Unfortunately for him, many political leaders in Victorian England were not so patient. He says that they refuse "to look beyond the immediate mitigation of misery" (2). Like the political leaders, Huxley believed that "the ethical progress of society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process,...but in combating it" (82). Thus, Huxley offered a direct alternative to Spencer's evolution through laissez-faire, clearly stating that people are obligated to act in defiance of seemingly natural forces.

The underlying point to Spencer's opposition to social legislation is his belief in the powers of the market to inevitably better people's lives along with his utopian social evolution. Even as early as Social Statics, Spencer based his belief in an ideal society where conflict will

disappear and thus laws will no longer need to exist on the hope that the unfit will gradually become extinct. Of course social legislation only serves to postpone this inexorable and necessary process. Therefore, the leaders, who are overly obsessed with legislating social problems, are trying to defy nature which is as inconceivable as plans can be. Spencer's sociological work would represent his biggest influence in the United States as the next chapter will show. All of his ideas would have a powerful impact across the Atlantic. However, given the economic crises brought by industrialization, Spencer's reflections on society would be very influential on both his American followers and dissenters.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE CONTEXT OF SPENCER'S AMERICAN FAME

The person most responsible for bringing Herbert Spencer's work to the United States was Edward Livingston Youmans who created and edited The Popular Science Monthly. Spencer's need to finance the writing of his Synthetic Philosophy caused him to see the United States as a possible source for more subscribers. For this purpose, Spencer engaged an American named E.A. Silsbee to contact prospective American publishers (Autobiography II 61). Silsbee introduced Spencer's work to Youmans, who sent the philosopher a letter, dated February 23, 1860. In that letter Youmans informed Spencer that disseminating the philosopher's ideas would be more difficult than he anticipated because at the time Spencer was "almost unknown to the people" (Duncan I 128-9).

Nevertheless, through Youmans' efforts, Spencer became quite well known to some of the most prominent thinkers in the United States. By May 1860 the subscription list for Spencer's series included some of the most important names in American intellectual and political circles: Asa Gray, Horace Greeley, Charles Sumner, and Henry Ward Beecher (Duncan I 131). Spencer's eclectic knowledge is exemplified by the diverse figures on his list: a

biologist, journalist, politician, and clergyman. This eclecticism would become a major reason for Spencer's general appeal; his unification philosophy could be applied to many different fields of thought. A variety of writers and thinkers weighed in on it, creating debates between people of different disciplines. The central thread that runs throughout Spencer's work is evolutionary theory. His use of this theory would get him much attention in the United States.

This chapter will center on the dissemination of Spencer's ideas in the United States along with the people who participated in that dissemination, focusing especially on the work of two of Spencer's main American disciples and one of his main critics: John Fiske, William Graham Sumner, and Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. Spencer's belief that societies naturally evolve through the free market appealed to a post-Civil War United States that was skeptical of government programs; therefore, Spencer's ideas perfectly fit the temperament of the postwar milieu. Americans embraced Spencer's concept of evolution more so because they wanted to believe it rather than for any inherent truth it might have had.

That Spencer's philosophy had the imprimatur of scientific reasoning only served to reinforce people's sense of its validity. However, by the turn of the century, reform writers like Lester Ward and Henry George appropriated social "science" from the Spencerians, giving their dynamic view of social development more credibility. These thinkers, along with the economic disruptions and hardships of the era, prompted many to question Spencer's ideas by the end of the century. Because of the social chaos of the era, Americans were no longer satisfied with Spencer's version of evolution because the suffering outweighed whatever long-term benefits it brought. As will be shown in later chapters, the realist novelists would offer characters that represent people's insecurity over Spencer's brand of social evolution. All of these factors revealed that by the early 1900's, the temperament had changed and with it Spencer's popularity began its decline.

The main lesson of Spencer's rise and fall in the United States is that philosophy represents a person's, or in this case, a society's desires and interests rather than any inherent value the philosophy might have. William James voices such a view in his book Pragmatism when he claims that "The history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments" (488). When

James lists examples of what he considers "temperamental thinkers," Spencer is on the list (489). William Graham Sumner exemplifies the standard view of a Spencerian temperament because he appears to offer an objective and unflinching view of social development that could be summarized in his phrase "root hog or die" (qtd. in Phelps 661).

In reality Spencer's philosophy is an optimistic one, predicting that people's suffering will result in an ideal society where only the fit survive. In his work Spencer downplays the suffering and emphasizes the satisfying future wrought by the suffering. Therefore, Robert C. Bannister questions Sumner's belief in Spencer's ideas. Both Spencer and Sumner criticized palliative measures that sought to regulate the market in order to mitigate the suffering of the poor. This criticism was one aspect of the philosophy known as "social Darwinism," which was perhaps Spencer's most famous contribution to American discourse. It combines Spencer's belief (as articulated in Social Statics and First Principles) in the progressive development of society through business activity with Darwin's emphasis on the conflict and struggle between members of a species and species with other species.

The end result of this development through struggle is the "survival of the fittest" as coined by Spencer in The Principles of Biology (530). In applying his theory to human society, Spencer defined the fittest as the financial successes of a particular society. Darwin adopted this term, thus revealing an apparent connection between Darwin's concept of natural selection and Spencer's version of social evolution (Richards 292). However, Spencer's description of an orderly social development remains a crucial difference between his and Darwin's theory. Over the years critics have debated social Darwinism's validity as a coherent philosophy and its influence in the period. Irvin G. Wylie minimizes its importance. He argues that the capitalist "success cult" derived more from the Protestant work ethic than any Darwinian influence. However, he does not examine the general intellectual context of the period, instead focusing mainly on self-help manuals of the time (83-6).

Many other critics such as Bannister, Donald Bellomy, and T.J. Jackson Lears have questioned the existence of social Darwinism; Bannister and Bellomy have questioned Sumner's belief in the philosophy as well as his connection to Spencer. Bellomy's "tentative conclusion" is that social Darwinism "was not a broad cultural phenomenon at

all." To prove his point, he cites the first reference to social Darwinism by an American writer as 1903, suggesting that the name was nonexistent in the late nineteenth century (2). The key figure in both defining the term and in showing its influence in the era is Richard Hofstadter and his Social Darwinism in American Thought first published in 1944 and then revised in 1950. In his introduction for the revised edition, Hofstadter carefully qualifies the use of the term. He says, "The social-Darwinian generation, if we may call it that, was a generation that had to learn to live with and accommodate to startling revelations" (4). Later he asserts that the era's dominant social thought "can be called 'social Darwinism'" (6). In referring to social Darwinism," he says "if we can call it that" and uses the passive voice, "can be called," never arguing for the term's preponderance in the period.

However, this awareness does not detract from the primacy of the ideas in the late nineteenth century. Whether or not they are linked under the term "social Darwinism," grounding the validity of laissez-faire economics in the objective truth of science constituted a popular form of analysis in the period. Furthermore, Fiske, Sumner, and Youmans employed science to oppose

ameliorative measures for the poor and working class. Spencer was the originator of this analysis whatever it is called. Later in the chapter, Sumner's ideas will be discussed in more detail, showing his firm belief in a scientific laissez-faire.

Spencer's ideas triggered battles between Christians and secular evolutionists, between theological and reform academics, between free market advocates and political reformers. In these debates Spencer's ideas tended to cut one way towards the secular evolutionist who lobbied for university reform and laissez-faire economics. These types wielded Spencer's thinking to support their intuitive sense of correct social organization. However, William James's idea of personality in philosophy demonstrates the point that seemingly empirical philosophies tend to exist merely to reinforce people's own inclinations. The chapter will be divided between the different debates that Spencer's ideas engendered. Before investigating those debates and the way that Spencer's ideas were disseminated through them, I will explain the post-Civil War socio-historical context.

## The United States 1860-1870

The text that initiated its own debate was Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species, published in November 1859, less than a year before the list of prominent subscribers (Shi 68). At the book's publication the New York Times predicted that Darwin's thesis would bring "a radical reconstruction of the fundamental doctrines of natural history" (3). Darwin's text, with its promise of controversy, helped lay the foundation for the reception of Spencer's ideas. This controversy, in addition to the general intellectual, social and economic climate of the country in the post-Civil War era, were the main reasons for Spencer's enthusiastic reception in the United States.

It is commonly agreed among historians and theorists that the Civil War was the most critical event in reshaping American life of the nineteenth century. In addition to creating a new political and social landscape, the Civil War changed the intellectual climate of the nation. In his influential study of American intellectual life before, during, and after the war, The Inner Civil War, George Frederickson argues that the major philosophical shift was from a romantic commitment to humanitarian causes to a disillusioned materialism. Frederickson states "The war

was shaping a generation which would have little respect for the broad enthusiasms of their elders, which would think in more practical or 'pragmatic' terms." He further asserts that this generation redefined the idea of "duty" from social commitment to a belief in "efficiency" (172). Similarly, in The Metaphysical Club Louis Menand highlights the "generational shift" that "the men who had been through the war" experienced. This shift was from a belief in "moralism" and "humanitarianism" to a respect for "professionalism" and "expertise" (59). As Frederickson demonstrates, the war was waged by a very fallible government, alternately corrupt and autocratic in the prosecuting of its war aims. This along with the overly sentimental beliefs of war's honor and greatness led to a type of fall from innocence which greatly affected many Americans' mindset.

This new mindset would create a very positive environment for the reception of Spencer's ideas. Hofstadter characterizes this mindset as conservative (5). Spencer's concept of social evolution grounded in science provided a legitimate justification for the postwar generation's suspicion of government. One of Spencer's famous subscribers, Henry Ward Beecher wrote a letter to

Spencer dated June 1866 in which he informed the philosopher that:

the peculiar condition of American society has made your writings far more fruitful and quickening here than in Europe. We are conscious of great obligations to you ... respecting your eminent service to us, and to the cause of the emancipation and enlightenment of the human mind. (qtd. in Duncan I 168)

In contrasting the American intellectual landscape to that in Europe, Beecher shows that Spencer's ideas were uniquely suited to the specific social climate in the United States. However, Beecher was the rare theologian to enthusiastically embrace both Spencer's ideas and evolutionary theory. In general clergymen would be the main obstacles to the acceptance of evolutionary theory and, more specifically, Spencer's version of it.

### Spencer and Religion

Both Spencer and religion offer ultimate explanations for human existence. Charles Hodge, professor at Princeton Theological Seminary and a major Presbyterian theologian, probably spoke for most religious people when in 1872 he equated evolution with atheism. Later, in his book What is

Darwinism? Hodge argued that evolution "banishes God from the universe" due to its contradiction of the Genesis creation story (174). Similarly, an unsigned editorial in the American Quarterly Church Review in 1865 asked "If this hypothesis be true, then is the Bible 'an unbearable fiction,' fabricated during successive ages?" (197) Most Christians did not want to contemplate such a possibility and, therefore, Hodge and others decided to dismiss the theory as false, indicating that evolution and Christianity were in competition in explaining the origin and future of life. Which one people chose depended on their own predilection.

All of these attacks were directed at Darwin's general theory. However, once Spencer became the most visible purveyor of evolutionary theory in America, criticisms became directed more personally at him. Spencer's reference to "the unknowable" was his way of avoiding religious criticism and reconciling religion and science by arguing that there exists a "force" behind all activity which is "unknowable." However, many felt his unknowable to be too vague and abstract a concept to be worshipped, and believed that this idea was just another form of atheism. In 1863 a Connecticut clergyman, J.E. Barnes, declared that Spencer's concept enslaved

prospective worshippers before an esoteric power which, at the same time, offered inadequate comfort to its worshippers (724-25, 28). Spencer's idea of the unknowable could not satisfy the need for a personable force to whom people could appeal in times of distress.

The most cogent example of such an argument came in an unsigned review of First Principles in the Christian Examiner in March 1866. Youmans claimed this article as "the ablest thing yet against Spencer" and he worried that this essay might dampen Spencer's appeal (Duncan I 168). The review succeeds because the author subjects Spencer's ideas to rigorous philosophical inquiry. The reviewer criticizes Spencer's concept of the unknowable, but also questions whether or not Spencer can realize his task of unifying all knowledge under the banner of evolutionary theory. The author spends most of the review distinguishing between Spencer's ideas and those of Auguste Comte, the creator of positivism. Spencer would spend a fair amount of time engaged in such an activity; he vehemently denied that he was a positivist. However, the author asserts that they are both engaged in "the unification of all knowledge," finding that Comte is more perceptive than Spencer in realizing that all knowledge cannot be unified under one rule.

The critic asserts that Spencer has also "pushed" his unification thesis "to the very verge of theology, in his doctrine of the Absolute, and in his attempted reconciliation of 'Science and Religion'" (239). However, Spencer's religion of evolution lacks spiritual sustenance. The author subsequently claims that Spencer's project excludes "from the universe all real or spiritual personality, whether human or superhuman; and consciously or unconsciously, Mr. Spencer conducts to a most rigid and through-going Materialism" (247). The author here uses materialism in opposition to spiritualism; however, it also is a synonym for atheism, since that is the author's chief criticism of Spencer's reconciliation of religion and science. Youmans correctly worried that the atheist label would harm Spencer's chances for success in the United States.

Such a reconciliation drove the work of John Fiske, one of Spencer's most devoted disciples. Fiske's career would in some ways mirror that of his intellectual mentor. Both were marginalized by the academic elite in their respective countries and both faced financial hardships in trying to publish and circulate their ideas. Spencer needed the money from his American readers while Fiske had to depend on his family, more specifically, his stepfather

(Berman 64). This marginalization derived from their wide breadth of general knowledge which existed at the expense of a thorough specialized knowledge. Thomas Huxley and Charles Darwin were scientists, while Spencer was a philosopher who dabbled, at times recklessly, in science. Similarly, Fiske was also a philosopher whose evolutionary theorizing came not from scientists like Darwin, but from a philosopher like Spencer. The chief difference between the two consists in Spencer never wanting an academic position while Fiske pined for a Harvard appointment that never materialized (Berman 123).

Despite his financial hardships, Fiske was a prolific writer who managed to circulate his ideas in many different venues. His most representative work is his four-volume Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy, which was initially written in 1869 as a series of lectures at the request of the new Harvard president, Charles William Eliot and subsequently published in book form in 1874. Fiske knew that the relationship between (and reconciliation of) religion and science was one of the more popular issues which the rise of evolution had spawned (Berman 103). Moreover, this reconciliation perfectly suited his optimistic temperament as he could show that two seemingly opposing systems of thought were truly similar. With this in mind Fiske

concluded the work with an optimistic assertion that once people cast away their fears and logically examined the conflict between religion and science, they would realize that there really is no conflict. He asserts that science and religion are both preoccupied with "the cause of truth, of goodness, and of beauty; `the glory of God, and the relief of man's estate'" (Outlines IV 372). Of course, this was not such a valid insight as the conception of God's glory does not show up in any of Spencer's texts. Spencer's unknowable may not even exist which makes it hard for the unknowable to radiate much "glory."

In most of the final section of Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy Fiske moves from defending the religious perspective, by asserting throughout that a "cosmist" believes in divine power, to critiquing the dominant form of Christian religion, the belief in a humanlike God, what he calls "anthropomorphism." In defending religion, he also attempts to defend Spencer against the criticism of atheism. Fiske uses Spencer's idea of gradual change in order to argue that the true evolutionist does not oppose religious belief, because such an opposition constitutes too dramatic a break from past human behavior. He asserts "The evolutionist, therefore, believing that faith in some controlling ideal is essential to right living ... does not

go about pointing out to the orthodox the inconsistencies which he discerns in their system of beliefs" (Outlines IV 360). Fiske attacks Auguste Comte's "extravagant ... proposals for remodeling religion and society" because they ignore the religious perspective and because they attempt to posit science as the "new religion" (Outlines IV 350-1). Ironically, in this analysis, Fiske manages to cast himself, and Spencer as the allies of religion by attacking Comte's myopia on the subject, in effect distinguishing Spencer's evolutionary theory from Comte's positivism. However, in attacking anthropomorphism, Fiske was attempting to "remodel" Christianity in a most fundamental way; it is a remodeling that most Christians would not tolerate.

Fiske also anticipates the criticism that evolutionary theory lacks an ethical element. This argument has a long history. One of its early adherents was a student of Thomas Huxley's, St. George Mivart. Fiske cites Mivart as one who fears that evolution "leaves morality without a theoretical basis" (Outlines IV 314). Mivart and others have argued that evolutionary theory offers a view of life which consists of amoral struggle in which brute force, rather than the morally just, wins out. Such a view of the

natural world was bad enough; when applied to the human world, this concept of evolution became very scary to some.

In his chapter on "Religion as Adjustment" Fiske counters this view by arguing that those who are not biologically fit are also not morally fit, essentially bestowing a cosmic morality on evolution. Fiske asserts that religion and evolution both enforce "the certainty that maladjustment will be followed by the suffering or the degradation of the wrong-doer himself, and usually by the suffering of others who are innocent" (Outlines IV 308). For the Christian, sin represents moral maladjustment; in effect, the sinner has not accepted a Christian morality. For the evolutionist, moral transgressions lead to the physical suffering of the sinner. Fiske equates a moral degeneration with a physical degeneration. Moreover, Fiske argues that nature is more unforgiving of moral wrongs than a Christian god because no amount of praying or repentance can alter a physical transgression (Outlines IV 309-10).

Fiske points out that evolution has far more powerful sanctions against wickedness than even Christianity. This may be Fiske's most original contribution to evolutionary theory as he sought a common ground for evolution and religion through moral judgment. Such a morality could appeal to Christians looking for a way to reform humanity

from its moral failings. Also, while it is a bit of a stretch, it is possible that God could work through biological processes. Still, Christians could not be completely satisfied with the harsh and uncompromising punishment meted out by Fiske's evolution. An anthropomorphic god could dole out forgiveness and direct people to the right course of life. In an evolutionary schema there is only decline and death with a possibility of meeting the unknowable.

This latter point parallels the type of analysis which left evolution open to Christian attacks. One of Fiske's arguments in asserting that science offers a more uncompromising ethics than religion is his disregard of a humanlike Christian God. In Fiske's (and Spencer's) defense of religion this point is usually the most problematic for Christians. Spencer articulated this position with his concept of the "unknowable." Fiske took up this concept in his own work. He argues that the deity is literally "unknowable just in so far as it is not manifested to consciousness through the phenomenal world ... unknowable in so far as infinite and absolute" (Outlines IV 317). Although Fiske says that God cannot be known through empirical phenomena, he proceeds to say that God is "knowable" in an intuitive manner "as the Power which is

disclosed in every throb of the mighty rhythmic life of the universe" and "as the eternal Source of a Moral Law which is implicated with each action of our lives" (Outlines IV 317).

Fiske anticipated Christian criticism when he claimed that "it will doubtless be urged that such religion is too abstract, too coldly scientific, to have any general influence upon action" (Outlines IV 315). In response, he asserts that those who "intelligently followed" his argument will realize that his form of theism "is in every way more satisfactory alike to head and heart" than anthropomorphism (Outlines IV 316). Although he anticipates possible objections to his de-anthropomorphism, he does not respond with a very convincing explanation other than to say that "intelligent" Christians should like his version of god better. By ridding the world of the personality of God, Spencer and Fiske leave the world with the "esoteric" abstraction that the clergyman J.E. Barnes descried as atheistic. Moreover, in Fiske's stern evolutionary ethics, such a deity lacked the comforting elements which Barnes and others believed made the Christian god worth worshipping.

Fiske was clearly trying to straddle the very thin line between a very real god and the more conceptual god of

Spencer. Predictably, his attempt met with the same resistance as Spencer's. H.W. Holland writing in The Nation declared that "The vague awe with which we turn to this impersonal, unchangeable, unknowable Essence of Cosmism, seems but ill-fitted to replace the martyr-zeal of Christianity" (137). Religious writers were even harsher towards Fiske's ideas. John Bascom, a liberal minister, considered "offensive" Fiske's conception of anthropomorphism as Christian "mythology" (619). There exists much to reinforce critics like Bascom. The reluctance to embrace a human Christian god would inevitably be a problem for most Christians, even liberal ones. Fiske asserts that those who yearn for the humanlike Christian deity are "as wise as little children who, when they have looked into a mirror, turn it around to see what is behind it" (Outlines IV 318). This brutally condescending assertion could only offend Christians who yearned for a human-like god. Moreover, while disclaiming any desire to refute Christianity, he maintains that the "absolutely perfect state of society would be ... a state in which the religious sense would have no further function to subserve" (Outlines IV 359). Fiske sees religious faith as a temporary inconvenience, an example of humans' lack of evolution. Although he says that a completely secular

society is utopian, just envisioning the time when religion would not be useful (or practiced) was also bound to anger many Christians.

### Spencer and the Battle over Reform

While treated rudely in his native England, Spencer's scientific justifications for the free market arrived in the United States at an appropriate time. The postwar period contained much economic conflict and disruption. Industrialization, which had begun before the war, accelerated rapidly after the war. It conferred many benefits on the American public, including the use of electrical power, increased train travel, and improved modes of communication. However, industrialization came with costs. It led to a boom and bust economic cycle in which growth was often erratic (Cashman 39). Moreover, a depression began in 1873 and did not cease until the end of the decade. To secure their own fortunes during unstable economic times industrialists often formed cooperatives which served to minimize competition and fix prices (Cashman 39).

Conversely, laborers experienced the greatest hardships during industrial development, especially in

economically troubled times. Even in prosperity industrial workers experienced long hours, dangerous working conditions and low pay (Cashman 100). During the 1873 depression three million unemployed workers dwelled in shantytowns on the outskirts of many cities because only twenty percent of the workforce was working steadily (Cashman 107). Therefore, beginning in 1866 with the National Labor Union and continuing until the end of the century, workers began to form cooperatives of their own in the form of unions which demanded higher wages and better working conditions. If these demands were not met, the unions struck. Some of the strikes and protests, like the Molly Maguire coal strike in 1871 and the Tompkins Square rally in 1874, turned violent, as the companies attempted to disrupt the strikes and break the unions (Cashman 107-8).

For many Americans, Spencer's concept of gradual change was a welcome viewpoint. The Civil War, boom and bust economic cycles, and labor unrest all contributed to substantial anxiety in the American people. After the violence of the war, most wanted to proceed with the business of living and bettering their own fortunes. This belief included a resistance to government interference in alleviating laborers' suffering because people tended to

associate the workers' causes with violence due to strikes like that of the Molly Maguires. Spencer's theory indicated that all of this strife would result in stability and prosperity if only society were left to evolve. When Henry George asked Spencer disciple Edward Livingston Youmans what could be done to solve the problems brought by industrialization, Youmans replied, "Nothing! You and I can do nothing at all. It's all a matter of evolution. We can only wait for evolution" (qtd. in Fine 44). Spencer appealed to the hope in people that evolution would come and stabilize the uncertain economy and society. Spencer clothed these hopes in the veil of scientific rhetoric. Similarly, as chapter three will reveal, Frank Norris appropriated such Spencerian optimism in the ambiguous ending to his tragedy The Octopus.

By the 1880's reformers started appropriating scientific discourse in order to criticize the concept of natural evolution through laissez-faire capitalism. Lester F. Ward was the most prominent thinker to represent this new direction. His book The Dynamic Sociology was first published in 1883; yet, the second edition in 1897 generated more attention (Boller Jr. 65). Ward directly attacked the application of evolutionary theory to society by claiming that human society differed greatly from the

natural world. One of these differences consisted in humanity's ability to alter and improve the course of nature. Sidney Fine implies that Ward differed from Spencer in his situating human agency as a key element in social development (255).

Ward also attacked the idea that natural selection was an efficient process. He used reproduction as an example to show that nature is typically wasteful. He pointed out that for animals to typically produce one or two surviving offspring, they must lay hundreds of eggs (73-76).

Moreover, Sidney Fine demonstrates that Ward saw government as an instrument to solve society's problems if it is used in a rational and "scientific" manner (258). Both Spencer and Ward could claim evolution to support their perspective. Still, Ward was open to a variety of options to solve America's pressing social problems. Social reformers like George and Ward were willing to experiment with new ideas which is the real the real example of scientific inquiry. They believed that an active human mind can have a positive impact on society. Conversely,

Spencer and his followers adhered to their theory despite social chaos and disruption. As Ward's experience shows, Sociology grew largely because of Spencer's anti-interventionist challenge. Sociologist Charles H. Cooley

asserted, "I imagine that nearly all of us who took up sociology between 1870, say, and 1890 did so at the instigation of Spencer" (qtd. in Hofstadter 20). Similarly, Louis Menand points out that "social science essentially created itself as a discipline by reacting against the laissez-faire views associated with ... Herbert Spencer" because their perspective offered more potential for intellectual growth due to their belief that "scientific intelligence" can direct social development (302).

One of Ward's chief adversaries was Yale sociologist William Graham Sumner, who believed that industrialism's problems should be left for evolution to solve. Hofstadter characterizes Sumner as a doctrinaire social Darwinist and as a strict follower of Spencer's. However, his position was more complicated than Fiske's, which is perhaps one reason why he was a far more successful academic than Fiske. In an 1874 review of The Study of Sociology, Sumner praises the empirical rigor of Spencer's sociology. He states that Spencer "presents history as a social evolution in which ... the social outcome of a nation's life is a resultant of a vast number of forces, each of which must be estimated for what it was in its day, not for what it would be now" (qtd. in Starr 345). Like Fiske and Ward,

Spencer's work influenced Sumner to find a "science" of society; however, unlike Fiske and more like Ward, Sumner did not attempt to unify all knowledge. Instead, he focused on developing an analytical approach that would explain the ways society developed.

Sumner approached his task of creating a "science" of society with the appearance of absolute objectivity. He begins his essay "Sociology" by describing the triumph of science as an independent area of thought. He explains that science's growing acceptance has given humanity more power in dealing with the vicissitudes of life, that science can function as a tool to improve people's lives. However, Sumner points out that sociology is still struggling to attain a scientific legitimacy (9). In order to further this cause, he defines sociology as an objective and rational form of inquiry by asserting that sociology distinguishes "the rules of right social living from the facts and laws which prevail by nature in the constitution and functions of society" (10).

Sumner's term "right social living" does not refer to morality, but to science. What is right is what can be proven by rational inquiry into human behavior. Sumner's idea parallels Spencer's concept of "the moral sense." Sumner fell back into the evolutionary quandary of ethics

that vexed Darwin and Spencer. Trying to objectively discover the right way of living is doomed to fail because there can be many ways of "right social living" depending on the individual's inclinations. Such diversity is the essence of living in a democratically free society. Sumner's goal reflects the way the new evolutionary philosophy affected people. Someone of Sumner's intellect truly believes that scientific inquiry could answer an essentially subjective question.

Even "right social living" involves inevitable suffering. Sumner believes that economic development, though unable to alleviate everyone's pain, makes life as good as it can be. Therefore, the capitalist economy should be allowed to freely run its course. However, Sumner ignores the equally proven truth that while suffering may be inevitable, so is the human desire to alleviate it. This idea was a major point of contention in evolutionary circles, even Darwin's. Not long after Darwin published On the Origin of Species many of his scientific colleagues were challenging the application of natural selection to humanity because people most often want to save their fellow humans not to destroy them (Richards 161-76). When someone mentioned this point to Sumner, he retorted that the "unfit" have a responsibility to try and

survive. If they do not survive, Sumner suggested that it is because of their own doing ("The Survival of the Fittest" 225). He claims that people who try helping those who are suffering are impeding the work of natural processes.

This assertion parallels Spencer's arguments against government interference in the economy. Moreover, Sumner titles his essay "Survival of the Fittest," showing his debt to Spencer. Still, Sumner cannot account for people's desire to alleviate suffering except to say that a human sentiment is misguided. Because he believes that the human desire to help is incorrect and unnatural, Sumner opposes any "ism" which attempts to mold a nation's institutions to some abstract concept of good ("State Interference" 104). Here he shares Fiske's suspicion of radical change. In his time capitalism was creating sweeping change. However, Sumner believes that unrestrained capitalism is a natural and socially beneficial process.

In the end Sumner thought that this process benefited the worker. He expressed certain sympathies with what he thought was the interests of the working class. His essay "The Forgotten Man" shows an almost direct Spencerian influence since Sumner praises "the honest laborer, ready to earn his living by productive work" (119). Like

Spencer's early work in The Proper Sphere of Government, Sumner posits the laborer as the victim of both the parasitic poor and the calculating politician, who conspire to take his or her earnings for their own devices. Sumner aligns the laborer with the wealthy business owner because laws which protect the owner's ability to accumulate capital will also aid the laborer in his ability to work and save. They are united against the "philanthropists" and "sentimentalists" who want to hinder capital accumulation in the name of the unmotivated poor (134). Spencer's use of this idea derived in large part from his middle-class suspicion of aristocracy. Hofstadter claims that Sumner's position reflects a Calvinist and individualist work ethic against a paternalistic government (37). Spencer and Sumner reflect similar sensibilities here with the exception of Sumner's Calvinism. Both Spencer and Sumner are united in their worship of individualism against a large interventionist government.

In "The Forgotten Man" essay Sumner inexplicably ignores the fact that the interests of seamstresses who earn fifty cents in twelve hours could conflict with those of the mill owner who pays them so little. Sumner's own "science" of society leads him to miss the point that the capitalist earns more profit through paying his workers as

little as possible (132-3). Conversely, in his book What Social Classes Owe to Each Other Sumner acknowledged that the relationship between business owners and workers is alternately antagonistic and mutual (74). Rather than merely dismissing the workers' complaints, he examines the issue with an objectivity that begins to resemble that wielded in scientific analysis. Yet, in claiming that employer/employee interests are both governed "by the universal law of supply and demand," he elevates an economic theory to the level of natural law, again reinforcing his blind devotion to a single economic theory. This be found throughout Sumner's work and it represents an intellectual blind spot which prevents him from examining America's economic conflicts in a truly objective, scientific, manner despite his claims to the contrary.

This devotion does not prevent him, however, from realizing that employers have an advantage over employees in the marketplace. Sumner declares that if employers wisely use the capital at their disposal, they will win greater profit than the employees who merely live day to day, earning enough to fulfill certain basic needs. Winning this greater profit requires that the employers anticipate and respond to economic developments. Conversely, because the employees lack the knowledge to

anticipate these economic trends, he believes that the employers have an unfair advantage. Therefore, he holds that unions fulfill a necessary purpose within the market (77-8). Moreover, because he views the competitive nature of the market as a type of war, Sumner upheld workers' right to strike if they are unhappy, only qualifying that strikes are justified if they are successful and wrong when they are not (80).

#### Spencer and Social Darwinism

Perhaps the term "social Darwinism" represents a distraction and thus should be discarded. However, Bellomy demonstrates that it has entered the public realm in such a popular way that Walter Mondale referred to it when he announced his 1984 candidacy for president (15). Thus, it probably will not easily disappear. Spencer and Sumner have been chiefly identified with social Darwinism. Their perspectives differ to some extent; however, they both employed science to defend the free market against reformist legislation, in the process trumpeting the wealthy as the biologically fit. This is the meaning of social Darwinism for the purpose of this study. Donald Bellomy and Robert C. Bannister argue against Sumner's

label as a social Darwinist, asserting that he was more clear-headed than most doctrinaire social Darwinists.

Bannister's view of Sumner rests on the fact that Sumner did not use Darwinian terms very often and that "he was not a 'business hireling' but a spokesman of an older middle class threatened by a variety of developments in American life" (98). Bannister further points out that Sumner "developed a passion for facts over theory, and a bias against metaphysics" (99). In his examination of Sumner, Bellomy also distinguishes between Darwin and Sumner (34-37). This is a valid distinction; however, Spencer also differed from Darwin in his brand of evolution; thus, this distinction does not get very far except to say that Sumner should not be associated with the "Darwinist" part of social Darwinism, of course neither should Spencer. In Sumner's defense, the above discussion shows a thinker trying to examine the problems of society with some objectivity. In his discussion of the conflicts between employer and worker, Sumner supports workers forming unions and initiating strikes to press their demands. He even argues that the unions, rather than the government, should regulate the economy by mandating eight-hour work days, greater safety rules, and child labor laws.

He even claimed that unions should institute public schools (What Social Classes Owe to Each Other 82-3).

Still, Bannister's arguments do not hold up. Although Sumner's "social Darwinism" is complicated, he never altered his position on government regulation of business. While this may not be a "metaphysical" position as Bannister claims, Sumner is myopic when it comes to social legislation. His idea that unions should regulate the economy is not very "scientific" in its ignorance of social reality. While that position is consistent with Sumner's belief in unregulated capitalism, it ignores the fact that unions possessed little real power in the latter part of the nineteenth century. One look at the results of the strikes revealed companies attempting to break both strikes and unions with considerable public and private power. Whether or not government or unions instituted eight-hour work days, the companies opposed such a measure. While Sumner was not a "business hireling," he also opposed such measures, believing that "spontaneous forces" (read evolutionary forces) should be allowed to work ("The Absurd Effort to Make the World Over" 179). This latter statement shows Sumner as a reactionary defender of business who wielded science in order to come to his predetermined opposition to social legislation.

Also, Richard Hofstadter disagrees with Bannister's view of Sumner's empiricism, asserting that Sumner was mostly influenced by theories. Hofstadter points out that Sumner fused "three great products of western capitalist culture: the Protestant ethic, the doctrines of classical economics, and Darwin's natural selection" (37). Hofstadter labeled Sumner a social Darwinist. Similarly, Sumner directly stated that millionaires were products of "natural selection" ("The Concentration of Wealth: Its Economic Justification" 157). Hofstadter accurately shows that Sumner's ideas consisted of capitalist manifestos rather than scientific method. While Sumner was not as deductive as Spencer, he could be just as rigid in clinging to his views. Moreover, Sumner praised Spencer for creating a "science" of society and this scientific inquiry became a key ingredient in Sumner's defense of laissez-faire. Louis Menand dubs Spencer "Sumner's philosophical master" (302). Spencer's use of evolution to explain certain human behaviors inspired a type of mania in American thinkers to discover the objective "laws" by which society worked. Sumner was one of these people who were searching for science to defend their own personal biases.

Exemplifying this point, Sumner declared that "monopolies exist in nature" because they represent an effective way to manage capital ("Democracy and Plutocracy" 147).

As for social Darwinism, Andrew Carnegie, one of the "fittest" in terms of economic success, believed in it. Instead of employing the term, Carnegie dubbed it the "law of competition," admitting that society pays a "great" price for the law. However, he asserts that "while the law may be sometimes hard for the individual, it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest in every department" ("The Gospel of Wealth" 16). Although social Darwinism may not have been as holistic and dominant as some critics believe, the fact that people like Fiske, Carnegie, and Sumner appropriated many facets of it shows that it had an influence in late nineteenth century America.

#### Spencer and The Law

Most critics would echo Louis Menand in his assertion that Spencer's ideas were "fading" in the United States by 1894 (302). There certainly exists much truth to this assertion. Both Henry George and Lester Ward criticized the social development theories of Spencer and Sumner.

George argued for a property tax on high value land (405-6) while Ward questioned Spencer's application of evolution to human society. Unlike Ward, George brought an ethical almost Christian critique to the growing inequality between rich and poor (Thomas 60-1). Still both views were anathema to Spencerians; in fact Spencer openly repudiated George's ideas (Duncan I 305). Also, American politics reflected a more activist sensibility. Congress passed the Sherman Antitrust Act in 1890 which made trusts illegal (Cashman 360). On the local level, political reform became more widespread. In the 1890's Detroit mayor Hazen Pingree inaugurated the drive for public ownership of utility companies (Summers 286; Cashman 372).

Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. was a contemporary of both Fiske and Sumner. His father was a poet and a professor at the Harvard Medical School. In a letter to Morris Cohen in which he reflects back on the intellectual atmosphere at Harvard before the war, Holmes recalled that although his father was a scientist, he still possessed "a certain softness of attitude" which his son did not share. In the letter Holmes also said:

The difference was in the air, although perhaps only a few of my time felt it. The Origin of Species I think came out while I was in college— H. Spencer had

announced his intention to put the universe into our pockets— I hadn't read either of them, to be sure, but as I say it was in the air. ("The Holmes-Cohen Correspondence" 14-15)

Holmes was a college student during the early years of Spencer's American influence. While at home convalescing from one of his war wounds, Holmes was taking volumes of Spencer and James and John Stuart Mill out of the Harvard library (Bowen 187). Even though Holmes identifies Spencer's ideas with those of his more skeptical generation, his father's "softer" evolution had more in common with Spencer's. In applying evolutionary theory to human behavior, the elder Holmes argued that people were necessarily improving as Spencer had argued in Social Statics. In one installment of his Poet at The Breakfast-Table series Holmes Sr. proclaimed "science comes to substitute the RISE of man" for the Biblical fall of man (182). Perhaps due to his war experiences, Holmes Jr. viewed evolution more pessimistically. In an American Law Review article published in 1873 Holmes examined the case of some British gas-stokers who were imprisoned due to their leading a strike.

In the article Holmes highlights a central contradiction in Spencer's thought. He thinks it odd that while

Spencer believes that societies develop through a gradual and uninhibited adaptation to environments, Spencer rigidly and willfully opposes government legislation of the economy. Holmes criticizes Spencer's attack on "class legislation" because Holmes sees Spencer as assuming a classless society. However, Holmes' pessimistic view of evolutionary struggle asserts that classes are involved in a type of war and that in legislation some classes will win and some will lose. Of course, Spencer was not concerned with class difference, thinking it reflected the fitness of those in the classes. Holmes asserts that laws would necessarily reflect the interests of the most powerful branches of society. He acknowledges that economic warfare could be ameliorated by people's empathy for their fellow beings; yet, he concludes that an individual would focus on his own interests instead of others' ("The Gas-Stokers' Strike" 50).

Spencer would have most likely agreed with these last points. Holmes continually said both directly and indirectly that the dominant powers in capitalist democracies were justified in exercising their power. He also believed that if people fulfill their own self-interest, society would inevitably improve. Still, Holmes expresses a more clear-sighted view of struggle than

Spencer or Sumner as he admits that government legislation could be a weapon in the economic war between classes, a point that neither Spencer nor Sumner could ever entertain due to their anti-government bias. Holmes, then, offers a more complete view of economic warfare than either Spencer or Sumner because he sees that either side of the battle should be able to use all resources at their disposal. If the working class could gather enough voters to support business regulation, then the workers can use that weapon to prevail.

The gas-stokers article anticipates Holmes' lifelong attempt to craft a more empirical evolutionary explanation of the law. In criticizing Spencer, Holmes reveals his aversion to an axiomatic explanation to human behavior. He would carry this sensibility into a criticism of legal formalism. In his lecture on "Early Forms of Liability," published in The Common Law in 1881, Holmes offers his now famous assertion, "The life of the law has not been logic: it has been experience" (5). Holmes' version of evolution emphasizes experience in the development of societies and species; Spencer tried to argue that his version of evolution included experience. However, he stresses ancestral inheritance over empirical experience. In The Common Law Holmes proceeded to assert that:

the prejudices which judges share with their fellow-men, have had a good deal more to do than the syllogism in determining the rules by which men should be governed. The law embodies the story of a nation's development through many centuries and it cannot be dealt with as if it contained only the axioms and corollaries of a book of mathematics. (5)

Holmes combines his opposition to legal formalism with an evolutionary perspective in order to argue that the law needs to consider people's lived experiences and, if necessary, adjust itself accordingly. In his gas-stokers article Holmes argued that Spencer did not consider this lived experience in creating his own theory; in effect Spencer was mistakenly guided by his own "general principles."

The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified on July 28, 1868. It was instituted to protect the rights of freed African-American slaves against persecution by their local counties or states. However, a group of Supreme Court justices interpreted the amendment economically rather than racially in the post-Civil War period. Justices Stephen Field, Rufus Peckham and David Brewer shared Spencer's repugnance at government regulation of the economy. Beginning in 1873 Justice Field construed

the Fourteenth Amendment's "due-process" clause as applying to people's right to engage in contract without state interference. This liberty to contract included individuals' right to engage in contracts without interference by labor unions or governments (Boller Jr. 170). Such an interpretation led to the reflexive protection of the interests of large corporations. Through repeated opinions, these justices began to convert both their colleagues on the Supreme Court as well as the state courts to their cause. The numbers bear out the justices' influence. Between 1868 and 1910 over six hundred Fourteenth Amendment cases had been heard by the Supreme Court; only twenty-eight of those involved the rights of African-Americans. Instead large corporations could use Field's interpretation of the amendment to successfully argue against laws which regulated their activities (Boller Jr. 172-3).

Given Holmes' criticism of Spencer and his own legal pragmatism, he disapproved of the way the courts were wielding a certain economic theory in legal adjudication. In his 1897 essay "The Path of the Law" he states that insecurity cloaked in logic is the imperative which drives those "who no longer hope to control the legislatures to look to the courts as expounders of Constitutions" (82).

He further offers a subtle reference to Field and his fellow Spencerians in asserting "that in some courts new principles have been discovered outside the bodies of those instruments, which may be generalized into acceptance of the economic doctrines which prevailed about fifty years ago" (82). Here Holmes uses his legal pragmatism to criticize Field and the rest's use of certain theories to impose the court's will on the legislatures which serve as the expression of the popular will. He also suggests that the justices' use of the theories do not represent the dominant viewpoint in the United States.

Five years after his "Path of the Law," essay President Roosevelt chose Holmes for the Supreme Court in 1902. By this time Field was no longer a member; however, Peckham and Brewer were. Also, by this point, the intellectual and social tide was speeding its flow against Spencer's ideas. The novelists of the period began adapting Spencer's ideas in order to offer bleak narratives of human suffering through evolution. In 1901 New York voters ousted Tammany Hall for the second time and Wisconsin elected a reform governor (Summers 286; Cashman 372). Nevertheless, Spencer's ideas were still accepted by Holmes' Supreme Court colleagues, which led to Holmes' dissent in the case of *Lochner v. New York* in 1905. The

case involved the right of the New York legislature to enact a law mandating a sixty-hour workweek and a ten-hour workday for bakers. A majority of the court, with an opinion by Peckham, used the Fourteenth Amendment to argue that the law violated the bakers' right to contract despite the fact that the law was being enacted to protect the bakers.

Holmes wrote a dissent in which he argues that "The Fourteenth Amendment does not enact Mr. Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics* ... a constitution is not intended to embody a particular economic theory, whether of paternalism and the organic relation of the citizen to the State or of laissez-faire" (149). Earlier in the opinion he states that "This case is decided upon an economic theory which a large part of the country does not entertain" (148). Holmes indicates the declining popularity of Spencer's ideas in the United States. Moreover, he argues against a tendentious interpretation of the Constitution, indicating that it was created for people of "differing viewpoints" rather than to reinforce the opinions of a few Supreme Court justices (149). In his opinion, Holmes attacks the general tendency to equate certain economic theories with the objective truth of science. In his own work Holmes applies the type of scientific reasoning, in which Sumner proclaimed to

believe, in order to question certain accepted notions of the law. Holmes, like his friend William James, presented a model for the way the scientific method could be used to expand the mode of inquiry in a nonscientific field of study. This new model signaled the decline of using scientific inquiry in an indiscriminate way as Spencer's followers had.

Richard Hofstadter declares that Spencer's popularity peaked with his visit to the United States which lasted from August to November of 1882 (34). That visit culminated in a banquet at Delmonico's in New York on November 9. T.J. Jackson Lears asserts that most of the speakers at the banquet displayed little knowledge of Spencer's ideas, thus questioning the legitimacy of Spencer's popularity among his social Darwinist American followers (22). Certainly many of the businessmen, like Andrew Carnegie, most likely did not read Spencer. In Carnegie's essay "Popular Illusions About Trusts" he argues for the necessity of business conglomeration by reversing one of Spencer's laws of evolution, claiming that evolution proceeds "from the heterogeneous to the homogeneous," clearly indicating his ignorance of Spencer's ideas (81).

Similarly, Spencer's visit to Carnegie's Pittsburgh demonstrated the gulf between the two. Throughout most of

his trip, Spencer suffered various physical and psychological maladies, revealing not the seemingly dynamic and inexhaustible author of thirty volumes of philosophy, but a quasi-invalid weakened by the smallest amount of social interaction. This version of Spencer came as a surprise to his American followers, especially Carnegie (Wall 384-5). When he proudly led Spencer on a tour of both his native Pittsburgh and his Bessemer steel plant, Spencer was nonplussed. He decried the pollution of the former and nearly collapsed from the noise and heat of the latter, concluding, "Six months residence here would justify suicide" (Wall 386).

Despite Carnegie's misunderstanding of Spencer's beliefs, the majority of the speakers at Delmonico's had read Spencer. Sumner in his own fashion thanked Spencer for creating a science of society, and declared that, "We still need the master to show us how to handle and apply its most fundamental doctrines" (36). Also, Fiske celebrated Spencer's articulation of a "power to which no limit in time or space is conceivable" (55). As he did in his earlier work, Fiske identified this power with God, proclaiming the harmonious union between evolution and religion. Lester Ward, who did not get to speak, later praised Spencer for his broad knowledge and his ability to

unify different fields (78). Although Ward clearly disagreed with Spencer's conclusions, Ward respected him for discovering certain ideas and presenting them to the world. Ward acknowledged that "the great demand of the age was a *synthetic philosophy*" (78). Not all of Spencer's American followers had read him; however, a great many did, and while they did not rigidly adhere to his principles, he provided them with enough intellectual heft to formulate their own ideas about religion, society, politics and law.

Often those formulations consisted in the reckless application of science to reinforce the thinkers' own biases. However, in reaction to those applications, thinkers like Holmes and Ward formulated some innovative ways of examining the world. Perhaps the slippery line between science and bias was no more evident than in Spencer's own address to his crowd of admirers at Delmonico's. After his long tour of the United States, his audience was most likely looking for an affirmation of their own belief that their nation was the exemplum of an evolved Spencerian society. Certainly Carnegie promoted his Bessemer steel plant as exemplifying the Spencerian utopia.

Nevertheless, Spencer surprised his audience by offering a stern rebuke to the American lifestyle. He

criticized Americans for being too obsessed with work and further asserted that this obsession was causing and would cause great psychological and physical damage. He even proceeded to use his indiscriminate evolutionary theory to argue that such overwork will harm the physical constitutions of the American offspring. He concluded by proclaiming that the "modern ideal" of progress through work will not survive and that "the gospel of work" needed to be replaced by "the gospel of relaxation" (28-35). While the point might have been lost on Spencer's smugly satisfied audience, his speech revealed that seemingly absolute scientific truths could be negated through the vagaries of one person's eccentric personality.

Fiske, Sumner, Holmes and Ward grappled with the validity of Spencer's ideas. The latter two thinkers logically revealed the limitations of Spencer's thought. Once his ideas arrived and circulated in the United States, they could be appropriated by people outside of sociology, law and politics. As stated earlier, Spencer had a significant following outside of the academy. This study will next focus on the way novelists directly and indirectly appropriated Spencer's ideas to craft their stories. Rather than trying to prove the logical validity of Spencer's ideas, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser and Jack

London looked to Spencer's ideas for models in creating characters and situations. However, in doing so, they, like Holmes and Ward, managed to reveal the limitations in his ideas. In describing the variety and depth of human behavior through fiction, these novelists show that Spencer's thought cannot accommodate the varieties of human experience.

Chapter Three: Frank Norris' Romanticism and The Horror of  
Herbert Spencer's Force Capitalism

In Social Darwinism in American Thought 1860-1915

Richard Hofstadter suggests that, by the time Frank Norris sat down to write The Octopus, in 1900, Herbert Spencer's popularity had already declined. Hofstadter attributes this decline to the critical reaction against Spencer's work by Lester Ward and Henry George among others (35). He claims:

The material basis of the Spencer-Sumner ideology was being transformed, and the battle lines of social thought were pushing on. It was not so much that the old arguments for individualism had been answered to general satisfaction; they had been swept away by a ground swell of popular feeling deeper than any of the subtleties of social theorists. As new contestants came upon the scene, the focus of debate changed. (98)

Hofstadter labels these "new contestants" "populists, Bryanites, muckrakers [and] progressives" along with nationalists and social gospel leaders (98). George and Ward represented the "progressive" part of this group.

As the previous chapter shows, there certainly exists much evidence to support Hofstadter's viewpoint. In many

parts of society, Spencer's destructive laissez-faire was uprooted and replaced by a more pro-government interventionist liberalism which regulated corporate activity. Moreover, Hofstadter asserts that this liberalism came with the approval "of popular feeling." Hofstadter cites other Spencer critics besides Ward and George. However, Hofstadter's idea of a "popular groundswell" is mitigated by the fact that the Lochner case was decided in 1905, when Spencer's ideas still held sway on the United States Supreme Court, one of the most powerful political bodies in the United States. As described in the previous chapter, Horace Peckham and his cohorts on the court typically upheld corporations' freedom from most government regulation.

Moreover, William McKinley beat the reformist William Jennings Bryan in the 1900 presidential election. More specifically, the Southern Pacific Railroad, on which Norris would focus The Octopus, still held sway in California politics (Mowry 16). All of this shows that by the time Norris was writing The Octopus, Spencer's ideas were still very influential in the political and economic realms. Perhaps this contradiction reveals the difficulty of describing the dominant ideas of a certain nation at a particular moment in history. In a society as fragmented

and multifaceted as the United States at the turn of the century, Spencer's ideas could be discredited in certain parts of society while remaining popular in others.

This chapter focuses on the way Herbert Spencer influenced Frank Norris. The thesis of this study is that Spencer influenced the novelists very differently from the way he did the economists, philosophers, and sociologists. The latter thinkers were examining Spencer's ideas for their empirical truth and then applying them to American society in the period. The novelists differed from the social scientists in their use of Spencer's ideas. In creating imaginative fiction, novelists try to describe the wide spectrum of human behavior. Often times, their characters are more eccentric or self-destructive than the average person. While their portraits may not conform to reader expectations, creative writers point readers to the diversity of the human condition, ideally creating awareness, if not tolerance, of humanity's variation. Spencer disregarded such difference. In his *Synthetic Philosophy*, he reduces all human behavior to the evolutionary principle of an organism's adjustment to its environment.

Norris channeled Spencer's ideas in a unique way. Unlike the other novelists in this study, Theodore Dreiser and Jack London, Norris never directly mentions Spencer in his writing. While Emile Zola influenced Norris's writing style and choice of subject matter, his use of force concepts at the end of The Octopus shows a clear awareness, and apparent acceptance, of Spencer's ideas. However, this acceptance conflicts with the rest of the narrative. Many critics have commented on this contradiction as a problem in interpreting the story. Spencer argued that forces typically move social evolution towards a more definite heterogeneity. Spencer located this heterogeneity in the greater diversity and specialization of market society. In using Spencer to interpret The Octopus, the reader is drawn to the issue of the Southwestern and Pacific Railroad which represents the Southern Pacific Railroad. By the end of the novel, the railroad is described as one aspect of the irresistible forces that build society. Yet, the railroad is responsible for chaos and death. Therefore, any reading of Spencer's role in the text has to include Norris's conception of the railroad which leads to the political nature of the novel. By appropriating a real battle between the farmers and the railroad, Norris waded into the

political issues of the day, some of which Spencer initiated with his ideas on laissez-faire.

Norris wrote The Octopus as the first book of his planned "epic of the wheat" trilogy. The Octopus concerns the harvesting of wheat in central California. The second novel, The Pit, is about the selling of wheat on the Chicago Stock exchange. Norris died before writing the third book which he intended to focus on the consumption of wheat in Europe (Martin 162). Norris based The Octopus on a true story of farmers resisting the Southern Pacific Railroad in Tulare County, California, a battle which resulted in death on both sides. In his novel, Norris describes in clear detail the life and activity in the farming town of Bonneville.

In the process he offers some indelible portraits of certain characters: the wheat farmer Magnus Derrick, who is often called "Governor" despite his having lost a campaign for California governor, and his son Harran Derrick who works with him; cantankerous genius farmer Buck Annixter, who falls in love with one of his milkmaids and thus becomes more empathetic towards others; the mysterious and mystical shepherd named Vanamee, who suffered the rape and death in childbirth of his true love, Angele; a German

immigrant Hooven who is married with two daughters; James Dyke, who leaves his job as a railroad engineer to farm hops only to have his business ruined by the railroad's shipping rates; and the villainous S. Behrman who represents the railroad and consistently manipulates and exploits the farmers and townspeople. The poet Presley, clearly representing Norris, lives with the Derricks in order to gain experience to write his "epic of the West."

The wheat farmers are renting land from the railroad. They chafe at its policies including shipping rates established by the railroad and supported by the California Railroad Commission in Sacramento. Believing that the railroad has unethically manipulated the law, the farmers use bribery in attempting to elect a railroad commission sympathetic to their interests. Magnus's other son Lyman Derrick is elected to support the farmers. However, he ends up supporting the railroad in return for the railroad's support for his political ambitions. When the railroad tries to evict the farmers, a shootout ensues, killing Hooven and all the ranchers except for Magnus Derrick who, publicly dishonored, has a mental breakdown. Hooven's wife dies homeless on the streets of San Francisco while his oldest daughter becomes a prostitute. In a narrative flourish, S. Behrman suffocates in wheat after

falling into a ship's hull where the wheat is being loaded. Depressed and angry over the loss of his friends, Presley confronts the railroad's owner Shelgrim who explains to him that natural forces led to the death of his friends, not Shelgrim's decisions or policies. After a talk with Venamee who finds love with Angele's daughter, Presley takes the "long view" that life evolves for good and that evil is temporary. As Shelgrim tells Presley, force is the main cause of evolution.

This conclusion exemplifies Spencerian evolution. Spencer used scientific theorizing in order to support his economic ideas. While his scientific ideas are largely discredited today, they influenced some eminent scientists of his day. One of those was American biologist Joseph Le Conte who taught at the University of California at Berkeley. Norris's critics agree that Le Conte, with whom Norris took classes in geology and zoology while he attended the University of California, exerted a strong influence on the young writer (Pizer 12-16; Civello 51-7). One of the earliest and foremost Norris scholars, Donald Pizer, connects Le Conte's version of evolutionary theory to that of Fiske and back to Spencer in order to argue that Le Conte attempted to articulate an optimistic evolutionary

theory which assumed that divine providence guided species development (14).

In Evolution: Its Nature, Its Evidences, and Its Relation to Religious Thought, first published in 1888, Le Conte calls Darwin and Spencer "the two great founders of the theory of evolution" (92). However, Le Conte emphasizes Spencer's concept of evolution as a theory that unifies all knowledge: "The process pervades the whole universe, and the doctrine concerns alike every department of science—yea, every department of human thought" (3). Like Fiske before him, Le Conte participates in the vogue of applying evolutionary theory to a variety of disciplines. Le Conte also invokes Spencer's idea that force underlies much of life, even the mind. In this discussion he cites physiologists who have connected acts of perception with physical changes in the brain.

Le Conte also defends Spencer's belief in French biologist Jean Baptiste de Lamarck's idea that the major factor in evolution is the inheritance of physically acquired characteristics. The Lamarckian mechanism of evolution provided Spencer, Le Conte, Norris and others with a comforting certainty. Like Spencer's concept of force, the inheritance of physically adapted

characteristics shows that there exists a design and direction to species development; those that have mastered their environment will proceed to pass that mastery on to their offspring. In such a schema, conflict and death have meaning: the improvement of humanity as Spencer demonstrates in Social Statics. In that work, Spencer asserts that as the unfit disappear and the fittest thrive, a utopia would be created where the fit could live in anarchic harmony (214). Spencer further argues that successful businesses, for example the Southern Pacific Railroad, should not be regulated so that the fit could succeed and pass their success on to their offspring. This is the optimistic force idea that Norris appropriates for the ending of his novel.

Darwin avoids such optimism by saying that natural selection occurs through any variation "from whatever cause proceeding" which helps an organism to survive." He states that the organism would subsequently pass this variation on to its offspring (51). Although Darwin treats the subject with the empirical rigor of a scientist, his reticence in defining the mechanisms of natural selection can only offer an ambiguity which implies that suffering has no meaning. Le Conte believes that Darwin's natural selection leads to random brutality, and he fears applying such a theory to

human and social development. He says, "In organic evolution, when the struggle for life is fierce and pitiless as it is now among the higher animals, natural selection is undoubtedly by far the most potent factor" (97). He further posits, "If Weismann and Wallace be right, then alas for all our hopes of race improvement—physical, mental, and moral!" (97) Le Conte wants human evolution to be more than merely random brutality. He defines it as "*continuous progressive change, according to certain laws, and by means of resident forces*" (8). For Le Conte natural selection was neither progressive nor a very certain law. Like Spencer, Le Conte believes that the inheritance of functionally acquired characteristics leads to the general improvement of humanity.

In arguing for the role that Lamarckian factors play in evolution, Le Conte distinguishes between animal and human evolution. He sees the chief difference contained in humans' ability to reason. He points out that this attribute "*determines a new kind of evolution—evolution on a new and higher plane*" (91). Le Conte diverges from Spencer who believes that human and organic evolution were similar, thus arguing that certain people should be left to wither away like some species. Le Conte concludes his defense of Lamarckian factors in Evolution by revising

Spencer's survival of the fittest theory through calling for the protection of "the weak, the helpless, the sick [and] the old," in effect the "unfit." He states that people "revolt with horror" over letting the unfit perish "because [to do so is] contrary to the law of our spiritual nature" (98).

Although Le Conte's views contradict Spencer's on this one important point, he believes in Spencer's concepts of force and progressive evolution. There is no evidence that Norris read Le Conte's book. Therefore, one can only speculate which ideas Norris would have heard in Le Conte's classes. Given that Norris took biology and geology classes with Le Conte, it is doubtful that he would have imbibed Le Conte's views on social inequality. Still, Norris received a variety of ideas from Le Conte, including the existence of "unknowable" forces that regulate organic and human development; a partiality to the Lamarckian mechanism of development as one of these forces; and a progressive evolution in which humanity is perpetually improving. All of these ideas play a crucial role in The Octopus.

As Hofstadter points out, the progressive ideas of George and Ward were also influencing public and

intellectual thought. Norris was quite aware of the reformist currents circulating through society. While working at McClure's Magazine, he was surrounded by the reformist sensibility, as his co-workers included the muckraking journalists Ida Tarbell and Lincoln Steffens. Norris even became interested in the Reverend W.S. Rainsford's settlement work while he was living in New York and working at McClure's (Walker 256). In writing a novel that involved the battle between wheat farmers and the fictional Pacific and Southwestern Railroad, modeled on the Southern Pacific, Norris knew that he was engaging in the conflict between laissez-faire capitalism and reform. In a letter to a friend Norris acknowledged that he was "in a beautiful 'political muddle' ... in The Octopus" (qtd. in Walker 251). In addition to Spencer's concepts of force and evolution, the conflict between Spencer's idea of evolutionary development through unregulated capitalism and others' belief in the destructive elements of laissez-faire serves as a context for Norris' creation of The Octopus.

Although Norris was aware of the political conflicts of the period, his ideas tended toward laissez-faire; he did not intend to write political fiction. Norris's biographer Franklin Walker notes that Norris "was interested in stories, not reforms" (257). Regarding the

central conflict in The Octopus, Walker assumes that Norris's "personal attitude toward the central conflict agreed more completely with Shelgrim's than with Presley's," the former being the owner of the railroad and the latter being the reform minded poet in the novel (258). Despite Walker's and Norris's declarations to the contrary, much criticism has focused on the political thrust of the novel because of its topical plot.

Like many novels, The Octopus has had a contradictory critical history from its early reviews to the present day. In The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism, Walter Benn Michaels argues that the novel articulates the dominant corporate ethos of its day. Michaels published his book in 1987. By the eighties, critics were re-examining both Norris's aesthetic and political value. However, some early critics viewed the novel as reformist. Hofstadter, in Age of Reform, yokes The Octopus with a group of protest books which includes The Jungle and Wealth against Commonwealth (200). Also, in a review in the reformist periodical Arena, B.O. Flower asserts that the novel "will quicken the conscience and awaken the moral sensibilities of the reader." He subsequently compares the novel to Patrick Henry addressing the Virginia House of Burgesses before the Revolutionary War (548). And George

Mowry claims that, "Whatever Norris' intention was in writing his story of wheat and the railroad, the reading public interpreted the novel as another assault on the Southern Pacific" (20).

An historian, a reviewer and the California reading audience read the book as a repudiation of Spencer's concept of laissez-faire through force, Michaels', Walker's and Norris's position to the contrary. These early readings could be attributed to the critics' own political agendas. Hofstadter was trying to create the sense of an "age of reform" in which Americans were questioning free market capitalism; as Mowry's title shows, he attempted to communicate the idea of a ground swell of California activism; and Flower wrote for a reformist periodical in the early twentieth century. Still, these readings cannot be dismissed as mere ideological reactions. Mowry admits that Norris's novel was possibly received differently from Norris's intention in writing it. In American Literature And The Universe of Force, written in the early eighties, a few years before Michaels, Ronald Martin asserts that Norris "feel[s] the social injustice keenly ... but he seems to believe the Spencerianism too, and the two perspectives are irreconcilable" (174). Martin precedes the new historicists and lacks their rigid perspective. Similarly,

he has the privilege of viewing the book and its critical reaction from an historical distance. His nuanced view suggests that there might be something in the way Norris wrote the novel that could lead to the contradiction between the social protest and apolitical interpretations.

Perhaps one explanation for this disjunction lies in Norris's purpose for writing fiction. Norris was a critic as well as a novelist. In his criticism, he suggests ways of interpreting his own fiction. In his essay "The Novel with a 'Purpose,'" Norris argues that "The elemental forces, then, contribute to the novel with a purpose to provide it with vigorous action" (1197). Norris sees that one of the primary purposes of novels is to reveal certain "forces" that govern life. Here Norris invokes Spencer's idea that force underlies all life. As Le Conte's own work shows, this idea was quite popular at the time. Regarding the universe of force in the period, Martin asserts that "'the universe of force' appeared not only in the usual media of scientific and philosophical discussion, but in newspapers and novels, in letters and diaries, in speeches, sermons and boardroom exhortations" (XI).

For Norris, the novelist, these forces represented "social tendencies" (1197). He admits that this concept of

force places the novelist in a quandary. He acknowledges that, "Unskillfully treated the story may dwindle down and degenerate into mere special pleading, and the novelist become a polemicist, a pamphleteer" (1197). Norris claims that "the novel with a 'purpose'" written badly "degenerates" into a political novel which agitates for reform rather than uncovering the cosmic and elemental "forces" of human existence. Later in the essay Norris offers Thomas Hardy as an example of someone who wrote a successful "novel with a 'purpose'" because Hardy was more interested in the suffering of the individual than the oppression of the coal miner (1198).

His criticism indicates that Norris was quite aware of the difficulties that lay before him in writing a novel like The Octopus. Similarly, Walker points out that "In writing 'the novel with a purpose' Norris placed himself in a dangerous position. Would he remain a novelist or would he become a propagandist?" (255) Another issue that complicates Norris's writing, and therefore an audience's reaction to the novel, is Norris's "plea for romantic fiction." In an essay of that title he redefines romantic literature away from "sentiment," asserting that "romance" "takes cognizance of variations from the type of normal life ... Romance may even treat of the sordid, the unlovely-

as for instance the novels of M. Zola" (1166). Norris contrasts his concept of romance to realism, which he believes is limited by its bourgeois subject matter. In this essay, he famously described realism as "the drama of a broken teacup" (1166).

His promotion of romance at the expense of a bourgeois realism would not preclude a fiction dedicated to reformist politics. In his essay "Zola as a Romantic Writer," Norris very clearly expresses the type of fiction that he wanted to write. His goal to articulate "a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death" parallels that of the protest writer Presley in The Octopus (1107). This type of story is not necessarily political, as Norris's McTeague demonstrates. McTeague's and Trina's fall reflect the cosmic condition of humanity more than a specific political problem. Although Norris tried to claim the same for The Octopus, writing about the railroad led him into his "beautiful political muddle."

If "a vast and terrible drama" occurs within a context of social inequality, then the story takes on political overtones. In the preceding quote, Norris praises his model Emile Zola for Zola's dramatic form of romantic

realism. This view reflects his own aesthetic in writing The Octopus. In focusing on tragedy and writing a novel about the railroad, Norris would have to deal with the railroad's harmful practices. Moreover, Norris said that "one objection urged against the novel with a purpose by the plain people who read" is that such a novel "always ends unhappily" ("The Novel With A 'Purpose'" 1199). In writing on a political topic in such a way as to emphasize "terrible drama" and "sudden death," all of which inevitably lead to unhappy endings, Norris would move precariously close to the political "propaganda" which he had hoped to avoid.

In order to heighten the tragedy of his story, Norris made some noteworthy changes from the actual events. In the pivotal shootout between the ranchers and the railroad's people, Norris has all the ranchers killed while six of the twelve were actually killed (Starr IX). In making this change, Norris emphasizes the tragedy of the situation while simultaneously accentuating the viciousness of the railroad. As Presley tells the crowd the day after the shootings, "Harran dead, Annixter dead, Broderson dead, Dabney dead, Osterman dead, Hooven dead; shot down, killed, killed in the defence of their homes, killed in the defence of their rights, killed for the sake of liberty" (549).

Presley's speech proceeds for four pages in which he calls the railroad an "iron-hearted monster" (549).

In his speech, Presley uses fiery political rhetoric that engages the crowd and the reader. However, after Presley gives the speech, Norris shifts the narrative focus onto Presley's anxiety over his writing. Presley realizes, that "he had not held the hearts of his audience. He had talked as he would have written; for all his scorn of literature, he had been literary. The men who listened to him ... were not once sympathetic" (552). Much as Norris attempted to do with his "epic of the wheat," Presley yearns to write "the Song of the West" (10). Part of this goal is to be a poet who appeals to a popular audience as well as to an educated one. His speech to the crowd is his attempt to reach a popular audience of farmers and tradesmen; yet, he fails. Norris creates this failure in order to distance his novel conspicuously from the political. At a crucial and dramatic point in the story, Norris focuses on Presley's internal crisis. However, much like Presley's optimism at the end of the novel, it is not convincing. Given the violence that has just been perpetrated, Presley's audience would not have needed much to be incited. The audience's shrugging its shoulders due to Presley's perceived eloquence does not work.

The aftermath of the Mussel Slough incident represented a victory of sorts for the ranchers. Despite killing two prospective buyers for the ranchers' land and shooting at a United States Marshall, the surviving ranchers received only eight months in jail on the minor charge of obstructing a federal officer. Moreover, they were allowed to come and go as they wished from their San Jose jail and were given a rousing send-off from the jail and a big welcoming committee on their arrivals home (Starr XVI). Norris leaves this part of the story out and instead opts for describing the miscarriage of the newly widowed Hilma Annixter, the starvation of Mrs. Hooven in San Francisco, and the senility of Magnus Derrick in the aftermath of the shooting (537, 612, 624).

Two of the examples that Norris used to convey the tragedy of the situation involve the very pathetic images of vulnerable mothers and children. In describing these events, Norris follows Zola in revealing "the sordid and the unlovely," Norris's definition of romantic fiction. Also, despite his attempts to avoid "propaganda," the pathetic sufferings work on the emotions of the reader. These emotions can only be swayed against the railroad. As George Mowry points out, Norris's California audience knew that the railroad was responsible for the sufferings of

mothers and children and would react accordingly to Norris's descriptions of such suffering (12).

Conversely, in making the small ranchers into big ranchers, Norris appears to be minimizing the inequality between the railroad and the farmers. California historian, Kevin Starr, states, "The railroad/rancher clash at the center of The Octopus pits against each other comparable opponents, each capable of bribery and influence peddling and the public be damned" (XV). Starr highlights the point that these growers are far from the small farmers of the Mussel Slough incident. While that may be, they are still closer to tenant farmers like the German immigrant Hooven than they are to the railroad. Hooven, with his wife and daughters, is trying to achieve the American Dream. However, he is killed in the ranchers' battle with the railroad, believing if the ranchers are evicted, he will be as well.

The ranchers are clearly much smaller than the railroad, closer to the small farmers of Mussel Slough than to a large corporate entity. Norris describes them as ordinary individuals who strive against an impersonal entity whose only representative throughout most of the novel is S. Behrman, whose almost caricatured villainy

derives from Norris wanting to write a romantic tragedy. The reader only sees S. Behrman happily exploiting and manipulating people. Conversely, Norris depicts the ranchers' daily lives, placing them within the fabric of the Bonneville community. This reinforces their humanness as the reader sees them interacting with the townspeople.

While Norris places the ranchers in the community, they show no humanness in dealing with the land. These are not farmers working harmoniously with nature. Norris portrays them as having "no love for the land. They were not attached to the soil. They worked their ranches as a quarter of a century before they had worked their mines ... To get all there was out the land, to squeeze it dry, to exhaust it, seemed their policy" (298). It could be argued that these ranchers are big businessmen, mercilessly appropriating nature for their own profit, much as the railroad is appropriating them for its own profit. Yet, this does not mean that they deserve their fate. Norris spends a lot of time cultivating reader identification with the characters through his description of them. When they are killed, it is a bigger tragedy than when the farmers harvest the wheat.

In many instances Norris presents the farmers as clumsy, almost inadequate businessmen, who often undercut their own interests with shortsighted or misguided policies. For example, the ranchers are initially certain that the railroad has to sell them the land at \$2.50 an acre. However, after actually reading the circular issued by the railroad, they discover that the \$2.50 per acre price only applies to "most" of the land (118). This is a detail about which they should have known. More specifically, the reader learns that the regal Magnus Derrick sold out his mine at a small profit, just missing becoming a millionaire in the Comstock load (63). This fact reflects Derrick's mediocrity as a businessman. If he had had good business sense, he would have held onto his mine and become one of the monied elite who would not have had to struggle with the railroad.

Similarly, Joseph R. McElrath Jr. points out that:

[The growers] directly contributed to their own predicament. They were grossly unprepared to competently enter the arena of economic competition, and their incompetence did them in. What early and later commentators have not duly emphasized is that Norris clearly pictures the ranchers as having no

actual defense for their position: the courts, up to the Supreme Court, correctly recognize that the Ranchers have no legal claim to a low price on the Railroad's sections of land. The Ranchers were thick-witted to the degree that they actually construed the Railroad's *handbills*, advertising low-priced land as "legal paper." (142-3)

Writing just before the new historicists and long after the reformists, McElrath believes that the growers deserve little sympathy, only their violent fate due to their "thick-witted incompetence." They represent the unfit that could not compete with the railroad in the open market. Along the same lines, Spencer declares that "the whole effort of nature is to get rid of such to clear the world of them and make room for better" (Social Statics 339). Norris appears to endorse Spencer's view. However, Norris's use of what he calls Zola's romanticism undermines his seeming affirmation. In writing "a vast and terrible drama that works itself out ... in blood, and in sudden death," Norris unwittingly inserts a political element into the novel, repudiating Le Conte's and Spencer's optimistic form of evolution in the process. The ranchers are just the types that Spencer believes should disappear. Yet, despite the ranchers' being incompetent big businessmen,

they are unfairly overwhelmed by the relentless power of the railroad and therefore gain the reader's sympathy, especially after their violent deaths. They are the victims of Norris's "terrible drama" and, due to his indelibly describing their characters, the reader cannot just ignore their suffering.

That description represents the conflict within Norris's text. The novel alternates between cosmic philosophizing about the all powerful forces of life, as exemplified by the railroad and the wheat, and painstakingly realistic descriptions of the ranchers, their lifestyles, their land and the particular situation in which they find themselves: fighting the railroad over shipping rates and ownership of their land. This duality exemplifies the tension in Norris's effort to write a novel with a "purpose." In that essay, he claims that there is a conflict between the larger purpose and the details of the story (1197). The "purpose" here is to reveal "the elemental forces" of life while the story must concern "the great storehouse of actual life" (1197). He sees a conflict in fitting the life to the forces and the forces to the life.

This conflict accurately describes The Octopus, since the events in the story cannot be contained by Norris's concept of force. Writing after the new historicists, in the early nineties, Michael Davitt Bell also sees this divide. He points out that:

Norris's political research for *The Octopus*, unlike his research into wheat ranching does play an important part in the book's action, providing the details for the story of the ranchers' unsuccessful effort to elect their own railroad commission and thus resist punitive increases in the rate charged for shipping their crop to market. Yet even here the details of political manipulation and counter-manipulation keep dissolving into the abstract rhetoric of the "big" and vital." (124)

Bell finds Norris's "abstract rhetoric" unconvincing, suggesting that it hinders the novelist from adequately articulating the details of his narrative. Bell is quite critical of Norris as a novelist largely due to his melodramatic generalizing (125-6). This generalizing represents Norris's intention to uncover the "elemental forces" of life which parallels Herbert Spencer's attempt to uncover the basic elements of life in his synthetic

philosophy. Both Norris and Spencer wrote in order to offer a comprehensive philosophy of life. Both offer a beneficent concept of force as a consolation for the consequences of evolution.

As shown in the last chapter, Spencer's ideas were beginning to be challenged by sociologists and political reformers. Norris unconsciously reveals the weaknesses of Spencer's theory because Norris emphasizes human suffering over what the spiritual shepherd Vanamee calls "the larger view" (636). This "larger view" represents the Spencerian beneficent forces working for the good in the long run despite whatever short term suffering occurs. Vanamee tells Presley that suffering and death are part of larger beneficent forces. Still, Norris's desire to write "the novel with a purpose" led him to focus on the ranchers' pathetic sufferings and deaths, thus undermining the cosmic optimism of the novel. As Bell implies, Norris's beneficent force is unconvincing given the way it clashes with the narrative action.

Critics have commented on the contradictory nature of the novel. As shown above, the novel's critical reception is equally paradoxical. One reason for this can be found in the title of James Folsom's "Social Darwinism or Social

Protest? The 'Philosophy' of *The Octopus*." Writing in the sixties, when the reformist perspective still held sway, Folsom attempted to identify the true philosophy underpinning Norris's narrative. In the early sixties, he was still willing to grant the novel a protest theme. Twenty years later, new historicists, like Michaels, would maintain that the novel reinforced corporate power. Folsom argues that the force concepts in the novel reflect more Presley's and Vanamee's limited perspectives. He states, "The tragedy of both Presley and Vanamee, in sum, is the tragedy of two men who 'Think Big,' who deny the forest because they refuse to admit the existence of trees" (397). Bell would agree that the same could be said about Norris. Folsom concludes his essay by asserting that force plays a meager role in the narrative and that Norris truly intended to reveal the "wickedness" of Shelgrim and the rest of the railroad bosses (400). Therefore, Folsom answers his own question with "social protest." However, this is a very reductive viewpoint. If McElrath's interpretation and Norris's own perspective are to be considered, Folsom's answer cannot be the final word.

In answer to this quandary, Franklin Walker claims that Norris reluctantly presented the narrative as a critique of the railroad, but that he wrote the novel this

way not out of "social theory but of a love for stupendous action ... as he discovered injustice and injustice in the California records, he added them to the story to strengthen its climax" (258). Walker connects Norris's romantic style to an inadvertent indictment of the railroad. Also, McElrath asserts that though the ranchers prove themselves unfit, they "thus suffer calamity, and the suffering is finally great enough to evoke a sympathetic response" (143). McElrath subsequently maintains, as Norris did in his criticism, that Norris constructs a "complicated reality" (143). However, Norris's melodramatic style slants this complication towards the iniquity of the railroad and thus towards social protest.

Ronald Martin responds to Folsom twenty years later by pointing out that neither social protest nor Spencerian force dominates the novel. Martin proclaims "that Spencerianism does not totally dominate and determine The Octopus. Norris' scheme was too ambitious, his range of human sympathies and his zest for literary effects were too diverse" (174). As Martin claims earlier in his study, Norris employed force concepts in an aesthetic manner rather than strictly to uncover any truth, though he thought that he was doing that, too (148). Norris's conscious beliefs to the contrary, Michael Davitt Bell

correctly points out that Norris did not know much about force concepts; he certainly knew less than Spencer, who offered a comprehensive explanation of life using force concepts (125-6). Conversely, Norris appropriated Spencerian force to heighten the dramatic effect of his narrative.

His purpose in writing was to relate "a vast and terrible drama that works itself out ... in blood and sudden death." While Norris thought that he was articulating the truth about these forces, his execution does not show much knowledge about them. In the battle between Norris the novelist and Norris the philosopher, the philosopher loses to the novelist. Not only is the Spencerianism not dominant in the novel, it is subverted by the narrative events. As an imaginative writer, Norris wound up writing a novel that revealed the true horror of a Spencerian system of evolution.

Pizer and Martin point out that Norris represents the wheat and the railroad as eternal and inexorable forces while he depicts people as ephemeral and vulnerable. Pizer believes that the wheat force is a benevolent one, claiming that it exemplifies "divine force or energy, as God immanent, apprehendable, eternal, omnipotent, and

benevolent" (144). He contrasts the transcendental force of the wheat to the "soulless Force" of the railroad "whose practices, spreading death and destruction, are opposed to the land" (148). Conversely, Martin offers a more nuanced reading, perceptively noticing that Norris often describes the wheat and nature as either impervious to human hopes and actions or complicit with the railroad in hindering individual actions. Martin cites two examples of Annie Derrick's reflections to prove his point.

When she first sees the wheat, Norris attaches a sexual repulsion to her thoughts; she perceives the wheat as "vaguely indecent ... this food of the people, this elemental force, this basic energy, weltering here under the sun in all the unconscious nakedness of a sprawling, primordial Titan" (60). Although her Victorian sensibility somewhat skews her perspective, the narrative proves her viewpoint to be valid because the struggle to harness the natural force of the wheat will only lead people to death and destruction. Conversely, Pizer argues that the wheat is a benevolent force due to its burying the greedy and corrupt railroad representative S. Behrman. Martin partially agrees here, calling the incident "poetic justice" and asserting that Behrman's death mitigates the "malevolence" of Norris's universe of force (168).

However, while Norris portrays Behrman as villainous, Martin acknowledges that his chief flaw and the main reason for his death by the wheat is his mistakenly grandiose belief that he is the "the master of the wheat" (168). Earlier in the novel, Annie Derrick indirectly contradicts Behrman's belief that he or anyone else could "master" the wheat:

As she glances at "the immensity of Los Muertos,"  
She recognized the colossal indifference of nature,  
not hostile, even kindly and friendly, so long as the  
human ant-swarm was submissive, working with it,  
hurrying along at its side in the mysterious march of  
the centuries. Let, however, the insect rebel, strive  
to make head against the power of this nature, and at  
once it became relentless, a gigantic engine, a vast  
power, huge, terrible; a leviathan with a heart of  
steel, knowing no compunction, no forgiveness, no  
tolerance; crushing out the human atom with a  
soundless calm, the agony of destruction sending never  
a jar, never the faintest tremour through all that  
prodigious mechanism of wheels and cogs. (180-1)

This passage represents Norris's philosophy breaking into the text. Annie Derrick subtly metaphorizes nature as

"a gigantic engine" with "wheels and cogs" and "a heart of steel"; in effect, nature becomes the railroad. However, this language does not match Annie Derrick throughout the novel; this language represents Norris's pompous highly literary language. Nature is described as having a "heart of steel" much as the railroad is made of steel. As in this description of nature, the railroad crushes any individual who tries to rebel against it. Norris portrays the relentless power of the railroad, inexorably destroying the ranchers in much the way Annie Derrick perceives the indifference of nature. The ranchers learn that "you can't buck up against the railroad" as both the rancher Annixter and the railroad journalist Genslinger claim (104, 455). Therefore, nature like the railroad, is not a benevolent force working for overall good. These assertions support Martin's claim that the narrative "seems to be rolling toward some predetermined conclusion, some ultimate explanation" (170).

Norris begins to reveal that ultimate conclusion when Presley confronts the head of the railroad, Shelgrim, about the shootout. Presley initially considers Shelgrim as one "who has sucked the life-blood from an entire People," thus invoking the language of protest literature (571). However, after some conversation with Shelgrim, Presley

quickly alters his initial perspective on the railroad titan as he discovers him to be "a sentimentalist and an art critic" (574). Presley further sees that Shelgrim was "not only great, but large; many sided of vast sympathies, who understood with equal intelligence the human nature in an habitual drunkard, the ethics of a masterpiece of painting, and the financiering and operation of ten thousand miles of railroad" (575). Presley's initial skepticism towards Shelgrim's moral character quickly turns to reverence for the railroad baron. Compared to Presley's financially incompetent rancher friends, Shelgrim truly is the fittest a society could produce. Norris reinforces the point that the growers' demise was natural because of their nemesis's greatness. Shelgrim's complex character reveals him to be more than the villain that Presley expected. Thus, Shelgrim's personality cannot be contained by the narrow confines of protest literature which can only see him as a conventional heavy.

While Presley is still reeling from Shelgrim's unexpectedly complex character, the railroad baron invokes Spencer's idea from Social Statics that businesses like natural objects just grow without human thought or action. Shelgrim tells Presley:

*Railroads build themselves.* Where there is a demand sooner or later there will be a supply ... What do I count for? Do I build the Railroad? You are dealing with forces, young man, when you speak of Wheat and the Railroads not with men ... The Wheat is one force, the Railroad, another, and there is the law that governs them—supply and demand. Men have only little to do in the whole business. Complications may arise, conditions that are hard on the individual—crush him maybe—but *the Wheat will be carried to feed the people* as inevitably as it will grow. If you want to fasten the blame of the affair at Los Muertos on any one person, you will make a mistake. Blame conditions not men. (576)

Shelgrim unites the wheat and railroad as similar forces beyond people's control, thus contradicting Pizer's distinguishing the two. More importantly, Shelgrim uses force to explain all human and natural actions. In doing so, like Spencer, he attempts to unite all diverse phenomena under one explanation. Coming from an empirical philosopher ostensibly out to seek truth, Spencer's theory has the pretense of objectivity, though even his objectivity is questionable. However, in a novel such reasoning becomes specious because stories are devoted to

certain specific circumstances, whether they are the vagaries of character or the uniqueness of certain situations. Norris acknowledges this in his essay "The Need of A Literary Conscience" when claiming that fiction must describe "life with all its complications" (1158). Shelgrim's version of force contradicts the circumstances in the novel. Bell says as much, when he asserts that "The railroad has been driven to combat the ranchers not by any demonstrated laws of nature or of the marketplace but by the conventional and melodramatic villainy of characters like the jowly railroad agent, S. Behrman" (122). Bell implies that Shelgrim's, and thus Norris's, version of force is superficial and thus inadequate in interpreting the farmers' deaths.

Also, in Shelgrim's explanation actions, no matter how complex, are reduced to "Force." Such a reduction ignores individual motivation and responsibility. In talking to Presley, Shelgrim omits his own culpability, as head of the railroad, for the crisis in Bonneville. He tells Presley that "force" led him to raise the grain shipping rates or to charge the farmers \$20 an acre for their land. Shelgrim portrays himself as a mere passive servant of nature. However, he disregards the fact that his own desires and self-interest contributed to these decisions. Indeed,

instead of being at the whim of larger forces, Shelgrim raised the grain rates and took over the growers' farms so that he could maximize his own gargantuan wealth. Similarly, Folsom perceptively points out, "The Railroad is not only a Force, as Vanamee and Presely would have it, but a force which operates at a profit" (399). Shelgrim, also, unwittingly admits this point when he invokes his own self-interest in telling Presley that he could fall into bankruptcy if he lowered shipping rates or sold the rancher's land to them at less than \$20 an acre (576). Given the railroad's wealth and power, this position is also not convincing.

Shelgrim invokes the capitalist laws of supply and demand as causing the conflict between the railroad and the ranchers. However, he ignores another central tenet of capitalism, and that is competition. In capitalism competition is supposed to set prices. Because the railroad is a monopoly, though, it can set freight rates at its own chosen price. After Dyke learns that the railroad has raised hop rates so high that he cannot afford to ship his hops to San Francisco, S. Behrman invokes free market discourse by telling Dyke that the rates are influenced by "~~All-the-traffic-will-bear~~" (350). Yet, the "traffic will bear" whatever the railroad decides because growers have to

ship with it. The railroad exists as a monopoly, not subject to competitive forces. Therefore, Behrman's use of competitive rates is disingenuous since Dyke cannot get a cheaper shipping price elsewhere. Because of this policy, Dyke's hops business fails and he becomes a criminal to support his family.

For Shelgrim, Presley and, above all, Norris all of these complex details can be subsumed under the concept of force. However, this point reveals a weakness in the attempt to explain all existence under one law, be it force or evolution. Such reasoning lacks empirical rigor because it ignores the influence of individual and specific decisions, desires and actions in explaining the way things happen. Presley cannot fathom the idea that Shelgrim can be a complex person, even gentle with his employees, but that Shelgrim's Spencerian concept of free market forces can also be hazardous to the general public. Even though Presley personally witnessed the impact of the railroad's policies, when confronted with Shelgrim's brilliance and insight, he quickly forgets the horror that his friends experienced.

Presley's viewpoint after the shootout is inconsistent. At one point he accepts Shelgrim's force

concept as an explanation for the massacre, even deciding that no man is to blame for "the horror at the irrigation ditch" and that nature is "a cyclopean power, huge terrible, a leviathan with a heart of steel" (577).

However, while eating dinner at the Gerards whose patriarch is a vice-president of the railroad, his anger returns and he envisions the Gerards and their wealthy friends feeding on the bodies of the ranchers before imagining the Gerards' opulent home being pillaged and destroyed in a furious uprising by the poor and the working class (608-9). This inconsistency undermines Presley's perspective, making his viewpoint unreliable. Such a perspective proves James Folsom right in his critique of Presley's character. Yet, in opposition to Folsom, Presley's flaws represent Norris's flaws, especially given his Norris like language.

The final influence on Presley is the mystic shepherd Vanamee. The story of the ascetic Vanamee trying to summon his murdered lover Angele back from the dead through his ability to silently "call" people appears oddly incompatible with the conflict between the farmers and the railroad. Sixteen years after his lover's death, Vanamee wanders solitarily through the southwest suffering alternately from inconsolable sorrow and defiant anger. The subplot represents both Norris's use of romantic

tragedy—Angele was raped and murdered as a young girl—and Norris's attempt to, as Pizer claims, locate "the supernatural in the natural" (130).

The subplot also provides a final optimistic view of the ranchers' death. As Presley leaves Los Muertos ranch for the last time, having just witnessed Magnus Derrick's humiliation at the hands of Behrman, he meets Vanamee who has managed to, in effect, call Angele back from the grave in the form of Angele's daughter, who perfectly resembles her mother as a teenager. This discovery leads the formerly lugubrious shepherd to wax optimistic on death and evil. He tells Presley:

What remains? Men perish, men are corrupted, hearts are rent asunder, but what remains untouched, unassailable, undefiled? Try to find that, not only in this, but in every crisis of the world's life, and you will find, if your view be large enough, that it is not evil, but good that in the end remains. (636)

After this speech, Vanamee declares that Angele has come back to him "more beautiful than ever" (636). This is Norris's form of Spencerian cosmic evolution. Despite death, miscarriages, and broken families, life continues to develop, with the disappearance of evil as the end result.

However, Vanamee's optimism is not convincing given that it derives from the fulfillment of his desire for Angele's return. His desire is fulfilled through a plot contrivance which just reinforces the point that Norris builds his concept of force on coincidences and miracles which, given the empirical detail of his plot, are not convincing. Michael Davitt Bell points out that "Norris has little interest in exploring the actual mechanism by which 'forces' and 'conditions' influence human behavior" (122). Vanamee's experience is not "an actual mechanism," but a flight of fancy.

Rather than being "larger," Vanamee's view is rather narrow and small. Just because his grief has been alleviated, this does not mean that larger evil inevitably disappears. In fact, the majority of people in Bonneville have suffered due to the railroad's policies. Vanamee's optimism is shaky as Norris's rendering of the ranchers' lives conflicts with his attempt at larger philosophy. Along these lines, Pizer perceptively points out that Norris "was often to search for the 'big idea' to be absorbed in cosmic systems. He was best, however, ... when he found a way to embody these ideas in the concrete detail of scene and incident that he could capture so well" (52). Bell partially agrees with Pizer here, ridiculing Norris

for his clumsy stabs at abstract philosophy. Norris's "capturing" of "scene and incident" is superior to his ability to represent "the big idea." Therefore, the violent scenes of the farmers' deaths leave a bigger mark on the reader than the rationalization of these incidents.

In terms of "scene and incident," Norris presents the reader with clear and detailed descriptions of the characters, the land they inhabit, and their lifestyles. The rancher Buck Annixter exemplifies this approach. In the beginning of the narrative, he is comically hotheaded, stubborn, crotchety, and intensely misogynistic. In addition to these traits, Annixter possesses "an astonishing degree of intelligence and ... an executive ability little short of positive genius" (25). Despite his disinterest in literature, he respects Presley's poetic ability (26). Thus, Annixter is a complicated and contradictory character. As the narrative progresses, Annixter's own psychological conflicts are described in detail, especially his attraction to the milkmaid Hilma Tree.

After finally foregoing his misogyny and marrying Hilma, Annixter tells Presley about the change in him. He declares that, "I've got a whole lot of ideas since I began

to love Hilma, and just as soon as I can, I'm going to get in and *help* people, and I'm going keep to that idea the rest of my natural life" (468). Unfortunately, Annixter's life does not last much longer, since he is killed that day. More specifically, his example reflects Norris's rendering the changes and anxieties of an evolving character with whom the reader identifies. Annixter's being transformed by a "good" woman is a reductive cliché about the healing powers of women. Nevertheless, Norris paints Annixter as a memorable and realistic character whose tragic death has a much stronger impact on the reader than the optimistic evolutionary theory in the novel. In addition, Hilma's miscarriage after she learns of Annixter's death only serves to reinforce the sympathy for her and the malevolence of the railroad (537).

In The Octopus, Norris builds his theory on Herbert Spencer's concept of evolution through force. Within the narrative "the universe of force," as Martin has termed it, inevitably works for good. At the conclusion of his novel Norris offers Spencer's utopian form of evolution as a consolation for what has come before. In the final paragraph of the novel, Presley sits on the Swanhilda which is about to sail for India to feed the hungry. He muses that "The larger view always and through all shams, all

wickednesses, discovers the Truth that will, in the end, prevail, and all things, surely, inevitably, resistlessly work together for good" (652). Presely posits, much as Spencer did, that evolution proceeds inexorably to its final utopian conclusion. However, Norris's own "epic of the wheat" has just demonstrated to the reader the horrific road to such a utopia. Through his own brand of tragic romanticism, Norris unwittingly undermines Spencer's own brand of optimistic evolution and, in so doing, has reluctantly written a protest novel which only served to hasten the decline of Spencer's popularity.

Chapter Four: "'The Frailties of Human Nature:' Sister Carrie and The Gaps in Herbert Spencer's Empirical Morality"

Unlike Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser read and commented on Herbert Spencer's work. Also, unlike Frank Norris, Dreiser wrote much non-fiction in which he articulated his position on various events in his life. Norris published much theory of fiction in various magazines and journals; however, almost none of it directly referred to his own life and work. In contrast, in both magazine editorials and his own autobiography, Dreiser commented on various issues including his reading and reaction to Herbert Spencer's ideas.

In the second part of his autobiography, entitled Newspaper Days, Dreiser recalls his first encounter with First Principles, which was when he was working as a reporter in Pittsburgh in 1894. At that time, Dreiser was living a particularly dreary and spartan existence; he was trying to save money to move to New York, so he could apply for a job with one of the big newspapers there. He recalls that First Principles "quite blew me to bits intellectually" (610). His reaction derived at least in part from the lingering influence of his strict Catholic upbringing. Despite his ostensible rebellion from the

stringent religion of his father, Dreiser still believed in "the existence of Christ" along with "the soundness of His moral and sociologic deductions" (610). Spencer's concept of religion as representing an unknowable sphere of knowledge unfit for empirical investigation served to destroy these last vestiges of Dreiser's religious faith. Therefore, Dreiser's experience appears to reinforce various theologians' fear that the spread of Spencer's unknowable would lead to more unbelievers.

More importantly, though, Spencer's ideas destroyed many of Dreiser's treasured basic beliefs. He recollects that "all that I had deemed substantial—man's place in nature, his importance in the universe and on this too too solid earth ... was questioned and dissolved ... I was completely thrown down in my conceptions or non-conceptions of life and made very gloomy" (610). Dreiser confesses that Spencer's ideas "came upon me and left me numb, my gravest fears as to the unsolvable disorder and brutality of life entirely verified" (611). However, as Ronald Martin, Ellen Moers, and other critics have argued, these last statements reveal Dreiser's misreading of Spencer's ideas due to his sense of melancholy over living in Pittsburgh. Indeed, his biographer W.A. Swanberg calls the Pittsburgh that Dreiser inhabited "a dreary hole" (60).

Similarly, Robert Elias asserts that Dreiser "began to associate Spencer with Pittsburgh" (83). In First Principles Spencer describes life as moving in a most definite and progressive manner which will lead to the ethical and physical betterment of humanity, revealing a more optimistic system than the one Dreiser discusses in his memoir.

Dreiser also errs in calling Spencer's system "inexplicable" (611). Certainly, with the unknowable, Spencer claimed that the ethereal world of heaven could never be known. However, he believed that human behavior and biological life could be understood in minute detail. To uncover the rules that governed all life was the point of Spencer's synthetic philosophy. In First Principles, Spencer offers some clear explanations for the forces which govern human existence. For one, Spencer says that all life consists in "the continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations" (61). He also argues that evolution involves matter moving "from an indefinite incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity" (321). In fact, Christopher Katope has argued that this concept governs the structure of Sister Carrie. Similarly, Martin argues that Dreiser like Norris "received Spencer's ineffectively defined and delimited

concepts only in his own peculiar way, sensitive to their poetic and dramatic overtones, but oblivious of the rationalistic essence and optimistic overtones of Spencer's system" (221).

Martin explains Dreiser's misreading of Spencer's ideas as deriving from both the vagueness of Spencer's ideas and from Dreiser's own uniquely creative personality. This chapter will focus on Martin's latter point and the attendant internal conflict Dreiser experienced over Spencer's ideas. On the one hand, Dreiser, like many thinkers of the period—for example John Fiske, Henry Ward Beecher—believed in the validity of Spencerian evolution. Moreover, in much of his writing Dreiser followed Spencer's model in offering comprehensively systematic explanations for people's actions. However, as the passage from his autobiography shows, Dreiser was unnerved by Spencer's explanation despite its apparent truth. Throughout his life, Dreiser missed the optimistic element of Spencer's thought because, as Martin indicates, he viewed Spencer's system from the perspective of a creative writer rather than that of a sociologist, philosopher, or businessman. This perspective led him to see both the limitations of a seemingly rational explanation for human development and

the potentially tragic aspects of an apparently optimistic theory.

His first novel, Sister Carrie, written not long after he was first exposed to Spencer's thought, is split between an imposing narrative voice that appears to have a commandingly Spencerian explanation for human motivation and an emphasis on the mysteries of human behavior. As a novelist dealing in the specifics of human behavior, Dreiser set out to reveal the limitations of trying to capture the variable factors that motivate people's actions into one comprehensive theory. Thus, Sister Carrie is divided between sweeping pronouncements that often derive their legitimacy from science and an insight into the uniqueness of certain individuals' behavior that serves as a warning to the readers against sweeping judgments. The novel's paradox represents Dreiser's ambivalence about Spencer's thought. While Dreiser believed that Spencer had found the truth, he was profoundly uncomfortable with that truth. In this study, I argue that Spencer's ideas appealed to the novelists as they did other thinkers. However, I also assert that the novelists inevitably rejected his ideas because they found them too narrow in explaining human nature, thus hastening Spencer's decline

in the United States. In Sister Carrie, Dreiser sought to combat Spencer's explanation for human behavior.

Dreiser also remarked on Spencer's ideas in his journalistic writings. Dreiser saved enough money and left Pittsburgh for New York in November 1894 (Swanberg 61). After a very low paying job at Joseph Pulitzer's New York World, Dreiser was on the brink of starvation and homelessness when he made an offer to his brother Paul (Swanberg 68). Paul, who had changed his name to Dresser, had become a very successful popular songwriter and performer in New York; his song "On The Banks of the Wabash" was later declared state song of Indiana (Moers 95). He was the exact opposite of his brother; Theodore was shy and contemplative while Paul was gregarious and shallow. Swanberg notes that Dresser "cared not a fig for Herbert Spencer" (69). Dreiser suggested to his brother and his partners that they start a magazine that would include the lyrics and music to their songs along with pictures, reports, reviews and stories. Dreiser would edit the magazine, giving him a job and a forum to express his views on various topics. Dreiser named the magazine Ev'ry Month and it launched in October 1895 (Swanberg 68).

Because of budget constraints, the magazine consisted mostly of Dreiser's writing. In addition to editing,

Dreiser wrote literary and drama reviews, personal profiles, a couple of short stories, and one poem. Dreiser took varying authorial names for these different spaces in order to conceal the fact that he was the only writer of the magazine (Barrineau XX). In his editorial columns Dreiser dubbed himself "The Prophet" and named the column "Reflections." In this space he often swung from expressing great admiration for Spencer to articulating his anger at the widening inequalities of American society, thus contradicting such American Spencerians as Edward Youmans and William Graham Sumner.

In his "Prophet" column of August 1896, Dreiser parrots Spencer's "survival of the fittest" concept: "Admire the strong we must. Before youth and health and strength make way—upon the victor's brow place the laurel" (144). Here Dreiser repeats Spencer's acceptance of the results of capitalist competition. However, he devotes the majority of this column to an indirect plea to help the unfit. He states that "the failures in this world are not to blame for their condition. They did not make the environment in which they were born; they could not regulate the early influences that prevailed over them. Poverty: it was not of their making" (144).

It is likely that Spencer's deterministic acceptance of poverty and suffering caused Dreiser's depressed reaction to the philosopher's ideas. This column shows his conflict over Spencer's brand of evolution. While repeating Spencer's mantra of evolution, Dreiser subverts it by suggesting that something needs to be done to alter society in some way. Spencerians claimed that such should not be done as represented by Youmans' reply to Ward (mentioned in chapter two) that evolution must be allowed to run its course to solve society's problems. Dreiser concludes a section of the editorial by exclaiming, "Neglect the infants much longer we dare not, else we imperil the ultimate life of the race itself!" (144) Rather than letting the offspring of the unfit suffer for their parents' inadequacies (as Spencer argued early in his career), Dreiser calls for them to get help, connecting their fate to the rest of the race's. In contrast, Spencer offered a progressive development that depended on the unfit and their offspring disappearing.

Conversely, in his September 1896 "Prophet" column Dreiser seems to have forgotten about the depressing elements of Spencer's thought. Dreiser calls Spencer's laws "beautiful" and declares that they show how "all animate and inanimate things have developed and arranged

themselves; how life has gradually become more and more complicated, more and more beautiful, and how architecture, sculpture, painting and music have gradually developed" (168). Given his artistic leanings, Dreiser sees more than the empirical truth in Spencer's theory; he sees Spencer's emphasis on progressive development as aesthetically pleasing. Spencer's idea that life moves from simplicity to complexity could satisfy Dreiser whose craft lay in representing the complexity of life. In pursuing what he thought was empirical truth, Spencer did not concern himself with the artistic dimension of his work. Still, he most likely would not have quarreled with Dreiser's description, seeing in it more proof of his ideas' validity.

In this column Dreiser also reinforces Spencer's idea that evolution can explain the development of all sensibilities when he argues that Spencer can help us understand the development of such sophisticated pursuits as painting and music. These fields are not immediately associated with evolutionary theory because more sophisticated human pursuits are not typically reduced to biological drives. Spencer's belief in the universal applications of evolutionary theory represents a flaw in his theory because such a narrow explanation ignores all

other possible influences in the development of painting and music in a particular nation at a certain period in history. Nevertheless, Dreiser ignores such a criticism and even concludes this section by claiming that if people read Spencer, they will be better able to understand and enjoy such literary works as Paradise Lost and "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" (168). In Jack London's Martin Eden also uses Spencer to explain the development of the arts. However, it is difficult to see how Spencer would help someone to understand the themes or complexity of Byron's and Milton's writing.

Despite such examples of agreement, Dreiser also indirectly criticizes Spencer. In the above example, Dreiser moves very far from his initially depressed reading of First Principles when living in Pittsburgh. This conflict is most obvious in the February 1897 column in which Dreiser articulates his contradictory views on Spencer in one space. He devotes the first section of the column to an attack on destructive greed as represented by two events: a banking scandal in Chicago and an arson case in New York. Dreiser claims that these events have been the most "fruitful in plain examples of the evil of American financial rapacity and its occasional dire result" (238). In response to these events, Dreiser asserts that

the pursuit of money is a hollow and soulless occupation which will only leave the pursuers unhappy and unfulfilled. Dreiser critiques the materialism which he sees as so destructive from a cosmic perspective rather than a political one.

Spencer's connection to Dreiser's opinions here is indirect. On one level Spencer's ideas could be seen as a justification for the type of greed that Dreiser decries. However, Dreiser ends this first section with the assertion that while America may be commercially successful, "it is also largely friendless" (240). This assertion mirrors Spencer's warning at his Delmonico's dinner almost sixteen years earlier. There is no evidence that Dreiser read Spencer's comments; therefore, a direct connection here is dubious. However, these events offer some insight on Spencer's thought. For one, the banking speculation (and attendant crash) shows that the social elite are not necessarily "the fittest." The financial dealers who created the crash did not reveal their expertise, but their shortsighted greed which suggests that, despite Dreiser's avoidance of the issue, these managers may need to be regulated by a neutral party. Also, for the purpose of this study, the crises Dreiser mentions undercut Hofstadter's implied thesis that Spencer's influence had

declined long before he died because progressive reforms had won the day.

In the following section, Dreiser unreservedly celebrates Spencer's ideas by stating that "all beings in all ages to come will owe him a debt of gratitude" (240). Dreiser asserts that this "debt" derives from Spencer's articulation of universal laws that govern all life. Dreiser argues that these laws are comprehensive, covering such diverse topics as sunlight, charity, and virtue; in an earlier column he said that they covered music and painting. He concludes by claiming that these laws are "unalterable" (241). Dreiser returns to Spencer as discoverer of objective truth. However, unlike his Newspaper Days recollection, the tone of the editorial is unrestrained optimism. Earlier in the piece he compares Spencer to a "refreshing spring" that exists to "refresh" and "strengthen" others in moving through the "boundless life-desert" (240). The message here is that Spencer enlivens and empowers his readers rather than depressing them. Moreover, he offers a metaphor of "Spencer the warrior, Spencer the general," who gloriously vanquishes all foes (240). To Dreiser, Spencer's triumph is humanity's triumph, because Spencer's version of life development is on the whole a happy one.

Yet, Dreiser follows this fulsome celebration of Spencer's ideas by returning to the hardship of the poor. In fact, he offers a meditation on Spencer's idea of "the survival of the fittest." This meditation exemplifies Dreiser's ambivalence over the practical consequences of Spencer's ideas. In this section he appears to justify Spencer's ideas. He states that, "Nature has by storm, sleet, and hunger weeded out the weaklings and incompetents before offering the gentle springtime and luxuriant summer to those fit ones who ... have thus managed to survive." He concludes this paragraph by claiming that this idea is "a very unchristian conclusion let us say, but a just one" (242).

As demonstrated earlier, Spencer helped Dreiser to liberate himself from the last influences of his father's oppressive Catholicism. However, in this passage, Dreiser refers to the charitable aspects of Christian doctrine, suggesting that while this situation may be "just," it may not be morally right. He furthers this point by suggesting that the fit may not be the most morally upright of the species. He asserts that, "It is the fit creature who manipulates bank, mining, or general market stock, and puts the acquired wealth between himself and possible destitution" (243). Earlier in the editorial he castigates

stock manipulators in Chicago and an arsonist in New York for ignoring morality in favor of social fitness. Dreiser follows this paragraph with a seemingly hard hearted indictment of the unfit; he calls them "weak-bodied and weak-hearted, lack[ing] the nerve to endure rebuff" (243). However, only six months earlier in his August 1896 column he argued that the supposed "unfit" were cast into a position not of their own making.

Dreiser concludes this section of his "Prophet" editorial of February 1897 with an uncertain tone regarding Spencer's concept of the survival of the fittest. He overtly states that the unfit's demise "fails to prove that the fit are the righteous, or the unfit the evil ones" (244). In fact, throughout the editorial he implies the exact opposite, which could only lead a reader to question the validity and benefits of a society based on the survival of the fittest concept. He still sounds unsure when he declares, "It may be that justice has been done those who have thus fallen before the winter; it may be that only the good have been preserved" (244). The use of "may" in both these clauses reveals that Dreiser was not sure of the benefits of the survival of the fittest idea. His confidence is still shaky when he concludes this section by claiming that "the unfit have been destroyed,

and we, the fit, have been preserved and retained to do, let us hope, what good we can" (244).

On the surface, Dreiser revered Herbert Spencer for his expansive theories, which Dreiser believed explained how life developed. Although he believed Spencer's theories, they dissatisfied him, as his memoir indicates. In his Ev'ry Month columns, Dreiser appears more satisfied by Spencer's ideas, seemingly to grasp the optimistic nature of Spencer's evolutionary theory. However, his other columns conflict with such optimism. Although he never directly criticizes Spencer's version of the survival of the fittest in those columns, his attacks on American materialism represent critiques of Spencer's ideas. In publishing his thoughts on Spencer, Dreiser attempted to disseminate the philosopher's ideas to a larger audience; nevertheless, while doing so, Dreiser subtly undermined this dissemination. This could explain his unmitigated celebration of Spencer's ideas in the Ev'ry Month columns as opposed to his personal anxiety over reading Spencer. The argument here is that Dreiser was deeply conflicted over Spencer's ideas throughout his own life, believing that were empirically valid, but hoping that they were not. As Martin states, Dreiser was sensitive to the "tragic overtones" of Spencer's philosophy (221).

He took such a conflict into his first novel published almost four years later, in November 1900. Critics have offered various opinions on the way Dreiser carried his interest in Herbert Spencer into the construction of Sister Carrie. The first sustained attempt at such an explanation came from Christopher Katope in "Sister Carrie and Spencer's First Principles," published in 1969. Before Katope, Dreiser critics like Ellen Moers and Robert H. Elias focused only on Dreiser's first reaction to reading First Principles, along with Spencer's influence in moving Dreiser to a more secular perspective. They did not connect Spencer to Dreiser's narrative technique. In fact, Robert Shafer probably spoke for the majority of Dreiser critics when he asserted that Dreiser "took from Spencer what he wanted, and nothing else; and it so happened that this included little or nothing specifically characteristic of Spencer as against various other naturalistic thinkers" (120). Shafer even goes so far as to say that Dreiser's form of naturalistic thinking opposed Spencer's due to Dreiser's focus on chaos and accident, in contrast to Spencer's emphasis on order (120). Therefore, Katope was the first critic to seriously consider Spencer's influence on Dreiser.

Katope argues that Spencer's concept of evolution and dissolution provides the narrative framework for Sister Carrie. In proving this point he focuses on Carrie's personal "evolution" and financial success along with Hurstwood's economic and physical dissolution. Katope argues that Carrie's growth from simple small town girl to successful New York actress offers a concrete example of Spencer's theory of life moving from simplicity to complexity or from "homogeneity" to "heterogeneity." This analysis shows that Spencer's general ideas can be applied to different situations; institutions, people, and societies often become more diverse and complicated as they develop. However, Spencer never applied his theory to specific individuals. In First Principles he is quite clear that individuals are subservient to the dominant forces that exist outside of them, not within them. It is inanimate "matter" that moves from "indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity" (307).

Katope's analysis suffers from another flaw. He argues that "The trait of indefiniteness—an attribute of homogeneity—is displayed in a variety of ways in Dreiser's characterization of Carrie" (67). He proceeds to show examples of Carrie's "rudimentary" "crude" mind as portrayed by Dreiser early in the novel. This point makes

Katope's analysis questionable. Carrie's naivete and simplicity do not necessarily derive from Spencer's theories; most likely Dreiser took this element from what Richard Lehan calls "the young man from the provinces subgenre" as represented by Charles Dickens' Great Expectations and Honore de Balzac's Lost Illusions ("Sister Carrie" 69). In Dreiser's rendering, Carrie becomes the "young man" whose journey typically moves from a naïve ignorance of the world to greater personal and professional development, thus, Carrie's change from a "crude" mind. Disillusionment usually accompanies this development as represented by Carrie's discontent at the conclusion of the novel. Therefore, the influence in Sister Carrie that Katope ascribes to Spencer is specious because Katope's examples reveal ideas that are not unique to Spencer. Instead, these character elements appear in other novels.

Lehan offers his own version of Spencerian influence in "Sister Carrie: The City, the Self, and the Modes of Narrative Discourse." Lehan, like Katope, falls into defining each character in terms of a Spencerian mechanism; for example, Carrie represents matter "moving toward completion" while Drouet exemplifies "stasis," and Hurstwood signifies "dissolution" (67). Again, while these characters represent these qualities, Spencer's ideas are

not necessarily Dreiser's chief influence here. Ellen Moers argues that Drouet's character originally came from a story by George Ade, a contemporary of Dreiser's (112). Still, throughout most of his essay, Lehan is on firmer footing than Katope because he examines the larger systems in which the characters find themselves. In describing the way Spencer's mechanism of "matter in motion" permeates the novel, Lehan focuses on the large urban environment: "The main force at work in the novel is that of the city. ... The city is repeatedly described as a magnet, a compelling attraction, drawing people to it with pulsating energy. Urban crowds are matter in motion, sweeping onward" ("Sister Carrie" 67). Lehan remains faithful to Spencer's ideas by arguing that the city's dynamics overpower individual's rational will, thus initiating changes which are beyond individual motivations. Spencer argued a similar point in First Principles in showing that his evolutionary laws transcended individual will.

Lehan reinforces this point when examining the characters' motivations for their various actions. In First Principles Spencer located the sun as the primary force in nature (179). Lehan claims that Dreiser also posits the sun as the primary force directing his characters ("Sister Carrie" 67). Lehan continues to assert

that "Free will is negated because all choice is weighted ... by which I mean there is more weight (force) on one side of the equation than on the other" ("Sister Carrie" 67-68). Thus, Lehan, unlike Katope, validly locates Spencer's concept of deterministic force within Dreiser's narrative. This force overwhelms human motivation, leaving the characters little autonomy in their own decisions. Lehan concludes his point by asserting that "like Spencer's, Dreiser's world is one of physical limits" ("Sister Carrie" 68). Here, Lehan shows that Spencerian force works similarly in Sister Carrie as it does in Frank Norris's The Octopus, as Norris also describes such forces as being larger than individual will. Norris, like Spencer, tried to show that these forces inevitably work for the benefit of humanity. However, his naturalist aesthetic undercuts such optimism. As shown above, Dreiser's ambivalence was more overt, reflecting the tragedy of individual helplessness.

Katope and Lehan largely ignore that ambivalence in their interpretations. They agree that Dreiser replicates Spencer's theories within Sister Carrie and in so doing they imply Dreiser's unqualified acceptance of Spencer's philosophy. However, as shown above, Dreiser felt conflicted over Spencer's ideas, intuitively believing that

they are valid, yet also feeling anxiety over the social and individual consequences of Spencer's theories. In opposition to them, Michael Davitt Bell argues that Sister Carrie is a split text. This split consists in what Bell calls the "immediate" voice whose style mimics the thoughts, feelings, and values of these characters, and an 'omniscient' voice whose interest is less in these characters than in the historical facts and general ideas they exemplify" (156).

Bell's distinction is very useful as regards Dreiser's ambivalence towards Spencer's ideas. The omniscient voice that tends to generalize human behavior can be compared to Dreiser's belief in the validity of Spencer's ideas. In using this narrator, Dreiser, like Spencer, attempts to reduce all human behavior to certain empirical rules. As Bell shows, when Drouet first makes his appearance, the narrator describes him in terms of a type, "the masher"; this term is followed by a long and detailed description of such a type (Sister Carrie 9). The narrator establishes the type "masher" and proceeds to articulate the universal characteristics that "mashers" tend to exhibit, thus asserting that all "mashers" are governed by the same general rules. Similarly, in describing Hurstwood's future in New York at his age, the omniscient narrator, declares:

A man's fortune or material progress is very much the same as his bodily growth. Either he is growing stronger, healthier, wiser, as the youth approaching manhood, or he is growing weaker, older, less incisive mentally, as the man approaching old age. There are no other states. (304)

The narrator further states that it is possible for a man to achieve "a balance" where he is neither growing stronger or weaker; however, he concludes that "the balance becomes a sagging towards the grave side" (305). Although these are not Spencer's ideas, the omniscient narrator again engages in a type of Spencerian reasoning. In the above passage the omniscient narrator attempts to reduce the dynamics of men's aging into one theory. Moreover, this particular example reflects Dreiser's own interest in biology as this section ends with a discussion of "certain poisons in the blood called katastates" which are produced by "a constantly subdued frame of mind." The narrator also mentions certain "helpful chemicals called anastates" which derive from "virtuous feelings of pleasure" (306). Here, Dreiser explains man's development through a seemingly scientific theory much in the way that Spencer tried to explain human development through evolutionary theory.

Conversely, Bell's "immediate voice" represents Dreiser's dissatisfaction with Spencer's type of thinking. The immediate voice allows the reader an intimate view of the various characters' thoughts and emotions. In doing so, Dreiser reveals the singularity of their personalities. At these moments, they do not merely represent a generalized process, but are individual people with their own thoughts. Therefore, the immediate voice suggests that their thoughts cannot be easily reduced to a general Spencerian theory. Hurstwood's complicated position in the novel represents this point. On the one hand, he is an adulterer and a thief, which makes him a general type for the omniscient narrator to explore. However, as Bell points out, the narrator's language is "not sufficiently *distinct* from [the characters'] language" (159). He means that the immediate voice collapses the distinction between narrator and character, thus creating a certain sense of identification. Hurstwood commits seemingly inexplicable acts. Nevertheless, the narrator often moves into Hurstwood's thoughts in order to reveal his motivation for his seemingly thoughtless actions. For instance, after Hurstwood meets Carrie the narrator offers a glimpse of Hurstwood's thoughts:

The reason for his interest, not to say fascination, was deeper than mere desire. It was a flowering out of feelings which had been withering in dry and barren soil for many years. It is probable that Carrie represented a better order of woman than had ever attracted him before. He had had no love affair since that which culminated in his marriage and since then time and the world had taught him how raw and erroneous was his original judgment. ... Such women as he had known were of nearly one type, selfish, ignorant, flashy. The wives of his friends were not inspiring to look upon. His own wife had developed a cold, commonplace nature which to him was anything but pleasing. (118)

The passage appears to begin with the "omniscient voice" objectively describing Hurstwood's unhappiness with his marriage. The narrator offers a cliched metaphor concerning Dreiser's emotional state. While using such a cliché might appear to be narrative incompetence, Bell suggests that the narrator often employs the type of language that the characters use (160). Hurstwood is portrayed as the type who might use clichés in his social interactions in order to demonstrate his social dexterity. He is described as a "starched and conventional poser"

(103). Moreover, next to Drouet, who has no "poetry" in him (102), Hurstwood is clearly more emotionally sensitive. The passage is also filled with other words that Hurstwood would use, for example "raw," "erroneous," "ignorant," "flashy," "cold," and "commonplace." Bell claims that this narrative technique collapses the distance between reader and character leading the reader to identify with the character (162). This narrative technique leads the reader to see the character as a unique individual who cannot be reduced to a product of universal processes. Also, this identification allows the reader to understand the character's specific suffering, creating a sympathy that transcends scientific laws like those of Spencer.

Bell's two differing narrative styles reflect Dreiser's conflict between objective generalizations and specific description. The style of thinking of the first type is probably Spencer's biggest influence on Dreiser. As shown in chapter two of this study, American thinkers who read Spencer acquired an appetite for comprehensive evolutionary theorizing. The novelists of the period also absorbed this mania for science-like theorizing. Although critics like Bell cite Emile Zola and Charles Darwin as the writers' main influences (109), Spencer's role in the

novelists' use of evolutionary theory is also important. In the last chapter it was argued that Frank Norris's use of force concepts as a consolation to tragic developments derived from Spencer's idea of the "conservation of force." The thesis of the overall study concerns the way the novelists consciously or unconsciously undermined their own use of evolutionary theory to explain human behavior. In the last chapter I argued that Norris's melodramatic and tragic style and theme subvert his use of force.

In Sister Carrie Dreiser also employs force concepts as a way to explain his character's motivations. However, unlike Norris, his use of it is more overtly complex. He titles the first chapter "A Waif amid forces" (7). Furthermore, in describing Carrie's arrival in Chicago, the narrator claims:

When a girl leaves her home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse. Of an intermediate balance, under the circumstances, there is no possibility. The city has its cunning wiles ... There are larger forces which allure with all the soulfulness of expression possible in the most

cultured human. The gleam of a thousand lights is often as effective as the persuasive light in a wooing and fascinating eye. Half the undoing of the unsophisticated and natural mind is accomplished by forces wholly superhuman. ... Without a counselor at hand to whisper cautions interpretations, what falsehoods may not these things breathe into the unguarded ear! (8)

In the beginning of the novel, Bell's omniscient voice establishes that morality will be a major theme of the novel. The passage begins with a self-righteous declaration of the only two possible consequences of Carrie's journey to Chicago: she will either become "better" or "worse." The story proceeds to undermine this rigid dichotomy by showing that while Carrie may wind up morally "worse," she becomes economically "better"; in fact, she rises from the working-class condition of her industrious but dour sister to the pleasurable upper-middle-class life of Drouet and Hurstwood. Once Carrie moves in with Drouet, the narrator asserts, "In the view of a certain stratum of society, Carrie was comfortably established—in the eyes of the starveling beaten by every wind and gusty sheet of rain, she was safe in a halcyon harbor" (90). This passage explains Carrie's becoming

"worse" in order to gain a certain place amid the uncertainty of the city. As the narrator shows, anyone who had experienced privation would understand Carrie's decision to become "worse."

In the above passage, the "omniscient" narrator associates the larger city with the "forces" of "allure." This is not quite Spencer's concept of force. His is a larger and more abstract entity that moves irresistibly and inexorably. In the passage above, the narrator suggests that these "forces" are duplicitous, but can be resisted by a cautious "counselor." This point shows, as Ronald Martin claims, that Dreiser appropriates Spencer's ideas for their poetic quality since he swerves from Spencer's original intention of force and uses the idea of it to explain that people are manipulated by their environment, an idea that parallels Spencer's thought. More importantly, Dreiser equates force with amorality, thus revealing what becomes a major point in the novel: that morality cannot be reduced to a rule, a law, or a science. Any concept of morality must consider a variety of factors, such as one's situation at the time of moral compromise.

Later in the novel, Dreiser overtly states this point in a reference to Spencer. After Drouet and Carrie consummate their relationship, the narrator asserts:

For all the liberal analysis of Spencer and our modern naturalistic philosophers, we have but an infantile perception of morals. There is more in the subject than mere conformity to a law of evolution. It is yet deeper than conformity to things of earth alone. It is more involved than we, as yet, perceive. Answer, first, why the heart thrills; explain wherefore some plaintive note goes wandering about the world, undying; make clear the rose's subtle alchemy evolving its ruddy lamp in light and rain. In the essence of these facts lie the first principles of morals. (90)

Dreiser's narrator critiques the idea that evolutionary science can explain aspects of life beyond biology. He claims that biological explanations are limited because they cannot consider beauty, desire, and emotion; these ideas cannot be quantified through biological rules. The narrator specifically contradicts Spencer's idea that a physical element, like the sun, can explain people's desires, the implication being that people are more complicated than mere products of their natural

environment. Thrilling hearts and "plaintive" notes exemplify this complexity; these things are so capricious that they cannot be predicted or explained through scientific law.

Within this narrative context, the passage directly applies to Carrie. The narrator again anticipates the moral judgment that the reader may pronounce on Carrie and proceeds to explain that morality is not as simply defined as a reader may believe. Hence Carrie can (and will) become morally worse, but materially better. While this point is certainly true, the passage better applies to Hurstwood because he experiences the harshest consequences of an evolutionary morality. The best American statement of such a morality is by John Fiske who, in countering religious criticism of his and Spencer's brand of evolutionary theory, combined a religious sense of morality with a rather harsh evolutionary ethics. In the fourth volume of his Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy Fiske argues that moral unfitness and physical unfitness are one and the same and that moral unfitness will be punished by physical extinction: survival of the morally fit (308).

This is exactly Hurstwood's fate: he cheats on his wife; steals money, albeit reluctantly, from his bosses;

and kidnaps his now reluctant lover to New York where he begins a slow painful physical and financial decline until he commits suicide. Thus, Hurstwood's case is closed; he suffered his appropriate evolutionary fate. However, given Hurstwood's central role within the narrative, the tragedy of his demise and the narrator's comment on evolutionary ethics, the reader understands and sympathizes with his plight. Dreiser presents Hurstwood's decline in a tragic manner through the use of Michael Davitt Bell's "immediate voice." Dreiser gives the reader Hurstwood's thoughts during his physical decline. After being aggressively rejected in his begging, Hurstwood walks down the Bowery "with death in his heart" and realizes that "People had turned on the gas before and died; why shouldn't he?" (454).

Dreiser shows Hurstwood as so desperate that he contemplates self-annihilation. In doing so, the author shows a sensibility that is outside the comprehension of many people; Dreiser's use of the immediate voice allows the reader to understand and empathize with Hurstwood's desperation, hence making his plight more tragic. This empathy transcends any objective scientific law. Similarly, Richard Lehan claims that Dreiser's conflict between his "romantic aspirations" and "his belief in a world of

physical limits led in his fiction to the displaced hero—the man whose desire for essential self-fulfillment is in conflict with his environment” (Theodore Dreiser 47).

Lehan asserts, here, that Dreiser acutely feels Hurstwood’s tragedy. Dreiser shows the destructive reality of an evolutionary theory, especially of an uncompromising Spencerian version of evolutionary ethics, thus subverting an evolutionary ethics. Similarly, Lawrence Hussman Jr. argues that Dreiser’s novels “record his characters’ attempts to resolve profound conflicts that he deeply felt himself” (17). Hurstwood’s experience is one example of such a conflict.

While Hurstwood considers stealing the money, the omniscient narrator, typically the voice of generalization, tells the reader not to judge Hurstwood morally because of the uniqueness of his situation:

To those who have never wavered in conscience, the predicament of the individual whose mind is less strongly constituted and who trembles in the balance between duty and desire is scarcely appreciable, unless graphically portrayed. ... Not alone in sensitive, highly organized natures is such a mental conflict possible. The dullest specimen of humanity,

when drawn by desire toward evil, is recalled by a sense of right, which is proportionate in power and strength to his evil tendency. (244)

Hurstwood subsequently steals the money from the safe of Fitzgerald and Moy's. His theft is described as almost an accident: "While the money was in his hand the lock clicked. It had sprung! Did he do it? ... It had closed. Heavens! he was in for it now, sure enough" (247).

Despite this ambivalence, Hurstwood has to bear the responsibility for the theft. However, again Dreiser shows that human actions have complicated motivations, therefore indicating that a strict evolutionary morality like the kind Fiske advocated is hard to defend.

One of the issues that an evolutionary morality cannot explain is desire. In the passage, the omniscient narrator states that Hurstwood is caught "between duty and desire." Desire is a key element of the narrative for both Hurstwood and Carrie; in fact Hussman argues that desire represents "the protagonist" of the novel (18). The desire for Carrie drove Hurstwood to steal the money and abandon his comfortable middle-class life. Also, Walter Benn Michaels points out that desire fuels Carrie's actions. He states that, "Fancy or imagination is the very agent of excessive

desire for Carrie" (44). Of course, this very desire leads to both Carrie's dramatic success and her moral transgressions about which the narrator warned the reader. Her desire to stay in Chicago when she has neither job nor money leads her to move in with Drouet. Similarly, as Michaels mentions, Drouet lights a "secret flame" in Carrie's heart when he encourages her to act (Dreiser 150). This will inevitably lead to her success on Broadway in New York. The whole way of life she witnesses in Chicago ignites her envy and makes it impossible for her to leave.

The key point here is that desire cannot be contained by an evolutionary ethics. As the omniscient narrator explained earlier, evolutionary theory cannot explain "why the heart thrills," which is another way to express the capriciousness of desire (90). That passage is crucial in reading Spencer's influence in the novel. Michael Davitt Bell asserts that the narrator's reference to Spencer represents "an assertion of science's inadequacy" which is the argument here (158). Conversely, Louis Zanine argues that Spencer's theory of morals parallels Dreiser's belief in desire as a major driving force in people's actions. Zanine states:

Spencer had declared pleasure as the ultimate goal of all human conduct and had built an evolutionary rationale for pronouncing pleasure seeking morally good. Rather than rejecting Spencerian ethics, Dreiser was merely shifting emphasis here from the scientific and evolutionary foundations of Spencer's theories to the mysterious, hedonistic aspect of his philosophy. (48)

Zanine's argument is appealing. In Principles of Ethics, Spencer criticizes asceticism as an example of "the devil-worship of the savage," hence equating self-denial with a lack of evolution (40). Moreover, he asserts that egoism comes before altruism because people's survival depends on their egoistic drives (187). However, these are only some aspects of Spencer's theory. While acknowledging egoism as central, Spencer associates altruism with higher species development so much so that he believes that as people evolve, they naturally become more altruistic (204). Zanine's attempt to reduce the complexity of Spencer's moral analysis represents the chief flaw in his argument. Asserting that Spencer "built an evolutionary rationale for pronouncing pleasure seeking morally good" ignores the many facets of Spencer's analysis. For example, Spencer argues that "civilized men" who cultivate a narrow range of

activities, for example "pleasure seeking" only, are acting unnaturally (73). Similarly, earlier in his study, Spencer asserts that the organism is highly evolved when it can master a diverse set of activities (25).

Although Dreiser does not reject certain elements of Spencer's morality, he powerfully demonstrates that something as subjective as morals cannot be apprehended by scientific inquiry. In the Principles of Ethics Spencer declares that he is articulating a "moral science" (57). In the passage that opens chapter ten of Sister Carrie, Dreiser argues that the key to understanding morals comes with understanding people's irrational reactions to fleeting and contingent sensual experiences. In doing so, Dreiser contradicts people like Spencer and Fiske, who apply evolutionary theory to morals or social development.

As a novelist, Dreiser was more preoccupied with portraying people's complexity, including their internal contradictions and irrational emotions, rather than proving a scientific theory. In their fiction, Dreiser and Frank Norris revealed the gaps in evolutionary logic. Given his continued conflict over Spencer's conception of evolution, Dreiser was more conscious of the problems in Spencer's theory than Norris, who revealed his doubts more

unconsciously. In the next chapter Jack London's conflict will be explained as manifested in his autobiographical novel Martin Eden.

Chapter Five: The Demise of the Fittest: Martin Eden as  
Spencerian Antihero

As he was for Theodore Dreiser, Herbert Spencer was a major intellectual presence in Jack London's life. In an August 10, 1899 letter to his long-time correspondent Cloudesley Johns, London wrote, "But Spencer's First Principles alone, leaving out all the rest of his work, has done more for mankind and through the ages will have done far more for mankind than a thousand books" (Letters Vol. One 103-04). In a subsequent letter to Fannie K. Hamilton dated July 15, 1906, London asserts that Spencer "has profoundly affected my life" (Letters Vol. Two 590). As with Dreiser, Spencer provided London with a philosophical foundation upon which he could build his own set of beliefs. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Dreiser attached himself to Spencer's idea of a harsh, but evolving, universe to replace his lapsed Catholicism.

London disregarded the teleological strain of Spencer's thought. Given his working-class background, London saw life as a Darwinian struggle without a positive result. As Ronald Martin demonstrates, the most important gift with which Spencer provided London was a systematic way of understanding a seemingly chaotic and irrational world (187). In a letter dated March 15, 1900, quoted at

length by Martin, London admonishes Johns that "to be well fitted for the tragedy of existence (intellectual existence), one must have a working philosophy, a synthesis of things" (Letters Vol. One 170). Spencer provided London with this "synthesis" by arguing for the interconnectedness of seemingly unlike things, such as the sun and the development of cities, providing an order to disorder.

Unlike both Norris and Dreiser, Herbert Spencer figures prominently in London's fiction. When the title character of London's autobiographical novel, Martin Eden, embarks on his writing career, he sees Spencer's philosophical influence in his writing:

"Overdue" would tell a story that would be true of its particular characters and its particular events; but it would tell, too, he was confident, great vital things that would be true of all time, and all sea, and all life—thanks to Herbert Spencer, he thought, leaning back for a moment from the table. Ay, thanks to Herbert Spencer and to the master-key of life, evolution which Spencer had placed in his hands. (266)

In Spencer's ideas, Eden sees an orientation toward big concepts that similarly infuses his own writing. However, Eden represents a Spencerian antihero, for his journey to

philosophical enlightenment and social respectability as a famous writer and thinker leads to disillusionment and unhappiness that culminate in Eden's suicide.

This chapter will focus on the way that London's narrative works to undermine the validity of Spencer's ideas. Eden is filled with contradictions. As he becomes more educated, he expresses his disdain for "the crowd." Spencer reinforces Eden's belief that the working class deserves its subservient social position. However, even after his conversion to Spencer's social thought, Eden never abandons his sympathy for the plight of the lower class. Eden is also conflicted between his belief in romanticism and his embrace of Spencer's evolutionary materialism. His aesthetic self leads him to celebrate romantic love as the only ideal for which humanity should strive. Conversely, he subscribes to a severe Spencerian materialism that reduces all life to evolutionary processes. Moreover, Eden's aesthetic sensibility also conflicts with his sympathy for the working class. He wants to write imaginative and thoughtful stories and poems; however, the working class does not appreciate his work. For example, after his sister reads one of his stories, she misses the point of it, focusing only on its sad ending (80-81).

Because Martin Eden is an autobiographical novel, London's connection to his fictional self needs to be addressed. London and his critics have weighed in on this point. In a November 5, 1915 letter to Mary Austin, London states that he wrote a novel that "was an attack on the super-man idea, namely, my Martin Eden. Nobody discovered that this was such an attack" (Letters Vol. Three 1513). One reason that nobody knew the novel was an attack could be that whatever London's conscious intention, he inevitably identifies with the fictional incarnation of himself. Thus, he could not help but to portray Eden in a positive way. Sam S. Baskett maintains that:

After obvious biographical differences have been noted, however, the overall congruence of character and author is unmistakable, the differences mostly inessential, sufficiently so as to authenticate, *mutatis mutandis*, London's ambiguous claim, "I was Martin Eden." As to his contradictory distinction between himself and Martin that Martin was an individualist, whereas he was committed to "the collective human need," London was surely enough of an individualist for any close reader to recognize in the character an extreme embodiment of a vital component of the author's self. In casting such a character the

author himself quite likely was not able to sort out precisely where and to what degree he was and was not Martin. (125)

Baskett argues that in describing someone so like himself, London lost the distinction between the two. However, Baskett's assertion that the differences between London's life and the novel are "inessential" needs to be examined rather than accepted. Therefore, comparing Eden's and London's experiences is necessary. One startling similarity is Eden and London moved from inarticulate members of the working-class to successful men of letters. Moreover, Ruth Morse is modeled on a woman named Mabel Applegarth who was, like Ruth, a literature student at the University of California, Berkeley; Mabel's physical appearance—pale with long golden hair—parallels that of Ruth Morse. Mabel met London, however, not through her brother whom he saved from a beating, as is the case with Eden, but through Fred Jacobs, who was an assistant librarian at the Oakland Library where London was checking out books. Jack instantly fell in love with Mabel and they came to have a relationship similar to the one Martin and Ruth had (Kershaw 41, 46). This part of the story reinforces Baskett's idea of trivial differences, even

given the fact that Mabel was dying of tuberculosis (Kershaw 42).

Still, London's and Eden's stories diverge in a crucial way. By the time London met Fred Jacobs and the Applegarths, he had discovered Karl Marx and was becoming a believer in socialism (Kershaw 39-40). Baskett quotes London as distinguishing between his interest in social justice and Eden's individualism. Such a difference is not trivial and represents one of the major paradoxes of Martin Eden, for, despite Eden's statements about the inferiority of the working-class, he never loses his personal empathy for his fellow laborers. Spencer claimed that economic inequality existed because the fittest thrived and the unfit did not. Although London admired Spencer's ability to create a comprehensive and empirical philosophy, he intuitively knew that Spencer's explanation was not complete, given that he, himself, once belonged to the lower class.

London's experience taught him that the lower class was not necessarily the unfit. Thus, London also sought socialism as an empirical explanation for human suffering. He developed a class consciousness from an early age. He was strongly influenced by his experience shoveling coal at the Oakland, San Leandro, and Haywards Electric Railway at

seventeen years of age. London had internalized the ethos of success through hard work, presenting himself to the foreman as one who was ready to prosper through the proverbial sweat of his brow. The foreman encouraged this spirit in him. However, London realized that he had been exploited by the foreman, when a co-worker told him that he had replaced two other men, earning half of one worker's pay (Kershaw 31). After this experience, London's sense of class conflict deepened when he joined Kelly's Army, a local offshoot of Coxey's Army of unemployed people marching to Washington to demand federally subsidized jobs building roads (Kershaw 32). The army broke apart in Iowa; however, London continued to travel east on his own.

He headed to Niagara Falls where he was arrested for vagrancy and sentenced to thirty days in late June of 1894; he was eighteen (Kershaw 34-6). In jail London witnessed extreme brutality. One noteworthy example involved a young mulatto who protested for his rights. Although London quietly supported the young man's cause, London witnessed him being thrown down five flights of stairs before collapsing into unconsciousness (Kershaw 37; Hedrick 28). Joan Hedrick maintains that the chief lesson London learned while in prison was that power derived from social

position. There was a hierarchy in prison to which even the smartest or strongest man had to kowtow.

This indirectly shows that London did not share Herbert Spencer's idea of the inherent fitness of the upper classes. Although he vowed to enter the middle class, London did not internalize any of the class's values; he merely pursued a more comfortable and stable life. His experience at the electrical company showed him that the management class could be just as predatory as the working class. Hedrick states that by the time of his success in 1902, London felt "that the middle class world that he had so desired differed only in degree from the sordidness of his lower-class youth" (57). These sentiments parallel Martin Eden's by the end of London's novel. However, London's political outlook allowed him to deal with the disappointment of material success much better than Martin Eden did. By the end of the novel, Martin Eden is disillusioned with upper class hypocrisy. On the other hand, London was already well aware of this hypocrisy.

After traveling back to the west coast, London decided to return to high school. He supplemented his high school education with his own reading regimen. During his travels, he had heard of Karl Marx's The Communist Manifesto and thus checked it out of the Oakland Public

Library. Marx's theory of exploitation provided him with a theoretical framework through which to view his experiences of abuse and poverty (Kershaw 40). However, there is some debate over how much of Marx London actually read. Ronald Martin quotes London's daughter Joan to prove that he acquired his knowledge of Marx more through conversing with Frank Strawn-Hamilton than through any actual reading of Marx (187). Certainly, London was someone who learned life more through his experiences than reading. Still, despite his minimal reading of Marx, he managed to apply the philosopher's ideas to his own life and his knowledge of communism led him to join the Oakland Socialist Labor Party (Kershaw 41).

London's socialist activities, which included denouncing capitalism in a midterm debate and protesting government limits on free speech, caused the Parent and Teachers Association to call for his punishment. London's high school socialism offers a different portrait than the one in Martin Eden; London discovered socialism at an early age while Eden remains a staunch opponent of socialism throughout his fictional life. When London left high school in 1896, he still had two years to go until he could graduate and apply to the University of California, Berkeley. London decided to gain entrance to the

university through the entrance examinations, which he did (Kershaw 46).

Kershaw highlights another difference between the novel and London's life. He states that, the novel reveals Jack's emasculation as he moves from his working-class peer group to the middle-class world of Ruth and its feminised values. It shows how his need to belong made him cast aside the validity of the gritty experiences which had shaped his character.

(42)

Similarly, Yung Min Kim asserts, "As Martin metamorphoses from the savage into the civilized gentleman, as he gains greater agency within one social realm, his sense of alienation increases, and he begins to lose his virility and strength" (11). However, this was not London's trajectory. Even after his relationship with Mabel and friendship with Fred Jacobs, he maintained his belief in socialism along with his working-class identity and they continued to support his education (Kershaw 46). This represents another difference from the novel. After the cub reporter misrepresents Eden's speech at the socialist meeting, the Morses abandon him (281-2).

At the university, London clearly differed in personality and temperament from his fellow upper class

students. He dressed more casually than they did and so passionately argued his points that according to Kershaw "he was delivering truth from the bottom of his heart." He also spent much time in the university gymnasium where he liked to challenge his fellow students to boxing matches (47). These examples show that London maintained his working class identity at the university. London's fictional alter ego internalizes the bourgeois definition of working-class life as "indecent" and "unclean," thus relinquishing an aspect of himself. As will be argued later, London criticizes Eden for abandoning his working class identity during his intellectual growth.

London continued his reading while at the university. This is when he discovered Herbert Spencer, being especially impressed with his Philosophy of Style, which he read in one sitting. Both Kershaw and Martin agree that London was most impressed with Spencer's evolutionary explanation of how life worked. Kershaw states, "In his haste, he understood little except that it offered the meaning of life. Certainly he did not see the contradiction in adopting Marxism as well as Spencer's philosophy of 'the survival of the fittest'" (49). More proof that London's educational trajectory markedly differs from that of Eden is the fact that London left the

University of California after only four months due to his belief that he could learn more through experience and his own reading than he could in a classroom. Once again, London chose physical experience over the more refined world of academia (Kershaw 49).

This biographical sketch serves to illustrate two points. One, Spencer was not London's only intellectual influence. His socialism is out of keeping with Spencer, since the philosopher opposed socialist policies his entire life. Although Kershaw accurately asserts that London was unaware of the contradiction, his socialism limited Spencer's influence on him (49). Two, while Martin Eden is clearly an autobiographical novel, it is fiction because London differs from Eden in at least one major way: London discovered socialism and, despite his continuing conflicts with the party, it profoundly influenced the way he thought. Thus, Sam S. Baskett is not right in asserting that the differences between London's life and the novel are trivial. In fact, given London's socialism, he might also be represented by Eden's poet friend Russ Brissenden, who encourages Eden to become a socialist (273).

Eden is older than eighteen at the beginning of the novel; therefore, a good part of his experiences are not described in detail. However, London makes no reference to

Eden's marching for jobs, his time in jail, or his high school socialism. Instead, London describes a tough and politically unconscious working-class youth who has had exotic experiences with tribal chiefs in the South Seas. He conspicuously avoids this part of his life because he wanted to create Eden a certain way, focusing on his extreme individualism.

Eden does not embrace socialism. By the end of the novel, he is out of ideas to help him understand the world. Spencer does not help him when Ruth Morse chooses her petty bourgeois values over Eden's love for her and thus Eden borders on clinical depression. As shown in the previous chapter, Spencer could only conceive of human morality or human happiness as byproducts of biological evolution; for Spencer the biologically fittest are the happiest and most moral. However, in Martin Eden London shows that individual happiness does not derive from biological development because Eden is the most biologically developed character in the novel; nevertheless, by the end of the novel, his unhappiness, which cannot be explained through evolution, halts his own personal evolution.

All of these examples show that Eden is a multifaceted and complex individual whose personality cannot be reduced to a comprehensive philosophy like that of Spencer's, which

Ronald Martin dubs "second-rate" (210). Similarly, Martin asserts that "as an artist [London] showed in his best works an intuitive awareness that there was more to life than any single paradigm could express" (185). All three novelists in this study demonstrate such an awareness in their various critiques, intended or unintended, of Spencer's thought. In his novel *London*, like Dreiser before him, uses Eden's experience to demonstrate that people are too complicated to be reduced to Spencer's evolutionary materialism. However, despite his complexity, Eden is never self-aware enough to fully understand his fragmented self. In general, Eden has trouble conceiving of such complexities at least partially due to his belief in certain laws and strictures.

The other philosopher who strongly influences Eden is Friedrich Nietzsche. London's assertion, in the letter quoted above, that he wanted to write a novel attacking the superman shows that London was compelled to write the novel in response to Nietzsche. Martin Eden consistently longs for "the strong man on horseback to save the state from its own rotten futility," suggesting a desire for a fascist dictator. He continues to tell Mr. Morse and Judge Blount, who espouse a belief in Republican economic regulation, that "Nietzsche was right. I won't take the time to tell

you who Nietzsche was, but he was right. The world belongs to the strong—to the strong who are noble as well and who do not wallow in the swine-trough of trade and exchange” (269). Many of these ideas contradict Spencer’s. Spencer was not a fascist and he believed that trade and exchange represent the highest form of civilized behavior. Eden ignores these contradictions in following both Nietzsche and Spencer. However, the two thinkers share one critical idea that defines Eden’s personality: a belief in the triumph of the strong.

Spencer believes that the strong will evolve and create a capitalist society that channels humanity’s violent tendencies into economic competition. Eden, like London, ignores this part of Spencer’s thought, and focuses instead on Spencer’s idea of the survival of the fittest. While addressing the socialists, Eden asserts that “the strong and the progeny of the strong survive, and so long as the struggle obtains, the strength of each generation increases.” Further in his speech, Eden argues that this “law of development” cannot “be annulled” (269). In asserting a “law of development,” Eden directly references Herbert Spencer. Eden stopped short of acknowledging the type of market society created by the law of development. Nevertheless, he accepted that the strong will survive to

be the leaders of society, thus demonstrating the connection between Nietzsche's superman and Spencer's biological evolution.

Similarly, in reading Spencer, Eden believes that he has found the ultimate explanation for how all life develops and functions. Both Nietzsche and Spencer contribute to Eden's arrogance. Ronald Martin states, "London, undoubtedly, meant to depict the hero's search for truth and his arrival at a very advanced, factual, and superior set of insights through Spencer" (210). Similarly, Eden's reading of Spencer is described as a type of revelation:

And here was the man Spencer, organizing all knowledge for him reducing everything to unity, elaborating ultimate realities, and presenting to his startled gaze a universe so concrete of realization that it was like the model of a ship such as sailors make and put into glass bottles. There was no caprice, no chance. All was law. (91)

This belief feeds Eden's sense of superiority which blinds him to the complexities in his own character and in the external world. Throughout the novel, Eden believes that there exists no unpredictability in life and that all existence proceeds according to Spencerian evolution. This

assumption will inevitably be his undoing because it feeds his rigid view of the world. Despite London's seeming respect for Spencer's thought, he also shows that Spencer's philosophy can lead to a certain intellectual blindness given his creation of a character such as Eden.

Eden is blind to the very complicated relationship he has with his fellow laborers. At certain instances, he is disdainful of what he perceives as their weaknesses. He reflects that working people "had their limitations to forget, and when they were drunk, their dim, stupid spirits were even as gods, and each ruled in his heaven of intoxicated desire" (41). At this moment Eden overtly separates himself from the members of the working class because they have "limitations" that he does not have. Similarly, when Eden meets Lizzie Connolly and her friend, he declares that "He was better than this. Life meant more to him than it meant to these two girls whose thoughts did not go beyond ice-cream and a gentleman friend" (45). Both of these examples show that Eden intuitively feels superior to his fellow workers.

These examples occur before Eden discovers Herbert Spencer's books, suggesting Eden's susceptibility to Spencer's idea of the inferiority of the working class. After reading Spencer's books, Eden becomes more articulate

and hardened in his feeling of superiority because Spencer has helped to teach him how to think about the world. At the socialist meeting, Eden invokes Spencerian language in order to describe the workers at the meeting; he calls them a "miserable mass of weaklings and inefficients who perished according to biological law on the ragged confines of life. They were the unfit" (275). In this passage, Eden applies Spencer's concept of the survival of the fittest to social relations, just as Spencer did, to argue for the inferiority of the working class.

However, despite the above examples, Eden is very ambivalent in his feelings toward the working class. Intellectually, he feels superior to members of his own class, while intuitively, feeling a very close bond with them. Even after reading and adopting Spencer's ideas, Eden maintains his strong respect and sympathy for working people. When Eden meets Joe Dawson, the latter is hung over from a drinking binge the previous night. Eden is on the "water-wagon," and realizes that there was an "enormous gulf between him and this man—the gulf the books had made; but he found no difficulty in crossing back over that gulf. He had lived all his life in the working-class world, and the *camaraderie* of labor was second nature with him" (120). Despite Spencer's teaching along with Eden's own sense of

superiority, Eden still has an intuitive affection for his fellow laborers, understanding the root of their seemingly thoughtless behavior. This affection competes with Spencer's ideas, creating a philosophical paradox within Eden's own psyche. As they work in the laundry together, Eden and Dawson's "camaraderie" only deepens and they become close friends.

In fact, "the enormous gulf" shrinks when Eden starts working in the laundry. Early in the novel, Eden condemns workers' drinking as a sign of their weakness; this condemnation also reflects his belief that the working-class cannot control their own appetites. The drinking leads to a routine of working and drinking with no personal improvement. Eden believes that he transcends such thoughtless behavior, thus fueling his sense of superiority over other members of the working-class. However, after working in the laundry, Eden returns to drinking because the work is so brutal (129). Before going to a bar, he realizes that "All that was god-like in him was blotted out. The spur of ambition was blunted; he had no vitality with which to feel the prod of it. He was dead. His soul seemed dead. He was a beast, a work-beast" (128).

At this point in the novel, London offers a very unflinching portrayal of the brutal nature of physical

labor (122-127). With this portrait along with the work's influence on Eden, London shows the reader the physical, psychological and emotional devastation that manual labor wreaks on a person. This point competes with the Spencerianism in the novel because London shows that Spencer's concept of the "survival of the fittest" is not necessarily valid. London's depiction of the excruciating life of labor shows that if the members of the upper class, as represented in the novel by Mr. Morse and Judge Blount, had to endure such toil, they would not be the paragons of success which they appear to be.

Had Eden remained in the laundry, he, the robust physical specimen, would have become another spiritually broken laborer who would have turned to alcohol for solace. Eden admits as much to Ruth after he returns from working in the laundry. He tells her that "the laundry was making a beast of me. Too much work of that sort drives to drink." He further tells her that he will write a book with the title of "'The Degradation of Toil' or the Psychology of Drink in the Working-class" (136). London debunks Eden's exalted sense of his own superiority. The work in the laundry led him to become a slave to alcohol and thus led him back to working-class weakness. After his experience in the laundry, Eden admires Joe Dawson for his

ability to have done it for so long; he also briefly questions his own invincibility. However, the work at that laundry does not lead to genuine self-awareness. He still overtly believes that the upper class deserves their comfortable position in society while the laborers like Joe Dawson are to blame for their lowly position. Thus, his view on economic inequality is not significantly altered.

Eden's perception of Lizzie Connolly is also not as simple as it seems. When he first meets Lizzie, he feels superior to her; however, he acknowledges that Lizzie's personality derives in large part to "a future that was a gamble between the ugliness of unending toil and the black pit of more terrible wretchedness" (44). Ruth Morse even comments on Lizzie's unfortunate situation. When Ruth and Martin pass by Lizzie on the street, Ruth tells Martin that if Lizzie "had proper opportunity to dress...and if she were taught how to carry herself, you would be fairly dazzled by her, and so would all men" (88). The tragedy of Lizzie's existence derives from the fact that, due to her class limitations, she has not had the opportunities that someone like Ruth has had to "dazzle" men.

All of these examples show that Eden's disdain for the working-class represents his ignorance of class relations. The biggest difference between London and Eden is London's

belief in socialism which represents London's larger awareness that the working-class do not necessarily deserve their subservient position in society. As Ronald Martin claims, "London had an empathy with the unfortunate and a sensitivity to social injustice so direct and powerful that it carried him...beyond Spencer's philanthropic ameliorism" (185). Similarly, Christopher Renny asserts:

Martin never comes to...political consciousness, although London himself does. Martin goes through the stage (as almost all narratives of upward mobility chronicle) of looking down on his origins. London, however, does not stereotype or belittle the working-class characters of the novel. (84)

As both Martin and Renny point out, London demonstrates an evident empathy for the working-class in Martin Eden, serving to undermine both Eden's own superiority along with his devotion to Spencer's ideas.

Eden's belief in Spencer's ideas also contradicts his romantic and aesthetic sensibility; however, Eden is as blind to this conflict as he is to other conflicts. In reading Spencer, Eden believes that he has found the answer to the mystery of life, because "the man Spencer organiz[ed] all knowledge for him, reducing everything to

unity" (91). After discovering Spencer for himself, Eden believes that he did not truly know the world and therefore was not genuinely prepared to write. He says to himself:

You wanted to write, and you tried to write, and you had childish notions, a few half-baked sentiments, a lot of undigested beauty, a great black mass of ignorance. And you wanted to write! Why, you're just on the edge of beginning to get something in you to write about. You wanted to create beauty, but how could you when you knew nothing about the nature of beauty? (93)

In this passage, Eden asserts that Spencer's unification philosophy has provided him with the true meaning of beauty. Eden finds beautiful the idea that seemingly disparate ideas are connected and he believes that this idea will give him material about which to write. Before the above passage, Eden joyously noted the connections between love, poetry, precious gems, beauty, and tobacco in that their origin can be traced to evolutionary theory (92).

Moreover, after having been reading Spencer for some time, Eden more fully connects art and science. When Ruth Morse directly questions whether or not his evolutionary materialism destroys beauty, Eden replies that:

This grass is more beautiful to me now that I know why it is grass, and all the hidden chemistry of sun and rain and earth that makes it become grass. Why there is romance in the life history of any grass, yes, and adventure too. The very thought of it stirs me. When I think of the play of force and matter, and all the tremendous struggle of it, I feel as if I could write an epic on the grass. (102)

In this passage Eden poetically celebrates the grass's role in the evolutionary cycle, uniting his aesthetic and scientific orientations. Eden's embrace of Spencer's ideas leads him to scrutinize the way the grass grows and develops in some detail. He claims that the empirical details of the grass's growth could lead to a great literary work. However, Walt Whitman wrote "an epic on the grass" that had little to do with "the hidden chemistry of sun and rain and earth that makes it become grass." Whitman ignored the literal scientific elements of the grass and instead used it imaginatively as a metaphor in his poem.

This suggests that Ruth Morse has a point. By dissecting something like grass in such empirical detail, Eden squeezes the mystery and uniqueness out of it, suggesting his inability to see the grass in any way except

as literal grass which is a product of evolution. Unbeknownst to him, Eden's attempt to merge art and science prevents him from being able to wield Whitman's powers of metaphor in projecting the grass as a representation of certain themes. This passage reveals that Eden's belief in Spencerian evolution conflicts with his desire to be a romantic writer like Whitman. In readily accepting Spencer's schema, Eden loses the ability to perceive the specific and unique differences between the above concepts such as art and science, instead choosing to see them as similar. This parallels Eden's inability to see complexity in the world, choosing instead to reduce every thought, emotion and physical object to the evolutionary dynamic.

In the above passages, Eden credits Spencer's evolutionary theory with his own desire and ability to create beauty. Similarly, when discussing art with Professor Caldwell, Eden remembers Spencer's philosophy and proceeds to point out that Caldwell's disquisition on Egyptian art does not consider Egyptians' biological evolution in explaining the development of their art. Caldwell acknowledges Eden's criticism and mentions that the only other person to point out such a weakness was Frank Norris's teacher, Joseph Le Conte, himself a disciple of Spencer (200-01). Once again Eden wants to reduce the

Egyptian artists' visions to biological development. He charges Caldwell with being too mechanical in his own history of Egyptian art; however, Eden, through the influence of Spencer, would merely replace Caldwell's historical materialism with his own biological materialism. As in Caldwell's analysis, Eden ignores the Egyptian artists' specific feelings and thoughts, thus showing, again, that Spencer influences Eden to lump art and science together, in the process ignoring the specific dynamics of art history.

Spencer's philosophy leads Eden to resist aesthetics. Spencer's philosophy also conflicts with his concept of romantic fiction. He articulates his idea of writing as he tries to become a writer:

He was amazed at the immense amount of printed stuff that was dead. No light, no life, no color, was shot through it. There was no breath of life in it, and yet it sold, at two cents a word...Life was so strange and wonderful, filled with an immensity of problems, of dreams, of heroic toils, and yet these stories dealt with only the commonplaces of life... He wanted to glorify the leaders of forlorn hopes, the mad lovers, the giants that fought under stress and strain, amid terror and tragedy, making life crackle with the

strength of their endeavor. And yet the magazine short stories seemed intent on glorifying the Mr. Butlers, the sordid dollar-chasers, and the commonplace little love affairs of commonplace little men and women. (99-100)

The reference to Mr. Butler is indicative as he is the social success that Ruth encourages Eden to emulate. He is the provident and industrious little boy who worked hard and sacrificed to become a wealthy lawyer (61-2). He exemplifies the evolved Spencerian individualist. For Spencer bourgeois market society personifies the highest form of social evolution, in effect a society of civilized Mr. Butlers. However, Mr. Butler is not the hero of Eden's fiction. He wants to write about adventurers who struggle with their environment. The fiction that Eden would like to write resembles that of Frank Norris. In fact, his attack on fiction about "the commonplaces of life" echoes Norris's idea of "the tragedy of the broken teacup." Both lambaste the emotionally reserved fiction of the middle class. Instead, Norris and Eden (and ostensibly London) write stories of protagonists who face great physical hazards and who suffer major personal calamities. As I have argued in previous chapters of this work, these kinds of stories show the drawbacks of a Spencerian world where

the "unfit" do not survive. Norris wrote his stories from the point of view of the "unfit" who are often Eden's fellow laborers. In attacking Spencerian heroes and in promoting potentially "unfit" tragic heroes, Eden's fiction indirectly contradicts Spencer's ideas.

Butler's banality is not Eden's only objection to him. Despite all of his success and wealth, Butler is a thoroughly unhappy, unpleasant and dyspeptic person (61-2). He foreshadows Eden's future of social and financial success with emotional despair. Spencer's evolution cannot account for this discrepancy. In his philosophy, physical development should result in emotional development. Butler's example, as well as Spencer's own, proves this not to be the case. Spencer spent much of his own life in emotional turmoil despite his prodigious output and popular celebrity. In analyzing Spencer's evolutionary theory, Robert J. Richards shows that in reality personal happiness is a missing aspect of Spencer's social framework. Richards punctuates his point by claiming that "one could imagine a highly evolved society of individuals, each of whom perfectly respected the freedom of others—yet who were not particularly happy, perhaps a society of Herbert Spencers" (309). Mr. Butler is such a Spencerian figure, one who is a highly evolved success in market society, yet

one who also sees no joy in life. A society of such people is Eden's nightmare, for they represent the banality and conventionality he finds so repugnant in the fiction of his day.

Eden's philosophical outlook is rife with contradictions. He is neither able to distinguish between differences in individual fields nor can he perceive the contradiction between his type of protagonist and the ideal Spencerian figure. Moreover, Eden believes that his idealistic love for Ruth is strengthened and exalted by the fact that he sees biological reason in it. When thinking of her, he reflects, "But Ruth and love had stood the test; for them he found a biological sanction. [...] Nature had been busy designing him as she had been busy with all normal men, for the purpose of loving" (267). Even his most idealistic and ethereal feelings are exalted by their grounding in evolutionary biology. However, in "designing him" for loving Ruth, nature had made a mistake. By the end of the novel, Eden realizes that "It was an idealized Ruth he had loved, an ethereal creature of his own creating, the bright and luminous spirit of his love-poems" (329). By this point biology and nature have dropped out of his connection with Ruth and Eden is left with his own crushed idealism and illusions which do not necessarily

figure in human evolution. He further realizes that "the real bourgeois Ruth" was someone "he had never loved" (330).

It is clear throughout the narrative that Ruth is the wrong person for Eden; even his friend Brissenden tells him so directly. However, Eden's idealistic vision of her grounded in his rigid belief in evolution prevents him from confronting the fact that Ruth is wrong for him. Eden is unable to question his vision of Ruth because he provides this vision with the imprimatur of science. Here Eden suffers from one of the more egregious of Spencer's own intellectual flaws: dressing up one's assumptions with the veil of science. Ronald Martin claims that Eden "felt betrayed by [Ruth] and her bourgeois world, although in exaggerating her ideality he had been more betrayed by his own imagination" (209). Eden is so certain of his perception of Ruth that when Brissenden tries to tell him about her true character, he violently attacks Brissenden for even bringing up the issue of Ruth's rightness for him (240).

As Theodore Dreiser showed in Sister Carrie, the vagaries and paradoxes of human desire cannot be explained by the rigid dictates of Spencer's evolutionary theory. In Dreiser's novel Hurstwood follows his fleeting desire for

Carrie and it inevitably leads to his destruction. Similarly, Eden's naïve love for Ruth at least partly causes his destruction. His disillusionment with her leads to a depression that subsequently leads to his suicide. Eden's attempt to reconcile his romantic self with his Spencerian beliefs leaves him unable to consider the possibility that the vagaries of romantic love might be counter to evolutionary theory. This inability leads to his extreme reaction to Ruth's behavior. At one point Brissenden calls his love for Ruth "calf love," assuming that Eden will move from Ruth to loving someone more appropriate for him (240). However, Eden cannot see for himself what is so obvious: that Ruth, with her bourgeois morals that run so counter to his irrepressible working class identity, is not right for him. And this inability to discern specific differences in people as well as in ideas partially leads to the harsh realization that Ruth was not the person that he (or evolution) made her out to be. This disillusionment is a major reason for his depression and suicide.

Ruth and her family's unappealing characters frustrate some critics' attempts at interpreting the novel. Many critics cannot simply dismiss Eden's depression and suicide as a flaw in him and in his philosophy because the people

around him are petty, hypocritical and superficial. Eden's dream is to be as educated and articulate as Ruth and her family. However, once he achieves this goal, he discovers that Ruth's ideas on art and literature are banal and myopic due to her bourgeois background. She equates decency with quality in literature. She pronounces Swinburne a "failed" poet because he is "indelicate." She continues to say that "There are many of his poems that should never be read. Every line of the really great poets is filled with beautiful truth, and calls to all that is high and noble in the human" (10). This is the type of literary criticism that Eden grows to hate as he continues writing because it narrowly defines literary "art" as superficial beauty. The inarticulate Eden praises Swinburne for his authentic passion (10-11). Similarly, Eden wants to write fiction that finds beauty in the seemingly ugly, but real, struggles of flawed characters.

He wants to write stories that are "true" rather than ones that are "decent." Martin and Ruth's conflicting views of literature become clear when Eden shows her his story "Wiki-Wiki." Rather than commenting on plot or character development, Ruth's first response is, "But that character Wiki-Wiki, why do you make him talk so roughly? Surely it will offend readers and surely that is why

editors are justified in refusing your work" (248). Eden responds that "It is life ... It is real. It is true. And I must write life as I see it" (249). As Eden becomes a more confident writer, he begins to see the superficial nature of Ruth's emphasis on decency. He writes from his experience as a laborer and sailor. It is not necessarily the quality of writing that Ruth judges, but the subject matter of Eden's work. Ruth's literary criticism exemplifies the bourgeois values that alienate Martin from her in the end, thus leading to some critics viewing Eden sympathetically as a victim of Ruth and her family's bourgeois hypocrisy.

In her article "Jack London's Modification of Herbert Spencer," Frances Kaye claims that Martin Eden shows London's "difficulties in systematically repudiating Spencer's individualism in terms of a man rather than an economic system" (69). She proceeds to claim that Eden's "depression and suicide seem entirely illogical" because London affirms Eden's alienation from his peers due to the fact that Eden "meets no one worth knowing" (69). She later asserts that Eden's suicide "seems to be the result of a flaw not in his own character, but to a flaw in London's conception of the book" (70). For Kaye the flaw exists because London intended Eden's suicide to repudiate

Eden's elitism and individualism; however, Kaye interprets Eden's suicide as understandable given the people in his environment. Moreover, she states that Eden "is not ruthless and cruel, though he is justifiably proud of his own talents and achievements" (69).

Kaye is correct in revealing the flaws in the secondary characters of the novel. Ruth Morse, her father, mother and brothers are myopic and self-righteous people who do not acknowledge the sacrifices that Eden makes to be successful. Eden exemplifies the work ethic that the family supposedly respects; yet, they do not respect it in him. With the advice of her family, Ruth Morse breaks her engagement with Eden because she does not approve of his lower-class Bohemian lifestyle, in effect, because he would not "settle down" to a "position" (281). However, after Eden becomes a successful writer, the Morses want him back in their world. Eden reflects that the Morses only want him "for the fame that was his, because he was somebody amongst men, and—why not?—because he had a hundred thousand dollars or so. That was the way bourgeois society valued a man, and who was he to expect otherwise?" (314) Ronald Martin calls Ruth and her family's behavior "the ultimate bourgeois insincerity" (209).

Still, Kaye is not right when she asserts that, "London intended individualism to be the sin for which Martin was punished, but if that is the case, he does not deserve to die" (70). Eden's suicide is perfectly logical given his Spencerian influences. Kaye acknowledges that Spencer is the only thing on which Eden can rely given the people he meets; she adds that "Martin adopts the philosopher with joy, and London does not undercut him" (70). As demonstrated above, Spencer's thought so blinds Eden to the flaws in himself and others that it does not prepare him to deal with the ambiguities and contradictions of life. Eden expects Ruth to be a certain kind of person. Because he, based on his reading of Spencer, justified those expectations with the objectivity of science, Eden was unable to see Ruth's true personality. In a passage quoted earlier, Eden maintained that his love for Ruth had "a biological sanction" (267). Such a sanction reinforces Martin's sense of rightness, hence preventing him from seeing Ruth's flaws. As Brissenden told him, Eden should have been prepared to leave Ruth and find someone who would truly love him. His inability to do so reveals a major flaw in Eden's personality if Ruth's disappointing behavior leads to such an extreme act as suicide.

Also, after witnessing the furious intellectual debate among Brissenden's "real dirt" San Francisco Bohemians, Eden proclaims "I know that I shall always be a realist. I am so made I guess" (264). However, in his love for Ruth, Eden reveals himself to be a romantic idealist. And his reaction to Ruth and her family's behavior shows a fallen idealist, one who thought that the world should work in certain ways: that Ruth should love him despite their social differences. It may not only be individualism for which Eden must be punished, but his naïve Spencerian idealism which did not prepare him for life's exigencies and people's petty behavior. London portrays Eden as a deeply divided consciousness, one that wants to believe in a Spencerian "realism," but one who is inclined towards romantic idealism. This point reveals Eden's general unawareness of himself which is another explanation for his suicidal despair.

Kaye is also wrong to say that Eden meets "no one worth knowing." Working people like Joe Dawson and Lizzie Connolly sincerely care for Eden, thus revealing the power of "the camaraderie of labor" to which Eden refers when working at the laundry (120). Towards the end of the novel, Eden tries to reconnect with his working-class friends by going to the Bricklayer's Picnic. In doing so,

Eden reflects that "they were his kind, these working people. He had been born among them, he had lived among them" (297). However, Eden feels alienated there because the workers do not share his learning or his outlook on life. Similarly, in her analysis Kaye dismisses Joe and Lizzie as "loyal, but stupid" (70). Eden's alienation makes some sense. He suffers existential angst because he is outside of any social group. However, this angst is largely self-created.

Also, his rejection of people like Joe Dawson reveals Eden's elitism. He rebuffs people because they do not measure up to his narrow standard of personal merit. He cannot see that certain people offer different benefits to others. He expects his fellow workers to be like the professionals whom he meets at the Morse house. While they cannot offer intellectual conversation, they can offer loyalty and sincere friendship. Eden's view of humanity remains narrow, much like Spencer's, because only certain people can fulfill his standards of personal value. He expects all people to be a certain way and thus, cannot appreciate the diverse qualities that people can offer. This flaw connects back to Eden's belief in Nietzsche and Spencer because they caused Eden to believe that he was superior to the people of his class. Nietzsche led Eden to

think that he is a type of superman due to his ability to outwork anybody whether as sailor or writer. Spencer provided Eden with "the law of development" which Eden believes is the ultimate explanation for how life develops.

Moreover, there exist other people with whom Eden could find a community. After Brissenden took him to see "the real dirt," Eden calls the evening "the greatest night of [his] life" and rewards Kreis, one of the Bohemians, with a \$1000 after he becomes rich. When Kreis tells Eden that he could provide him with many more nights, Eden replies that he "is done with philosophy" (321). However, there is no reason why Eden cannot establish fellowship with the Bohemians except that his destroyed idealism will not allow him to recover from life's disappointments. Before he speaks to Kreis, Eden reflects that the books that he had read had created a world for him "that proved an illusion" (297). Again, this assertion shows that Nietzsche's and Spencer's ideas leave him without a way to understand the world around him or he would have adapted to his disillusionment with the Morses and enjoyed a life of Bohemian community with his wealth.

Another critic who follows Frances Kaye's reasoning is Charles Watson Jr. in his 1983 book The Novels of Jack London: A Reappraisal. Watson also focuses on the people

in Eden's social world, especially Ruth and her family. Watson, like Kaye, focuses his interpretation on Eden as a victim of his environment rather than on Eden as representative of a certain philosophical attitude. Kaye argues that Eden does not deserve the fate that London creates for him given his benign demeanor and the people that he meets. She concludes that London's attempts to repudiate Eden do not make sense within the narrative. Watson accounts for this seeming paradox by claiming that Eden is a mythical hero whose suicide represents "the myth of the dying god discussed by Frazer in The Golden Bough and the Dionysian prototype of the tragic hero described by Nietzsche in The Birth of Tragedy" (156).

Watson's reading is perfectly acceptable on its own terms. It offers an alternative account from the one in this study, enriching the narrative by showing the diverse ways that it can be interpreted. However, his analysis does not account for London's own affinity for Spencer and his criticism of Spencer's influence. In choosing to focus on mythological archetypes, Watson removes Martin Eden from its place within the philosophical context of the late nineteenth century where Spencer occupies a crucial space and where London clearly situated himself. In the light of Spencer's crucial role in shaping Martin Eden's view of the

world and of himself, as well as London's own relationship to his ideas, ignoring Spencer's place in the novel leads to a very limited interpretation of it.

Also, the novel is written in a very realistic style. London painstakingly describes, sometimes in excruciating detail, Eden's travails while working and writing; the laundry episode with Joe Dawson is a clear example of this. This style precludes the type of allegory that a mythical interpretation of the novel would require. At no place does London offer any suggestions that Eden is a mythical figure in a fantastical world. It is true that at points Eden's superhuman abilities seem a little implausible in his ability to magnetically attract all women, for example, in his ability to work like few men can, and in his ability to transcend his class barriers. This is also a part of the Nietzschean theme. In order to attack the superman, London creates a superman. Also, this point may also partly reinforce Sam S. Baskett's position that London lost sense of the difference between Eden and himself. Although I disagree with Baskett's insistence on the similarity between the two, certainly London's description of Eden's ability to attract women and work inexhaustibly has an element of self-idealization and thus could reflect his identification with Eden. However, as the laundry episode

shows, Eden is not really superhuman; the laundry work makes him give up and start drinking again until he quits the job.

Many recent critics agree on Eden's feeling of despair after he succeeds; however, they offer differing explanations for it. These particular critics do not mention Herbert Spencer; still, their readings do not necessarily preclude Spencer's role in creating Eden's disillusionment. Christopher Renny argues that Martin Eden falls into a category of novels that "emphasize the sense of loss that haunts upward mobility" (80). He maintains that London wrote an original novel that questioned the Horatio Alger ideal that so dominated the American psyche at the turn of the century. Renny asserts that the Alger myth ignored the psychological dissonance that accompanies class mobility. In Renny's view, Eden is happiest when he struggles to succeed, expressing a crucial part of his tough working-class identity. Renny states:

It is his working-class willingness to fight that brings him, ultimately, into the middle-class world. It is too bad for him that the struggles didn't go on forever, since it is struggle that he is best suited for—fitted by the very working-class background he seeks to transcend. And therein lies the paradox of

upward mobility: the fortitude needed for the struggle is fostered by working-class culture, but it is working-class culture one must abandon to achieve upward mobility and fit in to the middle-class world one has achieved. To do so is to lose one's working-class conscience, and to abandon the desire for justice for all, for to be truly middle class is to value the retention of the status quo, that is, to value a system which allows one to keep that middle-class status.

Renny's point about justice is a thoughtful if not entirely valid one. He assumes that members of the working-class all believe in social justice; this is not necessarily the case. The Socialist Party that London joined mostly consisted of members of the upper class intelligentsia (Kershaw 44). Moreover, while Joe Dawson hates his job, he is not concerned with social justice. However, once Martin supplies him with money to start his own Laundromat, Joe declares that he will not work his employees as hard as he was worked (130). Thus he demonstrates some empathy with his fellow laborers, but not a general belief in social justice. Still, Renny points out the problem with Eden abandoning his working-class

identity. This abandonment leads to his despair and, as I argue, represents a flaw in his character.

Renny's position indirectly shows a flaw in Spencer's thinking as well. Although Spencer is not Eden's inspiration for becoming middle class, he inspires Martin to keep reading and thinking. This helps him to express himself better than Ruth and her family. Therefore, Spencer is bound up with Martin's quest to be middle class, a quest that leads him to his suicidal despair. Moreover, as I state throughout this work, Spencer validates the bourgeois lifestyle as the highest form of human development. However, as Renny and Kershaw among others show, that life is too confining for someone of Eden's honesty and passion.

Similar to Renny, Yung Min Kim equates Eden's alienation to a type of racial confusion. Kim takes the recent fascination with London's role in the turn-of-the-century colonial enterprise as a way to explain Eden's psychological anxiety. Kim states, "He is identified with the conquered savage and yet is himself a member of the race of conquerors" (3). To support this position, Kim mentions Martin's flashbacks to his time of fighting on Mexican beaches and meeting tribal chieftains. When thinking of these flashbacks, Martin tends to identify with

the indigenous people more than he does with the white middle-class Morse family. Similarly, Kim equates his first meeting with the Morses to a person from an exotic culture walking into the Morses' stately living room because Martin is as awkward as someone from another culture (5). Kim also mentions Eden's dark skin due to his working outside, clearly equating his working class identity to his islander identity (10).

Both Renny and Kim emphasize London's critique of the middle class as stifling Eden, leading to his sense of disillusionment. He becomes disillusioned because he accepts the middle class values, while abandoning his working class identity. This misjudgment leads to Martin's identity crisis, which subsequently leads to his suicide. His obsessive desire to accept the middle class identity represents his tragic flaw. As Donald Pease points out, "Eden discovers himself trapped between two incompatible cultural logics" (152). This weakness is at least partly a consequence of Spencer's influence. Throughout the novel, Eden believes that Spencer has shown him the truth of life: that evolution decided that he and Ruth must be together, that all things are connected, and that the physically and intellectually fit will prevail. However, when life does not justify these beliefs, Eden falls into the suicidal

despair that Lizzie's or the Bohemians' company cannot assuage.

Despite Kaye's position to the opposite, Eden's suicide is a reflection of his inability to perceive that Spencer's philosophy cannot account for the way people behave. Eden believes that "the law of development" can explain people; however, it leaves him unable to comprehend people's arbitrary desires and dislikes. Diverse people and unpredictable developments are not explained by Spencer's theory and Eden is not prepared for them. Thomas Huxley once said that "Spencer's idea of a tragedy is a deduction killed by a fact" (qtd. in Richards 245). From Spencer, Eden deduced that all life proceeded a certain way; however, life's failure to conform to this expectation turns Eden into a tragic character. Renny maintains that Eden's "ideology leaves him nowhere to go" when he becomes the fittest who succeeds as a writer (89).

Although Spencer is a strong presence throughout London's fiction, most contemporary critics ignore the relationship between London and Spencer in favor of a focus on gender and colonialism thanks to London's strong sense of masculinity, and because he was a sailor who wrote tales of exploration to far flung islands. In this analysis, I have sought to fill that gap by investigating the role

Spencer plays in London's novel Martin Eden. I conclude that Spencer's philosophy leads Eden to mistakenly believe that he has found the ultimate meaning of life. This discovery makes him a very one-dimensional thinker, seeing Spencer even in areas that the philosopher himself did not consider. Ronald Martin shows Eden engaging in this kind of thinking when Eden declares that Spencer argued that all women "were sisters under their skin" (London 152; Martin 207).

While Spencer provides Eden with a perspective from which to understand life, such a perspective causes many problems for him. The more Eden is converted to Spencer's viewpoint, the less aware he is of the complexities and contingencies of life. He expects life to proceed according to Spencer's laws of progress and development. However, when it does not, he is not capable of dealing with the consequences. Moreover, Eden is not able to perceive the contradictions between his conception of himself as a "realist" and his clearly romantic inclinations. London, like Norris and Dreiser before him, proves that life is more complicated and varied than Spencer's explanation of it. This is a lesson that Eden very tragically learns.

This study will conclude with another author who proves that Spencer's philosophy is limited in its analysis. While the previous three writers are novelists, the final chapter will focus on William James who attacked Spencer's ideas from a philosophical standpoint. In his own awareness of contingencies, James resembles a novelist because he gracefully argues in works such as Pragmatism for the inability of any philosophy to capture objective truth. His philosophy accepts multiple perspectives much as a novelist describes numerous viewpoints. James, like most American philosophers, economists and social scientists, was initially attracted to Spencer's synthetic philosophy. However, the more James grew as a thinker, he began to perceive the problems with Spencer's analysis. James' attraction to Spencer shows the appeal of comprehensive and teleological philosophy for Americans in the unstable post-Civil War era. However, as James matured, he criticized Spencer's ideas as too general and vague.

Conclusion: "Noise of Facts:"  
William James' Correction of Herbert Spencer

As a way of concluding this study, I turn to the work of philosopher William James. Although the three previous chapters focus on novelists who wrote after James, he, like the nation as a whole, matured in forming his opposition to Spencer's ideas. After the Civil War, Americans welcomed Spencer's description of a steadily improving society. However, the more American thinkers like Lester Ward, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. and especially James began to sharpen their critical faculties, they offered scathing critiques of Spencerian evolution from which he and his followers could not recover. Thus, Spencer has been largely lost to history.

All three of these figures offered the model of a dynamic and unpredictable world that required active critical engagement rather than repetitive assertions about the inevitable result of evolution. In chapter two, I explained that Ward created a sociological inquiry which emphasized the individual thinker's ability to judge social developments and that Holmes' version of legal pragmatism focused on the judge's perspective over legal precedent. Given the number of times James responded to Spencer, this concluding chapter focuses on him. Taking his cue from

Charles Peirce, James communicated a philosophy that forsook the search for objective truth, replacing it with an emphasis on choice in an uncertain universe. Indeed, for James the quest for universal truth in an fluctuating world is futile.

George Cotkin asserts that "as his philosophical sophistication grew far beyond the paltry boundaries of Spencerian nostrums, James evolved into one of the more creative and consistent anti-Spencerians" (55). Although Richard Hofstadter claims that by his death in 1903, Spencer had "outlived by many years the popularity of his works" (35), I suggest that Spencer's thought was still popular among certain groups in the nation even as late as 1906. James's friend and colleague Holmes Jr.'s battles on the Supreme Court, as represented by his futile dissent in the *Lochner* case, indicate that Spencer's ideas still held sway in that very powerful branch of government.

Throughout this study, I argue that American thinkers were drawn to Spencer's thought because of the great hope it offered a nation still reeling from the most violent conflict it had ever experienced. This was also a public skeptical and weary of government crusades. Herbert Spencer arrived in the United States just before the Civil War to provide allay Americans' insecurity in the years

after the conflict. Spencer's conception of an inexorable and natural social evolution legitimized postwar America's faith in free enterprise. Given that Spencer saw societies evolving from warlike stages to periods of market-driven peace, he had laid the blueprint for the United States; it had just moved from a period of major conflict to a new era of peace and prosperity driven by free markets.

Spencer was the philosopher and prophet of this transformation. However, this attraction to Spencer's cosmic evolutionism began to give way in no small part due to his reductive brand of evolutionary theory. As economic disruptions became more frequent and intense, Spencer and his acolytes' idea that evolution will gradually improve things started to sound hollow. Also, the novelists chiefly exposed the weaknesses in Spencer's thought because, as imaginative writers, they were not focused on discovering the empirical truth about life in the way that a scientist or sociologist would. Instead, they intended to describe the contradictory, diverse, and tragic nature of actual human experience.

This approach served to undermine Spencer's thought in two critical ways. First, in showing various kinds of human misfortune, the novelists reveal some of the social consequences that Spencer minimizes. Both Dreiser and

Norris demonstrate the suffering that Spencer's evolutionary process entails because they focus on the supposed "unfit" whose unhappy fate Spencer largely ignored. Second, in describing a "pluralistic universe," to borrow James's title, in which many different types of characters and behaviors can be found, the novelists demonstrate that Spencer's narrow conception of life cannot capture the diversity of human behavior. Similarly, William James was the creative philosopher, less concerned with empirical truth and more concerned with choice and difference in an unstable universe. His early critiques of Spencer's thought sowed the seed of doubt that the novelists would pick up as they proceeded to show the limitations of Spencer's thought in greater detail.

Throughout his life, James would have trouble settling on a career. He began his college studies as a naturalist and biologist and took a medical degree in the spring of 1869 (Perry 289). Given that Spencer appropriated scientific inquiry to support his version of evolutionary theory, James's formal education in biology and medicine could have proved instrumental in his critiques of Spencer. James's use of the scientific method colors much of his work. Pragmatism is a philosophy grounded in the trial and error of experience. It demonstrates the value of the

scientific method in daily experience. However, while James utilized the findings of evolutionary scientists like Charles Darwin and Francis Galton, James does not refer to his scientific training in much detail during his many attacks on Spencer.

For one, he did not really read Spencer critically until long after he had abandoned his scientific studies. In 1876-1877 James taught his Spencer elective, using Spencer's Principles of Psychology and began to grow "completely disgusted with the eminent philosopher" (qtd. in Perry 476). The ways he criticizes Spencer will be described below. As far as his scientific education goes, he studied under a staunch opponent of evolution, Louis Agassiz. Agassiz believed that the different species were created separately in the same numbers that existed in his time (Menand 106). Louis Menand asserts that the best lesson that Agassiz taught James was "that since everything we do we do out of some interest, we had better be clear about what our interests are" (101). Therefore, perhaps the best lesson that Agassiz unwittingly taught James was the subjective nature of scientific inquiry. This lesson would be a main part of his attacks on Spencer.

William James's first published article was a response to Spencer. His "Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind

as Correspondence" was published in the Journal of Speculative Philosophy in January 1878 (Simon 165). Appropriately enough, that journal was founded by William T. Harris because he could not publish an article critical of Spencer in the North American Review (Hofstadter 104). This shows that Spencer's ideas so dominated the intellectual landscape of the United States that criticizing them was inconceivable. By the time he published this article, James had traveled a long road. This publication came at the end of what Robert J. Richards dubs as James's "depressive period" (412). From his early twenties until his mid thirties, James suffered from various nervous and physiological disorders. Spencer's ideas played a crucial role in his trials and rehabilitation. As James gained a sense of personal agency, he began to perceive the flaws in Spencer's thinking.

As George C. Cotkin and T.J. Jackson Lears, among others, argue, James was typical of his class and generation in his feelings of psychological paralysis. According to Lears, by the 1880's educated members of the bourgeoisie, as James was, yearned for some form of "authentic experience" as they felt trapped by the banal and repressive nature of their middle class lives (5).

Despite this yearning, Cotkin claims that James and his type were essentially too hesitant and self-doubting to enact the escape which Lear's claims that they wanted. Cotkin argues that Hamlet became a major cultural figure in the late 1860's and early 1870's, especially for young white males, thanks to Hamlet's perceived inability to act in crucial situations (40-41). Moreover, as regards James, Cotkin states, "From 1867 until 1872, James would descend into what many historians define, without exaggeration, as his years of depression and doubt" (40).

Herbert Spencer's role in this cultural crisis is a complicated and difficult one. On the one hand, as Lear's demonstrates, Spencer crafted a "beneficent" universe in which society was "inexorably" moving away from "a warlike and militant stage of development to a pacific industrial age" (21). Thus, members of the educated elite could take comfort in a benevolent universe always moving towards peace and stability. However, this was also a universe in which individual action seemed useless, precisely the problem with which members of James's generation were already struggling. James, himself, defined "The Dilemma of Determinism" in his appropriately titled essay. For him this "dilemma" consists not merely in the insignificance of human action, but more importantly, in the irrelevancy of

human judgment because a determinist passively accepts all that happens as necessary and right. Instead, in the essay written sometime after his depressive period, James argues for a "subjectivism" that asserts that the world should not be viewed as a deterministic machine, but "as a contrivance for deepening the theoretic consciousness of what goodness and evil in their intrinsic natures are" (581). In effect, according to James the world exists for human contemplation. This point symbolizes the difference between James and Spencer. James sees the world existing for individual appropriation while Spencer views the individual as merely one aspect of the physical world.

If Spencer could demonstrate that the universe continued to evolve without individual will and action, then personal agency and individual judgment become largely irrelevant in a deterministic universe. This merely reinforced the psychological crisis in someone like William James, even if the universe could be seen as essentially benign. Nevertheless, Cotkin claims that James, like many thinkers, leaders and professionals of his generation, "was initially attracted to Spencerian ideas" largely because "Spencerian optimistic determinism transformed a world that appeared frighteningly complex and chaotic into a calm and ordered universe" (55). Similarly, Richard Hofstadter

asserts that James "read *First Principles* in the early 1860's and soon enrolled in the ranks of Spencerian converts" (108).

On the other hand, Spencer's thought at least partially helped James to recover from his depressive period. A key tenet in Spencer's thought is that life consists in the adjustment of inner and outer relations; in effect, the successful organism adjusts its physiology and its behavior to fit and subsequently transcend its environment. In *First Principles* Spencer attributes the development of "civilized" people to their "complex environment" that "presents a multiplicity of new phenomena" (319). Adjusting his own behavior to an external standard helped James to recover from the worst crisis of his life because he stopped pondering whether or not free will existed and convinced himself, with the help of French Neo-Kantian philosopher Charles Renouvier and William Wordsworth, that it did exist, or at least that he could believe in it (Simon 127, 134).

This would seem to contradict Spencer's stern and rigid concept of evolutionary theory. However, James's concept of free will was not so free; it was not a directionless and wandering freedom but a freedom grounded in acting for a cause. James's own personal cause was to

influence the world around him. Before he could realize such a plan, James needed to settle on a career. He had considered being an artist, a biologist, and a doctor. His inability to choose a career represented his mental crisis. Due to his mental crisis, James turned towards psychology despite his professed interest in philosophy. Given his personal struggle, James saw the selection of a career as the equivalent of battle, as he decided "to fight it out in the line of mental science" (qtd. in Simon 134).

With this in mind, James decided that one of his first orders of business for his new found freedom was to alter his personality by embarking on what Linda Simon states is the cultivation of new habits (128). In disciplining himself in order to act, and therefore, satisfying the outside world, James adjusted his own personality to his environment along much the same lines that Spencer described evolution. James's actions led to his own personal evolution. Therefore, Spencer's role in the spiritual crisis that gripped James is complex. Spencer's version of evolutionary determinism most likely contributed to James's anxiety by creating a system that, while comforting, was inevitably paralyzing. However, Spencer's exacting version of human development provided James with a model for how to engage with his own environment.

In his review of Spencer's autobiography, James recalls that when he read First Principles as a young man, he was "carried away with enthusiasm by the intellectual perspectives which it seemed to open." He also remembers that his older friend Charles S. Peirce's attack on Spencer "left him spiritually wounded, as by the defacement of a sacred image or picture," which shows James's early reverence for the philosopher. However, he concedes that he was unable to defend Spencer from Peirce's criticisms (127-8). In James's review of Spencer's autobiography, he explains the contradictory nature of Spencer's accomplishments. Early in his review James meditates on the "odd" aspect of Spencer's character and proceeds to claim about that character: "Greatness and smallness surely never lived in one skin together" (108).

Spencer's ideas came to the United States in the early to middle sixties just as, according to Ralph Barton Perry, James began to take up philosophy and "to think for himself" (I 474). As shown above, the young James was swept up by Spencer's unifying all fields of knowledge under the banner of evolutionary theory. Even in his review James praises Spencer's depth of knowledge and personal integrity:

He dealt in logical, metaphysical, and ethical first principles, in cosmogony and geology, in physics, and chemistry after a fashion, biology, psychology, sociology, politics, and aesthetics. Hardly any subject can be named which has not at least been touched on in some one of his many volumes. His erudition was prodigious. His civic conscience and his social courage both were admirable. His life was pure. He was devoted to truth and usefulness, and his character was wholly free from envy and malice (though not from contempt), and from the perverse egoisms that so often go with greatness. (110-11)

In the above quote James describes Spencer as an enlightened and objective seeker of truth. However, Perry shows that the young James's awe of Spencer was temporary. He asserts that despite Spencer's popularity, "There could be no stronger evidence of the essentially original quality of James' mind than its resistance to the Spencerian influence at a time when discipleship was so natural and easy for any philosopher favorably disposed to science" (I 474). Before examining James's critiques of Spencer, I shall turn to the ways that Spencer provided him with the philosophical blueprint for some of James's own ideas. Perry claims that in his own Principles of Psychology

Spencer introduced James to "the physiology of the nervous system" along with the idea that the human mind is a product of the interaction between the organism and its environment (I 476). James seconds this opinion in what may seem like a lukewarm endorsement at the beginning of his Principles of Psychology. Still James declares that Spencer was alone in examining mind as a product of its physical environment:

On the whole, few recent formulas have done more real service of a rough sort in psychology than the Spencerian one that the essence of mental and of bodily life are one, namely, "the adjustment of inner to outer relations." Such a formula is vagueness incarnate; but because it takes into account the fact that minds inhabit environments which act on them and on which they in turn react; because, in short, it takes mind in the midst of all its concrete relations, it is immensely more fertile than the old-fashioned "rational psychology" which treated the soul as a detached existent, sufficient unto itself, and assumed to consider only its nature and properties. (6)

James spends most of his book criticizing Spencer's concept of the human mind as vague despite Spencer's seemingly scientific approach. Still, James acknowledges

the importance of Spencer's early contribution to psychological inquiry. For Spencer the interaction between the human mind and its environment is crucial to human evolution. As shown in the above statement, Spencer pointed James in the direction of an empirical philosophy. Flawed though Spencer's rendition of evolution was, it still pushed the thinkers of the period towards examining the physical world for general truths. As James says, Spencer argued that the human mind, rather than being separate from the body, as the Cartesians argued, or being a product of divine creation, grew naturally and therefore was not separate from the human body.

Spencer did not invent such an idea. Robert J. Richards demonstrates that there existed a philosophical tradition of sensationalism—the idea that rational thought was produced by physical “sensations”—long before Spencer wrote (282). Throughout his book, Richards also shows that evolutionary theory grew out of the sensationalist school of thought; thus, the rise of evolutionary theory paralleled the philosophical move to physical experience. However, because of his popularity, Spencer managed to disseminate his own particular brand of evolutionary theory to many people not familiar with such a philosophical

tradition such as the young William James, and this helped spread the sensationalist idea.

Similarly, some early versions of James's own "radical empiricism" can be glimpsed in Spencer's First Principles. In his Pragmatism lectures, James examines the way new opinions become accepted as new truths. I quote it at length:

The individual has a stock of old opinions already, but he meets a new experience that puts them to a strain... The result is an inward trouble to which his mind till then had been a stranger, and from which he seeks to escape by modifying his previous mass of opinions. He saves as much of it as he can, for in this matter of belief we are all extreme conservatives. So he tries to change first this opinion, and then that (for they resist change very variously), until at last some new idea comes up which he can graft upon the ancient stock with a minimum of disturbance of the latter, some idea that mediates between the stock and the new experience and runs them into one another most felicitously and expediently.

(512-13)

In this passage James explains that rather than coming from beyond the individual, the formation of belief is a

psychological competition between old and new thoughts, an internal marketplace of ideas. Furthermore he asserts that it is the new idea that must adjust to the old rather than the old bowing down before the new because "we are all extreme conservatives" when it comes to this issue. James makes this point in order to demonstrate that his seemingly radical idea of pragmatism in reality is loyal to the old ideas and set ways of thinking (513).

In his First Principles published in 1860 Spencer offers a similar analysis of the fixation of new ideas. I quote this at length in order to show the similarities between the two:

No mental revolution can be accomplished without more or less laceration. Be it a change of habit or a change of conviction, it must if the habit or conviction be strong, do violence to some of the feelings; and these must of course oppose it. For long-experienced, and therefore definite, sources of satisfaction, have to be substituted sources of satisfaction that have not been experienced, and are therefore indefinite. That which is relatively well known and real, has to be given up for that which is relatively unknown and ideal. And of course such an

exchange cannot be made without a conflict involving pain. (85-6)

At this point in his study, Spencer is examining people's need to adhere to their religious beliefs. While James showed himself to be much friendlier to spiritual practice than Spencer, the latter shows his own affinity to religious belief when claiming that "the religion current in each age and among each people, has been as near an approximation to the truth as it was then and there possible for men to receive it" (86). In fact, these quotes come from the chapter in which Spencer sought to reconcile religion and science. Spencer was probably wrong to think that he could transcend his own biases and reconcile the two. His concept of the unknowable merely served to antagonize people of faith—see chapter two. However, in these examples, both thinkers demonstrate a respect for traditional thinking while simultaneously focusing on the fixation of belief as a type of competition within the individual knower, with Spencer clearly the influence on James. In focusing on the individual, Spencer stimulated James to revise radically the focus of philosophy by ignoring the idealist philosophical tradition whose central tenet claims that truth lay outside and beyond individual perception. Spencer grounds the truth in

empirical human experience; James would take this example and use it to create his own form of empiricism.

In creating his own empiricism, James offers stinging criticism of Spencer's brand of evolution. In general James believes that Spencer's synthetic philosophy is too reductive; relies on vague ideas; and erroneously ignores the specific, especially the individual. As shown earlier, James considered Spencer's emphasis on mind as adjustment to be "vagueness incarnate." James believed that in trying to show that evolution applies to everything, Spencer could not specifically explain how the mind works. In teaching Spencer's version of evolution, James satirically restated it: "Evolution is a change from a no-howish untalkaboutable all-alikeness to a somehowish and in general talkaboutable not-all-alikeness by continuous stickto generations and somethingelseifications" (qtd. in Perry I 482).

Moreover, given James's belief that one's philosophy derives from one's personality, he suggests that Spencer lacks the necessary imagination to see the beauty and diversity of life. In his review of Spencer's autobiography, James cites some of Spencer's limited attempts at aesthetic criticism. He quotes some of Spencer's aesthetic reflections: "In Greek statues the hair is falsely treated. Renaissance painting, even the

best, is spoiled by unreal illumination...Venetian gothic sins by meaningless ornamentation'" (122). James responds to these criticisms with an insight into Spencer's personality:

The fault-finding in all these cases rests on observation, true as far as it goes; but the total absence of genial relations with the entirety of the phenomenon discussed, the clutching at some paltry mechanical aspect of it that lends itself to reasoned proof by a plus b, and the practical denial of everything that only appeals to vaguer sentiment, show a mind so oddly limited to ratiocinative and explicit processes, and so wedded to the superficial and flagrantly *insufficient*, that one begins to wonder whether in the philosophic and scientific spheres the same mind can have wrought out results of extraordinary value. (123)

James answers this question in both the affirmative and the negative. More importantly, he makes the point that Spencer's mind is so literal that he cannot appreciate the virtues and attractions of aesthetic objects. When looking at the painting, Spencer will point out the unlikeness to reality rather than appreciating the artist's distinct vision. For James, who read Wordsworth, this is a

critical defect, revealing a somewhat dreary personality. He proceeds to pose the question as to whether or not an edifying and comprehensive philosophy can come from such a literal and myopic mind. From James's critique here, it can be extrapolated that Spencer's philosophy is incomplete, and thus needs to be completed by novelists and aesthetic minded philosophers like James, because, like the character Martin Eden, his mind cannot appreciate human behavior that does not conform to his personal expectations.

All of these criticisms factor into James's first published article "Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind as Correspondence" published in 1878 just as James was emerging from his depressive period. By the time James wrote this article, he had been teaching an elective course on "Physiological Psychology" at Harvard using Spencer's Principles of Psychology as a text for almost two years (Perry I 475). In that work Spencer argues that the mind is a passive product of its environment. This idea is a more specific version of Spencer's general idea that organisms grow through "the adjustment of inner to outer relations;" in this case the human mind develops by satisfying the demands of its environment.

James begins his critique by claiming that Spencer's concept of "correspondence" is rather limited because it ignores a range of human inclinations, such as emotions, reactions to beauty, religious belief, and personal affections. He proceeds to assert, "Common sense estimates mental excellence by a combination of all these standards, and yet how few of them correspond to anything that actually *is*—they are laws of the Ideal, dictated by subjective interests pure and simple" (894). In short, James argues that the mind hardly ever attempts to correspond to its external reality; instead it develops according to its own particular desires and interests. In general James argues that Spencer over emphasizes the external physical environment while ignoring the specific emotional and psychological workings of an individual mind. This point parallels James's battle against determinism, and represents the main problem he has with Spencerian evolution, in effect that Spencer sees the individual as completely shaped by the environment.

James states later in the essay that for Spencer the mind "is pure product, absolute derivative from the non-mental" (898). If James were to believe that the mind is totally constructed by its environment, he would fall back into his paralysis over the importance of individual

judgment and action. However, in his wrestling with Spencer's ideas, James stands resolute in his belief in the power of the individual mind. In the same vein as Dreiser and London, James demonstrates that Spencer's concept of evolution, in this case his theory of evolution as correspondence, ignores many aspects of human behavior. Dreiser enunciated subjective desire as a driving force in human behavior while London showed that people have multitudes of affections and interests, as James argues above, some of which contradict each other.

Similarly, in the essay James questions the end of Spencerian evolution. James generally criticizes Spencer for reducing the possible range of human thoughts. Similarly, he asserts that survival is a limited goal, in effect that humans crave more than survival and, within that craving, there are many possible options. Moreover, he questions the type of ideal person who would be successfully constructed by his environment. James describes the Spencerian superman as someone who, not unlike Spencer, is "a creature of superb cognitive endowments, from whose piercing perceptions no fact was too minute or too remote to escape" (898). Such a figure recalls Spencer's own art criticism as he offered minute

critiques of Greek statues along with other objects without appreciating their sublime beauty.

James continues by acknowledging the power of such a figure. He states:

There can be no doubt that, if such an incarnation of earthly prudence existed, a race of beings in whom this monotonously narrow passion for tribal self-preservation were aided by every cognitive gift, they would soon be kings of all the earth. All known human races would wither before their breath, and be as dust beneath their conquering feet. (898)

However, fitness does not necessarily equal happiness or rightness. James rightly points out that such a society would consist of a ruthless banality and thus "the common sense of mankind would stand aghast at the thought of [such a figure]." Despite the apparent density of Spencer's own character, James maintains that even Spencer would find such a dour and powerful figure unattractive (899).

James finds this fittest survivor repugnant because he believes that mere survival is not the most enriching end for humanity. Again, he says that "The social affections, all the various forms of play, the thrilling intimations of art, the delights of philosophic contemplation, the joy of religious emotion...some or all of these are absolutely

required to make the notion of mere existence tolerable" (899). Thus, in this essay James criticizes Spencer for a narrowness which ignores the critical role that the individual consciousness plays both in creating its own interests and in subsequently acting on those interests through, for example, religious devotion, artistic creation, or philosophical contemplation. Given Spencer's personal disregard for religion and art, it is not surprising that he would ignore these pursuits in his evolutionary theory. Still, James is right to say that they are important for a large majority of people and therefore need to be considered in any explanation of human growth. Towards the conclusion of his essay, James articulates this point by claiming that consciousness is "*intelligent intelligence*. It seems both to supply the means and the standard by which they [outward existence and consciousness] are measured. It not only *serves* a final purpose, but *brings* a final purpose—*posits*, declares it" (906). Thus, James establishes what would be his chief opposition to Spencer's brand of evolution: his belief in a dynamic consciousness, both making decisions and remaking its environment for itself.

In articulating a greater range of human behavior, James parallels the novelists in this study. Norris

indirectly showed the disastrous results of a world where the fittest, like the corporate head Shelgrim, survive; Dreiser argued that humans were driven by more than the need to survive; and London also demonstrated that people need more than material success. All four reveal the limitations of Spencer's thought. In doing so, they restore power to individuals to create worlds that better suit them as opposed to the limiting world Spencer delineates. James more directly addressed this issue in his lecture "Great Men and Their Environment" which was initially given before the Harvard Natural History Society, then published in the Atlantic Monthly in October 1880 and subsequently included in his collection of essays The Will to Believe, published in 1897.

James delivered the speech after he had returned from a successful trip to Europe where he met several of the eminent philosophers of his time, including Spencer. Linda Simon asserts that in meeting these figures and seeing them as individuals rather than as luminaries, James gained confidence, especially given his ability to hold his own in talking with them (171). With this new confidence, and his depressive period receding into the past, James decided to once again take Spencer on directly; this time he focused on Spencer's concept of social evolution. At the beginning

of the essay, he states the problem thus: "What are the causes that make communities change from generation to generation—that make the England of Queen Anne so different from the England of Queen Elizabeth" (619).

Beginning in his Social Statics and throughout the synthetic philosophy, Spencer argued that the environment changes and then creates people who, following the environmental changes, enact social changes. For example, Spencer believed that the physical geography of a place could be the chief influence driving social changes. One of Spencer's acolytes, Grant Allen, writing in the Popular Science Monthly, provoked James to defend the impact of individuals in social progress. He wrote two articles "Hellas and Civilization" and "Nation-Making" from which James quotes in his own essay (Cotkin 85). In "Hellas in Civilization" Allen claims with great certainty that the richness of classical Greek culture derives exclusively from Greece's geographical landscape, its location in Europe, and its place in history. He further states that "nothing whatsoever can differentiate one body of men from another except the physical conditions in which they are set" (166-7).

James rose up to attack Allen because Allen attacked free will in both of his articles. If Allen were right,

then James's whole belief in free will would be critically threatened and he would be left to fall into his old passivity. Cotkin says as much when he asserts that "The emperor of debility might be wearing new clothes, but James's view was that he still acted as a dictator of passivity and resignation—a monarch to be overthrown" (85). Those "new clothes" represent the authority of science that Spencer's brand of evolution conferred on social development. Cotkin's language is important here because James saw this debate, much as he saw other aspects of life, as a war that he must fight in the name of free will and individual power. Nevertheless, James decides early in the essay not to make free will his main point, choosing instead to "assume with the Spencerians the predestination of all human actions" (620). He would critique this idea of social development within its own logic.

For James the chief element of that logic is causation. He argues that for nations to change there must be specific causes that compel such change. However, neither Spencer nor Allen acknowledges such specific developments. James attacks Spencer's theory as too vague and abstract in locating those changes. He claims:

We must say, All things in the world are fatally predetermined, and hang together in the adamantine

fixity of a system of natural law. But in the vagueness of this vast proposition we have lost all the concrete facts and links; and in all practical matters the concrete links are the only things of importance. The human mind is essentially partial. It can be efficient at all only by *picking out* what to attend and ignoring everything else—by narrowing its point of view. (620)

In the first half of the quote James attacks Spencer's theory as lacking in specificity. In saying that all things are connected and thus create each other, Spencer offers no explanation for why, for example, tragedies occur. Spencer just ascribes events to generic processes that exist outside of the empirical world. This is quite a contradiction for the man who introduced empiricism to psychological study. Earlier in the essay James used the example of a man falling on ice and dying because he broke his skull. He claims that using Spencer's method, one would equate a dinner the man attended a few weeks earlier with the slippery ice as exact similar causes of his death (618). James's example points to the fact that Spencer's theory leaves no room for analysis and interrogation. It rests on the kind of passive thinking which James experienced during his depressive phase.

James emphasizes the importance of the individual mind in locating causation. Unlike Spencer, he explains that individual minds make causal connections through empirical reasoning, as opposed to Spencer's a priori system in which the individual has to accept an explanation on faith. James directly points out that Spencer's explanation for social change parallels the tendency to reply to any question with "'God is Great'" (631). Ironically, enough James compares Spencer, a materialist philosopher, to a fatalistic theologian. However, unlike religion, Spencer's concept of evolution offers no hope to the individual.

James uses this to demonstrate that individual "great" men are the specific causes of social change. In his article Allen explained the intellectual achievements of ancient Greece through the physical landscape. For James the accomplishments of Greek society are explained by the genius of Plato, Socrates and Aristotle among others. In responding directly to Allen, James concedes that Greece's global commercial relations might have helped to create its cultural richness. However, he poses the question: "But if they are a sufficient condition, why did not the Phoenicians outstrip the Greeks in intelligence?" (634). Like the Greeks, the Phoenicians traded with the outside world. Nevertheless, they did not develop the Greeks'

culture which shows that Allen's explanation offers no help in shedding light on how the Greeks developed such a sophisticated culture.

In his analysis Allen over emphasizes the role that environment plays in shaping individuals. This is one of Spencer's main arguments as well. However, James does not simply dismiss the role that environment plays. He sees that societies progress based on an interplay of the two. He states:

Thus social evolution is a resultant of the interaction of two wholly distinct factors—the individual, deriving his peculiar gifts from the play of physiological and infra-social forces, but bearing all the power of initiative and origination in his hands; and second, the social environment, with its power of adopting or rejecting both him and his gifts. Both factors are essential to change. The community stagnates without the impulse of the individual. The impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community (629-30)

James and Allen differ in their definitions of environment. Given James's belief in the power of individual thought and action, he categorizes the

environment as a large collection of individuals who weigh in on their belief in the "great man's" virtues. Conversely, Allen and Spencer claim that the environment consists of physical geography, historical epoch, and commercial activity. The last of these is driven by individuals. However, Spencer suggests in First Principles that the market arises naturally on its own. He asserts that "The joint actions of citizens [are] determined as are those of all other changes wrought by composition of forces" (193). For Spencer oblique forces move people rather than the aggregate choices of a large mass of individuals.

Spencer believes that the persistence of force and its influence in social development was the equivalent of a natural law. For Spencer and his acolytes this law is axiomatic and thus needs not be questioned. James believes that all laws are revisable, even those with the imprimatur of scientific reasoning. Towards the conclusion of his "great men" essay James criticizes the very notion of eternal and unchanging laws, especially ones applied to history:

It is folly, then, to speak of the "laws of history" as of something inevitable, which science has only to

discover, and whose consequences anyone can then foretell but do nothing to alter or avert. Why, the very laws of physics are conditional, and deal with *ifs*. The physicist does not say, "The water will boil anyhow"; he only says it will boil if a fire be kindled beneath it. And so the utmost the student of sociology can ever predict is that *if* a genius of a certain sort show the way, society will be sure to follow. (638)

In the preceding quote James does not merely accept that laws of any sort are self-evident and thus beyond interrogation. As he shows, scientific laws are grounded in some empirical test and thus need must be proven. They belong to a process of cause and effect. Herbert Spencer, the philosopher who introduced empiricism to psychological study should have known better than to merely assert axioms. However, as James so eloquently put it in his Pragmatism lectures, Spencer's synthetic philosophy was a mix of facts and deductions that appealed to a broad audience. Indeed, James says, "The noise of facts resounds through all his chapters" (504). While James respects and utilizes factual statements, he also preserved the right to question how "factual" certain "facts" are. He also knew that subjectivity, often expressed through one's own

temperament, played a role in the assertion of what is true.

Like the novelists in this study, James undercut Spencer because he saw that Spencer's "facts" and their attendant "noise" have their limitations in explaining the diverse experiences of being human. In their stories the novelists demonstrate the suffering, the gaps, and the myopia of Spencer's concept of evolution through characters and events. In doing so, the novelists indirectly argue that Spencer's philosophy is not well suited to human experience. Using a philosophy grounded in practical experience, James also showed that Spencer did not provide the individual with much choice of action. However, James criticized Spencer using logical reasoning as opposed to narratives. James, Dreiser, London, and Norris all showed in their own way that the individual thinker still has a place in deciding what is true.

## Epilogue

The goals of a dissertation are both personal and professional. One of the purposes of this study is to recover the individual thinker as a useful and valid figure against scientific determinism. Herbert Spencer's evolutionary materialism disregarded the individual in favor of general processes that render her irrelevant and passive. This is the main reason William James found Spencer wanting; he saw a crushing vagueness masquerading as science. This vagueness did not foster independent thought or active engagement with one's surroundings. Given Spencerian evolution, individuals instinctively react to their environments rather than try to reflect on one's reactions or change the environment. This conflict manifested itself politically. Spencer's American acolytes could repeatedly opposed any attempts to change the social fabric because evolution would inevitably solve the problems. In fact, to intervene would be destructively interfering with the natural order. This was small consolation to those suffering during the period. Conversely, people like Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Lester Ward, and Henry George urged local, state, and federal governments to act to mitigate the suffering of the poor.

Similarly, I disagree with the type of new historicism that has dominated the study of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This type of inquiry was spearheaded by Walter Benn Michaels and his penetrating The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism in 1987.

Michaels believes that individual judgments, opinions, and ideas are culturally constructed, thus de-emphasizing individual agency. In responding to Michaels, I have sought to recover the individual authors' ability to react authentically to their political and cultural context. In minimizing individual agency, the new historicists parallel Spencerian evolution because if individuals cannot change culture and society, how can these things be changed?

The two types of analysis differ in important ways. Spencer was a philosopher who conspicuously mixed science, politics, and psychology among other disciplines to reinforce his intuitive beliefs. New historicism is a mode of literary interpretation with a distinctly political bent. Also, the politics are very different—Spencer believed that the free market genuinely improves society while the new historicists argue that capitalism only limits people's ability to think freely while creating inequalities of wealth. Still, both Spencer and the new historicists remove an independent actor from the social

and historical landscape, thus rendering the individual helpless in the face of larger and more powerful forces.

In validating the writers' abilities to react legitimately to their surroundings, I do not claim that these reactions are either rational or consistent. Examining Frank Norris's The Octopus, I argued that the impact of the book differs from both Norris's own critical theory and his stated intention in writing it. In his own correspondence, Norris acknowledged that taking on the subject of a big railroad battling against independent farmers was fraught with difficulties. He insisted that he did not want to write a political novel; however, I argue that he inevitably did. Enough critics have commented on the paradoxical nature of The Octopus's ending as to indicate that Norris fell into a situation that he could not control. In trying to evoke Spencer's idea of force to optimistically end the novel, Norris wound up revealing force's vagueness and inadequacy in justifying exploitation and suffering.

Theodore Dreiser and Jack London were more conscious in their responses to Spencer. Dreiser was more conflicted than London because he genuinely, but not satisfactorily, believed that Spencer's system was the truth. Although

Dreiser believed it, he was not happy with it. His columns in Ev'ry Month are filled with paeans to Spencer along with fears of the impact of Spencer's ideas. Moreover, when he sat down to write Sister Carrie, he began to question Spencer's ability to answer ethical questions, revealing that survival is based on chance is shown by the fact that Carrie survives and Hurstwood does not. Conversely, while London professed to admire Spencer, his empathy for the working class and belief in socialism trumped his appreciation of Spencer. In writing Martin Eden, he attacked the Nietzschean superman and revealing the limitations of Spencerian evolution. Martin Eden is an autobiographical novel. However, we should not ignore the differences between London and his character, for they show London to be a literary craftsman who is critically examining a version of himself that he finds unappealing. Part of that examination involves Spencer's misguided influence on him.

Finally, another goal in writing this dissertation was to recover an important if flawed thinker from the obscurity to see what he can reveal about a certain historical period. Herbert Spencer was a popular public intellectual in the United States from 1860-1905. He was read by a diverse audience that included working people,

businessmen, clergymen, philosophers, economists, novelists, and sociologists, who agreed with his explanation that, despite certain cataclysms, society is always improving. Americans read this after the Civil War and were initially happy just to let things pursue their own course. Few people read Herbert Spencer today; they find his disregard for suffering frightening and his brand of evolution defective. Still, Spencer used evolution to support a purely libertarian meritocracy where all are responsible for their own positions in society. I'm not sure that the United States has moved so far away from such a system. Thus, recuperating Spencer might help Americans reflect on and acknowledge the suppositions on which their system is currently based.

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