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STRUCTURAL AND FUNCTIONAL APPROACHES

Ways of understanding the origins of the modern world

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A structural approach to the problem.

What is needed is a more 'structural' approach, in which it is the relations between the spheres which is important. An indication of what I mean is given in my essay for the Gellner symposium, pp. 4-6.

The special feature of capitalism/industrialism is the delicate - the delicate **balance** of the parts, not the intrinsic nature of the part themselves. Hence the need for a structural approach which considers the relations of the parts.

Two approaches; shopping list and recipe.

I will first take a 'shopping list' approach, whereby each of the main spheres is looked at. This may suggest a list of ingredients or common features, and hence "necessary causes". But more fruitful than this is probably to see how the ingredients were mixed, their relationship to each other. As in cooking, capitalism is not merely a matter of ingredients, it is the mixing of the ingredients, and the timing of their use, that is essential. Too much salt can ruin a dish, too little likewise. Even the point at which the salt is put in, is important. Too much political order can crush initiative, too little can make capitalist development impossible.

From a functional to a structural approach.

It is not the individual parts that are ultimately important, but their relationship to each other; the balance between the parts, more than their innate nature. Hence, one could have a situation where the parts are totally dissimilar, but the over-all pattern has a structural similarity. (As with a concerto by Bach and Handel).

Since the secret of modern capitalism lies in how the market is constituted in relation to other aspects of the society, e.g. whether it is 'free' or submerged, this leads us to suspect that the solution lies in examining how those institutions which usually swallow it - a predatory State, a clinging family, an over-zealous religion, have been held in check.

With this in mind, we would be seeking for clues to suggest that there was something unusual about the component parts of the major institutions in Japan and north-western Europe that gave the market freedom to grow.

Weber on the necessity for a structural approach.

(Taken from Collins, Weberian Sociological Theory).

p.34. "For Weber's constant theme is that the **pattern of relations among the various factors** is crucial in determining their effect upon economic rationalization. Any one factor occurring by itself tends to have opposite effects overall, to those which it has in combination with the other factors."

p.35 "Weber saw the rise of large-scale capitalism, then, as the result of a series of combinations of conditions which had to occur together. This makes world history look like the result of configurations of events so rare as to appear accidental...the full-scale capitalist breakthrough itself was a once-only event, radiating outward to transform all other institutions and societies."

p.36 "On a second level, one may say that the fundamental generalizations in Weber's theory of capitalism concern the crucial role of balances and tensions between opposing elements. 'All in all,' says Weber in a little-known passage (1968:1192-3), 'the specific roots of Occidental culture must be sought in the tension and peculiar balance, on the one hand, between office charisma and monasticism, and on the other between the contractual character of the feudal state and the autonomous bureaucratic hierarchy. (Note: In other words, the main features of the West depend on a tension between routinization of religious charisma in the church and the participatory communities of monks, and on a tension between the democratizing tendencies of self-supplied armies and the centralized bureaucratic state. These give us Weber's two great intermediate factors, a non-dualistic religious ethic and calculable law, respectively.) No one element must predominate if rationalization is to increase. More concretely, since each 'element' is composed of real people struggling for precedence, the creation of a calculable, open-market economy depends upon a continuous balance of power among differently organized groups.The capitalist economy depends on this balance. The open-market system is a situation of institutionalized strife. Its essence is struggle.../ The victory of any one side would spell the doom of the system. In this respect, as in others, Weber's theory is a conflict theory indeed."

The curious preservation and reinforcement of balance.

It has long been noted, with amusement, that African hunter-gatherers and hunter-gatherers in general are curiously 'modern' in many ways. They lacked the technology, literacy and so on, they often seem to have had the essential quality that nothing dominated ('free' individuals were not slaves to one institution) - religion, polity, economy or even kinship. From the start, then, it may be that 'modernity' existed a very long time ago. This is what Rousseau may have had in mind with his 'Noble Savage', born free without the chains; and Marx and Engels saw as the earliest stage before the growth of wealth, private property and the State shackled man.

The normal course of affairs was for this 'modernity' to be crushed during the long intervening years. As population grew more dense and wealth was congealed, hierarchies emerged, and mankind

became dominated by religious or political institutions, or, usually, a mixture of the two. This **ancien regime** world was to be found in most of Asia or pre-Revolutionary Europe or South America. It seemed a necessary 'stage' in the famed transition between tribal and 'modern' societies. Its social concomitant was peasantry.

The curious mix thesis in the West.

In western Europe, it could be argued that after the fall of the Roman Empire, there was a strange mixture of several elements. The survival of traces of Romanism, the contractual political system of Germanic feudalism, the ascetic and individualistic (and according to Gellner, modest) religion of Christianity, the non-segmentary kinship system, contributed over the centuries between about the fifth and eleventh a new and potentially very volatile, 'modern' system in terms of the division of spheres outlined above.

The secret must lie in the properties of the four main institutions, all of which must have a non-exclusive and limited character. This seems to have been the case. Christianity, especially in its heretical forms, and later in Protestantism, was not too deeply involved in this world, allowing people to render to Caesar that which was Caesar's. The bilateral kinship system cannot form the basis of the society since it built up no discrete political or social groupings. The political system, based on the contractual feudal system, was powerful enough to guarantee some order, but was always held in check by the countervailing devolution of power that is a necessary feature of feudalism. The ruler is the first among equals, unable to rule without consent, a limited monarch. The economy in this technologically backward and varied landscape was not strong enough to dominate the other spheres.

Maintaining the balance in Europe.

A sort of 'modern' balance had been achieved in much of western Europe by the eleventh century. But over much of the area, this changed and the widespread tendency which has been found in the older civilizations, such as those in India, South East Asia and China, manifested themselves. Over much of central, eastern and southern Europe a caste-like society arose with hereditary nobility, a King above the Law, a Church in alliance with the State. The usual re-confusion of economic, moral, political, social and religious spheres occurred.

Yet for reasons which are strictly historical and accidental, this widespread tendency did not occur in northern Europe to the same extent. In particular, in England much of the 'modernity' implicit over much of Europe in the tenth century survived. It continued and provided the balanced platform for the emergence, nearly a century before anywhere else, of a new technological order (industrialism) and a new social order (urbanism). There was no inevitability about this. But nor is there any particular mystery. By failing to gravitate towards absolutism, inquisition or familism, part of northern Europe preserved a balance which allowed free floating individuals to make themselves wealthier in peace, within a relatively secure framework. This was what the Pilgrims took to America.

Gellner is right to ask the question, "Just how did it come about that this privileged set of people developed, and were allowed to develop and maintain a spirit which, in the context of wider history, is so very unusual? How did they escape the logic of the agrarian situation, which prevails in most other parts of the world?" (Plough. 163).

The answer, briefly, seems to be that in this exceptional case, there were peoples who already had a politico-kinship system that was not segmentary and which already had a contractual, law-based, element. These people settled a wide area without becoming 'peasants'. They adopted a religion that did not fossilize into an intensive ritualistic system. In other words, they were agriculturists and traders, but they never went through a proper 'Agraria'. Thus certain peoples of northern Europe (and in a remarkably similar way Japan), moved from barbarism to modernity, without the intervening state of Agraria.

The separation and balance of powers: great thinkers on.

Montesquieu's remark in the 'Spirit of the Laws' that England "had progressed the farthest of all peoples of the world in three important things: in piety, in commerce and in freedom" was commented on by Max Weber as follows: "Is it not possible that their commercial superiority and their adaptation to free political institutions are connected in some way with that record of piety which Montesquieu ascribes to them?" (Protestant, 45) Thus Montesquieu and Weber saw that it was in the interconnections, the balance between religion, polity and economy that the secret lay, and that autonomy or 'freedom' of spheres was essential.

David Hume independently noted something similar in his **Essays**. The English had a mixed political system, "mixture of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy"; they were religiously pluralist, "all sects of religion are to be found among them." And consequently, though speaking one language and subject to one set of laws, "the great liberty and independency, which every man enjoys, allows him to display the manners peculiar to him". (Essays, 122). Much of this could, of course, be said of Japan - though 'every group' would have to be substituted for 'every man' in the last sentence.

Finally, there is Taine. When comparing England to France, he found each superior in certain ways. England was superior in three. Firstly, its political system "is liberal, and calls upon the individual citizen to take an active part in public life...British citizens enjoy full freedom of speech and association..." Politics, in other words, knows its limits; so does religion. "It subordinates ritual and dogma to ethics. It preaches 'self-government', the authority of conscience, and the cultivation of the will. It leaves a wide margin for personal interpretation and feeling. It is not altogether hostile to the spirit of modern science nor to the tendencies of the modern world." Finally, the economy is allowed to flourish in peace and security. "England has suffered no invasion for eight hundred years, and no civil war for two hundred years...Evidence of comfort and opulence is more plentiful in England than in any other country in the world." (Taine, Notes, 290-1).

A structural interpretation; the relationship of institutions.

The separation of spheres, where politics, economics, religion and kinship are artificially held apart, is the central feature of "modern" civilization (just as their blurring again, is perhaps a feature of post-modernism). There is no determining institution, but a precarious, and never to be taken for granted balance of power. What seems to have been peculiar in England and latently and sporadically in Japan before the Meiji period is that no single sphere predominated. Kinship, religion, politics etc. none of them were strong enough to dominate. All this allowed room for the economy to become free. This situation allowed a peculiarly "open" society, which persisted in England from before the sixteenth century, and which was found in fifteenth and sixteenth century Japan, partly under the Tokugawa, and was re-established at the Meiji restoration. At that point, the over-powerful dominance of one sphere, the polity, which had grown up, was stripped off (insert Fukuzawa;pp.21-2, countervailing tendencies; p.654, lineage power under Tokugawa; p.125, lack of uniformity of opinions in the West, separate spheres).

If we liken a modern economy to an internal combustion engine, we might suggest that the framework, the machine, the engine, is the institutional structure of the administrative system, communications etc. In Japan this was strong by the middle of the nineteenth century. The fuel is the energy and intelligence and entrepreneurial yearnings of the people. This also was in abundance in Japan before the Restoration. What the Restoration provided was the oxygen to allow combustion - the freeing of restraints, the opening of ports, the encouragement of business. The spark to ignite the machine was provided by the advanced technology brought from the West. The machine had all these four features in England from the seventeenth century. In many countries, however, that vital separation of spheres, the adjusting of relations whereby each institution is kept within its bounds, had not occurred and still has not occurred. India is still submerged within religion, China within politics, Russia and Eastern Europe until recently within politics. France made a partial break in 1789 and completed the separation in the later nineteenth century at the same time as Japan.

In this process the particular character of the kinship, feudal and religious systems which I have sketched, exceptional though it was and really only to be found in north-western Europe (and particularly Japan), played their vital roles.

The accident of a free-floating, open, society.

Contrary to all other cases, a civilization emerged in England (and Japan) which did not lurch, as all others have done, towards the hegemony of one sphere. It did not solidify into kinship, it did not accept the Inquisition, it did not move to political absolutism. If anything, it enshrined the economy, the grumbling hive, but only within limits. How and why this happened can only be explained by narrating the events, using the conventional tools, for there was no necessity in it. That it happened, seems not to be in doubt. And that it happened has influenced and is influencing all the species on the globe.

What is interesting, adding in the Japanese case, is that it happened twice - in totally separate parts of the world, and for different reasons. Japan was heading in the same direction and nearly 'took off' in the sixteenth century, and some people argue would have spontaneously done so in the

nineteenth, even without outside prodding (cf. Jacobs). It did so with a central similarity - the absence of hegemony, but also with a different mix of elements, more emphasis on the group, on hierarchy etc., as befitted a collectivized rice-growing culture.

Thoughts on the separation and spreading of spheres

It occurred to me that some sort of double process is indicated in the structure of the argument I am presenting. One the one hand we have, in section 2, separation, that is the separating of religion from economics, politics from kinship etc, so that each of the spheres becomes limited in its claims and somewhat autonomous within its own world. It is free from external harassment, as long as it makes limited claims on the sovereignty of others. No one sphere or institution dominates. In that section there are three chapters on how this happened in politics, religion and kinship.

But equally, and currently less stressed, is the next part which is about how a compensating spreading out occurred, whereby previously discrete fields were united, joined together or linked. Without this counter trend, the whole would have fallen apart. But when we come to examine what now held societies together, they are not the conventional or traditional forces - ritual, naked violence, blood, locality (the central features of *Gemeinschaft* as described by Tonnies). Rather, they are the new and artificial bonds of contract (implicit and explicit), of universal law, of literacy and writing and education, of universalistic and generalized morality, of scientific and technological mentality, of social and geographical mobility, of universal citizenship and national allegiance, and, of course, of the market, money, profit and the whole economic world.

It is as if as one is dealing with some substance like oil or water which, when it is blocked in one direction, spreads out in other directions. In a curious way, although in the earlier situation everything is interpenetrated and everything is embedded, there are, in other respects, huge barriers to communication. The paradox is that just as kinship, ritual, naked power are penned in and confined, so at the same time communication is made easier. But the new instruments of communication are symbolic instruments, which are much more powerful, abstract and general, rather than the representational and iconic instruments (like ritual, drama, clothing etc.) which were used before. No longer do people tend to communicate concretely in the here and now, but rather through money, writing etc, which communicate abstractly. These can transfer information over time and space and class in a way which the earlier forms of communication found impossible. This leads to a rather different structure to the book - for this revised plan see in the file 'plan'.

What holds a society together?

In the majority of societies, what holds the society together, i.e. provides integration, is either blood (kinship), or blood in association with something else (e.g. caste). What is very unusual is when a society cannot do this through kinship (being bilateral), and therefore has to use other mechanisms. In England, it seems to have been through the law, the State and, to a certain extent, through money and paper. I. In Japan, the legal system and the monetary system were not sufficiently advanced to do this, so instead they used three mechanisms: filial piety (*ko*) - to parents

and Emperor, honour and duty (giri) and the loyalty to the 'House' (ie). Also very strong were ceremonial, etiquette and art. All these were very important in Japan in a world where money/law were underdeveloped. The 'glue' in Japanese society might be said to be etiquette and ceremony, and 'filial duty'. The 'glue' in England was law and money.

The absence of hegemony: a structural interpretation of capitalism (1.7.1990)

One of the mistakes which analysts have made in approaching the problem of the origins and effects of capitalism has been to approach it in a functional way, namely looking at a specific institution or feature, for example the wool-trade, toilet-training, coal, the Protestant ethic or whatever happens to be their hunch, and trying to see to what extent this functioned as a cause of capitalism.

Instead, one might see capitalism as a particular configuration in which it is the relations between institutions which are important, not the things in themselves. This is similar to Gellner's remark (Muslim, p.6), that in comparing Islam to the West, "The difference would seem to be less in the absence of ideological elements than in the particular balance of power which existed between the various institutions in that society." Or again, he writes: This "miraculous political and ideological balance of power in the non-economic parts of society make the expansion (i.e. industrialization) possible..." (Plough, 132). Or as I wrote (in Essays to Gellner ?, p.18), quoting Montesquieu and Weber, "Thus Montesquieu and Weber saw that it was in the interconnections, the balance between religion, polity and economy, that the secret lay, and that 'autonomy' or 'freedom' of spheres was essential." Thus, for example, it is not religion in itself that is important, but rather the way in which religion is articulated with politics, economics etc.

Thus one might conceive of two extremes (see diagram, notebook p.2b), with A as a situation where there is an embedded world where every institution coincides with every other (religion, kinship, economics, politics) to a 'modern' world (B) where kinship, polity, economy and religion are separate and discrete spheres, held together by etiquette, law, literacy, money, ethics etc.

In A, all the spheres overlap and it is impossible to disentangle them. Hence any economic act is also a religious, political and social act. In B, the realms have floated "free"; they are kept from too much conflict by law, and mediated between by paper and money. Put in another way, in 'A' there is usually an 'infrastructure', ie. a hegemonic determining sphere, e.g. kinship or religion. In 'B' nothing determines the whole system, there is no over-riding principle. (Possibly similar to Giddens' idea of 'structuration'?).

The advantage of B is that it is an open world in which the basic unit, whether the individual (as in Britain or USA) or the firm (Japan) or small kin group (overseas Chinese, Indians etc), is 'free' to pursue its ends rationally. Rationality is very high, because ends and means can be brought into close alignment. If one wants to seek political goals, one does it by political means, not by religion or kinship. If one seeks religious goals, one does not have to involve kin groups, if one pursues economic goals, one does not need to consider ritual means etc. The arrow, so to speak, can be fired

directly at the target. It is not warped by context. This is the advantage; increasing rationality, efficiency and control, a mastery over nature, technological and scientific advance.

The disadvantage is that there are constant and growing tensions for the individual. Natural life is not fractured and fragmented like this. Humans like to act simultaneously at the religious, kinship and other levels. In situation B, these are held apart. People thus not only feel divided loyalties between the spheres, but contradictions whereby the different spheres seek control over the same area.

The tendency also empties everything of meaning, since activities become one-dimensional. For instance, economic activity becomes an end in itself, rather than a means, as many people think it should be. So why pursue economic gains? Politics is just a power struggle, without any religious merit or kinship advantages. Family life is stripped of its ritual and religious meaning. The world becomes disenchanting, defamilized, depoliticised; "a darkling plain" where "confused armies clash by night".

This seems to confirm Gellner's insight that there seems to be an inverse ratio; as one gains rationality and division of spheres and 'freedom', so one loses meaning, coherence, warmth etc. The art is to seek some kind of balance between these two tendencies. The two extremes represented by the Yanomamo and Tokyo are neither of them very appealing. We cannot go back to Community (gemeinschaft), but inexorable gesellschaft is also an appalling prospect.

The Japanese have partly overcome the alienation by turning business into pleasure. Perhaps they have created a "haven in a heartless world" not in the weak refuge of the family (as in Britain or America), but in the very citadel of consumerism and production, the work place. They have created Community right in the core - in the business firm - and this makes their life tolerable and even pleasurable, not a strife between head and heart, as in the West. They proverbially enjoy their work so much that they refuse to take their full holidays, have break-downs at week-ends etc. etc.

Ultimately, as Maine realised, the great transition is from societies based on status (i.e. birth/ the family) to those based on contract. England had passed the Rubicon by the ninth century or earlier. When had Japan? There seems to be some evidence that it had done so by a similarly early date. Among the evidence known to me is:

- a) the powerful feudalism of the fourteenth centuries onwards
- b) the evidence that even the family was artificial/ contractual, being determined more by residence than by blood from early on.

Thus it is probably that the foundation for capitalism had occurred very early in both places, though it took a little longer to flourish in Japan because of the Tokugawa lurch towards absolutism.

Another way to put the question is to ask whether either Japan or England ever had an 'ancien regime' in the true sense meant by De Tocqueville, ie. castes of a sort, a closed order, religious domination, relations based on status etc. It would seem not.

Some comments on some of the special features of England, which also seem to apply in Japan, are contained in my article on Ernest Gellner. Thus (p.15), one could compare institutional features which seem to have prevented the hegemony of any one institution:

feature	England	Japan
religion	non-ritualistic (Protestantism)	mixed non-ritual
kinship	bilateral networks, no groups	bilateral
politics	centralized feudalism	centralized f.
economy	moderately strong	moderately str.

As I noted in that article (p.16), England failed, as did Japan, to gravitate towards absolutism, inquisition or familism. Likewise I noted (p.17) that "certain peoples of northern Europe (and possibly the Japanese as well) moved from barbarism to modernity, without the intervening stage of Agraria".

Absence of a determining infrastructure in the West.

In the majority of social systems one sphere of life determines all others. In tribal societies, this is kinship. In India, as Weber and other have shown, it is religion. In China it was kinship (clans) again - and then communism. In much of Ancien Regime Europe it was an alliance of Church and State, embodied in the Inquisition. Basically, this means that all other spheres are given coherence, are bound together, are dominated by, the 'hegemonic' institution. For instance, in tribal societies, law, economy, politics, religion are not discrete spheres of activity, they are encapsulated within kinship. All these are instances where society 'freezes', to use Levi-Strauss' metaphor, so that status comes to dominate, whether kinship status as in unilineal kinship systems, or religious status, as in caste societies, or political status as in communism. This is all well known.

What is perhaps less well known is that western capitalist civilization is the only known case where there is no hegemony - though Japan is the one other case, in a different form. There is no infrastructural determinant. We might point to the market, but it has clearly not eliminated or totally conquered the State, nor even the Church, the law and the family.

As Gellner argues when comparing Islam and the West. "The difference would seem to be less in the absence of ideological elements than in the particular balance of power which existed between the various institutions in that society." (Muslim, 6). In the west, we have a polity with "an unusual balance of power internally and externally". This "miraculous political and ideological balance of

power in the non-economic parts of society made the expansion (i.e. industrialization, A.M.) possible..." (Plough, 277, 132).

In the west this has happened through a disassociation of spheres or realms. We operate in a plural world where there is an institutional division of labour; religion sticks to ethics within a circumscribed sphere; the family should keep out of politics and the economy; the law is an arbitrator between spheres; even economic rules need to be kept out of national parks, sport, love etc.

Now of course, this is an ideal-type model. There are, in practice, constant infringements of the boundaries, which we often call "corruption". But our ideal, and to a large extent it is achieved, is that no single major force should set the ground-rules. We oppose absolutist power, the sovereignty of the market, the creeping demands of the family, the intrusions into politics of the Church.

The benefit of this is flexibility, with the individual as the sole repository of the culture as a free actor. The price is constant contradictions and paradoxes of the kind we have mentioned; since there are no universal rules or infrastructures, everything is a compromise between competing allegiances. There is no such thing as a free lunch - everything has its cost, as well as its advantage. "Nothing except a battle lost can be half so melancholy as a battle won." (Duke of Wellington, after Waterloo). The individual is constantly pulled in his or her loyalties; should he maximise his religious, economic, kinship or political power and merit, what are his overriding obligations etc. ?

The Japanese case is both the same and different. It is the same in that no sphere is dominant - there is no infrastructure. But it is different in that this has been achieved not by splitting apart and keeping an artificial barrier between the parts, but by letting them blend again, but in an odd way. The locus of the blending is not the individual, but the small, artificially created, group - traditionally the *ie* or group of followers, now the work group. These groups are little holistic communities - no man is an island, indeed, in Japan. But unlike most situations, the islands are small and flexible. This is the curious compromise, the 'artificial community', the 'flexible rigidities' (Dore's book title), which one is trying to grasp in Japan.

Absence of hegemony; England and Japan.

What is peculiar about the two societies is that no single sphere predominates, for example kinship is fairly strong (and stronger in Japan), but not too strong (not determining politics, or religion, or economy. etc). The religion is quite widespread, but not so strong as to totally contain the polity. The political system is quite strong, but does not dominate religion and the family. This allows room for the economy. This was the situation of an 'open' society in England and Japan by the sixteenth century. In Japan it partially 'closed' u somewhat under Tokugawa rule, with political predominance. But it was not an entire absolutism, just a closed and centralized feudalism.