

2019

# Charles Horton Cooley and the Social Gospel influence

Taylor Emerson Styes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.emich.edu/theses>



Part of the [Sociology Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Styes, Taylor Emerson, "Charles Horton Cooley and the Social Gospel influence" (2019). *Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations*. 975.

<https://commons.emich.edu/theses/975>

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses, and Doctoral Dissertations, and Graduate Capstone Projects at DigitalCommons@EMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@EMU. For more information, please contact [lib-ir@emich.edu](mailto:lib-ir@emich.edu).

Charles Horton Cooley and the Social Gospel Influence

by

Taylor Emerson Styes

Thesis

Submitted to the Department of History and Philosophy

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

History

Thesis Committee:

Richard Nation, Ph.D. Chair  
John Wegner, Ph.D.  
Ashley Johnson-Bavery, Ph.D.

July 8, 2019

Ypsilanti, Michigan

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Professor Richard Nation for his unwavering support and enthusiasm through every detailed aspect of this project. Without his strict guidance and assistance, the level of research quality and depth within this thesis would not be possible. I would also especially like to thank Professor John Wegner for being my greatest mentor, friend, and counselor during my six years as an undergraduate and graduate student at Eastern Michigan University. Without his support, I would never have believed in the strength of my academic work. I also thank Professor Ashley Johnson Bavery, who was very helpful with my thesis at a difficult period of time. I also owe gratitude to all professors in the Eastern Michigan University history department who took a personal interest in my education, and they are too numerous to name. Finally, a special debt of gratitude is owed to my wife, Cassie Thayer-Styes, for pushing me to complete this thesis through difficult moments of self-doubt and helping me with the hardest editing decisions.

## Abstract

Charles Horton Cooley was one of the fundamental American intellectuals of the early twentieth century, primarily due to his social theories that involved the connection between individuals and society. This thesis demonstrates this connection with the influence of the Social Gospel movement as a basis for Cooley's evolving social organization theories that remained important for the next generation of sociologists. The last stage of this thesis examines the transition away from the Social Gospel influence through Cooley's organic social process, while Cooley retained parallels with the Social Gospel.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Introduction .....	1
Chapter One: Charles Horton Cooley and the Communications Revolution.....	13
Chapter Two: Charles Horton Cooley and the Social Gospel Influence.....	26
Chapter Three: Charles Horton Cooley’s Separation from the Social Gospel and the Organic Social Process .....	44
Conclusion .....	59
Bibliography .....	67

## Introduction

Charles Horton Cooley was born on August 17, 1864, to Thomas and Mary Cooley in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where Thomas was a member of the Michigan Supreme Court and belonged to the University of Michigan Law School faculty. Charles was in competition with his four siblings and father while fighting many illnesses as a child and would eventually develop a committed sense of individualism through a devoted reading of Emerson. In this process, Cooley would begin to foreshadow his future theory of the social self by observing that individuality and imitation within society were both required for adaptability. Further tendencies to this uncompromising sort of self-examination revealed a dormant idealism, one that reconciled the turbulence of Cooley's internal life as a child.<sup>1</sup> Within every stage of Cooley's career, this form of idealism would appear in his theories about the organic nature of society, whether studying religion, class, or nationalism as modern questions.

Cooley's idealism was important as he recognized the organizing force of modern religious experiences and movements, particularly as he was inspired by the Social Gospel's message of social justice and spirit of cooperation. Cooley's perspective of religious idealism was derived from a Progressive expression of democratic social unity that had existed in a nondenominational context for the first American sociologists since the Victorian era. The timing was important, as Cooley would come to the conclusion in the 1880s that expression of formal institutional religion was impossible for himself. Cooley's initial views on religion were inspired by Victorian psychologist and philosopher William James, who was dedicated to

---

<sup>1</sup> Marshall J. Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley and the Social Self in American Thought* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1982), 9.

religion through idealism and self-expression as opposed to specific doctrines.<sup>2</sup> Cooley wrote of his developing thoughts toward religious expression in 1889, where Cooley mentioned God as an “absolute self-abandonment and willingness for something better than self to fill you and raise you up.”<sup>3</sup>

A tension between Cooley’s doubt with his purpose in society and his expression through religious contemplation resulted in Cooley’s dual roles as activist and idealist. A sense of ecumenical purpose in religion became prominent in Cooley’s academic life and works as he strove to build on Emerson and James in order to apply the ideals of Christianity to membership within a universal and cooperative spirit. Again, Cooley was always an idealist in his work—and would progressively view religion as an expressed perspective of his social organization theories, not a doctrine.<sup>4</sup>

Cooley’s central theory of social organization was that primary groups embrace universal ideals such as democracy and religion and were crucial for unifying a society that was both collective and individualized.<sup>5</sup> Cooley viewed the function of religion to exist through good works, as opposed to formal doctrine. A neglected aspect of the historiography is the influence of ecumenicalism in Cooley’s work, with the formal traditions of Christianity being studied through a modern lens of social justice and cooperative ideals. Despite not considering himself a reformer in any official capacity, Cooley viewed modern religion as directly connected to

---

<sup>2</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 1, Cooley to Elsie Jones (June 3, 1889), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>4</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1909), 203-204.

common democratic values, just as the Social Gospel addressed the need to solve the problems of the working class and unite them in political and Christian idealism.<sup>6</sup>

Cooley began to view the Social Gospel as much less of an influence after his opinions on the validity of reformers began to change. Cooley lived in a self-centered academic environment during the middle stage of his career, with much of his focus based on developing social theories concerning individuals living in an organic world. Increasingly, Cooley found reformers and activists to be obsessive and striving for worldly ambition. Further, as a source of idealism, Cooley viewed the religious activism of the Social Gospel as losing importance for achieving social organization through primary groups.

Meeting Jane Addams in 1906 would be an important next step towards Cooley's last academic stage, as Cooley found many of her ideals very similar to his own. Addams was skeptical of social Christianity and also believed in the powerful relationship between individual and society. Soon after this meeting, Cooley began studying how idealism applied to primary groups through countless forms, not only religion. This wide range of universal ideals developed through social theories allowed Cooley to construct the organic social process, where individuals coordinated all ideals and institutions within a unified society. Cooley would break away from religion as a central ideal when his academic career reached its final stage, although the cooperative ideals of Social Gospel reformers inspired him to develop future theories about social organization.

### *Primary Sources*

For my archival research, I will be drawing frequently from the Charles Horton Cooley Papers, which include Cooley's personal journals, various collected letters and lecture notes.

---

<sup>6</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 380-382.

These sources are all located at the Bentley Historical Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan. By using this broad range of archival evidence, I hope to understand Cooley's enthusiasm for the importance of traditions shaping the social function of religion—and how Cooley's individual commitment to collective solutions was reflected within the trends of the larger Social Gospel movement. These journals are central in forming a narrative of Cooley as recognizing the ecumenical importance of reform within social Christianity, one that continued older traditions yet emphasized good works and cooperative social action. I believe that Cooley's observations of important ecumenical reformers within the Social Gospel movement will show how Cooley was able to embrace religion as democratic unity. At the same time, I hope to use these journals to demonstrate Cooley's transition to the organic social process and an understanding of ideals that shapes social organism beyond religion.

A substantial amount of research is also from Cooley's three major academic texts: *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902), *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind* (1909), and *Social Process* (1918). These three texts represent the academic development of Cooley's approach to sociology, with *Human Nature and the Social Order* suggesting that individuals develop by communication with the surrounding environment. *Social Organization* takes the concept of communication to introduce the primary group's ability to unify society through common values. Finally, *Social Process* strives to understand the individual parts, or mechanisms of purpose that unite society as a whole. These texts are a vital source for my project in understanding how Cooley's personal approach to sociology was not only based on embracing changing forms of communication to confront industrial chaos, but also to understand how the Social Gospel was useful to Cooley as an inspiration to study how individuals were united through common values.

### *Secondary Sources*

Historians who study Charles Horton Cooley primarily focus on the concept of modern communication as an aspect of the primary group, which Cooley defined as small social groups that form crucial ideals of the individual in his primary source. In another vein of secondary literature concerning Charles Horton Cooley, historians also focus on the idealism that permeates Cooley's concept of social organization within the primary group, particularly paying attention to methods and perspectives for studying Cooley's enthusiasm for a collectively ethical society. Instead of arguing that Cooley was fundamental towards influencing the first studies involving behavior and communication, this set of scholars instead uses human sentiment as impulse for societal changes in groups.

In *From the Small Town to the Great Community: The Social Thought of Progressive Intellectuals*, Jean Quandt constructed the first study that focuses on the importance of modern communications as a process of wider social organization within Cooley's work. Quandt located Cooley within a broader argument, which is that Progressive intellectuals were committed to the concept of integrating the values of small communities.<sup>7</sup> As a result, modern communications laid the basis for unity of common interests in response to the impact of urbanization and industrialization. Quandt stated that this vision of national community was inadequate because its focus on communication and small communities failed to address broad structural change in the United States. Cooley was particularly important within Quandt's framework of communications technologies as a method for extending the ideals of the primary group to the entire society.<sup>8</sup> Like the larger framework, Quandt also pointed out the inadequate nature of

---

<sup>7</sup> Jean B. Quandt, *From the Small Town to the Great Community: The Social Thought of Progressive Intellectuals* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 59-69.

Cooley's arguments by arguing that Cooley overlooked class and race barriers within a rapidly expanding society.

Like Quandt, Daniel J. Czitrom also located Cooley in a broader framework of communications as detailed in his text *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan*. Czitrom argued that the media of communication in the United States was responsible for a sizable impact on geography, consumption, and the social process. Czitrom noted that Cooley was one of the formative thinkers that designated modern communication as crucial in the social process, along with John Dewey and Robert Park.<sup>9</sup> Czitrom expanded on themes that Quandt first explored, such as the unity of individuals and society through mechanisms of communication. Czitrom expanded on the literature involving Cooley's awareness of the role of communication within the larger social process, and this is important for the text's main framework.<sup>10</sup> Czitrom also argued that Cooley was frustrated with immense anxiety associated with the rapid expansion of modern media, and he always relied on the belief of progress within a unified society.<sup>11</sup> Czitrom stated that although Cooley never strove to understand the effect of modern communications on future institutions and communities, Czitrom strived for a positive approach with Cooley, and that Cooley was the first to explain how communications media alter behavior and society.<sup>12</sup>

“Satan and Savior: Mass Communication in Progressive Thought” by John Durham Peters took the opposite approach of Quandt and Czitrom, arguing that while mass communication served as a central focus for progressives concerning solutions to problems

---

<sup>9</sup> Daniel J. Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 91.

<sup>10</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 92.

<sup>11</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 93.

<sup>12</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 102.

involving the social order and American democracy, the definition of how society is restored or replaced was never entirely clarified.<sup>13</sup> Peters argued that the importance of nineteenth century ideals in a time of industrialization and urbanization was foremost, like Quandt and Czitrom, although Peters expanded this concept into the idea that modern communication was used to build a society where boundaries of time and geography could be removed in human interactions. Within the social process, human intimacy could be simulated at great distances.<sup>14</sup>

Another vein of literature written by scholars concerning Cooley was based primarily on the idealism that centered around Cooley's concept of social organization. These scholars argued that Cooley imagined creative human sentiment as the impetus for social action. "Charles Horton Cooley's General Sociological Orientation" by Roscoe C. Hinkle was an intensive analysis of Cooley's major academic works, as seen through a comprehensive designation of idealism as a study of small groups. Hinkle argued that Cooley's concept of human nature values is highly definitive for expanding society at large through imagination and sympathy, according to Cooley's conception. As a result, a wide diversification of cultural ideals, principles, and communities were needed to create a collectively integrated democracy.<sup>15</sup> Hinkle also examined Cooley's concept of social change as having a widespread effect on other aspects of Cooley's idealism, defined by relationships between environment and change in social population.<sup>16</sup> Finally, Hinkle argued that through the analysis of Cooley's major works, the significance of

---

<sup>13</sup> John Durham Peters, "Satan and Savior: Mass Communication in Progressive Thought," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6, no. 3 (September 1989): 247.

<sup>14</sup> Peters, "Satan and Savior," 255-256.

<sup>15</sup> Roscoe C. Hinkle, "Charles Horton Cooley's General Sociological Orientation," *The Sociological Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 14.

<sup>16</sup> Hinkle, "Sociological Orientation," 18.

idealism is revealed through a theoretical orientation that unites concepts of self, groups, and social change within modern culture.<sup>17</sup>

Michael D. Clark expanded on Hinkle's argument that Cooley relied on historical continuity as key to the social process, based on the role of traditions within Cooley's conception of society.<sup>18</sup> Importantly, Clark argued that Cooley sought to engage traditions in definite forms through sentiments, beliefs, and customs as a resourceful method for communicating within modern society.<sup>19</sup>

Caroline Winterer, within "A Happy Medium: The Sociology of Charles Horton Cooley," argued that Cooley was prominent among a number of contemporary scholars for emphasizing sociology as a profession through highly general and integrated knowledge as opposed to the specialization that was beginning to dominate graduate programs.<sup>20</sup> Winterer examined more fully than previous scholars how Cooley's journals reflect intellectual pursuits through detailed introspection, and it is through inspection of these journals that Winterer described the tension between Cooley's anti-professional personality and the development of his sociology through examples from Goethe, Emerson, de Tocqueville, and other famous writers that maintained a strong internal focus.<sup>21</sup> Here, Winterer stated as important Cooley's reaction to precise measurement and quantification in the social sciences, which was to realize the validity of "historical, literary, and artistic tradition."<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Hinkle, "Sociological Orientation," 11-12.

<sup>18</sup> Michael D. Clark, "Charles H. Cooley and the Modern Necessity of Tradition," *Modern Age* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 277.

<sup>19</sup> Clark, "Tradition," 279.

<sup>20</sup> Caroline Winterer, "A Happy Medium: The Sociology of Charles Horton Cooley," *The Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 30, no. 1 (January 1994), 20.

<sup>21</sup> Winterer, "A Happy Medium," 20-21.

<sup>22</sup> Winterer, "A Happy Medium," 24.

Glenn Jacobs, within *Charles Horton Cooley: Imagining Social Reality*, strove to expand on Winterer's argument that pragmatism and Emersonian individual creativity were fundamental influences for Cooley to start offering explanations beyond the dominant Spencerian sociology that was so characteristic within nineteenth century sociology.<sup>23</sup> Further, Jacobs stated that what makes Cooley particularly unique as a representation of idealism is not only the American exceptionalism that Cooley embraced with other contemporaries, but a particular manifestation of this exceptionalism.<sup>24</sup> Jacobs examined Cooley's conception of social organization, which as has been stated before, was firmly rooted in the organic connection between the individual and society.

Jacobs made particular note of the fact that Cooley's theories of communication and sympathy within individuals were derived from the interdependence of many intellectual traditions. Jacobs placed great emphasis on the analysis of literary influences that guided Cooley's sociological theories, which prominently included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Michel de Montaigne, and Walter Pater. Jacobs pointed out that the distinctive quality of Cooley's work was derived from his view that imagination was the same source that produced the experience of the aesthetic and the spiritual.<sup>25</sup> As Jacobs discussed the development of this quality in Cooley's readings, Michel de Montaigne represented egotism and leadership within the self-referential nature of the essay, Ralph Waldo Emerson was an idealistic figure that transcended humanity, and Cooley was heavily influenced by Walter Pater for the sake of emphasizing the artist's aesthetic evolution and translating that focus into a language of the self.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Glenn Jacobs, *Charles Horton Cooley: Imagining Social Reality* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>24</sup> Jacobs, *Imagining Social Reality*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Jacobs, *Imagining Social Reality*, 4-6.

<sup>26</sup> Jacobs, *Imagining Social Reality*, 139-159.

My work will add to the historiography by demonstrating how Cooley was inspired by the Social Gospel's ecumenical framework as a method for cooperatively solving issues of modern disorganization. I will explore how encounters with Social Gospel reformers reflected an emphasis on traditions with social purpose for Cooley's academic works—and how Cooley viewed religion as a mechanism of communication with integrative values for society.

### *Thesis Review*

The development of Cooley's approach to why modern communications technology played such a fundamental role began through Cooley's early career and his critique of Herbert Spencer's theories of why individuals are separate from society. Cooley believed that Spencer's social process theories were based on qualities of inheritance between individuals without the ability for an individual to understand elements of the surrounding environment.<sup>27</sup> Cooley argued for the support of modern communications as a method of national unity between individuals and society through commonly shared ideals and institutions. Cooley continued expressing his enthusiasm for modern communications while writing his major texts. When the Social Gospel reached a height of prewar fervor, Cooley began to view modern communications as an instrument for expressing community values such as religion on a national level.<sup>28</sup>

During the writing of *Social Organization*, Cooley was constructing his social theories that focused on the connection between the individual and society through common ideals, including religion. Cooley believed that religious idealism was a central aspect of social organization, and this was demonstrated in his personal journals along with the influence of the

---

<sup>27</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 95.

<sup>28</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 63.

Social Gospel on Cooley as he made the transition from religious idealism to democratic unity.<sup>29</sup>

There were also important meetings with Social Gospel reformers that helped to guide the idealism in his theories. Finally, Cooley was intrigued by the continuity of elements such as traditions and symbolism that allow religious idealism to survive in the modern world.<sup>30</sup> This would allow Cooley to develop theories of adaptation within the organic social process.

The last change within Cooley's approach to sociology was the organic social process, which was based on the idea that all institutions and ideals interact within a unified society.<sup>31</sup> Cooley's focus on social religion at this stage would begin to fade, as Cooley believed that all ideals were equally important to the whole of society—despite interactions with Social Gospel reformers such as Graham Taylor and Jane Addams providing an influence for his organic theories. When the United States entered World War I, Cooley used his organic theories to build a nationalistic conception of society.<sup>32</sup> Cooley also retained similar parallels to the postwar direction of the Social Gospel, based off Progressive values such as democratic cooperation and scientific efficiency.

This thesis strives to understand how Cooley was one of the last great American intellectuals of the early twentieth century due to his social theories involving the connection between the individual and society through idealism. This thesis will also demonstrate the influence of the Social Gospel movement during an important transition in the middle stage of Cooley's career between focusing on primary groups, where individuals and society interacted through a select number of common ideals, and the organic social process, where individuals

---

<sup>29</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 16 (September 19, 1902 – June 17, 1903), Entry 1, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>30</sup> Clark, "Tradition," 284.

<sup>31</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 125.

<sup>32</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 223.

were united on all ideals within society. Cooley never truly believed in institutional religion, but the Social Gospel was a Progressive source for Cooley to understand the cooperation of ideals between individuals and society. Importantly, Cooley was also enthusiastic about modern communications and saw the immediate need to translate important values such as religion and democracy to a vast public. Finally, both Cooley and the Social Gospel developed similar parallels during World War I, which included a protection of democratic ideals and the enthusiasm of specialized experts cooperating in unity as a form of social organization. Cooley's Progressive social theories were responsible for inspiring future sociologists, although the Social Gospel was valuable for influencing Cooley to expand methods of social organization.

## Chapter One:

### Charles Horton Cooley and the Communications Revolution

For Charles Horton Cooley, the 1880s was an important period for confronting susceptibility to illness and his personal battle with inferiority. Occasional attacks of malaria forced Cooley to take periodic absences from college at the University of Michigan. One such trip to Colorado in 1882 was to restore his health through living strenuous outdoor life, and Cooley recorded the exertions and hard labor in his journals consistently.<sup>1</sup> Even in the rugged climate of the West, Cooley found it unbearable that his father's professional reputation preceded him, even in Colorado, where his name gained admiration among surrounding lawyers.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, in 1884, partially to escape the reputation of his father, Cooley took another leave from Ann Arbor to study political science in Germany. Cooley was not attracted to the currents in German philosophical thought at the time, however, and he was very quickly bored of his classes in Munich.<sup>3</sup> However, Cooley took a fascination in the oratorical abilities of his lecturer in German literature, a strength which led Cooley to a further devotion of self-improvement.<sup>4</sup> Cooley spent time climbing in Switzerland, travelled to Dresden, Holland, Berlin,

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 1, Cooley to Mrs. T.M. Cooley (May 13-May 28, 1882), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 1, Cooley to Mrs. T.M. Cooley (July 1, 1882), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 1, Cooley to Mrs. T.M. Cooley (May 7, 1884), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 1, Cooley to Mrs. T.M. Cooley (April 25, 1884), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

and London before returning home in December 1884 with improved health. Cooley graduated in 1887 from the University of Michigan with a Bachelor of Arts in mechanical engineering.<sup>5</sup>

After graduation, Cooley took time to work as a draughtsman in Bay City, Michigan, and according to his letters that he sent Elsie Jones, Cooley's future wife, this was when Cooley had first decided that his life would ultimately be that of a scholar.<sup>6</sup> Writing to Elsie, Cooley spoke of a deep interest in the "study of social questions" and felt the technological influence of the railroad on society was a major concern in 1888.<sup>7</sup> Cooley was also a social activist during this period and desired to experience a career that sought to understand the individual's relationship to larger communities, particularly the working class. His father by 1884, chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission, urged Charles to work in the real world—and offered his son a career in Washington, D.C. Cooley worked for the ICC and also the Census Bureau, staying for two years.<sup>8</sup>

During this period, Cooley began to write concrete articles on social sciences, primarily on the study of transportation. Cooley even collaborated once with his father on an article researching street railways. After this piece in 1894, Cooley's scholarly work took a new direction as he began to focus increasingly on modern transportation as a method of communication, through connecting the specialized parts of society by eliminating distance. Cooley's doctoral dissertation, *The Theory of Transportation*, was Cooley's first attempt to

---

<sup>5</sup> Marshall J. Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley and the Social Self in American Thought*, ed. Frank Friedel (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 1, Cooley to Elsie Jones (November 8, 1888), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 1, Cooley to Elsie Jones (December 4, 1888), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>8</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 12-13.

explore the concept of social organization through modern communication, and it would remain an important theme in his academic work.<sup>9</sup>

Charles Horton Cooley was married to Elsie Jones in 1890, when they were both twenty-six. Elsie Jones was born in Maplewood, New Jersey, as the first of eleven siblings, and her father, Samuel, was the first dean of the Homeopathic Medical College of the University of Michigan.<sup>10</sup> Elsie was highly skilled in the classics, especially Latin and Greek, and demonstrated a passion for literary interests from an early age. To classmates, she was sympathetic and humorous, and with a group of friends, she refused to pledge for sororities. Elsie met Cooley after this group formed The Samovar Club, which cheerily discussed literature.<sup>11</sup> Elsie and Cooley cared little for the social qualities of Ann Arbor, and led a life that was sympathetic, quiet, and dignified. Elsie was very extroverted where Cooley was not, and she was also a literary critic with a command of language.

It follows that Elsie was always Cooley's counselor and friend when he wrote his academic texts in isolation. As Elsie was social and energetic, she was also skilled at keeping visitors to the house occupied so that Cooley's contemplative mode of thinking would not be disturbed. Together, the Cooleys had three children, Rutger Horton in 1893, Margaret Horton in 1897, and Mary Elizabeth in 1904. Also, Cooley would often observe his children at play in order to further develop his own work on the social development of the individual and the influence of social groups.<sup>12</sup> During this time, the Cooley household became a domestic laboratory on personality, and Elsie provided a tolerance and devoted appreciation to all

---

<sup>9</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 66.

<sup>10</sup> Edward C. Jandy, *Charles Horton Cooley: His Life and His Social Theory* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1942), 32.

<sup>11</sup> Jandy, *His Life*, 33.

<sup>12</sup> Jandy, *His Life*, 34.

members of the household that would not have made Cooley's intensive social experiments possible otherwise.

After writing "The Theory of Transportation," Cooley settled with his family in Ann Arbor and took a half-time instructor position in the Department of Political Economy at the University of Michigan, ultimately becoming Professor of Sociology in 1907.<sup>13</sup> As Cooley began his appointment in the 1890s, many young sociologists were under the influence of Herbert Spencer's theories, and Cooley was no exception. Cooley found particular aspects of Spencer's works attractive: the comparison of societies to organisms and the concept of a society as a collective group. Within *The Principles of Sociology*, Spencer argued that societies are highly similar to the organic world, that societies and organisms display growth, and that there is always continuous difference in structure and function.<sup>14</sup> Spencer argued that the social process was biological—and that individuals were transmitted inherited mental states united through a coordinated and differentiated society. Cooley argued in turn that the development of a social process required transmission to the individual through environment and the traditions of history in addition to biological inheritance and found Spencer's research inadequate for neglecting the complementary relationship between the individual and the social whole.

Cooley wrote that Spencer provided no explanation of "a continuing social life, having an organization and history of its own, in which sentiments are gradually developed, and from which they are derived by the individual."<sup>15</sup> Further, Cooley argued that Spencer's theories of social process were derived from biological inheritance, and therefore the complexity of human

---

<sup>13</sup> Jandy, *His Life*, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel J. Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 95.

<sup>15</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 95.

personality in social relationships could also not be properly explained.<sup>16</sup> Cooley's interests in the importance of communications were flourishing in his studies of transportation, and Cooley argued in the industrial world for communications as a defining mechanism: "communication in the widest sense of the word; communication of ideas, of physical commodities between one time and another and one place and another. These are the threads that hold society together; upon them all unity depends."<sup>17</sup>

Cooley would focus on transportation initially as the material means of communication, primarily from statistical research at the Interstate Commerce Commission. Cooley soon pursued "psychical communication," however, which focused solely on the transportation of language and ideas.<sup>18</sup> Cooley would fully embrace the phenomenon of communication through an article called "The Process of Social Change."<sup>19</sup> Cooley argued that social change relied on the development of social environment, and the current methods of communication determine the shaping of individuals within this environment.<sup>20</sup> Cooley then felt he had found a way to organize all social progress with the history of communication. Cooley assured that social change was based on imitative, intellectual, and sympathetic qualities, and that society was only reaching cooperative trends through the latest innovations in modern communication.<sup>21</sup> As influences were given a faster transmission to a large population, Cooley felt that opportunity and competition were more likely to evolve within society.

---

<sup>16</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 95.

<sup>17</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 96.

<sup>18</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 96.

<sup>19</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 80.

<sup>20</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 96-97.

<sup>21</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 97.

Cooley's major three works, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902), *Social Organization* (1909), and *Social Process* (1918) would focus heavily on modern communication as a highly efficient method of social organization.<sup>22</sup> Before indicating an understanding that modern communication would serve a greater cultural and scientific unity within his own sociological thoughts, Cooley took important cultural and psychological inspiration from Albert Schaffle and John Dewey. Schaffle provided Cooley with a further criticism of Spencer's theories by combining idealism with the important role of culture in shaping organic communities. Further, through Schaffle's *Bau und Leben*, Schaffle argued that communications unified on a cultural, scientific, and economic level.<sup>23</sup>

Also, Cooley attended John Dewey's lectures in political philosophy and ethics in 1893 and 1894, where Dewey also turned Cooley towards a critique of Spencer. Dewey had inspired Cooley on a psychological level by promoting a mutual integration between individual and environment, using modern communication as the mechanism for sympathy influenced by knowledge.<sup>24</sup> Dewey's basis for an organic society through the innovations of communication eliminated the contradictions between the individual and society that Cooley found in Spencer's work. With the inspiration of two powerful academics that expanded Cooley's approach towards communication as social process on a cultural and psychological basis, Cooley identified the primary components of his sociology: to view society as an organic collective—and modern communication as the mechanism for conveying social change.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 97-98.

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 71-73.

<sup>24</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 95.

<sup>25</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 98.

Cooley's theoretical concept for the "social self" fully emerged within *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902), where Cooley fully sought to refute Spencer in an exploration of how the individual develops through social influences.<sup>26</sup> All Cooley's sociological thinking was located in the mind at this point, arguing that "the immediate social reality is the personal idea...in order to have society, it is evidently necessary that persons should get together somewhere; and they get together only as personal ideas in the mind."<sup>27</sup> Cooley's theory of individuals communicating with society was located within the imagination, and the concept that self-perception was defined only by association with others. Cooley argued that "the imaginations which people have of one another are the solid facts of society, and...to observe and interpret these must be a chief aim of sociology."<sup>28</sup> Referred to as the "looking-glass self" theory, Cooley specified that what defines self-images of individuals from a young age are how other people view those individuals.<sup>29</sup> Cooley heavily expanded his concept of the social self on William James's previous study of individuals and society based on the imagination, and also James Mark Baldwin's dialectic of personal growth.<sup>30</sup>

Cooley also observed his own children on a regular basis in order to grasp a wider understanding of how an individual's social personality gradually developed through surrounding influences. Cooley argued that an impulse to communicate was integrated with one's thought, representing a fundamental need of human nature.<sup>31</sup> Next, Cooley suggested that a personal intercourse was created from a young age, where humans define their significance

---

<sup>26</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 97.

<sup>27</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 98.

<sup>28</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 98.

<sup>29</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 98.

<sup>30</sup> Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 97.

<sup>31</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Scribners & Sons, 1902), 92-97.

through associations of faces and other symbols.<sup>32</sup> Cooley's basis of personality was that life began with visual and auditory communication with the surrounding environment. What gave this communication coherence for the growing individual was the personal association of an outside influence on the mind, such as a facial expression or tone of voice.<sup>33</sup> Cooley's theory of the social self was built upon the idea that the imagination is never solitary, for personal associations were created by communication with the larger society, and we needed these personal associations in the mind to allow the social process to evolve.<sup>34</sup>

Within Cooley's next work, *Social Organization* (1909), the primary group was first introduced as the concept for constructing the social nature and ideals of each individual through mutual cooperation. Cooley's conception of the primary group was that through individuals striving to cooperate, the social self would naturally find expression in the common aims and values of the larger group instead of individual goals.<sup>35</sup> In all societies, Cooley observed the family, play groups, neighborhoods, and communities as examples of primary groups in every society, and in every one of these groups Cooley saw the emergence of "primary ideals."<sup>36</sup>

Primary ideals were universal to humanity, such as love, individual freedom, and justice. Highly important within Cooley's theory of the primary group was that individuals were always self-assertive and ambitious, yet the unity of the primary group was derived by sympathy and the discipline to share common purposes.<sup>37</sup> Cooley argued that an individual's ego was tamed so that

---

<sup>32</sup> Cooley, *Human Nature*, 100-101.

<sup>33</sup> Cooley, *Human Nature*, 101-104.

<sup>34</sup> Cooley, *Human Nature*, 114-118.

<sup>35</sup> Jean B. Quandt, *From the Small Town to the Great Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 58-59.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind* (New York: Scribners & Sons, 1909), 24.

<sup>37</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 23.

every member's drive to achieve a coveted place in society was reflected by their ability to cooperate with fair standards.<sup>38</sup> Cooley also argued within his concept of the primary group that no changes were required in human nature, and Cooley was expanding his idealistic notion of organic social harmony.<sup>39</sup> This was based on a notion of a societal whole of which each individual was expressed. Also, Cooley argued that social progress required a larger environment for individuals to associate themselves with primary groups, and this is where Cooley would draw the most importance from modern communications.<sup>40</sup>

Cooley viewed the new era of modern communications in the twentieth century as welcoming due to the expansion of the national influence on democracy. Before, opinions and the balance of political power was given only to men of elite authority in established offices. However, because of the rise of newsprint, photography, telephones, and telegraphs, political opinion had become a privilege of the common citizen who could influence a large national stage through the fast exchange of ideas.<sup>41</sup>

Also, modern communication was quickly erasing the homogeneity of communities living in isolation. According to Cooley's work in *Social Organization*, there were no barriers preventing the expression of ideas and within "one lively mental whole" the rigid local conformity of the rural past could be eliminated.<sup>42</sup> In fact, Cooley's theory was that by allowing greater access to individuality through common ideas and influences, modern communications

---

<sup>38</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 35.

<sup>39</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 29-30.

<sup>40</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 82-83, 91-97.

<sup>41</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 56.

<sup>42</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 82-83, 91-97, 180.

allowed a national society to enjoy interactions through the same sense of community that rural groups had experienced.<sup>43</sup>

Cooley expected primary group ideals to be extended to society, with the result being the personal intimacy that flourished in small communities of the past.<sup>44</sup> Cooley's sociological views were based on the concept that each individual is an expression of a unified society, and the idea that sympathy and knowledge had the potential for social harmony further maintained these views.<sup>45</sup> Cooley's enthusiasm for modern communications was primarily derived from a belief that Cooley held in high opinion with other Progressive intellectuals—and that was an evolution of an organic social process.<sup>46</sup> Many potential difficulties to sympathy within theories of social harmony existed, such as the separation between social groups, the factor of inequality based on demographic or economy, or the concept that society was becoming too impersonal.

Cooley and other intellectuals who believed in the unifying ability of communications, known as communitarians, would continue to suggest that any barriers to technology as a mechanism for sympathy within social harmony were temporary and a product of rapid transition.<sup>47</sup> According to the communitarians, the communications revolution would signal unity in ideals of class, ethnicity, and spirituality, which would be crucial as Cooley saw communications as an instrument for religion during the height of the Social Gospel.<sup>48</sup>

Cooley shared a broad enthusiasm for the potential of integrating small community values with other Progressive intellectuals through the communications revolution. The means of

---

<sup>43</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 56.

<sup>44</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 60.

<sup>45</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 61.

<sup>46</sup> Cooley, *Human Nature*, 11, 399.

<sup>47</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 62-63.

<sup>48</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 63.

communication in modern society often defined immediate reforms for communitarians and made the consideration of practical questions regarding social and economic structure unnecessary.<sup>49</sup> The increasing use of technology signaled a drive towards reform and an understanding that a national community based on fellowship was at hand.

Modern communications laid the basis for communitarians to respond to issues of urbanization and industrialization, although the different views of intellectuals towards the agency of technology provided the definitive communitarian idealism. For example, sociologist Franklin Giddings maintained that new methods of communication fostered a homogenous fellowship in society, preventing conflict through universal purpose. Giddings viewed society through Spencerian theories, where all individuals function as one organism, unified in thought, and Giddings even imagined his ideas on a world-wide level, in order to connect disorganized societies.<sup>50</sup> Giddings represented one aspect of the communitarians and their approach towards methods of communication, where communities endured urbanization through organized social order and face-to-face interactions. Newspaper editor and politician William Allen White also took this view, arguing that modern technology served to fill the gap between industrial disorganization and the moral requirements of the family and neighborhood.<sup>51</sup>

White's optimistic views towards communication marked the beginning of a harmony between Progressive commitments, as White argued that isolation would disappear after knowledge and sympathy were disseminated in society. The coexistence of communitarian views was based on the analysis of reformer Jane Addams and philosopher John Dewey, who both agreed that sympathy and intimacy would find personal expression within organized society.

---

<sup>49</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 63.

<sup>50</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 63.

<sup>51</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 64.

Addams expressed an importance for confidence in human nature, believing in a wide expansion of altruism and intellectual knowledge in order for society to progress.<sup>52</sup> Dewey advanced this view by suggesting that community was based on a diverse public that found impulse to share varieties of useful intelligence and values. Dewey felt that an individual's intellectual and moral concept of the world was translated from a child's sympathetic insight, and every individual needed to be uniquely molded to contribute for the union of all.<sup>53</sup> It is here that Cooley's views paralleled Dewey's in that modern communication would provide an outlet for individuals to alleviate social conflict.

The communitarians of the early twentieth century relied on modern technologies of communication in the hopes of defining cooperative social progress, and by avoiding problems of class and ethnicity segregation, the potential these new methods presented was unarguable. The communitarians viewed the means of communication within modern society as the fulfillment of a realized democracy, with John Dewey noting that "We find that most of our pressing political problems cannot be solved by special measures of legislation or executive activity, but only by the promotion of common sympathies and a common understanding."<sup>54</sup> Dewey's emphasis on social unity as a crucial force of democracy also carried an important spiritual purpose as well for the communitarians: sympathy and fellowship among men was a definitive religious experience as well as the realization of democracy. The expansion of modern communication was even more important to the aims of the communitarians, and the new

---

<sup>52</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 65.

<sup>53</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 65-66.

<sup>54</sup> John Dewey, "The School as Social Center," *The Elementary School Teacher* 3, no. 2 (October 1902): 75.

technologies were deified as a method for expressing the impulse for cooperative action in communities.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 73.

## Chapter Two:

### Charles Horton Cooley and the Social Gospel Influence

From the start, Cooley recognized the qualities of Christianity that are similar in nature for democracy and religion, uniting religion and practical purpose in a moral process that translated sympathy to the social action of the community.<sup>1</sup> Further, Cooley believed that an ideal democracy was inherently religious, based around the devotion to communities and the nation, and that modern communication expressed this religion of communities by integrating all individuals.<sup>2</sup> In the sense that modern communication organized mankind into relations of fellowship and created the impulse towards cooperative action, Cooley wrote that “Modern communication fulfills one condition of ‘the Kingdom’ by bringing all mankind into somewhat familiar intercourse,” referring to the Kingdom of God as the sacred community of mankind living under divine principles that were reinterpreted for a universal social purpose.<sup>3</sup>

The Social Gospel movement would emerge through this same perspective, addressing individual obligation towards a commitment of social justice and cooperative fellowship. Emerging as the departure from individualist salvation in Victorian America, the Social Gospel embraced the Kingdom of God as their central tenet, viewing every Christian as needing to fulfill specific requirements to self and society.<sup>4</sup> Within the Kingdom of God, as Cooley expressed, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 16 (September 19, 1902-June 17, 1903), Entry 1, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>2</sup> Jean B. Quandt, *From the Small Town to the Great Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 74.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 17 (July 8, 1903-August 18, 1904), Entry 3, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 2-4.

principles of Christ were adapted for a central community of mankind to achieve democratic order through religion. The Social Gospel represented an international synthesis of state, democracy, and Christianity for the twentieth century, and immediate attention was given to the social realities of industrialization by reformers who were vital to the movement.<sup>5</sup> Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch responded to this new national agenda by seeking unity in society through the understanding of creeds and universal values within Christianity.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, Lyman Abbott strove to spread the popularization and dissemination of Christian dedication to democratic unity through his publication, *The Outlook*.<sup>7</sup>

All reformers agreed that an international missionary movement was necessary in tandem with Western expansionism and capitalism, since Social Gospel reformers believed that ideals must flourish.<sup>8</sup> Jane Addams, while not explicitly a Social Gospel reformer, responded to the values of the working class as a spiritual obligation for all members of society to pursue.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the philosopher Josiah Royce established a complex definition of social organization within the Kingdom of God. Within these terms, the secular and sacred were the same and that Christian doctrines needed to be reinterpreted on the basis of “man the community,” where the individual found true salvation for the greater needs of mankind.<sup>10</sup> Royce gave social meaning to the concept of saving grace, which allowed the spiritual community to prosper through worldly acts of peace and brotherhood. This reinterpretation of Christian doctrines which gave worldly triumphs an eternal quality represented a unifying spirit that Royce called the Great

---

<sup>5</sup> William Hutchinson, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 144-145.

<sup>6</sup> William Hutchinson, *The Modernist Impulse*, 116-117; 165-166.

<sup>7</sup> William Hutchinson, *The Modernist Impulse*, 117-118.

<sup>8</sup> William Hutchinson, *The Modernist Impulse*, 151.

<sup>9</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 65.

<sup>10</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 74.

Community.<sup>11</sup> As a result, modern communications were sanctified as the new social mechanisms of the Social Gospel in America.

Cooley would use a very similar approach to Royce's Great Community, as Cooley agreed that Christianity should be reinterpreted through a unifying role of social action.<sup>12</sup> Also, Cooley further believed that democratic and religious values were directly connected, responding directly to the same international synthesis the Social Gospel promoted by using his journals and academic works.<sup>13</sup> Finally, Cooley emphasized religion as a mechanism of communication that engaged traditions and creeds that were important to Christianity and made accessible through modern technologies.<sup>14</sup> Within Cooley's theories of social organization, the organic connection between the individual and society was always important. This emphasis also applied to the other thinkers that guided Cooley's theories, which included several Social Gospel reformers mentioned in his journals. Although Cooley never defined himself as a reformer of the movement, the active leaders of the Social Gospel reflected collective traditions that Cooley required to expand his social theories. The emergence of the Social Gospel would define a wide maturing of Cooley's academic work, as Cooley strove to integrate democracy and religion through modern communications, and the influence of Social Gospel reformers expanded Cooley's theories of organic connection in society.

---

<sup>11</sup> Quandt, *From the Small Town*, 74.

<sup>12</sup> Edward C. Jandy, *Charles Horton Cooley: His Life and His Social Theory* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1942), 48-51.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 118-120.

<sup>14</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 61-78.

Cooley recognized the social action that religion communicated through intellectual and spiritual higher values as a form of evolving community life.<sup>15</sup> Cooley realized this connection of human development between individuals and the social order as difficult and subtle, and therefore the individual must use well-maintained religious symbols and values that rest upon cherished rituals, music, and language. Cooley realized that ideas change frequently, and the most important mechanisms for defining social action within individuals were those that awakened impulses of higher sentiment, particularly good works.<sup>16</sup> Cooley's signature theory of social organization was based on systems of enduring ideals within small communities known as primary groups. In turn, Cooley believed that all worthwhile values were embraced naturally by primary groups, whether for equal opportunity, for the common good, or in kindness to the poor. Next, Cooley would state a need for Christian institutions and values in the United States to impart democratic values, as Cooley believed both systems had a similar vital set of primary ideals.

Cooley believed that ideal democracy and Christianity were the two systems of social organization in the United States that aspired to have the most enduring value within a modern industrial age, naturally serving an equal human need that was traced to the equal opportunity of the playground, the family, the common people.<sup>17</sup> For Cooley, the true experience of democracy as an American ideal was renewed and vivid, familiar to all classes as a historical structure of high moral order. Cooley's view of democratic impulse was that all individuals should recognize

---

<sup>15</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 15 (December 2, 1901-September 12, 1902), Entry 33, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>16</sup> Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 15 (December 2, 1901-September, 1902), Entry 78, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>17</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 203.

familiar ancestry from modern times to the known past, as the community life ideals of the past would always be traceable to the modern democracy of the future.<sup>18</sup>

However, Cooley believed that the modern industrial United States was highly superficial and disorganized in achieving primary ideals. Cooley refused to believe in abnormal influence within society, generally accepting that most individuals would accept some dedication to community order on either a national or local level.<sup>19</sup> From this point, Cooley decided that the inability to create unity between a nation and small community was based on the difficulty for individuals to align their lower and higher natures, a deep flaw within personal character.<sup>20</sup> It was important, Cooley felt, to express the need for society to flourish as a mechanism of organization and communication. Starting from diversified ideals, the mind of the individual should progress to the growth of rational and sympathetic customs within human nature at large, and Cooley believed the ultimate result in the modern era should be a unified body of social order based on a familiar understanding of values and institutions through the rapid expansion and freedom of communication in society.<sup>21</sup>

It was at the intersection of patriotism and religion that Cooley initially found most important to his concept of sociology, a modern platform for the common classes to spread intellectual ideals and familiar sympathetic values.<sup>22</sup> Democracy needed to exist in an era where Cooley claimed the university replaced the church and provided intellectualism for the masses.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 232.

<sup>19</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 52.

<sup>20</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 52-3.

<sup>21</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 54.

<sup>22</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 51.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 15 (December 2, 1901-September 12, 1902), Entry 23, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

As a result, Cooley's concept of social organization would always use democracy guided by religious ecumenicalism.

After Cooley's theories of sociology emerged after 1901 and the first manuscript of *Human Nature and the Social Order* was sent to the publishers, Cooley began to educate the masses about the mutual purpose of democracy and Christianity through higher ideals.<sup>24</sup> Cooley saw his writings as an essential impulse to express his imagination and ultimately, what Cooley defined as his "best self."<sup>25</sup> Cooley maintained in *Human Nature and the Social Order* that no good writing could exist without strong feeling within the individual, and that no tangible groups that have a basis in a complete social unity would be formed without the realized sentiment contained within personal images and expressions.<sup>26</sup>

From this point, Cooley would define his unique perspective on sociology as one of the first social psychologists in the United States, along with Edward Alsworth Ross and George Herbert Mead. Social psychology would involve the concept of social actions with the interrelation of personality, values, and mind as extremely important, and Cooley would also become highly representative as one of the founders of symbolic interactionism, which specifically strove to understand how individuals communicated to construct organized symbols and values through groups in society.<sup>27</sup> It was through establishing his landmark sociological theories in 1902's *Human Nature and the Social Order* that Cooley first began to understand religion and democracy in the United States as equal expressions of social unity, promoting

---

<sup>24</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 15 (December 2, 1901-September 12, 1902), Entry 13, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>25</sup> Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 15, Entry 13.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 15 (December 2, 1901-September 12, 1902), Entry 14, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>27</sup> Michael D. Clark, "Charles H. Cooley and the Modern Necessity of Tradition," *Modern Age* 36, no. 1 (March 1994): 278.

values of growth and freedom among the working class while limiting the desire for wealth and success.<sup>28</sup>

Cooley would soon begin to focus on the concept of class consciousness existing in conjunction with religion, as Cooley started to come upon a realization that members of the upper class who could afford to care only about success, salaries, and manners lacked the proper sympathy to associate with the ideals of the working class.<sup>29</sup> Cooley would soon start to notice the Social Gospel's reform ambitions towards the working class as the true essence of Christianity for a modern society, and their efforts indicated to Cooley that religion was now corresponding to an era based on good works instead of traditional elevated doctrine.<sup>30</sup>

Cooley began to argue at this stage of his writing that he was not necessarily religious, yet religious values communicated a detailed sense of intelligence and honesty to all classes.<sup>31</sup> From this statement, Cooley emphasized many times that embracing the qualities of religion translated to progressive unity within society, and from that point, the representation of happiness. However, Cooley believed that success and wealth vulgarized, and in order to embrace spiritual ideals literally, Cooley encouraged approval from the "common man," the lower classes that expressed by moral purpose and good works.

From this ideology, Cooley began to extend the importance of sentiment and symbolism within the application of Christianity, arguing that the best experiences of Christianity in the common man came from intuition and symbols that could edify the full range of classes, as these

---

<sup>28</sup>Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 15 (December 2, 1901-September 12, 1902), Entry 76, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>29</sup>Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 15 (December 2, 1901-September 12, 1902), Entry 54, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>30</sup>Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 15, Entry 76.

<sup>31</sup>Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 15, Entry 76.

would be the most likely to be maintained by communication and personal freedom in society.<sup>32</sup> Cooley saw the importance of eliminating complex formulas of doctrine in Christianity, as he believed that ideas such as miraculous conception and resurrection were still being used unnecessarily by religious leaders to educate the minds of the ordinary. The consequence of this was Cooley believed the worship rituals and the human nature aspects of religion would become confused, leading the mind of the individual and the group to reach a state of isolation and confinement. Personality, Cooley stated, was the best religious symbol of all—because of its primary ability to awaken higher sentiment and good works for a unified society.<sup>33</sup>

As soon as Cooley deduced that Christianity (and other religions) reacted upon democratic society as an expression of human nature, Cooley believed that the most powerful tendency of religious sentiment was to be secularized within higher social service, regardless of formal doctrine.<sup>34</sup> Cooley argued that a unified society was in its true nature religious, and that God existed in humans and beyond them through the higher nature of public will. Ultimately, Cooley felt a nation's religion was expressed properly through the institutions which the common man struggled the most to identify with and apply sympathy to.<sup>35</sup>

It was also at this juncture that Cooley began to view the nature of tradition and modern convention as interrelated notions of continuity within human society. Many serious sociologists had already rationalized the fundamental importance of traditions in society as the nineteenth century passed into the twentieth. Ferdinand Tönnies, for example, had played an important role in the expression of the traditional-modern antithesis through the *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft*.

---

<sup>32</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 377-78.

<sup>33</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 379.

<sup>34</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 205.

<sup>35</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 204.

Within American sociology, Franklin Henry Giddings was dedicated to the important role that traditions served, yet using the definition “social memory,” Giddings refused to admit the modern association with past history and custom.<sup>36</sup> Edward A. Ross also showed reluctance for continuity with traditions and modernity, for while he defined efficient social control as a Progressive, Ross also supported the elimination of long-held customs within immigrant communities.<sup>37</sup>

The difference with Cooley’s approach to traditions within modern society was that Cooley conceived of the individual, or social organism, as being focused on sentiments, beliefs, and symbols that endure. For Cooley, these individuals represented a society that was always reflected through traditions and history. Traditions, according to Cooley, were crucial to the adaptive growth of human life and the practicality of experiencing social development.<sup>38</sup> Where Cooley differed most significantly from his colleagues was in his optimistic views toward traditionalism and social development as opposed to expressing his theories as biologically deterministic. Within Cooley’s view, tradition functioned as an abundant set of resources, as “a continuous and unified organism, with rich and varied traditions, intricate co-operations, and a wide interplay of thought and sentiment.”<sup>39</sup>

Cooley commended modern communication once again for allowing convention and tradition to exist simultaneously, while allowing a greater range of individuals to fully draw upon the key traditions that were unique to them.<sup>40</sup> Within Cooley’s optimistic approach, Cooley viewed the beginning of “a new type of culture” which involved the renewal of enduring

---

<sup>36</sup> Clark, “Modern Necessity,” 277.

<sup>37</sup> Clark, “Modern Necessity,” 277.

<sup>38</sup> Clark, “Modern Necessity,” 279.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Process* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1918), 67-68.

<sup>40</sup> Clark, “Modern Necessity,” 282.

traditions as opposed to deserting them in the modern world.<sup>41</sup> Cooley's combination of elements for this new culture included aspects of conservatism, religious idealism, and pragmatism.

Cooley was not an admitted conservative, yet his thoughts on tradition, social organization, and the importance of "primary groups" such as the family are evident as conservative ideologies.<sup>42</sup> Returning to religious idealism, however, Cooley refused to cooperate with religious orthodoxy that traditionalist conservatives were often associated with. This was important, as many of Cooley's generation reserved a long-standing impulse towards religion through the philosophical and theological doubts of the late Victorian era, yet Cooley strove to find a suitable replacement for the standard traditional orthodox creeds.<sup>43</sup>

The next stage in Cooley's journey of traditionalism would be to investigate the concept of adaptive growth in humans, a necessary impulse that refused to sever continuity with the past while continuing on a variety of different directions.<sup>44</sup> The concept of adaptive growth took the form of traditions, institutions, and ideas as continuous pieces of society so that the past could become more accessible to modern life, and under circumstances where traditions could be carefully chosen, Cooley believed that "all the known past becomes accessible anywhere, and instead of the cult of immediate ancestors we have a long-armed, selective appropriation of whatever traditional ideas suit our tastes."<sup>45</sup> In fact, Cooley strongly emphasized the pragmatic and adaptive aspects of tradition to the point of allowing any individual to subscribe to any style or custom without preserving the singular continuity unique to certain traditions.

---

<sup>41</sup> Cooley, *Social Process*, 383-418.

<sup>42</sup> Clark, "Modern Necessity," 282.

<sup>43</sup> Clark, "Modern Necessity," 283.

<sup>44</sup> Cooley, *Social Process*, 8-9.

<sup>45</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 339.

Cooley argued for “many kinds of family, of school, of church, of community, of occupational and cultural associations, each with a tradition and spirit of its own.”<sup>46</sup> Through presenting tradition as essential to modern American society and separating it as a nostalgic burden, Cooley was able to perceive the elimination of conflict between individual and society since each provided mutual strength.<sup>47</sup> Cooley’s recognition of continuity within the human experience sought cultural customs in both the traditional and modern sense, allowing democratic ideals to exist in harmony with the known past. From this point, Cooley would come to understand the importance of older traditions shaping the modern social function of religion and modern society, particularly during the Social Gospel movement, and he would come to understand an individual commitment to collective solutions with Christian ideals due to observations of the working class.<sup>48</sup>

One of the first prominent examples of Cooley understanding how older traditions shared a sense of continuity with the modern world took place when Cooley visited New York City in 1904. Cooley’s observations sought to point out what was tradition and what was recent American industrialism, as well as how long residence in a Jewish neighborhood provided determined societal values. For example, Cooley met a Turkish Jewish girl at a cafe who had the ability to speak six languages.<sup>49</sup> This ability was through cultural tradition, although Cooley was deeply interested in the modern importance of individuals like these. The same applies to a boy Cooley met named Isidor, who wanted to be a socialist and a poet. Cooley observed within Isidor

---

<sup>46</sup> Cooley, *Social Process*, 363-365, 369.

<sup>47</sup> Clark, “Modern Necessity,” 284.

<sup>48</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 15 (December 2, 1901-September 12, 1902), Entry 47-48, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>49</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 18 (September 9, 1904-February 11, 1908), Entry 5, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

the sense of long-held tradition along with a modern habit of thought to achieve the “higher life” within society.<sup>50</sup> It is clear that Cooley was observing the continuity between older traditions and modern society. Now, he realized that cooperative social action and democratic unity could be possible. From this point, Cooley would strive to understand the traditions of Christianity within a modern democratic framework. Cooley achieved this goal by observing and meeting some of the Social Gospel’s most prominent reformers.

Each key reformer during the Social Gospel’s success that Cooley had an opportunity to develop a relationship or observe from a distance involved key aspects of shared values. All reformers involved strove to embrace traditional Christianity within modern democracy, and all found older values of cooperative social action in the modern world. Cooley was also observing the potential for Christian symbols and values as a method of social organization at the same time that the Social Gospel embraced the prospect of national communities for the working class, using individualism to cause good works within a problematic industrialized society. Soon, Cooley would meet and observe Social Gospel reformers to form his own notions about how Christian idealism forms democratic unity. However, an understanding of how the prominent leaders of the Social Gospel influenced Cooley, even at a distance, would provide crucial insight to how Cooley developed his theories of Christian idealism and democracy working in unity.

One of the key Social Gospel reformers that communicated with Cooley was theologian, educator, and Chicago settlement house director Graham Taylor. Born in Schenectady, New York, in 1851, Taylor was the son of Rev. William James Romeyn Taylor and Katharine

---

<sup>50</sup>Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 18 (September 9, 1904-February 11, 1908), Entry 6-7, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

Cowenhoven, who both followed a family tradition of service in the Dutch Reformed Church.<sup>51</sup> In 1870, Taylor graduated from Rutgers College and the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in New Brunswick in 1873. Soon after, Taylor was ordained and became pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church in Hopewell, New York. Seeking a more liberal theological perspective, Taylor moved to the Fourth Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1880 for twelve years. Taylor's practical theology and missionary work became known at Hartford Theological Seminary, and in 1892, Chicago Theological Seminary requested for Taylor to lead their department of Christian sociology.<sup>52</sup>

He would remain here until his retirement in 1924. In 1894, Taylor would launch his settlement house, Chicago Commons, which was located in a spacious house within the inner-city Seventeenth Ward. Taylor was also politically active, playing a large role in the Municipal Voters' League in Chicago, backing candidates and controlling aldermanic elections for two decades along with Raymond Robins and other independents. Most importantly, Taylor offered the first course for training social workers at the University of Chicago in 1903, introducing the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy in 1908. Finally, Taylor was responsible for the introduction of the Social Gospel into Congregational seminaries across the United States while bringing social work education to Chicago in the process. Taylor would be known as the "Conscience of Chicago."<sup>53</sup>

The meetings between Cooley and Taylor represented a crucial influence on Cooley's social theories regarding Christian idealism and democratic reform. Throughout his journals,

---

<sup>51</sup> Louise Wade Carroll, "Graham Taylor" in *American National Biography*, eds. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., vol. 15, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 376.

<sup>52</sup> Carroll, 376.

<sup>53</sup> Carroll, 377.

Cooley defined himself as not necessarily religious and certainly not the proud activist or reformer that Taylor was acknowledged as his entire life. However, Cooley embraced the connection between individual and society that the Social Gospel shared, and Cooley certainly believed in traditional religious ideals having a mutual integration with social action through the same understanding that Taylor was bound to.

When Cooley first met Taylor, however, his understanding of the Social Gospel and working-class social reform was still fairly unlearned. Cooley's first encounter with Taylor was in 1897, when Cooley was extremely self-centered and introspective about how his own academic work applied as individual sentiment to the larger society surrounding him.<sup>54</sup> This encounter took place before Cooley started writing *Human Nature and the Social Order*, where he would apply his concept of the social self. Cooley became aware of Social Gospel values as significant when Graham Taylor visited his house, the first and only prominent reformer to do so. Taylor first visited Cooley in November of 1897, staying for five days. Cooley's first impression of Taylor was of a figure that represents powerful values of a duty-based and unselfish nature. Cooley described him as being "simple, manly, besides being an unselfish man and a formidable reformer. In contact with such a man, I feel what at other times I can only think ---the baseness and fullness of envy and egoistic ambition, the beauty of sympathy, service, and duty."<sup>55</sup> In the presence of such a powerful figure as Taylor, it would be simple to assume that Cooley was easily influenced by this early meeting and became quickly influenced as to the effect of religious values on societal organization due to Taylor's ambitious presence.

---

<sup>54</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 12 (May 2, 1897-July 31, 1898), Entry 53, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>55</sup> Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 12, Entry 53.

However, throughout Cooley's remaining journal entries on Taylor, there was a new development within Cooley's thoughts on Social Gospel reform the more both men interacted. For example, in 1898, Cooley addresses a Sunday visit where Taylor is making interesting conversation, yet Cooley increasingly finds his personality to be egoistic and over-ambitious in a repulsive and tiring manner.<sup>56</sup> Within his own work, Cooley began to find disgust toward self-centered obsession and striving for worldly success. Also, using an entry from 1900 as an example, Cooley began to question the validity of reformers such as Graham Taylor who are always interested in activism and organizing for the public.<sup>57</sup> Cooley was still very isolated within his personal world of writing how individual values (and to an extent, how they were connected to religion) interacted within the higher life of society, yet Cooley could not keep up with how reformers brought their contributions to society. Graham Taylor did not provide the singular explanation of the Social Gospel Cooley required, or was searching for.

Another Social Gospel reformer that Cooley mentioned within his journals was Josiah Strong, Congregationalist pastor and missionary. As opposed to other encounters Cooley had with reformers, Cooley merely observed Strong at a distance and remarked on his intimidating personality. These observations took place when Cooley still hadn't reached a personal understanding where he believed that speeches about social action were egoistic platitudes.

Josiah Strong was an early reformer who convinced Cooley of the ability of religious values to promote democratic unity. Cooley described Strong in 1898 during one observation from a distance: "he seemed an interesting combination of minister, sociologist, and Yankee

---

<sup>56</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 14 (January 2, 1900-December 20, 1901), Entry 4, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>57</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 14 (January 2, 1900-December 20, 1901), Entry 83, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

promoter. I thought that with abundance of such shrewd, level-headed, determined, irrepressible men in the service of progress it was bound to go through.”<sup>58</sup> Cooley observed Strong as the energetic and zealous Protestant reformer who worked individually and collectively to solve industrial, social, political, and economic issues.<sup>59</sup>

The final Social Gospel reformer of importance within Cooley’s journals was Jane Addams, social activist and director of the Hull House settlement house in Chicago. The interesting difference between Addams and the other previously mentioned reformers is that Addams grew increasingly skeptical towards social Christianity and proselytizing as a method of reform.<sup>60</sup> Addams’ transition to pure social education was based on her education at the Rockford Female Seminary between 1877 and 1881, where Addams was one of the first generations of college-educated women in the United States.<sup>61</sup> Serving as valedictorian, class president, president of the literary society, and the first student from Rockford to gain a bachelor’s degree, Addams quickly found a lack of interest in teaching or missionary work.<sup>62</sup>

After being introduced to Toynbee Hall in London during the 1880s, Addams was first inspired to open a settlement house in Chicago, taking note of the industrial chaos that represented the city.<sup>63</sup> Deciding to rent an 1850s mansion built by Charles Hull, the settlement house was originally financed by the estate from Addams’ father in 1889. In the long term, the true sponsorship for Hull-House would arrive from wealthy Chicago women reformers.

---

<sup>58</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 13 (August 8, 1898-April 26, 1899), Entry 30, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>59</sup> Dixon Park Goist, “Josiah Strong,” in *American National Biography*, eds., John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., vol. 13, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 44.

<sup>60</sup> Victoria Bissell Brown, “Jane Addams,” in *American National Biography*, eds. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 139.

<sup>61</sup> Brown, 140.

<sup>62</sup> Brown, 141.

<sup>63</sup> Brown, 140.

Expanding over an entire block at Halsted and Polk Streets, Hull-House was the second settlement house in the United States, and easily the most innovative.<sup>64</sup>

The services that Addams brought to Hull-House were practical and needed for the working-class members of society, including a daycare center for working mothers and literacy classes for recently arrived immigrants.<sup>65</sup> Eventually, Addams began to view Hull-House as a powerful method for providing valuable information to society as opposed to simple philanthropy. Addams wanted legal aid, labor unions, boarding houses, and multiethnic organizations as just part of the environment uniting many neighborhoods in Chicago around civic goals.<sup>66</sup> Addams viewed the power of the individual and the responsibility to the community as essential, and interaction with working-class neighbors on Halsted Street changed her position as one of elitism to one who found interest in achieving social reform through outreach to all members of the community.<sup>67</sup>

Addams, very much like Cooley, argued that the only cure for society's ills was by locating common ideals and values within the individual, and establishing them within society. Cooley only described meeting Addams once in his journals, although what separates Addams from the other reformers is the length of the written description Cooley gives. The journal entry takes place when Cooley decided to visit Hull-House in 1906, and Cooley was quickly impressed with Addams' personality as he enters the front door.<sup>68</sup> Jane Addams was apparently dressed very plainly, and as Cooley describes her, "her manner is kind but very undemonstrative; she

---

<sup>64</sup> Brown, 139.

<sup>65</sup> Brown, 142.

<sup>66</sup> Brown, 141.

<sup>67</sup> Brown, 140.

<sup>68</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 18 (September 9, 1904-February 11, 1908), Entry 88, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

talks straightforwardly, smiles little, but is never cross or censorious. There is no pose about her, not even the pose of not posing, for she makes no objection to having her picture taken. She appears and is a simple, kindly, determined woman of much executive ability who finds a congenial career in living among the poor and sharing their problems.”<sup>69</sup>

This was just one of Cooley’s quoted passages concerning Addams, and as Cooley observed Addams, it was clear through his journal entries that she was the specific type of reformer who still engaged Cooley as he became skeptical about religion as a singular form of social action. In addition, Cooley found Addams’ desire to exist with the working class and see people as true individuals to be enlightening. Finally, Cooley was at a point in his life where he had long strived to leave pretensions of elitism behind, and he was also deeply aware of Addams’ humble personality. In addition, all reformers Cooley had previously met were egoistic, over-ambitious, and zealous.

As Cooley described Addams, “in her immediate presence it does not occur to me to think that she is extraordinary, still less would one dream of saying anything of the kind to her. She would think such an observation trivial and would not take the trouble to ask herself whether it were true or not.”<sup>70</sup> It is evident through reading Cooley’s journal entries that Addams inspired Cooley’s personal work most of all, as Addams represented that pure and humble individual to Cooley who thought of nothing except the highest ideals for the whole of society.<sup>71</sup> Through the inspiration of Jane Addams, Cooley would begin to construct the last stage of his social organization theories, where all society strove for success through common idealism.

---

<sup>69</sup> Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 18, Entry 88.

<sup>70</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 18 (September 9, 1904-February 11, 1908), Entry 89, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>71</sup> Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 18, Entry 89.

Chapter Three:  
Charles Horton Cooley's Separation from the Social Gospel  
and the Organic Social Process

By the time Cooley met Jane Addams in 1906, he had recognized important secular solutions for understanding the individual's purpose within a larger differentiated society. After meeting Addams in particular, Cooley developed a humanistic approach to his theories that viewed modern communication as crucial for allowing universal ideals to reach all of society. Cooley centered his theories on the notion of an organic social process, by which he sought to understand the interaction of institutions, historical phases, and human ideals within a society based on universal ethical standards, arguing that "if we take society to include the whole of human life, this may truly be said to be said to be organic, in the sense that influences may be and are transmitted from one part to any other part, so that all parts are bound together into an interdependent whole."<sup>1</sup> Finally, even though Cooley's work would move away from religion as a central focus at this stage, interactions with Social Gospel reformers allowed him to develop theories of their collective ideals. Future sociologists would always turn back to the psychology contained within Cooley's social self and the primary group sociology, as opposed to the social reform that Social Gospel activists strove for.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, what set Cooley apart within modern social science was the expression of his Progressive theories and values in forms that could be adapted to future sociological research.

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Process* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), 26.

<sup>2</sup> Marshall J. Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley and the Social Self in American Thought* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982), 198.

This research first had origins within Cooley's *Human Nature and the Social Order*, where Cooley argued that "a separate individual is an abstraction unknown to experience, and so likewise is society when regarded as something apart from individuals."<sup>3</sup> From this point in 1902, Cooley elaborated a critical social theory that defined individuals and society as aspects of a single distributive and collective process.<sup>4</sup> Cooley strove to discredit theories that viewed society and the individual as opposite entities, stating that "the antithesis, society versus the individual, is false and hollow whenever used as a general or philosophical statement of human relations."<sup>5</sup> Herbert Spencer's theories of individualism served as the context for Cooley's conception of organicism, as Spencer argued that psychology was "divided into individualistic or non-social tendencies or faculties, and those that are social."<sup>6</sup> Cooley challenged Spencer's argument, with the concept that awareness of the organic whole of human life must be the point of origin for studying individual or society. Cooley would develop his theories of organicism as describing a process where both individual and society were united. Next, *Human Nature and the Social Order* was extremely fundamental in 1902 for defining the individual within a social environment from which a wide range of imitative material could be drawn from in order to achieve self-definition.<sup>7</sup>

The most important stage within Cooley's social psychology, however, would be *Social Organization* in 1909. This text would analyze Cooley's organicism from the perspective of society, introducing the primary group into his sociology for the first time. "By primary groups,"

---

<sup>3</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 125.

<sup>5</sup> Cooley, *Human Nature*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Cooley, *Human Nature*, 11-12.

<sup>7</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 127-8.

Cooley wrote, “I mean those characterized by intimate face-to-face association and cooperation. They are primary in several senses, but chiefly in that they are fundamental in forming the social nature and ideals of the individual.”<sup>8</sup>

For Cooley, the primary group provided the individual with the greatest sense of social participation while also serving as the standard form of individual development. From these theories, Cooley would be deeply inspired by Christianity and democracy as based on these ideals and their extension to all of society.<sup>9</sup> Appropriately, Cooley was inspired by the Social Gospel because of these ideals, yet Cooley’s interaction of individuals within the primary group also paved the way for Cooley to study the class structure and caste principle within contemporary American society.<sup>10</sup> Cooley’s idealism would find final expression, beyond the doctrines of any particular religion, within the organicism of the social self.

*Social Organization* firmly established an enduring presence on Cooley’s academic legacy due to the primary group’s effect on modern sociology. However, Cooley’s impact on the organization of the new sociological establishment was almost completely accidental, as Cooley was deeply critical of empirical sociologists such as Franklin Giddings or Lester Ward.<sup>11</sup> Instead, Cooley focused on literary sociology, using any texts as a social tool to train observers on the organic process of life. Through contemporaries, Cooley found the works of Jane Addams more instructive than sociology texts, with *Social Organization* referencing Addams far more than any author.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1909), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 175.

<sup>10</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 176.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 167-8.

<sup>12</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 167.

Cooley was exceptional among colleagues for studying the expression of ideals within powerful individuals, and Addams was a particular influence on Cooley's understanding of group participation and self-development of individuality through her observation of communal immigrants and gangs in Chicago.<sup>13</sup> As Cooley appreciated these observations, the primary group would eventually be conceived as a training ground for the social self.

The formation of the primary group was crucial in Cooley expanding his model of social interaction to any "ideal of moral unity."<sup>14</sup> As Cooley never truly found faith within institutional religion, his fascination with the use of ideals by the individual within society carried a far greater weight and allowed Cooley a context to judge all larger organizations. As one major example, Cooley would use the primary group to study the class system, viewing the participation of individuals within groups as unified with the participation of classes within society, creating an interdependent sense of unity between an individual and their social class.<sup>15</sup> Cooley defined classes as "any persistent social group, other than the family, existing within a larger group," a rather vague definition that chose to focus on the concept that every society is a larger social group built of classes, economic or cultural.<sup>16</sup> Throughout Cooley's academic work and journals, the importance was placed on the difference between status and competition in society. Cooley argued that "fundamental to all study of classes are the two principles, of inheritance and of competition, according to which their membership is determined."<sup>17</sup>

Cooley viewed extensive social change and wide communication of ideals throughout the United States as fundamental towards the survival of working class individuals within social

---

<sup>13</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 171.

<sup>14</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 35.

<sup>15</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 175.

<sup>16</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 209.

<sup>17</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 210.

initiatives such as “the reform of housing and neighborhood conditions, improvement of the schools, public teaching of trades, abolition of child-labor and the humanizing of industry.”<sup>18</sup>

Cooley saw the goal of wealthy citizens as needing to help the working class reach a participating level of social organization, where their rights as a unified class within a larger society would be respected.<sup>19</sup> Cooley used this example of working-class survival to demonstrate the extension of the primary group to implement humanism within institutions. Cooley viewed the participation between the individual and the larger society as valuable to human progress, because he argued that “the opposition of ambitious young men and the general current of democratic sentiment” was the primary factor preventing inherited caste systems within America.<sup>20</sup>

However, as Cooley observed segregation in the South, which provided for inherited living conditions and the restricted specialization of labor, he would begin to study in closer detail where primary groups defined a society based on issues of race or inherited restrictions. Cooley defined three conditions which he felt favored the encouragement of the caste principle in America, especially within the race division in the Jim Crow South. Cooley argued these conditions included unlikeness in the citizens of the population, the rate of social change, and the current state of communication among society.<sup>21</sup> Cooley stated that the caste spirit is definite where differences exist between two races due to temperament and societal capacity, regardless of equality and democratic values. Cooley observed race difference as hereditary, so the conscious external qualities that white citizens forced upon African Americans at birth created

---

<sup>18</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 296.

<sup>19</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 181.

<sup>20</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 233.

<sup>21</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 217.

the caste division.<sup>22</sup> As a result of the inequality demonstrated within this social system, Cooley observed that the “race caste existing in the Southern United States illustrates the impotence of democratic traditions when fostered by obvious physical and psychical differences.”<sup>23</sup> In short, Cooley believed that as long as whites believed in strong hereditary differences with African Americans, the primary group concept could not be used to unite individuals within society.

Unusually for a scholar at the beginning of the twentieth century, Cooley focused on aspects of Jim Crow segregation that specifically recognized the caste principle from a negative perspective. Cooley was moderately opposed to Jim Crow segregation and proposed the validity of primary groups with universal ideals in African American society.<sup>24</sup> Cooley argued that “The idea that he is fundamentally a man like the rest of us cannot and should not be kept from the Negro any more than from other lowly orders of people. Science, religion, and the democratic spirit all give him a right to it; and the white man cannot deny it to him without being false to his own best self.”<sup>25</sup>

However, Cooley’s solution for the caste alternative was very uneven to the point of veiled racism, as Cooley justified segregation when whites argued that “race was an organic whole.”<sup>26</sup> Cooley felt comfortable with this argument as opposed to one where individuals were considered on their own basis. Even though segregation defined separation of races, Cooley believed that caste systems were impossible to escape. Finally, Cooley argued that the “practical question here is not that of abolishing castes but of securing just and kindly relations between

---

<sup>22</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 218.

<sup>23</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 218.

<sup>24</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 177.

<sup>25</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 220.

<sup>26</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 233.

them, of reconciling the fact of caste with ideals of freedom and right.”<sup>27</sup> Cooley argued that the white society of the United States was ideally situated to assimilate and conquer different social groups through settled conditions, low intelligence, and superiority from a biological state of mind.

Cooley believed that until diffusion of intelligence and communication mobilized across the United States to allow the growth of universal ideals between individuals across society, castes would be the only social structure encouraged.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, Cooley argued that white society with a widely settled superiority needed to compromise their hostile differences with African American society, reconciling equal ideals between divided castes.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, Cooley failed to realize the conflict of racism in his argument that could never be solved. White society would never admit to equal abilities and rights within African American society, and the inability to resolve the caste principle would remain.

Cooley also viewed his theory of the primary group as thoroughly integrated into his political perspectives, arguing that democracy is the “application on a large scale of principles which are universally felt to be right as applied to a small group.”<sup>30</sup> Cooley believed that understanding the moral unity and cooperation that was essential to the universal ideals of the primary group allowed for the much broader conditions of a democratic society. Here, the primary group existed through the “organized sway of public opinion,” where discussion and the free exchange of ideas allowed specialized individuals to express many differentiations from within the general public.<sup>31</sup> According to Cooley, democratic opinion as a whole was not built as

---

<sup>27</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 220.

<sup>28</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 227.

<sup>29</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 219-220.

<sup>30</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 119.

<sup>31</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 118.

a uniform average of all individual opinions. Cooley argued that public opinion was designed to be a highly complex system of specialized and generalized principles, and only the specialist individuals could be politically efficient through providing representative judgment on social issues.<sup>32</sup> This need to put faith in both democracy and expert opinion was a conflict that Cooley shared with many Progressives.

As the social self was a context for the individual within the primary group, the public realm was a context for the individual within a political society. Cooley believed that below the specialized individuals responsible for efficient public opinion, a public realm was the arena for political activity to be communicated by an entire nation.<sup>33</sup> The final realization of Cooley's political use of the primary group was the public will within the public realm, or "the deliberate self-direction of any social group."<sup>34</sup> Here, Cooley argued that freedom in communication and expression in specialized public opinion was essential for promoting the public will. Cooley believed that the most important aspect of the public will was the application of both individual and collective forums, where differentiated opinions could be expressed within a government that was the product of many interacting citizens.<sup>35</sup>

Consistent "self-assertion through voluntary organization" was all-important to Cooley for changing public opinion and negotiating public policies, as Cooley argued that conducting political activity outside private interests would allow individuals to thrive within the public realm.<sup>36</sup> Sharing a widely common belief with the Progressives of the period, Cooley strove to express that the public realm was an ideal of social organization, which individuals would use to

---

<sup>32</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 202.

<sup>33</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 207.

<sup>34</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 395.

<sup>35</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 208.

<sup>36</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 288.

acknowledge conflicting opinions for the purpose of the larger community. However, Cooley understood that defining private interests as secret and privileged while bringing political activities into the solely democratic public realm would create conflict for his concept of individualism.

What separated Cooley from the other Progressives was the need to say that public opinion was all-important, yet “also say ‘the good is the private,’ i.e. the individualized, self-reliant view.”<sup>37</sup> Cooley believed that the notion of the public as a general good could threaten the individual’s self-development, so the expression of private interests within the public realm were just as crucial as the compromise of perspectives. From a theoretical viewpoint, Cooley’s individuals already exchanged many different viewpoints, and his concept of a public realm was an initiative to secure the communication of ideals within the social whole on a political stage.<sup>38</sup>

The final development in Cooley’s sociology would be an explanation of the organic social process through his own perspective on social Darwinism. Written in 1918, the text *Social Process* was the last within Cooley’s social psychology trilogy. Cooley criticized Spencer’s logic that individual was separate from society, and Cooley argued that human life was an organic whole in the same way Charles Darwin argued that nature was an organic whole.<sup>39</sup> Believing that individuals, primary groups, and institutions all continually interact within a larger organic whole, Cooley used the joining of all these elements to place the context for the organic social process.<sup>40</sup> The success or failure within the larger organic whole, Cooley argued, was based on a theory called the “tentative method,” which was based on the ability to adapt and grow through

---

<sup>37</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 18 (September 9, 1904-February 11, 1908), Entry 51, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.

<sup>38</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 214-215.

<sup>39</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 186-187.

<sup>40</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 187.

interaction with other forms within the same environment.<sup>41</sup> Cooley employed this analogy to the social demands of individuals, but also to languages, trends, or institutions. Cooley believed that the method of fulfilling the needs of the social process was always experimental, and individuals could be either conscious or unconscious of their particular role in shaping future changes.<sup>42</sup>

Using the image of a growing grape vine, Cooley described the tentative method by illustrating that “a shoot which thus gets a hold grows rapidly and sends out more tendrils; if it fails to get a hold it by and by sags down and ceases to grow. Thus, it feels its way and has a system of behavior which ensures its growth along the line of successful experiment.”<sup>43</sup>

Essentially, as Cooley understood it, all social forms strive for a pattern of successful interaction within the larger environment they inhabit, or survival is never possible. Cooley argued that social change “is never produced out of nothing; there is always an antecedent system of tendencies, some of which expand and fructify under fresh suggestions,” defining the complexities of change within the social process as an organic condition of life and impossible to predict.<sup>44</sup>

Cooley understood the organic social process as the final development of his earlier conceptions of social science from the beginning of the century, where he had stated that a social scientist must embrace all of life as a “living, present, intimate whole.”<sup>45</sup> Cooley gained an understanding of social intelligence as “essentially a kind of foresight, a mental reaction that anticipates the operation of forces at work and is prepared in advance to adjust itself to them,”

---

<sup>41</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Process* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1918), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 188.

<sup>43</sup> Cooley, *Social Process*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> Cooley, *Social Process*, 17.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 15 (December 2, 1901- September 12, 1902), Entry 33, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.

using the tentative method to employ interaction and behavior within any set of factors.<sup>46</sup> Cooley believed that through social science the use of “sympathetic participation,” or the use of dramatic imagination and detailed participation by observers, the only legitimate method of demonstrating the process of interaction within the larger organic whole could be achieved.<sup>47</sup> In an era that strove for accurate methodology and statistical models within the social sciences, Cooley stood in opposition to exact science as a contrived obstruction to the dramatic insight that ordinary observation provided.

Also, Cooley believed that it was highly important for the concept of organic social science to also carry an ethical perspective, or else it would be “unfaithful to its deepest responsibility, that of functioning in aid of general progress.”<sup>48</sup> Ever since completing *Human Nature and the Social Order*, Cooley had always viewed his work as having ethical or moral significance, making the context for his morality clear in *Social Organization*: “Above all, the organic view of mind calls for social knowledge as the basis of morality.” *Social Process* was the reconciliation of all Cooley’s meditations of moral deficiency in the social organization of the United States, and it was here that Cooley concluded that an “ideal society must be an organic whole.”<sup>49</sup>

Finally, Cooley believed that the direction of social change was based on the efficient boundaries of the political process.<sup>50</sup> Cooley’s theory of democracy rested on the ability of the public realm to allow individual expression within the fulfillment of a larger organic whole that reconciled opinions, eventually coming to imply nationalism for Cooley and other Progressives.

---

<sup>46</sup> Cooley, *Social Process*, 351.

<sup>47</sup> Cooley, *Social Process*, 397.

<sup>48</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 21.

<sup>49</sup> Cooley, *Social Process*, 417.

<sup>50</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 195.

America's involvement in World War I would be even more important for Cooley's organic social process and commitment to ideals because Cooley believed the self-expression and cooperation of individuals through political ideals could find true fulfillment through war, implying nationalism.<sup>51</sup>

Cooley's organic social process and the public realm became fully united as the United States entered World War I in 1917. Like other Progressives, Cooley believed that individuals united by an organic system of ideals was highly important to America's changing role in social organization.<sup>52</sup> However, Cooley embraced the social-psychological effects of America's entrance into war, while many other Progressives such as John Dewey and Jane Addams expressed deep fears about war hysteria and the individual's fight against the coercion of the state. Cooley, from the opposite perspective, believed war would commit America's individuals to an organic understanding of national ideals. Cooley even believed that some emulation of Germany was highly important—primarily due to America's lack of what the enemy achieved: “an organic system of training, free in selection but stringent in function, reaching everybody, unified by a common spirit.”<sup>53</sup> Cooley argued that of all nations, Germany strove for an “idea, social, national, bold, disciplinary, subordinating the senses and all vulgar aims to an exacting devotion.”<sup>54</sup> For Cooley, the modern world created a pressing importance for the “I” to become the “we,” a concept that interrupted the personality of individuals and sacrificed democracy for many Progressives.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 221.

<sup>52</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 220.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 21 (November 1, 1913- April 11, 1919), Entry 21, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 21 (November 1, 1913- April 11, 1919), Entry 27, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.

<sup>55</sup> Cooley, *Social Process*, 253.

It was here that Cooley never realized the conflict between his definition of individualism and nationalism during World War I—because Cooley always perceived his political public realm as many self-assertive individuals within a larger organic whole. As Cooley approved further of American exceptionalism and a great commitment to national ideals, however, his original concept of the individual was being absorbed into a subordinating patriotic spirit.<sup>56</sup> To escape the political tension implicit in his argument, Cooley believed that the public realm of self-assertive individuals was greater understood in a stage of international order after a nation grows through the organic social process and expresses dedicated sentiments of nationalism. Cooley stated: “A ripe nationalism is favorable to international order for the same reason that a ripe individuality is favorable to order in a small group.”<sup>57</sup> Cooley believed a nation is ultimately capable of continual moral development and an international primary group will finally result, where a nation will search for the respect of other nations, “in which each nation and each national patriotism will be united, but not lost.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, Cooley’s perspective was that nations would become self-assertive individuals within an international public realm where compromise would be reached within the same stage of public opinion.

Cooley was in stark contrast to Jane Addams, who fought for individual freedom within a country that was swept up in a frenzy of nationalistic propaganda.<sup>59</sup> However, Cooley never viewed nationalism as the elimination of the public realm within a nation. In fact, Cooley argued that many public realms are located between the concept of self-assertive individuals within the primary group and self-assertive nations within an international order. Cooley believed that the

---

<sup>56</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 223.

<sup>57</sup> Cooley, *Social Process*, 256.

<sup>58</sup> Cooley, *Social Process*, 265.

<sup>59</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 223.

public realm where individuals exist in organic unity within a larger nationalism-based society was reasonable and also provided a sense of commitment to a lacking notion of patriotic idealism.<sup>60</sup> Cooley stated that the appropriate public realm was ultimately based on one's perspective, an unstable argument that proved ultimately why his conflict between individualism and nationalism was never truly solved.<sup>61</sup>

As Cooley's social views regarding the self-assertive individual began to change to one of nationalism during World War I, the Social Gospel would gradually come to see the war as a necessary cause for modern democracy in a similar fashion. Walter Rauschenbusch and other Social Gospel reformers began to believe that historic moral events were at work in the trenches of France, with an opportunity to embrace nationalism in order to prepare for "the religion of democracy," as Edward Scribner Ames described it.<sup>62</sup> Most reformers within the Social Gospel movement agreed that the war in Europe would profoundly alter American beliefs and standards of behavior, particularly through the demise of denominations and Victorian traditions to make way for progressive politics and a cooperative social culture based on specialized efficiency.<sup>63</sup> Methodist bishop Francis McConnell insisted within *Democratic Christianity* that coordinating expert results was most important in both the church or the secular stage, stating that "democracy is not safe if it begins to disparage the expert," further writing that "the church leader must be expert in knowledge and expert in skill."<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 222.

<sup>61</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 225.

<sup>62</sup> Edward Scribner Ames, *The New Orthodoxy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1918), 2.

<sup>63</sup> Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 184.

<sup>64</sup> Francis J. McConnell, *Democratic Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 33-34.

The postwar Social Gospel's focus on training self-assertive individuals to cooperate for the new Protestant churches functioned as a form of social organization that followed a similar perspective as Cooley's public realm, where also the cooperation of specialists within a unified group is highly important.<sup>65</sup> Another factor in which the Social Gospel shared a parallel with Cooley during this era was the increasing encouragement towards scientific efficiency within all aspects of society and industry, such as mass communication technologies for social organization.

Cooley shared a very similar perspective with the Social Gospel during wartime, using the public realm concept to argue that the individual is self-assertive and independent in function, while also subordinated to national values for support purposes. Cooley would never again focus on religion as central after the organic social process took full prominence, with members of the Social Gospel embracing moral and social efficiency in the name of protecting democracy, not denominations. Both would focus on methods of social organization and the importance of individual expertise in society replacing traditional religion, leaving the parallels between Cooley and the Social Gospel to grow closer.

---

<sup>65</sup> Curtis, *A Consuming Faith*, 187.

## Conclusion

The Progressive Era relapsed from a political perspective in the 1920s, and as a result, so did Cooley's academic career and life. The Progressive Era was never truly able to remain united in politics, and through the darkness of war and the resulting economic turmoil, the crumbling political party of 1916 finally fell. Cooley died from an unidentified form of cancer in 1929 at the age of 65, just as the Progressive Era was divided by both defections and continual faith in ideals. Walter Lippmann, for example, found public opinion of low quality as a valid political philosophy as both government and business were practicing the art of manipulation, in public and private forums.<sup>1</sup> John Dewey, on the other hand, found the public realm to be always compelling. Dewey also admitted that the only way for the public realm to function was for the "Great Society" to be converted to the "Great Community."<sup>2</sup> Dewey's faith in the public realm allowed for the continuity of traditions within Progressive social thought, especially in Cooley's theories of the social self and primary group. The importance of understanding Cooley's influence among later social scientists is based on the significance of his commitment to Progressive ideals.

The line of Cooley's influence within social science began with psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan. Believing that psychiatry and social psychology were associated with each other, Sullivan designed an interpersonal theory which "can never be isolated from the complex of interpersonal relations in which the person lives and has his being."<sup>3</sup> Psychiatrists Adolf Meyer

---

<sup>1</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 228.

<sup>2</sup> John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927), 142.

<sup>3</sup> Harry Stack Sullivan, *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York: Norton & Company, 1953), 10.

and Sigmund Freud both focused on the individual psyche of the mind, where Sullivan viewed Cooley's social psychology as an argument against this individualist approach, stating that "it showed very clearly that the unique individual person was a complex derivative of many others."<sup>4</sup> Sullivan was challenged by psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, who rejected concepts such as the primary group and the public realm by arguing that America was a mass society of manipulated individuals, bought and sold into united mediocrity by the mass media. Fromm argued that the Progressive social and political tradition where an individual can adjust to any variety social or personal needs to fit the larger environment "really means...giving up oneself, becoming part and parcel of the herd, and liking it."<sup>5</sup>

In turn, American sociologists influenced by the Progressive ideals of Cooley demonstrated that Fromm's model of an alienated mass society was oversimplified.<sup>6</sup> The leaders of this argument during the 1950s were sociologists such as Robert K. Merton, Kurt Lewin, Elihu Katz, and Paul F. Lazarsfield, who redefined primary groups as reference groups, which perform as intermediate variables between individuals and opinions created by the mass media.<sup>7</sup> These sociologists found that modern society is a complex net of reference groups that mass media content weaves through before finding the alienated individual. Another significant concept that both Sullivan and Merton developed was the need to identify society's "opinion leaders," individuals who sought power and influence within their environment without consciously realizing it.<sup>8</sup> Any one of these leaders was attached to a greater network of opinion

---

<sup>4</sup> Harry Stack Sullivan, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*, ed. Helen S. Perry and Mary L. Gawel (New York: Norton & Company, 1953), 17.

<sup>5</sup> Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (New York: Rinehart & Company, 1955), 158.

<sup>6</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 235.

<sup>7</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 236.

<sup>8</sup> Harry Stack Sullivan, *The Fusion of Psychiatry and Social Science*, ed. Helen Swick Perry (New York: Norton & Company, 1964), 146-147.

groups, a view both Sullivan and Merton embraced. It is also significant to mention that Merton referenced the contemporary influence of Cooley by describing *Human Nature and the Social Order* as “the seedbed of ideas about what is now called reference group behavior.”<sup>9</sup>

When American sociologists were challenged by images of totalitarianism through mechanical reception of information within an increasingly large society, Cooley’s concept of the primary group theory was always the appealing framework. These sociologists focused on personal interaction, and despite no particular stance on political activity, it was obvious that democratic pluralism was supported in opposition to mass society theory.<sup>10</sup> Cooley’s theories embodied an optimistic model of social life, particularly within his primary group concept and especially in the context of the public realm. Here, Cooley remained the last early twentieth-century sociologist to have continual impact throughout the political changes of the Cold War, and in many respects, Cooley’s ideal of communication between established individuals in a larger environment of free opinion had even more validity during this era than during the political turmoil of the Progressive Era.<sup>11</sup> American social scientists would always look back to Cooley’s social self and the primary group to develop theories of democratic social sciences and while Cooley would not be remembered for his religious idealism, the Social Gospel provided Cooley with a cooperative model that would allow future social scientists to challenge individualist views of society continually.

This thesis has striven to explain how Charles Horton Cooley’s social theories propelled him to be one of the greatest American intellectuals of the early twentieth century, and also how

---

<sup>9</sup> Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (2nd ed., New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968), 412.

<sup>10</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 238.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen, *Charles Horton Cooley*, 239.

the influence of the Social Gospel demonstrated a remarkable turning point for the central stage of his career. Despite never fully embracing institutional religion, Cooley had always pursued an intense form of self-examination about his purpose in society, and this would inevitably lead to an unwavering idealism as he reached adulthood and his early career at the University of Michigan. Cooley's fascination with the Social Gospel was highly linked with Cooley's theory involving the organic social process, which was in reality an evolved set of earlier theories which ultimately considered each individual or institution an expressed part of a social whole.<sup>12</sup>

In particular, the apex of Cooley's interest in the Social Gospel was between the writing of *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902) and *Social Organization* (1909). During this period, Cooley was highly focused on the concept of the primary group, which sought to express each individual's common ideals through all of society.<sup>13</sup> Through this concept, Cooley believed that small community values such as religion could be translated to a national level and end many problems of industrialization that were occurring on a mass level.<sup>14</sup> Cooley shared this sentiment of an evolving organic social process with many Progressives, and he kept defining it further throughout his career.

The Social Gospel movement, a community of modern Protestants, appealed to Cooley from the perspective that each reformer within the movement represented each individual's need to fulfill a dedication to social organization through the national communication of Christian ideals.<sup>15</sup> Cooley's views were also similar with the Social Gospel in that he began to study further the importance of expansionism within the United States, and Cooley would eventually

---

<sup>12</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Process* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), 26.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 23.

<sup>14</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 91-97.

<sup>15</sup> Cooley, *Social Organization*, 118-120.

come to believe that specialized individuals found the greatest social purpose within national ideals and political compromise. Cooley recognized within the Social Gospel both religion and democracy, two enduring ideals that he believed would contribute as factors within the organic whole of society.<sup>16</sup>

Cooley found these ideals even more important in the sense that his ongoing work on communications technology would always strive to demonstrate the organic social process between the individual and society through a modern approach.<sup>17</sup> Cooley also believed that modern communications were allowing individuals to interact through a national community, erasing the separated homogeneity of the rural past. Cooley and other Progressives saw the modern transition to communications technology as a social unity for all ideals, and Cooley's research would be further defined as he used modern communications to study the national integration of religion as the Social Gospel gained further momentum.<sup>18</sup>

Another key aspect of Cooley's fascination with the Social Gospel was his observations of key reformers. The reformers that Cooley observed would strongly focus his social organization theories as Christian idealism for a period of time. Graham Taylor, for example, was the only Social Gospel reformer that Cooley met with consistently. Taylor shared many of the same values as Cooley, such as the view that ideals connected individuals within society; Cooley and Taylor were also bound to the same perspective that religious traditions were crucial

---

<sup>16</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 15 (December 2, 1901-September 12, 1902), Entry 23, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), 399.

<sup>18</sup> Jean B. Quandt, *From the Small Town to the Great Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 62-63.

to modern social action.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, it was reformers such as Taylor who began to tire Cooley with highly ambitious personalities and obsession with success. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Cooley met settlement house director Jane Addams in 1906. Addams had become increasingly critical of social Christianity and argued that social change was achieved by finding all common ideals through the individual and then organizing them within society.<sup>20</sup> Cooley was also growing skeptical of religious idealism as a method of social organization, and what Cooley observed in Addams was the final stage of an organic social process, which sought to fully realize how all human ideals and institutions interact as pieces within a larger collective society.<sup>21</sup> Even though Cooley would begin to view all values as a singular expression of humanity, the Social Gospel was important for influencing Cooley's work on the interaction between the individual and society through idealism.

Cooley's concept of the organic social process was a personal definition of social Darwinism based on the context that all human life was composed of interacting elements from individuals to institutions that always existed within a much larger organic system. Cooley believed that whether the individuals or institutions survived was completely due to all elements interacting with the largest system and adapting to their surrounding environment.<sup>22</sup> Cooley understood the social change emerging from the organic social process as the conclusion of the many developments in social science he had observed since the beginning of the century. As a

---

<sup>19</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 12 (May 2, 1897-July 31, 1898), Entry 53, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>20</sup> Victoria Bissell Brown, "Jane Addams," in *American National Biography*, eds. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., Vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 139.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 18 (September 9, 1904-February 11, 1908), Entry 89, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>22</sup> Cooley, *Social Process*, 3.

result, Cooley's prior faith in religion as a central ideal would become a less important element within the organic system in his theory.<sup>23</sup>

Cooley believed most highly in the ability of individuals to find compromise with political ideals. America's entrance into World War I would find Cooley believing in political compromise from the perspective of nationalism, arguing that social change was only possible if individuals subordinated themselves to an idealism based on protecting democracy in war.<sup>24</sup> Cooley found parallels with the Social Gospel during the war, most importantly that highly specialized individuals were unified for cooperation and compromise as a method of social organization.<sup>25</sup> Both Cooley and the Social Gospel would grow further from institutional religion when Progressive values such as democratic unity and methods of social organization took precedence as nondenominational expressions of humanity. At the end of the Progressive Era, both Cooley and the Social Gospel believed in organic cooperation between individuals and society, regardless of specific ideals.

The Social Gospel was crucial for influencing Cooley's theories on the national unity of individuals and society through common ideals such as religion and democracy. This thesis also involves Cooley's personal journals to understand how the Social Gospel expanded Cooley's theories on social organization through his meetings and observations of Social Gospel reformers, which represented a crucial transition from Cooley's theories on the primary group to the organic social process. After World War I, both Cooley and the Social Gospel shared similar parallels in Progressive values, including developing methods of social organization and

---

<sup>23</sup> Cooley, *Human Nature*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Horton Cooley Papers, Box 3, Vol. 21 (November 1, 1913-April 11, 1919), Entry 21, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 187.

supporting democratic efficiency. These values would represent Cooley's legacy for future generations of American sociologists and psychiatrists who wished to study Cooley's interpersonal perspectives on society, yet the historical influence of the Social Gospel played a largely unrecognized role for inspiring Cooley's understanding of idealism on a national level.

## Bibliography

*Primary Sources*

Ames, Scribner Edward. *The New Orthodoxy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1918.

Cooley, Charles Horton. Papers: 1872-1930. University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Cooley, Charles Horton. *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Scribner's & Sons, 1902.

Cooley, Charles Horton. *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind*. New York: Scribner's & Sons, 1909.

Cooley, Charles Horton. *Social Process*. New York: Scribner's & Sons, 1918.

Dewey, John. "The School as Social Center." *The Elementary School Teacher* 3, no. 2 (October 1902): 73-86.

Dewey, John. *The Public and Its Problems*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927.

Fromm, Erich. *The Sane Society*. New York: Rinehart & Company, 1955.

McConnell, Francis J. *Democratic Christianity*. New York: Macmillan, 1919.

Merton, Robert K. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968.

Sullivan, Harry Stack. *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Norton & Company, 1953.

Sullivan, Harry Stack. *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*. Edited by Helen S. Perry and Mary L. Gawel. New York: Norton & Company, 1953.

Sullivan, Harry Stack. *The Fusion of Psychiatry and Social Science*. Edited by Helen S. Perry. New York: Norton & Company, 1964.

*Secondary Sources*

- Clark, Michael D. "Charles Horton Cooley and the Modern Necessity of Tradition." *Modern Age* 36, no. 1 (March 1994): 277-285.
- Cohen, Marshall J. *Charles Horton Cooley and the Social Self in American Thought*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1982.
- Curtis, Susan. *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Czitrom, Daniel J. *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982.
- Hinkle, Roscoe C. "Charles Horton Cooley's General Sociological Orientation." *The Sociological Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 5-20.
- Hutchinson, William. *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.
- Jacobs, Glenn. *Charles Horton Cooley: Imagining Social Reality*. Boston: The University of Massachusetts Press, 2006.
- Jandy, Edward C. *Charles Horton Cooley: His Life and His Social Theory*. New York: The Dryden Press, 1942.
- Peters, John Durham. "Satan and Savior: Mass Communication in Progressive Thought." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6, no. 3 (September 1989): 247-263.
- Quandt, Jean B. *From the Small Town to the Great Community*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970.
- Winterer, Caroline. "A Happy Medium: The Sociology of Charles Horton Cooley." *The Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 30, no. 1 (January 1994): 19-27.