Disenchantment and Ideology: Western Modernization

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Far-reaching political, socioeconomical and cultural transformations characterized the rise of modern society in the Western World from the late eighteenth until the early twentieth century. The simultaneous reflection on the process of modernization was expressed in political ideologies and in scientific knowledge about man and society. Ideologies and the human and social sciences were products of modernization, but at the same time they offered interpretations and evaluations of it. Ideology and science in a number of ways replaced the traditional religious world view and, in that way, they contributed to the secular understanding and a 'disenchantment' of the world, or, in the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's words, the death of God. Nietzsche's statement 'God is dead' not just refers to the demise of religious belief in modern society, but also to the fact that the belief in objective truth was undermined. However, at the same time ideologies and to some extent also scientific theories engendered new truths including re-enchanted and mythical elements.

Our own society and culture are the outcome of the modernization process in the nineteenth and a large part of the twentieth century and therefore cannot be understood without knowing what it is about. However, the basic values of modernization, and also those of science and ideology, have been under discussion since the last three decades or so. Some hold that we now have left the modern era behind us and that we now live in a 'late' or 'post-modern', 'post-industrial', 'risk', 'reflexive', 'network', 'globalized' or 'liquid' society with completely new structures, social and political issues, patterns of thought and identities. Others emphasise the basic continuity between the present and the modern world that began to take shape around 1800. This discussion cannot be grasped without understanding the process of modernization.[1]

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[1] See also: Peter Wagner (2008). *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation. A New Sociology of Modernity.* Cambridge/Malden, MA: Polity Press; Peter Wagner (2012). *Modernity: Understanding the Present.* Cambridge/Malden, MA: Polity Press; Anthony Elliott & Bryan S. Turner (2012). *On Society.* Cambridge & Malden: Polity Press; Ulrich Beck (1986). *Risikogesellschaft.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp; Anthony Giddens (1990). *The Consequences of Modernity.* Cambridge: Polity; Ulrich Beck, Scott Lash and Anthony Giddens (eds.) (1994). *Reflexive Modernization.* London: Sage; Zygmunt Bauman (1998). *Globalization: The Human Consequences.* Cambridge: Polity Press; Zygmunt Bauman (2000). *Liquid Modernity.* Cambridge: Polity.

The transformation of traditional into modern society: three revolutions

In the 'long nineteenth century' between the French Revolution and the outbreak of the First World War a crucial transition occurred from a traditional, predominantly agrarian and hierarchical society to a modern industrial and more egalitarian one. The importance of this transformation is momentous; according to some historians only the Neolithic Revolution (the transition from hunting and nomadic cultures to sedentary agricultural societies with took place around 10,000 BC in the Middle East and gradually expanded all over the world) led to similar large-scale changes in social structures and culture.[2] Others have characterised the period between 1750 and 1850, because of the threefold heritage of Enlightenment, democratic revolutions and the Industrial Revolution, as an *Achsenzeit*: an extraordinarily radical and irreversible transformation of society, which subsequently continued en spread all over the world in the nineteenth and beyond in the twentieth century. The German historian R. Koselleck used the term in analogy to the *Achsenzeit* that the philosopher Karl Jaspers and the sociologist Max Weber had identified between the sixth and the fourth centuries BC, when the great world religions (Confucianism, Brahmanism, Buddhism, Jewish monotheism with the later branches of Christianity and Islam) as well as Greek philosophy originated. According to Weber it was crucial that in this era a separation was made between the material and the spiritual world, which offered prospects for more or less independent research into the empirical world and the development of science in our sense of the word as well as an independent development (and rationalisation) of religion. In this context Weber used the notion of 'disenchantment'.

The process of transformation from a traditional into a modern society consisted of three basic changes. The first is a political transformation process that started when around 1770 democratic movements emerged all over the Western world, culminating in the American *Declaration of Independence* (1776) and the French Revolution of 1789. The second is a socio-economic transformation: the Industrial Revolution that started from around 1770 on in England, reached the continent after 1815, and in the course of the century expanded over a large part of Western and Middle Europe and America. Because of these two developments, the historian E.J. Hobsbawm speaks of the 'Dual Revolution'. However, a third factor should be taken into consideration: the role of cultural, intellectual and mental factors in the development of modern society. The Enlightenment, that paved the way for a secular and scientific worldview, is to be considered as the third of the 'revolutions' that modernised the world.

What was the historical background of these transformations? First, more or less modern and enlightened values, such as individualism and independent thinking, had in a number of ways already been advanced by the Renaissance, Humanism and Protestantism, without which

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[2] Gordon V. Childe coined the term Neolithic Revolution in his *New Light on the Most Ancient East* (1954).

modernization would not have been possible. The Enlightenment built on humanism and the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century. Second, the growth of (international) trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth century had laid the foundations for a capitalist economy. Third, the rise of the modern sovereign and centralised state in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (the so-called New Monarchies) had laid the foundations for a new type of politics, the contours of which would emerge in eighteenth-century Enlightened Despotism.

In the period 1750-1850 these three beginnings culminated in a large-scale and irreversible transformation of Western society as a whole.[3] That the transformation came about in that period was related to two factors. The first was an increasing population pressure after 1750. Reforms in agriculture and better nutrition led to a notable decrease in diseases, epidemics and famines, which recurred again and again in traditional society, and this resulted in a growing population. Moreover, this growth was boosted by related changes in the patterns of marriage. One of the most remarkable aspects of traditional European marriage practice had been the tendency to adjust the age of marriage to the means available. In times of poverty and famine people married at an older age (or not at all), and in better times at a younger age. The fact that more young men and women married added to the increase of the population after 1750. A growing population usually led to pauperism and high levels of mortality – as is still the case in many Third World countries. And indeed, poverty and bad living conditions were wide-spread in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century European society. However, through industrialisation, technological innovation and continuous economic growth that put an end to structural and enduring scarcity, it turned out to be possible to overcome this problem – be it in a gradual way and after social disruption, culture shocks, and mass migrations.

The second factor was the far-reaching socio-political consequences of the growing significance of trade and (proto)industry and the increasing role of science in society. The bourgeoisie, a new social group of well-to-do citizens, who under the *Ancien Régime* had hardly any share in political power, started to assert themselves. They were merchants and industrialists, civil servants, professionals and intellectuals like attorneys, clergymen, doctors and professors. A particular role was played by *Dissenters* – religious groups who did not belong to the dominant religion or state church – in the advancement of social awareness and political involvement. In the course of the eighteenth century middle-class people started to develop a civil society around magazines, reading circles, literary salons, scientific societies and philanthropic associations. Active and self-conscious citizens began to give voice to public opinion, which took a critical stand against traditional ways of thinking and the authorities of the *Ancien Régime*: monarchs, nobles and high clergy.

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[3] See Karl Polyani (1944/1957). *The Great Transformation.* Boston; Patricia Crone (1989/2003). *Pre-Industrial Societies: Anatomy of the Pre-Modern World.* Oxford; Pinguin; Ernest Gellner (1988). *Plough, Sword, and Book.* London: Collins Harvill.

This double pressure – socio-economic (as a result of population growth) and sociopolitical (owing to the rising bourgeoisie and its political demands) – weakened the structures of the *Ancien Régime.* Political dissatisfaction and risings occurred all over Europe and America. The historian R.R. Palmer therefore characterises the period from 1750 to 1850 as *The Age of Democratic Revolutions*, in which the American and French revolutions were of overriding importance. The French and American revolutions marked the breakthrough of the idea that the state and government should be in the interest of the people and not of a small elite. After these revolutions rulers could not legitimize their position any more on the basis of traditional privileges, custom, family inheritance or God's will.

The ambiguity of modernization: liberation and new constraints

That the nineteenth-century transition of the traditional to the modern world was total and far-reaching is shown by the dichotomies table by H.-U. Wehler (*Modernisierung und Geschichte*, Göttingen 1975) below. It offers a global (and simplified) overview of the crucial differences between traditional and modern society.

	Traditional society	*Modern society*
Degree of alphabetisation	Low	High
Occupational structure	Simple	Differentiated
Occupational mobility	Low	High
Communication	Personal	Media
Conflicts	Open; disruptive; violent	Institutionalised, channelled
Economy	Agrarian; artisan	Industrial
Income level	Low, with big differences	High; levelled out
Family	Extended families	Nuclear families
Functions	Diffused	Specialised
Function recruitment	Closed	Open
Life expectancy	Low	High
Mobility	Low	High
Degree of organisation	Low; informal	High; formal
Political power	Local; personal	Centralised nationally, institutional
Political participation	Low	High
Productivity	Low	High
Religion	Dogmatic; state control	Secularisation; individual
Social control	Direct; personal	Indirect; bureaucratic
Social differentiation	Low	High
Stratification	Estates	Classes
Technology	Simple	Complex

Location population	In the country	In towns and cities
Values	Particularistic	Universalistic

This schematic dichotomy of traditional versus modern is, however, not without problems. It suggests that the modernization of society developed in a more or less uniform manner, and it does not explain how people experienced and interpreted these changes and responded to them. The classical sociological view of modernization as a total, systematic, unidirectional and inevitable transformation which involves all dimensions of society at the same time and in the same pace and which lead to similar social, cultural and political outcomes, has been criticized by historians and sociologists. A clear-cut dichotomy of traditional and modern society is too simplistic and general. There is no uniform and all-encompassing evolutionary and progressive logic in various processes of modernization. The idea that modernization was a multifaceted process and subject to variation, gave rise to more refined and differentiated approaches, in which the active involvement of people and the guiding force of social institutions and the state are taken into consideration.[4]

The one-dimensional dichotomy also implies a value-judgement. The characteristics of traditional society seem outdated, and therefore undesirable and those of modern society seem good and desirable: the last ones appear to have historical progress on their side. This table therefore demonstrates all the problems of finalism or teleology – the disputable idea that history moves towards a pre-ordained goal and therefore has a *causa finalis* or intrinsic meaning. In this way history is presented in terms of inevitable linear progress and the past is judged on the basis of present standards. Such a 'presentist' approach neglects the paradoxes of modernization, which the nineteenth-century Spanish painter Francisco de Goya symbolised in his drawing *Modo de volar* (a way of flying).

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[4] Reinhard Bendix (1967). Tradition and Modernity Reconsidered. *Comparative Studies in Society and History 9/3*, 292-346; S.N. Eisenstadt (1974). Studies of Modernization and Sociological Theory. *History and Theory 13/3*, 225-252; Robert Nisbet (1986). Developmentalism: A Critical Analysis. In Robert Nisbet, *The Making of Modern Society* (pp. 33-69). New York: New York University Press; Chris Lorenz (2006). 'Won't you tell me, where have all the good times gone'? On the advantages and disadvantages of modernization theory for history. *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice 10/2*, 171-200.
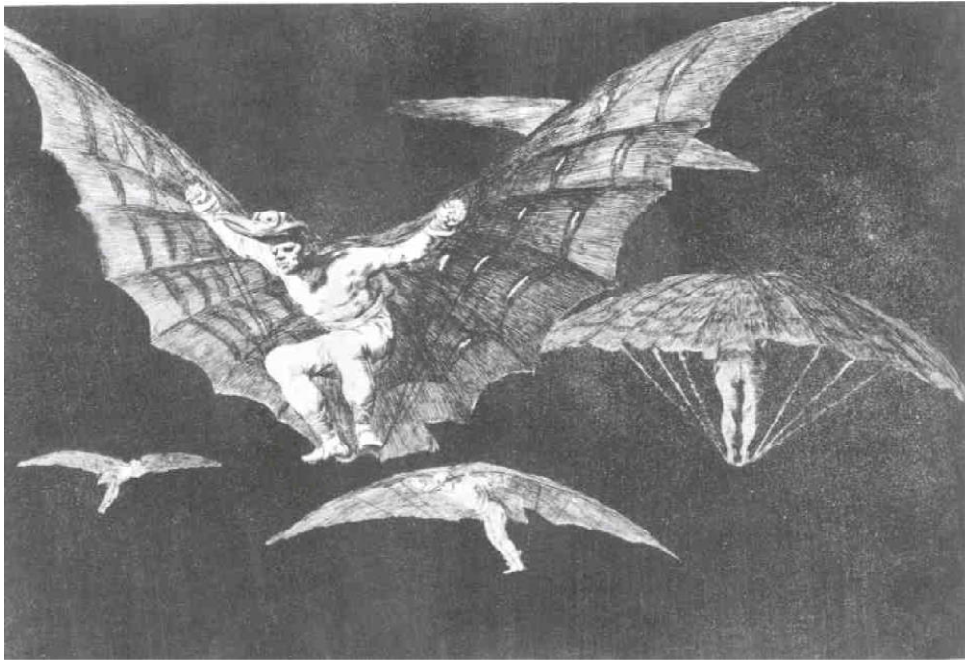
Francisco Goya, *Modo de volar* (1815-1820)

Goya's drawing shows flying men who have cast aside their human limitations and superstitious beliefs and who have freed themselves through their reason and technology. The bird helmets represent the taming of irrational delusions. In this perspective, the image represents the faith in progress and the control of nature. But Goya draws attention to another side of modernization as well: the very apparatus of their liberation, the wing-devices, cages the flyers anew and puts them in a new harness. The bird helmets also suggest that technology is a continuation of old magic in a new form.[5] The way Goya depicts technology is perhaps characteristic to all human endeavour: the very devices which human beings use in their attempt to master the world, constrain them in their turn.

Modernity comes in many shapes and sizes and there are differences in the extent to which socioeconomic and political developments such as capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, democratization and national unification were accompanied by rationalization, secularization, individualization and disenchantment. And modernity as a social, economic, political and cultural transformation was not endogenously produced in Europe. What is an exceptional European or Western trend, is not so much modernity as a descriptive term for an empirical social reality, but modernity as a mobilizing concept. From the Enlightenment onwards the social realities of modernization were entangled with the intellectual, in particular sociological and political-ideological reflection on and (positive or negative) evaluation of modernity. Modernity is also an intended project

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[5] Hans Holländer (1980). Raum und nichts. Über einige Schlussbilder der 'Desastres de la Guerra' und den 'Modo de Volar'. In: Catalogue exhibition *Goya. Das Zeitalter der Revolution. Kunst um 1800* (pp. 28-33, 208). Hamburg: Hamburger Kunsthalle.

which is involved in the shaping of its newness. Sociology was a form of reflexive self-understanding of 'modern' society. Modernity as an empirical external reality is entangled with the historically and culturally situated knowledge and narratives by which we understand it. The master narrative since the Enlightenment is a factor in bringing the reality of modernity about, but that reality is less straightforward and more muddled than modernity as an ambition and project.[6]

Modernization was experienced as a promise as well as a curse. The promise was emancipation and freedom with the help of rational thinking - summarized by Immanuel Kant's famous definition of the Enlightenment as 'mankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity'. Inherited traditions, beliefs and customs were condemned as obstacles to rational solutions of social issues and the progress of mankind. However, for many people, modernization meant the erosion of cherished values and durable structures, of what they considered as familiar, habitual, and secure, of what had seemed solid and lasting. Others pointed out that modernization gave rise to new structures that replaced old certainties and a sense of belonging with anonymous social forces that were more oppressive and compelling than traditional communities had ever been. The liberation from the shackles of traditional society (galling social bonds, collectives and hierarchies, the yoke of rulers and patronizing religious authorities) was followed by new rules, restraints and pressures, and new forms of re-enchantment by ideologies and science and technology. The liberal economic freedom, for example, meant a submission to impersonal market mechanisms (characterised by Adam Smith as 'the invisible hand'). The biomedical and social sciences put forward that human beings were determined by natural forces or social conditions. Capitalism and industrialisation entailed an obligation to work and to be productive and new time-regimes. The socialist freedom could be realised only by forcing man to be equal in a Rousseau-like (or even totalitarian) manner and to adapt himself to a new social order under the guidance of a centralised and rationalised state. New coercive and disciplinary systems emerged.[7]

From early on modernization evoked counter-reactions. Several nineteenth-century voices doubted its blessings. For example, apart from their very dissimilar political ideals, conservatives, Romantic artists and thinkers, utopian socialists and Marxists saw the new coercive structures of modern society all too well. In their view the downside of modernization was a society based on heartless self-interest, purely rational and utilitarian calculation and a monomaniacal focus on economic imperatives (making money, profits, mechanical production, efficiency, material affluence), which undermined a sense of security, stability and confidence as well as basic cultural and spiritual values. Large industrial cities seemed to be lonely places without any sense of belonging and community, and mechanical and routinized industrial production in large

[6] Sanjay Seth, (2016). Is Thinking with 'Modernity' Eurocentric? *Cultural Sociology 10/3*, 385-398.

[7] Jeffrey Alexander (2013). *The Dark Side of Modernity*. Cambridge, UK, Malden, MA: Polity Press.

factories had taken all creativity and enjoyment out of work. The capitalist money economy turned around the calculations of impersonal profit-and-loss accounts and undermined the quality of social relations as they were embedded in customs, community-spirit and moral sentiments.

Conservatives as well as anarchists and others pointed to the danger of the all-powerful centralized state that intervened in more and more social domains and they contended that democratization in mass societies entailed totalitarian tendencies. The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, pointed out the downside of modern Western civilisation in a different way. Refined civilisation more and more required the repression of all spontaneous desires and passions. Also, in the view of the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche modernization was not progress. He asserted that modern culture was increasingly dominated by a one-dimensional rationality that alienated man from his fundamental needs and drives. According to the influential sociologist Max Weber, the 'rationalisation' of society meant that man would become increasingly imprisoned in an 'iron cage': the imperatives of instrumental efficiency and bureaucratic regulations and procedures. Weber's rather gloomy picture of a fully disenchanted modern world was echoed by critical twentieth-century social thinkers such as the members of the Frankfurt School of Social Research, who built on the ideas of Marx as well as Freud. In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer argued that the emancipatory project of the Enlightenment, which promised to liberate man from his dependency on nature and social repression, had resulted in the domination of a one-dimensional instrumental and objectivizing rationality.[8] More recently, the influential French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault has argued again and again that in modern Western society the individual has been subjected continuously to regimes of surveillance, discipline and normalization.

Two perspectives on modernization

The transformation process from traditional into modern society can be analysed on two levels: (1) the actual political, socioeconomic and cultural-scientific developments and (2) the scientific and political (or ideological) interpretations by nineteenth-century thinkers of modernization. That a transformation process of far-reaching proportions was taking place, was obvious for people in those days as well. Especially in the years around the French Revolution, many people were aware of living in a radically new world. Even when they were disappointed by the changes and disapproved of them, the awareness of radical newness remained. This awareness was articulated in political perspectives on the process of change in the form of ideologies, like liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and nationalism, in order to evaluate, influence and direct the course of modernization. At the same time attempts were made to understand and explain the changes in a rational, scientific way, which was reflected in

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[8] Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer (1992/1944). *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso.

biomedical thinking and the emergence of new scientific fields: political theory (Alexis de Tocqueville), sociology (Max Weber) and psychology (Sigmund Freud). Man made him/herself, as a physical and mental as well as a social being, into an object of scientific inquiry, which considerably changed man's self-image.

The rise of the biomedical and social sciences and the ideologies cannot be understood without considering one of the most important legacies of Enlightenment: secularisation. Christianity lost much of its political and social impact through the separation of church and state, as proclaimed during the French Revolution. From a public concern religion became more and more a private matter. Furthermore, Christian ways of understanding the world were replaced by secular ones. Apart from the rise of the natural sciences, the development of historical awareness, the idea that the human world is changing all the time, and that social change has its own dynamic, played a crucial role. In the traditional Christian worldview man was embedded in a cosmic, predetermined God-given pattern that would lead from Creation through the Fall, the birth and crucifixion of Jesus and the possibility of individual redemption, to the second coming of Christ, the Thousand Year Reign and the collective redemption of mankind. In Christian messianism, the actual history of mankind was of minor importance.

The Christian worldview lost much of its public relevance in the nineteenth century, at least among intellectuals. But the need for all-encompassing philosophies to give meaning to the world and man's place in it remained. Philosophers and social and political thinkers went in search for new, secularised patterns which would throw light on the purpose of human history. In the early nineteenth century, rising interest in history was to a certain extent a symptom of a (conservative) longing for social stability and harmony. But at the same time, the emphasis on the importance of history had its reformist and revolutionary elements (embraced by liberals and socialists) as well. Attempts to change and (re)make society were often legitimised by a specific interpretation of history as progress, which suggested that certain political or revolutionary goals were in line with an inevitable historical process.

Christianity contained a clear model for a moral social order that was God given and eternal. The Enlightenment, the French and American revolutions and the Industrial Revolution demonstrated that this order was less solid and self-evident than had been assumed for centuries. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels pointed out in their *Communist Manifesto* (1848), modernization in general and industrial capitalism in particular implied ongoing change: 'All fixed, fast-frozen relationships […] are swept away, all new-formed ones become obsolete before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned.'[9] Modernization not only entailed an optimistic belief in progress, but also a sense of uncertainty and disorientation and a fear of disintegration and chaos. Responding to such feelings and fears, philosophers and social and political thinkers began to search for a new social order and for the

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[9] See also Marshall Berman (1983). *All that is Solid Melts into Air*. London: Verso.

(scientific and/or ideological) principles on which it could be founded in order to restore some stability.

A secularised worldview did not completely replace religion. On the contrary: the nineteenth century – partly as a consequence of Romanticism and perhaps also as a form of escape from the disenchanted public world – was probably more pious and religious in the private sphere than the eighteenth century. Moreover, disenchantment of the world entailed new forms of re-enchantment: the secular, especially ideological, but also scientific perspectives on the modern world had some religious features of their own. Nonetheless in the late eighteenth century there was an awareness that a completely new world was coming into being. From then on, people tried to understand and also to shape the new society. Out of this ambition, not only social science, but also ideologies came into being. I will now elaborate on these two elements of the second perspective on modernization.

The rise of sociological thinking

In the nineteenth century society became the object of the social sciences. For us the concept of society is more or less self-evident, but from a historical perspective it is not. The term goes back no further than the seventeenth century and its origin is of a political nature. In the traditional world there was no such thing as society referring to the ensemble of all social relations: the bulk of the agrarian population, living in rather closed and isolated local communities and showing considerable variety in practices and customs, were in a situation of fragmented subordination to the privileged minority of rulers. The concept of 'society' was first used to refer to the elite among the ruling caste who, through their interaction in capitals and at courts, cultivated similar attitudes and manners. After the Middle Ages, at princely courts, aristocratic circles came into being which prided themselves on their refined and civilised lifestyle. In his famous book *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation: socio- und psychogenetische Untersuchungen* (*On the Process of Civilisation: Socio- and Psychogenetic Investigations*, 1939) the historical sociologist Norbert Elias claims that this was the beginning of the process of civilisation, the gradual pacification of the social and political relations between men (as a consequence of the monopolisation of the use of force by the state) as well as the refinement of manners and the development of a sense of shame, first among the upper echelons and later among the middle class and the lower orders. According to Elias in this process *Fremdzwang* (external control) was more and more transformed into *Selbstzwang* (internal self-control). A similar explanation can already be found in the work of the influential nineteenth-century British liberal social thinker Herbert Spencer. He characterized traditional society, which was dominated by endless violent conflicts within and between states and by forced regulation and deterrence of the population by rulers, as militaristic. If any peaceful situation existed at all, it always was a precarious peace. Modern industrial society was, according to Spencer, more harmonious and peaceful, and based on spontaneous self-regulation.

From the seventeenth century on, aristocratic court-gatherings, which wanted to distinguish themselves from the 'common' people, referred to themselves as *société* – a term that is still found in the term *high society*. Imitating the aristocracy and distinguishing themselves from the lower orders, members of the bourgeoisie, on their turn, in the eighteenth century began to create their own 'societies', which were directed at the world of trade and industry, science, arts, social and cultural advancement as well as public debate, such as banks, commercial companies, scientific societies, institutes for education and charity, literary salons, pressure and lobby-groups, and publishing houses, newspapers and journals. The notion of *civil society* was derived from this: it included all citizens and all social relations and institutions apart from the state and it shaped the development of what we now refer to as public opinion. The middle-class ideal of civil society was a public space where citizens would be able to discus with each other in a rational way about social issues and the common good, free from the influence of tradition and custom and without being controlled by the power of the state, the ruling class, churches or narrow economic interests. From this perspective, the state should facilitate the interests of society instead of serving the interests of rulers and maintaining their domination. Although enlightened despotism, (authoritarian) government for the public good, also implied, to a certain extent, such a view on the state, it is obvious that the notion of civil society was supported particularly by the bourgeoisie, which increasingly played an important socio-economic role, but which was nevertheless unable to gain access to the state hierarchy of the *Ancien Régime*. In this way our modern concept 'society' originated: it refers to the social sphere in which individuals interact in a more or less structured way and which we consider as something that is independent from the state.

The emancipating bourgeoisie began to view society as the social environment which could and should be shaped by its own activities rather than as a social order which was imposed from above by tradition, the state and church. The development of civil society was reflected in the social theories of leading enlightened philosophes in France and Scotland, such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Anne Turgot, Marie-Jean de Condorcet, David Hume, Adam Ferguson en Adam Smith. They were the first who conceptualized society as a socio-cultural en economic reality in itself which should be considered in an objective and empirical rather than a normative and metaphysical way and which operated in accordance with its own 'natural' laws and dynamic. Adam Ferguson, for example, made his name with his *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), in which he claimed that society had emerged from deep-rooted feelings of solidarity that were part of human nature. Adam Smith argued in his *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) that economic activities and relations (labor, production, and commerce) were the motor of social and cultural development and that they were ruled by an 'invisible hand'. (At the same time Smith was also a moral philosopher who believed that moral values were indispensable for social cohesion.) Such new views of society in terms of

sociability and economic relations questioned the traditional legitimation of the social order by the established political-juridical and ecclesiastical authorities as well as military power. The emancipation of bourgeois civil society and the idea of its 'natural' and 'reasonable' organization set the conditions for challenging the powers that be: government should meet the needs in society and should be subjected to the rule of law. Only a state that was geared to the spontaneous, 'natural' organization of society could be considered as reasonable.

The notion of 'modern society' was in fact introduced and elaborated by the nineteenth century social thinkers who laid the groundwork for the emergence of sociology as a scientific discipline.[10] The rise of sociology was a result of the development of bourgeois civil society and it was part of the diverse intellectual and ideological movements that can be seen as responses to the dissolution of traditional society brought about by the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. The loss of social stability and cohesion, the fear of disorder and disintegration, and the undermining of coherent (religious) worldviews triggered the attempt to find the underlying structures of the new society in the making. It was no coincidence that the concept of 'social science' was introduced in France in the revolutionary period, when some leading thinkers felt the need to find secular and more democratic guidelines for the shaping of a new society.[11]

In his introduction to the history of sociology, *Orde, verandering, ongelijkheid: een inleiding tot de geschiedenis van de sociologie* (*Order, change, inequality: an introduction to the history of sociology*, 1981), the Dutch sociologist L. Laeyendecker argues that basically sociological thinking, from the late eighteenth century, was derived from the awareness that 'society' was determined by a social dynamics of its own, which gave cause to certain questions.[12] Laeyendecker point to three central questions about society:

(1) *How does social order come about?* This question became relevant when traditional society, based on local, fixed, collective and hierarchical organisation, disintegrated and was replaced by a more dynamic, open, individualised and egalitarian society. In his classical work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887) the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies characterized this change as the

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[10] The term sociology is derived from the Greek *ology* (the study of) and the Latin *socius* referring to fellow, companionship and friendship. The German term for society, *Gesellschaft*, comes from *Geselle,* meaning a shared space and associated with companionship or friendship.

[11] See Keith M. Baker (1964). The early history of the term 'social science'. *Annals of Science 20:3*, 211-226.

[12] Laeyendecker's analysis is far from unique; see for example Robert Nisbet (1967). *The Sociological Tradition*. London: Heinemann Educational Books; Johan Heilbron (1991). *Het ontstaan van de sociologie*. Amsterdam: Prometheus; David Inglis with Christopher Thorpe (2012). *An Invitation to Social Theory* (pp. 13-41). Cambridge & Malden: Polity Press; Anthony Elliott & Bryan S. Turner (2012). *On Society* (pp. 29-64). Cambridge & Malden: Polity Press; Craig Calhoun et al. (Eds.) (2012). *Classical Sociological Theory* (pp 1-17). Malden and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

transformation of 'community' into 'society'. In the traditional small-scale community social relations were based on direct, face-to-face interactions, they included all dimensions of human existence (personal, economic, cultural, political and religious) and they were regulated by fixed and unambiguous moral standards. Human beings were involuntarily embedded in tightly knit collectives in which they took up fixed positions and which required total and unconditional involvement. In modern differentiated and nationally organized societies social interaction is much more impersonal, fragmentary, fleeting, voluntary (free association for different purposes) and conditional (often based on formal contracts). Individuals are much more independent and have more freedom of action; to a large extent they can pursue their (economic or other) self-interests and ambitions and shape their own lives. The downside is, according to Tönnies and many other social and political thinkers, the loss of community-spirit and social cohesion. The crucial question was: how, in a world of apparently just free-floating individuals, was a stable social order possible?

(2) *How do social changes come about?* The awareness that the world was changing rapidly and that this change was not directed by God or some other supernatural power, led to the question why the transformation occurred, where it led to, and how it related to the problem of social order.

(3) *How does social inequality come about?* The traditional world was pre-eminently unequal: it was a world in which each social group had its fixed position, its own inherited privileges, rights and duties, and in which the relations between these groups were of a hierarchical and interdependent nature. Social and political inequality, which was not only about property and power, but also about status and prestige, was viewed as inevitable and self-evident. Among eighteenth-century intellectuals, however, the notion of a fundamental 'natural' equality of all men was raised as an important social and political ideal. In the words of the French anthropologist Louis Dumont: *homo hierarchicus* was superseded by *homo aequalis*.[13] At the same time, it was evident that this abstract ideal of equality was far from fully realised after the democratic revolutions and that economic inequalities even increased as a consequence of industrialisation. In modern democratised and industrialised society new forms of inequality, in particular social-economic but also political ones, emerged, notwithstanding the growing recognition of formal equality before the law. This led to the question how inequality can be explained. Which social mechanisms produced it? And was it inevitable or could and should it be resolved?

An explicit *sociological* way of asking questions like Laeyendecker's is, of course, constructed after the fact. Nineteenth-century social and

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[13] Louis Dumont (1967). *Homo Hierachicus*. Paris: Gallimard; Louis Dumont (1976). *Homo Aequalis*. Paris: Gallimard.

political philosophers, such as Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx, Henri de Saint-Simon, Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte, were certainly not professional sociologists but rather general thinkers who mixed history, social analysis, economics and political judgement and who did not (have to) worry about disciplinary boundaries, simply because they did not exist. Sociology as a science was a concept coined later in the century by among others the philosopher of positivism Auguste Comte and it developed into a separate discipline only towards the end of the nineteenth century, most prominently in the work of the academic scholars Émile Durkheim and Max Weber. Laeyendecker seems to assume that sociology was already outlined before it actually established itself as a disciple.[14] But this does not alter the fact that he demonstrates that as a consequence of social and political modernization a number of fundamental questions about society and the individual's place in it were raised, which were subsequently tackled by social thinkers and also by scientists who studied the human body and mind.

The rise of ideologies

The concept ideology is pre-eminently a product of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. It was used for the first time by the French Enlightenment thinker Antoine Destutt De Tracy (1754-1836), who was a member of a group of philosophers and scientists known as the Ideologues and who published his *Eléments d'idéologie* in several volumes in 1802. In this work he attempted to develop an 'ideological' method of analysis, which should make it possible to distinguish between 'true' and 'false' ideas. On the foundation of true ideas, a new and better society could subsequently be built. Such an approach, which implied liberal-democratic ideals, presupposed that ideology was some sort of objective, scientific analysis and knowledge.

The term ideology became current through Napoleon. However, he twisted its meaning in a negative way. Napoleon considered the Ideologues as a threat to his authoritarian regime. After his defeat in Russia in 1812, he held that all evil was to be blamed on their way of thinking. They had tried to conceptualise the laws of societies on the foundation of abstract, rationalistic thought-constructions instead of common sense, actual experiences, 'the laws of the human heart', and the practical lessons of history. These would offer more realistic guidelines for action than the theoretical speculations of the 'ideologists'.[15]

The concept of ideology played an important role in Karl Marx's theory of society and the Marxist meaning of it was the opposite of Destutt De Tracy's definition. He argued that an ideology is a particular worldview of the ruling class, which is used to dominate and control the other classes. In fact, Marx considers all ways of thinking about what human beings and societies are and should be as ideological, as determined by class

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[14] See Rein de Wilde (1992). *Discipline en legende. De identiteit van de sociologie in Duitsland en de Verenigde Staten 1870-1930* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep), 22-28.
[15] See Emmet Kennedy (1979). 'Ideology' from Destutt De Tracy to Marx. *Journal of the History of Ideas 40:3*, 353-368.

relations. Ideologies not only express the views and interests of the ruling class, but they also attempt to disguise this fact by making the subordinate classed believe that the dominant class' picture of reality is the only possible one and therefore natural and inevitable. The views of the ruling class are presented as if they were just an objective reflection of a self-evident reality, whereas in fact they offer a biased and distorted picture of the world. Thus, according to Marx, the mouthpieces of bourgeois interests such as liberal economic thinkers make it appear as if the free market is given like a natural phenomenon including inevitable iron laws. In this way an alternative organization of the economy and society seems to be unfeasible. (Nowadays neoliberal ideology suggests that there is no feasible alternative for the global free market.) Marx argued that the capitalist market and its workings should not be taken for granted: they had been made by human beings in history and they could be changed if people, in particular the suppressed class, became aware that they had been duped into a 'false consciousness'. They should take back control over the underlying material conditions and unequal relations of social power and ownership which had shaped this economic reality.

In the course of the nineteenth century ideology, in a more general way, has become part of modern thinking and the definitions of it have piled up. With the rise of the political parties from the late nineteenth century on, which based themselves on more or less coherent views on the present and future society, the concept has gained a more specific meaning: it refers to ideas about or blueprints of how society should be planned and designed. In nineteenth- and twentieth-century politics, ideologies have often served as a political weapon to mobilise supporters, to forge the unity of political parties and to gain power. The political-pragmatic function of ideologies has completely supplanted Destutt de Tracy's scientific connotation and is more in line with the Marxist meaning, be it that Marxism in itself is also seen as a political ideology. This is captured well in the definition of the German political scientist K.-D. Bracher. According to him an ideology is:

> a system of ideas and opinions, as extended as possible, on the relations between man, society and politics, that is suited to simplify reality into a few convenient formulas, and that is capable to obscure or twist this reality out of political interest.[16]

Bracher distinguishes between four functions of ideologies:
  (1) *Giving meaning to the world.* In this respect, for a large part ideology replaced religion. For example, the nineteenth-century liberal bourgeois liked to see himself as an agent of social and economic progress and individual liberties, whereas the socialist worker considered himself as part of an avant-garde who fought for social justice and liberation of his class from suppression by the bourgeoisie.

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[16] Karl-Dietrich Bracher (1984). *Zeit der Ideologien. Eine Geschichte politischen Denkens im 20. Jahrhundert.* Stuttgart: DVA, 14.

(2) *A guideline for action.* Any ideology gives its followers a clear guideline for action in society: the struggle for political and civil liberties (liberalism), for economic equality and social justice (socialism/Marxism), for the national cause (nationalism), for preservation of the existing cultural traditions and social bonds (conservatism) or against any form of government or social hierarchy (anarchism).

(3) *Social solidarity.* The collective ideological interpretation of the world and the collective struggle forges solidarity. Socialism advanced the unity of the working class and liberalism shaped the collective identity of a large segment of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie.

(4) *Political legitimacy.* Any regime needs legitimacy, but ever since the French Revolution with its rejection of the *Droit Divin* of kings and aristocratic privileges, and its emphasis on people's sovereignty, governments need this legitimacy explicitly from below. Rulers could not invoke divine rights or traditional privileges any more. Ideologies gave political leaders a tool to speak and govern on behalf of their supporters as well as of the common cause.

Ideologies are based on specific reasoned interpretations of social reality, but they are also characterised by idealistic and religious elements: the dream about a perfect society. Karl Marx promised the workers a classless society, in which they would have to work only in the morning, and they would be able to fish and hunt in the afternoon and engage in philosophy in the evening. Liberals believed in a market-regulated free world of plenty for all. The conservatives longed for a world of social and cultural diversity and authenticity rooted in history that would be stable and in harmony at the same time. The anarchists dreamed about a world without authority and hierarchy. The national socialists wanted to create a racially pure world dominated by Germans. Positivists and utilitarian thinkers held that modern society could be rationally and efficiently organized and managed on the basis of science and technology.

People cannot live without dreaming about 'the good life'. The Christian belief in paradise is a good example of this. In ideologies something of this religious vision can be traced in a secularised form: the utopian attempt to create heaven on earth. Also, the belief in the blessings of science and technology, which in the nineteenth century was expressed in Positivism, resembles ideology. Characteristic for ideologies is that they appeal on the one hand to the need for visions and ideals of 'the good life', but that they are at the same time intellectual constructions, which, against the background of modernization, pretend to give coherent answers to a number of key questions with regard to man, society and state. Ideologies usually include:

(1) *A general worldview.* (What is the view held on the nature of man and on the course of history?)

(2) *A social theory.* (What is the role of the individual in society and how do they relate to each other? How does order and social,

economic and political equality and inequality come about in society?)

(3) *A political theory.* (What is the meaning of liberty, equality and solidarity? Who or what legitimises the state, civil rights and property? How is citizenship defined? How is the state to be organised? What kind of policy measures are desirable, and to what extension?)

The answers to such questions throw light on the differences between the various ideologies. At the same time, we should keep in mind that ideologies in essence have a practical purpose: to develop a coherent vision in order to resolve social and cultural problems in a political way. The character of a specific ideology and its contents are to a large extent determined by the time- and cultural-specific ways in which these problems were defined, and the way ideologies are positioned in relation to each other. Ideologies are not static, but they change in history.[17]

In Bracher's (and also Marx's) definition there are negative connotations to ideology, because it offers a coloured and distorted picture of social and political reality. It is an 'essentially contested concept': its definition and also its application are not self-evident, but open for debate. In essentially contested concepts, values and negative or positive connotations are intrinsically part of the concept proper, and their application is the object of political strife. 'Democracy' and 'justice' are examples of a positively contested concept; 'propaganda' and 'ideology' of a negatively contested concept. Qualifications like 'that is ideology' or 'that is propaganda' will usually be considered in a negative and accusing way, while nowadays almost any government will present itself as 'democratic' and 'just'.

Social design and modern politics

As has become clear, there is a close relationship between the rise of ideologies and of sociological thinking. The social contract philosophers (Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau) can be viewed as predecessors of political ideologists as well as of social scientists. The questions that the ideologies as well as the social sciences try to answer are closely related. They are intrinsically linked to the disappearance of the traditional, especially religious underpinning of the social order and the rise of modern society and the effort to organize it in a new way.

Of course there are differences. Ideology is primarily directed at gaining political power. Sociology is directed primarily at understanding the structure of society and social change. However, precisely because sociology and ideology have a common origin and are engaged with similar questions, their function is similar and their affinity is inevitable. Many social thinkers, for example Tocqueville, Marx, Saint-Simon, Comte,

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[17] See Immanuel Wallerstein (1996). Three Ideologies or One? The Pseudo-battle of Modernity. In Stephen P. Turner (Ed.), *Social Theory and Sociology* (pp.53-69). Cambridge, MS, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Spencer and Weber, have played a political role. And in the work of other sociologists, such as Emile Durkheim, the political message was at least clearly implied. The same is true for the biomedical sciences, as can be illustrated by Darwin's and other theories of evolution and their reception in society.

Sociology and ideologies are indeed different, but at the same time both are basically responses to the great transformation process of traditional into modern society. In this context three factors explain their joint rise:

(1) *Secularisation and historization of the world view*. Although in the nineteenth century, especially in the private sphere, Christianity still flourished, at the same time the view of history was fundamentally secularised. History was generally seen as an autonomous process that was no longer subject to divine will and a supernatural destiny. New value systems emerged that offered rational, more or less coherent explanations of the world and the course of history. At the same time people could project their secular dreams about a better world in these explanations.

(2) *The need for legitimacy in the era of popular sovereignty and the growing impact of science*. Democratic political leadership needed more explicit legitimacy than the *Ancien Régime*, which based its power on religion (the divine right of kings and the self-evident authority of the church) and tradition (inherited privileges and given hierarchies). Ideologies on the other hand provided rulers with a democratic legitimacy from below. Through ideologies leaders communicated with their supporters and the masses. In that sense (mass)democracy and ideology are inseparable. Also, a rational, social-scientific underpinning of policy and social management, especially in the twentieth century, would increasingly become a source of legitimacy of government.

(3) *The concept of social design*. The French Revolution had clearly shown that society was not immutably anchored in tradition or the Will of God, but that it could be changed and planned by human intervention and (re)construction. All ideologies take a position vis-à-vis the issue of the (re)making of society. The ideologies provided an answer to the question how society should be shaped. Modern ideologies and, to a lesser extent, also the social sciences offer blueprints of how to design society. Knowledge claims in the social and human sciences are closely connected with the aim of managing man and society. The ideal of social design and utopian thinking are centuries old: in his political works Plato already nourished ideas about the ideal construction of society – but until about 1800 the means were lacking to realize dreams about a perfect society. The large-scale application of science and technology as well as bureaucratic organization provided the means to plan society. Social planning and engineering are typical modern endeavors.

Social design is a crucial concept for understanding modernization. Traditional life was rooted in an unquestioning acceptance of the symbols and customs of the past and the hierarchical social order as inscribed into the nature of things, as permanent and inevitable. Since the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, the modern Western world distinguished itself by an activist, engineering attitude with the aim to control and improve first nature and then also man and society. Society was no longer viewed as a natural or God-given order, but as an organisation or system that to a large extent could be (re)made through political, social, economic and legal intervention. This implied a completely new notion of politics: *the politics of modernity*. The citizens of the Greek *polis* were already engaged in politics, but the Greek way differed substantially from modern politics. In the public debates in the polis, the aim was not to change and organise society, but to engender harmony between various opinions. In the Greek *polis*, plagued by civil wars, harmony was vital. Aristotle's *Zôion Politikon* was a citizen who participated in the polis by giving his opinion, listening to other citizens, and debating with them. Thus, citizens shaped a temporary, fragile and uncertain common view on the world, which disappeared when the underlying opinions were no longer agreed on. The *polis* did not bring forth stable administrative institutions to shape the social relations and conditions of Greek society in a purposeful way. The political philosopher Hannah Arendt contrasted the politics in the *polis* to modern politics, which is directed towards intervention in the material world as well as in social relations. Modern man is *homo faber*, the making man, or the *animal laborans*, who labours incessantly to provide for his biological and social needs as well as to improve his living-conditions.[18]

The Platonic conception of politics is in a way more modern than that of the Greek *polis*. Plato's philosopher-king observes in a disinterested way the Idea of the Good and organises society accordingly. His utopia, however, remained a philosophical dream. Until the nineteenth or even twentieth century there were no or hardly technical or other means and large-scale institutions to transform these ideas into reality. In the early modern age two important foundations were laid for the realisation of modern idea of social design. The first was the rise of the new, Baconian ideal of knowledge, in which control over and the manipulation of natural laws with the help of technology are crucial. According to Francis Bacon one can only possess knowledge about something if one can construct it like a machine. Science and technology are closely linked in this practical notion of knowledge.

The second foundation of social design was the rise of the modern centralised state.[19] In their struggle against regional feudal lords and other forms of particularism, the monarchs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries accumulated power and laid the foundation for the modern

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[18] See Hannah Arendt (1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Hannah Arendt (1963). *On Revolution*. New York: Viking Press.
[19] See G. Poggi (1978). *The Development of the Modern State. A Sociological Introduction*. London: Hutchinson & Co.

centralised state. Because these absolutist monarchs needed increasingly large sums of money in order to monopolize the right of using force, to keep the internal order (against a factious nobility and potentially rebellious lower orders) and to pay for their wars against other states, they tried to organise their realms in a way that enabled them to impose taxes on their subjects as efficiently as possible. They started to establish centralised bureaucratic institutions and new sciences, which had to provide knowledge about their realm: *Polizeiwissenschaften* and *Kameralistiek* (policy management) and later also statistics. These new scientific techniques were employed to gather data, which would be used to control and organise the realm in an efficient way. Later, in the context of this scientific surveying of society and the bureaucratic organisation of the state, individuals were allocated to groups and assessed as conforming to or deviating from what was considered as the normal standard. The development of the social and human sciences, according to the French philosopher and historian of science Michel Foucault, originated in the context of surveying, controlling and disciplining individuals and groups of people.[20] The way in which the modern state started to organise its realm was in line with the new practical knowledge ideal of Bacon. The early-modern absolutist state was beginning to construct society and, in this process, systematic knowledge about society was acquired as well, which in turn could be used to improve the (bureaucratic) organisation and regulation of society. The rise of the modern centralised state very much brought *homo faber* into politics. The scale and organization of the state would increase, and populations would be mobilized on a larger scale than in traditional society.

The decisive step towards our modern ideal of social design and what the historian John Schwarzmantel characterizes as the 'politics of modernity', however, was taken at the end of the eighteenth century in the French Revolution.[21] It was the emergence of strong, centralised and bureaucratised political institutions and the utopian impulse of this revolution which paved the way for social design. In the eighteenth century, an enormous gap appeared between what Koselleck termed the 'horizon of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation'. As a consequence of the Enlightenment and the political crises of the *Ancien Régime*, the desired ideal world came to be very far removed from the real world experienced in daily life. That utopian moment, the longing for a radical break with existing society and for a completely new beginning, created space for blueprints of society and social planning, the belief that a new and better world could be created. Liberals and socialists, for example, wanted to organise society on the basis of economic production, although in very different ways: liberalism focused on individuals fending for themselves on the free market, whereas socialism centred on the need for a collective organisation and regulation of the economy. Nationalists, to

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[20] Michel Foucault (1995/1977). *Discipline and punish. The birth of the prison*. New York: Vintage Books.
[21] John Schwarzmantel (1998). *The Age of Ideology. Political ideologies from the American Revolution to post-modern times*. London: MacMillan.

give another example, tried to create a new national citizen through educational and cultural policies.

The idea of social design would expand on a huge scale in the twentieth century. The development of large-scale technical systems, methods of surveillance and control, transport and communication infrastructures, efficient concentration and management of information and other resources, and large-scale and rationally organized bureaucracies enabled governments to mobilize and manipulate populations in unprecedented ways. In this context the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman characterizes the modern state as a 'gardening state', which designs society by cultivating what is desired ('useful crops') and pulling out what is not desired ('the weeds'). According to Bauman, the planned organization of modern society tends to a stifling 'total administration': more and more dimensions of human life are controlled by scientific management, technological imperatives and bureaucratic procedures, which are geared to rational efficiency.[22] Totalitarian regimes like the Soviet-Union, Nazi-Germany and communist China undertook grand-scale social, economic and sociobiological experiments – however with disastrous consequences and many victims. But also in democratic countries the welfare state, which more and more intervened in social and economic life in order to advance and guarantee the welfare and well-being (and also surveillance) of its populations, was systematically organised on the basis of the most advanced social-scientific insights.

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[22] Zygmunt Baumann (1989/1999). *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Cambridge: Polity Press; cf. James C. Scott (1998). *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.