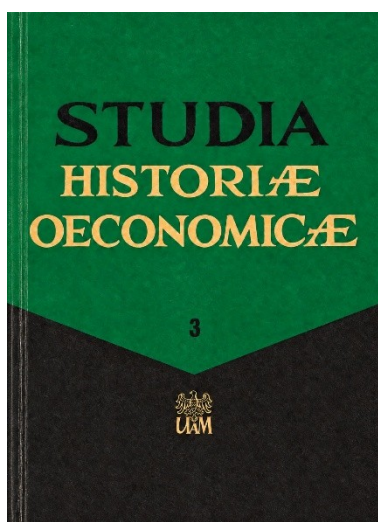




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Jerzy Topolski

CAUSES OF DUALISM IN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
OF MODERN EUROPE
(A Tentative New Theory)

I

Among the principal processes taking place in the economic and social life of Modern Europe the following three ones are most frequently mentioned:

- (1) the rise of the capitalist system,
- (2) the formation of dualism in the economic and social development,
- (3) the rise of the manorial-serf economy.

Those processes became the subject of many historical comments and many attempts at explaining them were formulated, particularly concerning process (3). Those attempts at explanations may be called theories, because they present certain assumptions as to the development of the phenomena concerned, phenomena which it would be impossible to observe in their development, in their inner interrelations either directly or by means of sources. In my subsequent remarks I should like to circumscribe the mutual relation of the discussed processes and thus also the mutual relations of the explaining theories. At the very start one can only say that an explanation of any of the above mentioned processes is to a greater or smaller extent an explanation of the other ones. In order to facilitate further discussion let us reconstruct the basic questions which the above mentioned three theories are the answers for:

(1') why about the sixteenth century does there emerge an economic system in Europe which is characterized by employee man-power?

(2') why it happened so that in some countries of Europe capitalism developed and in other countries (east of the Elbe river) processes of re-feudalization took place?

(3') what were the causes of the formation of the manorial-serf system (which, as we know, was the form of the re-feudalization processes in Central and Eastern Europe)?

Process (2) is sometimes more narrowly understood. Then the inquiry is concerned with dualism not in the economic development, but in agrarian one. In that case the question is formulated as follows:

(2a') what were the causes of the differences of the agrarian development of Europe, why in the countries east of the Elbe river the manorial-serf system developed and why in Western countries the rental system of the peasant economy became typical?

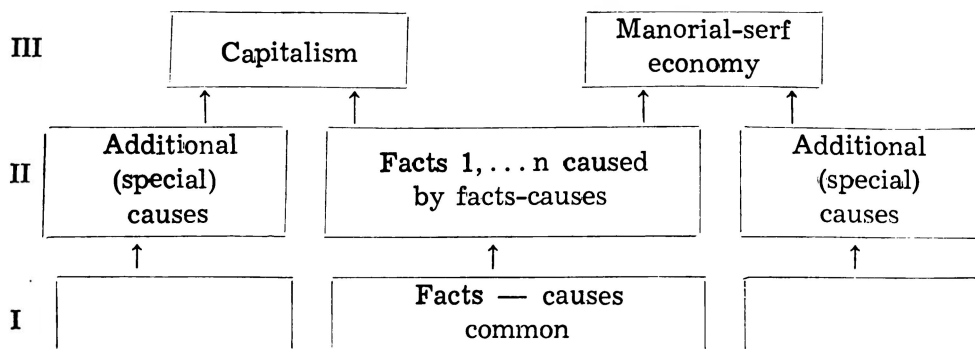
In subsequent discussion I am interested in process (2) in its wider sense, i.e. not limited to agrarian problems.

The manner in which process (2) is interconnected and so is question (2') with the other processes and the other respective questions depends on whether processes (1) and (3) have common causes, or whether they are largely independent from each other.

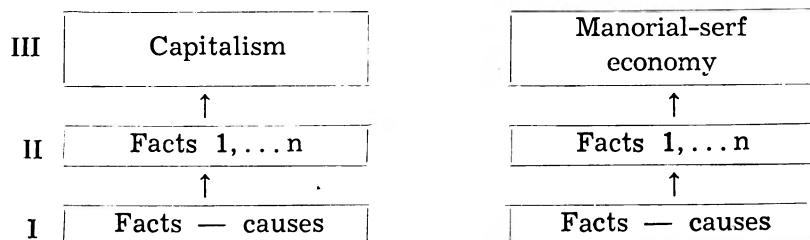
In the first case, i.e. if the rise of capitalism and the formation of the manorial-serf economy have a common origin, the theory which explains the process of the development of dualism in economy is the consequence of a certain wider theory which explains at the same time the rise of capitalism and the rise of the manorial-serf economy. It will attempt at an explanation why the same causes brought about, in different regions, different results. In the second case, if it becomes clear that the above mentioned processes (the development of capitalism and the rise of the manorial-serf economy), are independent as far as their causes are concerned, a theory explaining the economic dualism will have to explain the rise of capitalism and the rise of manorial economy separately. In that case the explanation of processes (1) and (3) becomes at the same time the explanation of process (2).

Graphically both above mentioned situations, being at the same time reflections of the structure of the respective theories, can be presented in the following way:

A. The structure of the theory explaining economic dualism with the assumption that the cause of the rise of capitalism and of the rise of the manorial-serf economy are common to both forms



B. The structure of the theory explaining economic dualism with the assumption that the rise of capitalism and the rise of manorial-serf economy are independent from each other



It is easy to note that in situation A the explanation of economic dualism may be understood either in a wider or in a narrower sense. The wider explanation must comprise all the stages (I—III) of the above presented structure and the narrower explanation — only a reconstruction of the additional (special) causes concomittant with the chain of the common causes.

In the literature of the subject the explanation of the rise of either capitalism or manorial-serf economy followed structure B. In such a situation it was not necessary to discuss separately the problem of economic dualism. As I have pointed out, explanations of the rise of the manorial-serf economy in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are particularly numerous. Many of these theories, which seemed to be right at the first glance, were too easily exploded by the argument that they point out to causes working both in Western and in Eastern and Central Europe, i. e. to causes which had influenced both the rise of capitalism and the rise of manorial-serf economy. As a result the discussions were becoming more and more futile.

The only way out of this deadlock seems to be a revision of the most general theoretical assumptions accepted *explicite* or *implicite* in the process of those explanations. In other words, I suggest here breaking away with the assumptions of the independent character of the processes of the rise of capitalism and of those connected with the rise of the manorial-serf economy and I suggest, too, the acceptance of a more complex explanation structure (i. e. structure A). It makes it possible to differentiate above all the situation in which under discussion are the common or the special causes. The rise of the manorial-serf economy (and of capitalism) was influenced in conjunction by both common and special causes. Thus, the fact that in some theory, explaining the rise of the manorial-serf economy, causes working in Europe as a whole are pointed out (i. e. common causes) does not abolish that theory, of course, if the place of those causes in the whole structure of explanation is shown beforehand.

II

From structure A of the theory explaining the rise of dualism in the economic development of Europe we may conclude that the explanation procedure should be double-channelled, i.e. discovering both the common causes of the rise of capitalism and the manorial-serf economy and the special causes of both these processes.

Let us first pay our attention to the common causes. I have already discussed them in my publication entitled, *The Rise of Capitalism in Europe in the Fourteenth-Seventeenth Centuries* (Warsaw 1965) and then partly also in an article published in *Rivista di Storia dell'Agricoltura* (No. 2, 1967) entitled, *Les tendances de l'évolution agraire de l'Europe Centrale et Orientale aux XVI^{me}—XVIII^{me} siècles*.

Here are my principal propositions pertaining to those causes based upon more detailed studies which I am not able to present in this article.

The point of departure is provided by the economic and social changes which were taking place in Europe in the last centuries of the Middle Ages. Among those processes I point out especially to the economic situation of the particular classes. Those researches imply that at the end of the Middle Ages, against the background of the developing market situation, the incomes of the bourgeoisie and the peasants definitely increased (these classes were indirectly participating in the economic life), and the incomes of the gentry, i.e. of a class the incomes of which were based on rent received from the peasants, declined. The gentry took the smallest advantage from the economic development. At first the development of market economy made the gentry to stick to a system in which the feudal duties were based on rent. In the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries, however, in connection of the continuous fall of the value of money, also falls the purchasing power of the rent received from the peasants. In England 20 shillings were minted from a pound of silver in 1244 and as many as 34 in 1464, 70 per cent more. The situation was similar in other countries. At the same time the wages of employees rose, which also militated against the incomes of the gentry. Apart from that, one must take into consideration the increase of needs, a corollary to a general rise of the standard of living of the late medieval society. It was increasingly difficult for the gentry, which was also increasing in number, to meet the requirements of a *more nobilium* mode of life. Those requirements were more and more exacting as the model of the Renaissance man was gradually formed. Disproportions in the dynamics of the incomes of the gentry and the bourgeoisie were rising fast. There was even movement in opposite directions. The gentry which claimed a leading role in the state and society began to exper-

ience serious difficulties. A process of the impoverishment of the gentry, both relative and absolute, followed.

The gentry could escape from the implications of this situation only by means of its own activeness. That activeness, at an increasing rate, can be actually observed all over Europe.

Two phases and at the same time two basic forms of that activeness can be differentiated:

- (1) non-economic activeness,
- (2) economic activeness..

The increase of various non-economic action is chronologically earlier than the later economic expansion of the gentry. Most of its cases are confined to fourteenth-fifteenth centuries. In a non-economic way it was possible to increase their income only by means of effecting a change in the deal of the national economy. It was not easy to increase the exploitation of the peasants who had the opportunities of an easy migration to the developing towns. Neither was it easy to take over a part of the incomes of the bourgeoisie. Short of robbery the only way left was to intermarry with the representatives of the bourgeois class. Far more effective were the changes in the share of income among the feudal class itself. Here actions within the temporal section of the gentry and the actions of the temporal gentry against the church must be differentiated. In the first group one must point out such things as service to a richer gentleman and obtaining of lucrative offices. The temporal gentry of many countries of Europe attacked with particular activeness the profits of the church. It was paralleled by the internal struggle for the incomes of the church (higher functions are increasingly reserved for the gentry) and a more and more pronounced tendency to take over in a direct way the estates (and incomes) of the church. That attack on the estates of the church was accompanied by another form in which the gentry tried to make good for the falling incomes, i.e. with practices of predatory knights. This aspect may comprise both individual acts of robbery and larger warfare. Even in wars involving whole states the spirit of predatory knighthood was a stimulus. This created a kind of vicious circle. Wars and internal chaos deepened by the predatory conduct of the gentry created conditions for the maintenance and development and impunity of that particular form of non-economic compensation exacted by the gentry for their falling incomes. In that case the adversary was not clearly definable from the class point of view. In practice the gentry of the enemy political camp was robbed or the gentry of another country and even the peasants. Predatory practices could not, of course, solve the problem of the gentry's incomes. By disorganizing the economic life of the country it indirectly influ-

enced the dwindling of those incomes. All in all, until the end of the fifteenth century all the efforts and ways on the part of the gentry to counteract the process of dwindling of their income did not bring any visible results. The Middle Ages were closing with a negative balance for the gentry.

The only effective method of increasing incomes in the situation of those times in which Europe developed economically was to develop one's own economic activity.

III

The sixteenth century witnesses a marked increase of the economic and social life of Europe. It must be also recalled that in the last centuries of the Middle Ages there were important changes in the social structure of the gentry. Those changes consisted above all in the infiltration of new social forces into the gentry. Those changes were going on in the sixteenth century, so that the economically active gentry of the time cannot be mechanically compared with the medieval knight-hood. The English gentry, the French *noblesse de robe*, the Russian *dvorianye* or the Polish middle gentry — those were the representatives of the new enterprising gentry.

Together with the earlier development of the activeness of the bourgeoisie and the peasants the increase of the economic activity of the gentry produced in its effect what we call the economic boom of the sixteenth century. Because that increase of the economic activeness of the gentry, caused by the dwindling of their incomes, was a new factor, we attribute to it the function of the stimulus which mobilized the simultaneous processes of primary accumulation, thus forming a starting point for the development of capitalism. What was the reason, however, of the fact that those opportunities for the development of capitalism were not exploited by the majority of the territories of Europe? By asking this question we enter the sphere of the special causes of economic dualism.

The question concerning those special causes may be formulated in a different way, i.e. as a question concerning the causes of different forms of economic activeness of the gentry in different countries.

Let us, to start with, make a survey of those various forms of the activeness of the gentry in the sixteenth century. The process of the enclosures in England was hitherto given most attention. There is no need to give it a special treatment. As we know, this process consisted in the destruction of the common-field system for the purpose of providing pastures for sheep. In France, too, a tendency to concentrate land may be observed. The gentry is more and more definitely interested in agricultural production. M. Bloch pointed out that in France appeared

"a new type of gentleman". Such a gentleman organized his own farming estate of a manorial type. The most profitable form, however, was for him the system of *métayage*, which became dominant nearly in all the territories of France. It was used both in the production of grains and wine. A similar evolution may be found in the territories of Italy near the French border (among other forms the Italian form of *métayage*, i. e. the *mezzadria*), and, on the other border the neighbouring territories of Germany. There was an extensive differentiation in Germany, however, as far as land concentration and the economic activeness of the gentry is concerned. In Rheinland, Würtemberg, Baden and in North-Western Germany there were tendencies among the gentry to organize their own farming estates, of course not so big as those east of the Elbe river, and to increase the feudal rent. Bavaria was a region representing something between the systems of France, Western Germany and Austria. Such a mixed type was also characteristic of Frisia, and Schleswig-Holstein. Interesting data showing the increase of the economic activeness of the gentry of those regions can be found in the publications of H. Kellenbenz.

The economic activeness of the gentry developed quite different forms in Spain and Portugal. There were many such forms, but colonial expansion was the most characteristic of them all. It originated upon the same ground of the counter-action of the gentry (with some additional factors at work) which caused the English enclosures, the French *métayage*, and the agricultural and commercial activity of the gentry of North Germany. Apart from colonial expansion we can point out also predatory actions, not yet extinct in the sixteenth century, sheep breeding (monopolized by Mesta) and the sale of wool. We can also speak about the increase of the economic activeness of the Balkan gentry, increasingly dealt with in the literature of the subject.

IV

In the light of what happened in Western Europe, the growing agrarian changes in the countries east of the Elbe river, taking place already in the fifteenth century, are quite clearly a variety of the changes taking place in Europe as a whole, or, to formulate it in a different way, as a form of the increase of the economic activeness of the gentry proper to those countries. In the first half of the sixteenth century the differences between countries lying east and west of the Elbe river were not yet so pronounced, as far as changes in the agricultural system are concerned, as they were in the years that followed. The forms of activeness were various, although the tendency which was becoming dominant was to organize manors based upon statute labour. Beside the growing number of grain manors (most typical for the

territories of Poland), there were such things as the growing interest of the gentry in sheep and cattle breeding (Mecklemburg, Western Pomerania, Moldavia, Wallachia), pond economy (Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia), special plantations, as e.g. wine (Hungary), the exploitation of forests (Kurland), industry (Bohemia, Russia) etc.

An interpretation of the development of the manorial economy based upon *corvée* at the European background makes it possible, as I have already pointed out, to shed a new light upon one of the most controversial question in this branch of scholarship, i.e. at the causes of the formation of the manorial economy based upon statute labour. In some of the theories it was pointed out that there were some facts comprising common causes of the growth of the economic activeness of the gentry which produced both processes of the rise of capitalism and processes characteristic of re-feudalization. In other theories factors were pointed out which influenced the gentry of the country in question to select their specific form of economic activization.

According to the advocates of the theory which could be called 'military' (G. F. Fuchs, F. Grossmann, F. Piekosiński, I. T. Baranowski) the gentry when the character of the army had been changed, as a result lost its military importance and means of livelihood, and was thus forced to take an active part in rural economy. According to other theories (without taking into consideration any racial argumentation), the feudal gentry was influenced in their manor-founding activity by the dwindling of the rents paid in cash, by a higher profitableness of the manorial economy as compared with the rent system (S. Orsini-Rosenberg), a great number of unused land which it was impossible otherwise to cultivate (F. Bujak, R. Grodecki), conditions which were particularly favourable for grain production east of the Elbe river (R. Krzymowski), a strong political position of the gentry in those countries (G. Below), the rising prices of agricultural products in the sixteenth century which made the gentry interested in agricultural production (M. Sering, J. Pekař), export opportunities to the countries of Western Europe (F. Rachfahl), the home market (B. D. Grekov), a confluence of such factors as the facility of selling agricultural products and a sharper form of serfdom (J. Rutkowski). The growth of the political importance of the gentry was pointed out by W. Rusiński and the dislocation of class forces in which the gentry was able to obtain a dominant position was discussed by B. Zientara.

The fact that so many factors have been pointed out and that as a result hardly any new ones can be found causes a more or less exact repetition of theories. Some authors favour one factor, other authors still another one. It has not been realized so far that those factors may

be referred alternatively to two different processes or to a more general one, i. e. the dwindling of the incomes of the gentry at the end of the Middle Ages and the economic activeness of the gentry that grew upon that ground or to the form of that activeness that was characteristic of the territories east of the Elbe river, i. e. above all to the economy based upon the manorial corvée system. That is why the adverse criticisms of the importance of some of the factors (such as, e. g. the devaluation of the rents or the change of the military system), showing that they allegedly did not influence the rise of the manorial corvée system, because there were areas where they were at work and that form of economy did not rise, are unsatisfactory. Both the devaluation of the rents and the changes in the military system influenced the weakening of the position of the gentry and caused its incomes to dwindle. This as a result brought about forms of economic activation of the gentry, differing from region to region and also influenced by individual factors.

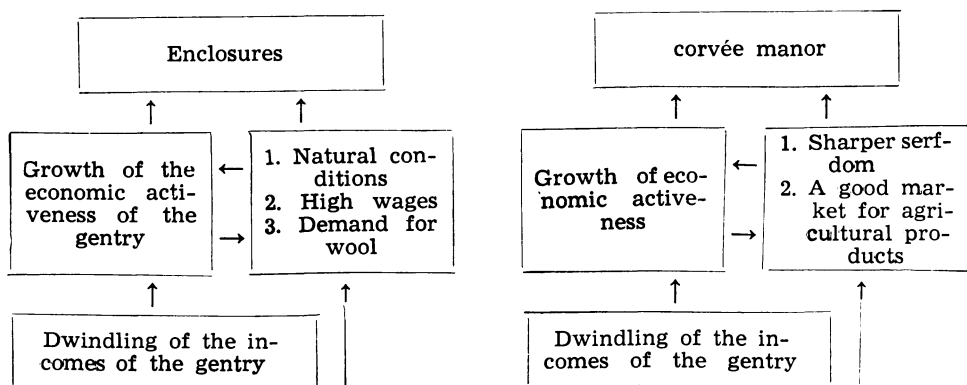
Those individual or special factors on which the choice on the part of the gentry of one form of activeness or another largely depended, may be divided into 3 groups:

- (1) situation in man-power,
- (2) market situation,
- (3) natural conditions.

As may be seen, these are factors of internal character, characteristic of a given region. There was no serfdom in England at the end of the Middle Ages. Thus no attempts at enforcing statute labour were possible. It was necessary to choose a form of production for which much labour was not necessary. There was a good market for wool at home and abroad and apart from that, mainly thanks to the bourgeoisie, English cloth was becoming dominant in sixteenth century Europe. Natural conditions were favourable for sheep breeding. In Poland on the other hand, conditions were favourable for the cultivation of grains which were in a growing demand in Western Europe and, apart from that, there were the growing prices which created an improvement of the terms of trade for the gentry (till the middle of the seventeenth century). Serfdom was not abolished, there were some small corvée forms preserved, so it was possible to find precedents.

Here are two graphs explaining the development of the English enclosures and the corvée manors (see p. 12).

The scheme of the explanation corresponding to the situation A is similar. This is on purpose treated as an open system, because the development of specific conditions of internal character depended on the whole previous history of the region in question.



The different results of the growth of the economic activeness of the gentry could be observed in the seventeenth and in the eighteenth centuries. They influenced economic growth in a different way. In regions where the gentry hampered the productive initiative of other classes (as it was the case in Poland), the results were negative not only in the sphere of economy but in the social and political spheres as well.

Translated by
H. ZBIERSKI