

THE RENAISSANCE AND THE
SOURCES OF THE MODERN
SOCIAL SCIENCES

I. FORMATION OF THE NEW SCIENCE

1. *The Development of Comparative Thought*

The possibility of the development of comparative thought made the Renaissance an era particularly favorable to the awakening of the scientific understanding of social phenomena. Isolated elements of such an attitude had already appeared, but now their accumulation became of decisive importance.

The leading role was played especially by the progress of rationalist thought first in Italy, then successively in all countries of Europe. The essential value of this thought consists in an appeal to human reason as the supreme tribunal in controversies and studies of nature and society and not merely—as Busson states it—in “the application of rational methods to religious matters, to the exclusion of faith”;¹ and, at the same time, in the

Translated by James H. Labadie.

1. Henri Busson, *Les Sources et le développement du rationalisme dans la littérature française de la Renaissance (1533-1601)* (Paris: Letouzy & Ané, 1922), p. xi.

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search for rational premises of phenomena and in the judgment of these phenomena from the point of view of the *ratio*.

An important role was also played by the treatment of problems from the historical point of view, that is, in regard to their development in time. The factors contributing to the ever increasing application of these methods became more numerous, and this consequently led to more profound developments in comparative thought.

Among these factors must first be mentioned economic changes and especially the general evolution toward primitive capitalism. The varying intensity of these changes in the different countries is well known, as well as the curve of their transformations, which shows a heterogeneous form as demonstrated, for example, by Alfred von Martin in his analysis of the case of Florence.² Nevertheless, the possibility of comparisons between the old rural economy, based on the possession of land and therefore static, and the new dynamic urban economy, drew attention to a certain number of phenomena, such as the increasing importance of money and of time. Italian clocks now sounded each hour, and Vespasiano da Bisticci, as well as other authors of biographies (*vitae*), stressing the positive traits of his hero, writes that, among other things, he “valued time highly, nor did he waste so much as an hour, notwithstanding all his occupations with affairs of state and with private concerns.”

Social changes, closely linked to the displacement of the economic center of gravity from the great landed properties to the cities, stimulated liberal and democratic movements (now in the broadest sense, *Stadtluft mache frei*).

In Italy the urban republics, representing a temporary step toward the principate regime, demonstrate social changes in all their breadth. These changes permit comparison in two possible cases—when the author criticizes the past and offers the example of the new “*virtù*” and when he criticizes modern times by showing in the ancestral custom the ideal of daily behavior.

Criticism of the slow pace of ancestors, of the inactivity and debauchery of the clergy, and (especially in the north) of the idle and licentious life of the court are results of comparing the intense activity of contemporaries with the remains of an *ancien régime* become an anachronism.

The incarnation of the ideals of the new epoch in the virtuoso, that is,

2. Alfred von Martin, “Von der florentinischer Bürgerrepublik zu dem Principat Lorenzos,” in *Soziologie der Renaissance* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke Verlag, 1932), p. 85. English ed., *Sociology of the Renaissance* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1944).

the “master of his trade,” led to an appreciation of value through a comparison of the particular potentialities of each one with those of other virtuosos, calling forth intellectual competition similar to the commercial competition. The virtuoso works no longer “for the greater glory of God” but for his own glory, now measured in money. Hence come reflections on the lucrative nature of the various professions: the complaints of the philosophers who are “rich in wisdom, poor in money” (Benedetto Accolti) and a preference for the life of the jurist who unites “wisdom” and “eloquence.”

Thus virtuosity, rivaling even the privileges of “high birth,” became the touchstone of social value: during the funeral of Filippino Lippi (1504) all the shops of the Via de’ Servi in Florence were closed, a privilege that had previously been reserved for the funerals of princes. Along with these transformations there developed an abundant literature on two modes of life, the active and the contemplative. These reflections generally resulted in a compromise. Rinuccini declares: “The fact that there are two kinds of happiness reveals to us two conditions of living.”

The movements of the Reformation contributed—especially in the northern countries—to basic transformations in the mentality of men. From the time that the doctrine of the Catholic church ceased to constitute a monopoly and as soon as the anathema lost its effectiveness as an instrument in the liquidation of “inner” controversies, men did their best on both sides of the barricade to assemble the most valued arguments.

Catholics now compared “heretical” doctrines with the obligatory dogmas of the church; Protestants examined the deviations of official Catholic doctrine from its old dogmatic and constitutional principles. Current controversy about the role of Catholicism and Protestantism in the history of the sciences³ should stress, I feel, not the “statistical” arguments (the number of representatives of one camp or the other in the domains of the individual sciences) but rather the genesis and process of development of the sciences taken as a whole; and precisely this consideration indicates to us that it was critical thought against dogmas that played the chief driving role. The weakening of the monopoly of Catholic doctrine also gave birth to a typical tendency of the time, consisting of a comparison of the various religions in the hope of finding—after surmounting secondary dogmatic controversies—the common religion. Nicholas of

3. R. Hooykaas, “Science and Reformation”; R. H. Bainton, “Critical Comment”; R. Hooykaas, “Answer to Dr. Bainton’s Comment on Science and Reformation”; F. Russo, “Rôle respectif du Catholicisme et du Protestantisme dans le développement des sciences aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles,” *Cahiers d’histoire mondiale* (Paris), No. 1 (1956) and Nos. 3 and 4 (1957).

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Cusa wrote: "The concord of religions is established therefore in the heaven of reason." The same opinions may be found in Fricius Modrevius and the "irenists."

Antiquity played a decisive role as the element which opened new horizons of the mind, thanks to a broadening of "perspective" allowing a more profound comparison of the present with the past. Since that time we find not only the habitual comparison of "new" with "old" (in Rabelais, for example: "I see brigands, butchers and adventurers of the present time more learned than the doctors and preachers of my own time") but also the perpetual presence of a third element, antiquity, which exerted an influence on the reasoning of writers. It was especially significant in Italy, where Roman antiquity has been treated as an essential part of the national tradition, which must be continued. At the time of the Renaissance each poet, philosopher, cavalier, or artist was compared not only with his immediate predecessors but also with the Greeks and the Romans (Homer, Ovid, etc.). Filippo Villani, in his collection of biographies of Florentine artists and scholars toward the middle of the fourteenth century, notes, for example, that the geometer and astronomer Pagolo "surpassed all the ancients and moderns in the scale of astronomical achievement."⁴ The very notions and names of the "Renaissance" and the "Middle Ages" originated in the comparison of "new" and "ancient" times.

Ideals of the future often arose from a comparison of reality with the more or less ancient past. As a result of the confrontation of the brilliant past of ancient Rome with its miserable current state (Petrarch: "Lo, the Italian soil is now shaken by barbarian violence"), writers sought the union of the nation as a supreme aim and attempted to find remedies for current evils. The ideals sketched in utopian schemes, notably in More's *Utopia*, also served as examples. The comparison of the present, which always leaves a great deal to be desired, with the possibilities of an idealized future, again served as a premise for the development of the social sciences.

Comparisons were made not only of the phenomena which take place in time but also of those which occur in space. The activity and the curiosity of the men of the Renaissance are evidenced also in the numerous voyages. A change of milieu enables one to observe his native institutions from a certain remove and thus to see the facts more distinctly. Consequently, the literature of that epoch (first expressed in correspondence)

4. Filippo Villani, *Le Vite d'uomini illustri fiorentini* (Firenze: S. Coen, 1847), p. 45; same comparison made about Coluccio (p. 20), Giotto (p. 47), etc.

contains many firsthand observations. This also explains the large role played by geography and the popularity of such eminent works of Glareanus' *On Geography* and Matthias de Miechovia's *Treatise on the two Sarmatias*. Geographic discoveries did much to broaden the possibilities of comparison. Montaigne, for example, wrote about cannibals, basing his judgment on the opinion of a man "who had lived for ten or twelve years in that other world which was discovered in our century." He notes, concerning the morals of the cannibals: "From what I have heard of that nation, I can see nothing barbarous or uncivilized about it, except that we all call barbarism that which does not fit in with our usages."

2. *The Empirical and Rationalist Attitude*

Concrete examples from the Renaissance era show a joining of the empirical with the rationalist attitude, typical for the natural sciences and somewhat rare in the social sciences. Several writers of the time underscore distinctly the role of observation linked to the critical analysis of economic, political, and social relations. Thus, for example, Erasmus of Rotterdam stresses his lack of confidence in whatever he has not seen with his own eyes ("I prefer first to see with my own eyes rather than with those of others"); Francesco Vettori separates examples acquired in books (Persia, Assyria, Rome, etc.) from those drawn from experience ("all the republics which I have known of through history or which I have seen") and, giving priority to the latter, declares in his *Summary of the History of Italy* that, "to speak frankly, all governments are tyrannical."⁵ In France Carolus Bovillus (Charles de Bouelles) wrote in his *Liber de sapiente* (1510) that "only reason is the mature and perfect daughter of nature."⁶

In Poland, Fricius Modrevius applied reason (*ratio*) as a criterion to most of the relationships which he observed closely, declaring them good or bad from that point of view. In his works he appealed to the "tribunal of reason" which, together with experience (to him the best teacher),⁷ became the element establishing the necessity of human interference in the sphere of social life.

5. Numerous examples may be found in E. Garin's anthology *Il Rinascimento italiano* (Milan, 1941).

6. Quoted in E. Cassirer's *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance* (Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1927).

7. *Experientia ipsa rerum magistra—De Republica, liber de schola*, chap. iv. The first edition appeared in Cracow in 1551, the next two at Basel in 1554 and 1559 (German translation, Basel, 1557). The latest edition was published in Warsaw by the Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy in 1953 (Vol. I of the *Opera omnia*).

3. *The Dynamic Conception of Social Life*

There remains to be mentioned the tendency to conceive the character of social life in a historical and dynamic fashion. Lorenzo Valla wrote: "So far as I am able to judge, more gravity, more prudence, more civil wisdom are displayed in historical orations than in the precepts of any philosopher."

This question was elaborated in all its aspects,⁸ but from our point of view it must not be forgotten that the supremacy of history was linked to a definite attitude of the author, especially to criticism or moral appreciation; that is, to the praise or condemnation of personalities and events. We can, for example, find in Johannis Bruti's *On the Praises of History* the idea that the historian is "the arbiter as it were of the whole world."

This attitude was closely linked to the subjective selection of facts, for the historian notes especially those events which, according to him, are worth retaining in the reader's memory. Filippo Villani, for example, declared: "My uncle John and my father Matthew endeavored to write down in the vulgar tongue what had happened worthy of memory in various periods. I shall construct something, which will certainly not be very beautiful, but such that important facts will not perish."⁹

Thus developed, the historic sense plays a double role. On the one hand, it gives arguments in discussions of all kinds—for example, Michel Servet, combating the dogma of the Trinity, wrote that this dogma was no doubt useful and necessary in the past but that it had become useless and ripe for rejection.¹⁰ On the other hand, it enables one to conceive human progress as a process in the perpetual perfecting of human thought, and Villani, who was quoted above, states that the facts amassed in his work "are confined to those which best and most aptly describe the material utilized."¹¹

8. On the development of historical thought consult H. Baron, "Das Erwachen des historischen Denkens in Humanismus des Quattrocento," *Historische Zeitschrift*, CXLVII (1932/1933), 5 ff.

9. *Op. cit.*, p. 54.

10. D. Cantimori, *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento* (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1939), p. 40. The "Polish brethren," on their side, regard religion as an ensemble of principles which undergo perpetual evolution. Georges Schomann, in his will, told his children that they must be faithful to their paternal religion but that, if after his death a more perfect religion were to arise, they should not hesitate to recognize it (*Bibliotheca antitrinitariorum sive catalogus scriptorum Christophori Sandii* [Freistadt, 1684], pp. 196-97).

In his *Sylvae* (1590), Fricius wrote that Luther had eliminated part of the errors, that after him it was Zwingli who had eliminated another part, but that in the future what remained would also be considered as erroneous.

11. *Op. cit.*, p. 54.

Garin correctly observed that history became “the supreme world tribunal,” as it is for us today, and the source of information on the social and intellectual life of the past. In this way history is not only mistress of life but also witness of life.

4. *Eagerness for Novelty*

Intellectual curiosity was markedly characteristic of the men of the Renaissance. They were, as César des Gaulois wrote, “eager for new things.” Conjointly with economic, social, and political tendencies, it was precisely this curiosity which was the motive force for dynamics and initiative of all kinds.

Dante Alighieri blames the Florentines for the perpetual change of opinions and political institutions, condemning it as a morbid symptom (*Purgatorio*, V, 145 ff.). Aeneas Silvius wrote: “Italy, rejoicing in novelty, has no stability.” And Petrarch, recommending travel, protested against the identification of constancy with inertia. He observed: “If there is anyone who place virtue, not in the mind, but in localities and calls immobility constancy, people afflicted with gout ought to seem constant to him; but the dead are even more constant” (*Ep. fam.*, XV, ep. iv). And Montaigne remarks (I, 25): “What a poor, paltry competence is a mere bookish competence!” He emphasizes: “To this end human intercourse is marvelously well adapted, as well as travel in foreign countries . . . to report chiefly on the intellectual characteristics and the manners of those nations, and to rub and file our brains in contact with those of others. . . . I should wish that he might be taken abroad in his early childhood.”

However, this pursuit of novelty—characteristic, as we have seen, of Montaigne himself, a writer of conservative mind—did not constitute an end in itself. The reason for the phenomenon, today called “the desire for novelty,” lies in the impossibility of expressing one’s self in inherited terms and in the impossibility of accepting an existing previous state of affairs. New events give rise to new ideas and to new thoughts directed toward the future.

5. *The Tendencies of Scientific Thought*

Quite independent of knowledge of the immediate cause for the formation of various concepts among writers (economic and social changes, stressed by Karl Marx; moral and ethical problems, by Max Weber; artistic questions brought to the forefront by D. Frey), modern scientific

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thought has since its origins shown several principal directions in its interests.

As early as the close of the fifteenth century the wisdom contained in the "book of nature" had been opposed to the "book of knowledge" of the erudite humanists. Despite the complaints of several writers, who argued the impossibility of scientific research in the absence of a rich collection of books (Coluccio Salutati wrote, for example, that he saw no possibility of discussion "in so great a dearth of books"), we can observe simultaneously an obvious lassitude provoked by the excess of bookish knowledge. Poggio Bracciolini declared: "I have become a little more tepid in this solicitude to search for new books." He also noted the unfavorable aspects of this sort of knowledge when he wrote: "For to assemble wood, stones, and cement endlessly can seem extremely stupid, if you never construct anything out of them."

Tommaso Campanella, forgetful of the role played by the erudite humanists, such as Gasin, severely attacked the erudition of Pico della Mirandola in terms which permit us to stress the total opposition between two different scientific attitudes: "This is the difference, then, between my way of philosophizing and that of Pico; and I learn more from the anatomy of an ant or of an herb . . . than from all the books that have been written since the beginning of the century." Leonardo da Vinci detested the interminable and sterile discussions of the humanists. According to him, no human investigation deserves to be called truly scientific unless it has passed the proof of mathematical investigation. The same point of view was later represented by Galileo, who said that philosophy should be deciphered in the book of nature, written "in the mathematical language."

Drawing its origin from these sources, the preponderance of the "exact sciences" which left a decisive mark on the style of modern scientific reflection ("qualitative" thought—that is, the utilization of categories such as "man," which imply other qualitative categories such as "mortal,") became insufficient and yielded to "quantitative" thought. This is the genesis of a phenomenon which Abel Rey called "the mathematics of the Renaissance."

Although constructed later "in the geometric order," the science of man and of society remained faithful for several years (despite some remarkable exceptions) to deductive speculation. It cannot claim to possess a John the Baptist of the Renaissance, and this is why the reconstruction of its origins requires the analysis of several fields of man's intellectual production.

II. THE ELEMENTS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Before the first history courses were introduced into universities at the beginning of the sixteenth century, historical thought had developed in several types of works: *historiae*, *comentarii*, and *vitae*. Although we find in them only chance and incoherent reflections on social, economic, and political life, the attentive reader may nevertheless discover from time to time an image of the reality in which the author lived. In France and in England several historical works of this sort may be found, but it was Italian historiography which contributed most to the formation of the premises of social science.¹²

The Florentine chronicles of the three Villanis (Giovanni, Matteo, and Filippo) contain not only—as do all historical works of the time—information on political history but also some considerations on the social and economic life of the Florentines. Giovanni Villani is proud of his native city: speaking of the “grandeur and authority and magnificence of the commune of Florence,” he states the total number of inhabitants, the number of men capable of bearing arms, the proportion of wealthy people to common people, the number of foreigners, schools, and monks, and structure of the corporations and their relation to each other, and so on (esp. XI, 94).

As first treated by the chronicler as a uniform whole “the people of Florence” (that is, “the Florentines”) become more and more heterogeneous when he describes social upsets; we see, on the one hand, the “common people” or “inferior people” and, on the other hand, the “nobles” or “the great.” Upsets such as earthquakes, floods, poor harvests, and counterfeiting give the writer occasion to communicate to his readers information on the monetary system (XIII, 53 and 97) or on the prices of articles of necessity (XII, 73), and so on.

Thus Villani draws his readers’ attention to social or economic affairs only when they become mobile (in other words, when things are no longer following their normal course). This was the characteristic trait of historians of the time: it is sufficient to point out the description of the “tumult of the simpletons” at Florence by Gino Capponi (*History of the Republic of Florence*, IV, 1) and Bernardino Corio’s description of the troubles caused at Milan by the expulsion of the monks from the monastery of Sant’Ambrogio.¹³

12. J. W. Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1942), and W. K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1948).

13. *L’Historia di Milano volgarmente scritta* (Vinegia, 1554) (1st ed.; Milan, 1503).

It has been the habit since the time of Burckhardt to deplore the fact that history, until then the profession of chroniclers, fell into the hands of the humanists, who left the imprint of a moralizing eloquence upon historical works. Today the difference between any work's form and its substance is stressed. This is why it may be said that Lionardo Bruni, for example, like other humanists of the first rank, kept his independence in the face of the authorities of antiquity¹⁴ as well as that of his direct master, Villani. Bruni re-examined facts and compared them with other data from contemporary chronicles and documents,¹⁵ always carefully observing the "societies of people" (VII, IX). It must also be noted that in the last three books of his *History* (covering the years 1390–1402) we find almost exclusively the authentic observations of the author, who, as an eye-witness of events (he was born in 1370), has rejected every intermediary.

Among the historians who may attract our attention, special mention must be made of Machiavelli and Guicciardini. As early as the Introduction to the *History of Florence*, Machiavelli, demonstrating his own interpretation of history and his relationships with contemporaries, writes that his predecessors have left nothing but descriptions of wars, remaining silent on internal affairs. In consideration of this deficiency, Machiavelli announces that his principal aim will be to show the genesis of the "grave and natural enmities" which always exist between "the men of the people and the nobles."¹⁶

This was more than an intention; he always, in fact, analyzed with precision the essence of the political and social struggle and noted, among other things, that it resulted in the inevitable formation of opposition in the victorious side. After analyzing the results of the "popular party's" triumph in Rome and Florence, he states that the degeneration of the Florentine patricians after the defeat was the consequence of the fact that they—desiring to regain the important role which they had formerly played—attempted "not only to be but to seem like the populace in their government, in their soul, and in their way of life" (pp. 138–39).

Machiavelli particularly noted that the men who possess the power never cease to tremble before the "mobile soul of the plebeians" (p. 274). This is not, naturally, a flattering observation, but it does present precisely

14. P. O. Kristeller, *The Classics and Renaissance Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 19.

15. E. Santini's Introduction in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1914), XIX, iii.

16. *Opere istoriche e politiche di Nicolò Machiavelli*, I, ix, 146, and 161.

a characteristic trait of plebeians, who, pursuing a change in their unfavorable situation, show constant proof, unlike the nobles in their conservative, "static" position, of their perpetual mobility. Among other opinions of his contemporaries, Machiavelli transmitted to us a fragment of an interesting address by a representative of the "plebeian men," stating that faithful slaves will always remain slaves and that "good men" will always remain poor. This will continue until the time when slaves become "unfaithful and bold" and the poor "rapacious and bold," indicating to us what directions some of the chiefs wished the "mobility" of the plebeians to take. This example is sufficient to show that it was Machiavelli's penetrating observation—and he often stressed the decisive role of experience as a criterion of an understanding of the facts—which gave good results.

Guicciardini's opinions resulted from the experience of a disappointed politician and from a conflict between reality and ideals which—as he well knew—would not soon be realized (*Ricordi*, p. 236). Recording his thoughts after the decline of his career he assumed—like his friend Machiavelli—the attitude of an observer of human affairs and rejected everything which hindered the attainment of that aim: books, dogmas, and the reflections of authorities who then enjoyed universal consideration. Thus, the image of reality which arises from his works is clear and concrete and, at the same time, bears the stamp of a certain coldness and dryness. Guicciardini sees the facts with a penetrating eye—conveyed by the reading of just a few pages of his *Relazione di Spagna*, written for his own use at the time when he was ambassador at the court of the king of Spain in Madrid. This narrative contains especially detailed information on the economic, social, and political conditions of the country. The author takes into consideration the habits, civilization, and culture of the Spanish. The conclusions drawn from these observations, and the observations themselves, have been confirmed by the scientific research of present-day scholars who closely compared the reports of Guicciardini with those of contemporary chroniclers and travelers.¹⁷

Experience—in a broad sense of the term—constitutes the basis of his opinions, and discernment in the real situation provides—in his opinion—the basis for reasonable and effective action. Knowing that the power of the Florentine republic had been founded by the bourgeoisie, he wished to cede power to the wealthy patricians, for he had understood "that in a

17. André Otetea, *François Guichardin, sa vie publique et sa pensée politique* (Paris: Picart, 1926), p. 63. Also Paslo Treves, *Il Realismo politico di Francesco Guicciardini* (Florence: "La Nuova Italia," 1931).

society whose prosperity was founded on industry and commerce, those who could exercise a direct and preponderant action on trade and production would have the political direction.”¹⁸ In the field of foreign affairs, too, his particular interest in Spain, for example, was not accidental. His main idea was the formation of an anti-Spanish coalition (the Pope, France, and Venice). It is true that the sack of Rome (1527) put an end to these intentions, but it must be said that, as chief of foreign affairs for the papacy, he gave proof of his great diplomatic talents. He defined politics as “a game of compacts, not of revolutions,” and this is why he also believed that “politics is not a matter for the people” (*Ricordi*, p. 140); the people can never grasp all the complications of affairs and lets itself be guided by impulse, because “it is always desirous of new things.”

This statement on the fickleness of the plebeians, almost identical to Machiavelli's, explains his conception of history. The *History of Italy*—the work which first included the history of all provinces of the Italian peninsula—does in fact show us, above all, a “game of conventions.” But Guicciardini remains an incomparable master in this field: his own opinions are always compared with those of other historians, and—which seems most important—he really makes an exposition of political questions in presenting both their pro and con aspects. Guicciardini attains this end especially through quotations of arguments from two opposing parties. For example, when he relates the discussion on reform of the Florentine government, after the discourse of Soderini, he writes: “But in contrast to Guid'Antonio Vespucci . . . I speak as follows.” He presents in this same way almost all the discussions of Florence, Venice, and so forth.¹⁹ This “dialectical” procedure consists essentially of recognizing the inseparability of contradictory opinions quoted almost verbatim. This is why Montaigne writes that from Guicciardini “one may learn the truth of the affairs of his times” (II, 10).

We know that Guicciardini led simultaneously both the active and the contemplative life. If he had not quit his university career, his works

18. Otetea, *op. cit.*, p. 326. Several years after the death of Guicciardini appeared the book *Della Repubblica di Genova* (1559) by Umberto Foglietta. The author presents in support of his thesis—the superiority of the new patrician class in comparison to the old—some very interesting arguments: he compares the properties of representative members of these two groups with the aid of abundant lists of names. Occasionally, he makes fun of the supposed virtues of the old patriciate. It is not surprising that upon the publication of this book the author was obliged to leave his native city (cf. C. Curcio, *Utopisti e riformatori sociali del cinquecento* (Bologna, 1941), pp. xii and 19 ff.).

19. *Della Istoria d'Italia . . . , Libri XX* (Venezia: G. Pasquali, 1738), I, 98 ff., 101 ff., 477 ff.; II, 1020 ff.

would doubtless have been less interesting from our point of view. But the historians of the time were never professional writers: Villani was a member of the council of the woolworker's guild; Bruni, a diplomat and chancellor of the Florentine republic; Capponi, chief magistrate of Florence; and Machiavelli, secretary of the "Council of Ten."

Contact with the practical side of daily life was considered an integral part of education. We can find proof of this tendency in Vespasiano da Bisticci: his biographies in large measure complete the marginal information of Machiavelli and Guicciardini on the cultural life of the epoch.²⁰ Thus, in these "biographies" may be found information about the sphere of intellectual interests of "illustrious men," on libraries (as, for instance, the description of the accumulation of works in the Strozzi Library), on cultural milieus, on scientific contacts between philosophers and scholars, on the education of the children of patricians, and many other matters.

Vespasiano da Bisticci draws the attention of the reader to the fact that "assiduity to know divides the time" of his heroes. This is another proof that time—along with money—was becoming the fundamental category of a new scale of values. We read, for example, that Manetti "condemned idle men devoid of any virtue, who spend their time uselessly." There may be a certain stylization in all this, but the causes of such a stylization are very characteristic. These works also show the great changes which had taken place in man's mentality: the world had already become a veritable dominion of men, and "terrestrial" problems, above all, now occupied the attention of historians.

Thanks to the author's interest in the history of his native country, we can reconstruct today the affairs of the provinces and cities of almost all Europe. Although these chronicles often contain little material for the historian of the social sciences, the intentions of the chroniclers merit our attention. They were enthusiastic about souvenirs of the past; for example, Johannes Turmair (Aventinus) underscores his efforts to gain knowledge of sources (in the broadest meaning of this term). For years, he writes, without regard for rain or snow, for cold waves or heat waves, he visited all of Bavaria looking for "manuscripts, ancient charters, conveyances, letters, chronicles, rumors, rhymes, aphorisms, ballads, adventures, songs, missals, holy relics, monstresances, old stones, old coins, . . ." ²¹

20. *Virorum illustrium CIII qui extiterunt vitae auctore caevo Vespasiano Florentino, Spicilegium Romanum* (Rome, 1839), Vol. I. For example: "Volendo Donato [Acciajuoli] oltre alla dottrina ed eloquenza acquistare della pratica delle cose del mondo . . .," etc., (p. 438).

21. Johannes Turmair genannt Aventinus, *Sämtliche Werke* (Munich, 1883), IV, 7-8.

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The role of "sources" had been growing ever since the Reformation; in the course of scientific polemics—although these were often concerned with theological questions—the adversaries stressed the importance of historical arguments. Therefore, the author who possessed the "best" historical arguments, that is, the original sources, was considered to be the "best."

At first it was obviously the adherents of the Reformation (especially Melancthon) who accented the primordial importance of sources. Then, hoping to vanquish the adversary with their own weapons, Catholic writers themselves appropriated the same method. This is symptomatic of the development of critical thought, and when Caesar Baronius, at the command of the Pope, prepared his *Annales ecclesiastici* (1588), directed against Lutheran concepts, he gave much room to the sources which he had found in the archives and libraries of the Vatican, theretofore inaccessible to most writers.

Along with the question of the validity of sources, the second problem in which writers were passionately interested was the geographical factor in historical research, closely linked with the desire for the strict territorial localization of historical events. Hence the great popularity of all sorts of geographical works. Without knowledge of geography "any reading of ancient authors is blind and any account of events is deaf," wrote Glareanus in his dedication to Jean Laski (Johannes Lasco) which opens the work *On Geography* (Basel, 1537). This was precisely—according to Laski's expression—the book of "expurgated," that is, critical, geography.²²

The essential value of a criticism of this sort consists not alone in the correction of faults of erudition in one's predecessors, but especially in the role of observation combined with the critical analysis of the authorities. When Mathias de Miechovia corrects the information of Herodotus—who claimed that all inhabitants of northern countries were transformed annually into wolves—he closes his argument with these significant words: "which, as experience shows, is completely fabricated and fictitious."²³ He rejects many fantastic tales as false, because "this is not the truth according to our own experience." After reading this book, Ulrich von Hutten wrote to Pirkheimer (1518) that many opinions of authors must now "be transformed into fables."

22. Herman Dalton, *Lasciana* (Berlin: Reuter & Reichard, 1898), pp. 115–16.

23. *Tractatus de duabus Sarmatiis*, first edition published at Cracow in 1517; then dozens of editions and translations into German, Dutch, Italian, etc.

Thus the increase in knowledge of human affairs paralleled the "broadening" of the known physical world. Guicciardini recognized that the great maritime discoveries have played a decisive role "in the knowledge of the earth" and foresaw in particular that they would shake the theological interpretation of the physical world. The understanding of the great importance of these changes was deepened, thanks to reflections on the role of the inventions of gunpowder and printing. It was probably Jean Bodin who first came to the conclusion that these events presented a convincing testimony to the superiority of the new times: "The invention of printing in itself could easily match all the inventions of the ancients."²⁴

This new evaluation naturally led to a displacement of the center of gravity of research: history became more and more the science of the present. In the eyes of the modern writer, man was no longer an unchanging abstraction but rather the living being, anchored in social and political reality. This is the beginning of the rich political literature of the second half of the sixteenth century.

III. THE STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS OF SOCIETY IN THE EYES OF POLITICAL WRITERS

1. *Analysis of Social and Political Reality: Postulates of Change*

Fricius Modrevius (Frycz Modrzewski) presents in his treatise the concept of the total reconstruction of manners, of laws, of the church, of the schools, and of international affairs, each book of the *De republica* being devoted to one of these problems. The observation of life was the starting point for his postulates dealing with the total amendment of the republic. His descriptions of social and political life were founded on a rich experience as secretary to the king of Poland, and literature played a very limited role. He considers fully the comparative analysis of social facts, referring to the phenomena of several countries of contemporary Europe (Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, Hungary, Spain, etc.). Like Montaigne, he directs the reader's attention to the great importance of travel.²⁵

This method of observation permits him to draw just conclusions of a

24. Jean Bodin: *La Méthode de l'histoire*, translation and edition by Pierre Mesnard (Paris-Algiers: "Les Belles Lettres," 1941), p. 299. English ed.: *Method for Easy Comprehension of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945).

25. K. Dobrowolski, "Le Problème de la méthodologie de la science polonaise à l'époque de la Renaissance" (in Polish); "La Renaissance en Pologne" ("Odrodzenie w Polsce") (Warsaw, 1956), II, i, 217 ff. The author analyzes the works of Fricius and of other Polish writers from the point of view of the historian of the social sciences.

general nature. He states among other things that “the nobility have as many enemies as subjects” and that “a commonwealth cannot prosper with nobles alone” (II, 10). Faithful to his idea that the principal duty of the writer is always to tell the truth, he thought that the supreme aim of his life was to extirpate the erroneous opinions prevalent in society and that this task constituted the indispensable condition for the improvement of the political regime.

Fricius conceived the aims and tasks of science in modern fashion: “arts grow with time and with exercise” (III, 4). He understood the essence of the evolution of science and defined it as an enrichment, realized by each generation, of the theses elaborated by scholars who, on the one hand, appeal to the thought of their predecessors and, on the other hand, themselves find successors to continue their own realizations. He saw the relationship of the science of law not only to philosophy but also to history; and for this reason he wished to intrust the preparation of a collection of laws “to jurists, to philosophers, and to historians.”

Fricius’ ideas appear with particular clarity where the radical elements of his thought are no longer hidden behind the veil of ordinary forms—where conservatism is the direct target of his attacks. From this point of view the concept of the transformation of the state and the law, presented in his *On the Improvement of the Commonwealth*, has a deeply anticonservative character. Fricius also attacked “the ancestral customs” so much appreciated by the nobility, who saw in them an alleged incomparable model of life. He demonstrated that traditional systems deserved our respect but that, as a result of the unceasing sequence of changes, it is absolutely necessary to get rid of them.

Fricius thus opposed to the conservative and traditional method of argument—which his adversaries used—a new type of reasoning, the evolutionist, which permitted him to demonstrate the need for a reconstruction of the political and social regime of his country. In *De republica*, we find, on the one hand, principles which indicate how to correct (*emendare*) the regime of the state and, on the other hand, rules created under the influence of the desire to constitute (*constituere*) the new regime of a better state (hence, the ideal), and it is in this domain only that Fricius’ state is marked by utopian traits.

Fricius’ predecessors and contemporaries had published works which treated fragmentary questions; the jurists decided to write treatises embracing—in the best hypothesis—the general problems of the law (Apel, Lagus, Zasius, Oldendorp). Even the next generation (Vigelius, Gail) did

not go beyond the limits of the problems of the “jurisconsults”—most of these writers really exercised the function of counselor-at-law.

This is why the *De republica* created a great stir not only among the humanists of the sixteenth century (Celio Secondo Curione, Sebastian Castellio, Johannes Oporinus, Giovanni Giustiniano) but also among writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, in the *Dictionnaire* of Pierre Bayle (1697)—who cites, among others, the Dutch scholar van der Kun’s interesting opinion on Fricius—and in Réal’s *The Science of Government* (1751).

2. *The Concept of Universal Law*

Unlike Fricius—who put especial emphasis on social problems—Jean Bodin concentrated his attention almost exclusively on the political structure. There is nothing surprising in this, as it was the political regime which, in France, cried out for reform. Montaigne—Bodin’s contemporary—states correctly in his *Essais* that France, in the second half of the sixteenth century, really represented a conglomeration of “small principalities” functioning, to all intents and purposes, independently (I, 42).

Bodin attempted a theoretical justification of the centralized monarchy. As a writer, he had a profound knowledge of the problem, his *Method of History* already including—as announced in the Preface—“a very abundant list of memorable facts.” He took them not only from “printed” sources but also from his “experience” as advocate at the Paris *parlement*. Convinced that “the best part of universal law is well hidden in history,” he joined the political attitude with that of the historian of law. In his historical research he gave free rein to his “comparative curiosity.”²⁶

Bodin conceived his treatise according to the principles of a coherent system: each fragment of the reasoning forms part of a logically arranged whole. He also excels in the differentiation of apparently homogeneous phenomena; his considerations of the “difference between the State and the Government,”²⁷ accompanied by an analysis of the political regimes of Venice and Germany, showing, for example, that Germany was not a monarchy but an aristocracy, or proving that Poland, Denmark, and Sweden “are changing and uncertain states, dependent on the prince or the nobility as powerful” (I, 10, p. 228), bears witness to Bodin’s ability

26. Jean Moreau-Reibel, *Jean Bodin et le droit public comparé* (Paris: Vrin, 1933), p. 46.

27. *Les six Livres de la République* (Paris, 1576) II, 2, p. 272; quotations and pagination of the Lyons edition of 1593. English ed.: *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, abridged and translated by M. J. Tooley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955).

to distinguish the form of the regime from its real substance. He also understood the importance of historical research for the understanding of the current state of a certain political phenomenon: "There is indeed need to see where the change in the republic comes from, before judging it" (IV, 1, p. 584). And this is why, along with opinions of writers, he gathers accounts of the events which took place "before our eyes" (as in, V, 4, p. 749) and transmits to us "rather notable [examples] from our memory."²⁸

Bodin naturally chose examples capable of proving his principal thesis, very often, for instance, using the Rome of Caesar's time, which is reasonable, assuming that he wished to show the superiority of the centralized regime. It was not accidental that he wrote: "There is nothing more just than that which is necessary, as an old Roman senator said" (VI, 2, p. 878). Thus he poses at the center of his considerations—as Grotius and Althusius had done—the problem of theoretical research on the genesis of sovereignty: Did it repose primitively in the people or in the prince? And it should not be forgotten that an abundant literature of this type paved the way for reflections on the "social contract"—the fundamental idea concerning the development of the sciences of man and of society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Jean Bodin did not wish to follow the path of Plato and Thomas More and "construct a republic in idea without effect" (I, 1, p. 4). But—as in Fricius and many others—one can easily discover his ideal scarcely veiled by the notion of a "well-ordered republic." Analyzing all the members of the "organism" of the state—a typical comparison in the political literature of the sixteenth century—he almost always compares their activity with the optimum possibilities of the "true image of the well-ordered republic" (VI, 6, p. 1057). This is yet another proof that the vision of a future ideal played an important role in the formation of the social sciences.

3. *The Reflection of Reality and the Postulates of Change in the Utopias*

Toward the end of the last century Karl Kautsky²⁹ drew the attention of scholars to the criticism of the economic, social, and political situation in England in Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). Today his research requires

28. *Op. cit.*, V, 6, p. 829. He notes, for example, the accounts of contemporary English, French, Polish ambassadors, etc. (I, 8, p. 139; IV, 6, p. 623; V, 1, p. 669; VI, 5, p. 976, etc.), and refers to the practice of the Parisian *parlement* (e.g., II, 5, p. 439; III, 6, p. 470).

29. *Thomas More und seine Utopie* (1887). English ed.: *Thomas More and His Utopia* (New York: International Publishers, 1927).

revision, but a quick glance is sufficient to reveal that *Utopia* offers something more than the simple image of an ideal state. The work undoubtedly contains several critical elements directed against reality and forms, in a certain sense, a negative test of social and political reality.

Here is the way in which his contemporaries themselves treated More's work: Erasmus of Rotterdam in a letter to Ulrich von Hutten (1519) wrote that More had shown "what the bad situation of the State depended on" (he was thinking especially of England), and Beatus Rhenanus said in 1518 that More "had exposed—especially in the *Utopia*—his true opinion of the situation." The same opinion may be repeated for later utopias as well (Campanella, Bacon) and for all treatises of this type which drew their origin from that transitional epoch when the old structures were shaken and the new ones were not yet erected.

Discontented with the reality they saw, the creators of utopias—when they were not glorifying myths of the past—were convinced that the regulation of life could assure happiness for citizens of the future state. According to them, irrationally complicated reality was to be replaced by a common future, rationally organized.

By limiting themselves to examples less well known, we see that the Italian utopias of the second half of the sixteenth century³⁰ drew their origin from different factors. Doni wrote under the influence of More's *Utopia*; Patrizi, under that of Platonism and the idealization of the Venetian regime; Agostini, under that of an idealized Venice and theocratic Catholicism re-establishing itself after the Council of Trent. Nevertheless, all these works—besides a detailed analysis of the regime of the future and an appeal to the daily experience of the reader—have one characteristic trait in common: they devoted the most space to questions directly linked to property (riches and poverty, succession, usury, work, and wages). The most radical is Doni. In his ideal state everything will be held in common: "No longer will one man be richer than another. Each will have as much food to eat and clothing to wear as any other, and each will have a house furnished like those of others."³¹ The state of the future would then be the antithesis of the present state, which Doni defines as a "mad" regime—his thesis is entitled *The Wise and the Mad World*. Such was the diagnosis which condemned the present in the name of the future.

Long treated in the nature of "curiosities," utopian thought is now be-

30. C. Curcio, *Utopisti e riformatori*. . . . The book contains texts and a critical introduction.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

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coming the subject of serious studies.³² Before they had developed to their fullest extent, it can be said, without fear of error, that the ideals of the future had always played a catalytic role in scientific reflection on man and society. Likewise, “the well-ordered republican regime” of Guicciardini, the thinking of Fricius directed “to constituting a republic,” or Bodin’s conception of the “well-ordered republic,” each rationally justified vision of the future developed the social thought of historians, political writers, and philosophers.

4. Philosophical Reflections on Man and Society: Montaigne, Bacon, and Hobbes

As if to confirm Hegel’s words about Minerva’s owl which “takes flight late in the evening,” not until the decline of the Renaissance do we find the origins of philosophical reflection on man and society. It was Montaigne who first began to observe and interpret the facts of human life in the manner of modern philosophy. For his knowledge in this field, he used “bookish” and “experimental” sources—first mainly bookish, later mainly experimental.

As far as individual psychology is concerned, he was already acquainted with several modern notions (such as instinctive movements, the subconscious, intuition, suggestion [I, 20]) and demonstrates the uselessness of “relative and borrowed” wisdom which consists merely of “filling the memory” and repeating “authoritative” opinions (I, 24). Without realizing it, Montaigne also introduced new concepts into “social psychology.” For example, he stresses the importance of the objective recounting of facts, that is, of narrations which have not been deformed by commentaries (I, 22); he knew the value of introducing a certain “distance” into the representation of things (cf. I, 31, a passage in which he introduces the subject of cannibals).

Although his rich “practice of life” strengthened his conservatism, it permitted him to attain exceptional universality of reflection. As a court judge for seventeen years, he was able daily to observe social conflicts, and, as a man who went into “society,” he witnessed the increasing greed for money, observing, for example, that the avarice of fathers very often turned their sons into simple thieves. His great predecessor, Rabelais, represented the enthusiasm for science typical of a true son of the people.

32. Most recently, G. Duveau, “La Résurrection de l’Utopie,” *Cahiers internationaux de la sociologie* (Paris), XXIII (1957), 3 ff. The author has already published several studies on the sociology of Utopia.

Montaigne, a gentleman, although his family was ennobled rather late (and entirely in consequence of this!), adopted a skeptical attitude toward the science.

He showed a favorable judgment of the new concepts, not only those of Paracelsus, but also (rather rare for the time) those of Copernicus. He thus demonstrated the modern tendency of science, which is more and more, as Bachelard expresses it, "a reflection on reflection." At the same time, however, he added this significant comment: "Who knows whether a third opinion a thousand years from now may upset the two preceding ones?" His attitude expresses equally understanding of the endless growth of science and skepticism. We must not reproach him for this today; doubt sometimes has an even greater creative force than enthusiasm. At the dawn of the Renaissance Dante had already written these words of profound wisdom: "Wherefore doubt springs, like a shoot, at the foot of truth" (*Par.*, IV, 130-31).

We know that Francis Bacon, whose *Essays* appeared in 1597, was a zealous reader and imitator of Montaigne. This would be of no importance if in developing his methodology of empiricism he did not also take into consideration, along with the philosophy of nature, the philosophy of man. This he divided into anthropology, which treats of individuals, and politics, which treats of social phenomena. For Bacon the scientific method, based on experience, not only establishes the facts but also—always based on induction—provides the interpretation of these facts: "Therefore from a closer and purer league between these two faculties, the experimental and the rational (such as has never yet been made) much may be hoped" (*Novum organum*, I, 95).

Bacon himself, though closely tied to the "practice of social life"—as diplomat, as jurist, and finally as Lord Chancellor of England—inclined especially toward the natural sciences. In his utopia (*The New Atlantis*) he traced the image of the state of the future, whose citizens would lead a happy life, thanks to technical inventions.

There is no need to stress here the role which the application of the Baconian method might have in the field of the social sciences, the less so as Bacon himself was convinced that the method applied in his works to the sciences of nature was also of great importance in the field of the juridical sciences.³³ This task might have been undertaken by his friend

33. P. H. Kocher, "Francis Bacon on the Science of Jurisprudence," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XVIII (1957), 3 ff.

Robert Lenoble writes: "Inventor of the experimental method [Bacon] scarcely had time to experiment" and adds that "the 'Bacon case' has not yet been cleared up." Declaring that

Thomas Hobbes. But Hobbes did not recognize Bacon's value as a philosopher and applied the deductive method in his political philosophy—that is, in the most original part of his system. The historian of the social sciences, however, turns his attention especially to the philosopher's mode of realistic observation. Robert Lenoble writes that modern materialism begins its career with Hobbes, for whom “the phenomenon acquires such value that it throws all the rest into shadow and is, in sum, defined as the only reality.”³⁴

Starting with the principle that society and nature are governed by the same laws, Hobbes pitilessly uncovered the egoistic impulses of his fellows. Obviously, he could not complain of a lack of examples: observation of the daily conduct of men was sufficient for him to prove that Aristotle's thesis—that man is, by his nature, a social being—is entirely false. The fact that no one had doubted this traditional dogma was—according to Hobbes—the result “of a too superficial examination of human nature.”³⁵

In accordance with his principle that human nature is invariable, Hobbes sought proofs of human egoism either in the “classical repertory” (Greece and Rome) or in phenomena “outside time”—for example, in the manner in which men behave in assemblies. He expressed himself clearly, his reasoning was convincing and logical, and therefore it is not at all surprising that his works have been admired both by his contemporaries (Gasendi, Sorbière) and by succeeding generations. Diderot, for example, wrote that the treatise *Human Nature* “is a masterpiece of logic and reason.”³⁶ Today Robert Lenoble writes:

One is immediately struck by the extremely “modern” character of this philosophy, if it is agreed that “modern” be defined as the elimination of the transcendent. Psychology is reduced to the study of more and more complicated reflexes. Ethics ceases to be a matter of conscience and is oriented toward “the science of manners.” Politics dominates the duality of individual and state and becomes resolutely totalitarian. Science, finally, takes over the monopoly so long enjoyed by philosophy.³⁷

And, in fact, the influence of Hobbes's works was great, especially

“every great doctrine surpasses its system by its method,” he says that, through his inventions, Bacon “was a man of genius who was precursor of true science” (“Origines de la pensée scientifique moderne,” in *Histoire de la science*, published under the direction of Maurice Daumas [Paris, 1957], pp. 421 ff.).

34. Lenoble, *op. cit.*, p. 523.

35. *Elementa philosophiae, sectio tertia: De cive*, III, 1, 1, 2. First edition published in Paris, 1642.

36. *Œuvres*, Assérat ed. (Paris: Garnier, 1875–77), XV, 124 (also III, 466).

37. Lenoble, *op. cit.*, pp. 526–27.

during the Enlightenment. Continuing the tradition of the greatest historians and jurists of the Renaissance (Guicciardini, Machiavelli, Bodin, Grotius), he was at the same time—thanks to his rationalism and realism—the promoter of an “ethical sociology” which is the most modern form of relativism.

Hobbes taught his readers acuteness and independence of observation, as Montaigne led them to reflect on the complicated nature of human opinions. Bacon, finally, bequeathed the empirical philosophy of man as a constituent part of a total system of sciences. Founded on induction, this philosophy of man—anthropology and politics—aimed at the search for laws, that is, for the constant properties of social phenomena.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary methodology of the historical and social sciences owes much to contemporary sociological interpretation, which sees in inter-human conflicts the essential element of history and positivism requiring scholars to rely mainly on facts. And it is precisely in the works of the writers of the Renaissance era that we find the germs of this modern scientific attitude.

Although the conceptions presented here may appear at first glance to depend exclusively on an enumeration of facts, the preceding chapters show that this is simply an illusion, because it is obviously impossible to separate the “science of social facts” of any given writer from his “point of view” on these facts. And this “point of view” itself became more and more modern. Historians, political writers, and philosophers eliminated as far as possible dependence on authorities and rejected useless details of erudition and rhetoric. The activity of contemporary life has found a perfect equivalent in the dynamics of scholars. In his letter to Pirkheimer (1518), Ulrich von Hutten pronounced these celebrated and significant words: “What an epoch! . . . What vigilance of minds! What flourishing of the sciences!”

Founded in knowledge of the past, excited by the present, that “vigilance of minds” often ran ahead of the future. Thanks to this—among other things—the premises of the social sciences developed at the time of the Renaissance.

The author of this article—who offers only the fundamental elements of the problem—hopes for severe criticism which will shed light on numerous details and will no doubt contribute to the verification of more than one hypothesis.