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The autonomous power of the state: its origins, mechanisms and results

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*The autonomous power of the state :
its origins, mechanisms and results*

THIS essay tries to specify the origins, mechanisms and results of the autonomous power which the state possesses in relation to the major power groupings of 'civil society'. The argument is couched generally, but it derives from a large, ongoing empirical research project into the development of power in human societies (1). At the moment, my generalisations are bolder about agrarian societies ; concerning industrial societies I will be more tentative. I define the state and then pursue the implications of that definition. I discuss two essential parts of the definition, centrality and territoriality, in relation to two types of state power, termed here *despotic* and *infrastructural* power. I argue that state autonomy, of both despotic and infrastructural forms, flows principally from the state's unique ability to provide a *territorially-centralised* form of organization.

Nowadays there is no need to belabour the point that most general theories of the state have been false because they have been reductionist. They have reduced the state to the pre-existing structures of civil society. This is obviously true of the Marxist, the liberal and the functionalist traditions of state theory, each of which has seen the state predominantly as a place, an *arena*, in which the struggles of classes, interest groups and individuals are expressed and institutionalised, and—in functionalist versions—in which a General Will (or, to use more modern terms, core values or normative consensus) is expressed and implemented. Though such theories disagree about many things, they are united in denying significant autonomous power to the state. But despite the existence of excellent critiques

(1) To be published as a three-volume work, *The Sources of Social Power*. Vol. I : *A History of Power in Agrarian Societies* is to be published in early 1985 ; Vol. II : *A History of Power in Industrial Societies*

will appear hopefully in 1986 ; Vol. III : *A Theory of Power* will follow, consisting of a series of theoretical essays comparable in scope and style to this one.

of such reductionism (e.g. by Wolin 1961) and despite the self-criticism implied by the constant use of the term 'relative autonomy' by recent Marxists (like Poulantzas 1972 and Therborn 1978), there has still been a curious reluctance to analyse this autonomy.

One major obstacle has been itself political. The main alternative theory which *appears* to uphold state autonomy has been associated with rather unpleasant politics. I refer to the militarist tradition of state theory embodied around the beginning of the century in the work of predominantly Germanic writers, like Gumplovicz (1899), Ratzehofer and Schmitt. They saw the state as physical force, and as this was the prime mover in society, so the militaristic state was supreme over those economic and ideological structures identified by the reductionist theories. But the scientific merits of these theories were quickly submerged by their political associations—with Social Darwinism, racism, glorification of state power, and then Fascism. The final (deeply ironic) outcome was that militarist theory was defeated on the battlefield by the combined forces of (Marxist) Russia and the (liberal democratic and functionalist) Western allies. We have heard little of it directly since. But its indirect influence has been felt, especially recently, through the work of 'good Germans' like Weber, Hintze (1975), Rüstow (1982) and the anarchist Oppenheimer (1975), all influenced to one degree or another by the German militarist tradition, and all of whose major works have now been translated into English.

I am not advocating a return to this alternative tradition, even at its scientific level. For when we look more closely, we see that it is usually also reductionist. The state is still nothing in itself : it is merely the embodiment of physical force in society. The state is not an arena where domestic economic/ideological issues are resolved, rather it is an arena in which military force is mobilized domestically and used domestically and, above all, internationally.

Both types of the theory have merit, yet both are partial. So what would happen if we put them together in a single theory ? We would assemble an essentially dual theory of the state. It would identify two dimensions : the domestic economic/ideological aspect of the state and the military, international aspect of states. In the present climate of comparative sociology, dominated by a Marxified Weberianism, domestic analysis would likely centre upon class relations. And as states would now be responding to two types of pressure and interest groups, a certain 'space' would be created in which a state elite could manœuvre, play off classes against war factions and other states, and so stake out an area and degree of power

autonomy for itself. To put the two together would give us a rudimentary account of state autonomy.

That is indeed precisely the point at which the best state theory has now arrived. It is exemplified by Theda Skocpol's excellent *States and Social Revolutions*. Skocpol draws upon Marx and Weber in about equal quantities. She quotes enthusiastically Otto Hintze's two-dimensional view of the determinants of state organization, 'first, the structure of social classes, and second, the external ordering of the states—their position relative to each other, and their over-all position in the world', and she then expands the latter in terms of military relations. These two 'basic sets of tasks' are undertaken by 'a set of administrative, policing and military organizations headed, and more or less well co-ordinated by, an executive authority' for whom resources are extracted from society. These resource-supported administrative and coercive organizations are 'the basis of state power as such'. This power can then be used with a degree of autonomy against either the dominant class, or against domestic war or peace factions and foreign states (Skocpol 1979 : 29-31 ; Hintze 1975 : 183). A very similar approach underlies Charles Tilly's recent work (e.g. 1981, Chaps. 5 & 8). And Anthony Giddens (1981) has argued in similar vein.

Now I do not wish to quite abandon this 'two-dimensional' model of the state—for I, too, have contributed a detailed analysis of English state finances in the period 1130-1815 starting from such a model (Mann 1980). All these works advance beyond reductionism. We can develop their insights considerably further, and so penetrate to the heart of state autonomy, its nature, degree and consequences. But to do this we must make a far more radical, yet in a sense peculiar and paradoxical, break with reductionism. I will argue in this paper that the state *is* merely and essentially an arena, a *place*, and yet *this* is the very source of its autonomy.

I. *Defining the state*

The state is undeniably a messy concept. The main problem is that most definitions contain two different levels of analysis, the 'institutional' and the 'functional'. That is, the state can be defined in terms of what it looks like, institutionally, or what it does, its functions. Predominant is a mixed, but largely institutional, view put forward originally by Weber. In this the state contains four main elements, being :

- a) a *differentiated* set of institutions and personnel embodying
 - b) *centrality* in the sense that political relations radiate outwards from a centre to cover
 - c) a *territorially-demarcated area*, over which it exercises
 - d) a monopoly of *authoritative binding rule-making*, backed up by a monopoly of the means of physical violence.
- (See, for example, the definitions of Eisenstadt 1969 : 5 ; MacIver 1926 : 22 ; Tilly 1975 : 27 ; Weber 1968 : I, 64).

Apart from the last phrase which tends to equate the state with military force (see below), I will follow this definition. It is still something of a mixed bag. It contains a predominant institutional element : states can be recognised by the central location of their differentiated institutions. Yet it also contains a 'functional' element : the essence of the state's functions is a monopoly of binding rule-making. Nevertheless, my principal interest lies in those centralised institutions generally called 'states', and in the powers of the personnel who staff them, at the higher levels generally termed the 'state elite'. The central question for us here, then, is what is the nature of the power possessed by states and state elites ? In answering I shall contrast state elites with power groupings whose base lies outside the state, in 'civil society'. In line with the model of power underlying my work, I divide these into three : ideological, economic, and military groups. So what, therefore, is the power of state elites as against the power of ideological movements, economic classes, and military elites ?

Two meanings of state power

What do we mean by 'the power of the state' ? As soon as we begin to think about this commonplace phrase, we encounter two quite different senses in which states and their elites might be considered powerful. We must disentangle them. The first sense concerns what we might term the *despotic power* of the state elite, the range of actions which the elite is empowered to undertake without routine, institutionalised negotiation with civil society groups. The historical variations in such powers have been so enormous that we can safely leave on one side the ticklish problem of how we precisely measure them. The despotic powers of many historical states have been virtually unlimited. The Chinese Emperor, as the Son of Heaven, 'owned' the whole of China and could do as he wished with any individual or group within his domain. The Roman

Emperor, only a minor god, acquired powers which were also in principle unlimited outside of a restricted area of affairs nominally controlled by the Senate. Some monarchs of early modern Europe also claimed divinely-derived, absolute powers (though they were not themselves divine). The contemporary Soviet state/party elite, as 'trustees' of the interests of the masses, also possess considerable despotic (though sometimes strictly unconstitutional) power. Great despotic power can be 'measured' most vividly in the ability of all these Red Queens to shout 'off with his head' and have their whim gratified without further ado—provided the person is at hand. Despotic power is also usually what is meant in the literature by 'autonomy of power'.

But there is a second sense in which people talk of 'the power of the state', especially in today's capitalist democracies. We might term this *infrastructural power*, the capacity of the state to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm. This was comparatively weak in the historical societies just mentioned—once you were out of sight of the Red Queen, she had difficulty in getting at you. But it is powerfully developed in all industrial societies. When people in the West today complain of the growing power of the state, they cannot be referring sensibly to the despotic powers of the state elite itself, for if anything these are still declining. It is, after all, only forty years since universal suffrage was fully established in several of the advanced capitalist states, and the basic political rights of groups such as ethnic minorities and women are still increasing. But the complaint is more justly levelled against the state's *infrastructural* encroachments. These powers are now immense. The state can assess and tax our income and wealth at source, without our consent or that of our neighbours or kin (which states before about 1850 were *never* able to do); it stores and can recall immediately a massive amount of information about all of us; it can enforce its will within the day almost anywhere in its domains; its influence on the overall economy is enormous; it even directly provides the subsistence of most of us (in state employment, in pensions, in family allowances, etc.). The state penetrates everyday life more than did any historical state. Its *infrastructural* power has increased enormously. If there were a Red Queen, we would all quail at her words—from Alaska to Florida, from the Shetlands to Cornwall there is no hiding place from the *infrastructural* reach of the modern state.

But who controls these states? Without prejudging a complex issue entirely, the answer in the capitalist democracies is less likely

to be 'an autonomous state elite' than in most historic societies. In these countries most of the formal political leadership is elected and recallable. Whether one regards the democracy as genuine or not, few would contest that politicians are largely controlled by outside civil society groups (either by their financiers or by the electorate) as well as by the law. President Nixon or M. Chaban-Delmas may have paid no taxes; political leaders may surreptitiously amass wealth, infringe the civil liberties of their opponents, and hold onto power by slyly undemocratic means. But they do not brazenly expropriate or kill their enemies or dare to overturn legal traditions enshrining constitutional rule, private property or individual freedoms. On the rare occasions this happens, we refer to it as a *coup* or a revolution, an overturning of the norms. If we turn from elected politicians to permanent bureaucrats we still do not find them exercising significant autonomous power over civil society. Perhaps I should qualify this, for the secret decisions of politicians and bureaucrats penetrate our everyday lives in an often infuriating way, deciding we are not eligible for this or that benefit, including, for some persons, citizenship itself. But their power to change the fundamental rules and overturn the distribution of power within civil society is feeble—without the backing of a formidable social movement.

So, in one sense states in the capitalist democracies are weak, in another they are strong. They are 'despotically weak' but 'infrastructurally strong'. Let us clearly distinguish these two types of state power. The first sense denotes power by the state elite itself *over* civil society. The second denotes the power of the state to penetrate and centrally co-ordinate the activities of civil society through its own infrastructure. The second type of power still allows the possibility that the state itself is a mere instrument of forces within civil society, i.e. that it has no despotic power at all. The two are analytically autonomous dimensions of power. In practice, of course, there may be a relationship between them. For example, the greater the state's infrastructural power, the greater the volume of binding rule-making, and therefore the greater the likelihood of despotic power over individuals and perhaps also over marginal, minority groups. All infrastructurally powerful states, including the capitalist democracies, are strong in relation to individuals and to the weaker groups in civil society, but the capitalist democratic states are feeble in relation to dominant groups—at least in comparison to most historical states.

From these two independent dimensions of state power we can derive four ideal-types in Figure 1.

THE AUTONOMOUS POWER OF THE STATE

		infrastructural co-ordination	
		low	high
despotic power	low	feudal	bureaucratic
	high	imperial	authoritarian

FIGURE 1 : *Two dimensions of state power*

The *feudal* state is the weakest, for it has both low despotic and low infrastructural power. The medieval European state approximated to this ideal-type, governing largely indirectly, through infrastructure freely and contractually provided and controlled by the principal and independent magnates, clerics and towns. The *imperial* state possesses its own governing agents, but has only limited capacity to penetrate and co-ordinate civil society without the assistance of other power groups. It corresponds to the term *patrimonial* state used by writers like Weber (1968) and Bendix (1978). Ancient states like the Akkadian, Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian and Roman approximated to this type. I hesitated over the term *bureaucratic* state, because of its negative connotations. But a bureaucracy has a high organizational capacity, yet cannot set its own goals; and the bureaucratic state is controlled by others, civil society groups, but their decisions once taken are enforceable through the state's infrastructure. Contemporary capitalist democracies approximate to this type as does the future state hoped for by most radicals and socialists. *Authoritarian* is intended to suggest a more institutionalised form of despotism, in which competing power groupings cannot evade the infrastructural reach of the state, nor are they structurally separate from the state (as they are in the bureaucratic type). All significant social power must go through the authoritative command structure of the state. Thus it is high on both dimensions, having high despotic power over civil society groups and being able to enforce this infrastructurally. In their different ways, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union tend towards this case. But they probably traded off some loss of infrastructural penetration for high despotic powers (thus neither attained as high a level of social mobilization during World War II as the 'despotically weak' but participatory Great Britain did). Nor is this to deny that such states contain competing interest groups which may possess different

bases in 'civil society'. Rather, in an authoritarian state power is transmitted through its directives and so such groups compete for direct control of the state. It is different in the capitalist democracies where the power of the capitalist class, for example, permeates the whole of society, and states generally accept the rules and rationality of the surrounding capitalist economy.

These are ideal-types. Yet my choice of real historical examples which roughly approximate to them reveals two major tendencies which are obvious enough yet worthy of explanation. Firstly, there has occurred a long-term historical growth in the infrastructural power of the state, apparently given tremendous boosts by industrial societies, but also perceptible within both pre-industrial and industrial societies considered separately. Second, however, within each historical epoch have occurred wide variations in despotic powers. There has been *no* general development tendency in despotic powers—non-despotic states existed in late fourth millennium B.C. Mesopotamia (the 'primitive democracy' of the early city-states), in first millennium B.C. Phoenicia, Greece and Rome, in medieval republics and city-states, and in the modern world alike. The history of despotism has been one of oscillation, not development. Why such wide divergencies on one dimension, but a developmental trend on the other?

The development of state infrastructural power

The growth of the infrastructural power of the state is one in the logistics of political control. I will not here enumerate its main historical phases. Instead, I example some logistical techniques which have aided effective state penetration of social life, each of which has has a long historical development.

a) A division of labour between the state's main activities which it co-ordinated centrally. A microcosm of this is to be found on the battlefields of history where a co-ordinated administrative division between infantry, cavalry and artillery, usually organized by the state, would normally defeat forces in which these activities were mixed up—at least in 'high intensity' warfare.

b) Literacy, enabling stabilised messages to be transmitted through the state's territories by its agents, and enabling legal responsibilities to be codified and stored. Giddens (1981) emphasises this 'storage' aspect of state power.

c) Coinage, and weights and measures, allowing commodities to be exchanged under an ultimate guarantee of value by the state.

d) Rapidity of communication of messages and of transport of people and resources through improved roads, ships, telegraphy, etc.

States able to use relatively highly-developed forms of these techniques have possessed greater capacity for infrastructural penetration.

This is pretty obvious. So is the fact that history has seen a secular process of infrastructural improvements.

Yet none of these techniques is specific to the state. They are part of general social development, part of the growth of human beings' increasing capacities for collective social mobilization of resources. Societies in general, not just their states, have advanced their powers. Thus none of these techniques necessarily changes the relationship between a state and its civil society; and none is necessarily pioneered by either the state or civil society.

Thus state power (in either sense) does not derive from techniques or means of power that are peculiar to itself. The varied techniques of power are of three main types: military, economic and ideological. They are characteristic of all social relationships. The state uses them all, adding no fourth means peculiar to itself. This has made reductionist theories of the state more plausible because the state seems dependent on resources also found more generally in civil society. If they are all wrong, it is not because the state manipulates means of power denied to other groups. The state is not autonomous in *this* sense.

Indeed, the fact that the means used are essentially also the means used in all social relationships ensures that states rarely diverge far from their civil societies. Let us examine what happens when a state pioneers an increase in logistic powers. A characteristic, though slow-paced, example is literacy.

The first stages of literacy in Mesopotamia, and probably also in the other major independent cases of the emergence of civilization, occurred within the state. In this respect, the state was largely codifying and stabilising two kinds of emergent norms, 'private' property rights and community rights and duties. The first pictograms and logograms enabled scribes at city-state temple-storehouses to improve their accountancy systems, and denote more permanently who possessed what and who owed what to the community. It solidified relations radiating across the surrounding territory and centred them more on itself. Writing then simplified into syllabic cuneiform script still essentially within the state bureaucracy, and performing the same dual functions. Writing was an important part of the growth of the first imperial states, that is of the Akkadian and subsequent Empires of the third and second millennia B.C. Literacy was restricted to the bureaucracy, stabilised its systems of justice and communications and so provided infrastructural support to a state despotism, though apparently in some kind of alliance with a property-owning economic class.

Yet the general utility of literacy was now recognised by civil society groups. By the time that the next simplifications, alphabetic script and parchment, became common (around the beginning of the first millenium B.C.) state domination had ended. The main pioneers were now not despotic states but decentralised groups of peasant-traders, village priests, and trading peoples organised into loose federations of small city- or tribal-states (like the Arameans, the Phoenicians and the Greeks). From then on, the power of such groups, usually with non-despotic states, rivalled that of the despotic empires. What had started by bolstering despotism continued by undermining it when the techniques spread beyond state confines. The states could not keep control over their own logistical inventions. And this is generally the case of all such inventions, whatever period of history we consider. In our time we have instances such as 'statistics': originally things which appertain to the state, later a useful method of systematic information-gathering for any power organization, especially large capitalist corporations.

However, converse examples are not difficult to find either, where states appropriate infrastructural techniques pioneered by civil society groups. The course of industrialization has seen several such examples, culminating in the Soviet Union whose state communications, surveillance and accountancy systems are similar to those pioneered by capitalist enterprises (with their states as junior partners) in the West. In this example what started in civil society continued in state despotism. Infrastructural techniques diffuse outwards from the particular power organizations that invented them.

Two conclusions emerge. First, in the whole history of the development of the infrastructure of power there is virtually no technique which belongs necessarily to the state, or conversely to civil society. Second, there is some kind of oscillation between the role of the two in social development. I hope to show later that it is not merely oscillation, but a dialectic.

The obvious question is: if infrastructural powers are a general feature of society, in what circumstances are they appropriated by the state? How does the state acquire in certain situations, but not others, despotic powers? What are the origins of the autonomous power of the state? My answer is in three stages, touching upon the *necessity* of the state, its *multiplicity of functions*, and its *territorialised centrality*. The first two have often been identified in recent theory, the third is I think novel.

II. *Origins of state power*

1. *The necessity of the state*

The only stateless societies have been primitive. There are no complex, civilized societies without any centre of binding rule-making authority, however limited its scope. If we consider the weak feudal cases we find that even they tend to arise from a more state-centred history whose norms linger on to reinforce the new weak states. Feudal states tend to emerge either as a check to the further disintegration of a once-unified larger state (as in China and Japan) or as a post-conquest division of the spoils among the victorious, and obviously united, conquerors (see Lattimore 1957). Western European feudalism embodies both these histories, though in varying mixtures in different regions. The laws of the feudal states in Europe were reinforced by rules descending from Roman law (especially property law), Christian codes of conduct, and Germanic notions of loyalty and honour. This is a further glimpse of a process to which I will return later : a perpetual dialectic of movement between state and civil society.

Thus societies with states have had superior survival value to those without them. We have no examples of stateless societies long enduring past a primitive level of development, and many examples of state societies absorbing or eliminating stateless ones. Where stateless societies conquer ones with states, they either themselves develop a state or they induce social regress in the conquered society. There are good sociological reasons for this. Only three alternative bases for order exist, force, exchange and custom, and none of these are sufficient in the long-run. At some point new exigencies arise for which custom is inadequate ; at some point to bargain about everything in exchange relations is inefficient and disintegrating ; while force alone, as Parsons emphasized, will soon 'deflate'. In the long-run normally taken for granted, but enforceable, rules are necessary to bind together strangers or semi-strangers. It is not requisite that all these rules are set by a single monopolistic state. Indeed, though the feudal example is extreme, most states exist in a multi-state civilisation which also provides certain normative rules of conduct. Nevertheless most societies seem to have required that some rules, particularly those relevant to the protection of life and property, be set monopolistically, and this has been the province of the state.

From this necessity, autonomous state power ultimately derives. The activities of the state personnel are necessary to society as a whole and/or to the various groups that benefit from the existing structure of rules which the state enforces. From this functionality derives the potentiality for exploitation, a lever for the achievement of private state interests. Whether the lever is used depends on other conditions, for—after all—we have not even established the existence of a permanent state cadre which might have identifiable interests. But necessity is the mother of state power.

2. *The multiplicity of state functions*

Despite the assertions of reductionists, most states have not in practice devoted themselves to the pursuit of a single function. 'Binding rule-making' is merely an umbrella term. The rules and functions have been extremely varied. As the two-dimensional models recognize, we may distinguish domestic and international, or economic, ideological and military functions. But there are many types of activity and each tends to be functional for differing 'constituencies' in society. I illustrate this with reference to what have been probably the four most persistent types of state activities.

a) *The maintenance of internal order.* This may benefit all, or all law-abiding, subjects of the state. It may also protect the majority from arbitrary usurpations by socially and economically powerful groups, other than those allied to the state. But probably the main benefit is to protect existing property relations from the mass of the property-less. This function probably best serves a dominant economic class constituency.

b) *Military defence/aggression,* directed against foreign foes. 'War parties' are rarely coterminous with either the whole society or with one particular class within it. Defence may be genuinely collective; aggression usually has more specific interests behind it. Those interests may be quite widely shared by all 'younger sons' without inheritance rights or all those expansively-minded; or they might comprise only a class fraction of an aristocracy, merchants or capitalists. In multi-state systems war usually involves alliances with other states, some of whom may share the same religion, ethnicity, or political philosophy as some domestic constituency. These are rarely reducible to economic class. Hence war and peace constituencies are usually somewhat idiosyncratic.

c) *The maintenance of communications infrastructures* : roads,

rivers, message systems, coinages, weights and measures, marketing arrangements. Though few states have monopolized all of these, all states have provided some, because they have a territorial basis which is often most efficiently organized from a centre. The principal constituencies here are a 'general interest' and more particular trade-centred groups.

d) *Economic redistribution* : the authoritative distribution of scarce material resources between different ecological niches, age-groups, sexes, regions, classes, etc. There is a strongly collective element in this function, more so than in the case of the others. Nevertheless, many of the redistributions involve rather particular groups, especially the economically inactive whose subsistence is thus protected by the state. And economic redistribution also has an international dimension, for the state normally regulates trade relations and currency exchanges across its boundaries, sometimes unilaterally, sometimes in alliance with other states. This also gives the state a particular constituency among merchants and other international agents—who, however, are rarely in agreement about desirable trade policy.

These four tasks are necessary, either to society as a whole or to interest groups within it. They are undertaken most efficiently by the personnel of a central state who become indispensable. And they bring the state into functional relations with diverse, sometimes cross-cutting groups between whom there is room to manoeuvre. The room can be exploited. Any state involved in a multiplicity of power relations can play off interest groups against each other.

It is worth noting that one example of this 'divide-and-rule' strategy has been a staple of sociological analysis. This is the case of a 'transitional state', living amid profound economic transformations from one mode of production to another. No single dominant economic class exists, and the state may play off traditional power groups against emergent ones. Such situations were discussed by both the classic stratification theorists. Marx analysed and satirised Louis Bonaparte's attempts to play off the factions of industrial and finance capital, petite bourgeoisie, peasantry and proletariat to enhance his own independent power. This is the 'Bonapartist balancing act', so stressed by Poulantzas (1972)—though Marx (and Poulantzas) rather under-estimated Bonaparte's ability to succeed (see Perez-Diaz 1979). Weber was struck by the ability of the Prussian State to use a declining economic class, the agrarian landlord Junkers, to hold on to autocratic power in the vacuum created by the political timidity of the rising bourgeois and proletarian classes (see Lachmann

1970 : 92-142). All the various groups in both examples needed the state, but none could capture it. Another example is the development of absolutism in early modern Europe. Monarchs played off against each other (or were unable to choose between) feudal and bourgeois, land and urban, groups. In particular, military functions and functions performed in relation to dominant economic classes were different. States used war as a means of attempting to reduce their dependence on classes (as Skocpol 1979 and Trimberger 1978 both argue).

These are familiar examples of the state balancing between what are predominantly classes or class factions. But the balancing possibilities are much more numerous if the state is involved in a multiplicity of relations with groups which may on some issues be narrower than classes and on others wider. Because most states are pursuing multiple functions, they can perform multiple *manœuvres*. The 'Bonapartist balancing act' is skill acquired by most states. This manœuvring space is the birthplace of state power.

And this is about as far as the insights contained within current two-dimensional theory can be expanded. It is progress, but not enough. It does not really capture the *distinctiveness* of the state as a social organization. After all, necessity plus multiplicity of function, and the balancing-act, are also the power-source and stock-in-trade of any ruthless committee chairperson. Is the state only a chair writ large? No, as we will now see.

3. *The territorial centrality of the state*

The definition of the state concentrates upon its institutional, territorial, centralised nature. This is the third, and most important, precondition of state power. As noted, the state does not possess a distinctive *means* of power independent of, and analogous to, economic, military and ideological power. The means used by states are only a combination of these, which are also the means of power used in all social relationships. However, the power of the state is irreducible in quite a different *socio-spatial* and *organizational* sense. Only the state is inherently centralised over a delimited territory over which it has authoritative power. Unlike economic, ideological or military groups in civil society, the state elite's resources radiate authoritatively outwards from a centre but stop at defined territorial boundaries. The state is, indeed, a *place*—both a central place and a unified territorial reach. As the principal forms of state autonomous power will flow from this distinctive attribute of the state,

it is important that I first prove that the state does so differ socio-spatially and organizationally from the major power groupings of civil society.

Economic power groupings—classes, corporations, merchant houses, manors, plantations, the *oikos*, etc.—normally exist in decentred, competitive or conflictual relations with one another. True, the internal arrangements of some of them (e.g. the modern corporation, or the household and manor of the great feudal lord) might be relatively centralised. But, first, they are oriented outwards to further opportunities for economic advantage which are not territorially confined nor subject to authoritative rules governing expansion (except by states). Economic power expansion is not authoritative, commanded—it is ‘diffused’, informally. Second, the scope of modern and some historic economic institutions is not territorial. They do not exercise general control of a specific territory, they control a specialised function and seek to extend it ‘transnationally’ wherever that function is demanded and exploitable. General Motors does not rule the territory around Detroit, it rules the assembly of automobiles and some aspects of the economic life—chances of its employees, stockholders and consumers. Third, in those cases where economic institutions have been authoritative, centralised and territorial (as in the feudal household/manor of historic nobilities) they have either been subject to a higher level of territorial, central control by the (imperial) state, or they have acquired political function (administering justice, raising military levies, etc.) from a weak (feudal) state and so become themselves ‘mini-states’. Thus states cannot be the simple instrument of classes, for they have a different territorial scope.

Analogous points can be made about ideological power movements like religions. Ideologies (unless state-led) normally spread even more diffusely than economic relations. They move diffusely and ‘interstitially’ inside state territories, spreading through communication networks among segments of a state’s population (like classes, age-cohorts, genders, urban/rural inhabitants, etc.); they often also move transnationally right through state boundaries. Ideologies may develop central, authoritative, Church-like institutions, but these are usually functionally, more than territorially, organised : they deal with the sacred rather than the secular, for example. There is a socio-spatial, as well as a spiritual, ‘transcendence’ about ideological movements, which is really the opposite of the territorial bounds of the state.

It is true, however, that military power overlaps considerably with the state, especially in modern states who usually monopolise

the means of organised violence. Nevertheless, it is helpful to treat the two as distinct sources of power. I have not the space here to fully justify this (see Mann 1985 Vol. I, Chap. 1). Let me instead make two simple points. First, not all warfare is most efficiently organized territorially-centrally—guerillas, military feudalism and warrior bands are all examples of relatively decentred military organisations effective at many historical periods. Second, the effective scope of military power does not cover a single, unitary territory. In fact, it has two rather different territorial radii of effective control.

Militaristic control of everyday behaviour requires such a high level of organised coercion, logistical back-up and surplus extraction that it is practical only within close communications to the armed forces in areas of high surplus availability. It does not spread evenly over entire state territories. It remains concentrated in pockets and along communications routes. It is relatively ineffective at penetrating peasant agriculture, for example.

The second radius enables, not everyday control, but the setting of broad limits of outward compliance over far greater areas. In this case, failure to comply with broad parameters such as the handing over of tribute, the performance of ritual acts of submission, occasional military support (or at least non-rebellion), could result in a punitive expedition, and so is avoided. This radius of military striking power has normally been far greater than that of state political control, as Owen Lattimore (1962) brilliantly argued. This is obviously so in the world today, given the capabilities of modern armaments. It is also true of the Superpowers in a more subtle sense: they can impose 'friendly' regimes and de-stabilize the unfriendly through client military elites and their own covert para-military organisations, but they cannot get those regimes to conform closely to their political dictates. A more traditional example would be Britain's punitive expedition to the Falklands, capable of defeating and so de-legitimising the Argentine regime, and remaining capable of repeating the punishment, but quite incapable of providing a political future for the Islands. The logistics of 'concentrated coercion'—that is, of military power—differ from those of the territorial centralised state. Thus we should distinguish the two as power organizations. The militarist theory of the state is false, and one reason is that the state's organization is not coterminous with military organization.

The organizational autonomy of the state is only partial—indeed, in many particular cases it may be rather small. General Motors and the capitalist class in general, or the Catholic Church, or the

feudal lords and knights, or the U.S. military, are or were quite capable of keeping watch on states they have propped up. Yet they could not do the states' jobs themselves unless they changed their own socio-spatial and organizational structure. A state autonomous power ensues from this difference. Even if a particular state is set up or intensified merely to institutionalise the relations between given social groups, this is done by concentrating resources and infrastructures in the hands of an institution that has different socio-spatial and organizational contours to those groups. Flexibility and speed of response entail concentration of decision-making and a tendency towards permanence of personnel. The decentred non-territorial interest-groups that set up the state in the first place are thus less able to control it. Territorial-centralization provides the state with a potentially independent basis of power mobilization being necessary to social development and uniquely in the possession of the state itself.

If we add together the necessity, multiplicity and territorial-centrality of the state, we can in principle explain its autonomous power. By these means the state elite possesses an independence from civil society which, though not absolute, is no less absolute in principle than the power of any other major group. Its power cannot be reduced to their power either directly or 'ultimately' or 'in the last instance'. The state is not merely a locus of class struggle, an instrument of class rule, the factor of social cohesion, the expression of core values, the centre of social allocation processes, the institutionalization of military force (as in the various reductionist theories)—it is a different socio-spatial organization. As a consequence we can treat states as *actors*, in the person of state elites, with a will to power and we can engage in the kind of 'rational action' theory of state interests advocated by Levi (1981).

The mechanisms for acquiring autonomous state power

Of course, this in itself does not confer a significant degree of actual power upon the state elite, for civil society groups even though slightly differently organized may yet be able to largely control it. But the principles do offer us a pair of hypotheses for explaining variations of power. (1) State infrastructural power derives from the social utility in any particular time and place of forms of territorial-centralization which cannot be provided by civil society forces themselves. (2) The extent of state despotic power derives from the inability of civil society forces to control those forms of territorial-

centralization, once set up. Hence, there are two phases in the development of despotism : the growth of territorial-centralization, and the loss of control over it. First function, then exploitation—let us take them in order.

Because states have undertaken such a variety of social activities, there are also numerous ways in which at different times they have acquired a disproportionate part of society's capacity for infrastructural co-ordination. Let me pick out three relatively uncontentious examples : the utility of a redistributive economy, of a co-ordinated military command for conquest or defence, and of a centrally co-ordinated 'late development' response to one's rivals. These are all common conditions favouring the territorial-centralisation of social resources.

The redistributive state seems to have been particularly appropriate, as anthropologists and archeologists argue, in the early history of societies before the exchange of commodities was possible. Different ecological niches delivered their surpluses to a central store-house which eventually became a permanent state. The case is often over-argued (e.g. by Service 1975), but it has often been archeologically useful (see Renfrew, 1972).

The military route was, perhaps, the best-known to the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century theorists like Spencer (1969 edition), Gumpłowicz (1899) and Oppenheimer (1975 edition). Though they exaggerated its role, there is no doubt that most of the well-known ancient Empires had the infrastructural powers of their states considerably boosted by their use of centralised, highly organised, disciplined, and well-equipped military forces for both defence and further conquest. Rome is the example best-known to us (see Hopkins 1978).

Thirdly, the response of late industrial developers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the interference of their early-industrialising rivals is well-known : a cumulative development, through countries like France, Prussia, Japan and Russia of more and more centralized and territorially-confined mobilisation of economic resources with state financing and state enterprises sheltering behind tariff walls (classically stated by Gerschenkron 1962). But it also has earlier parallels—for example, in the history of Assyria or the early Roman Republic, imitating earlier civilizations, but in a more centralised fashion.

Note that in all cases it is not economic or military necessity *per se* that increases the role of the state, for this might merely place it into the hands of classes or military groups in civil society. It is

rather the more particular utility of economic or military *territorial-centralisation* in a given situation. There are other types of economy (e.g. market exchange) and of military organization (e.g. feudal cavalry or chariotry, castle defence) which encourage decentralisation and so reduce state power. In all these above examples the principal power groupings of civil society *freely* conferred infrastructural powers upon their states. My explanation thus starts in a functionalist vein. But functions are then exploited and despotism results. The hypothesis is that civil society freely gives resources but then loses control and becomes oppressed by the state. How does this happen?

Let us consider first that old war-horse, the origins of the state. In some theories of state origins, the loss of control by 'civilians' is virtually automatic. For example, in the militarist tradition of theory, the leading warriors are seen as automatically converting temporary, legitimate authority in war-time to permanent, coercive power in peace-time. Yet as Clastres (1977) has pointed out, primitive societies take great precautions to ensure that their military leaders do not become permanent oppressors. Similarly, the redistributive state of the anthropologists seems to have contained a number of checks against chiefly usurpation which makes its further development problematic. In fact, it seems that permanent, coercive states did *not* generally evolve in later pre-history. Only in a few unusual cases (connected with the regional effects of alluvial agriculture) did 'pristine' states evolve endogenously, and they influenced all other cases. (I make this argument at greater length in Chapters 2-4 of Vol. I). The problem seems to be that for centralised functions to be converted into exploitation, organisational resources are necessary that only actually appeared with the emergence of civilised, stratified, state societies—which is a circular process.

However, the process is somewhat clearer with respect to the intensification of state power in already-established, stratified, civilized societies with states. It is clearest of all in relation to military conquest states. We know enough about early Rome and other, earlier cases to extend Spencer's notion of 'compulsory co-operation' (outlined in Mann 1977). Spencer saw that conquest may put new resources into the hands of the conquering centralised command such that it was able to attain a degree of autonomy from the groups who had set it in motion. But Spencer's argument can be widened into the sphere of agricultural production. In pre-industrial conditions increasing the productivity of labour usually involved increasing the intensity of effort. This was most easily obtained by coer-

cion. A militarized economy could increase output and be of benefit to civil society at large, or at least to its dominant groups. Obviously, in most agricultural conditions, coercion could not be routinely applied. But where labour was concentrated—say, in irrigation agriculture, in plantations, mines and in construction works—it could. But this required the maintenance of centralised militarism, because a centralised regime was more efficient at using a minimum of military resources for maximum effect.

This would really require considerable elaboration. In my work I call it 'military Keynesianism' (see Vol. I : Chap. 9) because of the multiplier effects which are generated by military force. These effects boost the despotic power of the state *vis-à-vis* civil society because they make useful the maintenance of centralised compulsory co-operation, which civil society cannot at first provide itself. It is an example of how centralisation increases general social resources—and thus no powerful civil society group wishes to dispense with the state—yet also increases the private power resources of the state elite. These can now be used despotically against civil society.

Provided the state's activities generate extra resources, then it has a particular logistical advantage. Territorial-centralization gives effective mobilising potentialities, able to concentrate these resources against any particular civil society group, even though it may be inferior in overall resources. Civil society groups may actually endorse state power. If the state upholds given relations of production, then the dominant economic class will have an interest in efficient state centralisation. If the state defends society from outside aggressors, or represses crime, then its centrality will be supported quite widely in society. Naturally, the degree of centralisation useful to these civil society interests will vary according to the system of production or method of warfare in question. Centrality can also be seen in the sphere of ideology, as Eisenstadt (1969) argues. The state and the interests it serves have always sought to uphold its authority by a claim to 'universalism' over its territories, a detachment from all particularistic, specialised ties to kin, locality, class, Church, etc. Naturally in practice states tend to represent the interests of particular kinship groupings, localities, classes, etc., but if they appeared merely to do this they would lose all claim to distinctiveness and to legitimacy. States thus appropriate what Eisenstadt calls 'free-floating resources', not tied to any particular interest group, able to float throughout the territorially-defined society.

This might seem a formidable catalogue of state powers. And yet the autonomous power achievements of historical states before

the twentieth century were generally limited and precarious. Here we encounter the fundamental logistical, infrastructural constraints operating against centralised regimes in extensive agrarian societies. We return to the greater effective range of punitive military action compared to effective political rule. Without going into detailed logistical calculations here, but drawing on the seminal work of Engel (1978) and van Creveld (1977), we can estimate that in Near Eastern imperial societies up to Alexander the Great the maximum unsupported march possible for an army was about 60-75 miles. Alexander and the Romans may have extended it to nearly 100 miles, and this remained the maximum until the eighteenth century in Europe when a massive rise in agricultural productivity provided the logistical basis for far wider operations. Before then further distances required more than one campaigning phase, or—far more common if some degree of political control was sought—it required elaborate negotiations with local allies regarding supplies. This is enhanced if routine political control is desired without the presence of the main army. So even the most pretentious of despotic rulers actually ruled through local notables. All extensive societies were in reality 'territorially federal'. Their imperial rule was always far feebler than traditional images of them allows for (this is now well-recognised by many writers e.g. Kautsky 1982 ; Gellner 1983 : Chap. 2 ; Giddens 1981 : 103-4).

So we have in this example contrary tendencies—militaristic centralisation followed by fragmenting federalism. Combining them we get a dialectic. If compulsory co-operation is successful, it increases both the infrastructural and the despotic power of the state. But it also increases social infrastructural resources in general. The logistical constraints mean that the new infrastructures cannot be kept within the body politic of the state. Its agents continually 'disappear' into civil society, bearing the state's resources with them. This happens continually to such regimes. The booty of conquest, land grants to military lieutenants, the fruits of office, taxes, literacy, coinage all go through a two-phase cycle, being first the property of the state then private (in the sense of 'hidden') property. And though there are cases where the fragmentation phase induces social collapse, there are others where civil society can use the resources which the despotic state has institutionalised, without needing such a strong state. The Arameans, Phoenicians and Greeks appropriated, and further developed, the techniques pioneered by the despotic states of the Near East. Christian Europe appropriated the Roman heritage.

My examples are relatively militaristic only because the process is easiest to describe there. It was a general dialectic in agrarian societies. In other words, imperial and feudal regimes do not merely oscillate (as Weber, Kautsky and many others have argued), they are entwined in a dialectical process. A range of infrastructural techniques are pioneered by despotic states, then appropriated by civil societies (or *vice-versa*); then further opportunities for centralised co-ordination present themselves, and the process begins anew. Such trends are as visible in early modern societies as in the ancient ones from which I have drawn my examples.

Such a view rejects a simple antithesis, common to ideologies of our own time, between the state and civil society, between public and private property. It sees the two as continuously, temporally entwined. More specifically it sees large private property concentrations—and, therefore, the power of dominant classes—as normally boosted by the fragmentation of successful, despotic states, not as the product of civil society forces alone. So the power autonomy of both states and classes has essentially fluctuated, dialectically. There can be no general formula concerning some 'timeless' degree of autonomous state power (in the despotic sense).

But the contemporary situation is relatively unclear. Power infrastructures leaped forward with the Industrial Revolution. Industrial capitalism destroyed 'territorially federal' societies, replacing them with nation states across whose territories unitary control and surveillance structures could penetrate (as Giddens has been recently arguing, e.g. 1981). Logistical penetration of territory has increased exponentially over the last century and a half.

What happens if a state acquires control of all those institutions of control divided historically and elsewhere between states, capitalist enterprises, Churches, charitable associations, etc.? Is that the end of the dialectic, because the state can now keep what it acquires? Obviously, in macro-historical terms the Soviet Union can control its provincial agents, and hence its provinces, in a way that was flatly impossible for any previous state. Moreover, though its degree of effective authoritarianism can be easily exaggerated (as in 'totalitarian' theories, for example), its centralisation tendencies are novel in form as well as extent. Group struggles are not decentralised, as they are substantially in the capitalist democracies, nor do they fragment as they did in agrarian societies. Struggle is itself centralised: there is something pulling the major contending forces—the 'liberals', 'technocrats', 'military/heavy industry complex', etc.—towards the Praesidium. They cannot evade the state, as agrarian

dissenters did ; they cannot struggle outside the state, as capitalists and workers often do. Does this authoritarian state exist despotically 'above' society, coercing it with its own autonomous power resources ? Or does its authoritarian despotism exist in milder terms, firstly as a place in which the most powerful social forces struggle and compromise, and secondly as a set of coercive apparatuses for enforcing the compromise on everyone else ? This has long been debated among theorists of the Soviet Union. I do not pretend to know the answer.

The bureaucratic states of the West also present problems. They are much as they were in relative power terms before the exponential growth in logistical powers began. Whatever the increases in their infrastructural capacities, these have not curbed the decentred powers of the capitalist class, its major power rival. Today agencies like multi-national corporations and international banking institutions still impose similar parameters of capitalist rationality as their predecessors did over a century ago. State elites have not acquired greater power autonomy despite their infrastructural capacities. Again, however, I am touching upon some of the central unsolved theoretical issues concerning contemporary societies. And, again, I offer no solution. Indeed, it may require a longer-run historical perspective than that of our generation to solve them, and so to decide whether the Industrial Revolution did finish off the agrarian dialectic I described.

Thus the impact of state autonomy on despotic power has been ambiguous. In terms of traditional theory results might seem disappointing : the state has not consistently possessed great powers—or indeed any fixed level of power. But I have discussed interesting power processes of a different kind. In agrarian societies states were able to exploit their territorial-centrality, but generally only precariously and temporarily because despotic power also generated its own antithesis in civil society. In industrial societies the emergence of authoritarian states indicates much greater potential despotism, but this is still somewhat controversial and ambiguous. In the capitalist democracies there are few signs of autonomous state power—of a despotic type.

But, perhaps, all along, and along with most traditional theory, we have been looking for state power in the wrong place. By further examining infrastructural power we can see that this is the case.

III. *Results : infrastructural power*

Any state which acquires or exploits social utility will be provided with infrastructural supports. These enable it to regulate, normatively and by force, a *given* set of social and territorial relations, and to erect boundaries against the outside. New boundaries momentarily reached by previous social interactions are stabilised, regulated, and heightened by the state's universalistic, monopolistic rules. In this sense the state gives territorial bounds to social relations whose dynamic lies outside of itself. The state is an arena, the condensation, the crystallisation, the summation of social relations within its territories—a point often made by Poulantzas (1972). Yet, despite appearances, this does not support Poulantzas' reductionist view of the state, for this is an *active* role. The state may promote great social change by consolidating territoriality which would not have occurred without it. The importance of this role is in proportion to its infrastructural powers : the greater they are or become, the greater the territorializing of social life. Thus even if the state's every move toward despotism is successfully resisted by civil society groups, massive state-led infrastructural re-organization may result. Every dispute between the state elite and elements of civil society, and every dispute among the latter which is routinely regulated through the state's institutions, tends to focus the relations and the struggles of civil society on to the territorial plane of the state, consolidating social interaction over that terrain, creating territorialised mechanisms for repressing or compromising the struggle, and breaking both smaller local and also wider transnational social relationships.

Let me give an example (elaborated in much more empirical detail in Mann 1980). From the thirteenth century onward, two principal social processes favoured a greater degree of territorial centralisation in Europe. First, warfare gradually favoured army command structures capable of routine, complex co-ordination of specialised infantry, cavalry and artillery. Gradually, the looser feudal levy of knights, retainers and a few mercenaries became obsolete. In turn this presupposed a routine 'extraction-coercion cycle' to deliver men, monies and supplies to the forces (see the brilliant essay by Finer 1975). Eventually, only territorially-centred states were able to provide such resources and the Grand Duchies, the Prince-Bishops and the Leagues of Towns lost power to the emerging 'national' states. Second, European expansion, especially economic

expansion taking an increasingly capitalistic form, required (1) increased military protection abroad, (2) more complex legal regulation of property and market transactions, and (3) domestic property forms (like rights to common lands). Capitalistic property owners sought out territorial states for help in these matters. Thus European states gradually acquired far greater infrastructural powers: regular taxation, a monopoly over military mobilisation, permanent bureaucratic administration, a monopoly of law-making and enforcement. In the long-run, despite attempts at absolutism, states failed to acquire despotic powers through this because it also enhanced the infrastructural capacities of civil society groups, especially of capitalist property-holders. This was most marked in Western Europe and as the balance of geo-political power tilted Westwards—and especially to Britain—the despotically weak state proved the general model for the modern era. States governed with, and usually in the interests of, the capitalist class.

But the process and the alliance facilitated the rise of a quite different type of state power, infrastructural in nature. When capitalism emerged as dominant, it took the form of a series of territorial segments—many systems of production and exchange, each to a large (though not total) extent bounded by a state and its overseas sphere of influence. The nation-state system of our own era was not a product of capitalism (or, indeed, of feudalism) considered as pure modes of production. It is in that sense 'autonomous'. But it resulted from the way expansive, emergent, capitalist relations were given regulative boundaries by pre-existing states. The states were the initially weak (in both despotism and in infrastructure) states of feudal Europe. In the twelfth century even the strongest absorbed less than 2 % of GNP (if we could measure it), they called out highly decentralized military levies of at most 10 to 20,000 men sometimes only for 30 days in the campaigning system, they couldn't tax in any regular way, they regulated only a small proportion of total social disputes—they were, in fact, marginal to the social lives of most Europeans. And yet these puny states became of decisive importance in structuring the world we live in today. The need for territorial centralisation led to the restructuring of first European, then world society. The balance of nuclear terror lies between the successor states of these puny Europeans.

In the international economic system today, nation-states appear as collective economic actors. Across the pages of most works of political economy today stride actors like 'The United States', 'Japan', or 'The United Kingdom'. This does not necessarily mean that

there is a common 'national interest', merely that on the international plane there are a series of collectively organised power actors, nation-states. There is no doubting the economic role of the nation-state : the existence of a domestic market segregated to a degree from the international market, the value of the state's currency, the level of its tariffs and import quotas, its support for its indigenous capital and labour, indeed, its whole political economy is permeated with the notion that 'civil society' is its territorial domain. The territoriality of the state has created social forces with a life of their own.

In this example, increasing territoriality has not increased despotic power. Western states were despotically weak in the twelfth century, and they remain so today. Yet the increase in infrastructural penetration has increased dramatically territorial boundedness. This seems a general characteristic of social development : increases in state infrastructural powers also increase the territorial boundedness of social interaction. We may also postulate the same tendency for despotic power, though it is far weaker. A despotic state without strong infrastructural supports will only claim territoriality. Like Rome and China it may build walls, as much to keep its subjects in as to keep 'barbarians' out. But its success is limited and precarious. So, again we might elaborate a historical dialectic. Increases in state infrastructural power will territorialise social relations. If the state then loses control of its resources they diffuse into civil society, decentering and de-territorialising it. Whether this is, indeed, beginning to happen in the contemporary capitalist world, with the rise of multi-national corporations outliving the decline of two successively hegemonic states, Great Britain and the United States, is one of the most hotly-debated issues in contemporary political economy. Here I must leave it as an open issue.

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In this essay I have argued that the state is essentially an arena, a place—just as reductionist theories have argued—and yet this is precisely the origin and mechanism of its autonomous powers. The state, unlike the principal power actors of civil society, is territorially bounded and centralised. Societies need some of their activities to be regulated over a centralised territory. So do dominant economic classes, Churches and other ideological power movements, and military elites. They, therefore, entrust power resources to state elites which they are incapable of fully recovering, precisely because their own socio-spatial basis of organisation is not centralised and

territorial. Such state power resources, and the autonomy to which they lead, may not amount to much. If, however, the state's use of the conferred resources generates further power resources—as was, indeed, intended by the civil society groups themselves—these will normally flow through the state's hands, and thus lead to a significant degree of power autonomy. Therefore, *autonomous state power is the product of the usefulness of enhanced territorial-centralisation to social life in general*. This has varied considerably through the history of societies, and so consequently have the power of states.

I distinguished two types of state power, despotic and infrastructural. The former, the power of the state elite over civil society classes and elites, is what has normally been meant by state power in the literature. I gave examples of how territorial-centralisation of economic, ideological and military resources have enhanced the despotic powers of states. But states have rarely been able to hold on to such power for long. Despotic achievements have usually been precarious in historic states because they have lacked effective logistical infrastructures for penetrating and co-ordinating social life. Thus when states did increase their 'private' resources, these were soon carried off into civil society by their own agents. Hence resulted the oscillation between imperial/patrimonial and feudal regimes first analysed by Max Weber.

By concentrating on infrastructural power, however, we can see that the oscillation was, in fact, a dialectic of social development. A variety of power infrastructures have been pioneered by despotic states. As they 'disappear' into civil society, general social powers increase. In Volume I of my work, I suggest that a core part of social development in agrarian societies has been a dialectic between centralised, authoritative power structures, exemplified best by 'Militaristic Empires', and decentralised, diffused power structures exemplified by 'Multi-Power Actor Civilisations'. Thus the developmental role of the powerful state has essentially fluctuated—sometimes promoting it, sometimes retarding it.

But I also emphasised a second result of state infrastructural powers. Where these have increased, so has the territoriality of social life itself. This has usually gone unnoticed within sociology because of the unchallenged status of sociology's masterconcept: 'society'. Most sociologists—indeed, most people anywhere who use this term—mean by 'society' the territory of a state. Thus 'American society', 'British society', 'Roman society', etc. The same is true of synonyms like 'social formation' and (to a lesser extent) 'social system'. Yet the relevance of state boundaries to what we

mean by societies is always partial and has varied enormously. Medievalists do not generally characterise 'society' in their time-period as state-defined; much more likely is a broader, transnational designation like 'Christendoom' or 'European society'. Yet this change between medieval and modern times is one of the most decisive aspects of the great modernizing transformations; just as the current relationship between nation states and 'the world system' is crucial to our understanding of late twentieth-century society. How territorialised and centralised are societies? This is the most significant theoretical issue on which we find states exercising a massive force over social life, *not* the more traditional terrain of dispute, the despotic power of state elites over classes or other elites. States are central to our understanding of what a society is. Where states are strong, societies are relatively territorialised and centralised. That is the most general statement we can make about the autonomous power of the state.

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