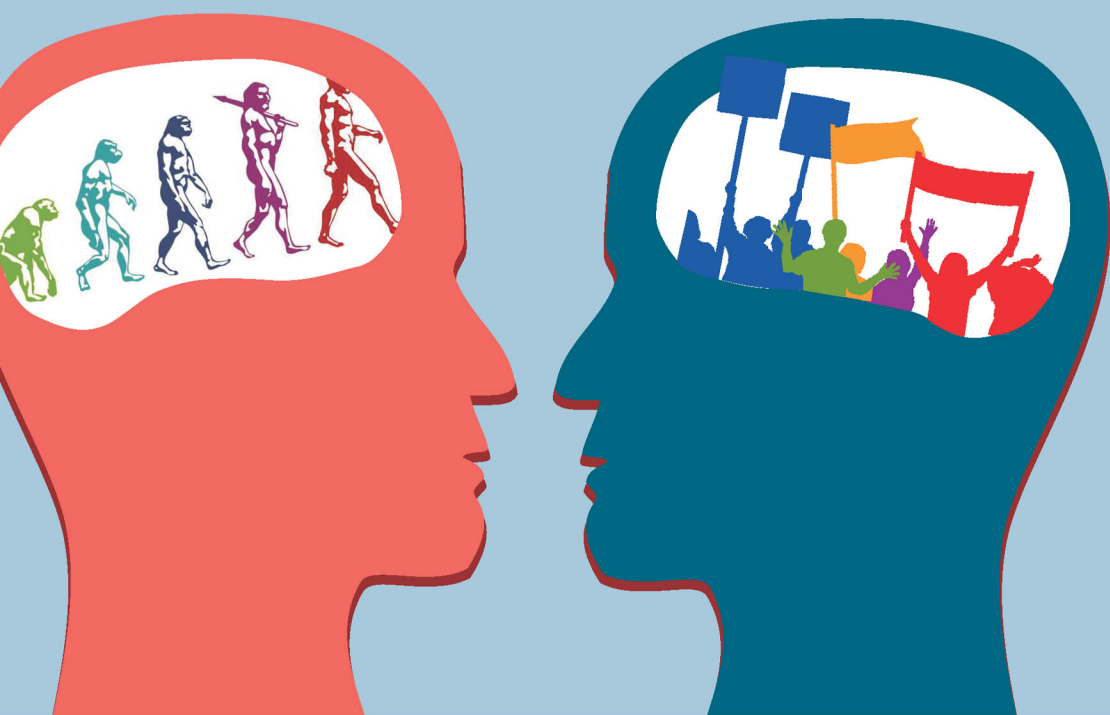


Evolution versus Revolution

The Paradoxes of Social Change



Melvyn L. Fein

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Irving L. Horowitz
And his indomitable spirit



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Acknowledgments

Social change is a complicated subject. If I have succeeded in untangling only a few of its most knotty features, it is not for want of effort. Like many members of my generation, I began my career as an idealist. Those of us who grew up in the wake of the Great Depression and the shadow of the Second World War knew that much was expected of us. We were asked to solve the problems of poverty and injustice our parents had left unresolved. Because we were presumably the best-educated cohort to deal with these issues, we were to use the knowledge we had acquired to advance human communities to unrivaled heights. In short, we were required to save the world.

This task turned out to be more difficult than most of us imagined. The ideals we were encouraged to pursue were, as I and others learned, to our dismay, unattainable. The nature of human beings, and social change, is such that the ideals were never possible. Nevertheless, this unwelcome truth took years to sink in. Although my personal experience played a part in recognizing our shared limitations, had I not been privy to the discoveries of others I would have remained in the dark. I therefore wish to thank some of those who helped open my eyes.

So many people were involved in teaching me critical lessons that not everyone can be acknowledged here. Besides the information I acquired from books, which was substantial, I also owe a considerable debt to Dr. Martin Lean for making me realize how much I did not know and to Dr. Vasili Economopoulos for the example of patience he provided. With respect to this work, I must specifically acknowledge the encouragement I received from Dr. Irving Horowitz. Not only did he publish my book *Post-Liberalism*, but he recognized that it offered a nonconservative alternative to liberal orthodoxy. I am also grateful to his wife, Mary Curtis, who now runs Transaction Publishers. She too understood that I am attempting to synthesize a host of materials, thereby presenting a new way to look at them. Investigations into social change are not new; my small contributions did not invent the wheel.

Whatever their virtues, they build upon the efforts of other scholars. They too are, thus, the product of a long evolution.

I must also thank the many students upon whom I practiced my ideas. Without their feedback, I could not have refined my thinking. In having to voice what I thought out loud, and doing so in a manner that could be understood, I was forced to clarify my hypotheses. Time to achieve this was also provided in an extended leave allowed me by Kennesaw State University. The space to write was not only a luxury, it offered an opportunity to integrate my thoughts.

Finally, I am indebted to Kathryn Siggelko for helping me to create the figures in this work and Shari Sheridan for saving me from the evil grasp of my computer. Nor can I neglect my wife, Linda Treiber. Her support and tolerance in what turned out to be an all-consuming project were invaluable.

The Strangeness of Social Change

Expositions

The juxtaposition was striking. The buildings were faux classical. Clad in white stucco, they appeared to be constructed of marble and sought to recapture the glory of ancient Rome.¹ At night, they were outlined in electric lights. Silhouetted against the Chicago sky, they cried out that here was a new marvel that not only rivaled but exceeded the achievements of Western civilization's greatest empire. Rome was not built in a day, but the White City² of the Columbian Exposition³ took barely a year to erect. What was more, it dazzled the eye both day and night. Rome might have been the wonder of its age, but it offered nothing to compare to the triumphs fashioned by the genius of American science and industry.

Just four hundred years after Columbus discovered the New World,⁴ the United States was on the verge of becoming the most powerful nation on earth.⁵ Little more than a century after its founding, it spanned a continent and spread its influence across the world. A beacon of liberty and a magnet for millions of immigrants, its wealth was legendary.⁶ The streets were not exactly paved with gold, but its burgeoning cities lifted their skylines to the heavens. Chicago was a prime example.⁷ Carved out of a wilderness, it rose from the ashes of a devastating fire to become a stunning metropolis. Located at the crossroads of the Great Lakes and multiple railroad lines, it throbbed with commercial activity. What better symbol was there of the country's enormous successes and scintillating promise? What better emblem of the changes its people had wrought and the miracles they would achieve?

The United States was a relatively new nation. Nowhere had a society started with so little and accumulated so much in so short a period. Its

know-how could accomplish almost anything. No wonder beneficial change seemed inevitable. For most of human history, however, ordinary persons simply hoped things would not get worse. If conditions remained the same, without a famine or war, people were content. To them, the world was a veil of tears from which only God could deliver us; hence, to aspire to intentional improvements was to appropriate the deity's prerogatives. During Europe's Middle Ages,⁸ peasants rarely ventured more than twenty miles from home. They never read, scarcely bathed, and could not conceive of an Industrial Revolution.⁹ The best they could anticipate was that if people followed the Lord's dictates, the millennium would shortly arrive.

Conscious efforts at major change have been the exception. The Egyptian pharaohs¹⁰ aspired to expand their territories, the biblical prophets¹¹ dreamed of cleansing the souls of the faithful, and Greek merchants crossed the Mediterranean in search of greater wealth.¹² All thought in comparatively personal terms. Accordingly, the Bible writers kept track of the fortunes of their people, the Hebrews. Across the sea, Athenians celebrated Solon for instituting a groundbreaking democracy in their city.¹³ As for Rome, its patricians and plebeians contested control of their Republic.¹⁴ It was not until the Italian Renaissance that thinkers such as Nicolò Machiavelli¹⁵ contemplated the unification of Italy as a broader reform.¹⁶ Even then the objective was limited.

For most of history, change was a matter of political turmoil and/or religious conversion. Kings rose to power but were later replaced by their sons or ambitious usurpers. Empires, such as that of the Persians, burgeoned from the obscure tribes, then disintegrated under the attacks of an Alexander the Great.¹⁷ Reformers, such as the Gracchi in Rome, sought to alter their country's political systems so as to protect the plebeians, not to construct entirely new ways of life. As for the Chin emperor, he defeated the warring states to consolidate his hold on China.¹⁸ His goal was not to foment a revolution, but to enhance his personal power.

Religion could often be more idealistic. Life was hazardous; hence, appeasing the gods was essential. This made the services of soothsayers imperative. Only they could read the intentions of the deities. Croesus, for instance, consulted the Delphic Oracle when deciding whether to war against Persia. And when told that a great empire would prevail, Croesus mistakenly thought it would be his. Priests also offered up sacrifices to their divinities and prayed for their favor. This was why the Jews trooped annually to Jerusalem to offer sheep at Solomon's Temple¹⁹

and why the Greeks erected magnificent stone edifices dedicated to Zeus and Athena. Their objective was to guard against disaster, not to remake the world.

There was also a bond between political and spiritual power, with each side exploiting the other. Hence, in Egypt the Pharaoh Akhenaten²⁰ sought to transform the traditional religion by making it monotheistic. He thereby attempted to elevate the sun god Ra so that his people could benefit from an association with the universe's most potent force. Constantine the Great made a similar calculation when he promoted the Catholic Church.²¹ Because so many of his troops had already accepted Christ, he promoted the religion in order to unify his empire. Similarly, Confucius²² crisscrossed China to promote filial piety so as to bring stability out of chaos.²³ The changes that followed were frequently dramatic, yet they were generally embraced for their strategic advantage.

The ancient world also witnessed technological and cultural changes, which normally came too slowly for their full impact to be appreciated. Writing and money were historical flexion points whose magnitude was grasped only in retrospect. Literacy was vital in administering nations such as Egypt, but its implications for expanding knowledge were not realized until much later. Likewise, money facilitated Greek commerce, but how this also expedited the rise of civilization was not entirely understood. Meanwhile, Alexander²⁴ introduced new ways of thought to the Middle East. Nevertheless, among his contemporaries, this was perceived more in terms of fashion than as an intellectual revolution.

Consciously embracing change as a positive in itself had to await the economic and political improvements of early modern Europe. After the continent rose out of the disorder of feudalism,²⁵ it developed a cohesion and stability that enabled its populace to contemplate a more robust secular future.²⁶ With unprecedented wealth accumulating in cities such as Florence, Bruges, and Paris, merchants and craftsmen could afford to think about the here and now. Hence, as the modern state struggled to emerge in places like France, the Netherlands, and England, scholars were stimulated to reflect upon its nature and prospects. Intellectuals such as Sir Thomas More²⁷ speculated about a utopian society, while Thomas Hobbes²⁸ conjectured about the nature of the world prior to the emergence of dependable governments. Plato²⁹ did something similar, but his concerns were more parochial. His righteous society was essentially for Greeks.³⁰

In the past, when people contemplated social change, they often thought in terms of a Golden Age or a millennial future; either there

had once been a Garden of Eden, or Christ's second coming would reward the good with eternal life. Then too, during the Dark Ages, people wondered at the magnificence of Roman ruins. The shell of the Coliseum, vestiges of well-built roads, and newly salvaged texts on medicine and law suggested that life had been better under the empire. Somehow people were smarter and more moral before its decline and fall.³¹ The best that could be hoped was that moderns might approach the achievements of their predecessors.

The optimism to believe that moderns could surpass the ancients arose gradually. First, communities had to become prosperous enough to afford Gothic cathedrals. Then they required the legal and military institutions to provide the wherewithal for a reliable defense. Both technically and organizationally, they needed to believe they could control their own destinies before they could contemplate improving on them. Only after the Industrial Revolution was in full swing did this conviction entirely take root. Only then did England, under the tutelage of Prince Albert, erect the Crystal Palace³² so as to revel in the nation's manufacturing prowess. Only then did France follow suit with an exposition that featured the Eiffel Tower and did the United States organize its Centennial and Columbian Expositions. The idea of "progress" thereby sprang into the collective imagination.³³ Change was not only possible, but people could build bigger, better, and higher than ever. They could make large dreams come true because science, industry, and government had entered into a coalition that promised unparalleled marvels.

Making Progress

Positive change has been with us for some time now. Indeed, it is accelerating at a dizzying pace. Scarcely a day goes by without someone inventing a groundbreaking product. Moreover, most of these modifications have been for the good. We do live longer and more comfortably. We do possess alternatives that our parents lacked. Much of this can be attributed to technology. We encounter newly conceived devices wherever we turn. They are in our homes, places of business, and the skies over our heads. Think of the contrivances our ancestors did not have. Cell phones, automobiles, rockets, as well as refrigerators, television sets, microwave ovens, electric lights and air-conditioning, were inconceivable for them, whereas for us they are standard.

We are acutely aware of these developments. This is why we make jokes about kindergartners being more proficient with computers than

their parents. It is why teenagers dial their phones with their thumbs, whereas their parents use their index fingers. As importantly, such technological changes rest upon extraordinary scientific breakthroughs. Additions to our collective knowledge may be less tangible than physical things, but they are equally profound. Thus, people did not know why the planets circle the sun until Isaac Newton³⁴ came along. Nor did they realize that the heart was a pump until William Harvey³⁵ demonstrated that the blood circulated throughout the body. Today this information is old hat for grammar school students.

Nevertheless, these intellectual advances paved the way for today's technical marvels. The cell phone would not have come into being without the integrated circuit, and the integrated circuit was not possible without atomic theory. The same applies to medicine. A case in point: Doctors now understand that viruses and bacteria cause disease and that anesthesia can take the pain out of surgical procedures.³⁶ In contrast, during the seventeenth century, Samuel Pepys³⁷ preferred to endure the agony of kidney stones rather than go under the knife. He rightly feared that death was more probable than relief from his distress.

While technology and science tend to capture our attention, a multitude of other changes have transformed our lives. We can begin with government. This was once the province of autocrats and plutocrats. Today, of course, we enjoy universal suffrage.³⁸ Historically, however, this sort of egalitarianism was rare. What is more, it was generally associated with market economies. This is why the Athenians pioneered democratic institutions,³⁹ why the British followed suit, and why the United States boasts the world's longest continuous democracy.

Families have likewise changed.⁴⁰ Whom people marry, the roles that spouses perform, and the number of children that couples raise have been altered by the techno-commercial marvels we take for granted. Not all changes are for the good—few would contend that divorce and unwed parenthood are desirable. Nonetheless, most people agree that women, in general, have been liberated and that the young are better educated. In addition, no longer do most people marry because they must. Today they do so for love.

Even religion has changed.⁴¹ Most Americans remain Christians, yet their orientation is more secular. Although they continue to believe in God and an afterlife, fewer attend regular church services. Furthermore, rather than experiencing a need to supplicate themselves as their forebears did, they eschew fire and brimstone in favor of a loving

savior.⁴² They do not regard themselves as sinful and, therefore, they expect to go to heaven.

All in all, Americans have become incredibly prosperous.⁴³ We can barely imagine life without indoor plumbing or a morning without a glass of orange juice. For us the past is a foreign land. That few of our ancestors lived in cities seems inconceivable. Yet most did not. And if they did, they had to put up with appalling public sanitation. The best colonial cities could manage was municipal pigs to eat the garbage people threw into the streets. On top of this, ordinary folks had perhaps two sets of clothing, one for daily use and another for Sundays. We, on the other hand, feel deprived if we cannot periodically refurbish our wardrobes. We also expect to take vacations in distant climes. The closest we come to experiencing what our ancestors endured is watching television shows about how long it took for them to trundle across the continent. Naturally, we do so in the comfort of our living rooms, with cold drink readily at hand.

Our prosperity has convinced us that we can have almost anything we want. If a desire is not immediately satisfied, we demand that the world be modified so as to provide it. Either we or a coalition of brilliant scientists and of equally committed politicians are expected to rearrange events to accommodate our wishes. Positive change seems pre-ordained. It occurred in the past, hence, we see no reason that it should not continue into the future. We may not yet have conquered cancer or developed automobiles that drive themselves, but these advancements are just around the corner. They already are in the movies.

Where change was once anticipated with foreboding, a long list of astonishing enhancements has transformed it into "progress." The question we confront is, therefore, which advances to seek. Whatever they are, we are sure that they will make our lives better. General Electric once proclaimed, "Progress is our most important product." It is ours as well. Why and how, we may not know; but that it is, we do not doubt.

The Ubiquity of Prophecy

What does the future hold? We want to know. So did our ancestors. They not only prayed to their Gods, they sought to interpret their will. Would Zeus be pleased if Athens⁴⁴ attacked Syracuse? Was Monday a propitious day to start a business? Not every venture was favorable, therefore, men consulted the Delphic Oracle or threw chicken bones in the air.⁴⁵ Gifted "seers" steered believers along advantageous paths and warned of harmful ones.

We moderns scoff at superstition, yet most of us know our astrological signs. And why not? We too want to be in step with the future. As a result, we are apt to consult contemporary prophets. Thus, experts are paid to explicate impending developments in technology. Commercial enterprises also want to know about shifts in styles so that they can determine if there will be a market for their products.⁴⁶ Among today's clairvoyants are social scientists. As authorities in human behavior, they allegedly have insights into such things as marital trends and social violence.⁴⁷ More than this, they can offer sound advice on how to control these variables. Individuals and organizations are not content to roll with events, they want to master them. Just as they employ the physical sciences to tame the material world, so they hope to utilize sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, and political science to generate wise social policies. Physics, chemistry, and biology laid the groundwork for transistors, synthetic fibers, and gene splicing; why shouldn't their social counterparts do the same for our personal, economic, and political lives?

But can they? Can laypersons or social experts truly foresee the future? How well do they actually understand the nature of social change? According to Attar of Nishapur,⁴⁸ an Asian potentate once challenged his wise men to come up with an observation that would never be wrong. They soon did. It was: "This too shall pass." Whatever the circumstance, it is assured not to last. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus⁴⁹ expressed a similar conviction when he wrote that "all things change." According to him, we can never step in the same river twice because its waters will have flowed away. Even the Romans had an apposite saying. They claimed that *tempura mutantur, nos et mutantur in illis*, which translates to "the times change, and we change with them."

Change has long been recognized as integral to the human condition. Indeed, life exposes us to a kaleidoscopic series of unexpected events. Just when we think we know what will happen next, something surprising pops up. The same is true on a larger scale. Social changes are every bit as disorienting. Consequently, their hows, whys, and wherefores deserve to be investigated. This, however, is no mean task. Because human societies are immensely complicated, so are their transformations.

This is not all. The difficulties we confront in understanding social change derive not only from their complexity but from our lack of neutrality. All of us have a dog in the fight. Individually and collectively

we care about what is found. As a result, we seek control. We are not dispassionate. Instead we put our fingers on the scale. We interpret things as we want, then persuade others to join us. In so doing, however, we fail to realize that we may be misperceiving reality. We assume that we are being objective, when in reality we are distorting facts and logic to our advantage.

These factors make it difficult to ascertain the truth about social change. The temptation to promote modifications of which we approve is so great that we typically engage in manipulation without realizing it. Indeed, this desire for hegemony is so deeply ingrained as to defy elimination. Fortunately our egotism can be separated from our intellectual pursuits. Although it is impossible to be completely unbiased, we can strive for relative detachment. If we understand the sources and means of our partiality, we can guard against it. So how does social change take place? And why does it proceed in some directions rather than others? In addition, what are the consequences for us? Can we be certain that they will be beneficial?

The Political Dimension

Over the last several centuries, politics has taken center stage in our quest for change.⁵⁰ Where once people placed their faith in religion, nowadays we are more inclined to turn to the state. Governments have grown so powerful that it seems there is nothing they cannot achieve. Do we want to eliminate poverty? The federal government must therefore initiate a war against it. Do we hope to conquer cancer? Politicians have to loosen the purse strings to fund more research. Have we decided women deserve equal rights? Legal regulations must immediately be instituted to require equal pay for equal work.

So closely do we link the government with social improvements that we judge the effectiveness of legislatures and executives by how many statutes they enact. Accordingly, Calvin Coolidge,⁵¹ who, during the 1920s, presided over one of the greatest spurts of economic growth the United States has ever experienced, is lambasted as a “do-nothing” president. The humorist Will Rogers said of him, “He didn’t do much, but that’s what we wanted done.” In fact, Coolidge reduced taxes and drastically cut government spending. Meanwhile, Franklin Roosevelt,⁵² who presided over the longest economic depression in our nation’s history,⁵³ is lauded for his achievements. In his case, he raised tax rates and vastly increased federal expenditures. This did not restore prosperity, yet he is lionized for having “done something.”

Nowadays it is assumed that efforts to bring about change are uniformly positive—and, hence, the more dramatic, the better. So confident have we become that the march toward progress cannot be stopped that merely to promise it is to be hailed a statesman. Once advertisers boasted that their products were “new and improved.” Today it is presumed that new ones must be improved. The same applies to political programs. If a policy has not been tried, or sounds as if it has not, voters are apt to embrace it. The pledge is equated with the promised results because what is different is bound to be superior.

This attitude was on display during Barack Obama’s first electoral campaign.⁵⁴ In an effort to portray himself as possessing the solution to an economic calamity, he proclaimed that he was the candidate of “hope and change.” He would overhaul the way Washington worked to eliminate the possibility of a repeat crisis. Yet there was a fly in the ointment. The president-to-be insisted he wanted change for the better; nonetheless, he never spelled out the specifics. This was by design. Thus, at one point, when asked if he favored redistribution of the wealth, he answered in the affirmative. Then he quickly changed the subject lest listeners disapprove. In its place, Obama remained vague in the expectation that voters would read into his promises whatever they wished. As it happened, many did. Consequently, they were surprised by his subsequent policies.

So prevalent is the desire for politically mediated change that political parties identify themselves in terms of their attitude toward it. The Democratic Party likes to characterize itself as the party of change, whereas the Republicans are regarded as the party of tradition. This is why Democrats prefer to be labeled “liberals” or “progressives,” whereas Republicans are content to be pigeonholed as “conservatives.” So widespread are these identifications that they have supplanted the party platforms in the minds of most citizens.

Yet this is misleading. Although it appears to capture the essence of each party, it does so by ignoring complicating factors. How this is achieved can be understood by scrutinizing the conventional ways of classifying attitudes toward change. At one end of the spectrum, *radicals* presumably want quick and dramatic change, whereas *liberals* favor slow and steady change. *Conservatives*, on the other hand, are ostensibly dedicated to maintaining the status quo, whereas *reactionaries* hope to return us to a romanticized past. This categorization is so clear-cut that it seems accurate. Nonetheless, it has drawbacks. In its very simplicity, it distorts reality.

To begin with, because most Americans believe in progress yet are moderate in their habits, liberalism has gained traction. Voters understand that their nation is not perfect, ergo they approve of measured attempts to mend it. By the same token, describing a politician as “extreme” sends shivers up their spines. As a result, liberal politicians routinely castigate conservatives as radical despite the fact that this label contradicts the essence of conservatism. Such legerdemain is achieved by portraying Republicans as being opposed to tackling problems for which solutions are readily available. They, for example, are habitually described as the party of “No!” Portrayed as favoring inequality, they allegedly refuse to remedy racial discrimination.

In fact, this perception, although conventional, is highly partisan.⁵⁵ It capitalizes on the political opinions of most Americans in order to make one party appear dependable and the other out of touch. The beneficiary is, of course, the Democratic Party. Despite its occasional advocacy of drastic changes, its adherents have sought to make these changes appear unthreatening. The trick is to employ language that arouses positive connotations. Thus, if drastic transformations are dressed up in traditional language, they appear familiar. Deficit spending, for instance, if called “investment” seems like sound policy.

But first let us examine the supposed extremes of the standard political spectrum. There can be little doubt that both radicals and reactionaries intend to transform our political and social institutions. Both are delighted to sponsor “revolutions” wherein the existing order is replaced by something entirely different. To this end, they plot to subvert our current ways of life and governance. Yet what sorts of changes do they hope for? And how do their end points differ?

According to the customary understanding, radicals wish to move us forward into a nearly utopian world, whereas reactionaries intend to return us to an idealized past. These factions are distinguished by the direction of the change they prefer—not its speed of arrival, which both insist be immediate. But let’s look more closely at their objectives. We can begin with the anarchists. These activists, who style themselves radicals, aim to eliminate government. They believe that organized states are oppressive and unnecessary. In their eyes, if people are allowed to conduct business as they see fit, their inherent goodness will produce superior outcomes. This clearly differs from our current situation. But the question is this: Would this be an advance or a retreat? The anarchists insist that their program is inevitable, but also that once upon a time it was the natural condition of humankind.

Before government was invented, we purportedly lived in biologically ordained harmony. So which are they, radicals or reactionaries? Do anarchists intend to move us “forward” or “backward”?

Or consider the communists⁵⁶ and the socialists. They hope to rework government so that it serves the interests of ordinary people. In the case of the communists, they also argue that a centralized regime will wither away once it serves this purpose. For them, socialism is a gateway to a world where people become more loving and property ownership is unnecessary. This would presumably revive the primitive communism believed to have preceded the agricultural empires. Much like the anarchists, they place their faith in human decency. The primary difference is that they are convinced an egalitarian outlook can only come about via the tutelage of a government that owns the means of production. Once again, we must ask: Does this move us forward or backward? Is this prophesized equality a utopian future or an idealized past?

As for the socialists,⁵⁷ they believe government regulation is necessary, but they also insist that it will be exercised on behalf of ordinary people. To this end, they would cede all property rights to the government—or at least those concerned with production. This way everyone would be provided with a fair share of the proceeds. And no one would be jealous of anyone else because all would be equally well-off. As for the government, it would never be oppressive because as an instrument of the people, it would only do what was in the collective interest. Under these conditions, everyone would look out for the welfare of everyone else. Each would, in short, be the other’s keeper.

Yet ponder this: When Joseph Stalin⁵⁸ collectivized the Russian farms, he depicted this as a step toward socialism. Farmworkers would toil on land held in common, with each allotted the product of his/her efforts. Nevertheless, these farms, which were assembled by confiscating the land of private owners (the so-called Kulaks), closely resembled the estates of the boyars. The primary difference was that communist apparatchiks, rather than aristocrats, now ran them. Decisions were not made in common, nor did all receive identical benefits. Party officials determined who did what and received what. Was this then an advance of a retreat? Was it a brave new world or an echo of the old one?

Turning to regimes prototypically portrayed as reactionary, what sort of changes did the Fascists⁵⁹ and Nazis seek? As for the Italian Fascists, under Benito Mussolini they attempted to revive the glory that was Rome, which was surely a reactionary ambition. Nonetheless

Mussolini regarded his movement as socialist. Its symbol, the fasces, derived from Roman sources, but was viewed as signifying a bright new future. These bundles of rods tied around an ax embodied the virtues of collective action in that a single one might easily be broken, whereas when joined together they were unbreakable. This represented what socialism intended, namely a system wherein people worked together for their mutual benefit.

As for Nazism,⁶⁰ although it has become a byword for reactionary beliefs, the term derives from “national socialism,” which is how Adolf Hitler⁶¹ conceived of the party. Although a mortal enemy of the communists, he too favored a collective regime in which people worked together for their shared glory. The primary difference was that Hitler was an ardent nationalist. He eschewed internationalist aspirations, hoping instead to bring the benefits of social solidarity to the German people. As a result, he venerated fictitious Aryan achievements in a glorified past, claiming that they heralded the master race’s impending thousand-year Reich. How then should we categorize Nazism or Fascism? Did they look toward an upgraded future or a revived past? Did they want dramatic changes or did they intend to prevent them? Whatever else they were, these programs were revolutionary. Like the communists, Nazis and Fascists sought immediate and spectacular transformations.

It might be argued that these collectivists were enamored with the absolutist regimes of the past. Louis the XIV⁶² of France would surely have controlled every aspect of his country if he possessed the means to do so. Having declared that *l’etat c’est moi*, he regarded the nation as his personal property. His problem was that he did not have the administrative machinery to impose his will. As it was, he had difficulty controlling his aristocracy, which is why he commanded them to spend time under his roof at Versailles. Present-day absolutists are in a better position. The modern bureaucracy and computer have lengthened their reach. Does this mean collectivist regimes are a combination of historic ambitions and futuristic technology? If so, do they represent a fusion of the past and future?

It should be evident that the distinction between radicals and reactionaries is muddled. While the two share traits, and it is sometimes said the extremes meet in a collectivist haze, exactly which way is “forward” is difficult to ascertain. Meanwhile, something similar applies to the distinction between liberals and conservatives. The notion that one side supports change whereas the other opposes it does not accord with the facts. Here too there are overlaps and ambiguities.

Let us start with the North Slope of Alaska.⁶³ Liberals and conservatives have long disagreed about whether it should be open to oil exploration. The former are opposed on the grounds that this would destroy a pristine environment that once violated could never be recovered, whereas the latter insist that exploiting our natural resources will produce economic growth, while doing little damage to the tundra. That this dispute is about something more than the advocates' stated positions became evident when the supporters of oil production developed slant-drilling techniques so as to limit the footprint of their rigs. Environmentalists then shifted their argument to cover any sort of exploitation. In other words, they wanted to make sure an unspoiled landscape remained forever unchanged. Was this a conservative position? Literally speaking, it certainly was. Yet, this was not how its advocates perceived it. Somehow making no changes was described as progressive, whereas promoting them was the opposite.

Liberals recurrently favor environmental positions that oppose change. They, for instance, ardently resisted the Keystone pipeline designed to transport crude oil from Canada to Texas. According to them, this would increase global warming, while simultaneously subjecting the Ogallala aquifer to toxic pollution. They also objected to pesticides, such as DDT, in the belief these were destructive to animal species—especially birds.⁶⁴ They maintained that in thinning the eggshells of raptors, DDT threatened the birds with extinction. Some liberals also advocate a sharp reduction in human populations. They insist that the carrying capacity of the earth is limited, hence, the number of people must be dialed back from seven billion to one billion. If it is not, they allege that we will run out of food and other resources while also making the environment uninhabitable. Is this position conservative or reactionary?

On the other hand, erstwhile conservatives cheer developments such as gene splicing. They do not consider genetically engineered plants a threat to human health. Nor do they resist fracking for natural gas. They see this as a boon to American industry. In general, businesspersons, who are usually associated with conservatism, favor economic growth. They are fascinated with technological innovations that can be converted to profits. If anything, they were the keenest proponents of the research and development programs that hatched the transistor, the computer, and Post-it Notes. They are even fond of DDT in the belief that it kills malaria-carrying mosquitoes. The issue is therefore

this: Do these attitudes indicate a penchant for change or for the reverse? Are they a harbinger of progress or of retreat?

In fact, the beliefs of liberals and conservatives have mutated many times over. This is because political definitions metamorphose as social interests do. Thus, Thomas Jefferson,⁶⁵ the founder of the Democratic Party, was a fervent champion of the rural yeoman, whereas today's Democrats promote urbanization as a counterbalance to runaway suburbanization. On the other hand, Alexander Hamilton,⁶⁶ one of the forefathers of the Republican Party, supported industrialization. He fought to preserve the infant nation's credit rating in the belief this would finance economic expansion. By the same token, the Republicans, as exemplified by Abraham Lincoln,⁶⁷ organized their party around antislavery principles that Southern Democrats abhorred. Today it is Democrats who rally around the iconic figures of John Kennedy,⁶⁸ Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr.⁶⁹ so as to validate their antidiscrimination credentials. Similarly, it was once Republican Party stalwarts who favored isolationism and Democrats who were internationalists. Now the shoe is on the other foot.

Just how outlandishly political identifiers can shift is demonstrated by the histories of the terms "liberal" and "progressive."⁷⁰ The designation *liberal* first gained currency during the nineteenth century.⁷¹ Initially applied to political partisans who sought to free commercial interests from government regulations, liberals wished to encourage free enterprise, free trade, and technical innovation to offset the government monopolies and confiscatory taxation then prevalent in Europe. Eventually, their success created an aura of modernity that was borrowed by their opponents. Gradually liberalism came to stand for cradle-to-grave welfare programs sponsored by central governments. In the process, the personal liberties the original liberals favored came to be disparaged as generating inequality. In this way, what was called liberalism swung from wishing to constrain central governments toward enhancing them.

The term *progressive* too has undergone radical surgery. Although associated with the word "progress," what this term exemplifies has been reworked. While always skeptical of the intentions of business titans, progressive policies concerning government have modified their aim. In the beginning, progressives hoped to use government to rein in the robber barons. The unprecedented corporate reach of a Rockefeller⁷² or Carnegie⁷³ filled them with dread. Only the state seemed to have the clout to curb their predatory activities. On the other hand, these same

progressives wanted the government to promote eugenics. Congenital idiots were supposedly a danger to society's welfare and, therefore, needed to be sterilized. Then, after Hitler⁷⁴ took this philosophy to its logical conclusion and attempted to eliminate whole classes of people, they were horrified and agitated against genetic engineering. Now progressives were a bulwark against what they had formerly advocated.

The meaning of "modernity" is also confusing.⁷⁵ Although literally referring to what is contemporary, because fashions change, modernity's political connotations need to be adjusted periodically. Nowadays the word largely refers to industrialized societies. "Postmodernism,"⁷⁶ in contradistinction, is used to designate postindustrial societies where the number of persons involved in manufacturing has declined. Nonetheless, whether modernity or postmodernity are good or bad, that is, whether they represent positive or negative changes, is in dispute. The positive associations of the term "modern," however, remain intact.

All in all, while politics has become the primary focus of social change, different partisans comprehend the landscape differently. But whatever their diverse goals, they seek allies to enlist the state on their side. This makes it essential for them to be persuasive. It is thus a mistake to believe that political characterizations of change are clear-cut. Because what is convincing varies with the exigencies of the moment, language is adapted to meet evolving needs. This is called "spin" and it has become a ubiquitous feature of political discourse.⁷⁷ A truly scientific analysis must, thus, look elsewhere to understand how and why change occurs.

Progress and Teleology

As noted above, progress has become a modern icon. The notion that constructive change is desirable is very widely held. Nevertheless, what constitutes progress is not always clear. Some transformations are universally heralded. Few would quarrel with the notion that modern medicine has made enormous strides.⁷⁸ Whether we are discussing heart bypass surgery or inoculation against childhood diseases, it is widely recognized that these advancements have increased life expectancy. Nor would many contest the view that a longer life is a positive development. Because we humans value our own lives, we welcome techniques that keep us healthy. For similar reasons, nearly everyone appreciates advances in transportation⁷⁹ and communications.⁸⁰ An automobile traveling on a well-paved highway gets us where we want to go more quickly and gently than an ox-driven cart trundling along a muddy path.

Likewise, the telephone can keep us in touch with friends more conveniently, and at longer distances, than can face-to-face conversations.

Nevertheless, many putative advances are less universally applauded. Consider the cell phone. Its convenience can hardly be denied, but as an adjunct of nearly every teenage life, it arguably interferes with establishing deep personal relations. The same applies to Facebook. Posting the details of one's intimate experiences online so that an army of "friends" can keep up with them may make the young feel like media stars, but how does this enhance their interpersonal sympathies? Even Google has its downside.⁸¹ While hyperspace allows for instant fact-checking, it also encourages intellectual grazing. Instead of the deep reading fostered by books, it promotes shallow entertainments that are never consolidated in a person's long-term memory.

Other alleged improvements are equally controversial.⁸² Among these are atomic energy, high-rise public housing, suburban sprawl, industrialization, edible underwear, rap music, wife swapping, gay marriage, and clear-cut logging. Many more examples could be added depending on the preferences of the compiler. One of the clearest examples of how vociferously people of goodwill can disagree is on the topic of health care. Liberals and conservatives both tell us our current system is broken and each side assures us that it possesses the proper remedy. Both are convinced their solutions represent progress, while the other's do not. Hence, liberals argue that federally sponsored health-care programs, such as ObamaCare,⁸³ are more rational and compassionate than market-based policies. Conservatives disagree. They campaign for a decentralized system wherein health-care providers compete over price and quality.

Who is right? Both factions are convinced that they are.⁸⁴ Each deems its proposals forward-looking, which is to say progressive. Furthermore, both deride their opponent as mired in the past. The fact is that in pushing for their preferred versions each side relies on a hoary metaphor. Both talk about "moving forward," but *forward* is a spatial-temporal analogy. It is a way of conceptualizing change without understanding it. In a sense, we are all moving forward. After all, time stops for no one. But in another, none of us is moving forward in that we are all physically in the place where we are. The situation is comparable to maps that show the North Pole as up and the South as down. This is a convention. Maps could be drawn the other way around without misrepresenting the terrain. Indeed, they already differ with respect to which nations are placed at their center.

What constitutes progress depends on our value judgments.⁸⁵ Ergo, what is regarded as an improvement essentially hinges upon what we desire. Because we value different things, we come to different conclusions. Progress, no matter how dearly coveted, is not merely about change, but about “positive” change. Yet what is thought positive is determined by what we believe to be moral. And since people differ about morality, they differ about the nature of progress.

More confusing still, because people can be strongly attached to their moral commitments, they see the world through this lens.⁸⁶ As a result, they distort reality. In other words, instead of being objective, they interpret the consequences of change not as they are but as they want them to be. The upshot is that not only are social outcomes misperceived, so are the mechanisms through which they occur. In the end, what is thought to be an improvement can be so enthusiastically sought that people assume it must work. This, they imagine, is the way the world is. The irony, and it is no small irony, is that such idealism can undermine scientific rigor. Seeking to do good frequently undermines intellectual honesty.

There is a designation for this sort of thinking. It is called teleology.⁸⁷ Teleology assumes that history has a definite starting point and an inexorable conclusion. It is the belief that change is fated to occur in a knowable sequence. If so, progress consists of moving toward some preset goal. Perhaps the best-known illustration of this is provided by how some people think of evolution. They assume that the only way it could have unfolded was to move smoothly from single-cell creatures through fishes, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, and apes until it culminated with us (i.e., human beings).⁸⁸ Each step was necessary, with *Homo sapiens* sitting at the apex of a design always intended to come out as it did.

An earlier version of teleology was, of course, provided by religion.⁸⁹ According to Christian doctrine, history before Christ prepared the way for his arrival, while after he rose it was concerned with preparing for his second coming. This progression is supposed to be inevitable. As part of God’s plan, it cannot be undone—save at his bidding. To this may be added another, more political example of teleology. Americans long thought of their nation as possessing a “manifest destiny.”⁹⁰ As a shining city on a hill, it was fated to stride across the continent even before the first Englishman stepped ashore at Jamestown. As importantly, it was destined to become a superpower that spread the twin doctrines of democracy and liberty across the globe.

Except that fate has a way of introducing unexpected quirks. Yes, the United States spread to California and Hawaii, but it did not take over Latin America, as was also anticipated. Nor is it clear that the twenty-first century will be as much an American century as was the twentieth. China may have a say in how things turn out. We might similarly ask the Russians about these twists of fate. For a while, they were convinced that their destiny entailed establishing communist regimes everywhere on earth. Nikita Khrushchev famously promised that he would “bury” the West. Yet we know how that came out. Centuries earlier, the Spanish nurtured a comparable vision.⁹¹ They believed their mission was to bring a purified version of Catholicism to heretics and heathens on both sides of the Atlantic. Unfortunately for them, events did not develop as foreseen.

Of course, Christ’s Second Coming has not arrived either. It did not come during the years immediately following Jesus’ crucifixion nor at the end of the first or second millennia. And as for biological determinism, the more we understand evolution, the messier it appears. In fact, the human species almost came to an abrupt end about seventy thousand years ago, when the Toba caldera exploded in Sumatra. This caused a “nuclear winter,” during which many plant and animal lines were severely tested. As a result, we experienced a genetic bottleneck that might have produced a dinosaur-like extinction.⁹² We should not gloat about this escape because we could still disappear in an unexpected catastrophe. Either global warming or atomic weapons might do us in.

Predictions have a nasty way of not coming to fruition. We like to imagine that we are at the center of the universe and therefore at the apex of creation, but this attitude is jingoistic. The future is promised to none of us, despite our fervent desire to prove the most enduring species ever. The world is so complicated, and our personal capacities so limited, that we understand only a fraction of what might—or will—occur. This ought not keep us from dreaming, but it should warn of the dangers of hubris.

We must remember that leading American scientists predicted that heavier-than-air flying machines were physically impossible in the very same year that the Wright brothers took off at Kitty Hawk.⁹³ Correspondingly, during the 1939 New York World’s Fair it was confidently forecast that everyone would soon own a personal flying machine. These would shortly be maneuvering between skyscrapers at breakneck speed. Then, in the 1950s, we were told atomic bombs would enable us

to dig canals more quickly than in Panama. Undeterred by a failure to realize this ambition, in the 1960s, it was assumed that we would not only send men to the moon but would also build colonies there ere long. Somehow these timetables were a bit off. Then again, who predicted the advent of antibiotics, computer chips, or touch-screen iPhones? Not only is teleology an undependable guide, it is a dangerous source of confidence. Predictions generally flow from extrapolating the past, yet if important variables are not known or events take unplanned turns, our calculations can miscarry. This is not the exception, but the norm.

Finally, the distinction between forward and backward, even if we could agree on which is which, would not settle how we should conduct our affairs. We might well come to the conclusion that we wish to move “backwards.” What is new is not always an improvement. Is, for instance, hip-hop better than Bach, Mozart, or Beethoven? Is the latest action flick superior to *Gone with the Wind* or *Gandhi*? Is Pop Art an advance over Rembrandt? What we find most valuable might lie behind us. It is up to us to decide. Will we choose to honor what the framers of the US Constitution intended⁹⁴ or to make extensive modifications? Simply labeling one progress and the other reactionary does not determine which is best.

As to the values of liberals and conservatives, there is a significant difference between them. The master value of the former is “equality,”⁹⁵ whereas that of the latter is “freedom.”⁹⁶ Time and again when we examine liberals’ and conservatives’ recommendations, these values are what motivate their choices. Thus, liberals insist that unless a complete equality of results is obtained, social justice has been thwarted; whereas conservatives argue that unless people are allowed to choose their lifestyles, they are being oppressed. Is one prescription forward-looking and the other backward? Is either destined to come to fruition? Both sides are sure history is on their side. The rest of us must await events.

The Sociological Dimension

Politics may be the cockpit of intentional social change, while the physical sciences may be the chief acolyte of politicians in developing technological fixes; nevertheless, the social sciences are eager to join the party. Economists, political scientists, and psychologists are not shy in promoting their credentials. In fact, sociology has placed social change at the center of its agenda. A large proportion of sociologists perceive their mission as developing pathways toward “social justice.” As avowed idealists, they hope to engage in social engineering that is

informed by their hard-won insights. In the conviction that they possess a superior appreciation of what threatens our collective welfare, as well as a keener understanding of how to circumvent these dangers, they perceive it as their duty to midwife progress.

Even so, sociologists are human. As such, the same sorts of limitations that plague other humans also plague them.⁹⁷ Thus, they too are moral creatures who possess a teleological orientation. This means that their decisions incorporate value commitments that cloud their judgments and shape their objectives. They too are thus prone to conceiving of their goals as inevitable. Similarly handicapped by a restricted awareness of complex facts, they cannot claim to be omniscient or infallible. Unhappily, many social scientists allow their hubris to run wild. Although their intentions are honorable, their conclusions are often flawed.

Not long ago, when sociologists met at a professional conference, they would ask each other, "What are you?" The expected answer was either a "conflict theorist" or a "structural-functionalist" (or sometimes a "symbolic interactionist"). Up until the 1950s the functionalists were dominant, but since then the conflict people have risen to such prominence as to render functionalism nearly extinct. In any event, both persuasions place social change at the heart of their inquiries.⁹⁸ Although conflict partisans are fond of disparaging functionalists as resisting change, the reality is that the latter subscribe to an evolutionary perspective, whereas the former yearn for revolutionary transformations.

Regrettably, both sides tend to be teleological. Each assumes that its version of the future is preordained. In general, the conflict people are more wedded to this than the functionalists, but both have strong moral predilections. For the conflict faction, social justice is paramount. Its partisans are opposed to oppression and intend to eliminate it. They are also committed to interpersonal equality and perceive dramatic social adjustments as necessary to effect it. As they see it, history is on their side, ergo those who contradict them are doomed. Ultimately, neither social class, race, gender, nor sexual orientation will be allowed to keep people from working amicably for the common good.

The functionalists are more divided. Some, such as the social Darwinists,⁹⁹ believe that the strong must be allowed to prevail and the weak to fail. They are convinced that our species—and institutions—can only become stronger when evolutionary forces operate unfettered. Only then can defective genes and unreliable social practices be weeded out. Another wing of functionalism is less judgmental and holds that

industrialization is an irresistible force that will not only bring people greater comfort but will make them more egalitarian. This faction tends to be pro-capitalism and wary of government intervention. Still another bloc, while insisting that evolution is never completely knowable, argues it will continue into the indefinite future. Many of the latter also contend that evolution is a good unto itself.

These two parties (i.e., the conflict and functionalist cliques) have little sympathy for each other. Neither is impressed with their rival's arguments nor is willing to concede their good intentions. They have reached an impasse in which both hold their own tenets inviolable. Consequently, social research is often of the advocacy variety. Investigators seek to prove, with what appears to be scientific rigor, that which they already believe. Neither side seems to be aware that it is promoting a moral position rather than studying empirical verities.

The question is can these differences be reconciled? Can the conflict and functional partisans see through their loyalties to find common ground? Most partisans doubt this. Nonetheless, a resolution may be possible if the two sides lower the moral temperature. Science, when it becomes moralized, ignores essential variables. Although there is no reason social scientists should abandon their private principles, these must sometimes be set aside so as to perceive unpleasant facts. Moral standards need to be modified to accord with reality, rather than reality forced into a Procrustean bed.

A Multidimensional Synthesis

Facts, as John Adams¹⁰⁰ counseled, are stubborn things, but they are also complex and camouflaged things. They may therefore be difficult to untangle—or even grasp. Although we are surrounded by change, and mired in moralistic controversies, we—like the proverbial fish—may not discern the waters in which we swim. Accordingly, it behooves us to examine the parts of this immense puzzle individually and in relationship to each other. If we are to decipher this mystery, we must be prepared for surprises. While we all (including this author) have preferences and blind spots, we need to identify and neutralize them if we can.

The following inquiry starts by examining what significant thinkers have believed about the nature of social change. Thumbnail sketches of classical theorists from a variety of disciplines make it plain that most have dealt with circumscribed aspects of a larger process. Much of what has been said is illuminating, yet it is generally incomplete.

The tendency is to hone in on a single issue and elevate it into an all-embracing explanation. Once this is recognized, we can investigate more comprehensive alternatives.

But before we do, we will focus on theorists explicitly associated with revolutionary and evolutionary perspectives. Because they represent the principal alternatives currently vying to explain social change, they deserve independent consideration. What do these scholars believe? Marx¹⁰¹ and the neo-Marxists on the one hand, and Spencer,¹⁰² Durkheim,¹⁰³ and Parsons¹⁰⁴ on the other, as well as more modest figures in both camps, have a great deal to offer. Chirot's¹⁰⁵ ideas, in particular, will receive detailed attention because they provide a foundation for our later speculations.

As will become apparent, I come down hard on the side of evolution. Traditional revolutionary theories, with their emphasis on complete equality, have never been implemented. Nor, it will be argued, can they be. On the other hand, attempts to transfer Darwinian-style evolution¹⁰⁶ directly onto social change are also inadequate. Among other things, they do not explain why people resist change, from whence the variation upon which social evolution operates is derived, how individuals and societies select the most functional options and how major changes are consolidated.

Social change is riven by paradoxes. People pretend that it is simple, yet it is complexly multidimensional. Commentators make believe they can control its direction, yet they rarely do. Ironically, while insisting that what they desire is inevitable, they frequently sabotage their own efforts. They similarly claim to be rational; nevertheless they allow moralistic and emotional impulses to run rampant. Why is this so? Part of the answer lies in what may be called the "social generalist's dilemma." As social animals, we must work together in order to survive. This requires social stability. Yet as generalists, we must be flexible enough to change as circumstances warrant. These needs, however, clash. Consequently, we require mechanisms that mediate between them. This generates many of the paradoxes that have hitherto stymied attempts to understand social change.

Once this is acknowledged, it becomes possible to construct a theory of integrated social evolution, which brings together contributions from many sources, including the revolutionary contention that conflict matters and the functionalist claim that societies compete to survive. Adding to, and reinterpreting, aspects of Chirot's evolutionary framework makes it possible to explicate how institutionalized societies are

disrupted by tensions, stressors, and crises. These then impel people to explore potential solutions by engaging in an adaptive radiation that generates innovations, which are eventually sorted through via semi-functional selection processes. In the end, adequate choices are consolidated in a society that is once again stabilized.

Much of the rest of the book fleshes out these stages. It begins by noting that institutionalized societies are in dynamic equilibrium. They are also multidimensional in that they incorporate cultural, structural, and institutional elements. Each of these is therefore investigated in detail, as is the manner in which they interact. To this is added the need for a historical particularism of the sort advocated by Franz Boas.¹⁰⁷ Absent this, theorizing can become alarmingly abstract.

By first taking the time to understand the manifold elements of which societies are composed, we can achieve a detailed analysis of the impulses toward social change. These may be internal or external and arise from cultural, structural, and/or institutional sources. Furthermore, because we humans are social generalists, they also provoke resistance to change. Which tendency will win out is not preordained and depends on unpredictable factors.

What Chirot describes as adaptive radiation is likewise examined in its particulars. From whence do social innovations arise? Do specific individuals introduce them or are they the product of social interactions? Likewise, do they develop within particular societies or are they imported from elsewhere? The difficulties in engaging in social engineering demand special attention. Given the aspirations of social scientists, the pitfalls inherent in their supposedly scientific methods are elaborated upon, with feminism used to illustrate that engineers often do not always understand the source of a problem, which approaches might rectify it, or how these solutions can be implemented.

At this point in our discussion, we will pivot to the resistance to social change. Those who have sought to transform societies invariably run up against opposition. The tendency is to chalk this up to the moral failings of those who refuse to cooperate. In fact, change is often stymied by attempts to achieve the impossible. Efforts to create total equality or universal love fall into this category. Sometimes, however, transformative equivocation, that is, a propensity to swerve from one objective to an incompatible alternative, prevents us from reaching a durable conclusion.

In any event, how we select the directions in which to proceed explains many of the paradoxes we encounter. For the most part, we do not consciously choose between identifiable options. The number

of variables involved is too great and the interests that must be accommodated too discordant. Because we rarely know what is most functional, we use conflicts over power and morality to sift through the alternatives. This enables us to reconcile diverse needs, but also places us at the mercy of power-hungry individuals and/or ethical rigidities. Instead of logically calculating the facts, a tripartite analysis of morality reveals that normative prescriptions are subject to social construction, which is grounded in biology, and sensitive to our personal and social experiences. As a consequence, polarized moral debates integrate divergent social interests much in the way that Adam Smith's¹⁰⁸ invisible hand presumably integrates economic ones.

Illuminating this inquiry further is an investigation into patterns of social change. These provide clues regarding the causal mechanisms underlying social evolution. Linear, cyclical, curvilinear, and dialectical patterns are discussed. So are questions about whether cultural changes provoke and/or inhibit structural changes and vice versa. This points the way to understanding the C-Blocks¹⁰⁹ and S-Blocks that frequently stand in the way of change.

Usually unnoticed is the inverse force rule. This suggests that small societies are stabilized by strong social forces, whereas large ones are stabilized by weak social forces. If true, this implies that our society may be headed toward greater decentralization. Implicated here is the appropriate rate of change. As the crux of the debate between liberals and conservatives, as well as between conflict theorists and functionalists, it must be carefully examined.

Finally, personal and collective dislocations, when dramatic, typically set off chain reactions whereby multiple small changes are combined into large ones. Because cultural, structural, and institutional modifications have repercussions, how these are reconciled is crucial to determining what ultimately occurs. Contrary to some reformers, partisan victories and social engineering are less influential than multiple, often unrecognized, interpersonal adjustments. The American Revolution,¹¹⁰ contemporary changes in gender roles,¹¹¹ and the growth of professionalization¹¹² demonstrate what takes place.

Our civilization has undergone a middle-class revolution.¹¹³ This transformation converted us into the most potent techno-commercial society in history. But it has also introduced greater bureaucratization and professionalization. In the process, it changed the way we work, how we constitute our families, the manner in which we socialize our children, the nature of our political conflicts, and the way social classes

are organized. All of these modifications entailed major disruptions that triggered efforts at consolidation.

My conclusion is that classical revolutions never achieve their stated aims. The dramatic changes they demand are too complex to be realized. An evolutionary alternative, however, must account for resistance to change, the inverse force rule, and the moral aspects of judging prospective improvements. It must therefore incorporate the numerous ways that conflict impacts evolution. If it is to reflect reality, it also needs to integrate what we know about biology, interpersonal attachment, social exchange, morality, and resocialization.¹¹⁴ Although stand-alone functionalism and conflict theory have much to offer, they have to be folded into a comprehensive whole. Nor must the disputes between liberals and conservatives dictate evolutionary theories. Their moralistic origins have to be recognized and contained. Progress, although widely sought, is not predestined. If we are to understand how we get into quagmires, we must appreciate the mechanisms of social change and why they get sidetracked.

At the moment, we are in the midst of an ideological crisis. The structural changes due to industrialization and the middle class ascendancy have been so vast as to be disorienting. The standard ideological compass has thus frozen in place. Although the ideals that guide most reformers derive from bygone eras, a satisfactory alternative has yet to evolve. This makes it all the more important to understand the uncertainties besetting us. It also suggests that a more integrated approach to appreciating social change is appropriate. More scientific and less moralistic, this third way of investigating reality can bring us closer to comprehending a complex reality.

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Classical Theories of Social Change

The Reform Impulse

We humans almost always want better than we have. From early childhood on, most of us entertain dreams of love and glory—or at least of greater comfort. As long as we suspect that there is an opportunity to improve our situations, we quest after a means of doing so. Too often, however, an implacable universe dashes our hopes. Nevertheless these fantasies are easily reanimated by the slightest whiff of optimism. Even pessimists, although they keep their aspirations under wraps, secretly hunger for the sweet taste of success.

The same is true on a social level. The notion that society is flawed and can be improved is widespread. Both individually and collectively, large numbers of us would love to reform the world. We would relish initiating social changes that produced happiness for us and those for whom we care. It was not without reason that Benjamin Franklin¹ revised the American Declaration of Independence to cite “the pursuit of happiness” as a natural right. He and his peers not only sought to sever ties with Britain, but to construct a new social order.

This reform impulse has a long and hallowed history. While it probably goes back to prehistory, we discover robust efforts to restructure communities shortly after the appearance of writing. As we have seen in Egypt,² Akhenaten sought to reform the state religion to make it subservient to the sun god. Shortly thereafter, the writers of the Bible³ implored their fellow Hebrews to purify their monotheism to make them powerful enough to defeat the Philistines.⁴ Similarly, under the great agrarian empires, religion was often utilized to mend social conditions. This was the case in India,⁵ where the Buddha preached a more peaceful society if individuals would only renounce their personal desires; it was the case in China,⁶ where Confucius taught

the importance of filial piety; and it was the case in Arabia, where Mohammad⁷ commanded his followers to prostrate themselves before a single all-powerful deity.

Politics was another path through which reforms were early on sought. Rulers and ruled alike attempted to modify governments to serve shared goals. So it was that Hammurabi⁸ introduced a legal code that gave teeth to his community's moral structures; so it was that Solon introduced laws to facilitate Athens's transition from a monarchy to a democracy;⁹ and so it was that Octavian, soon to be known as Augustus Caesar,¹⁰ reorganized Rome's Republican traditions to create an empire where factional fighting could be controlled.

Eventually great thinkers put their minds to developing superior forms of social order. Philosophers, such as Plato¹¹ and Aristotle,¹² tackled its intricacies. Plato, in particular, advocated city-states administered by "philosopher kings."¹³ These leaders, because they were more intelligent, better educated, and morally superior, would make sovereign decisions from which lesser citizens would benefit. Instead of passion or selfishness dictating events, deep thought and altruistic deeds were to take precedence.

Later on, during the Italian Renaissance,¹⁴ a less elevated prescription for social betterment made its appearance. Nicolò Machiavelli¹⁵ is regarded as an amoral schemer, but he aimed at a noble objective. While he recommended that a prince do whatever was necessary to survive, he hoped this power would help unify Italy, which had been divided for a millennium. Meanwhile, Sir Thomas More¹⁶ wrote a work that was to serve as a model for peaceful unity. This English chancellor, and martyr to the Catholic faith,¹⁷ in a slim tome called *Utopia*, described a nation where people took up political office not for the sake of power but as a social duty, and where money was so despised that gold and silver were used to fashion tableware. For More, what mattered is that people unselfishly help one another. This was not so in his native land where the Protestant reformation was soon to split the populace along partisan lines.

Early "Scientific" Theorists

It was not until the mid-seventeenth century that science was consciously applied to improving forms of social organization. Thus Thomas Hobbes,¹⁸ an ardent admirer of Galileo Galilei,¹⁹ sought to codify what was necessary for social viability. Writing at the time of the English Civil War,²⁰ he dedicated himself to returning the dislodged

monarchy to power. So far as Hobbes could see, this was the only way out of a century of religious disorder, wherein Catholics and Protestants were regularly at each other's throats. All needed to unite behind his patron, the future king Charles II.²¹

Hobbes began by imagining what the world must have been like before the advent of civilization. He concluded that it was a place where everyone competed, as individuals, against everyone else. Given that resources were scarce, the competition must have been brutal. What ensued would have been a war of all against all that ensured life would be "nasty, brutish and short." Ultimately, some people realized there had to be a better way. They then joined together in an assembly to hammer out a social compact. This agreement committed them—and their progeny—to assist the strongest among them, the so-called Leviathan, to keep the peace. In Hobbes's opinion, without the intervention of what amounted to a sovereign, chaos was inevitable.

The Hobbsian vision of reform thus entailed the conscious creation of a stable hierarchy. Where previously everyone had been equal, reform demanded the creation of a ranking system. The Leviathan would be superior to others, as would the proto-aristocrats who assisted him in maintaining order. Still, there never was a literal state of nature or a historical convocation that promulgated an inviolable contract. These were intellectual fictions. Their invention was a means of justifying a powerful governing body. Nonetheless Hobbes initiated a tradition wherein scholars sought to use knowledge to promote social progress.

About a half century after Hobbes, another Englishman, John Locke,²² attempted to improve upon his predecessor's ideas. He, however, was not allied with the monarchy, but aristocrats determined to overthrow what they regarded as a despot. As the secretary of one of the organizers of the Glorious Revolution, Locke sought to justify removing James II from the throne. James, as a Catholic in a largely Protestant country, was hated. His sin was that he plotted to reintroduce the old religion. He, therefore, had to go. It was merely a matter of finding an appropriate justification.

Locke supplied this by arguing that Hobbes's version of the social compact was flawed. Hobbes believed this contract was ironclad; that once adopted, it remained in effect forever. While Locke concurred that there had once existed a violent state of nature that needed to be tamed, he did not agree that the contract was unbreakable. Indeed, it specified that the monarch should retain power only so long as he

upheld the natural law. Were he to violate the inherent liberties of his subjects, he forfeited this mandate. Under these conditions, the people had a duty to rebel and replace him. A century later the same rationale was invoked to justify the American colonists' efforts to sever their ties to the British sovereign. In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson revived Locke's argument by cataloguing the ways George III had violated his obligations to his American subjects, thereby relieving them of their allegiance to him.²³

Locke, in essence, modified Hobbes's idea about what constitutes an appropriate hierarchy. Although he too believed that some persons are superior to others, their advantage was not absolute. Existing arrangements could be overridden. Natural laws, presumably identified by empirical means, were integral to the universe and thus inviolable. Power could, as a consequence, be limited by constitutional means. A people's right to "life, liberty, and property" took primacy over a monarch's pretensions.

A half century later another compact theorist introduced additional modifications. Jean-Jacques Rousseau²⁴ was Swiss by birth but did his most important work in France.²⁵ Extremely ambitious, he chafed under the restrictions of the *ancien régime*. Having come to prominence by winning an essay competition in which he argued that modern technical advances had not improved living conditions, he was exasperated by the pretensions of the aristocrats with whom he rubbed shoulders. Convinced that he was personally superior, he resented their dominance. So it was that he developed into the conscience of the French Revolution.²⁶

Rousseau too began by hypothesizing a state of nature.²⁷ Yet his was different from that of his English precursors. Where they regarded humans as inherently selfish, Rousseau considered them peaceful and loving. As he saw it, people originally lived in harmony with nature and each other. They were "noble savages" who shared the fruits of the earth without any thought of supremacy. Then a snake slithered into this paradise. Some nameless person decided to put a fence around a parcel of land and declare that it belonged to him. Others made the mistake of respecting this claim and, as a result, the notion of property was born. Almost at once people vied to see who could confiscate the most territory, with the upshot being that some became rich, while the rest were thrust into poverty. Next, because the poor envied the rich, the rich resorted to physical power to safeguard their holdings. They hired armies and constables to keep their rivals at bay. In the end,