

“STATIC” AND “DYNAMIC”

AS SOCIOLOGICAL CATEGORIES

The connection between static and dynamic forces in society became, once again, a topic for debate at the sociological congress held in Amsterdam in 1955. The reason for this renewed interest is not far to seek. Dynamic phenomena of great intensity force themselves on the observer of the contemporary scene. Within the Soviet sphere of influence, the structure of society is undergoing radical changes. At the same time, the Orient and all those areas said, not without reason, to be “developing,” are in the throes of modernization. And finally, even in countries ruled by liberalism and marked by stable institutions, the inner structure of such fundamental social concepts as “individual,” “family,” “stratification,” “organization” and “government” is rapidly being transformed. On the other hand, there are many countries in which society appears to be gravitating towards a static condition, characterized by Veblen more than fifty years ago, as a “new feudalism.” When all areas

Translated by H. Kaal.

beyond the present-day borders of capitalism will have been industrialized, capitalism will no longer be able to rely on new resources elsewhere, and its economic expansion, which was once thought to be demanded by the very nature of the system, will have come to an end. Capitalism will then have to revert to simply reproducing itself. This prospect is reflected in our present-day culture. Thus, Olivier Messiaen, a composer of the group known as "La Jeune France," said only recently, that the historical development of music had reached a ceiling beyond which no further development could be imagined; whether he was right or not, is not the point. What should be of most interest in a discussion of the conflict between static and dynamic forces, is the question which of these will prove to be the stronger; whether the trend of development prevailing since the Middle Ages will continue, or whether it will terminate in a state of paralysis of the kind that Himmler prophesied when he said that the Third Reich would last for ten or twenty thousand years, until the "end of modern times." But before we can speculate about the outcome of the conflict between the static and dynamic, we must reflect on the ideas connected with them; otherwise it would be like trying to settle the course of world history by idly tossing a coin.

Comte was the first to outline a program for turning sociology into a special discipline, for making it academically independent, and for converting it into a systematic and classificatory science. It is well known that he demanded that, "in sociology we must ...make a sharp distinction, in the case of each political unit, between the study of the fundamental conditions of the existence of society, and the study of the fundamental laws governing the continued motion of the social body."¹

Accordingly, we should "divide...social physics into two main disciplines to be called, for example, social statics and social dynamics."² This "scientific dualism" should be the counterpart, in society, of the two universal principles: order and progress. "For it is obvious that the static study of the social organism must, at bottom, coincide with the positive theory of order; it is a fact that,

¹ Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, vol. IV, 5th ed. (Société positiviste d'enseignement populaire supérieur, Paris, 1893), p. 254.

² *Ibid.*

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in its very nature, this order can only consist in a perfect and permanent harmony between the various conditions of existence in human society. And it is even more obvious that the dynamic study of the collective life of mankind coincides necessarily with the positive theory of social progress; this theory must discard all vain ideas of absolute and unlimited perfectibility and reduce naturally to the simple idea of this fundamental development."³

It is true that an uncritical observer could discover static and dynamic types in society well into the twentieth century. The peasantry furnished the favorite model of the static type, while the capitalist economy provided a model of the dynamic type, since it was essentially expansive and dynamic. Anyone who wants to defend this classification, can invoke the entire tradition of Western philosophy, including the Socratic distinction between φύσει and θεσει—between the natural and the merely human. Social phenomena that could be traced back to primordial human needs or, to use the current jargon of the existentialists, to "existence," are thought to fall under static categories and to obey static laws; whereas modifications of these basic phenomena, that is, social forms created by special kinds of socialization, are thought to be dynamic. Implicit in this way of thinking is the assumption that the large and all-inclusive main structures remain, whereas their modifications, which are logically inferior to them, are subject to change. Anyone who embraces this assumption will, from the very beginning, downgrade the dynamic elements to the status of the accidental and look upon them as mere embellishments of the main categories. He will not even raise the question whether his main categories may not have been derived by choosing a particular society as a model, and whether this choice of model may not have eliminated everything incompatible with his view that there are invariant elements in society. His methodological conviction enables him to skirt such questions: All we need to do in order to obtain an initial solid classification of social phenomena is to hold on to criteria like the static and dynamic. Yet, it is a well-known fact, and one that has been stressed again and again by sociologists, that we are tempted to glorify metaphysically the static elements, and, in particular, the institutions, because of their

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 255-6.

alleged eternity, and to disparage, as changeable and accidental, the dynamic elements, and, thereby, that which gives concrete content to social change. Anyone who yields to this temptation will have that philosophical tradition behind him which identifies the essential with the permanent, and the merely phenomenal with the transitory.

Whether the distinction between the static and dynamic is imposed on actual societies out of classificatory needs or because of an underlying philosophy, the phenomena as such are by no means divided accordingly. The archaic method of scholasticism, rejected long ago by epistemologists, has slipped through the filter of criticism and survives in the very heart of modern science. Real things are still thought to be composed of parts like essence, accident, existence and the principle of individuation, and to be explicable by adding up such general concepts. No thought is given to the mind, intent on order, without whose mediation the parts would not fit together at all; they could not even be said to have any being of their own, unless one assumed *a priori* that society was neatly divided into elements of order and elements of progress.

Consider the proposition "All social authority rests on the appropriation of other men's labor" as an ideal "static law," that is, without regard to its truth or falsity; and similarly, as an ideal "dynamic law," the proposition "Under the feudal system, authority is exercised through the relationship of leaseholder to tenant." If we now examine the facts, we find that a tenant was certainly not subject to a general law of "authority as such" and, in addition, to a particular law of "authority through lease," the two being related like genus and differentia. The tenant did not first experience authority as such and then its historical mutation; all he experienced was the authority of the feudal lords, whether or not authority through lease should be subsumed, in sociology, under a general higher-order concept of authority. This is not just an epistemological subtlety; the question is whether some laws can be classified as invariant and others as variable, and whether we can conclude from this to the nature of society. Such conclusions would be illegitimate if the so-called "invariants" occurred only in the form of the "variants," and not in isolation or "in themselves." We would then be reading what is true of the

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classificatory scheme into the thing itself. The inclination to do this, and all its consequences, are to be found even among modern sociologists, as for example in Mannheim, who invented the concept of "mediating principles," and in the American sociologists who recently resurrected it, in order to bridge the gap between alleged general laws and the brute facts that refused to obey them, even though there is nothing that corresponds to these mediating principles in the interplay of social forces.

If the uncritical division of society into static and dynamic elements seems to have the blessings of common sense, this is due to the simple-mindedness with which common sense mirrors its own distinctions back onto the object. Nor can this division be justified by a classification of needs into natural and constant ones on the one hand, and those created by man and subject to historical change on the other; for this distinction is produced entirely by the process of classification and is, as such, abstract. Needs cannot simply be divided in this way, because society itself cannot be divided into needs without remainder. It is true that needs enter into the social process of self-preservation, whether of the individual or of the organic whole; but they enter only through this whole. What a man needs or does not need for life, is not simply determined by nature, but depends on the state of production, its conditions and its capacity. Any attempt to distil what is purely natural out of human needs is bound to miscarry. In modern society at least, and no doubt in many earlier ones, the needs of men do not determine the order of their lives, but are instead determined beforehand—unless, indeed, they are first created, as they are in our present era of over-production. To reduce the laws of our capitalistic society without qualification to human needs, and to divide these laws according to these needs into static and dynamic ones, would be to give undue prominence to the satisfaction of needs which is nowadays a mere by-product of our economic interests. As if the acquisition of three cars by a family of two came under the same category as the gathering of fruit by a horde of primitive fruit-pickers! Not only do many things prove to be dynamic which appear static to the naive observer; even needs that are undeniably primordial, like those for food, clothing and shelter, undergo such drastic changes that the quantity of new satisfactions may be transformed into the quality of what

had been mistaken for invariant. The social process is neither purely social nor purely natural; it is an exchange between man and nature—a permanent interaction between the two. The natural is to be found on every level, and cannot be excized from its social form without violence to the phenomena. Technical progress in the last few decades has mobilized everywhere those social groups that could still be regarded as fairly static in the nineteenth century, though only by shutting one's eyes to their prehistory. In particular, it has mobilized the remains of the agrarian society, and thus given the lie to dogmas like the one that the mechanization of agriculture could not proceed beyond the limits set by God when he created the free farmer for all eternity. The more the concept of the natural is undermined by research, the more the doctrine of invariants stiffens into a dogma of philosophical anthropology and resists application to concrete social phenomena. The doctrine may finally turn for justification to a kind of ontology which is credited, by highly specialized scientists, and in blind confidence, with a great deal of truth, but which cannot even stand up under philosophical criticism, and which is totally incompatible with the insight that society has not so much originated in the nature of men's being, as been imposed on them from without.

If we want to understand why sociology still clings tenaciously to such fabrications as the static laws, we must go back to their origin in Comte. Comte derived his division, first of "states" (*états*)⁴ and then of laws, into static and dynamic, from the needs of the scientists: "To this end we must, first of all, extend to the whole of social phenomena a truly fundamental scientific distinction. I have drawn and used this distinction in all parts of this treatise, and especially in biological philosophy; for it is, by its very nature, wholly applicable to any phenomena whatsoever, and above all, to the phenomena presented by living bodies. I have considered separately, but always with a view to a precise systematic co-ordination, the *static* and the *dynamic* aspect of the subject matter of every positive science."⁵ The necessity behind

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁵ *Ibid.*

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the initial "must" stems from Comte's conception of a pyramid of sciences culminating in sociology: A science which occupies a higher level in this hierarchy must do justice to the principles of all lower-level sciences as well. Since Comte's times, the positivists have been peddling a substitute for the system of the idealists; they cultivated the idea (which dates back to Leibnitz) of a universal science which would triumph by the unity of its method over the diversity of its subject matter. The principles of positivism had had the effect of decomposing the world into atomic facts which were independent of the mind and could be brought under concepts only by ignoring their complexity. This decomposition was to be counteracted by science, which was responsible for splitting up the world in the first place. The single method of universal science was to take the place of the single overarching universe which had been shattered irrevocably and broken up into disconnected "facts." Here lies the origin of the temptation to attribute to the facts, and, as it were, as their internal structure, distinctions which could only be derived by classifying these facts, and only on the assumption that they had no internal structure. What is justly ridiculed in Linnaeus' system, passes unopposed in sociology: The order of the categories appears as the nature of the thing itself. Whatever the nature of the thing may be, it is suppressed with proud impartiality, along with everything that does not fit in with what one supposed to be the case.

Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive*, a document from the wild pioneering days of positivism, shows only too clearly how the structure of things can be contaminated by the classificatory scheme of the scientist. Comte argues by analogy from the anatomical and physiological aspects of the organism to a corresponding distinction in society.⁶ It may well be that a biologist can make a distinction between those aspects that are specifically connected with "life," namely, the physiological ones, and those aspects that are not, namely, the anatomical ones. A sociologist, however, no matter how crude a nominalist he may be, is only concerned with living human relationships and with their derivatives—their congealed social forms. These form are to be derived from human relationships, and not to be hypostatized as "anato-

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

my." The static layer, which Comte tries to urge on us, enjoys no independent existence.

Comte was not so simple-minded as to overlook that the connection between order and progress, that is, their "intimate and indissoluble union will henceforth mark the fundamental difficulty...for every true political system."⁷ But his political inclinations and his method, which was an imitation of the method of the natural sciences, led him off the track. Because the over-all trend of development seemed to push bourgeois society towards its dissolution in anarchy, he was inclined to place order above progress, and static over dynamic laws, and remained content with the dogmatic assertion that "this important consideration... could in no way affect either the intrinsic correctness of, or the immediate necessity for, our fundamental distinction between the static and the dynamic approach to social phenomena."⁸ Comte raises, but peremptorily rejects, the question whether that objection did not show his distinction to be after all, "the source of a faulty or pedantic division into two separate sciences."⁹

Even more implausible is Comte's famous identification of these two categories with the categories of order and progress. He makes implicit use of the criteria of concept formation which are at home in the natural sciences, and assumes without hesitation, that anything which is essential to society must work for its preservation. From the beginning, he excludes categories that imply the dissolution or destruction of the order to which they apply—as for example, impoverishment and the inability of an agrarian society to perpetuate itself in the event of a rapid increase in population. A sociologist who adopted the natural sciences as model would have to take as much account of such possibilities as of the opposite ones; otherwise he would be violating one of his own principles—that of completeness. Even if we concede to Comte that no matter how society is constituted, the reproduction of the species has precedence over all other social factors, including the tendencies towards disintegration, we need not agree with him that the forces of history aim necessarily at preservation of

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁹ *Ibid.*

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the species. Society as a whole breeds forces which threaten to bring it to a violent end. Comte himself was one of the first to stress the "destructive" tendencies in it. Yet it is these very tendencies, the true object of his theoretical interest, which he left out of his system. Hence the conflict between his system and the facts which he, as a positivist, had raised to a position of authority over ideas.

If Comte had reflected on social phenomena without prejudice, he would have realized that it was the static conditions that brought about the downfall of the Byzantine and the Ottoman empires. For static conditions produce, by reason of their immobility, the symptoms of paralysis which precede the ruin of the static order, especially where the static order is surrounded by a world of change. Conversely, if Comte had not placed arbitrary restrictions on the concept of a dynamic law, which were dictated *a priori* by his principles, he would have had to count as a dynamic law, the law of crises which governed a commercial society, left to its own devices and to the principles of liberalism. Crises could hardly be brought under the concept of progress without misrepresenting them. Comte's unhappy love affair with empiricism and the natural sciences blinded him to such considerations. He introduced concepts which seemed respectable enough when used in the natural sciences into sociology, without confronting them with the specific objects to which they were to be applied. Comte's work foreshadowed the fatal divergence between the productive use of scientific method and the uncritical promotion of this method to the rank of philosophy, which was to characterize the later phases of positivism. Comte tended to treat as things what were not things at all. By raising concepts to the status of supreme categories, he only meant to imitate the special sciences whose categories created no problems, either in their application to objects or in their relation to the thinking subject; but he confused the completed scientific apparatus with philosophy. This is why he treated society as the sum of static and dynamic elements, as if it were already composed of these two essential constituents and did not, first, have to be transformed so that the two could be combined in spite of their diversity.

That Comte should have overlooked the systematic discrepancies in his theory as well as its inadequacy to the facts, cannot

simply be explained by saying that his zealotry made him blind to science, for he was a zealous advocate of scientific method. The errors in his thought were, rather, dictated by his aims. What he dignified and extolled as the result of "irrevocable philosophical analysis,"¹⁰ and what he claimed to rest "on unshakeable rational foundations,"¹¹ was in fact what fitted in with his own interest. He himself was the first to point this out, in order to remove the suspicion of idle speculation, and to recommend himself as a practical man to the ruling powers of his day. He set himself the task of answering the "social question," which had been raised by the industrial revolution, by means of an "objective" science which stood above the class struggle—or, at least he tried to pass his own science off as such an answer. Comte's science had a function similar to Hegel's state:¹² "This first philosophical conception of a positive sociology has a natural and direct consequence, which is so obvious that it would seem superfluous to call special attention to it here. As I said at the beginning of this volume, the two ideas of order and progress, which are equally fundamental and whose deplorable and radical opposition constitutes, as we have seen..., the main characteristic symptom of profound disturbances in modern society, will henceforth be united in an insoluble manner."¹³ Just as Hegel expected the state to smooth out the contradictions in society and to subdue the forces that, according to his own theory, sought to go beyond bourgeois society,¹⁴ so Comte, who was less aware than Hegel and less critical of the real weakness of human reason, looked for salvation to a kind of sociology which would bring social contradictions under concepts that were consistent with each other and with themselves. The static and dynamic laws were the crudest examples of such concepts. The neat division between them was a kind of preparation for striking a balance between them, first in science and

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

¹² Cf. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (ed. Lasson, Leipzig, 1921), p. 189 (Sects. 245-6).

¹³ Comte, *op. cit.*, pp. 257-8.

¹⁴ Cf. Hegel, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

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then in the real world. Neither Hegel nor Comte was aware that a society which was splitting up into factions might be transformed, by making use of the dynamic forces in it, into a higher form—a form worthier of human beings. Both sought to preserve it with all existing institutions intact; this is why Comte set up the static laws as a corrective for the dynamic ones. In this way, he openly expressed the doubts of the middle classes which, only a few decades earlier, had still maintained a revolutionary and even progressive attitude, though only for the sake of capitalist expansion. Now they found themselves in a position where they had to take account of the impoverished masses, and could only ward them off by adopting either a progressive or a conservative attitude, depending on the circumstances. From the very beginning, positivism had a practical as well as a theoretical purpose. Concealed behind its conceptual beginnings, and covered by their scientific dress, lay apologetic intentions. To make it appear reasonable that a society full of antagonism was destined to last, the antagonism could not be presented as such, nor could society be burdened with it. Progress and order were placed side by side in perfect amity, even though interest in the one was incompatible with interest in the other in its consequences. The two concepts were thought to be independent of each other, complementary to each other and politically neutral, and their main use was thought to lie in scientific classification. The tension between order and progress was released through sociological system-building even prior to all analysis of social phenomena, and the middle classes were thus reassured over the dilemma they had gotten into, between development and stabilization. The polar opposition in society between order and progress was weakened into an opposition between different points of view from which to classify phenomena; either point of view could, it seemed, be adopted at will. The separation of the static from the dynamic, which appeared to Comte as a practical need, was in reality an ideological need. These two concepts were "positive" in a second sense of the word: they "posited" the irrational as a rational principle of scientific classification. This was easily overlooked since the concepts appeared to be politically and socially neutral. But a theorist who insisted on his neutrality and held on, by the skin of his teeth, to the contention that he stood above all conflicts of interest,

was almost certain to be a servant of the ruling interests. The positivists were able to build their systems so as to house all their hidden purposes which were unknown even to themselves, by bringing the facts under their concepts in an extremely superficial, arbitrary and even slovenly manner, and by looking upon the subject matter of sociology, that is, the social system and its structure, as a mere conglomeration of facts, to be noted and then fitted into the scientific scheme. The positivists in the social sciences were conformists even before they modelled their methods on those of market research. This is why social scientists with more critical attitudes distrusted them from the beginning, even when the positivists posed as the more radical group.

The distinction between the static and dynamic is an ideological one, not only because of the purpose it serves, but because there is, in fact, less truth in it than has been claimed for it since Comte's times. Comte himself was of the opinion "that such a clear-cut division of the social sciences might bring down upon us a great evil: It might lead us to neglect, perversely, the indispensable task of combining these two general points of view in a permanent union; and this would fit in only too well with the tendency of our contemporaries to take everything apart."¹⁵ But his efforts to heal the breach afterwards, and to mediate between the two concepts, were all in vain because, afterwards, there was no way in which they could be brought together. If sociology seemed to demand a distinction between the static and dynamic, then the sociologist's task was *not* to look for a third principle between them, but to examine the connections between the two; for they needed no mediation since the one implied the other directly. Hegel's metaphysical view that becoming, or the totality of the dialectical process, contained as its dialectical moments being and, again, becoming, rested on an observation of social phenomena; and so did his view that being was inconceivable without becoming, and becoming without being. In society, everything that is, has become; it is "second nature;" and all becoming arises from that which is—from the defects in it and from the kind of things it is. The different ways in which

¹⁵ Comte, *op. cit.*, pp. 254-5. His complaint that analysis takes everything apart is probably addressed to the school of the *idéologues* whom Napoleon had already taken to task for this.

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Comte and Hegel conceived of the connection between the static and dynamic were reflected in their language. By a mere formal move—by placing the static and dynamic into separate sociological compartments—Comte almost succeeded in rendering the dynamic forces inactive. Hegel, on the other hand, infused dynamic force even into logical forms, the prototypes of invariability. Although Hegel's Greater Logic was primarily intended as a critique of the logic of predication, Hegel kept on using the subject-predicate formula throughout this work. Indeed, there is hardly another philosophical work which makes such capricious and obstinate use of the copula. Almost every sentence contains the categorical "is;" and yet it is the deceptive power of this "is" and its contention that anything *is* what is predicated of it, that Hegel is concerned to attack. The reason Hegel insists on simple predications is that, merely by insisting on them, we can prove that it is not sufficient to consider only the "static" aspect of a fact; for every "is" of this kind contains an "is not"—or in Hegel's language, every identity contains non-identity. Anything which appears to be static when we look for its defining characteristics, begins to teem with life, like a drop of water, when we examine it as if under a microscope. In the same way, the categorical assertion that something is thus and not otherwise, becomes dynamic when we give a minute description of its logical structure. To examine the "is," which discursive logic accepts at its face value, is to see that being is becoming in disguise, in the sense which "being" and "becoming" have initially in dialectical logic. Sociology cannot afford to ignore this insight. What a society *is*, and what traditional metaphysics is inclined to hypostatize as its "being," is precisely what propels it forward, whether for better or for worse. *That* a society is thus, in particular, and not otherwise contradicts *what* that society is, no less than the special interests which go to make up *what* it is. The eternal and immutable aspect of a society defines the nature of the dynamic forces in it. Thus, certain kinds of authority, denial and resignation have so far remained invariant in our society; and in Comte's ideal society, a certain kind of order, imposed on the living from without, would be eternal and immutable. We cannot hope to reconcile the static and dynamic under the "right" social conditions as long as we believe in a kind of order which

is achieved by imposing laws from without. Just as little can we hope to reconcile them if we believe in a kind of progress which remains inside the social order. As Kafka pointed out, this kind of progress has so far failed to take place. If it were to take place, it would be at the same time its own negation—a simultaneous regress.

If we were to accept the distinction, proposed by Max Weber and his German admirers, especially Sombart, between tradition-bound and rational types of society, we would be committed to a definition of rationality as the tendency to destroy traditional social forms. It would be rational to remove what had become in the course of history when it began to cause friction. Rationality would be a historical force even though it frequently opposed history. This is what many who speak of progress have in mind. But there is, on the other hand, something static and unhistorical about reason in its objective and objectifying form. There is this much truth in the contention that the rationalists of the eighteenth century were anti-historical. But this contention is certainly an oversimplification: The anti-historical attitude did not just appear in that period of intellectual history; nor could the rationalists of the enlightenment have made up their alleged deficiency, merely by reflecting on historical facts; for Vico and Montesquieu did just that. Rather, rationality has gradually been losing its power of memory which it once possessed to a high degree. This is borne out by Henry Ford's dictum "History is bunk" and, with pathological force, by recent events in Germany. The terrifying picture of mankind without memory is not just a symptom of decadence; nor is it just a sign that we are, as is sometimes said, overpowered by stimuli which we are no longer able to master. Lack of historical consciousness is more than that: It is the forerunner of a static society, in which the bourgeois principle of universal exchange and balanced accounts will triumph, and in which bourgeois rationality will reign supreme. Everything historical will be excluded from such a society: To balance accounts is to leave nothing unaccounted for; but the historical is essentially what cannot be accounted for. Again, to exchange commodities it to cancel one act by another; it is, thus, an essentially timeless activity although it takes place in time—not unlike a mathematical operation which is also, in its essential nature, out of time. In-

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dustrial production will also cease to be essentially temporal: It will proceed more and more in identical and potentially simultaneous cycles. As the distance between bourgeois rationality and feudal traditionalism increases, the methods of industrial production will be progressively rationalized. As a result, experience, time and memory will in the end be liquidated like an unnecessary mortgage. There will no longer be any need for the rudiments of craftsmanship or for a long apprenticeship—the paradigms of qualitative accumulated experience. If mankind, in its present phase, is indeed engaged in burying its memories, in order to adapt itself so much the better to every new condition it encounters, then this reflects an objective trend. Just as the dynamic force which stands behind the growing power of rationality over nature had to originate in a static condition, so it will have to end in a static condition. Rationality can only develop in a particular way. This is what the totalitarian state teaches us, with its unlimited power of oppressor over oppressed and its result—the tranquillity of the graveyard, which is the very opposite of peace. The blind rule of rationality over nature must conform to the age-old pattern of antagonism between ruler and ruled: The antagonism is not resolved when rationality swallows up its enemy, nature. The static tendencies which dwell within the dynamic social force that seeks to extend the rule of rationality over nature, are an indication that there is something false and persistently irrational about that force. Thus rationality, that is, the kind of reason that seeks to dominate nature, is itself irrational; it cannot but objectify and falsify, and it is on the side of those who would criticize reason itself. But rationality is not exempt from the vice which Comte and all opponents of metaphysics attributed to speculation; for speculation is not alone in being reactionary. Moreover, there can be no freedom without speculation; the positivists, who paid lip-service to freedom, were plotting to depose it all the while. Marx could have argued against the positivists what he argued against Feuerbach and the Hegelian Left in a truly Hegelian spirit—that his speculations made him the heir to classical German philosophy.

Marx introduced the distinction between the static and dynamic as part of his critique of fetishism. Having traced the origin of fetishism to the value we attach to commodities, he went on

to follow up all its theoretical ramifications. His basic theme was a Hegelian one, which he had translated back into sociological terms: What appears to *be* should be conceived as something that has *come* to be—or in Hegel's terminology, as something "mediated." What has come to be, and hence, everything that would come under the abstract concept of the static, is thus stripped of its pretensions to "being in itself." Instead of analyzing the form after it had congealed, Marx deduced the form from the historical process itself. By refusing to apply static categories to social conditions, he tried to escape the temptation to treat them as absolutes. All social forms and all "economic forms" were according to him "transitory and historical."¹⁶ Marx blamed Comte's false synthesis on a deification of what had merely come to be; Comte had brought together on the surface, what was held together underneath only by its incompatibility. Marx's racy polemics against Proudhon might just as well have been addressed to Comte: "The historical movement which shakes the modern world elicits from him nothing but the question how to restore its balance and to synthesize two bourgeois ideas. And so the bright lad discovers, by sheer cleverness, the hidden thoughts of God and thus, how to unite two isolated ideas—which are isolated only because he himself has isolated them from everyday life and actual production, in which the realities expressed by these ideas are combined."¹⁷ Marx reproached Proudhon for his "dualism" between "eternal ideas" or "categories of pure reason" and "men and their everyday lives,"¹⁸ which is the same as the dualism between the static and dynamic, both in content and methodological consequences. Marx criticized society in the same way in which he criticized its hand-maiden, sociological theory: "These ideas and categories are no more eternal than the conditions they express. They are historical, perishable, transitory products. We are surrounded by constant movement—the growth of productive forces, the destruction of social conditions, the for-

¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Das Elend der Philosophie* (ed. by Bernstein and Kautsky, Berlin 1952), p. 130.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

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mation of ideas. Nothing is immovable except what we abstract from this movement—*mors immortalis*.”¹⁹

The last remark is meant ironically in this case; it portrays the abstract general concept of the static as the corpse of the dynamic social process. But it also points beyond its immediate object: Although Marx's nominalist convictions do not allow him to hypostatize abstractions, his reference to *mors immortalis* shows him to be dimly aware that an abstraction may also denote a social reality. Marx admits that there is something eternal in "prehistoric" society, though it is only the transitoriness of its forms and structures; these are eternally transitory because, as blind products of nature, they are subject to natural decay. Marx's dialectic includes, therefore, a doctrine of invariance, though it is only a kind of negative ontology of a society which advances through internal conflict. The dynamic aspects of society are, at the same time, its static aspects: Internal conflict provides the energy for change; but no change has taken place in this respect. Every productive relationship and every society have till now perished for the same reason. The urge to expand, to absorb more and more, and to leave out less and less, has so far remained static or invariant. In this way, every society has prepared its own fate: While it was trying to expand in order to avoid destruction, it was working unconsciously at its own destruction, and at the dissolution of the living whole of which it was composed. This was its only title to eternity. According to Marx, the end of "pre-historic" times will also be the end of such dynamic changes, and progress is already working towards this end. A better society will synthesize the static and dynamic which are now linked in a contradictory fashion: It will not seek to preserve what happens to *be*, to tie men down for the sake of order since no such fetters are needed when the interests of men coincide with those of society. Nor will it seek to perpetuate blind becoming, which is the opposite of Kant's aim of history—eternal peace.

Since what is happening gives the lie to Marx's predictions, we may suspect that not even he discarded altogether the old distinction between the static and dynamic, even though he liked to play off the dynamic force of labor (which he had made into

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

a central concept) against any allegedly static or invariant conditions. Marx placed the invariant laws of nature which governed society in general, side by side with the specific laws which governed a particular state in its development. Thus "the higher or lower degree to which social antagonisms have developed" appeared to be on the same level as the "natural laws of capitalist production."²⁰ This could hardly be explained by saying that Marx confused different levels of abstraction with different types of cause. He was, however, well aware that society is a product of nature: As long as men were not completely in control, either of themselves, or of society, the social process would continue in irrational cycles, in spite of all rationalizations. For Marx and, before him, Hegel, the dialectical movement of history could, in a sense, be summed up as permanent transition or unchanging change. With a kind of hope born of despair, Marx applied the term "prehistory" to no less than the entire stretch of history known to him—to what had been, and was, the realm of bondage. But, insofar as the dynamic forces reproduced the same pattern over and over again (as Anaximander had already claimed in his dictum, and after him, Heraclitus in his dynamic metaphysics), the dialectical process had to be described in terms of perennial categories, which needed only to be modified to apply, for instance, to the modern, rational, form of society. This is why, in Marx, such expressions as "wage slavery," which he applied to free wage labor, are something more than metaphors. Hegel bequeathed to all later dialecticians the insight that the dynamic forces do *not* destroy every "concept," or everything that is solid and permanent. This insight is often lacking in contemporary sociologists with nominalist persuasions. Yet we cannot think of change without presupposing something which remains the same—which undergoes the change and provides a measure of it. Such a view of history is as far removed from vitalism, which conceives of change

²⁰ Cf. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* (Tenth edition of Friedrich Engels' version, Hamburg 1922), vol. I, bk. I (*Der Produktionsprozess des Kapitals*), preface to the first edition, p. iv. - Cf. also Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der politischen Ökonomie* (reprinted with corrections from the Moscow edition, Berlin 1953), pp. 7, 10. 364 ff., and also Engels' review: "Rezension Karl Marx, *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*" (in *Das Volk*, London Aug. 6 and 20, 1859; reprinted in the people's edition of *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, Berlin 1951, p. 217 ff.)

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as a steady and continuous flow, as it is from Platonism. What are known today as "existential categories," can be accommodated by this view, though only authority, bondage, suffering, and ever-present catastrophe will deserve this title. Not only Hegel, but Goethe, too, can be put back on his feet: All striving and all stress is, indeed, eternal rest, but the opposite of the kind of rest we find in God, our Lord. When present-day existentialist ontologists claim to close the gap between the static and dynamic by presenting dynamic categories as invariant, and when they seek to justify this by appealing to history, we can hear in their voices, though only garbled and distorted, the distress signals of that which truly is, and which they, as self-appointed authorities on what is, think they can ignore.

Sociology cannot be divided into a static and dynamic branch; nor can the division between the static and dynamic be made to disappear completely. If we look at the dichotomy between invariant and variable forms through positivistic or anti-metaphysical eyes, we are bound to read into the facts the metaphysical doctrine of the primacy of the invariant over the ephemeral. This would be to do injustice to the "facts"—a concept, incidentally, which sociologists since Comte have examined only in a much too superficial manner. But, if we look without preconceptions at the disparity between static and dynamic factors, we can read off something about the prevalent contradictions in society: It grows rigid where it ought to change, because productive relationships resist the change demanded by productive forces; it rushes forward towards its own destruction, because irrational institutions fail to stem the tide of fate or grant a temporary stay of execution. But the categories of the static and dynamic are abstract—not only in Hegel's sense of isolated from one another, or not "mediated" by each other, but also, and simply, because their meanings, which were borrowed from the natural sciences of around 1800, are much too general.

The word "dynamic" is used in a more concrete sense when we speak of the historical trend towards ever-increasing control over external and internal nature as dynamic. This trend takes place in one dimension only, at the expense of possibilities which are not followed up because they do not lead to increased control over nature. Once the dynamic is let loose, it pursues its single

goal single-mindedly and like a maniac, devouring everything foreign to it on its way. By reducing the many to the one—by making everything in nature and society conform to the kind of reason it seeks to enthrone over nature—the dynamic turns into its very opposite: that which always remains the same, the static. As the principle behind this growing identity, the dynamic cannot tolerate the diverse, even if it were to be found in the remotest stellar system, just as little as a totalitarian state can tolerate opposition. In aiming at identity, the dynamic contracts, as it were, to autocracy. If it were to expand instead, it would bring about the gradual rise of diversity, which has been oppressed so far, or possibly liquidated, to a position of equality. The rationalization of working methods would then cease to aim mainly at "productivity," and could instead aim at making work worthier of a human being, at differentiating and satisfying genuine needs, and at conserving nature in its qualitative diversity while it was being exploited for human purposes. But the human species has allowed the dynamic to contract. By aiming only at itself, mankind sank back into nature; in seeking to control it, it conformed to it. This is why mankind does not really qualify as the subject of history; there is really no such subject, only the traces of its blood. But there is a possibility of change: Its germ lies in the development of the productive forces, which will make human labor superfluous up to a point. The decrease in the quantity of work, which could theoretically be at a minimum even today, prepares the way for a new quality to come into society. There is no longer any need for one-dimensional progress; but there it the danger that our present productive relationships will resist the change demanded by our productive forces, and induce the entire system to continue stubbornly in its present course. Full employment becomes an ideal even though work need no longer be the measure of everything.

The static, on the other hand, has so far always appeared as a negative quantity—as an obstacle to a one-sided increase in production. What claimed to be inviolable for no better reason than that it had come to be thus and not otherwise, has always helped to perpetuate misery, and what gave rise to misery: exploitation. Whenever that which had blindly come to be, that is, the static, was no longer able to restrain mankind, it made its

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negative contribution to political progress. Frequently enough, the conservative powers and their supporters—apparently the static elements in society—adopted the profitable principle of industrial progress. This happened, for example, during the decline of the bourgeoisie and in underdeveloped, and hence "static," countries which entered a phase of sudden development. As long as misery continues, the static will continue to provide the energy for change, and to be potentially dynamic. We would easily imagine a change in the nature of the static: General contentment would leave things as they were. This is no more difficult than to conceive a change in the nature of the dynamic. Nietzsche, who was the dynamic thinker *par excellence*, came close to reconciling the two when he professed his belief in violence without rationalizing it, though his only conscious purpose may have been to sing the praises of violence. He was also dimly aware of the other form of the static: "For all desire wants eternity." This form, however, cannot be realized until mankind alters its relationship to nature, in ways of which great works of art can sometimes give us a momentary glimpse.

A sociologist cannot adopt the point of view of an impartial observer. History does not allow him to, and truth and falsehood would present to him the same appearance. If he is allowed to venture a prediction from his partial point of view, then it is at least improbable that society will freeze into immobility. History will not come to rest, as long as there will be antagonism in the social order, and as long as men are not "subjects" of society, but remain its agents—whose low status is sometimes disguised by speaking of their "role" instead. Extreme oppression might perhaps force all unreconciled interests into silence; but it could not permanently release the pent-up tension. The modern oppressors themselves, in every camp, do not let these interests come to rest; they cannot and, indeed, must not do so if they wish to remain in power. The chances of total destruction are greater than the chances of stagnation on the Ancient Egyptian scale. But there is something unhistorical in the dynamic force which moves in aimless circles. Spengler's recurrent cycles made this clear, though this should not be counted as one of the merits of his philosophy of history. By identifying himself with the irrational in history, Spengler quite naturally discovered the essence of the

irrational in the hopeless rhythm of coming to be and passing away—or of eating and being eaten, as he, as a social Darwinist who believed in the survival of the fittest, might have put it. Nothing changes in the incessant recurrence of this rhythm. The historical link between predator and prey is essentially unhistorical. Peace cannot be achieved either in a motionless totalitarian order or in a state of ceaseless motion, but only through a reconciliation of these opposites.