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Introduction

The Origins and Foundations of Modern Social Theory: 1750–1920

Modern social theory first emerged during the period of what is often called the 'great transformation,' a term used by Karl Polanyi to describe the massive social change which took place in Europe between 1750 and 1920.[1] In practical terms, it is possible to outline some of the steps leading to these developments by looking at three geographical centers in European society: France, Germany and England. Generally, the story begins in France in the decade of the 1780s as France approaches the revolution. The French revolution of 1789 was one of the most decisive determinants leading to the development of a theory of society that was officially separate from philosophy. By the time the revolution had ended, it had delivered three distinct blows against society, history and politics. First, in asserting the reality of individual rights and freedoms, the revolution shook individuals in their political and social foundations. Second, the economic and political consequences of the revolution rocked the foundations of feudal society in its social and economic existence. Third, the political and social changes of the revolution shook the framework of philosophy in its inward looking and introspective existence. These blows to society, history, philosophy and politics set the stage for the development of an autonomous social theory by creating a division in philosophy along two distinct lines of development. In the first place, it necessitated a break with the philosophic tendency to look inward in favor of a direct encounter with reality and history. As Herbert Marcuse points out, this tended to bring philosophy into the sphere of history.[2] In the second place, all of the philosophical concepts which had been preoccupied with abstraction began to pattern themselves after social and historical content. By 1800, social and historical concepts had been brought more fully into the sphere of philosophy and these came fundamentally to rest in the subject matter of society and history. This had a profound effect on the development of social theory since all of the economic and political theorizing which had been packed into the philosophic mind since Plato and Aristotle had become externally manifest in the social and historical world as a consequence of the revolution in France.

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1 Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of our Time*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1944.

2 Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, New York: Humanities Press, 1954, p. 253.

By 1810, the impact of historical development on philosophy was fully realized in the work of Georg Hegel. It was Hegel who, in 1806, responded to the events of the French Revolution in his writings and, despite its philosophic language, his works were extremely forward looking in their focus on society and history. Hegel's response to the revolution not only changed philosophy and history, it also led to the development of an autonomous social theory distinct from philosophy itself.[3] Hegel brought this about in several ways. First, he took the view that the French revolution fundamentally changed the way thought understood reality and history. Previously, history had been seen as fixed in its political and social existence. The rapid decline of French society after the revolution led Hegel to observe that one form of social and political existence was replacing another and this led to the view that society itself changes from one form to another. This made it clear that economy and politics were obviously linked to society and history, a point which had not been stated in precisely this way before. It was Hegel, therefore, who was the first to understand that historical change took a social form and that this manifested itself in terms of a set of distinct stages of development from ancient, feudal and industrial societies.[4] Second, in showing a direct line of political development from slavery to the modern state, Hegel was able to make political functions the focus of social and historical development. This step made it clear that philosophy could only understand history by adopting social concepts and that history was, in fact, social in nature. Third, Hegel's philosophy was forward looking in its focus on individual freedom and self realization. In making the individual part of historical development, Hegel was one of the first to make individual experience the subject matter of historical and social analysis, a step which became more fully developed in the writings of Marx.[5] Fourth, to the extent that Hegel believed that history was marked by distinct stages of development, he was the first to conceptualize the different stages of society as distinct social forms which followed a pattern of social and historical development. In addition, all these social forms, according to Hegel, represented actual ways of thinking and being which could be separately studied by looking at the social and political characteristics of a given society.[6]

By 1844–45, many of the developments in Hegel's philosophy began to be consolidated in the writings of Marx and Engels and, as a result, the philosophical and historical concepts changed once again. With Marx and Engels, the critical elements of Hegel's philosophy began to turn more distinctly into social theory. But, where Hegel

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3 Hegel, in this regard, was the first to identify social subject matter as distinct from the subject matter of history and philosophy. See *The Philosophy of History*, New York: Dover, [1830] 1956, chapters 1–5.

4 Until this time, the concept of 'society' did not exist in classical knowledge. Durkheim confirms this in his inaugural lecture of 1888 when he states that, while there was no absence of discussion of 'society' in the ancient world, 'the greater part of the works of ancient philosophy were dominated by ideas that prevented the social sciences from being formed'. See E. Durkheim, 'Inaugural Lecture at Bordeaux' (1887–8) *Sociological Inquiry*, 44, 1974, 189–204.

5 J.N. Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968.

6 For a discussion of the steps which Hegel took to conceptualize society beyond the enlightenment thinkers see *The Philosophy of History,* New York: Dover, [1830] 1956.

had used philosophic concepts, Marx used economic and social concepts to explain historical development.[7] Where the French revolution had shaped Hegel's historical perspective, it was the economic and industrial changes in England which shaped Marx's and Engels' thinking. Where Hegel had absorbed society and history into philosophy, Marx was absorbing philosophy into history and economy and this led to the use of distinct economic concepts to understand society and social existence. This shift from philosophy to economy necessitated the second critical transition of philosophic concepts to the sphere of political economy and the study of industrial capitalism.

Parallel to these developments, large scale social changes were taking place in Europe and in England, and these occurred on several different fronts. First, by 1830 industrial capitalism had replaced the old feudal economies of the preceding period and Adam Smith had laid the foundations for the first study of capitalism, making him the founder of modern political economy. Second, the mechanical discoveries necessary for industrial production had made England the 'workshop of the world' and therefore an industrial center. This began to dissolve the old agrarian economy of the countryside and led to rapid developments in commerce, science and industry. As a result, agricultural land began to be used for commercial purposes and landholders began to evict tenant cultivators from their agricultural holdings, leaving them without the means of economic livelihood. This not only set in motion a period where property in land began to be privatized, but it also began an extensive transfer of the rural population from the countryside to the industrial centers, where they became an impoverished class and a problem population. Third, economic changes occurring in land and labor necessitated the rise of a new working class of wage laborers who were forcibly separated from the land as a primary means of economic survival.[8] At this stage, the migration of philosophic concepts into history and social theory had become more complete and, by the time Marx had published *Capital* in 1867, social and historical concepts were more fully incorporated into social thought and began to form the first theories of society.

In France, there were similar developments. At the time, French social thought was being shaped by thinkers such as Saint-Simon (1760–1825), Auguste Comte (1798–1857) and Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) who were grappling with the themes of revolution, social progress and industrial change. Comte and Durkheim, for their part, founded a school of social theory which was largely shaped by the themes of science, by a conservative response to the French revolution and by a rejection of philosophy as a basis of social inquiry. By 1830, an important step was taken with the appearance of Comte's *Positive Philosophy*.[9] For his part, Comte had described the age primarily in terms of the development of the scientific method which he wanted

7 Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution,* pp. 251–257.

8 For an account of this period see Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism,* New York: Basic Books, 1947.

9 Auguste Comte, *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, Paris: Bachelier, 1830–1842.

to extend to the study of society.[10] In France, this began a period of reaction against speculative philosophy, culminating in the work of Durkheim who wanted to found a scientific theory of society. With the publication of such works as *The Division of Labor* in 1893 and *Suicide* in 1897, Durkheim began to differentiate himself from Comte's theory of society, essentially by conceiving of society as a structure of social elements existing outside the individual. This led Durkheim to turn his attention to the study of what he called 'the two great currents of social life' which he thought had formed 'two distinct types of structure'.[11] This made Durkheim the first to identify the study of 'structure' as the single solitary subject matter of social theory, and as a result structural concepts began to be more formally incorporated into the study of society.

By 1905, with the publication of works such as Marx's *German Ideology* and *Capital*, Emile Durkheim's *The Division of Labor* and *Suicide,* and Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, a body of knowledge was formed and a common perspective emerged which began to define social thought separately from historical thought, leading to a perspective referred to as structural theory. Based on the works of Marx, Durkheim and Weber, structural theory is the name used to describe a family of perspectives in social thought which use specific techniques of interpretation for studying history, human nature and society and, in the main, it gets its name from the tendency to conceptualize society as a structure of social fields which exist outside the individual. The central idea is that these structures first constitute themselves as diverse social fields, which include the economy, the political structure, the family system and the field of law and religion. These social fields were thought to structure social activity, impose external limits on action and compel individuals to act in ways which often override their personal considerations and their private will. The tendency to conceive of society as a structure of social fields existing outside the individual and as having the power to structure social interchanges, led to a third transition in the development of social thought which changed the concepts once again. With Durkheim's assertion that social thought was separable from philosophy, and that the structure of society was separable from the structure of history, it meant that all the philosophic and critical language of Hegel and Marx was to be converted into investigative concepts and into an investigative language for identifying elements of structure which were thought to exist outside the individual.

It was therefore Durkheim who had discovered a distinct subject matter which owed nothing to the already constituted disciplines of philosophy, psychology or history. Durkheim, in fact, was the first to identify the external structure of society by outlining a system of duties and obligations lying outside the individual that

10 D.G. Charlton, *Positive Thought in France*, London: Verso, 1979; W.M. Simon, *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century*, New York: Cornell, 1963.

11 See Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, p. 229. Some commentators take the view that Durkheim conceived of society as a unified organic whole whose parts function in organic-like interrelationships. However, by the time Durkheim had written *The Division of Labor*, he had broken with this view after criticizing Spencer's contention that social differentiation was related to the organic traits of society.

constituted a new subject matter 'to which the term social was to be applied'.[12] Durkheim's structuralist language had for the first time asserted the existence of a field of social activity lying beyond the individual, and this led to a more systematic study of the structure of society as a field of investigation. As a result, observation, description and classification replaced the search for historical laws and the underlying themes of economic development that had been established by Marx.

In Germany, the work of Max Weber (1864–1920) represented a fourth shift in the direction of modern social theory. Though he was born in 1864, Weber did not write his first theoretical work until 1903 when he published his first formal theory of capitalism. By this time, Weber's overall theory of economic organization had established the study of capitalism as a central focus of modern social theory.[13] In contrast to Marx, who focused on the economic changes of the early nineteenth century, Weber's theoretical work was largely in response to the themes of late modern society which focused on the direction of historical change and civilization processes taking place in the West. Later, this led to a series of broad historical works on ancient economies, feudalism, bureaucracy, household organization, the formation of rational law and the history of world religions.

In looking at society from the perspective of what he called the overlapping social spheres of religion, economy, politics and law, Weber was among the first to assert that a theory of society could be obtained only by looking at the causal influences of various social spheres, which he conceived of as forming different 'departments of life'. Rather than restricting his analysis to the economic sphere, as Marx had done, Weber focused on the affects of the religious sphere on the economic and political spheres. Weber, in fact, develops the concept of the 'social sphere' into a methodological tool, which he used to study the legal and political influences leading to the formation of modern social classes and the specific influences of the religious sphere on the development of capitalism and the formation of the modern economy. This made Weber one of the first to challenge Marx's theory of capitalism and to question his claim about the role played by economic forces in social and historical development.[14]

The fundamental insight by Weber that society could not be understood without looking at the role played by the overlapping social and institutional spheres cannot be overestimated. He thought the political, economic, religious and legal spheres of society defined the nature of social life in the changes occurring after the period described by Marx in the nineteenth century. This led him to look at the underlying conditions leading to the formation of the modern household as it became separate from the sphere of

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12 Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, pp. 1–2.

13 Weber put forward two theories of capitalism. First was *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, New York: Scribner, 1958; second was his *General Economic History*, New York: Collier, 1961.

14 Weber's analysis of religion, and its effects on the formation of an economic ethic, can be contrasted with Marx's theory of society as a succession of economic epochs. Weber's opposition to Marx's theory of history can be found in the first three chapters of *The Protestant Ethic*, where he outlines the effect of a religious ethic on an economic ethic.

work, and to examine the changes taking place in the modern class system, the formation of status groups, the function of statute law and the overall formation of modern economies.[15] Subsequently, Weber's comparison of modern economies with ancient and feudal economies led him to identify patterns of development as diverse as the social activity resulting from the adoption of Roman law in the West, to the technical utilization of scientific knowledge for purposes of the rational mastery over reality.

In addition to this was Weber's methodological innovations and the role they played in the development of the social sciences. In contrast to Marx or Durkheim, Weber challenged the validity of adopting a straightforward scientific view of society that was modeled on the methods of the natural sciences. It was within this framework that Weber put forward a general theory of social action, which he outlined in a work entitled *Economy and Society*, and it was this that established his difference from Durkheim. Whereas Durkheim had explicitly focused on trying to found a method of investigation which broke with speculative philosophy by adopting scientific positivism, Weber questioned the necessity of adopting the methods of the natural sciences in the context of the social sciences. In his methodological essays, Weber drew on what he thought was the necessary distinction between the subject matter of the social sciences and the subject matter of the natural sciences, and this led him to focus on human 'social acts' which he thought were fundamentally distinct from physical 'acts' in nature. This led Weber to believe that 'evaluation' and 'judgment' underlie human social acts and this led him to pursue the dimension of human 'inner states' by propounding a theory of interpretive social action.

To the extent that Weber's theory of social action called Durkheim's focus on external social facts and restraint into question, the concepts changed once again. Weber's stress on the role played by 'judgment' and 'evaluation' in human social action shifted the investigative focus from the external social rules and 'outer states' described by Durkheim to the 'inner states' of actors and the necessity of integrating human inner states into a theory of society.

Modern Social Theory Defined

The term modern social theory grew out of the framework of European social thought beginning in the nineteenth century, and began to take shape in a more definitive form with the transition to modern times, the growth of industrialized economies, modern political systems and the development of social thought proper.[16] Modern social theory therefore formed as a discipline by undertaking the study of the changes that were taking place in the structure of social institutions during the transition from

15 Weber's discussion of these themes is evident in his writings on economic organization, where he describes developmements in modern economies after Marx.

16 It was these themes that formed the distinct subject matter of social theory and identified a domain whose field of activity was distinct from 'historical' subject matter.

feudal to industrial society.[17] As a formal response to the changes of modernism, the writings of Marx, Durkheim and Weber led to the development of large-scale explanatory perspectives on society and history and to the formation of theories of society and its objective structure. Social theory, therefore, came into being on the basis of three broad areas of investigation. First was the focus on the description of societies past and present and their historical development. In itself, this took the form of a historical comparison between different kinds of societies, including the forms of political authority, the means of economic production, the development of legal rules, the forms of religious belief, the role played by large scale social institutions, the growth of individualism and the development of modern capitalism. This focus took the form of accumulating factual knowledge of different societies and endeavored to understand their social, political and economic organization by a comparison of the system of social relations, the patterns of historical formation, the form of the class structure and the mode of collective and economic organization.[18] With the general focus on structure, it was possible to classify different societies along the lines of their different structural characteristics as well as looking at which institutions were dominant during a given period of history. It was this interest which led Marx, Durkheim and Weber to pursue a comparison of the different economies, the different forms of household organization, the different forms of administration, the different manifestations of the class structure, the different religious doctrines and the differences existing in the suicide characteristics of diverse societies.

A second broad area of investigation to emerge in social theory relates to the way of looking at society and history. This focus deals primarily with the explanatory framework of social theory and its underlying foundation in the history of social thought. It was this latter focus that established the formal connection between theory and society and, for all practical purposes, it was based on three interrelated assumptions about society. First, was the belief that underlying the factual world of everyday experience is a system of values, standards, ethics and politics which derive from societies in the past and which act as common conditions of action in the present. These social and political values, so to speak, form the underlying basis of society and act as common conditions of human social action. Second, was the belief that, since values and standards often manifest themselves in a system of politics and ethics, the formal assumption was that they may be employed to describe societies past and present, and to look for underlying patterns of development and the effects of this development on human social groups. Third, was the view which held that, since all human experience was in some way related to the social world, a theory of

17 By 1890, the study of the transition from feudal society to industrial society appeared in two central sociological works: Marx's study of the transition from feudal to industrial society in *The German Ideology*, and in Weber's discussion of the different forms of political domination in *Economy and Society*.

18 Marx's *German Ideology* and Durkheim's *The Division of Labor* were among the first nineteenth century works to form bodies of knowledge about the organization of different economies, the different systems of social relations and the different structural characteristics of society.

society could not be divorced from a theory of politics, economics, ethics and religion. Under these circumstances, these 'social things' formed a class of events which were distinct from 'physical things' and these things were to be studied in their own right, forming a body of knowledge separate from the knowledge of the physical or natural world. At this point, the central purpose of social theory was to separate 'social things' from 'physical things', and to form a theory about how these social things form themselves into patterns of social action and into the total structure of society.

A third broad area of investigation to emerge in social theory relates to describing the way in which the values and standards which have existed in the social and historical past come to act on us in the present.[19] That is, to the extent that the social practices, duties, obligations and system of social relations imply an existence outside ourselves in the form of a social framework, one of the interests Marx, Durkheim and Weber had was to show how the network of these practices and social obligations form themselves into total societies and patterns of action which often come to override our own personal choices and private discretions.

This takes us directly to the question of the central subject matter of social theory. Generally, the subject matter of social theory encompasses three broad dimensions of social change and development: first are the political changes brought about by the French Revolution and the shift taking place in the feudal dynamic; second are the economic changes leading to the growth of modern industrial economies and the emergence of capitalism in England; third is the development of industrialization and individualism.

The Central Subject Matter of Social Theory

1 Political Change, the Feudal Dynamic and the Revolution in France

The events leading to the French revolution began to be shaped in the decade of the 1780s and came to a turbulent conclusion in July and August of 1789. By 1791, a whole way of political and economic life had been replaced by new social and political conditions. In order to understand these developments, it will be necessary to look more closely at the social and political changes which took place in France in the context of the feudal dynamic in the last half of the eighteenth century.

In the eighteenth century, France was largely a feudal society. Feudal societies originated in the countryside with settled agriculture and landholding, and it was this overall structure which gave the unmistakable stamp to feudal societies as distinct from the societies of antiquity. In order to understand why the feudal dynamic was so important to the social and political changes taking place at the time, it will be worthwhile to outline the structure of feudal society more generally.

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19 Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Boston: Little Brown, 1960.

The history of feudal societies began in the countryside with agriculture and landholding and the absence of towns and cities. This was in contrast to ancient societies which began with cities and with an outlying rural economy. Feudalism and feudal economies, then, may be defined as a system of land holding that was entirely rural and, in the main, had two key structural characteristics: an agricultural economy geared to the production of a food supply, and a system of social relations centering on class distinctions between the landholder and the serf cultivator. Historically, feudal societies have appeared in diverse forms with different patterns of social and historical development and are found in Asia and India and in other regions of the East. In fact, the main characteristics of feudal societies – agricultural economies, rigid class or caste structure and relations of subordination centering on the landholder and the peasant cultivator – have appeared in various forms throughout history.[20] In England and France, the feudal way of life began during the ninth century and comprised a total way of economic and political life by the end of the tenth century. The feudal economy was entirely rural, land was used solely for agricultural purposes, and there was a complete absence of towns and town life.[21] Based principally on the allotment of large parcels of land to a political aristocracy, feudal estates were made up of autonomous political and legal jurisdictions and were managed by an aristocratic class who used land as a source of economic livelihood. The principle activity of the feudal estate was thus confined to agricultural production, and in this sense feudal estates were politically and legally autonomous and comprised a total way of life, including parish, village and various branches of rural economy.[22]

At the center of feudal society was the production of a food supply, a production highlighted by a system of land holding based on social relations of subordination between the landholder and the serf. Serfs occupied agricultural holdings comprised of small undertakings in which they cultivated land and produced their economic livelihoods. While the landholder was the legal and political head of the feudal estate, a complex system of obligations and customary rights linked the peasant to the lord.[23] Among these, five distinct social characteristics stand out as significant. First, was a series of economic obligations imposed upon the serf by the lord, and chief among these were the corvée system of labor rights.[24] The corvée right, which was so central to the feudal economy, goes back as far as Roman law and can be defined as a legal privilege of the landholder to compel or requisition work from a serf or a slave and to specify the form and the amount of labor to be provided. Corvée rights allowed

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20 On the history of Indian agricultural economies see Irfan Habib, 'Economic History of the Delhi Sultanate: An Essay in Interpretation,' *Indian Historical Review*, 4, 2, 1978, 287–303; and R. S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*: c 300–1200, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1965.

21 Georges Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1968, pp. 5–11.

22 Perry Anderson, *Passages From Antiquity to Feudalism*. London: Verso, 1978.

23 Ibid., pp. 182–196.

24 Georges Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life*, pp. 39–42.

landholders to compel forced unpaid labor service from the serf, either in the form of work on the lord's agricultural holdings or labor within the manor. On average, labor service could amount to one week in four. Under these circumstances, serfs were the direct producers of physical labor, and while serfs produced for the landholder, the landholder did not produce for the serf.[25]

Second, serfs were legitimately subordinated to the lord through a system of legal and social distinctions derived from the class divisions of feudal society. While resting formally on physical coercion, the subordination of the serf was mediated by a complex system of prerogatives and obligations supported by political, legal and religious distinctions based on the social position of the landholder. In many respects, the social relation between the lord and serf duplicated the coercive mechanism of slavery, even though the social fabric of feudal society was such as to link individuals by obligation and customary right.[26]

A third characteristic of feudal society was the right of the landholder to obtain control over the agricultural production of the serf. In this case, landholders were able to take as much as half of the serf's agricultural production, which was surrendered to the lord on a regular basis and which appeared in the form of economic levies imposed on the serf by the lord. The social and economic advantage given to the landholder meant that, while the serf provided agricultural production for the lord, the lord did not provide agricultural production for the serf. A fourth characteristic of feudal society was the right of the landholder to impose a system of economic exactions on the serf.[27] In many instances the exactions took the form of taxes, dues and fees levied on the peasant population. In some cases, they manifested themselves in the form of levies imposed upon the serf for the use the lord's milling facilities, or for purposes of grinding corn and for the use of presses related to wine production.[28] In other cases a system of exactions, usually rendered in the form of labor service, existed in the form of rent, dues and taxes payable by the serf to the lord. In still other instances economic exactions took the form of the right of the lord to control the agricultural production of the serf. In addition to this, economic exactions existed between various level of the feudal economy and within the social hierarchy of feudal society. For instance, the right of the landholder to extract payment from serfs paralleled the right of the clergy to exact payments in the form of tithes from the landholder. Tithes were levied by the church on

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25 While the landlord system seems to be duplicated in the East in the Indian village communities, the exact formation of the system of subordination and the class of intermediaries and their political and economic powers is a matter of debate. See Irfan Habib, 'Classifying Pre-Colonial India,' *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 12, 1985, 44–53; Marx, 'British Rule In India,' in R. Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Second Ed., pp. 653–58; and H. Fukazawa 'A Note on the Corvée System in the Eighteenth Century Maratha Kingdom,' *Science and Human Progress*, Bombay, 1974, pp. 117–30.

26 Alexis De Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution,* New York: Anchor Books, [1856] 1955.

27 Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, p.193; and Albert Soboul, The French Revolution 1787–1799. Vol. 1. London: NLB, 1974, pp. 33–67.

28 This is discussed by Stephen Marglin, in 'What Do Bosses Do? The Origins and Functions of Hierarchy in Capitalist Production,' *Review of Radical Political Economy*, 6, 2, 1974, 33–60.

landholders according to the size of crops and domestic herds. In some cases, different tithes were levied on different crops and, in others, payments existed in the form of rents and taxes. These in turn required an administrative and judicial apparatus as a means of record keeping and enforcement.[29]

A fifth characteristic of feudal society was the tendency to develop a fixed social hierarchy and a system of social and class distinctions which were backed up by legal and religious sanctions. While wide variations existed within the social structure of the manor and between the lord and the serf, the social distinctions existing in the class structure of feudal society defined not only the relations of dominance and subordination between the classes, but they also defined a complex system of obligations existing between the lord's household and the serf's. These obligations were often defined outside the specific duties of the corvée right and assigned to individual serfs who were responsible for specific tasks performed on the lord's holdings during certain times of the year. Still other obligations and restrictions existed when serfs performed corvée labor at remote locations for extended periods of time. Other duties were imposed on serfs who owed a fixed number of corvée labor days to the lord during certain seasons and who were required to carry out corvée labor on the lord's holdings.[30] In addition, other serfs were obligated to work smaller holdings and pay ground rent by surrendering part of their agricultural production, while others were required to take fire wood and food stuff directly to the manor.

In the years preceding the revolution, France retained the political and economic characteristics of a feudal society: rigid social hierarchy, social and economic inequality, a system of economic exactions and mandatory unpaid corvée labor. By 1780, France had begun to show signs of economic distress and, in the years preceding the revolution, tenant cultivators found it difficult to maintain their livelihoods while paying excessive dues and taxes. Eventually, poor crops, rising prices and economic mismanagement led to a crisis, calling for economic and political reform. As the crisis deepened, demands for reform became more urgent and antagonism between the peasants and the aristocracy grew. By 1787, members of the middle classes began to form a revolutionary committee, which drew up a set of demands which were submitted to the central authority of the French state called the Estates General, a three hundred year old political body comprised of the three main orders of society, the aristocracy, clergy and the peasants.[31] The demands, or grievances as they were called, became the central political focus of reform and received extraordinary philosophical sanction by upholding human rights, equality and liberty.

The Fall of Feudalism and the Elimination of Social Distinctions By May of 1789, the Revolutionary Committee challenged the authority of the king and, in response, the king called a meeting of the Estates General, hoping that the aristocracy

29 See Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life*, pp. 56–8.

30 Ibid, p. 40.

31 Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution From its Origins to 1793*, London: Routledge, 1962.

and clergy would outvote the peasants and avoid a crisis. But, by the time the Estates General had assembled, the loyalties of the clergy had shifted in support of the peasants and, shortly after, a turbulent debate broke out over voting procedure. Members of the aristocracy favored a vote canvassing the three estates, while representatives of the people demanded a vote by head. On June 17, 1789, the Third Estate split off from the Estates General, proclaiming a new political body called the National Assembly.[32] On June 27 the king backed down from the confrontation, leaving the National Assembly as the dominant party of social and political reform. Between June and July of 1789, riots swept France and troops appeared in Paris. By the time an armed mob had stormed a military garrison at the outskirts of the city called the Bastille in July of 1789, the revolution had become a political reality.

Shortly after these events, the National Assembly drafted the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man,' which was a central political document defining human rights and setting out demands for reform. The political rights and freedoms proclaimed by the 'Declaration' were so wide-ranging in their human emancipation that it set the standard for social and political thinking, and formed the central rallying point of the revolution. The 'Declaration' stated at the outset that all human beings were born free and equal in their political rights, regardless of their class position, and this proceeded to set up a system of constitutional principles based on liberty, security and resistance to oppression. With philosophical authority, the 'Declaration' proclaimed that all individuals had the prerogative to exercise their 'natural right' and that the law rather than the monarch was the expression of the common interest.[33] This led to the elimination of all social distinctions on the one hand, and the right to resist oppression on the other.

By August the National Assembly began to deal directly with political and legal reforms, first by eliminating feudal dues and corvée privileges and then by abolishing serfdom. Second, by compelling the church to give up the right to tithes, the National Assembly altered the hierarchical authority and class position of the clergy. Third, in declaring that 'all citizens, without distinction, can be admitted to ecclesiastical, civil and military posts and dignities,' it proclaimed an end to all feudal social distinctions.

As the criticism of social and political inequalities spread throughout society, there was a widespread critique of economic inequality altogether and this led to putting into question all other forms of subordination. With this came the idea that human beings, without distinctions, were the bearers of natural rights – a concept which had a corrosive effect on all other forms of inequality. Finally, from the assertions inherent in the 'Declarations of Rights,' a new category of social person came into being which came fundamentally to rest in the concept of the 'citizen,' whose social and political rights were brought within the framework of the state.

As the political changes began to take effect, there were abrupt social changes in the form of altered politics and in the form of the political reorganization of the feudal way of life. This brought with it two central historical shifts. First, it

32 Soboul, *The French Revolution 1787–1799.*

33 Lefebvre, *The French Revolution from its Origins to 1793.*

transformed the existing class structure of feudal society and led to the decline of class privilege and a change in the relations of subordination which had existed up until that time. Second, it set loose political and legal reforms which brought about a change from a political aristocracy based on sovereign authority to a democratic republic based on the rights of the citizen.[34]

2 Economic Changes and the Development of Capitalism

Another dimension of change was the wide-sweeping economic development of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Though largely confined to England and the rural economy in the early stages, economic change eventually spread throughout Europe and transformed the economic and political structure of society. As a result, there was large scale social disruption, leading to a total transformation in the way people lived, how they earned their livelihoods and in the way they had labored. At first, the economic changes came in the form of wide sweeping social transformations. Then they began to manifest themselves in the form of the introduction of an industrial economy, the centering of economic life in cities and the growth of industrial capitalism. This was a period of the most far reaching political, social and economic upheaval and, taken collectively, it fragmented social life, segmented social institutions, accelerated social crises and differentiated peoples and collectivities. While change was occurring at all levels of society, the center of this change was in the economic system, and this eventually led to the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In order to understand the impact of these changes, it is important that we look more closely at the structure of the feudal economy in England in the period before these changes took place.

Earlier, we used the term feudalism to refer to a period of social and economic organization defined by the formation of self sufficient feudal estates which were economically and political autonomous. Landholders drew their social and political powers from links to an aristocratic class, whose rights centered on land holding and economic prerogatives in which landholders had powers over tenant serfs. Based on landholding, the feudal way of life involved large bodies of land used primarily for purposes of agricultural production and these formed independent economies, with class distinctions and relations of subordination between landholders and serfs based largely on the corvée right.[35]

In the early stages of feudal society the rural way of life was universal, there was an absence of towns and the production of a food supply dominated everyday life.[36] Serf cultivators labored on their own agricultural holdings to satisfy their economic needs and performed unpaid labor service on the lord's estate in accordance with the

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34 For the changes taking place in the class system after the revolution see Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolute State*, pp. 85–112.

35 Georges Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life*, pp. 28–54; Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, pp. 16–22.

36 R.H. Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages,* Oxford: Clarendon, 1975; and *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, London: NLB Humanities Press, 1976, pp. 9–30.

corvée right. While landholders held jurisdiction over the land and assumed entitlements, it is important to note that they did not own land outright as private property. In the place of private property was an elaborate system of customary obligations linking individuals to each other and to the land. Within the scope of these rights existed distinction in the kinds and uses of land. First were estate lands, which included the lord's agricultural holdings.[37] Second were the distinctions in arable land called 'open fields,' which were directly used by serfs for agricultural purposes to produce crops and provide economic livelihood. Third was the distinction in land referred to as 'common fields', which was a term used to refer to lands on which no tenant claim existed, but which were generally used for purposes of grazing domestic animals. In exchange for the use of land, serfs were obligated to pay 'labor rent,' which existed as an entitlement of the lord to place a claim upon the serf payable in the form of labor service on the lord's holdings.

By the middle of sixteenth century, however, economic changes began to have an impact on the feudal economy as a whole, and these manifested themselves in the form of four broad dimensions of change. First was the transformation created by the enclosure movement and the demographic transfer of the agricultural population from the rural economy to the economies of industry. Second was the shift to the town economies which began to replace the feudal economies of the countryside and to facilitate capitalist development. Third was the transformation which followed upon the decline of the power of the trade guilds, which up until that time had contained capitalist expansion. Fourth was the change which occurred at the level of the management of the 'dangerous classes' and the problem population who began to form in the industrial centers as cities became the center of economic life and as the conditions of labor and the structure of the workday began to harden. Since no complete understanding of the scale of this change is possible without further examination, let us look more closely.

Depopulation, the Enclosure Movement and the Demographic Transfer of the Population The first sign of industrial change manifested itself in England in the form of land enclosures which began to occur in the rural economy as early as 1560, when landholders began to assert rights of private property over feudal land. Essentially, the enclosure movement can be described as a system whereby tenant holdings in feudal land and agriculture became enclosed and made available for the private use of the landholder.[38] As a result, peasant families were evicted from their holdings and in many cases thrown off the land. While many of the first enclosures were initiated by landlords in order to appropriate tenant holdings, in the latter stages of change they were used to make way for sheep pastures. However, by 1710 the first Enclosure

37 Eric Kerridge, *The Agricultural Revolution,* New York: Augustus Kelly, 1968.

38 See A.E. Bland, P.A. Brown, and R.H. Tawney (eds.), *English Economic History: Select Document*s, London: Bell & Sons, 1925; William Lazonick, 'Karl Marx and Enclosures in England,' *Review of Radical Political Economics, V*ol. 6, 2, 1974, 1–32. Kerridge, *The Agricultural Revolution,* pp. 19–24; Chambers and Mingay, *The Agricultural Revolution* 1750–1880.

Bill appeared which legalized the enclosure of tenant holdings by Parliamentary Acts.[39] With parliamentary approval, enclosures could proceed at a more advanced rate and eventually became commonplace by mid century as conversions became more rapid. By 1800, 4000 Parliamentary Acts had been passed and in excess of six million acres of land had been enclosed.[40]

As the pace of economic change began to intensify, the rate of enclosures accelerated to the point where the displaced population of agricultural workers began to increase dramatically and this began to mobilize a transfer of the population to the centers of industry. As this occurred, commissioners of enclosures were appointed to report to the courts classifying the number of tenants to be foreclosed and the amount of land, fuel and pasture which were to be re-allotted. While commissioners were initially responsible for the enclosing of estate lands as such, they eventually began to mobilize the necessary legal force for evictions and foreclosures to proceed on a mass scale.[41]As statutory enactments gave the power of eviction to landlords, legal proceedings multiplied the rate of local evictions and at the same time restricted the use of pastures from domestic animals, prohibited the use of arable land from tenant agriculture, and displaced agricultural workers and hereditary tenants.[42] In the case of the enclosures at the Chancery at Durham, for instance, all lands and common fields were to be 'measured, divided and respectively hedged, fenced and enclosed at the lord's advantage.'[43] At this stage there was a more formal clearing away of the remaining serf population of agricultural workers.

In practice, enclosures became a society-wide depopulation movement fueled by mass evictions and foreclosures which coercively separated peasants from their means of livelihood by removing them from their own agricultural holdings. As serfs were forced off the land, landlords were able to assert rights of modern private property over land to which they previously held only feudal title. This hastened the transformation of land into a commercial commodity, first by subjecting it to buying and selling, and second by extending its capacity to produce money rent.[44] Under these circumstances, customary rights and obligations in land began to be forcibly dissolved, and with this went the bonds connecting peasants to the land through hereditary tenure and leasehold. As soon as money rents replaced labor rent, peasants were forced to

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39 R. H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 62.

40 Lazonick, 'Karl Marx and Enclosures in England,' p. 10.

41 Rates for evictions of persons and families are listed in *The Doomsday of Enclosures: 1517–1518*, London: Kennikat Press, 1971. Data of this kind are useful in determining the extent to which the structure of British society was totally redrawn during this period. See also *English Economic History: Selected Documents*, A.E. Bland, P.A. Brown, and R.H. Tawney (eds.), London: Bell and Sons, 1925, p. 525.

42 Statutory enactments fueling evictions flooded the legislative agenda of parliament and fortified the law and corrective institutions. For evidence of this, see A.E. Bland et al., *English Economic History: Select Documents*, London: G. Bell and Sons, 1925.

43 Ibid., pp. 525–6.

44 See J.D. Chambers, 'Enclosure and the Labor Supply in The Industrial Revolution,' *Economic History Review 2nd Series*, Vol. V, 1953, 319–343; Eric Kerridge, 'The Movement of Rent, 1540–1640,' *Economic History Review 2nd Series*, Vol. VI, 1953, pp. 17–34.

focus their attention on their own holdings, making money rent a precondition to economic survival. Those who were unable to pay were eventually ruined or evicted.[45] At this point it became possible to express the value of land in money, and this led to the transformation of land into private property and eventually a commercial commodity. As land became subject to buying and selling, the economic balance between serfs and landlords was upset and feudal obligations in land and livelihood began to deteriorate.

As the breakdown of feudal obligations in land continued, it began to place the serf population under new forces of social differentiation and fragmentation. This put the serf population at the disposal of the new forces of production, which put into play a massive demographic transfer of the agricultural population into the industrial centers, bringing about a more complete transition to a new category of labor based on wages. At this stage, the flow of population from the old feudal economies to the new economies of industry became a more urgent fact of economic change, and this began to complete the process of transforming the agricultural worker of previous centuries into the wage laborer of the industrial economy.

By 1840 the transition to an industrial economy was more or less complete. Agricultural labor was forcibly cleared from the land, feudal obligations in land were dissolved, pastures were enclosed, and the rights of modern private property were asserted.[46] As a result, peasant cultivators were wrenched from their roles as agriculture producers and formed a class of detached landless laborers who were forced to seek their livelihoods in the new industrial centers.[47] At this stage the separation of the agricultural worker from the means of production was more or less complete and the loss of control over their own livelihoods was more or less formalized.

Several consequences ensued as a result of the displacement of the serf population from the rural economies. First, the eviction rates and rates of displacement became part of the political arithmetic of the regional restructuring of ownership and population, leading ultimately to the reorganization of life, land and livelihood. Second, as the transfer of the population proceeded, it brought about a massive social displacement which dispersed families, uprooted local economies and undermined regional modes of life and livelihood.[48] In and of itself, this created several broad shifts in relation to the economy of the city as compared with the economy of rural agriculture. First, it dissolved the serf's relationship to the land and altered the system of economic livelihood, forcing serfs to sell their labor for a wage, and severing the serf's feudal relation to the agricultural means of production. Second, the shift to an industrial economy meant that wage laborers were

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45 Rodney Hilton develops this line of argument in his 'Capitalism: What's in a Name?', *Past and Present,* 1, 1952, 32–43.

46 Paul Mantoux, *The Industrial Revolution in the Eighteenth Century, Lo*ndon: Methuen, 1907.

47 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class,* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968.

48 William Chambliss' analysis of vagrancy law and the statutory regulation of the period related to vagrancy shows how the legal definition of vagrancy coincided with the identification of a 'class of persons' who fell within the statute, even though 'idleness' was not a criminal offense. After the statute, however, idleness became a criminal offence. See W. Chambliss, 'A Sociological Analysis of the Law of Vagrancy,' *Social Problems*, 12, 1964, pp. 67–77.

unable to employ the means of production on their own as they once did in a feudal economy, and as a result they lost control over the ability to put the means of production to work. Third, as the shift to an industrial economy became finalized, the old class structure of feudal society was replaced by the formation of a new commercial class who were at the center of power and industry. This began to bring about the transfer of the ownership of the means of production to the commercial classes and, consequently, as the means of production fell into private hands, it became the property of one class.

The Growth of Town Economies A second dimension of change was the growth of town economies. In the early stages of the feudal economy there were no towns as such. Economic production was confined to rural agriculture and the production of a food supply. Gradually, towns began to develop and by the fourteenth century the town was put into economic competition with the rural economy of the countryside.[49] This had the effect of gradually dissolving the economic boundaries of the feudal estates and promoting more open economies. By the seventeenth century, towns began to gain an economic foothold over the rural economy due to the growth of concentrated skills and crafts and, as towns gained the upper hand, small scale production in textiles and weaving in towns began to operate independently of feudal economy. Though they were not capitalist enterprises by any means, the development of new production techniques, the level and intensity of commodity production, and the division of labor, were sufficient to add to the productive push to establish manufacturing in towns, making them the center of economic life over rural economies. This led to the centering of the economy in towns and to a decline of the feudal economy. In addition, it changed forever the way livelihoods were earned.

As the formal shift in the economic center of gravity from agriculture to industry took place, towns became economic centers over the economy of rural agriculture. As a result, new class interests began to be mobilized in the industrial cities, and this led to changes in the way livelihoods were earned and to changes in the way the means of production were utilized. As a result of cities becoming the center of economic life, a new social axis was formed on the old axis of land, agriculture and feudal title.[50] This constituted the formation of new institutional alignments centering on work, family and schooling, as opposed to the old alignments of the monarch, the church and the aristocracy which had been characteristic of the feudal way of life up until that time.

Decline of the Guild System and the Beginning of Capitalist Development A third dimension of change was the transformation of the role played by the handicraft guilds and the guild system in economic life. The guild system may be defined as a professional association of craftsmen whose basic function was to protect and regulate

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49 For discussion on the development of towns and the competition between rural and town economies, see A.B. Hibbert, 'The Origins of the Medieval Town Patriciate,' *Past and Present*, 3, 1953, pp. 15–27.

50 At this point the institutions of work, family and schooling became the central axial points of society over the old social axis of monarchy, estate and guild.

work relating to trades.[51] Trades included all goods and services produced by persons who were skilled and who had served a period of training under a master. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, guilds played a predominant role in economic life by restricting capitalist development. Chief among the function of guilds was the practice of restricting access into trades and occupations by the system of apprenticeship and by controlling entry to trades through restrictive practices such as licensing. In addition, guilds regulated the prices of goods and restricted competition among workshops by controlling rival markets.[52] Of all the restrictive functions performed by guilds, the regulation of the expansion of workshops was the most significant. Guilds, in effect, were opposed to the development of large scale enterprises and capitalist expansion. By restricting the number of employees and the kinds of labor used in shops, guilds prevented existing workshops from turning into large scale capitalist enterprises. Also, by discouraging the intermingling of trades, guilds were able to thwart the development of a complex division of labor, thereby blocking the development of the specialization necessary for full scale capitalist production and manufacture.

By 1800, guild regulations began to lose their influence over selected workshops, giving way to concentrations of capital, industrial production and free wage labor. As mechanical production in England began to focus almost wholly on cloth and woolen goods, it began to bring about an overall expansion in industry to the point that there was growth in commercial markets and in world trade. This put the pressure of expansion on the centers of production and, as the demand for woolen goods increased, some workshops began to be infiltrated by non-guild labor and gradually guild regulation broke down altogether.[53]

Management of the Problem Population: Unemployed Idle Laborers and the Dangerous Classes A fourth dimension of economic change occurred at the level of the management of the unemployed classes as cities became the center of economic life. In the main, this came about as feudal economies were replaced by industrial economies and the old conditions of labor were replaced by new conditions of wage labor. As the new centers of industrial production began to emerge, it led to a centralized authority and a new class system which began to be mobilized on the decline of the old economic classes and class structure. Consequently, there was a formal transfer of power from feudal landlords to the commercial classes and, soon after, there was a central market economy and a system of exchange for the buying and selling of labor and the buying and selling of commodities. At this point, new class interests began to form which created the need for state administration and the basis for a state political apparatus. This acted to accelerate the growth of cities, mobilize the demographic transfer of

51 See Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present*, London: Methuen and Co., 1984.

52 See Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, p. 90,

53 Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present*, London: Methuen and Co.,1984.

the remaining agricultural population, and formally completed the process of separating the agricultural worker from the land where they had lived as hereditary tenants.

However, as the pace of economic change brought about a more effective clearing away of the old feudal society, the industrial cities became populated with a large class of unattached workers who sought out their livelihoods in the newly emerging industrial economies.[54] All this put pressure on the population of unemployed workers in cities such as Manchester, Stoke-on-Trent, London and other centers. Eventually, unattached workers began to be perceived as a problem population who, as a result of being outside the economy, became subject to Poor Law enactments, workhouse confinement and statutory regulation such as the anatomy act.[55] As the unemployed populations increased, statutory regulation began to mount and new procedures were put in place to manage the problem population by a classification of their social needs on the one hand, and a classification of their deviance on the other. This included a classification of the degree of their poverty, the state of their hygiene, the content of their skills, the characteristics of their living quarters and the condition of 'the child' as it related to family, life and labor. This led to a whole new class of statutory acts which were imposed in the form of vagrancy laws and Poor Law administration on the one hand, and labor regulations regarding the codification of the laborer and the length and duration of the workday on the other. All this set into motion the machinery for managing the problem population who were becoming part of a growing army of unattached vagrants and idle laborers.

Several consequences ensued as a result of this. First, the existing rates of unemployed workers became part of the political arithmetic of the regional restructuring of the urban population. Second, with the new institutional axis forming in relation to the family, work and schooling, the urban population began to be patterned in relation to their social position within the family and work. This led to the identification of those who were outside of work as posing a social danger, and this became extended to other 'dangers,' such as the danger of poverty, the danger of the absence of employment, the danger of crime, and the danger of the criminal population.[56] This acted to shore up the gap which had existed between the formation of the new institutions of politics, law and government, and the conditions under which these institutions could become corrective. This led to the definition of more distinctly defined social functions which began

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54 During this period the rural population had formed into what Marx called the 'hospital' of the reserve army of unemployed workers. For more on the confinement of this class, see Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, New York: Vintage Books, 1988, pp. 38–64.

55 The 'Anatomy Act' of 1832 required that unattached vagrants who died in the houses of correction were to be given over to medical hospitals as cadavers to be dissected. Some argue that this was a form of postmortem punishment of whosoever was deviant and whosoever was poor. Like the vagrancy act before it, the anatomy act marked the point at which poverty was recast as a criminal act at precisely the time that economic categories became dominant. For further discussion of the anatomy act, the anatomy inspectorate and a comparison with the factory inspectorate, see Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987.

56 It is at this point that the 'dangerous individual' became a subject of psychiatry and law. See Michel Foucault, 'About the Concept of the 'Dangerous Individual' in Nineteenth Century Legal Psychiatry,' *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 1, 1978, pp. 1–18.

the process of containing and correcting the new social dangers of idleness, vagrancy, poverty, crime, insanity, contagion and disease, etc.[57]

In the nineteenth century, this led to formation of new social policy and the study of the urban population that was directed to the problem of the industrial laborer and the working poor. This, in turn, led to a more precise identification of the different dimensions of the problem population, including their living conditions, their nutrition, their poverty, their birth rates, their mortality rates, their idleness and the degree to which their living conditions affected the health of the child. The intervention by statutory acts into public and private spaces led to a further classification of different kinds of workers and different kinds of work; of the distinction between the places of work and schooling, and to the new powers of segregation which began to emerge between these spaces and other more dangerous spaces and their possible application to the social and political spaces of the city.[58] Then there arose all kinds of statutory regulations and public ordinances in relation to these spaces, so that for each of the possible elements of the population – the idle laborer, the working poor, the able-bodied pauper, the child, the commercial classes, the destitute working-poor, the stout laborer, etc. – there emerged classifications and statutory regulations whose function it was to segregate the vagabond from the idle laborer, the unemployed worker from the vagrant, the working poor from the wealthy classes. All this served to identify poverty, idleness, indigence, illness and unemployment as dangers, and as a form of existence that was outside the norm and subject to the law and to state power.[59]

Eventually, this led to the acquisition of new forms of knowledge that were related to the prevention of the problem population by enactments restricting their movement. In 1835, the statutes of Edward were enacted with respect to vagrancy and the idle laborer, declaring that 'no laborer at the end of their work term could depart from the place where they dwell.' In addition, legal restrictions prevented unemployed laborers from traveling to localities where there was an accumulation of unemployed indigent workers. Then in 1837 came the distinction between persons who were unemployed because they could not get work, and persons unemployed because they did not want to work. This led to enactments which forcibly set the 'unemployed to work and committed those who did not want to work to the houses of correction.'[60]

Then there were the statutes which required the prevention of poverty by the containment of the poor within the work houses. As a result, statutory regulation began to classify the poor into several groupings comprised of able bodied idle paupers and able bodied workers. This formed a point of separation between those who worked, and

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57 Discussion of the history of vagrancy law can be found in William Chambliss 'A Sociological Analysis of the Law of Vagrancy,' *Social Problems*, 12, 1964, pp. 67–77. He shows that the legal definition of vagrancy coincided with the criminal identification of a 'class of persons' who fell within the statute even though their 'idleness' was not a *de facto* criminal offense.

58 Ibid., pp. 6–7.

59 Michel Foucault's study of the birth of the confinement movement, the process of social separation and the emergence of the houses of confinement is relevant here. See *Madness and Civilization*, New York: Vintage, 1988.

60 A.E. Bland, *English Economic History: Select Documents*, London: G.Bell and Sons, 1925, p. 364.

those who did not, and from this arose a set of restrictions against begging by those who were idle in certain localities within the city.[61] Then came the acts that assigned the poor to places where they were permitted to beg and receive aid, and those places where the poor and the impoverished were prohibited from gathering. This had the effect of confining the poor to one place where they could be observed and classified. In addition, it brought public attention to the large agenda of statutory regulation enacted between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, showing a distinct turn in the law toward a great 'setting to work' of those who were among the idle population on the one hand, and those who would be committed to 'the houses of correction in accordance with the act' on the other.[62]

As the effects of this became more pervasive, it enlarged the space of public regulation in three distinct ways. First, by defining those spaces which were to be subject to public regulation, it became possible to enact public infractions on the basis of statutory requirements in relation to poverty, begging, hygiene, sickness, contagion, disease, unemployment and criminality.[63] Second, by increasing the space of public regulation and defining what was normative, it turned the industrial city into the sphere of civil society so that its commerce, its living quarters, its places of labor and public leisure, became the space of social classes, of families, of workshops and of public civility. This necessitated the appearance of legality in relation to the disruption of these spaces, particularly in relation to crimes of property such as loitering, drunkenness, false occupancy, fraud, illegal access and trespass.[64] Third, as the city became the center of commence, there was the necessity for constant policing that arose in relation to the protection of property, and this led to concentrations within the city proper of municipal authorities whose concern was to maintain levels of decorum and the appearance of public order. In turn, this gave rise to a whole network of statutory regulation which governed the new illegalities and the new departures from legality.

As soon as the class of social dangers began to be linked to knowledge about possible forms of their correction, they began to be related to other branches of public hygiene, to the formation of schooling institutions, to the living conditions of workers and other classes, and to the problem of over population and the condition of the 'child.'[65] This led to further coercive measures by social institutions. For one thing, it extended the power of social institutions related to family life, work and schooling by extending their laws and their regulatory reach to other institutional domains. In and of itself, this gave rise to new forms of statutory regulation of public social spaces – the space of the poor, the space of the alcoholic, the space of commerce, the

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61 Ibid., pp. 366–7.

62 Ibid., p. 364.

63 On the question of the new classification of the vagrant population and the corrective endeavors of the vagrancy act, see W. Chambliss, 'A Sociological Analysis of the Law of Vagrancy,' *Social Problems*, 12, 1964, pp. 68–71.

64 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, especially the 'Gentle way in punishment,' pp. 104–13.

65 Michel Foucault, 'The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century,' in *Power/Knowledge*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.

space of crime. This was made manifest by the new statutory classification of the illegal vagrant, the unattached idle worker, the able-bodied pauper and the destitute, whose poverty was made the subject of enactments in respect to the workhouse and the workhouse test.[66] As a result of the definition of these spaces, a new category of criminal misdemeanor emerged along with a new classification of public space and civil society.[67] This, in turn, created the category of the possible disruption of public spaces and the concept of the menace of public space by misdemeanor, worker strikes, the unemployed idle laborer and the presence of criminality.

3 The Dual Movement of Individualism and Industrialization

Following the large-scale changes in the political and economic foundations of society there emerged a third significant development. This concerned the individual's relation to society as a whole and to its collective unity. This theme, so central to the development of modern social theory, is called the process of individualism.[68] The term 'individualism' grew out of the framework of European social thought that first emerged during the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Thinkers such as Joseph de Maistre and Henri Saint-Simon were the first to use the term to criticize the glorification of the individual over the dominance of social and political institutions which began to occur after the French Revolution.[69]

Historically, the theme of individualism refers to the process in modern economies and in modern politics that create privatizations in the form of the detached isolated individual, whose relation to society took on a new form in the modern industrial economies. Gone were the old unities of society that once existed in the form of the social attachments to groups and political bodies outside the individual. Gone were the cooperative forms of work which existed in the old agrarian economies. These had been replaced by the new unities of the modern state which brought about the dual movement of industrialization and individualism and which created unprecedented social conformity at the same time that it created unprecedented modes of isolation, separation and privatization.

But beyond this, the process of individualism defines the point in the development of society where individuals began to be separated from the roles they once played

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66 The workhouse test was an extension of the vagrancy statutes in that its aim was to penalize those who refused to labor. For the exact functioning of the workhouse test and the use of the test as a 'trick' on the unemployed worker by the official institutions see A.E. Bland et al., *English Economic History: Selected Documents*, London: Bell and Sons, 1925.

67 On this see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

68 Steven Lukes, *Individualism,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973; C.D. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, London: Oxford University, 1962; K.W. Swart, 'Individualism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century (1826–1860),' *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 23, 1962, 77–90.; A.D. Lindsay, 'Individualism,' *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 7, 1930–33, 674–80.

69 See R.R. Palmer, 'Man and Citizen: Applications of Individualism in the French Revolution,' in Milton R. Konvitz and Arthur E. Murphy (eds.), *Essays in Political Theory,* New York: Kennikat Press, 1972, pp. 130–152; W. Swart, 'Individualism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century (1826–1860),' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 23, 1962, 77–90.

in previous societies and in previous economies. Individualism in this sense refers to the process of setting up society into what is called 'individuals'; that is, into autonomous, juridical political persons who are the subjects of certain legal rights and political freedoms and whose unity to society is represented in the form of the modern political state.[70] In the main, individualism refers to the process of isolation that occurs between the individual and the wider society which ensues during the dual movement of industrialization and privatization. Since no complete understanding of nineteenth century social theory is possible without looking at this process and at the relationship between the individual and society, let us look more closely.

Within the context of European social thought, the collective maintenance of society was thought to depend on the preservation of large scale institutional powers, consisting of the church, the monarchy and the state. Within this social framework, individuals were thought to participate in society and social life only as members of much larger social groups, such as the estates and guilds with whom they cooperated and formed attachments. These groups asserted collective rights over individuals, acted as corporate bodies which exercised proprietary powers over them and, to a large extent, determined their place in society.

In addition to this, the social bonds linking groups to larger corporate bodies and dominant social institutions often determined individual legal rights and social obligations, and this acted to define the individual's place within society as a whole and determine the extent of their social attachments to the group. Large collective bodies, such as the guilds, churches and feudal estates, functioned as corporate entities whose authority, prerogative and proprietary powers over individuals were spelled out by state government. Generally, these large political bodies dominated social life, controlled trades and regulated occupations. Here, individuals participated in society only as members of larger groups.[71] Many were unable to participate in occupations or trades except as members of these corporate bodies, and only as members of these bodies did individuals participate in the wider society. Under these circumstances, the rights and purposes of collective bodies seemed always to exceed the rights and purposes of individuals.

Thus, predominantly, in earlier historical periods the 'individual appears as dependent, and as belonging to a greater social whole defined by the family, then by the family extended to the clan and then later to the various forms of collective society arising from the clan formations.' Only in the eighteenth century, 'does the individual appear as detached and isolated from the wider collectivity.'[72] Individualism, then, is the name given to the overall process leading to the political, social, and economic separation of individuals from the wider ties they once had to larger social groups and dominant institutions. Historically, three immediate forces were at work to bring these changes about. First, after the French Revolution, the legal rights that

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70 See N. Poulantzas' *State, Power, Socialism*, London: NLB, 1978, pp. 50–71.

71 Lukes, *Individualism*, p. 21; and Louis Dumont, 'The Modern Conception of the Individual,' *Contributions to Indian Sociology,* 8, 1965, 13–61.

72 Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973, pp. 83–4.

were assigned to individuals began to dissolve the old proprietary powers inherent in corporate bodies.[73] Second, as a result of the political changes following the French Revolution, all the estates and guilds were abolished and their powers, rights and prerogatives assigned as legal entitlements to individuals. What had thus been corporate and collective in nature was suddenly centered on the individual. Third, as a result of the development of modern economies, the old collective participation in economic life suddenly shifted to the detached isolated individual whose economic livelihood was their own private responsibility. In a 'society of free competition, the isolated individual thus appears detached from their natural bonds which in an earlier historical period makes them the accessory of a definite and limited human conglomerate.'[74] This period 'produces isolated individuals' who confront each other 'as a means towards their private purposes;' and in this the individual emerges on the stage of history at the expense of the larger institutions of society.[75]

By 1890, the term 'individualism' began to be used by Durkheim in *The Division of Labor* and in *Suicide* to designate the themes of egoism and autonomy which were thought to have been brought about as a result of the disappearance of the social links and bonds that once connected individuals to larger groups. But beyond this, Durkheim found that the level of individual attachment to the wider society largely depended on the structure of the pervasive network of social inks and bonds that tied individuals directly to society as a whole. From this came the idea that the process of individualism was itself social in origin, and Durkheim set out to find how changes in the economic structure of society and the social division of labor would have led to the breakdown of the broader system of social attachments. Other thinkers took the view that the progressive focus on the individual evident in the expanded rights and freedoms that occurred after the French revolution, automatically jeopardized the greater collective interests of society and, for some, this meant the collapse of social unity and the dissolution of society.

In French social thought proper, individualism was seen as a threat to aggregate social maintenance and many believed that it would undermine the political and economic order of society.[76] In France, where the concept of society had been premised on individual self interest and autonomy, the process of individualism was looked upon as the social and political equivalent of a crisis. It threatened to dissolve society and destroy collective unity, and at every level of society it was thought to signify autonomy, freedom, and lack of restraint from collective social rules.

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73 See, R.R. Palmer, 'Man and Citizen: Applications of Individualism in the French Revolution,' in Milton R. Konvitz and Arthur E. Murphy (eds.), *Essays in Political Theory*, New York: Kennikat Press, 1972, pp. 130–152.

74 See Marx's discussion of isolated 'independent individuals' in *The Grundrisse*, pp. 83–4; and N. Poulantzas' discussion of the 'isolation effect' in his *Political Power and Social Classes*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1973, pp. 130–291.

75 Marx, *Grundrisse*, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1973, p. 84.

76 Durkheim's reaction to the problem of advancing individualism is evident in his study of *Suicide* and his discussion of the problem in 'Individualism and the Intellectuals', *Political Studies*, 17, [1898], 1969, 14–30. Also, see Gregory Claeys, 'Individualism, Socialism and Social Science: Further Notes on a Process of Conceptual Formation 1800–1850,' *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 33, 1986, 81–93.

By 1895, the process of individualism found support in an economic doctrine called laissez-faire competition, and then it found support in a political doctrine known as utilitarianism. This had claimed that the only right actions and the only right laws were those which maximize individual utility and private interest. In this view, individuals were thought to share common motives of individual utility and personal gain which impelled them to pursue their private interest through economic attainment, but beyond this the individual owed nothing to society in its own right. In this context, society was nothing more than the spontaneous actions and interests of individuals acting in the world on the basis of their utility, and as such the concept of society was reduced to the spontaneous actions and attitudes of individuals.[77]

As an economic doctrine, individualism found its basis in Adam Smith's defense of the system of private interest and private enterprise, which he developed in a work called *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776.[78] In it, Smith justified the conception of individual competition by setting out the fundamental principle of private enterprise, stating that each individual was free to compete among their fellows and pursue their self interest in the form of private economic gain. While this may not seem extraordinary in itself, the effects of universal competition based on the private acts of individuals cut deeply into the social fabric and into the form of the social attachments. Where individuals had once been linked by a system of common obligations, cooperative work and economic bonds, these were suddenly replaced by the independent pursuit of self interest, free enterprise and private gain. Seen from this perspective, society was little more than an association of autonomous, isolated individuals acting on the basis of private utility and economic self interest. Smith's conception of society as the pursuit of individual competition thus reduced society and the collective restraint to the spontaneous interests and competitive acts of individuals, and to this extent society had no purpose in itself. Instead of conceiving of individual competition as a stage in social and historical development, Smith thought that individual competition and private gain were the natural outcomes of economic progress.

What was extraordinary about Smith's proposal concerning the pursuit of private interest was its conception of the collective whole and the community of individuals. It was Smith's view that the individual was a 'natural' member of the social order only by their individual pursuit of private gain, and only through this gain did individuals contribute to the common prosperity of society.[79] According to this view, individuals were 'free agents,' able to make contracts and enter into economic interchanges without obligation to the wider society. Conceived of in this way, social relations between individuals were reduced to a set of commercial transactions and economic exchanges, and the idea of the common authority of society was reduced to straightforward economic utility and self interest.

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77 A.D. Lindsay, 'Individualism', *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 7, 1930–33, 674–80.

78 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations,* London: Dent & Sons, [1776] 1910.

79 See Jacob Viner, 'Adam Smith and Laissez Faire,' in J.M. Clark and P.H. Douglas et al., *Adam Smith 1776–1926*, New York: Augustus Kelly, 1966.

Smith's economic justification of private enterprise and individual competition was thus ingenious. Though based on a crude appeal to the collective good conceived of in terms of 'fiscal well being' and the duty to accumulate wealth, Smith pronounced his rationale for individual competition by stating that 'in pursuing their self interest, the individual promotes the greater good of society by contributing to its national wealth and this they do more effectively than when they really intend to promote it.'[80] By conceiving of the unity of society as a 'common economic prosperity,' Smith was able to reduce the maintenance of society to collective forces of self interest and economic competition. Accordingly, all the collective social functions of society shrank to the role of protecting private rights of individuals so that they could engage in the pursuit of private interest and economic gain.

Modern Social Thought and the Nineteenth Century Theories of Knowledge

No complete understanding of the history of social thought or of the theoretical works of Marx, Durkheim and Weber is possible without some discussion of the theories of knowledge which were dominant during the latter part of the nineteenth century. In fact, by the end of the century, three dominant philosophies had come to the forefront during the development of classical social theory. These were the philosophies of idealism, empiricism, and positivism, and what is important to note is that each of these philosophies influenced the development of social thought and had an enormous impact on nineteenth century social theory as a whole. Let us begin by looking at the first body of knowledge called idealism.

Classical Idealism Philosophical idealism originated in 480 B.C. with the work of Socrates and Plato, who were among the first to set out principles of thought which acted as guidelines for investigating the existence of a realm of concepts thought to be beyond the physical world.[81] As a philosophic perspective, idealism got its name from a branch of knowledge which believed that the most important task of philosophy was to inquire into a realm whose existence could only be grasped by theoretical activity, rather than by straightforward observation or straightforward logical reasoning. The growth of idealist philosophy is best understood in opposition to a type of philosophical thought which existed in Greece during the fifth century B.C., and which focused on the origins of the natural world.[82] Among the first philosophers to put forward a rudimentary theory of nature and physics were those who believed only in the ultimate reality of the physical world. Among the claims put forward by these philosophers was the idea that the natural world was primarily made up of

80 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations,* p. 423.

81 This practice was common in the dialogues of Plato.

82 Ernest Barker, *Greek Political Theory*, London: Methuen, 1918.

physical matter and that, according to this view, the object of philosophy was to explain how change took place in reality and in the physical world itself.

The tradition of philosophic idealism can best be understood therefore as a direct response to the very straightforward philosophic view which insisted that reality was to be regarded as nothing more than what can be determined with the senses and by sense perception in relation to physical reality. By 430 B.C., however, Socrates began to advance an idealist doctrine which argued that, beneath the basic physical structure of reality, was some greater fundamental reality giving purpose and meaning to existence, and that, without this, individual existence made little sense. It was Socrates, therefore, who was the first to put forward the view that a more enduring pattern or purpose must underlie the apparent physical reality of experience and that this pattern was not itself subject to change, but was eternal and unchanging.[83]

This disagreement in philosophy over the appropriate subject matter of investigation, between 'physical matter' on the one hand, and the 'values' and 'ideals' related to universals such as equality, freedom and social justice on the other, led to the formation of two distinct schools of thought; in fact, two distinct tendencies in knowledge. The first of these perspectives took the view that only the world of physical reality exists and that knowledge of physical reality can be apprehended and brought to light only by the senses and by sense perception. The second perspective, by contrast, took the view that the proper object of philosophical investigation were the 'realities' and 'concepts' which involve the well-being and equality of the social and political community, since it was these realities that bear on human and political things in contrast to physical or material things. Furthermore, because these concepts and realities were above physical things, it was thought that they could only be brought to light through theory and theoretical activity.

The distinction between 'physical or natural' things and 'human' things, was thus the central starting place of idealist political philosophy and the focus on human political and social questions. In contrast to physical reality, therefore, those things studied by the branch of knowledge concerned with the human political community could not be known by sense perception, since they involve principles, standards, ideals and ethics not directly graspable by the senses. According to this view, social and political things form a class of objects by themselves and, therefore, should be studied separately from physical things.

The absolute starting place for social and political thought is therefore Plato's Republic. The central discussion in this work relates to the importance of social and political ideals and standards for collective life and for society. While many believe that Plato's Republic is a political fantasy, others take the view that Plato had a more serious purpose in mind. In fact, the Republic is one of the first sustained philosophic conversations about the 'ideal' social community, and in it Socrates puts forward the view that the state is founded on two primary functions. The first of these concerned

83 A. E. Taylor, *Elements of Metaphysics*, London: Methuen, 1956.

practical matters and physical things such as the division of labor, the production of a food supply, a system of education, and the conditions of safety and security.[84] These physical functions of society serve practical ends and relate to securing the material well being of individuals and the community. But Socrates believed that the second group of things – formally defined as 'ideal' functions – involves principles, practices and standards of society which relate to the system of human conduct and thus involves the social and political good of society.[85] In contrast to the practical functions, these functions are organized in reference to human and political things. In these terms, the 'ideal,' then, can be described simply as anything relating to the human political community which strives for what is beyond the functional or practical level of activity and which promotes the well-being of the human political community.

As far as idealist philosophy was concerned, practical things had a utilitarian sanction, while those things relating to larger purposes or standards of society and the political community were given an extraordinary ethical sanction.[86] Plato believed that the leap from the practical to the ideal was, in fact, ethical in nature and it was this that formed the basis of Greek political philosophy and its focus on political functions and institutions. Social and political theory, therefore, was an instrument first used to make the central social and ethical questions about society and human necessity seem compelling and important, and as a necessary social and political good. Since everything depends on the system of ethics and values of the society we live in, the first social and political thinkers believed that a special branch of philosophic thought should be dedicated to things political and human, and this branch of thinking got its name in direct contrast to the body of thought which studied material reality and physical things.

It was Plato, then, who was among the first to make the ideal realm an object of discussion in his dialogues, and to assume that knowledge was attainable only by making the distinction between the 'ideal' and the 'material' realms. The first of these realms, Plato thought, is the sense world, which is the world of everyday material existence. This, according to Plato, is the most immediate and first level of experience. But here the objects of the material world are in a constant state of change and, therefore, cannot be known absolutely since, when in a constant state of change, no object maintains its form over time. Plato reasoned, therefore, that since the world of immediate experience was constantly changing, any absolute knowledge of it was impossible.

The second realm recognized by Plato is made up of what he called 'universals', or more simply 'forms' or 'concepts.' Basically, this dimension gets its name from a set of ideas and concepts such as justice and equality, which the Greek philosophers believed were essentially unchanging because they were related to human things and applied universally to all social and historical circumstances.[87] These 'absolutes' get

84 Richard Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*, London: Macmillan, 1958.

85 Taylor, *Elements of Metaphysics*, pp. 18–22.

86 The distinction between utilitarian and ethical sanctions is developed by Laszlo Versenyi, *Socratic Humanism*, New Haven: Yale, 1963, pp. 79–98.

87 Ernest Barker, *Greek Political Theory,* pp. 282–283.

their name from a set of ideas which were thought to supersede time and place, and accordingly surpass all social and historical situations since they apply to all societies. So far as they applied universally to all societies and were believed to be unchanging, the ideals and concepts were thought to be applicable to all human social and political communities.

In this context, three distinct characteristics of classical idealism can be outlined. First is the reliance on a conception of philosophy as a body of thought aimed at understanding existence by means of universal concepts, such as history, human necessity and equality, which cannot be known by sense perception or by experience alone. Second is the implied philosophic relation between knowledge of universal concepts, and the knowledge of the structure of human societies as associations whose line of development reflects the essential concepts and standards held to be universally valid. Third is the reliance on a form of knowledge which attempts to develop theories of society, history and existence, in contrast to scientific knowledge which attempts to develop factual knowledge of the natural empirical world and the human body.[88]

Hegelian Idealism and the Theory of Historical Development A second current of philosophical idealism emerged in Germany with the writings of Georg Hegel (1770–1831). Hegel is best known for developing a complete system of idealist philosophy, which by the nineteenth century had become the dominant philosophic framework in Western Europe. By 1830 he had pioneered theoretical investigations into history, existence, politics and social thought and was the first to introduce the concept of society into classical knowledge. But to understand the impact of his work on the development of idealism and social theory, we must look more closely.

Hegel was born in 1770 in Stuttgart and studied theology and philosophy at Tubingen University. In 1806, when at the University of Jena, Hegel wrote his first major philosophical work, entitled *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel's writings were central to the social and political thought of the time in several respects. First, he forced philosophy to confront historical and social questions, thus transforming philosophic concepts into social and historical ones.[89] Second, Hegel's writings acted as a theoretical background to Marx's and Engels' economic and political works because Hegel had identified society as a field of activity outside of history. Third, it was Hegel's philosophical idealism which later shaped Comte's critique of philosophy known as 'positivism,' leading eventually to a widespread opposition to idealism and to its eventual decline.

In order to put Hegel's work into perspective, it will be useful to look at his main theoretical writings by placing them in the context of classical idealism. As we noted earlier, classical idealism had taken the view that the physical world could not be known with any direct certainty because its material existence was always changing. This ultimately forced classical idealism to abandon the material world in order to

88 Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*, p. 61.

89 Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution;* J.N. Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination*; Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx*.

focus on the realm of absolute truths whose existence could be relied upon as objects of theoretical investigation. Hegel, however, thought that the tendency in classical idealism to draw sharp distinctions between the material world and the ideal world ultimately split human experience into two separate spheres and this, he thought, canceled out the study of the material world of experience. Hegel's most important contribution to the development of social theory, therefore, was his re-introduction of the material world back into thought. This immediately rescued the material world from the philosophic extremities where it had been placed since antiquity, mainly by bringing it back into a theory of knowledge.

Hegel's main theoretical influence was Aristotle.[90] What interested Hegel in Aristotle's work was his rejection of Plato's doctrine of the transcendent realm of absolutes which tended to stand above the material world of experience. Aristotle maintained that Plato's separation of the material and ideal realms was unnecessary, and he took the view that both the ideal and the material worlds were in fact immanent in human experience, and thus fundamentally belonged together and should be treated as a philosophic unity.[91]

For Hegel, this was a key philosophic step, since it took the view that the principles of human and social development worked implicitly toward ultimate ends and that the process of development was itself implicit in social and historical subject matter. As a result of Hegel's incorporation of principles of material and social development within history, the focal point of philosophical and theoretical activity shifted from an investigation of the realm of Platonic absolutes to one of studying and explaining the material processes of social and historical development itself. This brought with it several important things. First, it led to the introduction of the concept of society as an independent reality and as a field of activity. Second, it separated the space of society from the space of history in a way that had not been done previously up until that time. Third, it led to the assertion that historical development itself took a social form represented by distinct societies, whose system of politics, forms of class distinction, religion, and inward social divisions obeyed principles of their own. These steps made it clear that philosophy could only understand history by adopting social concepts and that history was, in fact, social in nature.

This led Hegel to introduce what he called the four social realms, or historical kingdoms, which constituted one of the first expressions of the distinct social forms in societies past and present.[92] According to Hegel, there was the Asiatic form where the individual was part of the social mass, religion was dominant, the ruler was a dynastic lord, law was undifferentiated from custom and morality and 'class differences became crystallized into hereditary castes.'[93] Then there were the societies of

90 J.N. Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination,* London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958.

91 Ibid.

92 The four social realms or historical kingdoms are outlined by Hegel in *The Philosophy of History* and *The Philosophy of Right*.

93 Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1958, p. 220.

antiquity where, according to Hegel, individuals were separated from the social mass, decision-making was based on oracles, ruling was in the form of shared politics, and existence was divided into classes of slaves and of free individuals. Then came the feudal period, where the community was structured in relation to an economy of agriculture, and there emerged a trading class of guilds where ruling was in the form of sovereignty and existence was divided into classes of landholders and serf cultivators. What was unprecedented about Hegel's characterization of the four political realms of society was the expression, perhaps for the first time in social thought, of the fact that societies differ in their structures in terms of their class systems, their institutions, the form of their politics, and the degree to which the individual is or is not submerged into the social mass.

At the basis of all this was Aristotle's assertion that the natural and social world acted according to ultimate purposes or ends which, in his view, were actualized in the principle of development. The name Aristotle gave to this process was 'teleology,' a concept which took the view that the ideal and material realm were fused together in a process of development. In this view, human and material things ultimately act according to ends or purposes in the process of social development, and the function of theory in this regard is to explain these processes as they appear in the formation of distinct societies. Drawing from Aristotle, Hegel attempted to pioneer a system of thinking that endeavored to explain human existence as a process of development. Simply stated, Hegel believed that the 'ideal' and 'material' realms belonged together and were fundamentally rooted in the structure of reality and history.[94] This step was of central philosophic significance because it tied the universal concepts of history and necessity into existence, rather than placing them above experience as classical idealism had done. In this sense, Hegel's idealism was thus founded upon a theory of history and society.

Empiricism and the Growth of the Scientific Outlook It was clear that by the second half of the nineteenth century idealist philosophy was in decline and that by 1850 a serious critical attack against idealism began to be mounted. In order to understand these developments it will be useful to look briefly at the history of empiricism in relation to the development of a theory of knowledge in the social sciences. Essentially, the term empiricism originates from the Greek word 'empereiria', meaning experience. It can be defined as the general name given to the doctrine in philosophy which holds that knowledge of the material world must be based on straightforward observation and sense perception.

It was Aristotle who is historically believed to be the founder of empiricism by his attempt to integrate experience into a theory of knowledge. In contrast to idealism, therefore, the fundamental tenet of empiricism is the belief that knowledge is the product of a straightforward perceptual encounter with the natural world. Eventually, empiricism attained its place in Western thought because of its relation to modern

94 Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx*; Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination.*

science and its emphasis on substantiating knowledge statements by recourse to observation and the accumulation of facts.[95] As successes in the natural sciences began to mount in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there was universal acceptance of empirical methods in the social sciences and these became standardized in disciplines such as history, social science, psychology and anthropology.

One of the principle qualities of empiricism is its reliance on sense perception. This is expressed in a number of key assumptions which characterize the empirical standpoint. The first of these assumes that things in the material world remain the same over time and are subject to observation and description. Second, empiricism asserts that, while a division exists between the 'outer world' of things and the 'inner world' of the mind, knowledge is the straightforward grasping or apprehension of the object in the material world. Third, empirical methods assume that accounts concerning the validity of observation must be given about the operations and procedures used to obtain knowledge of things in the outer world. Where no account can be given, claims may not be validated. Fourth, empirical methodologies assume that certainty lies in the methods of measurement used to obtain reliable knowledge from the physical world and believes that these methods are an indispensable means of representing the factual consistency of the natural world itself. Fifth, empiricism assumes that the tendency to commit error in the formation of knowledge can only be reduced when we increase our reliance on observation and measurement.[96] Historically, it was this reliance on measurement, and the belief that the outer world could be measured, that eventually gave birth to the scientific outlook and the scientific method and its utilization in the social sciences. But, as we shall see later, there were problems in the social sciences when it became time to derive knowledge from the material world based on an uncritical reliance on empirical and scientific techniques.

The Development of Positivism This takes us directly to the development of positivism as a theory of knowledge which emerged in the nineteenth century. Primarily a philosophic doctrine associated with the work of Auguste Comte, positivism may be defined as a scientific movement which began to create reforms in the way knowledge was acquired. While Comte published his work on positive philosophy in 1830, positivism did not become a world wide movement until the latter part of the nineteenth century, when it announced that the age of 'speculation' and 'intuition' in philosophy was at an end.[97] Historically, positivism came fully into prominence only when it mounted a critical attack on idealist philosophy.

In a work entitled *A Course on Positive Philosophy*, Comte put forward two basic premises. First, he asserted that all the speculative philosophies of knowledge would be replaced by the methods of the natural sciences and, second, he took the view that

95 Paul K. Feyerabend, *Problems of Empiricism*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
96 Ibid.
97 Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, London: Routledge, 1908.

positivism was the highest possible stage in the development of knowledge. Comte, therefore, tended to equate positivism with scientific progress and social reform. As a scientific doctrine positivism emphasized two key points of departure from idealist philosophies which had been dominant up until that time. It stressed the reliability of observation as a basis for a theory of knowledge; and it placed an extraordinary emphasis on the search for factual regularities which Comte believed would lead to the formation of general laws. Positivism thus constituted a key shift in the philosophy of knowledge, to the extent that it insisted that the old idealist search for underlying meaning and ultimate causes or truths be abandoned and replaced with the ultimate stress on observation and description.

The influence of positivism on the development of the social sciences was therefore dramatic.[98] Generally, there were two pivotal assertions which made positivism so influential. First, Comte's 'law of three stages' had the effect of essentially equating the use of the scientific method with historical development and social progress. Second, Comte developed a system for classifying the sciences by arranging them in terms of a definite order, and by hierarchically organizing the sciences in relation to their complexity and utilization of the scientific method.[99] This left no doubt that, in contrast to the social and historical sciences, the methods of the natural sciences had obtained greater precision and thus had attained the highest rank. Though Comte's law of three stages was basically straightforward, its social impact was considerable. It had taken the view that the human mind develops in three distinct and unalterable phases: the theological stage, in which human beings explain causes in terms of the will of anthropomorphic gods; the metaphysical stage, in which causes are explained in terms of abstract speculative ideas; and the positive stage, in which causes are explained in terms of scientific laws. What proved to be so controversial about Comte's assertion that positivism constituted the highest stage in knowledge was its immediate claim that the speculative stage of knowledge was to be replaced by the positivistic stage and that the development toward this stage was necessary if social thought was to become a credible science. In essence, this meant that positivism became associated in the minds of many with progress and social reform. Under these circumstances, it became a matter of historical urgency for the social sciences to develop from the speculative to the positive stage, thereby marking their scientific stature. In this respect, positive philosophy did nothing less than mark the end of speculative thought going back as far as the philosophy of antiquity.

In addition to differentiating itself from idealism, positivism made itself distinct from empiricism. Whereas empiricism advocated the general philosophical view that reality was to be equated with the physical world and sense perception, positivism was a social movement which pronounced the demise of speculative philosophy by promising to resolve the 'intellectual anarchy' that was thought to exist in the

98 Simon, *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century,* pp. 4–18.
99 Ibid.

philosophical sciences.[100] While positivism had adopted the empirical principles of observation and sense perception, it gained its historical significance by proclaiming that the age of speculative philosophy was at an end.

By 1890 positivism had become a dominant social force advocating scientific change and social reforms and had adopted methods premised on the natural sciences.[101] The key characteristics of positivistic method can best be outlined as follows. First, positivism was premised on the assumption that a search for universal truths or ideals be abandoned in favor of a search for law-like regularities. Second, it took the view that the only legitimate objects of scientific investigation were those which were subject to observation, since observation had become the central criterion of verification. Since verification was preparatory to the formulation of general laws, laws themselves were to be subject to the test of facts. Third, with its stress on observation, positivism equated knowledge with the experience of factual regularity and this greatly reduced the role reason had played in theory formation. Eventually, these distinctions in knowledge brought about a split in social theory between the study of human necessity, politics and social inequality on the one hand, and the study of facts and laws on the other. By the twentieth century, the study of politics and human economic necessity was abandoned for the study of facts, and the search for knowledge was itself reduced to a search for facts in the observable world. Fourth, positivism's straightforward acceptance of the physical sciences as a model of certainty and exactness put other disciplines on notice that the methods of the natural sciences were to be the ultimate goal of all disciplines in their search for knowledge. Fifth, positivism upheld the view that progress and social reform depended on an orientation to facts and factual knowledge.

It is important to remember that, in advocating the adoption of positive methods in the social sciences, Comte was responding to two particular challenges which he felt represented a threat to the threshold of a new scientific age. The first of these was the social and political anarchy which had been caused by the revolution in France. Second, was the perceived anarchy of philosophical speculation which had prevailed since the dominance of Hegel's idealism in European thought. Comte took the view that the new science of positive philosophy would in fact serve two specific purposes. It would make French society whole again by examining the problems of society scientifically, and it would pronounce the end of speculative philosophy and its mystical view of nature, society and history.[102] Viewed from this perspective, positivism may be defined as a scientific outlook on the world which departed from speculative philosophy by abandoning the search for ultimate, final, or first causes or truths.

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100 See Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, pp. 323–360.

101 For discussion of the social and political reforms of positivism, see, D.G. Charlton, *Positive Thought in France During the Second Empire:1852–70*, Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1959.

102 See D.G. Chartton, *Secular Religions in France 1815–1870*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1963.