

Moralizing Economics, Making the Social Scientific: From Political Economy to Social Economy in the Early NAPSS

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As sociology and social history increasingly become reflexive, there has been growing interest in interrogating and debating their basic categories of analysis. This article contributes to this debate through a close empirical study of discourses of “the social” in the early transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, particularly the association’s social economy section. “The social” was formed into a scientific category within social economy through its confrontation with the “dismal science” of political economy. Social economists insisted that all social relations were moral relations and had to be conceived and understood as such. The social only became fully scientific when it made the shift from being perceived as an empirical object of investigation to becoming a foundational explanatory category. This early contest to infuse the social with moral significance was far from being settled during the nineteenth century; rather, the question of the character of the relationship between the social and the moral has remained central to a social scientific debate that has only intensified in recent years.

La sociologie et l’histoire sociale tendant de plus en plus à la réflexion, leurs catégories d’analyse fondamentales suscitent une interrogation et des discussions grandissantes. Le présent article alimente ce débat par une étude empirique serrée des discours sur le « social » dans les premiers travaux de la National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, en particulier la section d’économie sociale de l’association. On fait du « social » une catégorie scientifique de l’économie sociale par opposition à la « science lugubre » de l’économie politique. Les économistes sociaux affirmaient que toutes les relations sociales étaient des relations morales et devaient être comprises en ce sens. Le social n’est devenu pleinement scientifique que lorsqu’on a cessé de le percevoir comme un objet d’étude empirique pour le considérer comme une catégorie explicative fondamentale. On a loin d’avoir réglé cet affrontement précoce pour infuser le social d’un sens moral au XIX^e siècle. Plutôt, la question de la nature de la relation entre le social et le moral est demeurée

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au cœur d'un débat socio-scientifique qui n'a fait que s'accroître ces dernières années.

AS RECENT WORK attests, *the social* has finally been given its history.¹ Different constructions of it have been described in their historical specificity and contingency, such that the naturalness of the term, and the domains to which it refers, can no longer be assumed. Here I suggest that a distinction should be made between the social as *explanans* — that which does explanatory work — and as *explanandum* — that which is to be explained. *Explanandum*, in other words, is an *object* category; it refers to an object of investigation towards which an explanatory discourse is directed. *Explanans*, on the other hand, designates explanatory categories, words employed to explain the emergence, development, and decline, for example, of various objects of investigation. The distinction somewhat coincides with that between an empirical reference and a theoretical one or, in a more philosophical context, between ontology and epistemology. In the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, *the social* shifted from being something to be investigated to being something that explains things, and this shift represents the substance of a transition from “moral and political” science to “social science” as such.²

With this distinction in mind, I document one contextual moment in the social history of the social, its construction as a scientific term in the early years of the first National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (NAPSS).³ In contrast to the case in contemporary social science, in the early years of the NAPSS the social was generally not used to *explain* anything, the founders of the association being more concerned to establish the social as a scientific *object*, around which, contrary to detractors and cynics, one could build a science. Mary Poovey documents how, by the mid-nineteenth century, the social was constituted as a distinct domain of inquiry, but it was constituted as such less in opposition to political economy than by embracing and going beyond that science through a strategy of bringing *the moral* to bear upon it.⁴ While the social was constructed as a legitimate sci-

1 See, for instance, Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Patrick Joyce, ed., *The Social in Question: New Bearings in History and the Social Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

2 I wish to thank Bruce Curtis for suggesting that I clarify and stress this point.

3 The NAPSS is rather under-researched, but see Lawrence Goldman, “The Social Science Association, 1857–1886: A Context for Mid-Victorian Liberalism”, *English Historical Review*, vol. 101 (January 1986); Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol, eds., *States, Social Knowledge, and the Origins of Modern Social Policies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press,), pp. 31–35.

4 Poovey, *Making a Social Body*. Bryan S. Turner, in “Introduction” in Turner, *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), notes that the “emergence of the social as a specific field of analysis has always been an essential part of the implicit set of relationships between economic and social theory” (p. 4). He suggests, however, that “to some extent the concept of the social in sociology is often equivalent to the idea of the not-economic”. This is similar to Poovey’s

entific object of inquiry, it was the moral and the material,⁵ and the relations between them, that initially served as explanatory categories in the schemes and knowledges of the NAPSS. In “social economy”, however, the social was slowly extended from *explanandum* to *explanans*, thus becoming an explanatory as well as an object category. As an object category, the social could serve as an organizing referent for the elaboration of “facts” and the collection of statistical information, but, by becoming, in addition, an explanatory category, the social served the construction of a specifically *social science*. Perhaps more precisely, the shift was from a mere empirical or documentary science to a fully explanatory and thus theoretical one.

The distinction between the object of knowledge and knowledge itself should not be overly drawn, however, since the conceptualization and naming of objects is deeply entangled in the schemes that seek to explain those objects. Indeed, the absence of this theoretical distinction from much of the literature is not so much a failure as it is a refusal. The sociology of scientific knowledge and social, cultural, and historical studies of science in general have blurred the distinction between the object of knowledge and knowledge itself because the distinction coincides with that between ontology and epistemology, domains difficult to keep apart precisely because metaphysics, the business of speaking about what exists in order that knowledge be possible at all, is already and at the same time part of the business of making knowledge claims. Thus to claim to speak about a reality independent of our knowledge of it seems to some to be absurd: knowledge changes historically (even at the level of theoretical physics), such that what exists — the object — and knowledge of what exists — explanation of the object — are kept distinct only by an apparently momentous sleight of hand.

There is logic to this argument, one that 400 years of realist philosophy has

argument. In the case of France, Jacques Donzelot and Giovanna Procacci have recognized that social economy, as early as the 1830s, involved a “systematic grafting of morality on to economics”. Giovanna Procacci, “Social Economy and the Government of Poverty” in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), p. 157. I suggest, with Procacci, that the social was economic plus moral. It is crucial, however, that the social not simply be viewed as a “specific object of analysis” (Procacci, “Social Economy”, p. 157); it was also made into an explanatory category.

⁵ It is crucial to remember that the equation taken for granted today between “the material” and “the economic” barely existed in the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, this equation is largely a Marxist invention that, along with the injunction against reification, has precluded a broader and more cultural understanding of material forms. Reference to the material in the nineteenth century ranged across the domain of objects now considered “material culture”, everything from land, buildings, and bodies to tools, technologies, clothing (more broadly fabrics), furniture, and pots and pans. Because eighteenth- and nineteenth-century elites viewed a cultured environment as a sign of both grace and civilization, they had an understanding of materiality closer to that of contemporary material culture scholars than to the currently rather taken-for-granted Marxist idea. See Patrick Carroll-Burke, “Material Designs: Engineering Cultures and Engineering States — Ireland 1650–1900”, *Theory and Society*, vol. 31 (2002), pp. 75–114.

not managed to dislodge.⁶ Social history and the sociology of scientific knowledge have tended to avoid it by speaking only about what scientists *say* exists and how and why they come to say what they do in the context of particular socio-historical circumstances. It is left to the scientists themselves to argue over what *actually* exists. Post-structuralists, on the other hand, tend to push the problem to its apparently unsolvable conclusion. A rigorous and committed example is Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter*.⁷ Butler criticizes Foucault for implying the existence of a body prior to its inscription by discourse. No such body can be spoken of, she argues, because the body is "always already in discourse". In other words, it is logically impossible to maintain a distinction between ontological and epistemological categories. The "matter" of bodies thus becomes indistinguishable from what we "say" it is at any particular moment in history.

It is not necessary, however, to follow this logic. Indeed, it is precisely the rigorously logical character of the post-structuralist argument that illustrates the difference between what is logical and what is sensible. While logic operates at the level of pure abstraction, reason can be made sensible if it is subjected to the government of empirical evidence. Apart from pointing out the irony of the post-structuralist argument, that it *compels*, in the best Enlightenment tradition, one and only one correct conclusion, it can be countered empirically by pointing out that the distinction between that which exists and that which is known about it is in fact regularly made by social and historical actors. The distinction is maintained by researchers because it is an effective strategy for gaining knowledge of the world, and the act of wrenching apart words and things is rightly associated with the development of modern scientific knowledge. Thus, while there is little likelihood of a return to the realist fiction of an absolute separation between subject and object (and its correlate, the modern philosophical problem of how to connect the two in an epistemologically satisfactory way), nor is it likely that most social scientists and historians will accept the post-structuralist invitation to collapse entirely (or "implode") ontological/object categories into epistemological/explanatory ones.

As a practical matter of doing social science/history, the issue is better approached empirically than logically. Rather than prescribing, on the basis of a rigorously logical argument, what historical actors may or may not be permitted to do, one can simply document what they actually do. It becomes clear that the social was not always, as it is today, employed as an explanatory category, and that its use as such in contemporary socio-historical studies needs to be understood precisely by reference to the work it is doing in a particular context. In early social science, use of the social was for the most part merely a reference to an object of investigation. The first major transi-

6 See the introductory chapter in Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

7 Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

tion of the social from *explanandum* to *explanans* comes with the formation of “sociology” within — and in some respects coextensive with — “social science”. Sociology, at the turn of the twentieth century, adopts the social as its central *explanandum* and begins the process of systematically expanding that object through the deployment of the social as *explanans*.

As sociology competed with other emergent disciplinary knowledges, especially psychology and biology, its claim that certain phenomena belonged to its domain of explanation came under challenge and intense competition. Durkheim is particularly notable in this respect, constructing suicide as a legitimate object of sociological inquiry by deploying the social as the explanatory category for suicide rates. What appeared an entirely psychological matter was brought within the scope of *the social scientific*.⁸ Subsequently, the “individual” — or more precisely “the self” — was fully explained in social terms. It was a small step from there to encircle the domain of “reality” and from there the object called “natural science”. Social constructivism, particularly the sociology of scientific knowledge, completed the sociological circle during the past quarter century by providing social explanations for both “social reality” and scientific knowledge. Indeed, it is in these three areas, the individual/self, (social) reality, and natural scientific knowledge, that one sees the crucial deployment of the social as *explanans*, as the mechanism through which sociology annexed these phenomena into the domain of its *explanandum*. The development of social history took a similar path, first constituting a set of socio-historical objects that could be documented, then expanding the social as a category capable of explaining those and other “facts”.⁹ In both history and sociology, it was in important respects by targeting workers, their conditions, problems, aspirations, and struggles, that the social was made scientific.

8 Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (New York: The Free Press, 1951 [1897]). Durkheim identified three basic types of suicide: egotistic, altruistic, and anomic. Suicide was a symptom of an imbalance between social integration and social differentiation and thus “result[ed] directly from social causes” (p. 294). This emphasis on the social as a causal category marks the transition from an empirical or object-centred science to a theoretical or explanatory one.

9 It might be suggested that “social history” originated in the work of Hegel and Marx, but Hegel was more centrally concerned with the dialectical history of ideas, whereas Marx quickly subsumed the social into the economic, so that it was the latter that explained the former (cf. note 110). In any case, the idea of social history, like that of the labour theory of value, was widely held in the mid-Victorian period. For instance, a contributor to the social economy section of the NAPSS used the term “social history” to refer to the history of the relations between social classes, but did so in a way that treated the social as an object rather than an explanatory category. William Mathew Williams, “On the Teaching of Social Economy”, *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, 1857* (hereafter *TNAPSS*) (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1858), p. 510. Within the Marxist tradition the social is only given some explanatory power relatively autonomous from the economic with, for example, the ground-breaking work of Thompson. See especially E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964 [1963]). For a useful discussion of the “new social history” and its conflicts with post-structuralism, see Mariana Valverde, “Some Remarks on the Rise and Fall of Discourse Analysis”, *Histoire sociale/ Social History*, vol. 33, no. 65 (May 2000), pp. 59–77.

Given the power of this expansion of the social, it is difficult to forgive Nikolas Rose for suggesting that the late twentieth century might be witnessing the “death of the social”. Like talk about the “end of history” or the “end of science”, the idea that the social is moribund demands a degree of wishful thinking. Sociologists and social historians, having fought for a century so that the social could live, are not now likely to deliver it to the cemetery. Sociologists are resisting current attempts to collapse the social into the discursive or cultural. For instance, the distinction between the social and the cultural is still, according to Charles Tilly, a useful one.¹⁰ It is not that they are separate ontologically, but that one can strategically abstract them from each other for epistemic and methodological purposes. The social can be used to refer more immediately to “social ties”, to interactive relationships, to dyads, triads, families, classes, and so on. The social can, in other words, still serve to target *relations*. The cultural, on the other hand, can be used to designate the symbolic and material universe in which these interactions are relationally embedded.¹¹

Yet it can be readily acknowledged that in other contexts talk of the social should be restricted. In the second edition of their groundbreaking book, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts*, Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar chose to remove the word “social” from their title.¹² As they explained, use of the social in this way only made sense in the context of a struggle with those who claimed that sociology could have nothing meaningful to say about the “content” of natural scientific knowledge. Indeed, it was widely believed that knowledge was scientific precisely because, and to the extent that, it was asocial and ahistorical. Once this was shown to be wrong,¹³

10 Charles Tilly, “Epilogue: Now Where?” in George Steinmetz, ed., *State/Culture: State Formation After the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 407–419, especially pp. 411–412. Interestingly, Tilly’s approach seems somewhat in keeping with the early development of the term in the NAPSS, when the social was located in the everyday relations between, for instance, workers and employers. Steven Seidman interrogates sociology’s use of the term in “Sociology and Cultural Studies” in Elizabeth Long, ed., *From Sociology to Cultural Studies: New Perspectives* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997). See also Turner, “Introduction”. An indication that the social is very much alive and well is Steve Fuller, *Social Epistemology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

11 For examples of the current state of material culture studies, see the articles by Chandra Mukerji, Thomas Gieryn, and Patrick Carroll-Burke in the special volume of *Theory and Society*, vol. 31 (2002).

12 Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1979); Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

13 “Wrong” is a strong term, and I do not use it lightly. The fact is, however, that there now exists an enormous literature in sociology, history, philosophy, and anthropology that demonstrates that the idea of an asocial, acultural, and ahistorical science is simply wrong. For instance, see Michael Mulkay, “Some Aspects of Cultural Growth in the Natural Sciences”, *Social Research*, vol. 36 (1969), pp. 22–52; David Edge and Michael Mulkay, *Astronomy Transformed* (New York: Wiley, 1976); Latour and Woolgar, *Laboratory Life* (1979 ed.); John Law, “Theories and Methods in the Sociology of Science: An Interpretive Approach”, *Social Sciences Information*, vol. 13 (1974),

and once it was shown that all interactions, including those of an epistemic character, are crucially social, reference to that fact became redundant and indeed a hindrance to the work of those studying the social history of scientific knowledge. The job of the social as an explanatory category was in important respects done, since the object “scientific knowledge” had been successfully made into a legitimate object of socio-historical inquiry and explanation. Latour and Woolgar, by questioning the further value of using the social as an adjective placed before “construction”, thus presented a welcome methodological injunction against its redundant usage. Yet we need not, as they suggest, entirely purge talk of the social.¹⁴ A fine-tuning would suggest that use of the social as an explanatory category should be deferred in favour of more specific terms, but that it can and should be retained as a designation that is strategically appropriate in some contexts, if not indispensable in others. For instance, invoking the social as an explanatory category remains a particularly useful discursive counter against the excessive psychologizing and biologizing discourses that today remain so prevalent. Indeed, social studies has always invoked the social as a strategy for holding in check these other, equally imperialistic, discourses of *the human*. A close empirical study of the ordinary papers in social economy presented at the early NAPSS shows how the social was marshalled to expand understanding beyond, though not necessarily against, the economic. In this respect it appears that Mary Poovey overstates the extent to which the social was colonized by the economic. As she puts it, the “social body” was “dissolved into its constitutive members”, understood as “free”, “self-governing”, and “disciplined individuals”.¹⁵ On the contrary, social economy constructed the social to mean not only the relations between individuals, but also, crucially, those between groups and organizations. Furthermore, the social economists generally resisted attempts to use the political economic conception of freely interacting autonomous individuals as a basis to deny the desirability (or possibility) of effective government intervention in such relations.¹⁶

pp. 163–171; Michael Lynch, *Art and Artifact in Laboratory Science* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986); Sharon Traweek, *Beamtimes and Lifetimes: The World of High Energy Physics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); Andrew Pickering, ed., *Science as a Practice and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Karin Knorr Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999). See also numerous articles in the journals *Social Studies of Science* and *Science in Context*.

14 Latour and Woolgar, *Laboratory Life*; Latour, *Pandora's Hope*.

15 Poovey, *Making a Social Body*, p. 24.

16 Poovey cites Sir James Emerson Tennent's presidential address to the social economy section of the NAPSS to support this interpretation, but Tennent was perhaps the least well informed speaker in the association, by his own admission, on the character of social economy (cf. below for a discussion of Tennent's address). Poovey, *Making a Social Body*, pp. 22–24. A comprehensive survey of the papers in the social economy section suggests that Tennent was one of the least representative speakers in the department. Furthermore, far from the definition of the social becoming settled in the mid-nineteenth century in terms of the liberal political economic conception of atomistic individuals, the struggle for

The NAPSS

The NAPSS was the first national “social science” association in the world, meeting for the first time in 1857 in Birmingham, England. Early members can be sorted into nine main groups: government officials, jurists, philanthropic reformers, medical doctors, natural scientists, engineers, academics, clergymen, and politicians. These categories were anything but exclusive, however, officials often being jurists and reformers, and reformers often being members of parliament. Officials of government, both high and low, comprised one of the most important constituencies of the NAPSS. In this respect government did not simply use the knowledge of social science; it shaped its development and played an important role in the very construction of the social. The first president of the association was Henry Peter Brougham, the famed Whig reformer who had served in the 1830s as Lord Chancellor of England.¹⁷ John Russell, prime minister in the late 1840s, held the presidency in 1858. In 1859 the Earl of Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper) held the post. Cooper was famous for his moral campaigns to reform the factory system, and he founded the Ragged Schools Union in 1844, which by the first congress of NAPSS had established over 200 schools. Other presidents were no less eminent, including Lord Dufferin during his tenure as Undersecretary to India (later Governor General of Canada), the Earl of Carnarvon (Egyptologist), Sir Stafford Northcote, the Duke of Northumberland, Lord Napier, and the Earl of Rosebury.¹⁸

Given this leadership, it should not be surprising that *the moral* provided a central logic of explanation in the NAPSS. The relevance of the moral was contested, however, particularly in the discourses of the amoral “dismal science” of political economy. The contestation expressed itself in the way the “departments” of the association were distinguished and particularly in the

its meaning was only just beginning. With the advent of sociology at the end of the century, and the later emergence of a more explanatory historiography within social history, a conceptualization of the social as an object greater than the sum of its individual parts eventually defeated the classical economic concept of a society composed of free individuals (despite Margaret Thatcher’s claim in the 1980s that there was “no such thing as society, only individuals”). Thus the social comes to explain the character of the individual, rather than the other way around. This is now largely true even in the most voluntarist and economist social theories, such as rational choice theory, in that institutional and organizational (i.e. social) environments are now seen as providing individuals with both the information upon which they make rational calculations and the criteria upon which they base their judgments. See, for instance, Mary C. Brinton and Victor Nee, eds., *The New Institutionalism in Sociology*, foreword by Robert K. Merton (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998); or, for an even more forceful statement of the shift, Walter W. Powell and Paul J. Dimaggio, eds., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹⁷ Brougham also held the presidency from 1860 to 1865.

¹⁸ The following were among the presidents of the various “departments”: Lord Stanley, James Stephen, Benjamin Collins Brodie, Sir W. Page Wood, James Kay Shuttleworth, Joseph Napier, Michel Chevalier, Fitzroy Kelly, Judge Longfield, Talbot de Malahide, James P. Wilde, Edwin Chadwick, William Farr, James Simpson, Robert Kane, George W. Hastings, Charles Hastings, Henry Rumsey, Robert Rawlinson, William Armstrong, H. W. D. Acland.

creation of the department of “social economy”. While the moral had a prominent place in specialized departments such as “punishment” and “education”, its radical home was in social economy, for only there did it extend its reach to include the objects and concepts of political economy. It was in the department of social economy, more than any other, that the social was made scientific in the service of moralizing economics. The life of the department of social economy in the NAPSS was short, but *the economic* would never be the same again. Political economy, practised with no sense of moral value, was met with a non-revolutionary but powerful alternative: social economics/science.

In his introduction to the first published transactions of the NAPSS, G. W. Hastings liberally applied the social as an adjective. He spoke of the need for social science to rely upon the “actual experience” of “social reformers” and argued that “moral law” was stamped with the same “unity” as natural law. “Social problems” were not isolated evils, but ones that went to the “roots” of the “substance of the nation, ramifying through a hundred secret crevices into classes apparently the most removed [from each other]”.¹⁹ Solving them required “social inquiry” into “social nuisances” and “social knowledge” of “social subjects”. The term he used to describe collectively the activity of the association was “social economics”.²⁰ His choice of “social economics” rather than “social science” signalled immediately that one particular constituency of the association had an eye to the objects of political economy. Four years later, in the transactions for the meeting held in Dublin in 1861, Hastings explained that the association “sprang out of the belief that many of our political economists have illogically narrowed their investigations by ignoring all view of moral duty, and that a union was needed between the moral and economic sciences”.²¹ Social economy sought to effect such a union and, as such, was necessarily set upon a collision course with the discourses of classical economics.

The Department of Social Economy

The initial organization of social economy was confined to one of five departments, the others being jurisprudence, education, reformatory punishment, and public health. Social economy sometimes appeared as a classification of last resort for those papers that did not fit the others. At other times it appeared to be co-extensive with social science more generally. The substance of the social was unstable, ill-defined, and contested, and my purpose

19 G. W. Hastings, “Introduction”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 1, pp. xxi–xxii.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. xxi–xxiii. The Inspector of Reformatories, Rev. Sydney Turner, gave the opening sermon at St. Philips and spoke of the association’s members as “social husbandmen” and “workmen in our great social factory” and described the departments as the “great branches of our social polity — Improved Laws, Effective Education, Sanitary Regulation, Reformatory Agency, and Economic Science” (*TNAPSS*, 1857, pp. 6, 2).

21 G. W. Hastings, “Introduction”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 5, pp. xvii–xviii.

is thus to trace the evolution of its definition rather than prescribe what it referred to at the outset.

Hastings described the department's papers as highly varied, and the preface to the section in the transactions spoke of the difficulty arranging the papers due to their "more desultory character than those of the other four [departments]".²² Hastings found a common denominator in the papers to the extent that they showed the "soundness of the doctrine, still often contested, that the welfare of the great bulk of the people depends chiefly on their own exertion and forethought, and cannot be secured by legislative interference or eleemosynary [charitable] aid".²³ One might speculate as to whom Hastings was trying to reassure, but this comment was at odds with his later expressed view that political economy was in need of a moral compass, and the character of the papers in the social economy section implies (if anything) quite the opposite view, that government had a duty to "interpose" itself in relationships and activities that had detrimental effects upon the moral and physical condition of the people, their "safety" and "security". Lord Brougham, for instance, addressed the problem of railway accidents, arguing that it was necessary for "the public authority to interpose" to minimize the risks associated with railway travel. It was not, he argued, a "valid objection to such interposition, that the conduct of their business should be left to the Company themselves, and that the State has no right to interfere with private concerns".²⁴ The law of "civilized communities" watched over "life", and "severe punishment" was rightly inflicted on any "carelessness from which fatal consequences result".²⁵

Angus Smith, a chemist and fellow of the Royal Society, gave this argument broad applicability in a paper on "Science and Social Progress". He argued that all departments of government required some scientific expertise and pointed to the recently created office of the Registrar-General, which had evolved "important knowledge on vital statistics".²⁶ This was an example of how "scientific arrangement is gradually pressing upon the governing body". Scientific laws were capable of being administered as other laws were, and they required application to "cases of nuisance from manufactures" as much as the government of sewerage.²⁷ It was in the interest of manufacturers to "encourage their own works", but they were often "not aware of the nature of their own works in the eyes of the public". They were thus in need of a "friendly and intelligent advisor", in substance a "medical police officer",²⁸

22 G. W. Hastings, "Social Economy", *TNAPSS*, vol. 1, p. 505.

23 Hastings, "Introduction", *TNAPSS*, vol. 1, p. xxxi.

24 Lord Brougham, "Railway Accidents", *TNAPSS*, vol. 1, p. 506.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 508.

26 Angus Smith, "Science and Social Progress: General Principles, especially effecting Courts of Law", *TNAPSS*, vol. 1, p. 520.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 523.

28 On the nature of medical police, see Patrick Carroll, "Medical Police and the History of Public Health", *Medical History* (October 2002).

who would have both the knowledge and the power to ameliorate the nuisances that were “too numerous in manufacturing districts”.²⁹ Issues of “public” safety, security, and health increasingly provided an opening for a scientifically justified interference by government in the “private” matters of business, but the department of social economy also extended this scrutiny to the treatment of different “classes” of workers (men, women, children), to the education of workers in the principles of political economy, and even to the “relations” between employers and workers in the “factory system”. Edward Akroyd, a member of parliament and one of the original founders of the NAPSS, presented a paper “On the Relations betwixt Employers and Employed”, in which he explained how, as a “political economist myself, I am fully aware of the objections which may be justly raised against any unwise interruptions of the ordinary channels of supply and demand”.³⁰ Reflecting on the history of manufacturing, however, led him to ask if he and other employers had done their “duty” with respect to the workers who laboured on their behalf.

Akroyd described a “social disease” that had resulted from the introduction of the spinning jenny and the steam engine into industry. Labourers, he explained, were previously scattered throughout the country or congregated in hamlets or villages. They were free from immediate supervision and chose their own hours, varying their occupation with outdoor work, especially during harvest. The worker’s “health benefited by this variety in his toil, and he was hardy and robust in body, whilst happy and contented in mind”. The mill owners who first adopted the spinning jenny, however, “were so entirely absorbed in opening out new sources of wealth, that they neglected to guard against the social evils which attended this sudden development of productive industry”.³¹ The masters treated their workers as “hirelings, from whom they extracted the utmost labour which physical strength would permit”.³² Parents began to treat their children similarly, looking to the additional income they could provide rather than the damage that would be done to them by “premature and excessive toil”. The result was a “fearful rupture of social and domestic ties”.³³ As the years passed the relations between employers and employed became increasingly antagonistic, the “workman looking upon the master as a grasping and selfish tyrant”. Popular and violent agitation escalated and was partly ameliorated by the *Factory Act* (1833) and the *Ten Hours Bill* (1847). Reflecting on these developments led Akroyd to commit himself (as his father had before him) to improving the “intellectual, moral, and physical condition” of his 5,000 workers (including 1,100 children aged eight to thirteen). In something of the spirit

29 Smith, “Science and Social Progress”, p. 523.

30 Edward Ackroyd, “On the Relations betwixt Employers and Employed”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 1, p. 529.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 527.

32 *Ibid.*

33 *Ibid.*

of the “utopian socialists” like Robert Owen,³⁴ he built a village of “model cottages” exclusively for his workers. The cottages had “every convenience”, including garden plots and piped water supplies. The village, housing 1,000 of his mill workers, was lit by gas lamps. He also provided, for those who travelled to work from neighbouring villages, a dining hall with a capacity for 700, as well as a chef and culinary staff (the whole run by a committee of workers). A library with free access was created, as was a “news-room” supplied with newspapers and periodicals. A band was equipped with musical instruments, a Horticultural and Floral Society established, recreation grounds allotted for children, a “Sick and Funeral Club” created for the supply of medicines at a small rate of subscription, and a Penny Savings Bank established to encourage saving. As the use of these services grew they became more “economical”, and he added a “public bakehouse”, producing better and cheaper bread than could be had on the market. During the winter the bake house provided low-cost tea, soup, and coffee, and a coal depot supplied small quantities of coal at cost price. In addition to the regular “factory school”³⁵ for ages eight to thirteen, an “infant school” (ages three to eight) was established to prepare the children for regular school, as well as a workingman’s college providing evening classes to boys and men over thirteen and an evening college for girls and women with training in both domestic and industrial subjects.

A critic might protest that all of this was nothing more than an attempt to return to the patriarchal order of the feudal estate, or that Akroyd was simply trying to indenture his workers to him and to a life of perpetual servitude. But, while there is no doubt that Akroyd wanted to re-establish the more harmonious “relations” that he believed had been lost as a result of industrialization, his was not a backward-looking ideology. On the contrary, Akroyd supported the political economy of capitalism, but a particularly forward-looking idea of it that demanded the consideration of “moral duty”. His were “experiments” that demonstrated how the broader scope of social economy supplied the “moral science” necessary for a truly successful capitalist system of production and exchange.

A significant number of papers presented in the department of social economy argued that the condition of the working class could only be ameliorated by their own agency and that the best interventions of outside agencies should be directed toward teaching them the principles of prudence and economy. An equally large number of papers advocated various reforms or interventions of government (or other agencies with the support of government)

34 Owen submitted a paper to the department of punishment and reformation in which he argued that society could be governed without punishment. A short abstract of the paper was published, although the paper was not. Robert Owen, “The Human Race governed without Punishment”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 1, p. 280.

35 On ragged schools and factory schools, see Patrick Carroll-Burke, *Colonial Discipline: The Making of the Irish Convict System* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), chap. 4.

in pursuit of removing “external” causes of economic misery. As with all the sections, there was a steady stream of reports on philanthropic and co-operative endeavours. By the second year of the association the “desultory” character of the papers began to yield to sub-classification in terms of the “condition of the working classes”, “economic science”, “population, labour, and capital”, “workhouse management”, “labour, capital and strikes”, “statistical science and the census”, “social provision”, and the “industrial employment of women”.

The role and condition of women in industrial work became a regular theme of social economy. Some papers focused upon what was construed as the disastrous moral consequences for both the women themselves and domestic order. Charles Bray suggested that young women working in industry became “independent” at too early an age and that this resulted in them defying their parents to the point of leaving home. Country girls coming to town fell into “bad company”, and “indiscriminate mixing of the sexes” eroded “natural modesty” and led to immorality.³⁶ Many other papers, however, sought to secure the same protections for women workers as others sought for men. For instance, a paper read by Hastings³⁷ argued that women were already a sizeable percentage of the work force and that it was redundant to speak of such in terms of either hope or fear.³⁸ Using data from the census, the author stated that about 75 per cent of adult unmarried women, 66 per cent of widows, and 15 per cent of married women were “earning their bread by independent labor”.³⁹ This amounted, the author claimed, to about two million adult women, or about a third of the entire female population. The author explained that this had occurred despite every discouragement and, consequently, without any care for the women’s well-being.⁴⁰ “Society”, by treating any other than the poorest female worker as “little better than an outcast”, had “enabled all to oppress her that found it for their interest to do so”.⁴¹ The author argued that it was “our duty to bestow on female industry the same respect, and to extend to it the same encouragement, as has been accorded to the industry of man”.⁴² It was not the case, as evidenced by textile manufacturing districts, that the industrial employment of women was prejudicial to the domestic happiness of the working classes. The facts, according to this author, indicated the contrary. What was required, then, was not discouragement of women workers, but recognition that “the female sex as a whole” constituted a specific “class” of worker. Women needed to

36 Charles Bray, “The Industrial Employment of Women”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 1, p. 545.

37 The name of the author of the paper was not provided, but the title of his or her book was given as *The Social and Industrial Condition of Women in the Middle and Lower Ranks*.

38 “Remarks on the Industrial Employment of Women”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 1, p. 532.

39 *Ibid.*

40 *Ibid.*, p. 533.

41 *Ibid.*

42 *Ibid.*

“act” as a class, have “institutions to minister to their peculiar wants, a press to represent their wishes, and a public opinion to watch over and protect them”.⁴³

Social economy not only advocated the rights of different classes of workers, but openly addressed the working classes’ own views on matters concerning the relations between worker and master, labour and capital, and rich and poor. A paper on teaching social economy by William Mathew Williams, for instance, recounted how the first attempt at introducing a curriculum in social economy at the London Mechanics’ Institution was opposed by a large majority of the governing committee, despite the fact that the classes were to be funded by a donation of £100.⁴⁴ Only after much agitation did the governing committee agree to permit the teaching of the subject. A special school was subsequently opened in 1848. The method of teaching adopted is interesting in that it was not based on lectures, but attempted through questioning to lead the trainees “up a sort of intellectual inclined plane, which landed them at last fairly and firmly upon the principle or conclusion” that the teacher sought to instil. The students were “not merely taught the definitions dogmatically, but were led to invent and agree to them”.⁴⁵

Williams decided to adopt the method and apply it in an “experiment” of his own at a “secular school” in Edinburgh, where he taught physiology, chemistry, and physics to the children of skilled artisans. He explained that the students took the subject of social economy well, much better than was generally assumed by those who argued that only mature minds could comprehend the issues involved. The girls were particularly keen and “rather excelled the boys”.⁴⁶ Difficulties arose, however, at the first “public examination”, at which the children’s parents were present. The social economy part of the exam addressed the “causes of the fluctuations of wages, including, of course, some of the relations between the capitalist and the labourer”.⁴⁷ At the end of the exam, about half a dozen of the men stepped forward and congratulated Williams on all aspects of the instruction, except the “social economy ‘nonsense’, as they termed it”.⁴⁸ The workers told Williams that, unless the subject were discontinued, a large proportion of the pupils would be withdrawn from the school. Williams was somewhat shocked, especially because the men were “some of the most intelligent and influential of the working men of Edinburgh”, one of whom, a type-founder, was the editor of a workers’ newspaper and “could write well”.⁴⁹ Upon teaching social economy as usual the following year, Williams found that a large number of students were withdrawn from

43 *Ibid.*, p. 538.

44 William Mathew Williams, “On the Teaching of Social Economy”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 1, p. 510.

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Ibid.*, p. 511.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 512.

48 *Ibid.*

49 *Ibid.*

the school, but, on account of the quality of the rest of the curriculum, the type-founder and some of his shop-men kept their children enrolled. However, they “gave them lessons on social economy at home in refutation of the lessons given at school”. One explained that they did not withdraw their children because “it was not worth while, since the children themselves, with a little aid, could refute all the school lessons on the subject”.⁵⁰

Williams’s paper is an excellent source for demonstrating how the working class developed its own critique of the dogma of political economy, a critique based upon common sense ideas of “class” and “value”. Williams attempted to teach them the error of their thinking by setting up special classes for the parents, who agreed to participate only if the design was constructed as a “society” for “discussion”. They would not accept the label of “pupils” nor follow the lesson plan, addressing immediately lesson 21, entitled “Competition is one of most efficient agents for diffusing the benefits of industrial enterprize over the whole world”.⁵¹ This proposition they “pronounced to be absurd; and though it was under discussion for several evenings, I doubt I succeeded in convincing three out thirty that it was not so”. The same occurred with the other lessons, until Williams finally asked himself why they “refused” to be “taught social science” when they were clearly interested in the subject. He suggested three answers to his own question. First, working men, like “all classes”, were of the view that there was no science of the social, that it amounted to nothing more than opinions and “random empiricism”. None would believe that the “phenomena of society” and “all its institutions are the resultants of the moral forces exerted by the individuals composing it”.⁵² This basis of resistance, however, was not as strong among working men as among other classes. A bigger problem was the workers’ “suspicion of the motives of those who teach it”.⁵³ It was, he explained,

still held as an hereditary article of popular faith, that the leading effort of political and social effort on the part of the rich, is to keep the people down, and to secure to themselves the perpetual maintenance of their own existing advantages. Kings and queens are supposed to regard the country and the people as their own personal goods and chattels, to be used for their private gratification; the aristocracy is looked upon as their confederates, among whom the national spoil is divided, and the government mainly as a machine for the suppression of rebellion.⁵⁴

Remarkably (for the context), Williams suggested that such “traditional”

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 513. In this context Williams articulated the classic opposition in social science between “forces” (structures) and “free will” (agency).

⁵³ Williams, “On the Teaching of Moral Economy”, p. 513.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 514.

opinions, when viewed through the lens of “social history”, were “founded on fact”: “Men that are not yet gray can remember well when it was a common fashion among lords and gentlemen, and the clergy, to talk both publicly and privately of the danger of affording to the working man an education calculated to give him notions ‘above his station in life’. Even at the present day we sometimes hear faint reverberations of this old foolishness.”⁵⁵ He countered, however, that such attitudes were no longer held by the majority of persons. The problem now lay in the working people remaining “under the influences of the past”. Such influences only confirmed the need for teaching social economy to the working class, for only through education could the workers be relieved of their current misconceptions. But the “greatest difficulty” posed to the project of education, faced even when workers were willing students, was the problem of the “definition” of the terms of political economy and the way the worker refuted the technical definitions by evoking their common meanings:

Tell a skilled artisan that he is a labourer, and he will consider himself insulted. Tell him that, according to the signification accepted by political economists, the rich physician, the barrister, the judge, the Lord Chancellor, are all labourers; he will tell you that the political economist knows nothing about it, that the labourer is a common fellow who earns twelve or fifteen shillings per week by carrying burthens and such-like rude employment. When he finds that the accepted signification of the term value leads to the conclusion that coal gas is more valuable than the air we breathe — that this in one of the least valuable of all things, he looks upon the economist as a downright simpleton; for he will argue that we cannot exist for two minutes without air to breathe, and therefore it is the most valuable thing in the universe. But you tell him that the economist only regards these things as commodities; he replies that this is a low, groveling, money-grubbing notion of value, unworthy of a man of lofty aspirations. You reply that the most eminent economists have agreed to thus limit the application of the term. Then they ought to be ashamed of themselves, is his conclusion.⁵⁶

The negative attitudes of the workers towards attempts by the middle class to educate them in the mysteries of market economics was linked to the broader problem of the “deplorable conditions” in which many were forced to live. There was already in existence a robust movement to ameliorate those conditions, and members of that movement immediately found a welcome home in the department of social economy of the NAPSS. For instance, Henry Roberts, formerly “Honorary Architect” and member of the Committee of the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes, read the first paper in what henceforth became a regular section of the department on the

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 516.

“Condition of the Working Classes”. Roberts argued that the “wretched” condition of the houses of workers was the main “counteracting influence” undermining pedagogical attempts to raise them from their “state of ignorance and moral degradation”.⁵⁷ The material condition of the houses led to drunkenness, domestic feuds, lingering sickness, premature death, “and vice in its most appalling forms”. Evidence from the “Police Courts” showed that the condition of dwellings was the “cause” of incest, rape, and murder.⁵⁸ Reports from the Register-General for Scotland on the “great amount of illegitimacy” in certain districts proved the “necessity for improved cottages”.

Arguments such as these aligned a “moral duty” to intervene with a powerful “government interest” in doing so. As did other members of the NAPSS who occupied a space between private and public agency, Roberts constructed a social history of efforts to ameliorate the “physical and moral” degradation of the working classes and the poor. Citing John Howard and Dr. Chalmers as early reformers and Southwood Smith and J. P. Kay Shuttleworth as contemporary examples, Roberts explained how government was compelled to act, first in the form of special reports (Chadwick’s becoming the “text-book of sanitary research”) and Royal Commissions, and finally in the form of the public health and local government acts (1848, 1849, 1855, and 1858). As in much of the literature in the department of public health and during the mid-Victorian period generally, the physical character of the environment was linked to issues of health, sanitation, and moral conditions. Roberts explained how the *Lodging Houses Act* for London was “fully enforced by the police” and argued that such enforcement was required nation-wide.⁵⁹ All property owners, he suggested, should be subject to the “operation of a power, acting gradually and simultaneously” in the service of providing dwellings with proper light, air, water, drainage, and refuse collection.⁶⁰ Legislation was also needed to facilitate the work of private associations, such as that passed for Scotland which contained a clause permitting the “compulsory” purchase of properties that were “in a condition which may cause disease to the inhabitants”.⁶¹ The class who “have not the power, in this respect, of protecting themselves, and who suffer greatly from the consequences of that inability, may justly expect at the hands of Government the same immunity in regard to their dwellings which the public at large are entitled to in regard to the falsification of weights, and the unwholesome condition of staple articles of food”.⁶²

57 Henry Roberts, “The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes, their Improvement through the Operation of Government Measures, by those of Public Bodies and Benevolent Associations, as well as by Individual Efforts”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 2, p. 583.

58 *Ibid.*

59 *Ibid.*, p. 589.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 588.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 590.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 588.

Southwood Smith is perhaps one of the most famous advocates of the idea that dilapidated material conditions caused moral degeneracy. In a paper focused upon the prolongation of life during the eighteenth century (presented in the department of public health), he made the broad argument that “the existence in any high degree of the intellectual and moral must be preceded by a liberal possession and enjoyment of the physical”.⁶³ He argued that the new “tissues and textures” of textile manufacture not only favoured, but “compel[ed] frequent washing”. Thus material forms could effect sanitary progress even when not initially designed to do so.⁶⁴ Indeed, Smith believed that the improvements already achieved without design only confirmed the even greater improvements that might be achieved through sanitary science. He argued that, “from the evidence which has been adduced, it is clear that no sanitary improvement, whether designed or undesigned, can be effected without improving the physical, and, *through that* [emphasis added], the intellectual and moral condition of the people”. The social, in this context, was the totality of material and moral conditions.

If social economy was centrally concerned with ameliorating the demoralizing effects of material poverty, it was a discourse no less concerned with the degenerative effects of excessive toil. Thus the department served as an organ for what became known as the “early closing movement”, the objects of which were the “physical improvement, mental culture, and moral elevation” of those subject to “overwork”.⁶⁵ Its immediate goals were fourfold: to reduce the hours of employment and of labour in “every department of industrial life”; the relief of tradesmen and their assistants from the “drudgery of Sunday trading”; the promotion of an earlier payment of wages (so as to negate the need for weekend shopping); and the institution of a half-day on Saturdays.⁶⁶ A paper presented at the first congress inquired into the “conditions of certain sections of the overworked classes”, bringing the voice of the workers themselves to bear on the discourses of the NAPSS. Many experiences of workers were relayed to the audience, such as this one from a drapery shop worker:

With the opening spring and soon after I was first apprenticed, came the full horror of the late hour system. I should utterly fail were I to attempt to describe my sufferings, and the cruel treatment I received from my master. We began preparing for business at six o'clock in the morning, and, during the season, never closed the doors earlier than half-past eleven at night. On Saturdays we rarely, if ever, got done before two o'clock [in the morning] — it was sometimes two or three before we finished. I have a painful recollection that I have

63 Southwood Smith, “On the Evidence of the Prolongation of Life during the Eighteenth Century”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 1, p. 502.

64 *Ibid.*

65 John Lilwall, “The Early Closing Movement — a Practical Inquiry into the Condition of certain Sections of the Overworked Classes”, *TNAPSS*, pp. 548–563.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 548.

stood in the shop (sitting was strictly forbidden) at twelve o'clock at night, folding up articles, when I have fallen asleep with the goods in my hands, on seeing which my master has threatened to set me at some heavy work to keep my eyes open. Such was the treatment I received after having been on my feet for eighteen hours out of twenty-four. My bed was under the counter, where I was overrun with vermin.⁶⁷

The author cited information with the “authority of Government” to claim that London killed a thousand workers a year directly by toil beyond that which the human constitution could endure. Eight times this number were made seriously ill. Others claimed the figures were much higher, “a large number of the victims ... known to return to the country and die at their own homes”. In addition, the “rapid and extensive increase of insanity” was attributed by authorities to the “unceasing toil and anxiety to which the working classes are subjected”.⁶⁸ Victims were believed to pass on their madness to their children in the form of “imperfectly developed sensorium or nervous system”. The physician to the Queen, referring to the long hours of work on dressmaking and milliner machines, concluded that a “mode of life more completely calculated to destroy human health could scarcely be devised”.⁶⁹

As might be expected, capitalists were generally not enamoured by the scrutiny of the early closing movement, their efforts looked upon with “great suspicion and disfavour by employers”.⁷⁰ An important counter to such resistance by social economists was not only to admonish on moral grounds, but also to appeal to interest on economic grounds. Thus Lilwall cited a study conducted by Southwood Smith that showed how excessive hours led to diminishing rates of return due to decreases in productivity and increases in the amount of product spoiled. Smith explained how a printing company, due to a peculiar press of business, adopted a 15-hour work day during which the machines never stopped, not even for lunch or dinner. For the first six weeks production was steady, but thereafter began to decline. By the end of the third month, “[T]he production of the machines arrived at its minimum, and the proportion of spoiled work at its maximum.” Alarmed by the loss to spoilage, the employers reduced the work day, and “as soon as the alteration was made the amount of spoiled work sunk to its previous level”.

⁶⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 549.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 554.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 550.

⁷¹ See also W. Neilson Hancock, “The Journeymen Bakers’ Case”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 5, pp. 599–608; Rev. James Begg, “The Early Closing Movement in Edinburgh”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 7, pp. 689–691; also the resolution submitted to the council by the department (p. 766): “That in the opinion of the Department there is an intimate connexion between the practical development of the early closing movement and all efforts for elevating the moral and social condition of the industrial classes, the possession of leisure on the part of the employed being necessary in order to their duly sharing in the benefits of the various educational institutions of the age.”

Here, according to Smith, was remarkable testimony,⁷¹ from the employers themselves, to the effect that “excessive labour defeats its own object”.⁷² When employers could not be swayed to change their ways on the basis of either moral or economic arguments, however, the social economists were the first to evoke the power of government to “interpose” with the “stringent check of the law”. In respect to the deplorable situation of the dressmakers and journeymen bakers, Lilwall “confidently believed that nothing short of legislation would give effectual relief”.⁷³

Given the recognition by members of the department of social economy that workers were subject to a range of miseries that were not of their own making and were beyond their individual capacity to amend, it is not surprising that the issue of trade unions and industrial action was eventually included in their research and reform agenda. The transactions of the first congress (Birmingham) contained no more than a half-page synopsis of a paper on “strikes”, and in 1858 (Liverpool) there was no mention whatsoever of industrial struggles. However, a separate conference taking place at the same time in Liverpool was dedicated to the subject of “Trades’ Societies” and was attended by several members of the NAPSS. The council of the association subsequently “constituted a special committee” to inquire into and report the following year “upon the objects and constitution of Trades’ Societies, with their effect upon wages and upon the industry and commerce of this country”.⁷⁴ The report was not ready for the next meeting, held in Bradford in 1859, but a section of the departments’ business concerned these issues under the head of “Labour and Capital — Strikes”, and an entire day was spent reading and discussing the papers.

Henry Fawcett, in a paper on the “Theory and Tendency of Strikes”, argued that “strikes must be an agency towards an ameliorating change”.⁷⁵ The trade union movement, he suggested, could be directed but not checked, and he predicted that it would eventually “extend to every section of the labouring population”.⁷⁶ John Holmes, in a paper on the West Yorkshire Coal Strike of 1858, argued that it was necessary to bring the facts concerning the antagonisms between capital and labour before an “impartial, inquiring, and intelligent audience”.⁷⁷ After a detailed accounting of events, he concluded that “the men did not originate the strike” and that “the masters caused the whole contention”. Indeed, the workers “did all they could by proposing arbitration, and by deputations, to reason and arrange terms”, but the “masters

72 Lilwall, “The Early Closing Movement”, p. 559.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 563.

74 “Report of the Committee on Trades’ Societies”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 3, p. 657.

75 Henry Fawcett, “The Theory and Tendency of Strikes”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 3, p. 639.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 638.

77 John Holmes, “Facts and Inferences relating to the West Yorkshire Coal Strike, from February to December, 1858”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 3, p. 640.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 644.

uniformly rejected all and every proposition to reason, arrange, or modify”.⁷⁸ Other papers on the subject were presented and discussed but not printed. One by John Watts suggested that unions could “furnish workmen with a remedy against the injustice of employers, without any undue and tyrannical interference with the conditions of labour”.⁷⁹ Another by John Plummer argued that strikes were “occasioned by coldness, tyranny, or misbehaviour on the part of employers”.⁸⁰ Two papers argued against strikes on orthodox political economic grounds, but the general tenor of the section was clear. Perhaps even more significant than the support expressed for the workers in this first attempt of the NAPSS to grapple with such issues, however, is that workers themselves were permitted to present papers in their defence. Noah Forrest, a chain maker, provided an account of the conflicts between workers and employers in his trade, protesting the media representation of non-unionists as “persecuted paragons of goodness, and unionists in general as idlers, vagabonds, revolutionists, &c.”⁸¹

A vigorous debate ensued in which Akroyd suggested that a “social war” was raging between masters and workmen and that “political economy will not help us avoid strikes and their attendant evils”. Indeed, in one of the strongest statements up to this point on the differences between the social economists and their political counterparts, Akroyd argued that “the danger is aggravated by the rigid application of this [political economic] science”.⁸² Fawcett, because he looked upon strikes as an appropriate response to a necessary conflict between capital and labour, failed to understand, according to Akroyd, that the “only true social science, based upon Christianity”, demanded sympathy and kind feeling in all relations.⁸³ A representative of the Society of Engineers confirmed that want of good feeling was often the cause of a strike, but he argued that workers could only represent themselves in combination.⁸⁴

The following year, at the meeting held in Glasgow, the differences between social and political economy finally came to a head. Most of the papers published in the section on “labour and capital” steered clear of controversy, but three of the printed papers addressed the issues head on. One, by M. D. Hill (the famed reformer and Recorder of Birmingham), argued in favour of workers’ co-operatives against both socialism (Owen’s version) and the competitive system of capitalist political economy. Hill was of the view that all the drawbacks of competition — lack of quality, antagonism and conflict, waste through advertising costs, adulteration — were “avoided through

79 “Summary of Proceedings in the Social Economy Department”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 3, p. 713.

80 *Ibid.*

81 Noah Forrest, “The Chain and Tracemakers of Cradley Heath and its Vicinity and their Employers; or Union and Disunion, and their Consequences”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 3, p. 656.

82 “Summary of Proceedings”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 3, p. 720.

83 *Ibid.*

84 *Ibid.*, p. 721.

85 M. D. Hill, “Co-operation”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 4, p. 754.

cooperation".⁸⁵ This was followed by a paper arguing against trade unions (by a member of the Royal Society) and another in favour by "Representatives of the United Joiners of Glasgow". The former, written by Edmund Potter, in his own words "one of the master class", took exception to the special committee report on Trades' Societies and Strikes and particularly its statement that most employers were "indifferent" to the influence of unions upon "moral and commercial" matters. Rather, they viewed the "internal arrangements of their establishments, hours, mode of payment, or contract, no more the affairs of the public than the routine of a man's own household".⁸⁶

Potter was unapologetic in his advocacy of an amoral science of the economy. The "conclusion" he wished to "arrive at and keep in mind is, that labour must be considered as a mere purchasable article, like all other commodities, and ought to be bought and sold, weighed and measured accordingly".⁸⁷ The economy was a "contest" between the "owners of capital" and the "mere seller of physical labour", but the employer was the "prime mover", for "it is he who seeks the worker, states his wishes, offers the contract, and directs the mode of operation." Further, the employer could be "assumed" to be "more highly educated, and consequently the more moral and benevolent".⁸⁸ Potter was fully aware that it would be argued that it was precisely because of views such as his that the worker required the power of combination as a defence, but he was not bothered by the complaint. All trade unions, he declared, were productive of immorality, even those founded for co-operation, sick funds, or burial clubs. All attempts to raise a class by "protective and aggressive combinations" would necessarily lead to "bad moral effects".⁸⁹ Association always produced a "weaker morality" than that "of individual and direct responsibility".⁹⁰ When "intimidation or force" was used by either side of a buying/selling relationship, "it becomes criminal, and ought to be treated as such".⁹¹ Potter was clearly of the view that the laws against combination should be reinstated.

The paper by the representatives of the Glasgow joiners, in contrast, argued in concert with many other union representatives that, apart from the many material advantages of association for workers, it was also the best means of securing high moral standards. Workers had "benefited morally and socially by the agency of their trades' unions, cultivating a sense of duty and honour to each other; and bringing into action, in the intercourse of every-day life, the true sentiments of brotherly love and affection".⁹² The union was against "wage fixing" because it worked against efficiency and

86 Edmund Potter, "Trades' Unions and their Tendencies", *TNAPSS*, vol. 4, p. 755.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 756.

88 *Ibid.*

89 *Ibid.*, p. 762.

90 *Ibid.*

91 *Ibid.*, p. 756.

92 Representatives of the United Joiners of Glasgow, "The Improvements necessary for the more effectual working of Trades' Unions", *TNAPSS*, vol. 4, p. 763.

did not reward the truly outstanding craftsman. A central concern for the joiners was the quality of their product, and for this reason they strictly regulated the apprentice system. They favoured a court of arbitration for settling disputes, but opposed the chair of such a body being appointed by government, believing the chair should be elected from a slate of candidates presented to the arbitration council. Finally, they wished to prove the moral standard of their activities by having a reporter present at their council meetings, believing that meetings kept open to the public were conducted in a manner that “elevated” the proceedings.

Of many other papers that were presented and discussed, most were opposed to the political economy of Potter.⁹³ During the discussion support was expressed for Hill’s paper and for the idea of co-operatives generally. Nothing, according to William Chambers, had “improved the morals of the labouring classes as much as this [co-op] movement”.⁹⁴ Another participant expressed the view that the co-ops did not aim simply at profit, but general improvement through “organization”. Workers “hated strikes”, and co-ops were a way to avoid them.⁹⁵ A. Hunter, of the Council of United Trades, explained how the institution of a union among the bakers had wrought a “reformation” away from “fighting and drinking” and towards “steady and respectable” behaviour. An operative blacksmith read a paper showing that unions were not injurious to the welfare of society, pointing out that the capitalists “form themselves into unions for the protection of their interests, and call them ‘Chambers of Commerce’ and ‘Trade Protection Societies’; and surely if they, notwithstanding all the individual power which they possess, require to do so, then there exists a strong necessity why workmen should unite together, whose only capital was labour.”⁹⁶ One of the discussants, however, was of the view that the interests of “labour and capital were so blended as to be identical”. Thus he argued that unions should agree to set up a governing system that would protect all workers from intimidation by others and would secure the right to the individual worker to “labour for whom he pleases and at the rate he can attain”.⁹⁷ Another, who identified himself as a working man, was entirely opposed to unions because they were “regulated on principles at variance with the maxims of political economy, univer-

93 Henry Fawcett, “How the Condition of the Labouring Classes may be raised by Co-operation”; John Watts, “Co-operative Societies”; A. F. Hunder (of the Glasgow Council of United Trades), “The Objects of Trades’ Unions”; Peter Allan, “Trades’ Unions, and their Effects on Society”; William Caw, “Trades’ Unions, and their Objects”; Thomas Pringle, “Workman and Master”; Alexander Frazer, “Trades’ Unions not injurious to the Welfare of Society”; in “Summary of Proceedings in the Social Economy Department”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 4, pp. 870–887.

94 “Summary of the Proceedings”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 4, p. 874.

95 *Ibid.*

96 *Ibid.*, p. 878.

97 *Ibid.*

98 *Ibid.*, p. 877.

sal experience, and common sense”.⁹⁸

Hastings, in his introduction to these transactions, hailed the meeting for bringing the “representatives of capital and labour ... face to face and on equal terms, to debate questions involving the most cherished interests of both”. At no previous meeting “had working men taken so active and useful a part”, and the aim of the “Association to furnish an impartial arena for social inquiry was fully realized”.⁹⁹ Social economy had finally come face to face with the workers, and the subsequent debate revealed what many political economists already suspected, that social economists were morally aligned with the working class against the “scientific” principles of *laissez faire* economics, or at least the radical ideological version that opposed all forms of governed economy, either by political bodies or organized labour.¹⁰⁰

The report of the special committee on trade unions and strikes, signed by the chair, J. P. Shuttleworth,¹⁰¹ ran to 651 pages and was published in a separate volume. This report, recognized a century later as a “classic” in economics,¹⁰² is a treasure of diverse data (interviews, official investigations, statistics, observer reports, and historical citations) on various trade groups, strikes, regulations, and the history of combination in Britain. It could justifiably merit a paper in itself, but for present purposes it is enough to show that the report came down strongly in support of unions, not as a right, but as a moral agency upon the economy and society generally. At the end of the day it was an issue of *fairness*, though a fairness that could be established *scientifically*. Thus the report concluded:

The capitalist has the advantage of past accumulation in striking [the choice of word is likely deliberate] his bargain. The labourer, unassisted by combination, has not. It is the object of a trade society to give him this advantage, and thus to put him on more equal ground in competing with the capitalist. ...One remarkable effect of trade societies — which is, strictly speaking, in conformity with economical laws — is, that by these means they render the rate of wages more equable over the same trade....¹⁰³

The answers received by the Committee, and the prefaces to the rules of the

⁹⁹ G. W. Hastings, “Introduction”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 4, p. xxiv.

¹⁰⁰ On the ideology of extreme anti-governmentality, see Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of our Time*, foreword by Joseph E. Stiglitz and new introduction by Fred Block (Boston: Beacon Hill Press, 2001 [1944]).

¹⁰¹ The original committee members were E. Akroyd, J. T. Danson, A. Edgar, W. Farr, G. W. Hastings, Charles Hawkins, Thomas Hughes, R. H. Hutton, W. A. Jevons, George Lefevre, Horace Mann, Rev. F. D. Maurice, W. B. Ranken, and R. H. Rathbone, to which was later added J. M. Ludlow and Professor John Wilson, and later again Shuttleworth.

¹⁰² *Trades' Societies and Strikes: Report of the Committee on Trades' Societies, appointed by the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, presented at the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Association, at Glasgow, September, 1860* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, Series of Reprints of Economic Classics, 1968).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

different societies, for the most part agree in asserting as the primary reason of trades' societies, that without combination the workman cannot in all cases secure the market price of his labour, but is, to a certain extent, at the mercy of his employer....¹⁰⁴

That the principles upon which trade societies regulate their proceedings are more moderate, and that discussions between the workmen belonging to them and their masters have been managed in a fairer spirit than in the times before the repeal of the laws against combination....

That the workmen belonging to these societies ... are less unreasonable in their expectations of obtaining increased wages, that they understand better the necessity of submitting to reductions, that they have generally overcome the prejudices which they once entertained against machinery, and that their leaders are men of higher character and intelligence....

That the strikes, though more frequent, are conducted with less violence than in former days, though there remains room for improvement....

That the establishment of ... [co-ops] ... will be of great use to working men [by showing them] ... the relative value of manual and of intellectual labour and of capital, and by showing them that there are fluctuations in trade over which the masters have no control....

That the Legislature may do much good service to workmen, by providing an easy and cheap remedy, both in law and equity, to meet the case of disputes between trades' societies and their members, especially in respect to the application of benefit funds....

That the slightest return to the old policy of prohibiting combinations would be most mischievous, and that no legislative measures for preventing strikes and lock-outs would be effectual....

[T]hat the experience of the past has convinced many of the employers that not to care for their hands, not to promote their intellectual and moral welfare, not to show sympathy with them and forbearance towards them, is to ruin themselves....¹⁰⁵

There were, of course, critical comments as well, and a minority resolution was attached that was less supportive, but none of that could detract from the fact that this first major publication of the confrontation between social and

104 *Ibid.*, p. ix.

105 *Ibid.*, pp. xviii–xix.

political economy in the NAPSS was positive in its evaluation of the moral and economic effects of trade unions. Amoral political economy was not, however, to be easily countered within the discourses of social science more generally, and the period between 1859 and 1864 was something of a peak for the moral energy of the social economists. Viewing the first decade of the NAPSS, one can see a development in social economy from a rag-bag of issues to a clear agenda for a moral vision of all social relations, including economic relations. In 1857 the department had no express logic other than the implication that it went beyond political economy to include moral issues, practical problems, and the workers' perspective. In 1858 the opening address on Social Economy began: "By the term social economy we propose (as I understand) to designate all branches of social science for which no appropriate place could be found within any of our four preceding specifications."

In 1859 there was no opening address on "social economy", but one by J. K. Shuttleworth entitled "On the Progress of Civilization in England".¹⁰⁶ Shuttleworth's piece reads almost like an admonition to the social economists. It is as though his address had been directly targeted at workers who wanted "patience", yet he chaired the special committee on unions to its successful conclusion the following year. In 1860 the Anglo-Irishman Sir James Emerson Tennent gave the presidential address on social economy, though he clearly did not initially know what the department was about. Indeed, he gave his opening address at the end of the department's business, apologizing for the "anomalous" nature of the timing. But he put his finger precisely on the mark in respect to one of the sections: "The section with which I am more immediately connected has been chiefly occupied by questions directly involving the rights of labour, and the happiness and prosperity of all engaged in it." The department as a whole "has had assigned to it, under the comprehensive title of 'Social Economy', ... a variety of topics bearing on the progress and happiness of the community, its occupations, its enjoyments, its privations, and its destiny".¹⁰⁷ By 1861 social economy defined a broad and comprehensive scope of inquiry, considering the

various questions relating to Social Economics; the conditions of Industrial Success, whether of nations or individuals; Savings' Banks and Insurance; the relations between employers and employed; strikes and combinations; legislative interference with hours and wages of labour; legislative regulation of professions, trades, and employment generally, and of prices and means of supply; emigration, its effect, and true conditions; exercise of public and private char-

106 Sir James Kay Shuttleworth, "Address on the Progress of Civilization in England", *TNAPSS*, vol. 3, pp. 122–151.

107 Sir James Emerson Tennent, "Address on Social Economy", *TNAPSS*, vol. 4, p. 127.

ity; relief of the poor; industrial employment of women; industrial and economical instruction of the labouring classes; public amusements; social economics in relation to education, &c.¹⁰⁸

In 1862–1863 this broad statement of aims remains, but in 1864, under the presidency of Chadwick, the department of “social economy” was replaced by a new department of “economy and trade”, the scope of which was defined economically (in more ways than one) as “the various questions relating to Economics, Social, Political, and Commercial” (with a note on the collection of “information relating to production, manufacture and trade”).¹⁰⁹ This remained the name and purpose of the department at least until 1877. Talk of social economy slowly faded, but strikes and unions and the condition of the working classes remained part of the department’s agenda. The effect of *the social* upon economics and politics was enduring, though not triumphant. Indeed, one can hardly doubt, in the context of current discourses of free trade, ethical responsibility, and government obligation, that *the moral*, riding upon the vehicle of *the social*, continues to interrogate the conceits of free trade ideology.

Conclusion

One of the key differences between social science/economy (as indicated earlier there was considerable slippage between the two) and political economy was the discourse, in the former, of “social problems” and practical moral and material solutions. All the solutions proposed were not centred on government, but social economy did not overly dwell, like political economy, upon an abstract discourse of government versus non-government. All the various “agencies”, whether individual, privately organized, mixtures of private and public, or governmental, were given a role in the solution of social problems. Of all the departments of the NAPSS, it was primarily social economy that ventured beyond the bounded object of a specific social problem (such as sanitation or crime). It embraced all aspects of “normal” society, crucially addressing what might be justly termed *the social problem* of the modern age, that of the social disorder and misery born of reckless and ungoverned capitalism, and the nourishment of that recklessness by an amoral economic science. In this respect it alone, among the departments of the NAPSS, was the crucial harbinger of a social science/history that, in the twentieth century, would expand its object to include everything, as Latour has put it, both human and non-human. By articulating visions of different modes of organizing and governing entire economies — productive and moral, and therefore social — it avoided the tendencies of the other departments to become reduced to a form of “social work” that rarely questioned

108 “Social Economy”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 5, p. 679.

109 “Economy and Trade”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 7, p. 655.

the broad and systemic social causes of social problems.

By coming down in support of both the moral and economic advantages of trade unions, the NAPSS placed social economy squarely at odds with one of the most defining doctrines of mid-Victorian political economy: that combinations of workmen were inimical to market capitalism and could only (as Potter put it) lead to bad effects both morally and economically. In this, as in the other areas discussed, the social was made scientific precisely by moralizing an otherwise amoral discourse of political economy. Though social economy initially lost the contest with political economy (which spawned an equally amoral opposition in the form of Marxism),¹¹⁰ “moral science”, under the banner of *the social*, would be reborn at the end of the century as “sociology”, *the science of the social*.¹¹¹ Durkheim, in particular, founded sociology upon an idea of the social that was profoundly moral in character, and he conceived “social order” to be, precisely, “moral order”.¹¹² Basing his entire sociology of the evolution of modern societies upon the division of labour, he maintained the crucial nexus between the economic and the moral that had defined the agenda of the early social economists.¹¹³ The difference between Durkheim’s sociology and that of the social economists, however, is that Durkheim consciously equated the moral with the

110 There is little doubt that Marx constructed a social ontology at the heart of which was social relations, but I would hold that his radical rejection of talk of morality and his identification of these relations as essentially productive in nature led him from philosophical concerns (dispatched with the “Theses on Feuerbach”) to political economic ones. Thus the social, in any particular stage of development or condition, was explained by the economic. Marxism thus developed as a form of political economy rather than social economy. Even though Marx began with a foundational social ontology, as his work developed the social — understood as all social relations — became located in the superstructure. Or, to put it another way, if the social is *explanans* in Marx, it is a radically disaggregated conceptualization of it that credits primary (“in the last analysis”) explanatory power to productive relations, and at best only secondary (“reflexive”) explanatory power to all others (religious, moral, legal, governmental). On Marx’s theory of the social, see an argument that pushes somewhat in the opposite direction to my own interpretation, Carol C. Gould, *Marx’s Social Ontology: Individuality and Community in Marx’s Theory of Social Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978).

111 Auguste Comte did, of course, coin the word sociology, and a paper offered but not published by the association (1858) proposed a new science of comparative sociology: Rev. W. N. Molesworth, “Suggestions for the Institution of a new Social Science, under the name of Comparative Sociology”, *TNAPSS*, vol. 2, p. 696. A useful source on the history of the word sociology was published in the transactions of the first British sociological association: Victor V. Branford, “On the Origin and Use of the Word Sociology, and on the Relation of Sociological to other Studies and to Practical Problems”, *Transactions of the Sociological Society* (London, 1905), pp. 1–42.

112 See especially Emile Durkheim, *Moral Education: A Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1973 [based upon lectures, 1902–1903]), p. 5: “The fact is, we are witnessing the establishing [*sic*] of a science that is still in its beginnings, but that undertakes to treat the phenomena of moral life as natural phenomena — in other words, as rational phenomena.”

113 Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1984 [1893]), pp. xxviii–xxix: “What reconciles science and morality is the science of morality, for at the same time as it teaches us to respect moral reality it affords us the means of improving it.”

social, then employed the latter as an explanatory category, and indeed did so as part of a broad strategy to establish sociology as a science independent and distinct from all others. Though drawing metaphorically upon biology, he argued that society could only be explained in terms of its own unique structures and functions, its own organizations and rules, and its own logic of development. These essentially social (and moral) forms could in turn explain phenomena, as he famously demonstrated with respect to suicide. In contrast, the social marshalled little explanatory power in the discourses of the mid-Victorian social science movement. The social was made an object of knowledge, but still in a very ill-defined and loosely applied manner. Indeed, the “social” was often simply tacked onto the end of sentences that otherwise functioned on the basis of more familiar referents. With social economy, however, the social began to emerge as a category capable of explaining other phenomena. Social economics, by focusing upon the socio-moral relations between labour and capital, worker and master, rich and poor, and government and society, constructed the social as a category that could, potentially at least, explain variations in moral and material conditions and also degrees of conflict and harmony between groups as well as individuals. The social, as both *explanandum* and *explanans*, could begin to stand independently with, or against if necessary, the economic, the biological, and the psychological. The legacy of the moral-social nexus was thus primarily established by the social economists, by a broad and diverse group rather than a few great men, and it was established as such precisely, and one might say somewhat paradoxically, by moralizing economics.

This is not to conclude, however, that the character of the social as a morally infused domain was finally settled. Indeed, just what this implied about the social, whether in terms of conceptualization, investigation, explanation, or policy, has remained a central matter of contention throughout the twentieth century. The Durkheimian tradition, for example, developed a conceptualization in which all social relations were governed by “norms”, a form of secular morality that prescribed modes of proper conduct involving definite obligations and expectations held in place by both formal and informal sanctions. For Durkheim, social science became the science of morality. In Marxist traditions, however, the moral issue resolved itself into questions concerning the most effective way to develop an understanding of forms and techniques of exploitation and domination, and how to develop strategies and policies for the liberation of subordinated peoples, for the most part the working class. Of course, with the rediscovery of Weber and the later development of feminist and post-colonial theory, not to mention cultural studies and queer theory, the moral question in social science, however implicit and understated as such, has only intensified.