

On the sociogenesis of sociology*

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Sociology as a recognisable branch of science grew into shape in the first half of the 19th century. It had not during these early stages the distinct character of a scientific discipline which it has now. One did not conceive it as a subject to be taught at universities. Those who contributed to its growth did not do so as a profession. Departmentalisation of social sciences closely connected with the task of teaching at a university and with the need for a division of labour in research had not gone, at that early stage, as far as it has now. The boundary lines between different sciences of society, such as economics, politics, history, or sociology, and between all of them and philosophy were less sharply drawn. And if one regards these different academic departments not simply as temporary organisational divisions convenient for teaching and research, but as conceptual counterparts of eternal divisions in society itself, one is at some disadvantage in understanding the problems raised by the early development of the sciences of society, - and, incidentally, also many of the problems of their present conditions. Adam Smith never called himself an "economist". Malthus and Marx never thought of themselves as "sociologists", and the latter would have hated to be so called. Enquiries into the social genesis of sociology cannot be made on the assumption that one need pay attention only to specific authors who called themselves "sociologists" or who according to the established canons

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are now counted among the founding fathers of sociology.

As it emerged in the first half of the 19th century "sociology" was, like "economics", one manifestation among others of a specific transformation in the mode of thinking about problems of society which was not confined to a few great writers. It was symptomatic of the transition from a pre-scientific to a more scientific approach to these problems. After some preparatory moves in that direction in the pre-revolutionary, "traditional" societies of Europe, particularly in England and France, during the latter part of the 18th century, one can observe a major break-through in that direction after the Revolution. The transformation gathered strength in the first half of the 19th century and there is good reason to believe that we are still in the middle of it.

This paper is concerned with the early phases of this transformation. In the narrower sense the question is: What were the characteristic changes in the modes of thinking about problems of society to which one refers if one speaks of a transformation, a "break-through" from a pre-scientific to a more scientific approach to these problems? The wider question is: What were the characteristic changes in the structure of society of which these changes in the mode of thinking about society formed part?

There are many examples which one could choose in order to illustrate the change in the approach to problems of society to which I have referred. One of them which I shall take as my point of departure is the development of the concept "economic" and its derivatives. One is so familiar with the term that one may easily assume the concept has existed from time immemorial. In fact it is of very recent date; it is hardly more than two centuries ago that people began to conceptualise clearly certain aspects of their world in the form to which we now refer if we speak of "the economy" or of "economic factors", or of "economics" as a science.

Initially, the term "economic", like other terms

which now refer to a nexus of interdependent functions referred only to specific social activities of individual people. One can trace it back to a Greek word whose derivatives probably became part of the English via the French language. It referred in the first place to the ordering of a person's household, to the management of people's domestic affairs. It was used as a more learned relative of the term husbandry; "to economise" means even today "to husband one's resources". That was the stage in which the term referred only to specific activities, to the way people acted and, one thought, ought to act. In the 17th and early 18th centuries its normative implications did not apply to all people in a society; they were still mainly characteristic of what were then men of the lower social strata, of people who worked for their living, such as merchants and traders, who had to "live within their means", who were expected to subordinate their expenditure to their income and perhaps even to consume less than they earned in order to get rich.

It is often assumed today that there is only one possible approach to the vexed problem how to square income with expenditure. It requires, one believes, nothing more than the exercise of one's reasoning power to see that one cannot, and should not, spend more than one earns. However, in this as in many other cases an act of reasoning which appears simply as "rational", as "logical", as an act of which all human beings are capable independently of the stage of development and the structure of the society to which they belong, reveals itself, on closer inspection, as an act which people can learn to perform only under special conditions, at a specific stage of social development, and which is bound up with the emergence of a specific social code. The development to its present meaning of the term "economic" and the whole family of concepts associated with it, was closely connected with the development of this social code. For the greater part, throughout the history of mankind, the majority of people in a society did not refrain from spending more than they earned because they regarded it as wrong, as unwise, as uneconomical, but simply because not

more was available to them to spend. The question did not arise. A social code which demanded that one *should* keep within one's means, that one should not spend *more* than one earned and preferably less, - an ethos which perscribed as a social virtue that one should on one's own accord balance one's own account and, if possible, save part of one's earnings for investment was a relatively late and a relatively rare form of social ethos. It could only emerge in a society with liquid resources sufficiently large to make credit facilities and investment opportunities available to a wide range of people. The social ethos emerged together with the temptation which it was designed to counter-act. The social code of the rich and the mighty was, throughout men's history, with very few exceptions, almost the opposite of that which demanded the subordination of consumption to income. It demanded from them, as a rule, a high rate of spending regardless of income. Standards of consumption were set for people of wealth and power by their social rank and the public opinion of their fellows. The penalty for not living up to these expectations was loss of face and status. How they met the expenses commensurate with their rank was their affair. Today conspicuous consumption often appears simply as an individual vice. If it gets a family into debt one often perceives it as a sign of individual stupidity. Given a social structure and a teaching which requires foresight and the postponement of many short-time pleasures for long-term rewards, such judgments may be justified. But they are quite inappropriate if applied to social formations with a different structure and a different social code.

It was this type of code, a status consumption code, which dominated what we now call the "economic" attitudes of the upper strata of society in the pre-industrial "traditional" European societies prior to the French Revolution, particularly in continental countries such as France, less uncompromisingly in maritime countries, such as Holland and England. In the usage of these higher ranking strata, of people of quality who were expected to "live up to their rank" and to spend in accordance with their status, terms coming from

the root "economic" seem to have had, at least up to the latter part of the 18th century a somewhat derogatory undertone. They probably associated them with the lower orders, especially in France where contact with commerce and trade for the upper ranks of society was strictly taboo and where, in spite of the activities of ministers descended from the ranks of the commercial middle classes such as Colbert and some of his successors, the feeling that earning one's money by commerce, trade and industry and all the attitudes connected with it, were rather contemptible, permeated the dominant value system as well as the language almost up to the end of the *ancien régime*.

The rise of the term "economic" with its derivatives from its use as an action term to that as a function term was closely connected with the rise in power of social strata which valued attitudes now conceived as "rational" or "economic" such as balancing income and expenditure or selling at a profit or saving for investment. But one of the most noticeable steps in that direction had already been taken before under the "traditional" system of the *ancien régime* in France where the rise of the industrial and commercial classes was still blocked and intellectual innovations were for the greater part still confined to people who spoke for and to small power élites centred on court society and high ranking state officials with all the limitations to intellectual innovations which such a public imposes.

One can determine with fair precision the first major turning point in the development of the term "economic" towards a more scientific meaning. It was not a sudden break, - not a "break with traditionalism", but, as in many other cases, rather one of a series of major and minor breakthroughs in that direction. By looking at it in some detail one can gain a better understanding of the wider change in the mode of thinking about society generally which came into its own later in the 19th century. The first decisive change in the meaning of the term "economic" was a shift from the level of private to that of public administration, from a reference to household management of

individual persons to the "household" management of a country as a whole. The composite phrase "political economy" was symptomatic of this change. The people who launched the term economic towards its wider, less personal and more scientific use and steered it into the channel where it during the early 19th century gained its sharper definition, were a Court physician, François Quesney, and his disciples. As far as one can see, they were the first people who linked the term "economic" to the term "science". They regarded their own theories as the embodiment of the "*science économique*". Their contemporaries knew them simply as the "*Économistes*". From a book published in 1767 by one of them, Du Pont de Nemours, which was called "*Physiocratie ou constitution naturelle du Gouvernement*" the whole group became gradually known as "Physiocrats", probably because the name "economists" spread from the original *Économistes* to other schools of thought and one needed a distinguishing label for the former. Thus a neologism propagated by one man and his disciples as a distinguishing mark of their specific body of doctrines became in course of time a familiar term and a familiar concept of the ordinary language first in France and England and then in many other languages all over the world.

This turning point in the fortunes of a term which played an increasing part in the vocabulary of the following centuries provides some indication of the changing pattern of thinking with regard to society. Close scrutiny of the genesis of concepts can be of considerable help for a sociological diagnosis of the wider social transformation in response to which words change their meaning and new concepts get under way. How far ideas expressed in the book of an outstanding individual are representative of a wider public is often difficult to ascertain. A history of ideas culled from the books of a few selected authors has some similarity with the vista which one has from an aeroplane passing over a mountain range of which one is only able to see the summits; the rest is shrouded in clouds. If a new meaning given to a word by a few individuals enters the public language of a society, - enters it not only as a passing fad, but

as a permanent feature and gives rise to further developments in that direction, one can be quite sure that the new turn given to the word was more than a private whim or the isolated insight of an exceptional person. One can be sure that it corresponded to the needs of a whole public for intellectual tools which could help them to cope with new problems on their mental horizon. The difficulty is that once a concept has become firmly established in a language and has found a home in a specific word, one is apt to take it for granted; the capacity to perceive different shades of meaning in the uses of the same word at an earlier stage of the concept's development becomes blunted. One may think it an odd occupation for a sociologist to trace the development of a concept. But it is an eminently sociological task; it is representative of a developmental approach to the problems of thinking and of knowledge as an integral part of a theory of knowledge in which the sociological and the philosophical traditions are no longer divorced.

The fortunes of the term economic are an example. The Physiocrats were among the first, not simply to say in a general way, but to demonstrate by means of empirical evidence that society like nature had its inherent laws which one could not neglect without doing great harm. It was not the idea of "laws", of self-regulating forces in society as such which constituted an innovation of thought. That idea had been the key-note of many philosophical doctrines before. It usually took the form of a belief in nature as the regulative force in society. Left to its own devices undisturbed by the artificial interference of unenlightened governments, that was the gist of the argument, nature in society would on its own produce a happier and more harmonious life among men. Rousseau's work was only a paradigmatic crystallisation of a strand of feeling in that sense which run through many writings and discussions of 18th century society. But like many other philosophical ideas of that age it had the form of a social creed. One believed it or did not believe it, but one did not think of it as a scientific doctrine in need of empirical verification. The Physiocrats

as well as Adam Smith were profoundly influenced by this social creed. Both believed that nature in society if only its own "laws" were allowed to assert themselves freely, would automatically secure the welfare and prosperity of men. But in their case the social belief in the goodness of nature as a self-regulating force in society was brought into closer contact than before with a body of empirical evidence. The Physiocrats first, and a little later Adam Smith and others, used empirical data to demonstrate the "laws", the self-regulating forces operating in society.

Again, many of the empirical data which they used had been available before their time. In circles of artisans and manufacturers the practical advantages of division of labour had been known long before the concept was used to demonstrate a self-regulating social mechanism and the example of pin making used by Adam Smith can be found in popular French writings already in the first half of the 18th century. The demand for free competition as a simple practical measure had been made long before "free competition" became the centrepiece of an "economic" theory. Mercantilist writers had collected and, on a small scale, conceptually organised a good deal of the knowledge about self-regulating mechanisms which we now classify as "economic".

The intellectual innovations of the Physiocrats, like those of Adam Smith, were to a large extent feats of synthesis. They connected with specific empirical data what had been before a philosophical creed. Quesnay, a man with a physician's training and a scientific outlook, combined the belief in the beneficial effects of the laws of nature in society with the "economic" data at hand. An idea with the function of a social religion enriched by a fund of empirical data transformed itself into an idea with the function of a scientific hypothesis. In that sense the Physiocrats represented a break-through towards a more scientific approach. Their success in showing that one could actually demonstrate the self-regulating mechanisms, the "natural laws" of society by means of factual evidence was probably more responsible for the

spread of the term "economic" in the sense which they gave it than the actual content of their theories which did not have a far-reaching effect on the development of economic thinking. The classical economists and sociologists, some more and others less, went much further in their attempts to link ideas to evidence. Nevertheless, their ideas too had this double character half way between a social religion and a scientific hypothesis.

The growing interdependence and fusion between two, until then, still largely independent streams of tradition, between large-scale philosophical concepts of book-writers often without direct experience of practical problems on the one hand and on the other a stream of practical knowledge of specific social data, which had accumulated over the generations among leading administrators or merchants gave significance to the example set by the Physiocrats. Quesnay and his disciples were probably the first to develop specific tools which made it possible not only to perceive the subjects of a king as a society, but also to observe and measure specific aspects of the new social level. Just as Harvey's theory of the way in which blood circulated through the human body was not only an observational, but also a conceptual achievement which gave impetus to further observations in terms of the organism as a unit both of theoretical synthesis and empirical observation, so the Physiocrats worked out specific models whose centre-piece was the concept of an annual income of a whole country. Their theories showed how this income circulated through the three main classes of people which they distinguished in society and which were the agrarian predecessors of Marx's industrial classes. They showed how it reproduced itself. They explicitly stated the need for forming hypotheses to show which variations in the distribution of a country's total annual income were harmful to society and which were beneficial. They perceived, in short, certain aspects of society consistently as a nexus of functions. The nexus was to a high degree self-regulating like the processes of nature. It followed its own laws. And although Quesnay and his disciples still conceived

these laws as natural laws, they insisted that these laws unlike those of philosophers, had not been established deductively, not by mere thinking. Like the laws of natural science those of economic science could be established and proved with the help of factual evidence. A philosophical stream and an observational stream brought together resulted in a more scientific approach to social problems.

The first moves towards this new approach already occurred within the framework of an autocratically ruled and still largely pre-industrial society. The seeds of the innovation were already there. But the difference between the conditions under which they appeared in these traditional societies and those under which they developed into a more mature scientific approach make some of the blockages visible to which they were exposed by the former.

It was still immensely difficult in these European pre-industrial societies to imagine that industry could be more productive of wealth than agriculture, forestry, mining, - than the good earth. Even Adam Smith, with all his Scottish and English experiences behind him, still wrote, and was taken to task for it later by Ricardo, of "the advantages which the land possesses over every other source of useful produce". One is able to think differently in contemporary pre-industrial societies because the example of wealth produced by industry and the corresponding theoretical insight are already there. To envisage the full potentialities of machine industry in the 18th century was much more difficult. For many people, certainly for the Physiocrats the very positive emotional undertones of the word "nature" probably added to the value one attached to the land as a source of wealth. Their dislike of Colbert's policy which favoured manufacture and commerce together with the traditional value system of the French upper classes who rather despised people engaged in these occupations probably helps to explain the part allotted to them in the theoretical scheme of the Physiocrats. They entered these classes into their models as "sterile classes" and proved with

elaborate arguments that the only classes who contributed to the wealth of a country were those who cultivated the land.

Moreover, they thought in terms of a country, a kingdom, a state, a nation, not yet in terms of "society" or "economy", distinct from them. For all their reforming zeal, Quesnay and his disciples, like most earlier advocates of an enlightened policy, aimed at improving, not at destroying the existing order.

The *ancien régime*, like other regimes, set specific limits not only to what people could write, but also to what they could think. Only if one realises how difficult it was for people who themselves moved among the higher ranks of society in such a traditional social system to break through these boundaries, can one appreciate the courage which was needed in order to say and to demonstrate with the help of factual evidence that society had laws of its own which were independent of laws given by their rulers. The beginnings of the concept "society" as something distinct from the "state" lay here. The daring of such a conception can only be understood if one revives for one's understanding the social implications of this conception. In the past it had been difficult enough to convince powerful men in church and state that nature followed laws of its own which were independent of any secular or spiritual authority and which one had to study by means of special procedures before one could hope to control the forces subject to such laws. It meant that specialists for the study of nature could claim authority and could exercise power of a kind which ran counter to the established order of things. Implicitly, if not explicitly the idea of a world ruled by autonomous natural laws was an attack against established authorities. The same was true of the nascent idea of "society" as an autonomous order of events with its own inherent regularities, its own "laws". To tell, even by implication, to kings and ministers, in traditional societies with the immense power accumulating in their hands that they were not the supreme givers of laws in the land, but that before taking decisions they had first to study the in-

herent laws of society, and to take counsel with those who had knowledge of these laws, - this in an oligarchically ruled state was not only a daring thing to say, but even daring to conceive. One can still feel the pressure of this situation if one reads, for instance, the words in which Du Pont de Nemours implores the authorities to take note of the new science:

"Supreme administrators of the people", he wrote, "images of the sovereign of all beings, this sublime science is made for you; you will recognise there the source of your rights, the basis and extent of your authority which has not and cannot have any limits except those imposed by God himself. You will learn there to share, so to say, with him the sweet prerogative to make mortals happy by executing the laws which he has prescribed for society (...) In this science you will discover the indissoluble chain with which he has bound your power and your wealth to the *observance* of the laws of the *social order*" (1).

The difference in the attitude towards governments between Physiocrats and classical economists of the first part of the 19th century brings home at once the connection between changes in the use of the term "economic" and changes in the distribution of power in a society. The Physiocrats, like the mercantilists before them, had not questioned the fact that "economic" like other state affairs could and should be regulated by those who ruled the country. They had only demanded that the administrators of their country should pay heed to the "natural", the self-regulating capacity of social functions in the same way in which a physician might pay heed to the self-regulating propensities of the human organism. The classical economists went much further than that. They too put in the centre of their doctrines the self-regulating capacities of specific social functions, the economic "laws". But they insisted that the welfare of society was best served if these self-regulating mechanisms were allowed to operate in society without any government interference whatsoever. The Physiocrats had regarded their doctrines as a vital contribution to the art of government. Adam Smith had described political economy as a science of statesmen or legislators.

Now political economy began gradually to transform itself into economics pure and simple. Its representatives claimed autonomy, sometimes relative, sometimes complete, in at least two respects which were interdependent and which were highly characteristic of the idea of economics as a science and as a discipline separate from others. They claimed that an autonomous nexus of specifically economic functions and mechanisms existed in society of which the functions and mechanisms set in motion by free competition between individual traders, merchants and manufacturers were the supreme example. And they claimed autonomy for theories and concepts which demonstrated how these economic mechanisms functioned and why they functioned in that way.

Their claim for autonomy in this double sense was symptomatic of the changed position which these writers in 19th century England, compared with the writers of the *ancien régime*, held in relation to the ruling circles of the state. And the changes in the position and attitudes of these writers themselves were bound up with changes in the distribution of power in society at large. Compared with the traditional societies the power of the commercial and industrial middle-classes in relation not only to one specific government, but in relation to governments generally had vastly increased. Many of their representatives had clamoured in the past and were now clamouring with increasing insistence that governments should not interfere with their activities. "*Laissez nous faire*" was the motto of a little pamphlet which a cotton spinner published in the 1830's against governmental interference. People from the rising industrial middle classes demanded in the first place greater autonomy, greater freedom for themselves. And that they gained their point at least to a large extent, that the scope within which business operations could function without government interference became, compared with conditions in traditional societies, very wide was characteristic of a change in the distribution of power which had many facets; in this case it showed an access of power in favour of broad middle-strata of society relative to governments. From the

reading of history books one may sometimes get the impression that the middle-classes, and later the working classes, gained greater power mainly because they were given the vote. The reverse was the case. They were given the vote because their power in society, actually and potentially, had increased. The power they exercised by means of their vote represented a secondary feedback mechanism reinforcing the increased power primarily derived from growing dependence of the former ruling classes on middle-class and later on working class functions, combined with the pressure they could exercise, even without the vote, by means of their numbers and their growing wealth in large urban areas.

And as the power potential of middle-class groups increased, as they were left to act without government interference in the pursuit of their business aims, their interlocking operations themselves, buying and selling not only in local markets, but in nationwide markets, became more self-regulating and autonomous, followed, as it were, laws of their own. If up to the threshold of the 19th century the principal fluctuations which affected the lives of ordinary people were fluctuations determined by the laws of nature, namely good and bad harvests, from the 19th century on, increasingly, peoples' lives were affected by fluctuations determined by "social laws", by the self-regulating mechanisms of business cycles who quite visibly had a high degree of autonomy even in relation to the most powerful governments. The shift from a very uneven, almost unilateral balance of power towards a less uneven, more multilateral balance did not create, but greatly accentuated the relatively impersonal and self-regulating propensities of social phenomena such as national and international markets.

And so, finally, the growing experiences of social phenomena like these as phenomena which had a force of their own, as phenomena like nature, and yet social in character, dependent on human actions and yet with a measure of autonomy in relation to each human action and not easily controllable by human agencies, stimulated the quest for new ways of thinking about society. They made it more

apparent that the traditional ways of thinking about social phenomena were not wholly adequate. They created a demand for specialists who could do for these social phenomena what natural scientists had done for the order of nature. The relative autonomy of phenomena to which one came to apply increasingly the special term "economic" justified the claim of specialists for the relative autonomy of theories and concepts by means of which they hoped to represent and to explain the "laws" which these phenomena followed. The transformation of thinking from the stage in which one spoke and thought of all regularities which one encountered as "nature" to another where the special character of economic phenomena was clearly conceptualised as such, as specifically economic was very slow, and so was the transformation from a stage where the assistance of nature appeared as the main factor in the creation of human wealth to another where one clearly and unequivocally conceptualised human wealth in social terms. Thus, rent, traditionally often conceived primarily as payment for the use of land derived from the produce of nature, was now perceived in the context of a market. "It is not from the produce", wrote Buchanan in 1814 commenting on an observation by Adam Smith, "but from the price at which the produce is sold, that rent is derived; and this price is got not because nature assists in the production, but because it is the price which suits the consumption to the supply". And Ricardo added to this an observation which, one may think, should have been obvious before, but which probably could only be made when certain blockages of perception created by the traditional belief in nature as the main producer of wealth, had been removed: "When land is most abundant, when most productive and most fertile it yields no rent". The growing autonomy of social phenomena such as markets found expression in a gradual emancipation of thinking from the models of an earlier age, in a growing autonomy of thinking about these phenomena. The rising science of economics began to form theories of its own and to assert its own autonomy in relation to the older sciences of nature.

What has been said, shows that this claim had at

least three strands. It was a claim asserting the autonomy of the nexus of functions which formed the subject-matter of the science of economics, - of their autonomy in relation to other functions, the subject-matter of other disciplines. It was a claim to autonomy of the science whose subject-matter this nexus was, - of its autonomy in relation to other sciences, and that of its theories and methods in relation to those of other disciplines. And it was also a claim to autonomy of the class of people who were specialists in the performance of these functions in relation to other social groups and particularly in relation to governments. This development towards greater autonomy which one can observe here in the development of one of the rising social sciences is one of the signposts on the way from a pre-scientific to a more scientific mode of thinking everywhere. One of the aspects of a change in that direction is always the growing recognition that a field of events has a specific order with regularities of connections *sui generis*, which before had been conceived as a subordinate field of a larger universe; as long as it is conceived as such its specific order remains inaccessible to men's comprehensions; it is overshadowed by the categories, the evaluations, the habits of thinking suited to the ruling order of the universe of which it is conceived as a subordinate part and as these categories, these evaluations and habits are in fact unsuited to the specific order of the latter, it often remains in a state where it appears to have, like "nature" in former days or like "history" today, no particular order, - no pattern of connections of which one can be certain at all; it appears as a largely unpatterned, accidental or mysterious medley of events without any regularities of connections. What we conceive as the nexus of physical events still appeared largely as such as long as one expected to find explanations for part events mainly in terms of supernatural forces. And, again, the nexus of social events appeared largely as such as long as one expected to find explanations for part-connections there either in supernatural terms or in terms of the natural sciences. In each case the recognition that a specific level of the universe, a specific type of events had an order and regularities of its own was one of the main charac-

teristics of the rise and the coming of age of a scientific specialism devoted to the task of opening up and conceptualising this specific level with its specific regularities.

Without special conditions, the subject-matter of sociological enquiries, the move towards greater autonomy of sociology would have lacked impetus or remained blocked. Both together, a specific type of order and specific instruments of enquiry attuned to this order, form the basis for the claim to relative autonomy of groups of scientific specialists devoted to the exploration of a particular field of events. If such a group cannot demonstrate that the special subject-matter of its enquiries constitutes a field of this type with its specific order whose exploration requires specific skills, their *raison d'être* as relatively autonomous group in the academic universe is threatened. Sometimes a group of scientific specialists develops highly specialised theories and concepts and tenuously preserves them not so much because they are particularly useful in the exploration of their special field; in fact they may have the opposite effect; but because they represent the distinguishing badge of their specialism and of themselves as a distinct and autonomous group.

But this problem did hardly arise in the early stages of the development of economics. At that time, economists did not yet form a distinct professional group. The fortunes of the rising science were still more directly linked to those of specific classes in society at large. Its claim to greater autonomy was closely associated with that of social groups whose occupational specialism itself came to be closely associated with the meaning of the term "economic". The social rise of groups specifically concerned with buying and selling, with paying wages and calculating profits, and other similar activities went hand in hand with that of specialists who made it their business to explore and to explain what happened in this field of events and to construct for this purpose theoretical models demonstrating its regularities or "laws" in the same way in which natural scien-

tists constructed theories and established laws in the field of "nature".

One can see at once the difficulties with which one has to contend if one tries to unravel the rise of social sciences as a sociological problem. The subject-matter of the rising natural sciences did not change while men's approach to nature changed from a pre-scientific to a more scientific form, from the less differentiated, traditional, theologically ruled concept of the universe to another within which "nature" as subject-matter of sciences had greater autonomy. But the corresponding change in men's approaches to the social level of the universe went hand in hand with specific changes in the object of enquiries. In a double sense, as changes in the conditions of the enquiring subjects and as changes in the structure of the objects of enquiry, the development of society played its part in the rise of a more scientific approach to society. It may be useful to mention briefly some of the basic tasks with which men were confronted on that road. They are still very much with us. But in retrospect one can see them more clearly; one can understand better the initial, as well as some of the present, difficulties of social sciences if one becomes aware of them; it is no particular merit that one can conceptualise them more clearly today than one was able to do in these earlier stages.

There was the task of learning from the models of the older natural sciences and at the same time of emancipating one's own theories and methods from these models whenever one's evidence demanded it. For part of the 19th century it was taken for granted that every recurrent regularity of connection which one thought to have discovered in explorations of society and which one considered to have some kind of necessity, was a "law" more or less of the same kind as the "laws" discovered in the classical physical sciences and pointed to a necessity of the same kind as that conceptualised as "mechanical necessity" by these sciences. In many cases the finding of such regularities in society was automatically interpreted as proof that what one had found was quite literally a "law of

nature". The growing stature, the rising authority and prestige of the natural sciences reinforced this tendency. Whether the representatives of the rising social sciences thought of themselves directly as discoverers of natural laws or whether they merely identified without further thought scientific procedure generally with procedure of the natural sciences, from the start the emancipation of the social sciences from the ruling models of the natural sciences proved a difficult task.

Another task which proved in the long run no less difficult was that of conceptualising what one studied in less personal terms than those currently used in society at large. In every field of study conceptualisations in terms of acts of living beings, human or superhuman, form the point of departure from which conceptualisation starts. On the level of the universe studied by the physical sciences action terms had been increasingly transformed into function terms. On the level explored by the social sciences this was, in spite of the already existing models set by the natural sciences and often enough because of these models, hardly less difficult than it had been there. It was difficult to conceive phenomena in terms of configurations of persons, as networks of impersonal functions, which one in ordinary life largely experienced in terms of aims and acts of persons. It proved an exacting task to clarify the relationship between these configurations, which usually took a course and followed regularities that were not intended by those who formed them, and the acts and intentions of the constituent persons themselves; it proved an exacting task, in other words, to clarify the relationship between social acts and social functions; it was difficult to conceive and to express clearly that the regularities which one observed and which one conceived in the early stages of this development as social or economic "laws" were regularities of configurations of people, not regularities of people.

Again another task was that of distinguishing in one's enquiries between the sociological diagnosis of functional interdependencies in the development, structure and functioning of societies and state-

ments representative of aims, creeds, ideals and evaluations of specific groups. It was difficult to distinguish clearly in one's own as well as in other people's scientific efforts between their function as instrument and representation of scientific research and their function as weapon in the struggles of contending social groups in society at large, - between their scientific and their ideological functions.

There are many examples illustrating the difficulties posed by these last two tasks in the early development of economic science. One of the most obvious is the invention of the "*homo oeconomicus*" as an explanatory hypothesis. It shows how difficult it was not to express primarily as properties of people what were in fact properties of configurations which people formed. One of the major concerns of 19th century economists was that of studying, conceptualising and explaining the regularities of markets. The rising, industrial middle-classes in England had fought successfully for the freedom of markets from extraneous interference. After a long period of gestation, aided by the development of railways, national and super-national markets for a growing number of commodities were in full operation. They were one of the phenomena of that period which help to explain the rise of a scientific approach to social problems. They are a good example of the kind of phenomena with which social sciences were concerned. Although relatively free from deliberate human regulations, they appeared to have regularities of their own; they were like the phenomena of nature, self-regulating. They were formed by men and yet followed their own laws. Here was a task very similar, as it seemed, to that of natural scientists: How could one express, how could one explain these regularities? That was the question. Its solution was made difficult by the fact that one had already firm and fixed ideas as to how it ought to be done, and that norms and ideals coloured one's selection of relevancies. Here is an example:

"Before commencing the inquiry", wrote John St. Mill in his Principles of Political Economy (2), "into the laws of value and price (...) I must give warning, once for

all, that the cases (...) I contemplate are those in which values and prices are determined by competition alone. In so far only as they are thus determined, can they be reduced to any assignable law. The buyers must be supposed as studious to buy cheap, as the seller to sell dear. The values and prices, therefore, to which our conclusions apply, are mercantile values and prices; such prices as are quoted in pricecurrents; prices in the wholesale markets in which buying as well as selling is a matter of business; in which the buyers take pains to know, and generally do know, the lowest price at which an article of a given quality can be obtained; and in which, therefore, the axiom is true, that there cannot be, for the same article, of the same quality, two prices in the same market. Our propositions will be true in a more qualified sense of retail prices; the prices paid in shops for personal consumption. For such things there often are not merely two, but many prices in different shops, or even in the same shop; (...) Purchase for private use, even by people in business, are not always made on business principles (...) Either from indolence, or carelessness or because people think it fine to pay and ask no questions, three-fourths of those who can afford it give much higher prices than necessary for the things they consume while the poor often do the same from ignorance and defect of judgment, want of time for searching and making enquiries and not unfrequently from coercion, open or disguised. For these reasons, retail prices do not follow with all the regularity which might be expected, the action of the causes which determine wholesale prices (...) In all reasoning about prices, the proviso must be understood 'supposing all parties to take care of their own interest'. Inattention to these distinctions has led to improper applications of the abstract principles of political economy (...)"

In spite of all protestations about induction, analysis was not yet primarily directed towards the study of society as it was. It was to a high extent dictated by preconceived ideals; it was directed towards demonstrating what society ought to be. The ideals had many facets. One of them was that of "rationality" of conduct in buying and selling; it was almost a moral demand that one should buy as cheaply as possible and sell as dearly as possible. Although it appeared, and often appears, simply as a result of man's eternal

reasoning power, the attitude as well as the ethos had their focal point in social classes whose social situation they reflected. One can see from the slightly deprecating manner in which Mill spoke of the behaviour of people who in buying goods did not behave in accordance with the businessmen's code that he disapproved of them, although he understood the dependence of their behaviour on their social situation and as part of it on the nature of the market in which they bought.

Mill's reasoning shows how the demand for "rational behaviour" in the sense of the businessman's ethos merged with, and in fact satisfied, the demand for finding and expressing regularities in a form as nearly akin as possible to that of the natural sciences, in the form of eternal and immutable "laws". For the same reason, however much one saw that the regularities which one analysed were in fact regularities of markets, one could not help in one's conceptualisations to fall back upon expressions which made them appear, in the first place, as regularities of people. It was still too difficult to conceptualise adequately observations at which on occasions Adam Smith had already tried his hand which indicated that phenomena like division of labour did not develop as a result of intentions which anyone had to bring them about. But whatever the mode of development of markets, once they were under way, once they had reached in their development their 19th century level, especially in commercial countries like England, they and their regularities steered the behaviour of individuals involved in them into certain definite channels. In a vacuum, independently of the existence of such markets, the characteristic code of conduct of their participants could have hardly maintained itself. It is doubtful whether the corresponding behaviour in such a case could have been called "rational".

Hence all attempts which were made at the time to explain in the reverse order the functioning of markets from a particular type of individual behaviour, to build models which proceeded from

individual motivations to markets as a kind of epiphenomenon, were bound to lead to the odd intellectual contortions of which the ideal type of *homo oeconomicus* was an example.

The time had not come when one could clearly and consistently envisage social theories as function theories. The science of economics though in fact contributing a great deal to the understanding of functional connections and regularities formulated, and continued to formulate for a long time, its basic theories as action theories. Its basic models were constructed largely as models of the behaviour of individuals. In the last resort economics appeared to their representatives, as many social sciences do today, as a behavioural not, in the first place, as a configurational science. The nature of its subject-matter, and above all the problem of the relationship between individual action and social function, between configurations of people and the behaviour of people who formed them remained largely unexplored. One started from models of actions and never quite reached the stage, on the level of a general theory, where models were clearly conceived as representing a nexus of functions. The tendency to start from actions of individuals had many reasons. But it was greatly strengthened by the stress which the rising social middle-classes laid in terms of values and ideals on freely competing individuals. The strength of one's sense of values blunted one's perception of functions as such. The postulate that individuals should be left to compete freely found expression in theoretical models which proved the beneficial effects for society as a whole that must follow if individuals were left to compete freely. Of the many tasks with which the rising social sciences had to struggle one of the most difficult was that of facing up to, and of examining critically, the problem of their representatives' own involvement, of the double functions of all the early theories in the field, - of their functions as such, as theories with the claim to represent the structure and functioning of a particular region of the human universe and to be, as such, valid for all people on earth, and of their functions as ideologies,

as transient weapons in the struggles of contemporary groups.

This, then, the move towards a more scientific approach in the field which we now call "economics", and the development in that direction of the concept "economic" itself, is one example of a change on a much broader front. Towards the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century the old traditional forms of society characterised by a high concentration of power in the hands of relatively small groups and the corresponding forms of thinking about society with their strong emphasis on the laws of a country and the regulating power of governments gave way, gradually or abruptly, to other forms of society and other forms of thinking about society. The distribution of power began to become less uneven than it had been. As a result certain spheres in society, such as markets, were left free from government regulations. They were left to find their own level. And the problem of the forces at work in such social configurations, not directed by any person one could name and least of all by any person who helped to form it, began to engage the thoughts of men. It was understandable that they conceived what they experienced in terms of "nature". That was the only models they had for conceptualising a self-regulating and impersonal nexus of functions.

A change in the same direction on a slightly different and on a broader front occurred in the field we now call "sociology". What has been said about the development of economics, more limited in its scope, may facilitate and somewhat shorten the task with which one is confronted if one tries to clarify the same problems with regard to this other facet of the rising science of society, to sociology in the narrower sense of the word.

On the face of it, the early sociologists differed far more from each other than the early economists. Some of them had not direct communications with each other. Few of them felt, as most of the early economists, at least of the early English economists, did, that they all stood, as masters, as disciples or opponents in the same line of

succession.

The links of the early sociologists were of a different kind. They were bound to each other and in their work showed some very fundamental similarities not so much because of their influence upon each other but because they were confronted with similar problems by certain basic similarities of their situation in the widest sense of the word, by fundamental changes in the structure of societies which occurred in their time as well as by the stage of development which the modes of thinking and the fund of knowledge about society had reached. However different, however antagonistic their ideas were, in these respects they had much in common. Their social ideals were frequently different. Some of them stood intellectually on different sides of the class barriers. But they shared with each other what one might call the same situational platform. Some of the basic questions which they tried to answer were the same. And, as is usually the case with men of the same historical hour, in some respects their approach to the problems was also the same.

Among the most significant of these common features was the fact that they all conceptualised certain common experiences as "society". The novelty of their concept at the time is often concealed from us because we are familiar with it. Central to the common way in which they used the term was the meaning which they gave to it as something which was not determined in its course and its functioning by governments. They distinguished "society" with greater deliberation than people had done in previous generations from the state. Like the economists, only in a much broader sense, they perceived what they called "society" as self-regulating. They all were trying to discover the "laws" of society, - not the "laws" that had been set by law-givers and were administered by state appointed authorities, but the laws underlying all men-made laws, - the laws inherent in society as natural laws were inherent in nature. Montesquieu had already tried to penetrate to what lay behind the men-made laws, to the "spirit of the laws". One is reminded in reading this great

book how difficult it was in that prerevolutionary era to penetrate to, and to conceptualise, what we now might call the social conditions of laws and their regularities. The early sociologists were more successful in penetrating to this layer of their world. They began to perceive what they called "society" as a region of the universe which had a degree of autonomy in relation to others, which had or which constituted an order *sui generis*. And they tried to present in their writing this order. The picture they had of this order was often very different, but the task they set themselves was the same. They all tried to solve the problem in accordance with the examples of the older sciences. They tried to do it in a scientific manner. That is to say they tried to prove the general ideas which they had about the regularities, about the "laws" of society by means of factual evidence. Whether or not they were in agreement with Comte in other respects, in this respect the early sociologists were at one, they regarded the study of society as a "positive" study. The fund of knowledge about societies had reached a stage where they could substantiate claims to particular regularities they saw in society by ample references to historical and other materials. The available evidence had been slender in previous generations; it had grown steadily and, stimulated by the widening interest, was now growing fast.

Thus sociology, like economics, came into its own as a science when groups of people conceived a particular order of events as relatively autonomous in its functioning and were able to substantiate their claim by a continuous crossfertilisation by a process of reciprocal testing of the general ideas they formed of this order and of factual observations of details they made within this order. But sociologists were less concerned than the economists of their time with static regularities of the kind which economists observed in the recurrent movements of prizes and other properties of markets. The problem shared by all the early sociologists was how society developed. They all saw society as a self-regulating process which had a force of its own more or less independent of the

short-term intentions of individuals who formed it. They all were concerned with the direction of this process. Their common problem was the long-term development of mankind. They wanted to know the order of this development, its stages and its driving forces.

The novelty of this common pattern of thought at that time stands out more clearly if one looks back, if one becomes aware of the fact that during the 18th century the approach to the problems of men had been generally far more static. Only during its latter part can one find the first intimations of an approach to men as society with regularities of its own. The Physiocrats had a concept of society as a kind of cyclical process, - rising to higher civilisation and greater luxury and falling back again to decadence and decay. Turgot took up their conception with a stronger accent on the non-recurrent progress of society; and there were numerous small attempts at the time in which one can discover the growing awareness of a developmental order in the multitude of historical and social events. But the first great manifestation of the rising pattern of thought was undoubtedly Hegel's work. In one's dismissal of Hegel's vision of world history as speculative metaphysics one is apt to overlook that, fantastic as his answer was, the problem which he tried to answer was decidedly different from that of his predecessors and very similar to that which occupied the minds of the early sociologists, one of which, Marx, stood in the direct line of succession. In Hegel's work we find the first great manifestation of a line of thought in which the accent was no longer on the unchanging pattern of nature and reason, but on the changing pattern of history, on the development of mankind. What accounted for this change in the central problems which people tried to answer? It may help to go further back to see the problem in perspective.

In the 17th and 18th centuries the presentation of secular ideas about society on a high level generality was still definitely a task for philosophers; that is to say the general fund of factual knowledge about men available in society

was still so small that one could satisfy one's curiosity in many respects only by thinking alone and by bringing to bear one's general ideas about God and the world on the social problems that presented themselves. Many of the social philosophical writings of that period, of the period of the enlightenment, moreover, bore the stamp of a specific social task which philosophers had in a society of the 18th century type. They were written, in the main, for people who belonged or who might one day belong to the government. Whoever it was, Hobbes or Locke, Montesquieu or Voltaire, their writings about society like that of most of their contemporaries was, if one may use this expression, beamed towards actual or potential members of governments. They were the type of people whom, above all others, one tried to influence by means of one's writings. In absolutistic states, and to some extent even in England, they were the people whose intentions and decisions counted most in all those matters which we now call social, - unless one wrote as an outsider dreaming of the overthrow of the existing social order. Underlying the dominant approaches to society of that period was therefore the tacit assumption that the main condition for the proper functioning or the improvement of society were the right ideas, the right intentions and aims of those who governed. If one wanted to explain social events one looked in the first place for the plans, intentions and interests of the leading men, or at the most of a few leading factions and cliques.

One of the principal factors in the emergence of a science of society was the growing awareness that this type of explanation was not enough. During and after the French Revolution people were again and again confronted by social changes which could no longer be explained as the result of plans and intentions of this or that man whom one could name. As time went on one could observe repeatedly that governments might plan, intend and decide on one course of action, and yet the outcome of their own actions might be very different from what they themselves had planned and intended. For the first time some people became conscious of the peculiar enigma of society; whatever happened

was certainly due to plans and actions of people, and yet the interplay of their actions resulted often enough in a course of events which none of the actors had intended or even foreseen. Formerly one could persuade oneself that kings and governments if they were only enlightened enough could lead a country in the socially desirable direction. Even if they were tyrannical one could think at least that someone was in charge of the fate of the country, - someone who had laid his plans, directed the course of events, and had the power to execute his plans. One could believe that, for better or worse, there was at least someone in charge. Gradually after the French Revolution this confidence began to vanish. No-one, not even kings or ministers, seemed any longer to be powerful enough to direct the course of society or even to know where it was going. Changes in society often appeared to be determined rather by anonymous forces than by persons one knew, - by forces which if they were not actually identical with those of nature seemed in some way akin to forces of nature, such as sunshine and rain, over which one had little control, which seemed to have characteristics of their own and whatever they were could not be explained in the same way in which one explained the actions of individual people.

That, if one may try to bring it to life again, was one of a number of basic experiences which gradually gave rise to a new science, to sociology. Just as up to the 15th or 16th centuries people did not see nature as nature in the sense in which the word is used now, - as representation of a specific type or order, but still rather as a congeries of acts of beings who pursued certain aims, moved in accordance with a purpose, so up to the late 18th century people did not experience society as society, but rather as a congeries of persons and their acts, particularly of leading persons who pursued certain ends, were motivated by a definite purpose. And in that case too this conception began, from the 19th century on, to be supplemented by another in which society presented itself as a more impersonal order which functioned in ways that were not necessarily intended by the people who formed it. The change in conception was

connected with specific changes in the experience of people. They were drawn in a whirlpool of social changes which no-one seemed to have brought about deliberately and which at the same time were not entirely anarchic and disorderly, which in fact seemed to have a certain order and direction of their own. If one does not ask merely for a definition of society, but rather for the experiences which cradled a science of society, this was one of them: the experience that although people form societies and keep society moving by their actions and plans, at the same time society seems often to go its own way and, while being driven by those who form it, at the same time, seems to drive them. The task of the emerging science of society, as seen by their first representatives, was to discover and if possible to explain this order, its regularities, its driving forces, and its direction so that one could use one's knowledge for the better achievement of one's own special aims, in the same way in which one was using the growing knowledge of the order of nature for the better attainment of human ends.

As they have been presented so far, their approaches could have been those of people who were motivated by nothing but their scientific aims, by their simple effort to find out and to explain what was and what is. And this was undoubtedly one aspect of their common endeavour. At the same time almost all the men whom we know as pioneering sociologists had certain wider goals in common. In their case, as in most other cases, attention to problems of social development in sociological enquiries was closely connected with their author's vision of the future of mankind. Men so different in their ideals and in their concepts of social development as Comte, Spencer, Marx and Hobhouse, to name only a few, had this in common: each had a firm vision of the future of mankind which represented at the same time what he *wished* society to be, what he morally felt society *ought* to be and what he prophetically believed society *would in fact be*. It served as a programme of action, expressed the ends for which men were expected to strive, and its final success was mostly taken for granted; future was always on

their side. Although formed in connection with specific social experiences, once such a vision had set in its mould and hardened as a centrepiece of an inflexible social creed, it usually appeared to its adherents as the final truth, as "a priori", as so immediately convincing that it appeared to precede all experiences and often as part of one's nature.

In sociological enquiries, these social ideals combined with their function as a social creed that of hypotheses or theories: they determined the kind of questions which one asked, the kind of data which one selected as relevant, and the kind of explanation for which one was looking. Unlike hypotheses and theories, these social creeds were more or less taken for granted as something absolute behind which one need not go. They were as a rule not open to correction and revision in the light of controlled tests and new observations or experiences. Although all the great pioneering sociologists tried to proceed scientifically, the two functions of their theories stood in the way. As beliefs, their general ideas remained outside the dialectic interplay between general theory and empirical enquiries which is characteristic of science. As something felt to be an absolute truth, they were held in place by the deep satisfaction, by the profound emotional rewards they gave to those who held them.

Of this kind was above all the belief that mankind was inevitably and necessarily progressing which was shared by the majority of 19th century sociologists, even though they had often very different ideas as to what progress meant. To some it meant the gradual retreat of warfare and violence, the steady advance of greater harmony and the rule of law among men. To others it meant increasing welfare with the help of state controlled social reforms but whichever it was, the pattern of the development of society which they perceived and presented in their work was profoundly affected by that of their creed. In one sense or the other "social development" always meant for them "change towards something better". It was identical with "progress".

One could certainly hear throughout the 19th century a chorus of voices which proclaimed the opposite creed implying a different value scheme. There were social scientists who believed, and who tried to prove, that the misery of the majority of men was inevitable and unalterable. Others believed in the unalterable mindlessness and barbarism of the masses and in the need for keeping them in check by strong ruling groups. Again others thought periods of peace would invariably and inevitably be followed by periods of war and violence, and periods of rise by periods of decline.

Even from a distance one can still hear the voices of these two choruses competing, as it were, for the ear of their public, of those who looked forward to a better future and those who held present and past in high esteem. For the greater part of the 19th century those of the believers in progress were stronger. Then gradually during the latter part of the century the voices of their opponents gathered strength; they gained increasing support in society at large until gradually in the course of the 20th century the feeling which they expressed, articulate or diffuse, became more widespread and often dominant, at least so far as their scepticism with regard to progress, to the greater value of the future, and their belief in the greater value of present or past was concerned.

One can say: the idea that society developed rarely played any major part among those groups for whom the future did not hold out any emotional rewards. If they spoke of "social development", it had a different meaning; and it referred at the most to short-term trends. Lacking strong hopes for the future, men who belonged to this camp rarely set out to build up comprehensive models of the development of mankind. If they attempted a synopsis of the history of mankind they tended to conceive it as Spengler, Toynbee or Sorokin did, as a cyclical and basically static pattern. They too organised methodically material into a pre-ordained scheme in accordance with their social creed. But the pattern which they perceived in the history of men was not that of a movement which,

like that of the wings of windmills, repeated itself again and again, in eternal rise and fall.

Broadly speaking, therefore, one can say that in the 19th and early 20th centuries the emotional impetus for scientific enquiry in the long-term development of society was strongest among those in whose social beliefs the image of the future, compared with that of present and past, stood out as the symbol of highest value like a still far away beacon towards which one was working, striving and struggling, - a still distant social aim which made life worth living. The models of mankind's development which were worked out in that era corresponded to this value scheme. By comparison with the mythical views of previous ages about mankind's development, the leading sociologists of the 19th century brought the idea of a development in history down to earth. Men like Comte, Marx or Spencer fitted the idea of history as a patterned sequence of nonrecurrent changes in one and the same direction increasingly to their widening knowledge of historical facts. At the same time, their ideas of an order, a sequence, a pattern in the multitude of historical changes still had strong metaphysical overtones. In the last resort, history always moved, dialectically or in a straight line, nearer and nearer towards one's own goal; it miraculously moved, as it were, by itself, to implement one's ideals. Implied in these models of mankind's development, or explicitly stated, was thus an assumption which was not and could not be substantiated by any factual evidence, - the assumption that, unless society collapsed, its development in the direction which one desired and which one regarded as progress was a kind of law which had almost the same stringency as the laws of nature. In that way one's conception of mankind's past in the last resort always fitted one's vision of mankind's future. One could reinforce by one's studies of the past the conviction that history was meaningful, that it moved in fact towards that goal, towards which one wished it would and felt it ought to move, and that its movement in that direction following as it did, the inexorable law of progress was predictable.

At that stage, as one can see, the ideas which men had of a development in history represented a strange blend of myth and theory. As they used it, the concept of development was a double-edged instrument of scientific analysis and synopsis. On the one hand, their axiomatic social creeds and ideas produced in the believers as they always do, a very high resistance against the perception of evidence and the understanding of arguments which did not fit into the scheme of their preconceived expectations for the future. Yet, on the other hand, they also sharpened, at least in some of them, to quite an extraordinary degree the perception of data and pattern in the history of mankind which, at the same time, were supported by strong factual evidence and could help to support their visions for the future. One can see here once more from a different angle the links of the rising science of society with a specific transformation of society. To most of those living today the fact that men have social ideals is so familiar that they no longer ask for the specific social conditions which make it possible and meaningful for men to have social ideals. Most people are so involved, directly or indirectly, leisurely or intensely, in open or hidden struggles for their own or against other people's social ideals that they no longer ask what are the social functions of social creeds and ideals as such.

One can see the problem better if one looks back to the age of the early sociologists. In their time social ideals such as liberalism, conservatism, radicalism, socialism, communism and others appeared as something new. It was the first century of the great 'isms. The social beliefs which played so large a part in the approaches to society of the early sociologists were not necessarily identical with the nascent mass beliefs of their age, but although often more sophisticated, they were functionally related to them. One of the main levers for the study of society undertaken by the early sociologists was their desire to contribute with the help of their studies to the clarification of the aims, the programmes of action, the banners behind which social groups in society at large marched and rallied in their contests with each

other. One of the main motives in studying the past development of society was that of proving scientifically with the help of factual evidence that one's aims for the future were right. Sociology in that sense was a child of an era of popular parties and mass movements. Aristocrats had fought each other in the name of philosophical principles devised for the guidance of statesmen. The feeling which increasingly took possession of people that "history", that "society" ran a course of its own, made it necessary to study this course so as to assure oneself and others that it was the course one desired. In this respect too, as one can see, the basic transformation of society to which the rise of a science of society pointed was the change in the distribution of power. As one encountered it in the 19th century it was the latest phase of a process which had started far back in the development of European societies. One may call it a process of increasing democratisation. It was anything but a straight process. It had many ups and downs. But after the French Revolution it reached a stage where no section of society remained unaffected by it. In essence, it was an increase in the power potential of wider and wider social strata which proceeded until no stratum of society remained so weak, socially speaking, that its power potential could be disregarded, that it needed not to be taken into account in planning the strategies of other sections of their society.

The relative distribution of power between the broader strata of society themselves varied a great deal from society to society. So did the political institutions which like a shell contained and canalised the power relations within. But the general direction of the change which countries underwent when they "broke with traditionalism" was the same. It was by no means simply a consequence of increasing industrialisation. In a rather complex manner both democratisation and industrialisation were interconnected as strands in an overall transformation of society. Briefly, it was a change from greater to smaller power differentials between the various sections of a society and from relatively unilateral to more multilateral and more reciprocal controls. The in-

creasing social power of the formerly rather powerless mass of the population in the developing societies of Europe might make itself felt in the sheer weight of discontent, in threats of violence and upheavels forcing the hand of ruling groups if no institutional channels were available for its expression. They might express themselves in the voting behaviour or in organised strikes, in the actions of mass parties and mass movements with their social creeds. Whatever form they took, it became in the course of this transformation less and less possible to govern effectively without regard for the multitude of special interest groups in society at large. Formerly, effective power had been reserved for a few relatively small top groups whose members were known as persons. Now, as power became more widely distributed with increasing specialisation and increasing mutual interdependence of all social activities, no social stratum remained a mere passive object of the power exercised by others and devoid of any share in the making of decisions. This, one might say, was the basic aspect of the transformation of society which gave rise to sciences of society. Multiplicity and reciprocity of controls in a society made it more difficult to explain the actual course of events in personal terms.

Power did not become diffuse only when the ballot-box was introduced. Societies often developed along lines which did not correspond to the intentions of their members. Hence it tended to appear to the individuals who formed it, as markets did on a smaller scale, as something outside of them, as a force of its own to whose manifestations one was frequently exposed as helplessly as to those of the forces of nature. That, one might say, was one of the core experiences with which the early sociologists wrestled. One can express it now more simply. At the time it was difficult to grasp. It was difficult to conceptualise it, and to express in terms which everyone could understand that what one observed as characteristics of configurations of people could not be deduced if one first observed each of these people singly. Sociology as a configurational science was on the rise, but its own characteristics as such were

still unclear. In spite of these difficulties, the early sociologists brought much light on the nature and characteristics of societies and their development as configurations of people, as a nexus of functions which people had in relations with each other. In that respect sociologists acted as explorers and observers in a still largely unexplored land. They made society as such an object of their studies. They tried to determine the structure and the stages of its development. They evolved for their studies new, more impersonal concepts or cleansed older concepts, to some extent, of meanings more appropriate to the level of people seen singly. They spoke of "laws of social development" or "social forces" or "relations of production". By and large sociologists were more aware than economists of society as a specific order of events and tried to clarify men's ideas about this order. They were more aware of the dynamics of configurations, of the self-propelling propensities which configurations of people can have although for them too the problem of the relationship between the properties of such configurations and those of the people who formed them remained a great stumbling-block. It was a problem which they hardly saw as such, as a central problem of sociology, and which they certainly did not solve. They were particularly concerned with the likely course of social events, with the direction of social development, with the problem: where are we as societies going?

Yet they were not only observers, but also participants. They themselves wanted society to go in one direction rather than in another. And so they often had in their studies of the past, in their studies of "history", like Roman priests in the study of sibylline books or of the entrails of holy animals, made up their mind beforehand. They looked in the past in order to make prophesies about the future; but they knew beforehand what the future would be. In their role as observers and explorers they were well able to approach the phenomena which resulted from the wider distribution of power, from the increased autonomy of social developments in relation to plans of specific individuals or groups, with a degree of detachment. In their role

as participants the wider, more multilateral, more reciprocal distribution of power in their societies affected them in a different way. The novel fact, symptom of the wider distribution of power, that wider and wider sections of society rallied around specific programmes for the organisation of society in the form of social ideals and social beliefs was one of the strongest stimulants to the study of society, to the rise of sociology. All the early sociologists were deeply involved in the battles between various social creeds. And what they perceived and did not perceive was determined by the needs of their own side in these battles. In studying society they helped to forge more or less consciously intellectual weapons in the struggles between different ideals and value systems which raged in society at large. The double function of their ideas as sociological theories and as expressions of a fixed social creed was not accidental. Nor was it merely due to personal characteristics. It was the counterpart of the social task which they saw before them. It reflected their double role as detached observers and involved participants in the increasingly polyarchic societies of their age.

Notes

1. Du Pont de Nemours, *Physiocratie*. 1767, p. LXXIX.
2. J.S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*. London: 1857, Vol. I, iii, I paragraph 5.

Postscript

This paper, as one can see, attempts to trace the socio-genesis of sociology as the scientific discipline one of whose tasks it is to work out a basic theory of society. Confusion may arise because sociologists themselves, as a rule, trace their ancestry only to writers who explicitly called themselves sociologists. This convention, however, still dominant in lectures and textbooks, is more historical than sociological in character. It is descriptive rather than explanatory. It breaks down if one includes among the ancestral figures of sociology not only Comte and Durkheim,

but also Marx who would have fiercely attacked anyone calling him a sociologist, for that would have meant to him "a follower of Comte". Yet, one cannot omit Marx; whether or not one shares his ideals, he made a significant contribution to the development of a basic theory of society.

In other words, one cannot explain the emergence of sociology as the science whose representatives have, among other functions, the task of working out a testable central theory of society, by confining one's attention to the ingenious men who invented and propagated a distinct name for the science of society. If one is concerned with a sociological approach to the genesis of sociology, one has to answer the question: Which development of human societies made it possible to recognize unintended structures underlying, as well as resulting from, the multitude of intertwining human activities, and to work out testable theoretical models of such structures, of figurations of people, and their structured transformations? The Physiocrats were one of the earliest groups of people, perhaps *the* earliest group, who not only worked out a central theory of society based on detailed evidence, but also drew practical conclusions from them. They experimented with names for themselves as a group and thus for their common theory of society. But whatever the name they gave themselves, men like Adam Smith who never called himself an economist, the Physiocrats who sometimes called themselves "Economists", Malthus, and other not named here, certainly deserve to be regarded as sociologists *avant la lettre*.