

The Temporalization of Social Order: Some Theoretical Remarks on the Change in "Change"

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***Bernard Giesen***

Anyone who does not wish to confine the analysis of social change to merely sketching temporal variations in social phenomena but insists on aiming to propound an autonomous theory of social change is soon confronted with the suspicion that to indulge in such a hope is to indulge in speculation. Social change, it might be argued, is no more and no less a specific object for theory-construction than is history itself. Moreover, it might be argued that explanations for the sequence of and relationships among the events that make up history and social change have already been provided by the theories of action and structure; consequently, there is no need for any separate theoretical concepts.

However, any such attempt to decouple the analysis of social change from autonomous theoretical concepts overlooks the tacit categorial assumptions made in all analysis of social change. Although "temporality" has to be regarded as a universal presupposition for experience, conceptions of temporality and change are themselves subject to alteration over time. The observations that follow are concerned with social change and the evolutionary development of these categorial preliminary assumptions regarding change and development.

These reflections start with the assumption that it was necessary for certain differentiations and structural transformations to have occurred during the course of the history of ideas before alterations over time could be conceived of as "social change." If one pursues the story of how the concept of social change came about, there is some evidence for the supposition that "social change" as a sociological term already represents a further transformation of the temporal structures that underlay the historical

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theory of the modern era or, before that, the history-of-salvation models in Christian philosophy (see Löwith 1953). Consequently, these differentiations set out a repertoire of possible approaches to the subject of social change that delimits and structures any theoretical treatment. The following evolutionary-theoretical outline is guided by the notion that the switch from historical to social change transforms temporal structures in a manner analogous to the process of secularization in which the problem of social change is differentiated from that of social order.[1]

# 1. The Analysis of Temporal Structures

The basis for the remarks in this chapter is the following model for the analysis of interpretational patterns.[2] According to this model, analyses of worldviews, interpretational patterns, and categorial structures can be developed along three dimensions. The first dimension involves the depiction of various systems for classifying the world. These systems are characterized by the spatial-topological distinction between different spheres, occurring in its most basic form in the dichotomous differentiation of internal and external, near and far, above and below.[3] The second dimension is concerned with various models for the production, genesis, and temporal linking of events. These process models, which are incorporated in interpretational patterns, can be traced back to the elementary experience and shaping of temporality as actions are performed. The third dimension is concerned with the forms and methods by which a subject reflexively verifies and adopts a posture toward the world (the matter of whether that subject is an individual or a collective is irrelevant). In analyzing interpretational patterns or categorial structures I assume that all interpretational patterns of whatever kind incorporate a structural, a processual, and a reflexive dimension.

## 1.1. Topological Structure

As is true of other models, models of temporality and change can only be conceived of with great difficulty in the absence of points of reference. In this instance, the structural and topological reference is represented by a fundamental difference on which our awareness and conception of change depends: the difference between a sphere of stability, continuity, and identity, on the one hand, and one of variability, transformation, and dynamism, on the other hand. Change can only be perceived against a constant background just as continuity can only be recognized against the sphere of change. In an elementary form this difference between stability and continuity occurs as the boundary between the continuity of the subject having the experience and the chaotic change in that which he is experiencing in the "world." Naturally, positions providing a guarantee of identity and continuity may also develop outside the experiencing subject in the world. Thus the development of differences in temporality between different spheres and the topology of those spheres constitutes the first axis in an evolutionary-theoretical reconstruction of models of change.[4]

## 1.2. Process Models

Process models have been given particularly close attention to date by those who propound historical theories and metatheories of social change.[5] Observers draw distinctions between cyclical and recurrent conceptions of the course of time, on the one hand, and cumulative models of progress and purposive development, on the other hand. A third concept of temporal sequence has gained less attention: the idea that events succeed one another chaotically and at random, the idea of chance and indeterminacy.[6]

Such elementary experiences as purposive action, aging, the sequence of day and night, and uncertainty about events in the world provide the ontogenetic basis for process models. The nature of such processes provides a second important means of distinguishing between the models: change can be kept in motion by action-type processes or it can be determined by natural events. The increasing differentiation between natural, objective processes and those in which action is involved represents an important line of development in the evolution of temporal structures.

No society has confined its concept of change exclusively to one particular process model;

several such models have always been used simultaneously, even though they were of course differentiated on the basis of spheres. Together with differentiation according to tempi, that is, according to the speed of change, then, the differentiation of spheres according to the cyclical, cumulative, or chaotic sequences involved is a further area of attention in an evolutionary analysis of models of change.

### **1.3. Reflexive Forms**

The subject of processes of change can adopt three possible responsive postures. One alternative is that change is actively and purposefully driven on by the subject, accelerated or decelerated by him. Another alternative is that the subject experiences change as inevitable and uncontrollable, even though his own action is affected by it. The third posture is that the subject experiencing change is insufficiently affected by it and perceives it with an attitude of indifference. Of course no society confines itself exclusively to just one attitude to processes of change, but attitudes are invariably differentiated to suit particular spheres. For example, even if they accept change in the majority of spheres fatalistically, actors may nevertheless adopt an activist attitude to carrying out their everyday actions and remain indifferent toward the changes in natural phenomena that they perceive but by which they are not clearly affected. Thus the attention of evolutionary-theoretical analysis is directed toward change as it is distributed between spheres in which it evokes activist, fatalistic, and indifferent attitudes.

## **2. The Change in "Change"**

### **2.1. Time as the Action Period**

An analysis of this kind starts out from an interpretational pattern that makes no distinction between processes of social action, on the one hand, and processes of social order and social change, on the other hand. There is no recognizable social order standing out above processes of interaction within the framework of this interpretational pattern. The perception of change and temporal alteration is limited to the time-period one has lived through and remembered, to the *durée* of social action.[7] Hence the "narrative" logic by which action is recounted both frames and structures the logic underlying the passage of time.[8] The "stories" recalled are kept in motion by interaction among a number of actors, and the stories' beginnings and ends are determined by how the theme of interaction is dealt with.[9]

Both the change experienced in the world during the course of action and the change experienced in the subjects themselves that they remember as they consider own personal experience of getting old are of course limited as long as there is no social structure differentiating among time periods. Aging processes take place synchronously and therefore hardly give cause for the social differentiation of periods of time or of temporal levels. Beyond the period of action and the lifetime as directly experienced the world is experienced as something timeless and ultimately chaotic.

Primitive classifications, which by definition are not systematized by any superordinate principle, clearly show the unordered complexity of the world. They barely offer a topological "toehold" for identifying time that reaches beyond one's own lifetime or beyond the actions of the present (Lévi-Strauss 1962). The only way in which primitive classification allows a number of lifetimes to be linked together is via the kinship link of conception and birth; this pushes the temporal horizon back into the past and creates an awareness of continuity and change independent of the experience of the present. Evidently, the extension of such a genealogical model of time marks out a line of development running from the action-period

notion of time to the socially differentiated notion of time.

## **2.2 Historical Time**

### **2.2.1 The differentiation of temporal levels.**

It is only possible for such a socially differentiated notion of temporality to exist and to be capable of grasping change even when change occurs beyond the course of action or individual experience if the structure of social order breaks free from processes of interaction to take on a duration and scope that is cast more broadly than individual interaction processes. In early high cultures the topological structure of such an order emerges as a vertical hierarchical ranking of a number of levels distinguished according to the tempo of change and according to the forms of process (see Kanitscheider 1974, 27; Lämmlli 1962). The highest level in the hierarchy is generally timeless and infinite: the sphere of the gods, the sacred and the cosmic order. This realm preserves continuity and stability, instills time with unity and cohesion, determines change in the world, and determines the fates of human beings. This celestial sphere was initially—and for a considerable time afterward—conceived of in terms of acting personages: almighty and immortal gods who created the world, who guide the history of humankind by their active involvement, and who command the laws of the world as its supreme rulers. The fact that the reference of continuity had been detached from the individual human subject did not yet mean that the action scheme has been abandoned as a process model.[10] Below the eternal, infinite order of the sacred, but still determined by it, change takes place in the political passage of time, that is, in the rise and fall of empires. When set against the eternal order of the cosmos, the rhythm of this level takes the form of a short-term cyclical sequence, remaining a series of mere "histories" in which cohesiveness can be found only on the uppermost level (Hager 1974; Meier 1975; Koselleck 1973). However, when set against the action period experienced by the individual, the processes by which states and unions are formed, i.e., the passage of time on the political level, represents long-term growth and development. It serves as a reference point of lend "superordinate meaning" to the parallel courses and the chaotic multifariousness of individual lives.

This middle level of historical and political change was separated from the eternal order of the cosmos, on one side, and the juxtapositions and sequences of the actions of the present, on the other side. But these separations still do not rule out the possibility that superordinate historical processes were understood in terms of the familiar model of the action period. Action-theoretical metaphors continued to set the scene: struggle and conflict, victory and defeat, ambition and avarice. The development of historical time initially takes place as a topological differentiation of tempo, but not of forms of process.

Beneath politically constituted "historical time," that is, on the level of social action and interaction, change continues to occur according to the principles of the action period. However, having recourse to the historical time-axis makes it easier to recall past action situations.[11] The hierarchical construction of temporal levels means time can be perceived in a special way and more keenly: rapidity, fleetingness, and transitoriness are no longer perceived only via contrast with the continuity maintained by the subject. Individuals become able to be aware that their own lifetimes and actions are transitory, fleeting, and solitary. It is via this solitude and isolation of human action that conceptions of human individuality then come into view, in Roman thought, for example (see Seneca 1969; Boethius 1974). At the same time, the desire to transcend one's own short-lived existence and attain the level of immortality becomes a powerful motivating force for human action and the central theme of the high religions.

As divine order, historical change, and human action diverge from one another, a final essential aspect is that the acting subject must adopt some posture: activism and fatalism then diverge from each other. Activism is limited to the subject's relationship to processes occurring on the same temporal level or on the next level down, whereas fatalism applies to the attitude toward higher levels. The assumption here is that, although interaction between "neighboring" levels is always possible, differences in temporality generally prevent control being exercised upward from below. Human action is too short-lived to be able to determine historical processes, and the course of history has no influence on the gods. An indifferent attitude to change, the final alternative, cannot develop until certain levels have been depersonalized and objectivized, when, for example, the responsibility for ensuring the unity of the world and maintaining the progress of history no longer lies with the will of an eternal God but with an impersonal cosmic order. As long as action-type processes keep the world in motion, the predominant forms of response remain fatalism and activism.

### ***2.2.2 The history-of-salvation model .***

It is now common to view Judaeo-Christian eschatology as having transcended the cyclical concepts of history that prevailed during the classical period. The Christian promise of deliverance meant that the tension between life on earth and the hereafter, between the eternal kingdom of God and the finite and changeable terrestrial realm, was to become the driving force for an irreversible and linear history of salvation. At its conclusion, by the grace of God and the striving of the chosen, life on earth and the hereafter would be reconciled. In this view it is the task of humankind to drive on this history-of-salvation by sacralizing the here and now and to make progress with a view to the return of the holy spirit. It was the agreement to fulfil this task that separated the chosen people from the damned.

The original Judaeo-Christian eschatology still conceives history within the bounds of a model based on the action period. By virtue of its covenant with a mighty God and the intervention of his Son, a people remembers and experiences its history as the path toward a salvation that, to begin with, was understood in quite earthly terms. This ultimately magical pattern of interpretation was not so much based on the separation of different temporal levels as on the topological difference between the chosen people and the heathens. It was not until after it became obvious that the return of the Redeemer could not be expected within a single lifetime that—under the influence of classical philosophy—the time horizon and the topological difference between life on earth and the hereafter, between God and the world, between the immortal soul and mortal flesh, and between the terrestrial and heavenly realms were expanded and thus diverted attention away from the division between the chosen people and the heathens. There was an added topological difference between the individual and the world historical levels of explanation. The individual was able to make progress along the path to salvation; the world, via the sequence of the three realms (paradise, life after the fall, and salvation), carried out God's promise of deliverance.[12]

Another development of momentous significance was the new form taken on by the process model for change in the secular sphere. The cyclical view of the rise and fall of empires was supplemented by the perspective of the unilinear and irreversible development of the world and progress toward salvation.

Moreover, for history to be seen as the history of salvation, it was also necessary for humankind to be active in its approach and to strive for salvation. Redemption and the reconciliation of earthly life with the hereafter were not solely the work of God but involved humanity as well. This eschatological dualism introduced a comprehensive, positive moment of tension into historical change. No longer was change merely short-term unrest without underlying hope. It

now had as its goal and ultimate end the perfection and redemption of the world. The beginning and end of history were in turn determined by the timelessness of paradise, past and future. Naturally, the eschatological process at first remained completely within the bounds of action-theoretical notions: the world has been created by a personal God who issued commandments, and if humanity followed these it would ensure its own progress to salvation.

### **2.2.3. Secularization as the structural transformation of the history of salvation.**

When the rediscovery of classical philosophy occurred in the twelfth century, a topological differentiation began that laid the foundations for the secularization process of the modern era within the hierarchical model of temporal levels (Hoffmann [1926] 1960; Baeumker 1927; Beierwaltes 1969; Bredow 1972). The secular sphere now became more markedly and more clearly differentiated along two lines. First, the course of history and the prevailing social order was separated from the individual striving for salvation and morality. Second, the sphere of action and history was separated from the natural order. Nature, however, was no longer seen as unredeemed, unholy, barbaric, and the source of the base desires of the flesh. Rather, it was seen as the creation of God, a creation that reveals the eternal principles of the divine. The individual, by actually withdrawing from the spheres of worldly interests and the changing times into his or her inner being, becomes an equally timeless stage for encounters with God and gaining knowledge of the truth.

The "dehistorification" of nature as a reflection of the divine and the dehistorification of the individual as the locus of the search for salvation and knowledge have the corollary effect of making the level of historical processes appear particularly secular, profane, and time-bound. As the level of individual action comes under increasing pressure from the history of salvation and as the eternal laws of the creator are sought in nature, history and the sphere of politics are gradually freed from their eschatological ties and are treated as a specific field of unrest in human action with a dynamism of their own. Even the final attempts to provide history with a theological intent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (by Bossuet and the Protestant universal historians) could not avoid making the assumption of inner-worldly regular patterns in their presentation of the course of history (see, for example, Carion [1532] 1966; Bossuet 1964; Klempt 1960, 8). Following Guicardini's and Machiavelli's historiographies of the Renaissance, active intervention by the eternal God recedes into the background. God no longer reveals himself to the faithful. Rather the faithful experience him through their own reason. Nature follows the unalterable, eternal laws of its maker, and history becomes the stage for interests and politics functioning according to their own secular principles (Machiavelli [1532] 1962; Bodin [1583] 1961; and Pufendorf [1744] 1967).

In modern thought, too, the level of historical time, which lies above that of action-period time, is primarily constituted by politics and law. Political interests are what move history, and the principles of legality and the state are what constitute the order of society. The legitimation of the law and authority by God through his grace, by reason via enlightened monarchy, by nature via the notion of natural law, or by individual freedom via the concept of contractual agreement thus become the central problems in conveying continuity or discontinuity. The "detheologization" of history and dehistorification of nature bring about a fundamental transformation of the temporal levels. The level of timelessness is no longer conceived of as a level involving acting personages. The place of the eternal God is now taken by the objectivity of reason, natural law, and the laws of nature.

In contrast to this, the social level, which includes customs and common usage, initially appears incoherent and random, to be made up of illusions and mere fashions, to be "irrational" (see

Fontenelle [1686] 1908). The differences between the sphere of the social, on the one hand, and the principles of nature and morality, on the other hand, nevertheless provide an avenue for analysis and explanation. "The external circumstances which cause the differences in human customs and may be supposed to favour them further should be divided into natural and moral circumstances," according to Walch's *Philosophical Lexicon*, published in 1726 (Walch [1726] 1968). The main natural causes are taken to be physical constitution and climate, and differences in upbringing and education are thought to be the main moral causes (Montesquieu [1758] 1950). The education of humankind by enlightenment thus offers itself as a paradigm of historical change and progress.[13] The idea of progress was to develop in the wake of the famous *querelle des anciens et des modernes*, " that is, the argument about the respective merits of ancient and modern learning, into the central concept of historical theory in the eighteenth century (Burry [1932] 1955). By applying reason and gaining knowledge of nature, observers believed that it was possible to repeal superstitions and misconceptions to an ever greater degree and to make history itself rational.

The new model and paradigm of history, then, is academic and scientific progress, which many believe will allow the fortunes of humanity to be planned in a society of the enlightened. "The perfectibility of man knows no factual bounds, and can never reverse into decline," writes Condorcet in 1793 ([1793] 1963, 27, my translation). The conception of infinite progress had as its opposite number the universal expansion of history's area of concern as proposed by Voltaire in his famous *Essai sur les moeurs*. Europe and Christendom were no longer the self-evident reference points for historical change. Shortly before this, Vico, in his *Scienza nuova*, had made the *mondo civile* the object of a special branch of science investigating social action and societal order. This investigation was not conducted, as before, with reference to moral precepts or the history of salvation but with respect to actual conditions. Once the future had been opened up as offering the prospect of never-ending progress, the space under consideration was extended and the "social" was discovered as an object of empirical science. The confines of the hierarchical model were overcome once and for all.

Apart from the extension of historical space in Voltaire's philosophy of history, the natural sciences' concept of time in the eighteenth century also broke through the barriers of the hierarchical model of temporal levels. The concept of an objective measurable passage of time determined and moved by the laws of nature gradually asserted itself as a point of reference. Against it, historical time appears limited, imprecise, and inconstant. The temporality of the world, on the one hand, and that of the passage of history and experience, on the other hand, are hence ever more sharply delineated by different process models. "Objective" time moves according to the eternal laws of nature, whereas historical time is kept in motion by the progress of the human race (Elias 1984).

## **2.3. The Emergence of "Social Change"**

### **2.3.1. The temporalization of the topological structure.**

The years of the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century are regarded by historians today as a threshold period. This applies, indeed especially to the understanding of temporality, history, and change. The hierarchical topology of different temporal levels, where change and adjustment form part of a comprehensive and stable order, is replaced by a model that understands change as an abstract, universal process that reverses the relationships between order and change. No longer is change contained within the framework of an order guaranteeing continuity, but order is the continually new product of a comprehensive, persistent process of change.

The "temporalization of order" as part of the consciousness of progress in the nineteenth century is initially recognizable in a changeover from fundamentally synchronously arranged topologies to a series of consecutive development stages.[14] The stage that comes later in time is regarded as superior and accorded a higher rank. Historical change no longer funds unity and a reference point guaranteeing continuity in an upper level of timelessness but rather in the infinite future that should be made a reality "as quickly as possible." From the point of view of the modern consciousness, change becomes the normal state. Moves to consolidate processes of change in stable orders pushed to the verge of the pathological, and the modern order's legitimacy consists primarily in its capacity to be systematically revised and refashioned. Progress, history, development, and finally evolution are the comprehensive "collective singulars" (Koselleck 1972, 1973). Their processes and their courses provide the material for the differentiation of different forms of order as "developmental stages" (Koselleck 1972, xvii). Although one could talk of progress in the sciences at the beginning of the eighteenth century, neither the terms development nor progress, nor even history, would normally be found in philosophical dictionaries. But by the first half of the nineteenth century these terms were part of the recognized inventory of philosophy (see Krug [1832–38] 1969, 1:776, 2:591, 216).

The temporalization of order is also apparent in the change in meaning over time of the term "revolution" (Koselleck 1984). Kepler still used the term "*revolutio*" to describe the orbits of the planets. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the term referred to the renewed establishment of the old, just order as history, having lost its innate order, completed another cycle. Yet in the nineteenth century revolution was understood in terms of the acceleration of history. The old order stands in the way of change and progress and so must be smashed to clear a path of history. Finally, in the following century, "permanent revolution" marks the attempt to prevent any tendency of history, having once been accelerated, to become settled enough to produce a new order. In this latter case change in itself is thought to be enough to ensure that reason prevails.

In the view we hold of social structure today the temporalization of order is brought out by the metaphor of the avant garde, which is now beginning to replace the concept of societal rank and honor: It is no longer one's traditional rank but one's ability to preempt whatever is new and of the future that creates social respect. The concept of avant garde is temporalized to the core. An attribute that is avant garde today will be generally known tomorrow, and shortly after that will even be seen as "backward" (Eco 1984, 77).

Neither the principles of a societal order as a whole nor its law and politics can be made comprehensible except when placed in terms of time: The contradistinction between progressive and conservative is an allusion to historical orientations. The working class does not build its interests on old claims that have been disregarded in the past but on the societal order of the future. And the law as it exists is under the notorious suspicion that it is "outmoded" and that it impedes the march of history. The classical theory of society, from Comte and Hegel to Marx and from Spencer and Mill to Durkheim, is determined by this model of the temporalization of social order. Observers can only analyze and understand a social order by contrasting it with its past and future stages of development and by conceiving of it as the product of historical development. No longer do monarchs, as symbols of either state unity or God, guarantee a society's unity. Their place is taken by the future and the orientation of action toward the project of creating a society of the future.

This temporal relativizing of the social order obviously caused problems for a purely moral approach to the social, which was still emphasized in the eighteenth century, for example, in the Scottish School of Moral Philosophy. The focus of attention was not now on a historical institution's relationship to the universal order of reason or morality but on its temporal

relationship to preceding and succeeding developments.

The temporalization of the topological structure is backed up by the cumulative process model, which the late-eighteenth-century philosophers of history retained from the phase of secularization. Within this model every event and every state of rest is accorded its own position in the flux of time. History, therefore, is unique; it is a sequence of historical individuals who can only be understood and placed in order according to a single, timeless principle: the principle of temporal consecutiveness itself (Meinecke 1959a; Meinecke 1959b, 118–20; Faber 1982, 45–65).

The temporalization of order thus also cleared the stage for a theory of society that was intended to be "positive science," that is, for an autonomous theory of social change that could no longer be reduced to terms of action theory or to the theory of social order but could claim to be a fundamental theory of the social in its own right. Since that time the theory of society has no longer been the theory of contract but the theory of evolution.

With the turn toward the theory of society in the nineteenth century there is also a change in the topological relationship between the individual, on the one hand, and the sphere of the social on the other hand. Until the Enlightenment the old European tradition contrasted the individual, in whom universal reason and natural morality were located, with the sphere of customs, fashions, errors, and variations that went to make up things social. In Hegel, at the latest, although probably earlier (in Proudhon and Turgot), this relationship begins to be turned on itself. The individual now appears to be myopic, governed by particularized interests and blind passions, and incapable of comprehending what reason underlies societal development and the march of history. It is only through the cunning of reason that the historical forces that stand behind the backs of acting individuals (Marx) and that also assert themselves against the will and without the understanding of acting individuals shape historical progress. Reason in history might be discerned by scrutiny, and the important point is to unveil the essential and general aspects beneath the surface of particular individual actions.

### **2.3.2 Functional differentiation as a process model.**

The temporalization of topology is complemented by the rebuilding of the process model so that the dynamism for change no longer derives from the relationship of tension between unequal levels in a hierarchy but from the relationship between equally ranked units of society. The individual striving for salvation gives way to the dynamics of functionally differentiated subsystems.[15]

In the context of the old European temporal-level model the political functional aspect has already emerged in differentiated form for the level of historical change. This point of reference was formulated in terms of action theory and the theory of order as, respectively, the logic of the rational pursuit of political interests and as the question of just rule and authority. The "self-thematization" of society as it entered the modern era is a clear reflection of this differentiation of politics. The theory of society was indeed political theory, an identity that can also be inferred from the increasing "legalization" of social action and societal processes. The demand that authority claims be legally regulated long represented the focus of modern conceptions of progress and the central theme of political movements.

The theory of society during the Enlightenment, with its orientation to knowledge gained by science, reason, and natural morality, presented an obstacle to the dominance of politics. Scientific advances caused political authority and legal stipulation to seem backward and wanting in justification. Progress had now changed horses: the differentiated sphere of science

and culture, not politics, was in the vanguard of history. (Even in Comte, the highest level of historical development is still characterized by the rule of positive science.)

At the turn of the nineteenth century another functional sphere provided the theme for the theory of society: the economy. A considerable part of the nineteenth-century theory of society consisted of the analysis of society using the terminology and guiding concepts of economics. The terms "division of labor" and "functional differentiation" became the fundamental structural concepts of the theory of society, and the notion of progress was interpreted more and more as increasing economic productivity. In this movement the orientation to economic goals seemed to envelop and regulate all other conceptions of progress. The raising of production levels signified prosperity and happiness for the individual and progress in the sciences and became a guiding conception of politics and the law. This fascination with economic dynamism as the fundamental driving force for societal motion can be felt in an exemplary way in Marx, who wrote that history is held in a state of unrest by the contradiction between the dynamics of the forces of production and their enchainment by the law, politics, and ideology, that is, by the backward spheres. Not until ideology, the law, and politics have made up for this developmental lag is history able to come into its own. Thus, as Löwith (1953) has shown, the old motif of the history of salvation is taken up anew, and, in addition—especially when communist society ceases to be a realistic historical expectation—a new process model is documented, one that will take on an increasing significance as time moves on.

Once politics, science, and the economy had been identified and differentiated, both symbolically and institutionally, different societal spheres came into existence and interrelated in such a way that unrest in even one of these spheres caused relations among spheres to become fundamentally imbalanced and loaded with tension. Establishing relations among spheres that have differing dynamics presents us with a new way to experience time. If temporality and change are the fundamental givens of history, specific fixed points can no longer be used as the guarantors of continuity: everything is always in motion, and the only constant in change itself. The relativistic perception of time only remains in the relationship that different processes of change have with one another, in the differences in dynamism between spheres, and in the gap between advanced and retarded spheres.[16]

If these differences in dynamics do not occur, and the various spheres develop "in time," that is, synchronously, then the possibility of historical time also disappears. When developments accelerate and a particular "pace-making" sphere triggers a societywide take-off because of its own dynamism, then history and change have their chance. Consequently, order in any particular society can never be a concrete and ultimate phenomenon. Order is always a process-generated, provisional, and transitory structure that has its continuity solely in the infinite nature of the process itself and in the lack of simultaneity among different spheres. As society undergoes conversion from a stratified to a functionally differentiated structure, the models of temporality are likewise fundamentally reconstructed. Within the framework of the order the guarantees continuity change is replaced by the temporalization of order, and the social hierarchy is replaced by the market as the model of history and change.

An analogous paradigmatic switch occurred in biology when the Linnean classification of natural processes was succeeded by the Darwinian theory of evolution. Darwin's theory of the origin of the species by natural selection, which was to prove extraordinarily momentous for the theory of society that followed, brings out, in its very name, the temporalization of order. A number of observers have noted that Darwinian theory itself took as its model certain economic theories of the day.[17]

### **2.3.3. The objectification and moral neutralization of the social realm.**

The changed makeup of the topological structure and the switch in the process model that occur in the modern theory of change have as a counterpart alterations in the prevailing reflexive forms in change. These alterations primarily involve moral aspects giving way to cognitive aspects in society.

This movement, which forms part of the comprehensive process of rationalization in modernity, is brought out in the value-neutral attitude adopted by scientific observation. This changeover is as apparent in the alteration of the concept of society during the nineteenth century as it is in the objectification of social structures, which become ever more markedly separated from the level of individual social action.

In the seventeenth century "society" still largely refers to particularized societies in the sense of organized groupings serving a specific purpose. It later takes on the additional sense of a community of educated and civilized persons.[18] Only during the course of the nineteenth century does "bourgeois society" lead to the concept of society as a comprehensive social system that cannot be reduced to the terms of its constituent parts (see Riedel 1975). The objective structures of history and society, on the one hand, and the processes of individual and collective action, on the other hand, take on their own separate identities. The progress of history and the development of the individual or the development of a collective subject, e.g., mankind, the nation, followed one and the same pedagogical principle in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and in the model of the theory of contract the structure of the state always remained bound to the interests of contracting parties. But in later times the collective singulars (see Koselleck 1972, 1973), i.e., history, society, and progress, became a set of impersonal, abstract, and objective interrelations actually developing in contrast to both subjectivity and particularized organizations. The levels of interaction, organization, and society part company (Luhmann 1975a, 1984, 551ff.).

This objectification of the societal is especially evident in the nature of the relationship linking the various levels of society. In premodern hierarchical historical models the relationship was one of command and obedience, of moral prescription and adherence to precepts. The notion of an action-type relationship between various actors that was capable of being moralized was still a binding one for the Enlightenment's idea of history. However, it should be noted that these relationships were viewed in reverse: in the conflict between rulers and the ruled, the apologists of the ancien régime and those of the revolution, and later between society and the individual, the higher level in the hierarchy bore the taint of immorality.

In the nineteenth century the concept of society begins to separate from the notion of intentional action that one has to relate to in moral terms, whether in the form of rebellion or obedience. Society is comprehended as an objective structure that is only linked to the action level via the unintentional consequences of action or, more frequently, via the preconditions for action that are not necessarily conscious. As structure and action or, stated in a different terminology, system and life-world or, to use yet another famous phrase, society and community part company, this tendency is initially treated morally—as an opportunity to register critical complaints against modernity. But it is later treated theoretically—as a theme and point of departure for sociological reflection. Although Marx criticizes the commodity form and the abstractness shown by social relations, he still systematically uses the parting of societal conditions, individual consciousness, and societal consequences of action in his own conception of crisis. In comparison with the impersonal and objective mechanisms of the process of capital exploitation, the individual consciousness, and indeed the collective consciousness of particular classes, appears to be of secondary significance. Yet even the economic relations involved in the

process of capital exploitation are themselves those of a tacit and more deep-seated relationship that of course must be understood in the Enlightenment tradition as authoritarian and as an impediment to the realm of freedom.

In Durkheim, however, the noncontractual elements of contract are made the constitutive structures for society and the moral foundation of society is drawn away from the sphere of individual or collective action. No longer does action provide the explanation for societal structures; rather action is now explained as a product of those structures. At the same time the objectivity of societal structures is delimited by its forms of manifestation in culture, religion, and the economy. Thus the relationship between knowledge and society has changed fundamentally since the Enlightenment. No longer does the dynamism—or the backwardness—of knowledge govern changes in customs; instead, the structure of society explains the variation in knowledge and religion.

Since Durkheim, society has irrevocably become an objective and empirical reality that can no longer be adequately grasped in moral reflection or controlled by political action. Rather, as an empirical system in reality, society needs to be approached scientifically and cognitively in an effort to ascertain the principles peculiar to all that is social. Sociology comes on the scene as an empirical and positive science. The posture adopted toward change by science rests primarily on the impartiality of the observer, who is at pains to be objective. Although activism remains the predominant attitude of the citizen within society, this orientation necessarily recedes into the background when the scientific examination of the actual situation begins. Weber's theory of sociological science, in particular, documents this attitude of impartiality toward social reality. His work, in which social action becomes the comprehensive concept commanding the subservience of economic action, marks the end of a line that reaches from the idea of the irrationality and randomness of customs to that of a distinctive logic of the social providing the foundation for the multifariousness of historical change. Finally, the modern sociological theory of a social change comes forward with the claim to assume the position of the theory of history and to take over the legacy of secularization.

### **3. On the Current Situation of the Theory of Social Change**

Contemporary theories of social change are confronted with a scenario that has not only developed beyond the temporal structures of the secularized history-of-salvation model but also beyond the evolutionism of the nineteenth century. The topological differentiation of various temporal levels is supplemented and overlaid by the unregulated juxtaposition of several equal-ranking subsystems. Societal structures are no longer simply seen as a reflection or consequence of individual or collective action, but as a comprehensive determinant basis for action.

Nor is the interpretation of the process of change itself any longer reliant on a secularized version of the history-of-salvation model. History has lost sight of its goal, and the concept of a cyclical passage of events is also no longer able to offer a plausible overall interpretation of the historical process. Unrest and change in societal structures are no longer solely the product of the contingencies and interweaving of individual action; they are also the product of the unregulated relationships social system have with one another as they attempt to maintain and reproduce their structures in the face of insecure environments. Although stratified structures and cyclical sequences do occur in processes that are temporally and structurally limited, they do not occur in the overall process of societal change itself.

The overall process of change is no more than the most general, empty frame of reference for the development and decline of structures. In this extreme formulation change is synonymous with temporality. This generalization, together with the dilution of the concept of change, is

reflected by the switch from the experienced and recalled action-period time, via the time reflected in the course of history, to the objective time used in physics, which also provides the self-evident frame of reference for the sociological analysis of change. This time is infinite, vacuous, reversible, equally divisible, and measurable.

There are a number of ways in which sociological theory may react to this situation. I outline the two most important options.

1. The first option is to abandon the aim of achieving an autonomous theory of social change because temporality and change form a general determinant of the social realm. The category of change is too empty and unspecific to serve as a worthwhile object of specific theory-building. The sociological analysis of change should therefore be confined to investigating certain empirical aspects of specific processes of change. Thus this option completes—after a certain amount of delay—the turn away from the ambitious theory construction already carried out by the historical sciences. The obvious gain from such a strategy is that the methodological approach would be between quantitative historical science and the empirical analysis of social change. The price would be the underdevelopment of the theoretical concepts implicit in this option and the surrender of the subject of time to the natural sciences.
2. In contrast to this, a number of theoreticians insist on a second option that continues to treat the question of change sociologically but does so within the framework of simple—sometimes too simple—temporal structures.

One can initially conceive of four options in terms of theoretical strategy for analyzing and explaining social change in the context of premodern temporal structures. Two of these fall within the model of action-period time and do not make any strict distinction between the themes of social action, social order, and social change. Two other options, although they establish differentiated levels with regard to social action and social order, nevertheless still treat the question of social change in a frame of reference defined by a theory of order. In these two cases the background is provided by a model of temporal levels.

1. Individualistic explanations and analyses of social change give primacy to theories of instrumental, or strategic, action, even when it comes to answering questions of social order and social change (see Schmid 1982, 58–92). Although it is true that individualistic theories, in their topologies, set the action level apart from the structural level or level of order, the only factor admitted as a process model is the dynamism of individual, utility-oriented action. The interconnection and interweaving of these actions on a larger scale, resulting in unintentional effects, are, however, not generally treated using specific theories of social order. Rather they are explained by a theory of instruments of action. Similarly, social change is seen as change in structures that is generated by action. Hence it is explained in action-theoretical terms. Consequently, social change is taken to have been adequately explained only if it can be traced back to the actions of empirical subjects.[19] Just as a social order or a social structure is inconceivable without the individuals who compose it, so too social change is incomprehensible without the actors who are its moving force. Because this involves temporarily breaking down the process of change into actions and their consequences, the analysis of long-term structural change is impaired. The pursuit of far-reaching results of action is tortuous from a theoretical point of view and painstaking from an empirical one.
2. Interactionistic analyses of social change also have difficulty in using theory to trace the differentiation between social action, social order, and social change. Indeed, the very ambition of interactionistic theory is to present social order and structure as the fragile and fleeting result of a continual process of social interaction and construction.[20] Change is directly located on

the action level and does not require any special theoretical question to be posed. If lasting structural relations have any part to play at all in the context of interactionistic analysis, it is as symbolic structures of knowledge that form the prerequisite for communication. Of course change and adjustment in these structures are entirely bound up with an action-type process model.

3. In contrast to individualistic or interactionistic analyses, classical system-theoretical and conflict-theoretical explanations do not start out from the theme of action but from that of social order. They comprehend social change as either instability on the part of structures or adjustments to solutions to the problem of order. Associated with the shift in primacy from the theme of action to that of order is a similar shift in temporal structures: action-period time gives way to the model of temporal levels. The common objection to the classical functionalist theory of society that it is incapable of delivering an appropriate explanation for social change may be reformulated at this point. Traditional functionalist analyses are in fact in a position to analyze social change but in doing so they always start out from a general assumption of social order. [21] Change is produced when actors attempt to eliminate disturbances in equilibrium, maladjustments, or tensions arising from within the system and to restore a state of relative order or relative equilibrium. In this case change always occurs within the context of order and with regard to the creation of order. The concept of different systemic levels where change may take place points to the model of temporal levels as a topological structure. This concept means that action-theoretical assumptions concerning the process of change are no longer necessary. Change occurs as a process of seeking equilibrium or adapting to a changing environment.

4. Conflict-theoretical analyses of social change maintain the use of action-type process models but apply these models to the relations between collective actors. Again, the problem of order is placed in the foreground. Conflicts between societal groups and contrary interests emerge out of the existing social order, and change can only be conceived of as a result of the conflicts surrounding social order (see, for example, Dahrendorf 1958). It is difficult to imagine any original conception of social change independent of the theme of order in this situation. The conflict-theoretical analysis of change also moves within the framework of the model of temporal levels. An indicator of this model is provided by the topological difference between the ruling class, which is presumed to have conservative interests, and the groups over which it rules, which are regarded as the sources of change and the conveyers of interest in seeing some alteration to the status quo.

5. In contrast to classical systems and conflict theories evolutionist theories in sociology take the temporalization of order in the modern worldview into account but shift theoretical primary from the theme of order to that of change. A fundamental distinction needs to be drawn here between two evolutionist conceptions. One encompasses the materialistic theories of evolution, which see the dynamics of societal evolution in terms of a progression in the relationship of society to nature (see, for example, Lenski and Lenski 1970; White 1959; Sahlins and Service 1960; Harris 1977). The other includes idealistic evolutionary theories, which analyze societal evolution as a pedagogic relationship between the members of society, or even between the intellectual vanguard and the people, a learning process, or the rationalization of worldviews. [22] Both materialistic and idealistic variants of evolutionism, however, assume that there is a topological difference between a universally valid motor of evolution, on the one hand, and the spheres it moves, with their tendency toward backwardness, on the other hand. Of course there are various and frequently contradictory interpretations of which is the motor and which are the backward spheres. Societal evolution, then, is perceived as a progressive relationships, as growth and unilinear development. One such view focuses on thermodynamic efficiency and growth in productivity; another focuses on the development of the moral consciousness, progress, and the differentiation and rationalization of knowledge. Both variants of

evolutionism have recourse to models of progress from the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century, and both have been the targets of fierce criticism from the empirical, historical, methodological, and theoretical standpoints (see Smith 1973; Schmid 1982; Giesen and Lau 1981).

6. If one wishes to take note of these criticisms yet not to abandon the temporalization of order, another concept of evolution understands functional differentiation as a process model and regards the concept of directed development as inappropriate to societal change as an all-embracing phenomenon.

Theories that are based on the analytical primacy of the question of change and assume a polycentric and relativistic conception of history have to reject the idea of progress and development in global history. They must replace the concept of global and unilinear modernization and progress with a relativistic conception of rationality, that is, with the idea of the structural "epigenesis" of the temporally limited emergence and decay of structures. History and progress dissolve in a diversity of contingent histories and progresses that are, however, interconnected and intermingled in a global process of change.

The radicalization of the modern pattern of temporarily and change finally engenders a "postmodern" view of society. The topology of postmodern models of change abandons the moral opposition of individual subject and society and renounces the evaluative differentiation of backward and progressive spheres of society. Instead it conceives the realm of the social as being composed of objective structures existing above and beyond the acting subjects and focuses attention on the internal and external relationships of structures. Postmodern topology centers on the differences between system and environment, between structure and situation, and between text and context, and it temporalizes these differences: the emergence and disintegration of structures are at the core of the postmodern paradigm of change.

Even if the elaboration of this postmodern paradigm is still in its infancy, two alternative theoretical options can be discerned. The first option is represented by attempts to apply advanced theoretical concepts from the sciences—in particular from either the biological theory of autopoietic systems or the theory of dissipative structures—to social processes (Luhmann 1984). The second option for a postmodern paradigm of change is the "poststructuralist" analysis of texts and related concepts that aim at the transformation of symbolic systems (see Lyotard 1984; Baudrillard 1983). Both options dramatically increase the objectification of social reality and the temporalization of social order resulting from modernity. One may doubt, however, whether a discipline that is deeply rooted in modernity and that considers Max Weber as one of its founding fathers will be able to survive in the thin and cool air of postmodern conceptions of change.

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## Notes:

[1] For a discussion of the process of secularization see Blumenberg 1974 (75ff.); Lübbe 1965. M. Weber refers to religious secularization as a part of the process of rationalization. See Weber 1963 (1:11) and Schluchter 1980 (9–40).

[2] For the concept of interpretational structure see Oevermann 1973; Giesen 1987; Arnold 1983.

[3] Structuralists usually refer only to the topological dimension of symbolic systems and ignore the equally important dimensions of process and reflective interpretation.

[4] For the evolution of levels of time see Fraser 1982. M. Schmid (1986) also argues in favor of an evolutionary-theoretical conception of time.

[5] Chemistry, however, was the first scientific discipline that applied the notion of "process." See Roedgers 1983.

[6] However, the concept of randomness has recently gained more attention in the philosophy of history. See Koselleck 1968; Meier 1978; Troeltsch 1913; Lübbe 1977, 54–68.

[7] The phenomenological conception of time focuses solely on the mental representation of time as action period. See Bergmann 1981.

[8] For the narrative conception of historical method see Louch 1966; Danto 1965; Olafson 1970.

[9] In a magical understanding of the world nature is also composed of entities with whom it is possible to interact—although it occasionally may be difficult to do so. Such interactions do not involve a separate level of change or experience of time.

[10] Greek philosophy was the first to depersonalize this level, understanding it, on the one hand, in terms of elementary building blocks and principles of nature and, on the other hand, in terms of everlasting ideas. Both the pre-Socratic and the Platonic alternatives mark a decisive and momentous structural transformation.

[11] Koselleck has recently suggested a threefold differentiation of levels of time that separates the before-after of historical action events from the supraindividual historical processes and the metahistorical "conditions of historical possibility." See Koselleck 1984; Braudel 1958.

[12] See Augustin 1955, 1:35, 10:32, 15:1, 5, 21, 10:14. See also Aquileia 1864, chapter 43, 246A: "Perfectio non in annis, sed in animis"; and Aquin 1934, 1, 2 qu. 106, art 4c: "Unde non potest esse aliquis perfectior status praesentis vitae quam status novae legis: quia tanto es unumquodque perfectius, quanto ultimo fini propinquius."

[13] Löwith (1953, 74) names Pascal as the first who—albeit still with a Christian intent—saw history in terms of a learning process.

[14] See Luhmann 1978 for the analytically inverse concept of "temporalization of complexity." Luhmann discusses the process of temporalization at the level of general systems theory in his *Soziale Systeme* (1984). See also Luhmann 1975b and 1980.

[15] Luhmann (1980) notes that the temporalization of complexity is closely connected to the functional differentiation of society.

[16] This is a point that Schlegel has already noted: "The proper problem of history is the unevenness of progress in the different components of the total human education, particularly, in the large divergence with repeat to the degree of intellectual and moral education" (cited in Koselleck 1975, 391, my translation). More recent theorizing on the system-relative experience of time has adopted this point of departure (Bergmann 1981, 171).

[17] It was not until Darwin read Malthus's essay on population in October 1838 that he found a theoretical model that integrated his observations. See De Beer 1964. Marx originally intended to dedicate the first volume of *Das Kapital* to Darwin. For a general discussion of the several links between social theories and Darwin's theory of evolution see Burrow 1966.

[18] See "Gesellschaft" in Zedler 1735, col. 1260; "Societät" in Zedler 1743, col. 171; "Societät (öffentliche)" in Zedler 1743, col. 180; "Gesellschaft" in Walch [1726] 1968, 1:col. 1659–63; "Societät" in Walch [1726] 1968, 2:col. 916; "Gesellschaft" in Adelung 1775, 617; "Gesellschaft (societas)" in Krug [1832–38] 1969, 2:238–42; and Kaupp 1974, col. 459–66.

[19] The idea of a structural mechanism of change is contrary to the individualistic social ontology. See Alexander and Giesen 1987.

[20] Schmid (1982, 104) states that, after investigation, he was not able to detect an interactionistic theory of social change. See also Turner 1974, 182

[21] See Parsons 1951 and 1967. Münch is completely right in defending Parsons against the usual criticism that the assumption of consensus and order is *empirically* false, but the very idea of considering social order as an analytical point of reference supports the thesis that the theories of the "middle" Parsons have to be considered as giving primacy to the problem of order. See Münch 1982, 108. The most comprehensive elaboration of the problem of social action and social order is presented by Alexander 1982–83.

[22] Habermas 1976; Schluchter 1979. According to the (oversimplified) scheme of classification offered in this chapter, Parsonian neoevolutionism and the neo-Parsonian theories of J. Alexander and R. Münch have to be classified here as idealistic evolutionary theories.