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## Hobhouse, L. T. (1864–1929)

*Stephen K. Sanderson*

Leonard Trelawney Hobhouse was born in 1864 in Cornwall, England. His father was rector of the local parish church, and his grandfather had been a distinguished barrister and public servant (Owen 1974). Educated at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, he became a tutor there in 1887. In 1907 he became the first person to hold the Martin White Chair of Sociology at the University of London. In addition to his academic career, Hobhouse spent time as a journalist, working for the *Manchester Guardian* between 1897 and 1902. Later he spent time as a journalist in London (Owen 1974).

Hobhouse is generally regarded as the first British sociologist. He wrote numerous books, the most important of which dealt with long-term social evolution and its meaning for the present and the future. The most important of these books were *Mind in Evolution* (1901), *Morals in Evolution* (1951 [1906]), *The Material Culture and Social Institutions of the Simpler Peoples* (1965 [1915]), and *Development and Purpose* (1927 [1913]).

In *Morals in Evolution*, Hobhouse sketched out the evolution of systems of morality or ethics

as part of a larger process of mental evolution. In this regard, he identified a process of mental evolution that began with the rudimentary and impulse-driven thought of early preliterate societies. The first real advance in mental evolution was the protoscience of ancient China, Babylonia, and Egypt. This was followed by a new stage of reflection between the eighth and fifth centuries BCE that was characterized by the rise of the earliest world religions of Judaism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Then came the first truly critical and systematic secular philosophy of the Greeks, and then finally the rise of modern empirical modes of thinking in Europe beginning in the sixteenth century (Ginsberg 1951).

Hobhouse identified four stages in the evolution of morality. At the lowest stage, people feel obligations toward one another, but these are limited to human relations in very small groups, either the local community or the kin group. Life is regarded as important, but it is only protected through such mechanisms as blood feud, and there is no moral principle that life itself is something sacred. Right moral action means avenging a wrong done to a member of one's own group. A second stage of morality is reached when people conceptualize a duty not merely to avenge a wrong but to protect life and to guard property instead of just retaliating against thieves. Moral obligations have become broader, but they still apply only to the members of one's own group, and there are no general ethical principles. This second stage of morality roughly corresponds to the second stage of mental evolution, and thus makes its appearance for the first time in the earliest civilizations.

In the third stage of morality people formulate moral principles and ideals of character and conduct of a religious nature. Here we find morality and ethics as integral parts of the great world religions; this third moral stage corresponds roughly to the third mental stage. The fourth and highest moral stage is reached when an attempt is made to construct a rational ethical theory that prescribes rights and duties that apply universally. It was the ancient Greeks who first began to grope toward this sort of ethical universalism, which has been extended by philosophers and theologians in more modern times.

In *The Material Culture and Social Institutions of the Simpler Peoples*, written in collaboration with G. C. Wheeler and Morris Ginsberg, the authors classified societies according to their technological inventory. They produced a scheme of seven major “stages of economic culture”: (1) Lower Hunters; (2) Higher Hunters; (3) Incipient Agriculturalists; (4) Middle Agriculturalists; (5) Highest Agriculturalists; (6) Lower Pastoralists; and (7) Higher Pastoralists. There is a rough evolutionary sequence here, except that agriculture and pastoralism stand to each other as subsistence alternatives rather than in an evolutionary relationship.

The authors related these economic stages to other dimensions of social life, especially morality, religion, law, and overall social organization by assembling data on over 400 ethnographically known societies. They found that the higher the economic stage, the more developed and formalized the system of government. In terms of the administration of justice, there was a pronounced trend from private redress of wrongs to public redress by chiefs or tribal councils. The authors also looked at the relationship between their economic stages and various dimensions of marriage and family life. Here the correlations were not always as dramatic or striking. But in the final analyses, which involved variables bearing on social stratification and property ownership, the results were again dramatic. There was a very marked trend from communal to private forms of property ownership and toward greater social and economic inequalities.

Given the emphasis on economic stages as the starting point for the whole book, and the correlations between these stages and other dimensions of social life, one might get the impression that Hobhouse, Wheeler, and Ginsberg were materialists. But this is not the case. Hobhouse was in fact a strong theoretical idealist. This is clear from his *Morals in Evolution*, but even more so from his capstone work, *Development and Purpose*, in which he presents an overall philosophy of evolution. Hobhouse was highly critical of Spencer and the social Darwinists, and claimed that it was the human mind, not the struggle for existence, that was the engine of social evolution. He contended that it was the “slowly wrought out dominance of mind [that] is the

central fact of evolution” (Hobhouse 1951: 637). Even the stages of economic culture themselves are explained ideationally, as the results of the mind accumulating “stocks of knowledge” over the millennia.

Like many early evolutionists, Hobhouse was committed to a doctrine of social progress, even though he recognized that progress is not automatic and social evolution is by no means strictly unilinear. Human progress is erratic, with periods of retrogression interspersed with periods of progression. But on the whole, humankind has been improving itself, gradually moving toward a society based on harmony and a kind of ethical universalism in which all of humanity will eventually form a single social unit.

Hobhouse was a liberal humanitarian and social reformer who was a strong proponent of social harmony and internationalism. He spoke out against imperialism in all of its forms. His interest in practical affairs is clearly indicated by his journalistic activity and his work for many years on various trade boards, where he concerned himself with labor conditions. Several prominent British government officials came under Hobhouse’s influence, either directly or indirectly. These included Harold Laski, Clement Atlee, Hugh Dalton, and Hugh Gaitskell (Owen 1974).

SEE ALSO: Civilizations; Evolution; Peace and Reconciliation Processes; Primitive Religion; Property, Private; Spencer, Herbert

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## Holocaust

*Fred Emil Katz*

The stark facts of the Holocaust can be summarized. When Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist Party came to power in Germany in 1933, they initiated measures against Germany's Jews. Before their rise to power the Nazis, under Hitler, had openly and vehemently blamed Jews for all of Germany's ills in the years following the country's loss of World War I (1914–18). After they gained power, the Nazi anti-Jewish measures included use of the existing legal machinery of the German state to devise and implement increasingly restrictive measures against Germany's Jewish population. These measures incrementally but inexorably deprived Jews of more and more rights of citizenship and capacity of living their daily lives. The legal measures were augmented by sporadic brutal attacks by organized thugs who molested and terrorized individuals and communities of Jews. The most extreme of these occurred on the night of November 9, 1938, the *Kristallnacht*, where a nationwide attack on Jews took place. Yet all of these eventually turned out to be preliminaries to an active and focused program to actually exterminate all Jews who came within Germany's reach during World War II – the war of 1939 to 1945. During the early years of that war Germany had overrun and conquered most of continental Europe, a land mass that included millions of Jews who had been living in the various countries now under German control. The actual extermination of Jews relied, at first,

on the direct execution of individuals by individual German soldiers and paramilitary functionaries of the state – most notably the SS. Although this took place on a huge scale, the extermination plan was so grandiose that more elaborate systems of mass murder were devised, most notably a system of concentration camps that served as extermination factories, using lethal gas and the burning of bodies on a mass scale never before seen. The Auschwitz concentration camp, located in Poland, was the most notorious but not the only camp of this kind. Murdered at Auschwitz were some 2 million innocent persons, most of them Jews, but also others whom the Nazi ideologues regarded as unworthy of living in their utopian vision of the superstate dominated by pure Nordics. It is estimated that the Nazis managed to murder some 6 million Jews before their rampage was stopped by the victory of the Allies that ended the war. This genocide, this deliberate and systematic murder of 6 million human beings, is doubtless the largest effort of its kind in all of human history.

Following a period of stunned silence, there has been a flood of responses. Within the academic community these have come from historians (e.g., Hilberg 1967; Bauer 1978), political scientists (e.g., Shirer 1960; Goldhagen 1996), and psychologists (e.g., Adorno et al. 1950; Milgram 1974) and social philosophers (e.g., Arendt 1964, 1968).

Apart from one conspicuous exception (Fein 1979), sociologists have been exceedingly silent in response to the Holocaust. In 1979, a Jewish sociologist said that “there is in essence no sociological literature on the Holocaust” (Dank), and in 1989 another sociologist said that the Holocaust work of sociologists “looks more like a collective exercise in forgetting and eye-closing” (Bauman). Bauman's assessment still seems to hold today.

Despite this silence, it seems that sociology can contribute insights about the Holocaust that no other discipline can. And that, in turn, the Holocaust can help us sharpen some of the most venerable sociological insights derived from Max Weber and Émile Durkheim (Katz 1993, 2003, 2004). The first begins from what is perhaps sociology's underlying premise: the need to explain ordinary people's ordinary social lives.