

The centre of Herbert Spencer's interest lies, nevertheless, in biology and sociology, and he brings in that solitary speculation taken from the inorganic world as an example of historical development on the cosmical scale. This bringing together of the largest cosmical phenomena with those in the restricted region of living things is peculiar to Spencer before Darwin's hypothesis brought greater precision into this latter region. The eye for far-reaching analogies, and the habit of regarding individual phenomena in their surroundings in space and their succession in time, form the two characteristic conceptions of Spencer's early speculations. On these he builds up his special scheme of evolution, the main points of which he developed in a series of separate essays to which he refers in his first systematic work. His philosophical development is thus quite different from that of Comte or from that of Mill, with whom he has not infrequently been classed owing to the leading interest in social questions common to both.

Comte's scientific knowledge was really limited to mechanics and astronomy, and he saw clearly, what only those familiar with mathematical reasoning sufficiently appreciate—viz., that the phenomena and processes of life and consciousness require an entirely different treatment from that which is applicable and sufficient when dealing with the purely mechanical processes of the cosmos and the lifeless world. The transition of scientific thought from lifeless things to living and conscious beings was never clearly defined in Spencer's philosophy, and forms one of the unsolved difficulties in any scheme of general evolution.