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Organon 3, 201-218

1966

Artykuł umieszczony jest w kolekcji cyfrowej Bazhum, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych tworzonej przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego.

Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie ze środków specjalnych MNiSW dzięki Wydziałowi Historycznemu Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

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SPENCER'S MEANING OF STRUCTURE

Social sciences show recently a considerably increased interest in the term "structure". This is expressed, among others in the great number of definitions which have been advanced for the last fifteen years. The definitions of this "difficult and at the same time very attractive term"¹ differ greatly from one another², while on the other hand, they become free to a lesser or greater degree from the influence of the term's original meaning. The now prevailing tendency towards unifying this meaning should go along with the examination of its genetic conditionings, that is to say, with considerations concerning the contents given to the term "structure", especially in its first applications. It is, then, necessary to take Spencer's conception of structure due to which this term had been introduced into social vocabulary in the second half of the nineteenth century. The task is all the more important because the term "structure" has become fashionable³ in sociology, this being primarily due to the fact, that the concept of structure constitutes one of the main elements of the theoretical foundations of the school of functionalism in sociology, as well as in social and cultural anthropology. All this certainly enhances the theoretical splendour of the term and in some measure increases its attractiveness.

The purpose of the present attempt to analyze the meanings given by Spencer to the term "structure" is to see how he understood that

¹ Cf: *Le concept de structure sociale*. "Cahiers internationaux de Sociologie" 1955, p. 23.

² This may be exemplified by the known controversy between G. Gurvitch and C. Levi-Strauss concerning the definition of the term "social structure". See also: Henri Lefèbre: *Réflexions sur le structuralisme et l'histoire*. "Cahiers internationaux de Sociologie" 1963, vol. 35, p. 4.

³ "The term and the concept of structure — says Gurvitch — are fashionable now. With an exceptional force, they attract the attention of the representatives of all disciplines". *Structures sociales et systèmes de connaissances in: Notion de structure et structure de la connaissance*. (Report from *Vingtième semaine de synthèse*, 18—27. IV. 1955) Paris 1957; cf. also: A. L. Kroeber: *Anthropology Today*, 1948, p. 325.

term. This can be of importance as a source of semantic inspiration, and as an aid in the sociological study of Spencer's synthesis or of some of its elements. Finally, it may, as well, be a contribution to the history of sociology.

I

Before dealing with the meanings of the term "structure" borrowed by Spencer from biology, it should be emphasized that the concept of structure relative to society was already known to Comte. In his system of positive philosophy, worked out in 1830—1842 and presented in the six volumes of his *Cours de philosophie positive*, the foundations of sociological methods contained in the famous formula: *Ordre et Progrès*, were set forth in two theories:

1) the theory of social statics, that is to say, the theory of "spontaneous order of societies",

2) the theory of social dynamics, that is to say, the theory of "necessary and continuous growth of mankind".

The first one, namely the theory of order (*théorie de l'ordre*), is based upon what is sometimes called "the law of structural dependence of all the elements of society". Comte does not use the term "structure", although such a definition of the "theory of order" seems justified, since it most aptly represents the essence of that theory and, indirectly, the essence of Comte's conception of social statics and of the methodology of sociology.

The purpose of scientific research, according to Comte, was not to detect the causes of investigated phenomena, which he considered to be unattainable, but to determine the laws governing them. Regarding society as an organic whole, he saw in it, first and foremost, a harmonious union of social phenomena governed by two kinds of unvariable laws; they determine the correlation of co-existent phenomena and the unidirectional dependence of successive ones. He thought that sociological research should include, first of all, static dependencies, expressing the "order of society". In such investigations, one should be guided by the theoretical conceptions which enable to handle the studied phenomena in an empirical and mutually-connected way. Comte, after having advanced the postulate of discerning two fundamental aspects of social reality, namely: "order" and "progress", statics and dynamics, based the laws governing statics upon the concept of the whole, considered from the angle of the co-existence and mutual dependence of constituent elements; such an approach, therefore, corresponds to the structural understanding of the subject of this research. According to Comte, society itself is an organic whole, all its elements are linked by co-existence and interdependence, and therefore the structural dependencies connect them together. That is why, although Comte does

not use the term "structure" in his considerations the very way of understanding the laws of social statics makes him the intellectual precursor of the structural approach to social phenomena. This seems to be worth of being emphasized.

II

Gurvitch's paper ⁴ reminds of the fact that it was precisely Spencer who introduced the term "structure" in sociology. It was also he, who enriched the tools of sociological research by some new terms, such as "control", "institution", "function", "evolution". Spencer's understanding of the term "structure" is closely connected with his idea of evolution, which should be examined here in the first place.

Faithful to the traditions of English philosophy, which was, since the seventeenth century, under the domination of the empirical trend, Spencer built up his great system (*A System of Synthetic Philosophy*, 1860—1896) on the basis of the results of particular sciences, especially the natural ones. He expounds the history of society as a manifestation of the action of a single great law of nature which governs the whole reality. Reality is subject to changes taking place in accordance with that law, defined by Spencer as the law of evolution tending towards integration and differentiation. His formulation of that law was influenced, as he pointed out himself, by the biological investigations of von Baer who had found that the embryonic development within the vegetable and animal world consists in passing from the stage of homogeneity to the stage of heterogeneity. Spencer extended the applicability of this law by stating in his theory of evolution that it holds not only of the organic world, but also of the inorganic as well, as the super-organic or social ones, thus forming a synthesis of all scientific laws concerning variability in this domain.

Removing the partitions between natural sciences and humanities, Spencer became the first theoretician in sociology, having an evolutionistic and organicistic disposition. This found its expression in his monistic system of sociology, although his interpretation of social phenomena was not devoid of psychological elements and he did not negate the interactions between the evolution of individuals, that of the society regarded as a whole, and the products of that evolution *i.e.* spiritual and material culture.

1) The analysis of the law of evolution in regard to society is the subject of Spencer's three-volume work: *The Principles of Sociology* (1876—1896).

⁴ *Une source oubliée des concepts de "structure sociale", "fonction sociale", et "institution": Herbert Spencer. "Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie" 1957, vol. 23.*

Social evolution proceeds through integration of human aggregates. These are thus transformed into a new, larger, functionally differentiated assemblage whose parts become more and more interdependent owing to the increasing division of labour. Such conditions foster the advance of social organization; the loose assemblage is transformed into an ecological whole — organized and based upon definite institutions — into a society. The subsequent evolution of society tends towards greater specialization and social differentiation, combined with institutional development according to Spencer's synthetical formula: "There is progress towards greater size, coherence, multiformity, and definiteness".

Evolution, however, does not imply continuous progress: "There is no uniform ascent from lower to higher, but only an occasional production of a form which, in virtue of greater fitness for more complex conditions, becomes capable of a longer life of a more varied kind"⁵; — that is to say, of life at a higher stage of evolution, since variety and differentiation are manifestations of the evolutionary process, in the course of which the species less adapted to outer conditions — perish.

In spite of this qualification, weakening the optimism which could be inspired by the theory of all-embracing evolution, Spencer closes his considerations with quite an optimistic statement, that the process of social evolution (generally consisting in the integration accompanied by differentiation), after giving origin to great and highly-differentiated states, will bring about their federation; the latter, exercising supreme authority, may, "by forbidding wars between any of its constituent nations, put an end to the re-barbarization which is continually undoing civilization"⁶.

Here we have Spencer's remarkable pacifism, so characteristic of him. In connection with his theory of evolution, Spencer lays stress on the necessity of studying and determining the laws governing social evolution; "it becomes requisite that the sociologist should acquaint himself with the laws of modification to which organized beings in general conform. Unless he does this he must continually err, both in thought and deed"⁷.

2) The fundamental cell of society is in Spencer's system the bio-physical unit, in contrast with the family which constitutes such a cell in Comte's considerations: "A valuable introduction to the study of social life is the familiarization with the truths of individual life". Biology is the most suitable introduction to the cognition of these truths: "the human being — he says — is at once the terminal problem

⁵ *The Principles of Sociology*. Vol. III, London 1904, p. 599.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 600.

⁷ *The Study of Sociology*. London 1877, p. 337.

of Biology and the initial factor of Sociology"⁸. It is, therefore, not surprising that in Spencer's considerations the problems of the structure of individuals are prior to those concerning the structure of societies. Thus, let us consider, what meaning was assigned by him to the term "structure".

A. Since Spencer gave no definition of the term "structure" its meaning must be inferred from its context.

When Spencer writes, that Schweinfurth, "describing the structure of this degraded type of man", says: "The superior region of the chest is flat, and much contracted, but it widens out below to support the huge hanging belly"⁹ and when he points out, that: "by his structure man was not so well fitted for dealing with his difficulties"¹⁰, the term "structure" has only a biological or, strictly speaking, an anatomical sense, regarding the whole constituted by an individual biological organism and meaning its build. Such an understanding of the term "structure" shows that Spencer, after having borrowed this term from biology, used it here in the sense peculiar to that science. In biology, indeed, the term "structure" means in accordance with its etymology (*struere* — to build), the build of a material whole. The same meaning of the term "structure" is also applied by Spencer to material objects, such as houses, ships *etc.*¹¹

Apart from this meaning of the term "structure", we encounter another one, likewise connected with biological organisms. This occurs when Spencer writes: "the various organs..., which alone remain fully alive, while the structures evolved from them lose their vitality..."¹² or: "the development of a structure bringing these materials"¹³. In these quotations, the meaning of the term "structure" is different, since it concerns an organ, that is to say, a complex material whole, and not its build.

B. Physical, chemical as well as biological investigations, showing the dependencies between the properties of constituent parts and those of the wholes formed of those parts, had led Spencer to conclusions and generalizations which he applied to sociological research. This was due to the fact, that he assumed an analogy between certain laws governing biological and social organisms.¹⁴ Such an assumption, asto-

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

⁹ *The Principles of Sociology*. Vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹¹ "The late Japanese system completely military in origin and nature, similarly permeated industry; great and small things — houses, ships, down even to mats — were prescribed in their structures". *Ibid.*, p. 550.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 446.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

¹⁴ This was contrary to Hobbes, who drew analogies between the parts of biological organisms and those of society, and in accordance with Comte, who based his analogies on common principles concerning the build of biological organism and of society.

nishing "those who have been brought up in the belief that the laws relative to nature and to society were quite different"¹⁵, had its roots in the observation of such phenomena as the division of labour, dependence between parts and the whole, coordination, growth and decay, *etc.*, which occur not only in biological organisms, but also in society.

In order to demonstrate the union between the laws of evolution and the organization *sensu largo* of biological organism as well as of society, Spencer used a widely developed system of analogies between society and organisms, applying to society the terminology originally connected with biological organism. He pointed out, however, that those analogies, were of a merely heuristic character, and he gave them up in his description of institutions, forming the bulk of his system of sociology.

While drawing parallels between the structure of individuals, including their traits of character, mind and concepts, and that of a social assemblage corresponding to the lowest stages of social evolution and determined as a social aggregate¹⁶. Spencer claimed that a mutual dependence exists between those two kinds of structures. The said dependence consists in that the properties of the aggregate's structure are compatible with those of the structures of units making up the aggregate.¹⁷ Such is the case, however, only in the beginning: with further evolution of society the situation gets changed. These very properties of the units, to some extent depending upon the conditions of organic and inorganic environment, determine not only the structure but also the growth of the aggregate.

When applied to human assemblages, the term "structure" used in these considerations obtains a qualification including social aspects. Here we find such expressions as, "structure of social aggregate", "structure of community", "structure of tribe", which have an altered content as compared with the above meanings of the term structure. This new connotation is closely connected with the understanding of the integration within a social aggregate. The particular social aggregates become integrated to a various extent, that is to say, their component parts — the units — are from the social point of view variously interrelated: the aggregates corresponding to various stages of social development have, consequently, different structures. The in-

¹⁵ *The Study of Sociology. Op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹⁶ It is to be noted that Spencer sometimes uses in his works the term "social aggregate" not only in the sense of a rudimentary and unorganized aggregate opposed to society, but also in the sense of the society itself, the latter being then understood as an advanced aggregate. The term aggregate was likewise applied to all inorganic or organic assemblages.

¹⁷ "Thus, given the natures of the units, and the nature of the aggregate they form is predetermined, (...) and no community having such traits can be formed out of individuals having other structures and instincts". *Ibid.*, p. 50.

tegration of the social aggregate in the sense of the earliest stage of social evolution is still insignificant: the horde is discrete and all its units exhibit a very low standard of social differentiation. A certain differentiation of social roles is conditioned, at most, by differences in biological structures of the units, for instance, by differences existing between sexes. This character of the aggregates is determined by their small size and the undeveloped division of labour among the units. Not only the most primitive hordes of nomads, but also the "primitive tribes show no established contrasts of parts. At first all men carry on the same kinds of activities, with no dependence on one another, or but occasional dependence"¹⁸. In those "small unformed social aggregates"¹⁹ there is no settled chieftainship: beyond wartime, for example, the leader of a tribe keeps carrying on the functions of an ordinary member of his community.

"Structures of social aggregates", referred to by Spencer, but not defined by him either, would be then pre-organizational and discrete arrangements of units, based upon subjective intentions of parties, and not upon formal institutions of the aggregate. In such arrangements, the actions of the units are not mutually-differentiated, nor fixedly coordinated in relation to social aggregates by means of a differentiated and organized system of social dependences, in short, by means of social organization.

At first sight, the term "structure of social aggregate" suggests the idea of some organized whole and of its build. A closer analysis of the text, however, leads to the conclusion, that even if the properties of the units determine the properties of the aggregate and there exists some connection of a biological and social character between them, it is not to be understood either as the structure in the sense of an organized whole or as the way in which this whole is built, for the simple reason that the social aggregate is not at all an organized whole. In borrowing an example from Spencer's considerations on society, we could say, that a loose collection of stones, bricks and wood is not to be regarded as a whole exhibiting new traits in regard to those of the particular elements of the assemblage, that is, a whole, about which one could pronounce sentences being no conjunction of those concerning the particular elements. The whole will not arise until the elements have been connected in a fixed way as a building. Analogically, as long as functional differentiation and social inter-dependence, together with the social tie relating the units into one whole and constituting this social whole, do not appear among the units making up the aggregate as described by Spencer, the whole does not appear as

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 331—332.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

defined along his criteria.²⁰ On the contrary, we have to do with an undifferentiated, unorganized assemblage of units, an assemblage based only upon direct social contacts. These very properties of the assemblage — in which the units are ranked on the basis of their individual biopsychical traits, and not on the ground of their social roles which could implicate a definite organizational relationship towards other units — are expressed by Spencer's term: "the structure of social aggregate". By the latter he does not understand a whole nor the build of a whole (which, after all, does not exist here), but only a discrete arrangement of biopsychical units.

Thus, the analysis of Spencer's attitude towards the problem of when the assemblage constitutes an organized "whole" and when it is still an aggregate, leads to the conclusion that, in regard to assemblages, he uses the term "structure" in various meanings. In a certain meaning, the structure of every social assemblage is determined by the system of relations between the units, characteristic of the given assemblage. We may describe "the structure of social aggregate" by stating that it is discrete and that social roles within it are only slightly differentiated. In another sense, "the structure" exists only in assemblage properly organized and composed of differentiated and interdependent parts. With time, the aggregate becomes transformed into an assemblage characterized by a definite structure. This concept of structure, enabling us to speak of the increase of structure in the course of society's evolution, will be still discussed below.

Spencer's interest in the social aggregate may be explained by his application of the methodological rule, stating that research on any phenomena should start from such arrangements, in which these phenomena occur in their simplest form. This rule is especially important for investigations of a genetic character and that is why, the concept of aggregate was indispensable for Spencer's study of structures and social functions.

This is confirmed in Spencer's *Study of Sociology*, where speaking of the tasks of sociology, he says: "Beginning with types of men who form but small and incoherent social aggregates such a science has to show in what ways the individual qualities, intellectual and emotional, negative further aggregation. It has to explain how slight modifications of individual nature, arising under notified conditions of life, make somewhat larger aggregates possible"²¹.

²⁰ With other criteria, the social aggregate in the narrow sense of the term can be regarded as a whole, for instance, for the sake of psychological and spatial bonds; with Spencer, however, the criterion of being "a whole" is constituted exclusively by an organizational bond. "That mutual dependence of parts which constitutes organization is thus effectually established. Though discrete instead of concrete (like a biological organism — L. K.), the social aggregate is rendered a living whole". *The Principles of Sociology. Op. cit.*, p. 448.

²¹ *The Study of Sociology. Op. cit.*, p. 52.

C. As stated above, the social aggregate evolves through integration combined with differentiation. Two stages may be distinguished in this process: the one relates to integration, the other — to differentiation.

“The primitive social group — says Spencer — like the primitive group of living molecules with which organic evolution begins, never attains any considerable size by simple increase”²². This is attained by integration. As far as society is concerned, the combination of particular aggregates most frequently occurs by conquests. Within the compound aggregate thus developed (simply compound, doubly compound, and so on) the differentiation of its constituent parts takes place. Along with the growth of populations, occupations become differentiated, and this differentiation increases according to the growth of the aggregate. This process, successively recurring and giving origin to large societies, has always taken place according to the formula that the increase in size of societies is accompanied by the “increase of structure”, that is, by the differentiation of parts making up a social or biological aggregate. “As the aggregate grows, says Spencer, its parts become unlike: it exhibits increase of structure”²³. Here lies the question of an increasing heterogeneity of the originally homogeneous aggregate, the only differentiation of which was based on the division of labour by sex. Thus, the term “structure” is used here to express the differentiation of the aggregate’s elements. Analogically: “structured” means differentiated, “unstructured” — undifferentiated. “The changes by which this structureless mass becomes a structured mass, having the characters and powers possessed by what we call an organism, are changes through which its parts lose their original likenesses: and do this while assuming the unlike kinds of activity”²⁴.

Spencer emphasizes the special character of this differentiation. “Evolution establishes in them both (*i.e.* biological and social organisms, L.K.) not differences simply, but definitely connected differences — differences such that each makes the others possible”²⁵. This paves the way for further differentiation, whose termination implies the end of the process of evolution.

D. The emergence of social organization *sensu largo* constitutes another stage within the development of social aggregate. In the process of functional differentiation of the aggregate there arises a mutual dependence of its differentiated parts as a result of an increased division of labour.²⁶ And this interdependence constitutes not only a neces-

²² *The Principles of Sociology. Op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 454.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 450.

²⁴ *The Study of Sociology. Op. cit.*, p. 331.

²⁵ *The Principles of Sociology, Op. cit.*, p. 439.

²⁶ “this division of labour, first dwelt on by political economists as a social phenomenon of living bodies, which they called the physiological division of

sary but also a sufficient condition of social co-operation due to social roles being interdependent and complementary. It is only the co-operation that transforms the social aggregate, still discrete but already differentiated, into a developing whole composed of parts, marked off but at the same time joined together owing to "the persistence of the arrangements among them throughout the area occupied. And it is this trait which yields our idea of a society, says Spencer. For withholding the name (that is the name "society" — L.K.) from an ever changing cluster such as primitive men form, we apply it only where some constancy in the distribution of parts has resulted from settled life" ²⁷. Thus, the further evolution of a compound social aggregate, already as a concrete ecological whole, becomes possible owing to the agencies transforming it into a society, that is, owing to the differentiation and mutual dependence of parts making possible a voluntary co-operation, when the satisfaction of personal goals is aimed at, or a compulsory one, when the ends of the whole community are meant. It is these two phenomena, differentiation and mutual dependence, that make up the concept of structure whenever Spencer uses that term in order to describe the system of relationships within the organized aggregate, that is within society. "Structure" is here equivalent to the organization of society. We find this very meaning in the following quotation: "By comparing societies of different kinds, and societies in different stages, we must ascertain what traits of size, structure, function, etc., are associated" ²⁸.

E. Spencer also uses the term "structure" to denote some characteristic parts of society. Thus, his expression "social structures", is linked with the considerations on social evolution of society.

In Spencer's opinion, the development of social aggregate is influenced not only by the structure of its component units, but also by the conditionings of its environment which codetermine the aggregate's structure, that is, indirectly the question whether it will be the victim of a conquest or the conqueror itself. The evolution of society, however, becomes gradually more and more independent of those conditionings, since society purposely transforms its own environment. On the other hand, this evolution continues to depend upon the structures of units, upon organization and social structures, influenced in turn by society as the whole. But Spencer did not define the expression "social structures", just as he did not give the definition of the terms "structure" and: "structures of social aggregate".

labour, is that which in the society as in the animal, makes a living whole. Scarcely can I emphasize enough the truth that in respect of this fundamental trait a social organism and an individual organism are entirely alike". *Ibid.*, p. 440.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 436.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 431.

What determines the growth of those social structures and in what does their importance consist? As we have seen, the origin of a structure understood as the differentiation of a social aggregate was influenced by integration, giving rise to the formation of society. The growth of social structures is linked with the conditions of organization *sensu largo*. Evolution of political organization is determined by the interactions of adjacent societies called by Spencer the "super-organic environment of society". Thus *e.g.* wars have all-important effects in developing certain social structures.²⁹ Hence it follows that only some structures involve in correlation with the growth of political organization, while the remaining ones change owing to the industrial one. Originally — according to Spencer — organization depended chiefly on the conditions of inorganic and organic environment, upon which the evolution of the remaining social structures is likewise dependent.³⁰

Thus, there is a genetic interdependence between organization and social structures. The organization of the society as a whole, "begins with a contrast between the division which carries on relations, habitually hostile, with environing societies, and the division which is devoted to procuring necessaries of life; and during the earlier stages of development these two divisions constitute the whole"³¹. So, when Spencer says, that according to the law of organization distinct functions entail distinct structures, and that the gradual differentiation of functions goes along with a gradual differentiation of structures, it is to be presumed, that those two social functions, covering the relations with environing societies and the satisfaction of the society's needs, correspond to two kinds of structures whose task consists in performing those functions. This very division is shown in Spencer's statement, concerning the tasks of sociology, which should describe the changing relations between this regulative structure which is unproductive, and those structures which carry on production.³² The confrontation of those two statements may lead to the conclusion, that when Spencer refers to the "two contrasted parts of society", described also as the "regulative and operative part", and to two kinds of structure, namely the regulative and the productive one; in either case he means the same. More than that, it seems that the above expressions are equivalent to such ones as "fundamental parts of society" and "social classes". "When from low tribes entirely undifferentiated, we pass to tribes next above them, we find classes of masters and slaves — masters who, as warriors, carry on the offensive and defensive activi-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 462.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 582.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 427.

ties and thus especially stand in relations to envioning agencies; and slaves who carry on inner activities for the general sustentation, primarily of their masters and secondarily of themselves”³³. Thus, Spencer gives “social structures” a meaning, according to which the groups he distinguishes as social classes are to be regarded as referents of those structures; both expressions are, then, equivalent. Along with the increasing size of society, these two interdependent classes, which were originally in direct contact with each other, lose their intimate connection. The need for indirect contact arises, giving origin to a new, intermediate class serving to transfer products and “influences” from one part to the other. (Here we use Spencer’s term “influences” which corresponds to the word “information” in cybernetics). Spencer adscribes particular importance to this third intermediate class: “In all subsequent stages, evolution of the two earlier systems of structures depends on evolution of this additional system”³⁴. Thus the model of society and of its functioning comprises all three mutually connected systems, namely the regulative, the operative and the informative one. Since Spencer stresses, that the development of the first two depends on the development of the third, he is aware, that there is a feedback between the regulative and the informative systems, and that is why his model of society may be treated as an early cybernetical model.

Spencer, as it appears, transferred the respective generalizations of biological research into social sciences and, as a result, regarded society as a great organic whole. His profound knowledge of the dynamics of such systems found its confirmation in modern cybernetics, which shows the common principles of functioning of living organisms and social structures.³⁵

The origin of such social structures is bound up with the division of functions with regard to the whole. The performance of those functions, defence and atack on the one hand, and the procurement of the necessaries of life on the other, is made possible by those very structures, in other words, by social classes and the organization involved. Further advance of social structures conforms to the general law of organization: „differentiations proceed from the more general to the

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 480—481.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 582.

³⁵ One could point out analogies between the structures conceived as parts of society and the meaning given by Spencer to the term “structure” when he speaks of biological organism: “As this change progresses, the nutriment taken up by the alimentary structures is better distributed by these vascular structures to the outer and inner organs in proportion to their needs” (*The Principles of Sociology*. vol. I, p. 482). “Alimentary structures” and “vascular structures” mean “alimentary canal” and “blood vessels” respectively; both form functionally connected and mutually dependent parts of an organic whole. Terminological convergence with structures conceived as social classes seems, consequently, not to be accidental; it is justified by the fact, that the term “structure” is understood in either case as the interdependent and compound parts of a whole — social or organic.

more special"³⁶ — that is, towards an increasing specialization in function and structure.

"First the broad division between ruling and ruled; then within the ruling part divisions into political, religious, military, and within the ruled part divisions into food-producing classes and handicraftsmen; then within each of these divisions minor ones, and so on"³⁷. The growth of the class exercising religious control may serve as an example: during the early stage of aggregation, all the functions requiring a contact with super-natural forces are performed by men who are at once sorcerers, priests, diviners, exorcists, and doctors. Along with advance in integration, there come both differences of function and differences of rank, there grows specialization: the rain-makers and sorcerers come from the priests, the priests from the diviners, and so forth. Finally, there comes a distinct sacerdotal class, within which various categories arise: sacrificers, diviners, singers, composers of hymns, instructors of youth; then within each of these categories there develops a further specialisation.³⁸

III

As we have seen, Spencer uses the term "structure" without precisising it, in intuitive meanings, that is, in meanings dependent on the context. The application of the so-called authentic interpretation with the view of determining the sense of the expressions we are concerned with, proves to be impossible, because the author himself has not defined the term in question. This fact is all the more embarrassing, since we have to do here with a term introduced by Spencer himself into the vocabulary of sociology. Consequently, one should not claim, that the meaning of this term is self-evident and that it does not call for an explicit definition.

When analyzing the meanings which Spencer gave to the term "structure", we have seen that various concepts of structure correspond to various contexts. In the analysis in question we used implicitly two criteria which enabled us to single out more easily those varying connotations. The first may be described as (1) a "reistic" criterion, the second as (2) a "relational" one. The use of the first criterion makes us concentrate on the properties of things or phenomena (in regard to which Spencer uses the term "structure"); the application of the second attracts attention to the relationships existing between the parts of those things or phenomena.

As far as the "reistic" criterion is concerned we may say that:

³⁶ *The Principles of Sociology, op. cit.*, p. 463.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 581.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

a) When applying the first criterion to the analysis, for example, of "the unformed social aggregate", we may come to conclusion that it is composed of functionally undifferentiated biopsychical units and that it does not constitute a whole analogous to that formed, say, by a biological organism, in regard to which the term "structure" meant the whole or the build. In that case, it becomes clear that the Spencian expressions "structure of social aggregate", or "structure of tribe" do not mean the whole nor the build, they mean only a discrete assemblage of units making up the aggregate.

b) When Spencer speaks, for instance, of aggregated, differentiated, functionally interdependent biopsychical units which make up a social aggregate *sensu largo*, then the term: "structure of social aggregate" pertains to a society understood as an organized ecological whole consisting of these units, and the term "structure", in contradistinction to the signification described in item (a), concerns the organization of that whole, the organization of society.

c) When dealing with the organization of society, Spencer considers its great parts and their properties, then the analysis of their features leads us to the conclusion, that those great parts should not be regarded as ethnic, state or religious groups, but as social classes only. Such an understanding of these groups is determined by the role which they play within the social division of labour, within social functions concerning defense and conservation of society, as well as satisfaction of its needs. Their very character shows that they are social groups *sensu stricto*, described by Spencer in a general way as "social structures".

In the second case, when the relations existing between the parts of things or phenomena are regarded as the criterion for distinguishing the meanings of the term "structure", the analysis of those relations enables us to grasp the differences between such meanings. The relations in question, both in regard to the biological organism and to society, are of two kinds, namely spatial relations in literal or metaphorical sense and dependence relations of various degrees. When Spencer analyzes, for instance, the biological organism from the viewpoint of spatial relations as well as of functional dependences existing between its parts, the term "structure", as used in this case, means the build of the organism. It is precisely the spatial arrangement of functionally-correlated parts that determines that build. On the other hand, when a set of co-existing elements bound by spatial ties, but devoid of functional dependences is considered, the term "structure" means in such a context a discrete arrangement of elements, and not the organization of a whole.

It is separately or jointly that these two criteria — properties and relationships — may be used for determining the meanings of the term "structure". The particular meanings of that term can be singled out

not only on the basis of a single criterion, for the differences between them may pertain to both criteria, which are often cross-ranged. Such an analysis does not exclude divergences in interpretation resulting from the lack of univocal terms in Spencer's works.

The above analysis of contexts including the term "structure" leads to the conclusion, that in regard to biological organism Spencer uses that term in the following meanings:

- (1) of a compound material object — the structure is an organ.
- (2) Of an object containing subordinate structures.
- (3) In other contexts concerning the biological organism, structure means the arrangement of parts or their relationships, in other words, the build of a given object.

In the group of contexts where the term "structure" bears a social connotation, its meaning can be the following:

(1) Structure concerns each arrangement of elements, characteristic of a given assemblage. The former may be either (a) a loose arrangement of undifferentiated elements of social aggregate understood as a most early stage of social development, or (b) an arrangement of differentiated elements bound by ties of mutual dependence and co-operation, that is to say, an organized arrangement concerning the organization of society or the society itself.

(2) Structure concerns the differentiation of elements of a social assemblage.

(3) The term "structure" is used likewise in the meaning of social classes.

More than that, Spencer uses that term interchangeably in place of the concept "institution", and he even sometimes identifies it with rites or rules of behaviour in society. Thus, in some measure it is difficult to see clearly into the meaning of the context which, of course, should be variously understood according to the sense ascribed to that multivocal term in various parts of Spencer's works.

IV

George Gurvitch regards the introduction of the term "structure" and the pertinent enrichment of the research tools of sociology as one of the greatest merits of Spencer, which is all the greater, since his meaning of that term is often much clearer than the one employed by contemporary American sociologists who have introduced that very "significant and fruitful expression" into their research work. In the light of interpretational difficulties caused by the term "structure" in its present-day applications, the words "much clearer" used by G. Gurvitch are not equivalent to saying that Spencer's use of it is quite clear to the former. For Gurvitch admits that, with the above American

authors, i.e., with T. Parsons, R. K. Merton and their followers, one comes across the same confusion of ideas and the same difficulties as characterize their source, that is, Spencer's works. This confusion consists in blending of structures with procedures, rites and social regulations, and even with institutions.³⁹

The question of logical consistence of Spencer's conception is dealt with nowadays by other authors. Werner Stark charges Spencer with an inconsequent interpretation of the concept of society;⁴⁰ he points out, among others, that Spencer in *The Principles of Sociology* regards society as "a unity rather than a plurality", and in *The Man Versus the State* — as "a plurality rather than a unity"⁴¹.

V

It seems necessary, in conclusion, to consider what is the present significance of the Spencerian conception of structure. Such considerations will be confined here to the school of functionalism which, as stated above, makes the concept "structure" the centre of its theoretical system. Although there exist many inspirers of functionalism who have been found out by the historians of sociology or indicated by certain functionalists, Don Martindale, while describing positivist organicists as "the true founders of functionalism",⁴² emphasizes that the main source of inspiration for this trend is to be looked for in the conceptions created by the founders of that science and pursued, to some extent or other, by the representatives of different schools active in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries under the influence of Comte and Spencer. That is why the works of those continuators, especially of Durkheim, Cooley, Thomas and Pareto, are important, but only indirect links connecting positivist organicism with functionalism. While recognizing the position of Don Martindale and that of Timasheff⁴³ as

³⁹ "Une source oubliée des concepts de "structure sociale"... *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁴⁰ W. Stark: *Herbert Spencer's Three Sociologies*. "American Sociological Review" 1961, vol. 26.

⁴¹ One could say, in fact, that things are going still worse, because the two contradictory and (according to Stark) irreconcilable positions, namely the organic and the individualistic one, appear already in the first volume of *The Principles of Sociology*. Nevertheless, Spencer who reconciles both positions seems to be only apparently inconsequent. This is more evident if we do not overlook the most significant of his positions, namely, the evolutionary approach to society and to its organization.

When studying society from the evolutionary angle, Spencer combined the two following aspects: on the one hand, he analyzed the developing unity comparable with biological organisms and on the other, the plurality determining the character of that development. Only when combined, these two aspects made up the proper picture of social dynamics.

⁴² Don Martindale: *The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory*. London 1961, p. 448.

⁴³ N. S. Timasheff: *Sociological Theory, its Nature and Growth*. New York 1957, p. 221.

reasonable, we should make a brief attempt at confronting directly the conceptions of Spencer with those of the functionalists.

From Spencer's conceptual heritage, the above school took over, first of all, the idea of the organic system as an explanatory model, recognizing it, as the intellectual foundation of functional theory in sociology, and performing a broad generalisation of the system as compared with Spencer's ideas. This was made easier owing to the fact, that this school had adopted as its methodological foundation the conception of a closed system, strictly speaking, the conception of the plurality of relatively isolated systems of which reality is composed. The said conception had been proposed by Znaniecki whose book, *The Polish Peasant*, passed for the first significant work of functionalist trend.⁴⁴ Each of the above-mentioned "isolated systems", "is composed of limited number of elements more intimately inter-related with one another than with any objects which do not belong to the system, and each possessing a specific internal structure which isolates it in certain respects from external influences".⁴⁵ This structure is understood by Znaniecki as a "limited system", as an internal order, owing to which those interdependent elements, most intimately connected with one another, make up a system.

Within this conception of structure, the following theses seem to be of basic character:

1. Structure is a condition of the existence of the system conceived as a whole.

2. The relationships between the elements of the system are those of a particularly close interdependence. Thus the isolation of the system is not an absolute one, and it may be said, that relations of a less intimate dependence are formed on the surroundings of the system.

3. The characteristics of the system's elements is as important for the system's analysis as the explanation of the principle ordering those elements and "building" it as a whole.

In this conception of a closed system, one can easily find the features of the Spencerian understanding of structure in the sense of the build of biological organisms.

In the idea of social structure, proposed by Meyer Fortes, representing the modern school of functionalism in social anthropology, we encounter, too, the same elements of the Spencerian understanding of structure.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁴⁵ *The Method of Sociology*. New York 1934, p. 12 (quoted after D. Martindale, *op. cit.*, p. 468).

⁴⁶ *Time and Social Structure*. London 1949, p. 84.

On the other hand, when Parsons describes the structure of social system as its differentiation according to the roles played by the integrated units,⁴⁷ the resemblance to one of the above-analyzed Spencerian meanings of the term "structure" seems to be a far-reaching one, with the mere reservation that the term "social system" in Parson's conception may be, but need not be equivalent to the term "society" as Spencer understood it. For, thanks to the system's generalization we had spoken of, each whole conceptionally isolated from the reality, according to Radcliffe-Brown's definition, constitutes a social system as conceived by functionalists. Parsons, consequently, ascribes the character of the social system not only to the society conceived as a whole, but also to every assemblage composed of interacting units, that is, to families and other social groups, to offices, enterprises, armies, political parties, universities, hospitals. They all constitute parts of a wider system, that is, of society. In any case they concern integrated and differentiated wholes, and the very differentiation of these wholes constitutes, according to Parsons, a structure in the wide comprehension of the term.

Social structure, according to A. Radcliffe-Brown, is "an arrangement of persons in institutionally controlled or defined relationships"⁴⁸. It is not hard to see, here, a resemblance to yet another comprehension of the term "structure" by Spencer. We know that he understood the structure of social aggregate, deprived of organizational bonds, as a discrete arrangement of units. It may be said by analogy that the "structure of society" as an organized whole should have its counterpart in an arrangement of individuals characterized by institutionally controlled or defined relationships, according to the definition of Radcliffe-Brown.

Those examples show, that there are some affiliations between contemporary conceptions of structure as suggested by the functionalists and Spencer's ideas. At the same time, those examples show the important role played by Spencer in inspiring certain schools of sociology and anthropology during the twentieth century.

⁴⁷ *The Social System*. London 1952, p. 114.

⁴⁸ *A Natural Science of Society*. London 1952, p. 5 (quoted after Dorothy E m m e t: *Function, Purpose and Powers*. London 1958, p. 23.