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HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

GERMANY AND THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CRISIS*

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ABSTRACT. *This article surveys the debate on the 'General Crisis' of the seventeenth century in the light of hitherto neglected research. Firstly, most theories of the crisis fail to combine its economic and socio-political aspects. Secondly, few explanations of the crisis take account of evidence from the local and regional levels. Thirdly and most seriously, theories of the crisis have ignored Germany, while historians of Germany have ignored the crisis debate. This article seeks to fill these gaps. It puts Germany at the centre of a comprehensive theory of the crisis that takes existing crisis theories as its starting point, but also shows how the Thirty Years War, largely caused by the peculiar institutional structure of the Holy Roman Empire, in turn wrought significant institutional change, not just in Germany, but throughout Europe.*

I. Introduction

The political, economic, and social upheavals of the mid-seventeenth century are called a 'General Crisis', and debated under that rubric, in most countries.¹ The exception is Germany. For historians of Germany, the Thirty Years War is the central concept for organizing the seventeenth century.² Conversely, historians of the general

* I am grateful to Jeremy Edwards, Larry Epstein and participants at the German Historical Society conference on 'Crisis in German history' in April 1989 and at a meeting of the Cambridge Historical Society in May 1991, for extremely helpful comments on earlier versions. I should like to thank André Carus in particular, for the many stimulating conversations in which these ideas have been developed, and for his valuable improvements to the final draft.

¹ Most of the major contributions to the debate are collected in T.S. Aston (ed.), *Crisis in Europe 1560-1660: Essays from Past and Present* (London, 1965); and N.G. Parker & L.M. Smith (eds.), *The General Crisis of the seventeenth century* (London, 1978).

² English-speaking historians of Germany sometimes refer to the crisis: valuable contributions on aspects of the crisis are made by C.R. Friedrichs, 'German town revolts and the seventeenth-century crisis', *Renaissance and modern studies*, 26 (1982), and W.W. Hagen, 'Seventeenth-century crisis in Brandenburg: The Thirty Years War, the destabilization of serfdom, and the rise of absolutism', *American historical review* (1989), 302-35. G. Benecke, 'The Thirty Years War and its place in the General Crisis of the seventeenth century: Review article', *Journal of European economic history*, 9 (1980) mentions the crisis in the title without dealing with it in the text. Two historians of the German Democratic Republic reviewed the crisis debate at its high point around 1970: G. Schilfert, 'Revolutionen beim Übergang vom Feudalismus zum Kapitalismus', *Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 1-2 (1969); H. Langer, 'Eine neue "Krise des Feudalismus"? Zur Diskussion um die sogenannte Krise des 17. Jahrhunderts', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 19 (1971). P. Kriedte's *Spätfeudalismus und Handelskapital* (Göttingen, 1980), translated as *Peasants, landlords and merchant capitalists: Europe and the world economy, 1500-1800* (Leamington Spa, 1983), places the economic crisis (although not the debate about it) at centre stage, pp. 79-126.

crisis have largely ignored Germany.³ This is unsatisfactory on both sides. For the crisis historians it is unacceptable not only because any theory of general crisis must be able to account for Germany, but also because the Thirty Years War was the most spectacular disorder of the crisis period. German historians, on the other hand, cannot be satisfied with a purely German account of the Thirty Years War that suppresses the wider political and economic context of what was, after all, a 'European civil war'.⁴

This article will reconcile these viewpoints by putting Germany squarely at the centre of a theory of the crisis that takes existing crisis theories as its starting point, but also shows how the Thirty Years War, largely caused by the peculiar institutional structure of the Holy Roman Empire, in turn wrought significant institutional change, not just in Germany, but throughout Europe.

II. *The general crisis debate*

Lively debate has surrounded the seventeenth-century crisis since the 1950s. One current has argued that the crisis was economic in origin. A second has focussed on politics, particularly the mid-century revolts and rebellions. A third current has adopted a sceptical stance toward the very concept of a general crisis.

The economic strand of the debate, in turn, falls into three broad classes: Marxist theories, theories stemming from price historians, and theories that locate the cause of the crisis in long-term ecological or demographic movements.

The Marxist historians of the general crisis saw it as a critical juncture in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. E. Hobsbawm opened the debate in 1954 along these lines⁵, followed by B. Porshnev, who saw two separate stages of class struggle: The mid-century revolts were a 'lower form of class struggle' between peasants and feudal nobility, which the nobility won by developing the central state. A 'higher' class struggle for control of that new entity then followed, between bourgeoisie and feudal aristocracy.⁶ Variants on these themes followed: M. Hroch and J. Petràn argued that an exogenous contraction in demand triggered the crisis, issuing in rebellions in the west and refeudalization in the east.⁷ Class struggle, in other versions, is less important than changes in the forces and relations of production.⁸

All Marxist theories shared two basic elements: the revolts were class conflicts, and the crisis was one of production, part of the transition from feudalism to capitalism.⁹ But there was wide disagreement: Was the primary cause of the crisis changes in

³ An exception is H.G. Koenigsberger in 'Die Krise des 17. Jahrhunderts', *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung*, 9 (1982), appearing in shortened form as 'The crisis of the 17th century: A farewell' in H.G. Koenigsberger, *Politicians and virtuosi: Essays in early modern history* (London, 1986), which emphasizes the importance of 'composite states' such as the Empire in shaping the crisis.

⁴ H.G. Koenigsberger, *The Habsburgs and Europe 1516-1660* (Ithaca/London, 1971), p. 219.

⁵ E.J. Hobsbawm, 'The crisis of the seventeenth century', in Aston, *Crisis*, pp. 5-58.

⁶ B. Porshnev, *Les soulèvements populaires en France de 1623 à 1648* (Paris, 1963); and 'Das Wesen des Feudalstaats', *Sowjetwissenschaft GA* (1952), 248-77.

⁷ M. Hroch and J. Petràn, *Das 17. Jahrhundert - Krise der Feudalgesellschaft?* (Hamburg, 1981; Czech orig. Prague, 1976).

⁸ J.A. Kosminski, 'Das Problem des Klassenkampfes in der Epoche des Feudalismus', *Sowjetwissenschaft GA* (1952), 248-77, esp. p. 260 criticising Porshnev; and A.N. Cistozvonov, 'Die Genesis des Kapitalismus und ihre Widerspiegelung in den regionalen Typen der Bauernbewegungen in Europa im XVI. bis XVIII. Jahrhundert (Problemstellung)', in G. Heitz et al. (eds.), *Der Bauer im Klassenkampf: Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Bauernkrieges und der bäuerlichen Klassenkämpfe im Spätfudalismus* (Berlin/GDR, 1975), pp. 1-26.

⁹ For instance, Langer, 'Krise', p. 1398.

production, or in the balance of class power? Which classes were in conflict? Was this the first crisis of rising capitalism or the last crisis of declining feudalism?¹⁰

Another group of economic historians, less theoretically motivated than the Marxists, concentrated on the evidence of price trends, diagnosing the seventeenth century as a period of instability following the sixteenth-century 'price revolution'. P. Chaunu focussed on the evidence of Spanish-American trade, whose final two Kondratieff cycles (the violent fluctuations of 1600-20, and the general decline of 1620-50) he identified with the general crisis, possibly as its cause.¹¹ R. Romano broadened the focus to the whole European economy, and to agriculture rather than trade as that economy's largest sector. While underlying structural factors such as the reimposition of serfdom play a role in Romano's theory, a Keynesian demand slump is viewed as the trigger, associated with the monetary upheavals of northern and central Europe in 1619-22.¹²

Finally, a third group of economic theories of the crisis focussed on ecological and demographic trends. J.A. Eddy argued that the 'Maunder minimum', the period of low sun-spot activity in the seventeenth century, caused lower temperatures and higher precipitation, poorer and later harvests, and a pan-European (even world-wide) subsistence crisis.¹³ E. Le Roy Ladurie argued that the cycles of expansion and contraction in the European economy were caused by an inescapable Malthusian dynamic. When populations hit their production ceilings, they limited their numbers by the 'positive checks' of famine, pestilence and war and the 'preventive checks' of late marriage and low fertility.¹⁴ According to Le Roy Ladurie, Europe reached such a Malthusian ceiling in the seventeenth century, resulting in a protracted crisis of subsistence.¹⁵

The political theories of the crisis have as a rule been less sophisticated and less general than those put forward by economic historians. While even contemporaries were aware of the revolts throughout Europe in the mid-seventeenth century¹⁶, it took until the mid-twentieth century for historians to overcome their nationalist isolation and tell Europe-wide stories about the remarkable cataract of disorder.¹⁷ Some valuable insights were gained, notably by the first attempt at a political explanation,

¹⁰ The debate on this question up to the mid-1960s is summarized in M.W. Netschkins, 'Zu den Ergebnissen der Diskussion über das "aufsteigende" und das "absteigende" Stadium des Feudalismus', *Sowjetwissenschaft: Gesellschaftswissenschaftliche Beiträge*, 11 (1964); see also Hroch & Petráň, *Das 17. Jahrhundert*, pp. 57-60.

¹¹ P. Chaunu, *Seville et l'Atlantique (1504-1650)* (Paris, 1955-9), VII, 39.

¹² R. Romano, 'Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: The economic crisis of 1619-22', in Parker & Smith, *Crisis*, pp. 165-225.

¹³ J.A. Eddy, 'The "Maunder Minimum": Sunspots and climate in the reign of Louis XIV', in Parker & Smith, *Crisis*, pp. 226-68; G. Utterstroem, 'Climatic fluctuations and population problems in early modern history', *Scandinavian economic history review*, 3 (1955), esp. 39-44.

¹⁴ E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Les paysans de Languedoc* (Paris, 1966), esp. I, pp. 8, 652-4.

¹⁵ J.A. Faber, 'The decline of the Baltic grain-trade in the second half of the seventeenth century', *Acta historiae Neerlandica*, 1, has subsequently argued that the demographic downswing, as manifested in the decline in grain shipments through the Oeresund in the second half of the seventeenth century, explains the crisis (p. 130).

¹⁶ Seventeenth-century writers aware of the contemporaneous revolts are quoted extensively in N.G. Parker & L.M. Smith, 'Introduction', in Parker & Smith, *Crisis*, pp. 1-4; and in Koenigsberger, 'Crisis', pp. 149-59.

¹⁷ The two earliest discussions of the crisis (which did not, however, advance explanations for it) were R.B. Merriman, *Six contemporaneous revolutions* (Glasgow, 1937); and R. Mousnier, *Les XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: Le progrès de la civilisation européenne et le déclin de l'Orient (1492-1715)* (2 vols., Paris, 1954), II, *Le XVIIe siècle (1598-1715)*.

by H.R. Trevor-Roper, who argued in 1959 (against Hobsbawm) that the mid-century revolts were not class struggle, but political conflict between a court faction (which benefited from the growing strength of the Renaissance state) and a country faction (which suffered the consequences).¹⁸ This idea was disputed by historians of other countries, who were quick to point out Trevor-Roper's Anglocentricity, and to substitute the peculiar political conflicts of their own countries as the driving force of the crisis. R. Mousnier argued that the crisis resulted from conflict between nobility and crown over taxes, as in France during the Fronde, while J. Polišíenský argued that it was an international crisis confronting absolutism and parliamentarism, as in Central Europe during the Thirty Years War.¹⁹

These divisions were exploited by the sceptics, who argued that the mid-seventeenth century crisis was not unique in early modern Europe, but just another cluster of disorders, no different from similar clusters in previous years. P. Clark, J.H. Elliott, I. Schoeffler, and J. Topolski separately pointed out spates of popular revolt and political rebellion at periods other than the 1640s: e.g., in the 1560s and the 1590s. The economic decline, also, began at different times in different parts of Europe: in northern Italy in the 1580s, Germany and Austria in the 1620s, France and the Baltic in the 1650s, and Castile in the late seventeenth century. England was only slightly affected, and the Netherlands hardly at all. Topolski argued that the seventeenth century saw not a general economic crisis, but 'consolidation' and the beginning of regional differentiation. Others contended that the evidence is flawed, and too regionally various to support the notion of any simultaneous or widespread economic breakdown.²⁰

Of most interest in the present context are two theories of the crisis, put forward by R. Brenner and N. Steensgaard, that draw together some or all of the strands in the debate surveyed above. Brenner's 1976 article pulled together the three currents of economic theories of the crisis – the Marxist, the price-cyclical, and the ecological-demographic.²¹ Brenner agreed with Romano's emphasis on agriculture, and with Le Roy Ladurie's focus on the relationship between population and resources, but he argued that trade and population cycles did not determine the course of the crisis. Why did the same cycles give rise to different outcomes in different parts of Europe: refeudalization in eastern Europe, peasant farming in France, large commercial estates in England? For Brenner, social structure was the answer: the seventeenth-century crisis was caused by class conflict between lord and peasant, and the differing paths of the crisis were caused by the differing relative strengths of these classes in different European societies.

The avenues opened by this analysis were never explored. Historians within

¹⁸ H.R. Trevor-Roper, 'The General Crisis of the seventeenth century', in Aston, *Crisis*, pp. 59–96.

¹⁹ R. Mousnier, *Fureurs paysannes* (Paris, 1967), and 'Research into the popular uprisings in France before the Fronde', in P.J. Coveney (ed.), *France in crisis, 1620–1675* (London/Basingstoke, 1977); J.V. Polišíenský, 'The Thirty Years War and the crises and revolutions of seventeenth-century Europe', *Past and present*, 39 (1968); 'Zur Problematik des Dreißigjährigen Krieges und der Wallensteinfrage', *Aus 500 Jahren deutsch-tschechoslowakischer Geschichte* (Berlin, 1958), pp. 106ff, 116; and 'The Thirty Years War', *Past and present*, 6 (1954).

²⁰ P. Clark (ed.), *The European crisis of the 1590s: Essays in comparative history* (London, 1985); J. Topolski, *Narodziny kapitalizmu w Europie XIV–XVII wieku* (Warsaw, 1965), quoted extensively in Langer, 'Krise', e.g. p. 1413; I. Schoeffler, 'Did Holland's Golden Age coincide with a period of crisis?', *Acta historiae Neerlandica*, 1 (1966), p. 88; J.H. Elliott, 'Revolution and continuity in early modern Europe', in Parker & Smith, *Crisis*, pp. 112–3; 'Yet another crisis?', in Clark, *Crisis*, p. 301–3.

²¹ R. Brenner, 'Agrarian class structure and economic development in pre-industrial Europe', *Past and present*, 70 (1976).

national traditions took – sometimes justified – exception to Brenner's delineation of specific national social structures.²² The ensuing debate obscured Brenner's perception that divergent patterns of economic crisis in seventeenth-century Europe may be explained by differences in social structure. The further challenge, of using social structure to explain the divergent patterns of *political* crisis (revolt and rebellion), was not taken up. Brenner's approach to the economic crisis was not carried over into the political sphere.

Where Brenner had tried to integrate the different economic theories of the crisis, Steensgaard tried to integrate the political with the economic. He argued that the crisis was caused by changes at the interface of politics and economics, changes in distribution, and redistribution. On the one hand, he saw a redistribution *among* states, with growing north Atlantic trade displacing the declining Spanish American and Mediterranean trade. On the other hand, and most centrally, he saw a redistribution *within* states: 'Behind the conflict we find the same thing everywhere,' he writes, 'the State's demand for higher revenues... In every case it was the governments that acted in a revolutionary manner: the tax demands disrupted the social balance. They did not create a revolutionary situation: they were in themselves a revolution.'²³ Steensgaard deployed evidence of the huge growth in the resources extracted by the early modern European state, and the military, bureaucratic and fiscal pressure necessary to achieve this. But the avenues opened by this approach (as with Brenner's) were never explored.

III. Germany and the crisis theories

All these theories have one thing in common: they leave out Germany. What happens when we put Germany back into the picture?

A. Germany and the economic theories

Economic theories of the crisis fail the test posed by German territorial fragmentation.

Economic cycles varied across German regions, whose economies began to diverge more widely precisely in this period. While commercial agriculture and 'proto-industries' arose in western Germany, east-Elbian Germany refeudalized. Some German regions never recovered from the trade slump of 1619–22 and the hyperinflation of the 1620s, while others emerged relatively unscathed. Parts of Germany (such as Hamburg) flourished throughout the Thirty Years War, but most were hard-hit, and still others had begun to decline before the war began.²⁴ Nor does a cyclical theory account for the German mid-century revolts and rebellions, which were regionally diverse and not closely correlated with economic performance.²⁵ If the

²² See the essays in T. H. Aston & C. H. E. Philpin (eds.), *The Brenner debate: Agrarian class structure and economic development in pre-industrial Europe* (Cambridge, 1985).

²³ N. Steensgaard, 'The seventeenth-century crisis', in Parker & Smith, *Crisis*, pp. 26–56; this passage, p. 44.

²⁴ Indeed, German regional diversity has given rise to a long controversy about whether German economic decline was caused by the Thirty Years War or predated it: see T.K. Rabb, 'The effects of the Thirty Years' War on the German economy', *Journal of modern history*, 34 (1962); and H. Kamen, 'The economic and social consequences of the Thirty Years' War', *Journal of modern history*, 39 (1968).

²⁵ The Habsburg lands, the Black Forest, the Upper Rhine, and Upper Swabia experienced frequent serious revolts from the late sixteenth century on, while in the north and east there were hardly any, and central Germany was relatively peaceful until the first half of the seventeenth

crisis consisted of a cyclical downswing, in Germany it was modified by factors peculiar to each region.

German class structure was also affected by the fragmentation of the Empire and its complex social and institutional structures. Eric Hobsbawm's mid-seventeenth-century peak in class conflict between the bourgeois and feudal classes cannot be found in Germany. The Imperial institutional framework largely isolated Germany's most powerful bourgeoisie, that of the Free Imperial Cities, from both peasants and nobles. The territorial 'home towns', as Mack Walker shows, obtained princely guarantees of their corporate privileges in this period.²⁶ The large number of courts, and the immense growth in government in this period, meant that in many German territories, the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie were losing ground to a political bourgeoisie of bureaucrats, *Kameralunternehmer*, court bankers, and others dependent on state favour.²⁷ Even industrial and commercial bourgeoisies depended increasingly on monopolies, subsidies, and other privileges granted by the prince, often within the framework of corporate or feudal institutions.²⁸ These adaptive responses, rather than conflict with the nobility, shaped the role of the German bourgeoisie in the crisis.

Their institutional isolation deprived German towns of the incentive to make common cause with peasants against nobles. There was little bourgeois support for early modern German peasant revolts, according to Schultz and Heitz, and little peasant involvement in urban revolts.²⁹ The German urban conflicts studied by Friedrichs were driven primarily by divisions internal to the bourgeoisie, rather than mirroring feudal-bourgeois class antagonisms.³⁰

The German towns' dependence on the state directed conflicts between bourgeoisie and nobility into institutional resolutions rather than violent confrontation. Indeed, the German bourgeoisie supported the military activities of the 'feudal' (aristocratic or monarchical) classes, during the Thirty Years War, rather than resisting them.³¹ Friedrichs finds that there was a slump, not a peak, in German bourgeois revolts between 1620 and 1650.³² The German crisis did not see the bourgeois victory of Hobsbawm's analysis, at least partly because their symbiosis with princes and nobility limited the growth of German towns.³³ In addition, the Thirty Years War

century (see Langer, 'Krise', p. 1398); this timing does not reflect the performance of the regional economies.

²⁶ M. Walker, *German home towns: Community, state, and general estate 1648-1871* (Ithaca/London, 1971).

²⁷ A. Hoffmann, 'Zur Typologie der Bauernaufstände in Oberösterreich', in W. Schulze (ed.), *Europäische Bauernrevolten der frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt, 1982), pp. 309-22; on this, p. 317.

²⁸ Walker, *German home towns*; S.C. Ogilvie, 'Coming of age in a corporate society: Capitalism, Pietism and family authority in rural Württemberg', *Continuity and change*, 1 (1986); G. Heitz, 'Der Zusammenhang zwischen den Bauernbewegungen und der Entwicklung des Absolutismus in Mitteleuropa', in Schulze, *Europäische Bauernrevolten*, pp. 171-90 (on this, p. 173).

²⁹ H. Schultz, 'Bäuerlicher Klassenkampf und "zweite Leibeigenschaft". Einige Probleme des Kampfes in der Zeit zwischen frühbürgerlicher Revolution und Dreißigjährigem Krieg', in Heitz et al., *Bauer im Klassenkampf*, pp. 401-4; G. Heitz, 'Bäuerliche Klassenkämpfe im Spätfeudalismus', in G. Brendler & A. Laube (eds.), *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg 1524/25* (Berlin, 1977), p. 207.

³⁰ Friedrichs, 'Revolts'; and C. R. Friedrichs, 'Urban conflicts and the Imperial constitution in seventeenth-century Germany', *Journal of modern history*, 58 suppl. (1986), S98-S123.

³¹ W. Reinhard, 'Theorie und Empirie bei der Erforschung Frühneuzeitlicher Volksaufstände', in H. Fenske, W. Reinhard, & E. Schulin (eds.), *Historia Integra: Festschrift für Erich Hassinger zum 70. Geburtstag* (Berlin, 1977), p. 174.

³² Friedrichs, 'Revolts'; C. R. Friedrichs, 'Urban conflicts', *passim*.

³³ J. de Vries, *European urbanization, 1500-1800* (1984), p. 153.

drained most free and territorial German cities of resources, stifled the industry and commerce on which an independent bourgeoisie would have relied, and strengthened the control of the feudal nobility or the state over 'free' bourgeois institutions.³⁴ The German bourgeoisie was either weak, or politicized, or unintegrated into territorial society. Its role in the crisis was minimal. Whatever the case with other European societies, in Germany the seventeenth-century crisis was not caused by a bourgeois revolution.

Nor was the crisis caused by Porshnev's or Brenner's peak in feudal conflict between lord and peasant. Feudalism, too, varied across German regions, and was shaped by a wide variety of social and political institutions – in particular, as Heide Wunder argues, by peasant communities and the state.³⁵ German landholding arrangements were diverse, and in many of them the peasants did *not* confront a feudal aristocracy.³⁶ In western Germany by the seventeenth century, most peasants had redeemed feudal obligations, or seen them pass to territorial princes, city magistracies, or religious houses. Peasant revolts, even against 'feudal' exactions, were therefore often channelled by the institutional affiliations and privileges of the landlords, rather than by class. In eastern Germany, where 'feudalism' survived, conflict was also channelled by variations in social and political institutions.³⁷

Moreover, conflicts *between* peasant and noble classes were often less important than differences *within* the peasant class or *within* the nobility. Early modern German villages were deeply riven, the interests of broad strata below the peasantry opposed to those of the richer 'full peasants', who were often in a minority.³⁸ These divergent interests prevented unified peasant (or 'rural proletarian') resistance to landlords, or channelled such resistance, where it arose, to the disadvantage of the peasant class as a whole.³⁹ Nor did the German nobility usually present a united front, even within the bounds of a single territory. Some parts of the aristocracy had become bureaucrats, tax-farmers

³⁴ W. Rausch (ed.), *Die Städte Mitteleuropas im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Linz, 1981); K. Gerteis, *Die deutschen Städte in der frühen Neuzeit. Zur Vorgeschichte der 'bürgerlichen Welt'* (Darmstadt, 1986), pp. 75–81.

³⁵ H. Wunder, 'Peasant organization and class conflict in eastern and western Germany', in Aston & Philpin, *Brenner debate*, pp. 91–100.

³⁶ W. Conze, 'The effects of nineteenth-century liberal agrarian reforms on social structure in Central Europe', in F. Crouzet et al. (eds.), *Essays in European economic history* (London, 1969), pp. 56–7.

³⁷ H. Harnisch, 'Die Gutsherrschaft: Forschungsgeschichte, Entwicklungszusammenhänge und Strukturelemente', *Jahrbuch für Geschichte des Feudalismus*, 9 (1985), esp. 231–4, where he argues that the legal characteristics of peasant leases were probably the most important factor distinguishing areas of *Gutsherrschaft* from those of greater personal liberty for peasants.

³⁸ W. Schulze, 'Europäische und deutsche Bauernrevolten der frühen Neuzeit – Probleme der vergleichenden Betrachtung', in Schulze, *Europäische Bauernrevolten*, pp. 40–1; G. Franz, *Geschichte des deutschen Bauernstandes vom frühen Mittelalter bis zum 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1976), pp. 214ff; J. Lesczynski, 'Forschungsergebnisse der polnischen Historiographie auf dem Gebiete des Klassenkampfes der schlesischen Bauern im Spätfudalismus', in Heitz et al., *Bauer im Klassenkampf*, p. 483.

³⁹ T. Robisheaux, 'Peasants and pastors: rural youth control and the Reformation in Hohenlohe, 1540–1680', *Social history*, 6 (1981), 281–300; T. Robisheaux, *Rural society and the search for order in early modern Germany* (Cambridge, 1989); H. Rebel, *Peasant classes: The bureaucratization of property and family relations under early Habsburg absolutism 1511–1636* (Princeton, 1983); W. Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand und feudale Herrschaft in der frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 1980), pp. 117–8; T. Barnett-Robisheaux, 'Peasant revolts in Germany and Central Europe after the Peasants' War: Comments on the literature', *Central European history*, 17 (1984), 384–403 (here 394–9); Hoffmann, 'Typologie', p. 316; Heitz, 'Zusammenhang', pp. 175–7; Lesczynski, 'Forschungsergebnisse'.

and lenders to the state. Others derived their income from feudal rents. Still others were unemployed, or in the service of foreign princes, supplanted in military and governmental functions by assorted court Jews and military entrepreneurs⁴⁰, and in bureaucratic office by a new *Staatspatriziat* of bourgeois technocrats.⁴¹ This divergence of economic and social interests generated conflict *within* the aristocracy and reduced cohesion in cases of conflict with other classes.⁴² These deep fissures within, rather than between, classes were no less evident at the Imperial level than within particular territories: the Thirty Years War itself, after all, began as a conflict between coalitions of territorial nobility.⁴³

For German peasant revolts, feudal conflict was neither sufficient nor necessary. Indeed, the 'refeudalization' of Brandenburg and Pomerania proceeded in the seventeenth century without serious revolts.⁴⁴ Where revolts were most numerous in the period after 1600, in southern Germany and the Habsburg lands, they were directed against taxation or religious regulation as often as against feudal burdens.⁴⁵ Even in cases of feudal conflict, the issue was often the intensification of seigneurial burdens by the prince's growing bureaucracy,⁴⁶ a pattern particularly common in Germany because the Imperial framework sustained small territories where the prince was the major landlord.⁴⁷ Nor can we argue that, when German peasants resisted the state rather than the nobility, they were merely resisting 'centralized feudalism'.⁴⁸ There

⁴⁰ These were close to 1500 in number, according to the estimate of R. Redlich, *The German military enterpriser and his workforce* (2 vols., Wiesbaden, 1964-5), I, 170. Polišínský, 'Crises and revolutions', refers to them as a 'new nobility' (p. 34).

⁴¹ P. Goubert & J. Meyer, 'Les problèmes de la noblesse au XVII^e siècle', *Thirteenth International Historical Congress* (Moscow, 1970), pp. 7, 9, 11; on this phenomenon within the Austrian *Hofkanzlei*, E. N. Williams, *The Ancien Regime in Europe* (New York, 1970), pp. 369-70; for a detailed territorial study, with material on the seventeenth century, J. Lampe, *Aristokratie, Hofadel und Staatspatriziat in Kurhannover 1714-1760* (2 vols., Hannover, 1963).

⁴² Hagen, 'Crisis'; generalized by R. Villari, 'Rivolte e coscienza rivoluzionaria nel secolo XVII', *Studi storici*, 12 (1971), 235-64, parts of whose argument are summarized in Koenigsberger, 'Crisis', p. 156.

⁴³ Langer, 'Krise', remarks that 'there was an increase in conflicts between individual fractions of the feudal class for the growth in the traditional feudal rent, and increasingly for the income from trade and commerce as well as from production' (p. 1412).

⁴⁴ On Brandenburg, see Hagen, 'Crisis'; on how the suppression of peasants in Pomerania took place 'without great class struggle', see B. Wachowiak, *Gospodarstwo położenie chłopów w domenach Księstwa Szczecińskiego w XVII w pierwszej połowie XVII wieku* (Szczecin, 1967), p. 353, cited in Langer, 'Krise', p. 1412.

⁴⁵ Reinhard, 'Theorie', p. 174; P. Bierbrauer, 'Bäuerliche Revolten im Alten Reich. Ein Forschungsbericht', in P. Blicke et al. (eds.), *Aufbruch und Empörung? Studien zum bäuerlichen Widerstand im Alten Reich* (Munich, 1980), pp. 52-5.

⁴⁶ Hoffmann, 'Typologie', pp. 309-13; Hagen, 'Crisis', esp. pp. 308-10; W. Schulze, 'Peasant resistance in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Germany in a European context', in K. von Greyerz (ed.), *Religion, politics and social protest: Three studies on early modern Germany* (London, 1984), pp. 82-5. On how anti-seigneurial grievances often developed out of anti-fiscal grievances in France as well, see H. Neveux, 'Die ideologische Dimension der französischen Bauernaufstände im 17. Jahrhundert', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 238 (1984), esp. 277-8.

⁴⁷ This is remarked on by both Barnett-Robisheaux, 'Revolts', pp. 391-2; and T. Scott, 'Peasant revolts in early modern Germany', *Historical journal*, 28 (1985), 455-68.

⁴⁸ Despite problems with the evidence, this view of the state is applied to early modern Germany by Heitz, 'Zusammenhang', e.g. p. 171: 'The absolute monarchy is the dictatorship of the class of the nobility, more exactly, the dictatorship in the interest of this class'; it is disputed by R. G. Asch, 'Estates and princes after 1648: The consequences of the Thirty Years War', *German history*, 6 (1988), 113-32, here esp. 121-2.

were very few German peasant revolts in which state innovations benefited only the nobility. Indeed, most larger German territories implemented policies of *Bauernschutz* in the seventeenth century, protecting the peasant household and the peasant community against lords for fiscal purposes.⁴⁹ Even during 'refeudalization', princes did not always support the economic interests of the nobility; their support for peasant resistance was widespread and deliberate.⁵⁰

Rebellious German peasants, even east of the Elbe, found it worthwhile to invest large sums in lobbying and litigation against their feudal lords in the courts of the territorial lord, and against the latter in Imperial courts.⁵¹ To conduct these cases, peasants sent permanent deputies to princely and Imperial courts, and established corporate peasant 'syndicates', subsequently the focus for other forms of collective action.⁵² Despite the protests of the noble Estates, princes and emperor were increasingly willing to accept such cases.⁵³ Laws enabling peasant litigation against lords were promulgated in the Habsburg hereditary lands from the 1530s on, and in the large and medium-sized territories of the Empire in the 1560s (e.g. Saxony in 1559); they were intensified everywhere toward the end of the century.⁵⁴ Passages enshrining this right increasingly appeared in legal textbooks.⁵⁵ The volume of such litigation increased from the late sixteenth century on.⁵⁶ The prince's courts were consistently prepared to issue peasants with at least redress of grievances, and often favourable judgments,⁵⁷ despite complaints from the whole noble Estate that such protracted 'parliamenting' with the rebellious peasants was 'counter to our forbears' custom and privilege'.⁵⁸ In early modern German peasant revolts, Schulze finds, 'almost always, concrete and palpable results can be observed, such as reductions in taxes, restrictions on *corvée*, general pardons for participants in revolts, indeed even changes of ruler'.⁵⁹

In Germany, the ubiquity of peasant litigation against lords, the willingness of peasants to invest resources in it, the favourable judgments delivered, and the rising chorus of noble complaint against it, cast doubt on the argument that the state might

⁴⁹ F. Lütge, *Geschichte der deutschen Agrarverfassung von der frühen Neuzeit bis zum 19. Jahrhundert* (2nd edn Stuttgart, 1967), pp. 127ff.

⁵⁰ W. W. Hagen, 'Capitalism and the countryside in early modern Europe: Interpretations, models, debates', *Agricultural history*, 62 (1988), esp. pp. 31, 41.

⁵¹ Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*. On East Elbian areas, see e.g. Hagen, 'Capitalism', p. 41, and Hagen, 'Crisis'. W. Trossbach, in 'Bauernbewegungen in deutschen Kleinterritorien zwischen 1648 und 1789', in W. Schulze (ed.), *Aufstände, Revolten, Prozesse: Beiträge zu bäuerlichen Widerstandsbewegungen im frühneuzeitlichen Europa* (Stuttgart, 1983), p. 250, argues that 'the peasants made these institutions [the Imperial courts] very much their own and transformed them in their own interest'.

⁵² *Ibid.* pp. 247-53.

⁵³ W. Schulze, "'Geben Aufruhr und Aufstand Anlass zu neuen heilsamen Gesetzen". Beobachtungen über die Wirkungen bäuerlichen Widerstands in der frühen Neuzeit', in Schulze, *Aufstände*, p. 273.

⁵⁴ H. Valentinitich, 'Advokaten, Winkelschreiber und Bauernprokuratoren in Innerösterreich in der frühen Neuzeit', in Schulze, *Aufstände*, pp. 191-2; Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*, pp. 77-80.

⁵⁵ W. Schulze, 'Die veränderte Bedeutung sozialer Konflikte', in Schulze, *Europäische Bauernrevolten*, p. 286. ⁵⁶ Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*, p. 78; Hagen, 'Crisis', p. 308.

⁵⁷ Schulze, 'Geben Aufruhr', p. 265; Hagen, 'Crisis'; Trossbach, 'Bauernbewegungen', p. 248.

⁵⁸ This was the formal complaint of the Upper Austrian nobility in the aftermath of the peasant uprising of 1597. The Estates of Vorderösterreich had made similar complaints in 1594. Trossbach, 'Bauernbewegungen', pp. 247-8; Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*, p. 96.

⁵⁹ Schulze, 'Geben Aufruhr', p. 265.

judge against individual nobles but not against the interests of the nobility as a class, and thus that peasant revolts against the German state were simply part of 'feudal' conflict.⁶⁰ Although not the objective and benign state of conservative historiography⁶¹, the German *Kleinstaat* was not the 'captured' state, either, a mere tool of the feudal nobility.⁶²

Finally, the severe conflicts between nobility and princes in German territories cast doubt on a view of the crisis in terms of feudal conflict between lord and peasant. The Bohemian Revolt in 1618, the Lower Austrian and Moravian revolts of the same date, and the Upper Austrian rebellion of 1626 were all noble rebellions against Habsburg centralization.⁶³ In 1620, the Saxon nobility resisted their Elector's aid to the Emperor in suppressing the rebellious Bohemian nobles, 'their dear neighbours, their friends through blood and other ties, and also their co-religionists'.⁶⁴ In 1625 the Hessian nobility, rebelling against the military, fiscal and religious policies of their Landgrave, put itself under the protection of the Emperor.⁶⁵ The nobles of German territories resisted the state because it taxed them, because it forced a state religion on them, because it replaced them in administration and military endeavour by new university-educated technocrats (*Kamerarlisten*), and because it competed directly with them for the extortion of peasant surpluses.⁶⁶

The relationships of economic classes with the state and with one another in seventeenth-century German societies covered a spectrum. At one end, there were small principalities where landlord and territorial lord were one and the same, although even here the state cannot be viewed solely as a tool of class conflict between lord and peasant. But on the other end there were German territories where a variety of classes, sub-classes, corporate groups, institutions, and individuals (including the state's own bureaucracy and military) all competed for favours from the state. In addition, the Empire made all German states subject to various levels of pressure and legitimate interference from outside. The characteristics of German popular revolts and noble rebellions suggest that in most German territories by the seventeenth century, the state was the tool of no single class, but rather purchased support (via redistributive and regulatory policies) from many social groups, trading off to the point where the ratio between favours given and support received was roughly equal for each group.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ As is argued, for example, by Heitz, 'Zusammenhang', pp. 184–6; by Schultz, 'Klassenkampf', p. 397; and by J. Leszczynski, 'Forschungsergebnisse', p. 483. Their positions are disputed by J. Petràn, in 'Typologie der Bauernbewegungen in Mitteleuropa unter dem Aspekt des Übergangs vom Feudalismus zum Kapitalismus', in Heitz et al., *Bauer im Klassenkampf*, p. 458.

⁶¹ For example, O. Brunner, *Neue Wege der Verfassungs- und Sozialgeschichte* (2nd edn, Göttingen, 1968), pp. 199–212.

⁶² As portrayed, e.g., by Heitz, 'Zusammenhang', pp. 184–6. On the German *Kleinstaat*, see J. van der Zande, *Bürger und Beamter: Johann Georg Schlosser 1739–1799* (Stuttgart, 1986), esp. pp. 138–46.

⁶³ As argued by Langer, 'Krise', p. 1410.

⁶⁴ Quoted in F.L. Carsten, *Princes and parliaments in Germany from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century* (Oxford, 1959), p. 229.

⁶⁵ Ibid. pp. 177–8.

⁶⁶ On Brandenburg see Hagen, 'Crisis'; on German territories in general see Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*, pp. 69–73.

⁶⁷ V. Press, 'Herrschaft, Landschaft und "Gemeiner Mann" in Oberdeutschland vom 15. bis zum frühen 19. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins*, NF 84 (1975), esp. 210. Trossbach, 'Bauernbewegungen', argues that the courts judging peasant litigation against lords 'made it clear to the *Duodezfürsten* [princes of small states] that even the early modern state could not survive without a minimal consensus and a certain recognition by the governed' (p. 248). This is consistent with certain recent developments in the economic theory of interest groups and

This suggests that German absolutism cannot be viewed as merely the centralization of feudalism, and the crisis to which it contributed cannot be simplified as a form of feudal conflict.

B. Germany and the political theories

But if Germany does not confirm the economic theories of the crisis, it provides even less support for the political theories.

For German politics, Trevor-Roper's idea of a crisis between luxurious 'court' and puritan 'country' is all but irrelevant. There were over one thousand courts in the Empire, and most were geographically and socially close to the rest of their territories. The pressures for confessional uniformity arising from the Augsburg religious settlement caused German puritan movements either to be outlawed altogether or, as with Württemberg pietism after 1645, to become the state religion.⁶⁸

But French high politics come no closer than English to providing a European paradigm. Mousnier views the crisis as a struggle between crown and nobles over taxation, resolved by the emergence of absolutism. His argument that the absolutist state 'resolved' the crisis appears peculiarly inappropriate for German societies, repeatedly destabilized by absolutist taxation and warfare.⁶⁹ Moreover, relations between princes and nobles were channelled by factors specific to each European state and, in Germany, by Imperial institutions. The French nobility may have invariably opposed princely centralization and taxation, but in Germany matters were not so simple.⁷⁰ Many German nobles were Free Imperial Knights, excluded from all but Imperial and Circle taxes.⁷¹ Other nobles, in the Habsburg hereditary lands for instance, administered and benefited from taxes paid by other classes; despite their own opposition to absolutism, they also opposed popular revolts. The nobles of small southwestern principalities (where feudal and territorial lordship coincided) strongly supported rising taxes, as also in territories such as Mecklenburg, with strong noble estates and a weak bourgeoisie.⁷² Elsewhere, as in Brandenburg, the nobility was split, with the larger nobles sharing fiscal responsibility with the prince, and supporting higher taxation, while the Junkers resisted such competition for peasant surpluses.⁷³ Only the nobles of Saxony, Hessen-Kassel, and the Rhine territories resembled French nobles in resisting princely taxation.⁷⁴ Every German society had different fissures between nobility and prince and within the nobility itself. Indeed, political theories of the crisis tend to fail the test of territorial variation for Europe more widely.

political processes: G.S. Becker, 'A theory of competition among pressure groups for political influence', *Quarterly journal of economics*, 93 (1983), 371-400, and S. Peltzman, 'Toward a general theory of regulation', *Journal of law and economics* (1976), 211-40.

⁶⁸ P. Schattenmann, 'Eigenart und Geschichte des deutschen Frühpietismus mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Württembergisch-Franken', *Blätter für württembergische Kirchengeschichte*, 40 (1936), 1-32. ⁶⁹ Mousnier, 'Uprisings', pp 161, 164; and *Le XVIIe siècle*, pp. 249-56.

⁷⁰ R. Mousnier, *Les institutions de la France*, 1, 85-93.

⁷¹ The original Württemberg nobility, by refusing to attend meetings of the Estates, became directly subject to the Emperor in the early sixteenth century, and could levy taxes independently. See J. A. Vann, *The making of a state: Württemberg, 1593-1793* (Ithaca/London, 1984).

⁷² Scott, 'Revolts'; but for other examples such as Lübeck and Königsberg cf. also M.-L. Pelus, 'Lübeck au milieu du XVIIe siècle: Conflits politiques et sociaux, conjoncture économique', *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 92 (1978); Königsberger, 'Krise', p. 165.

⁷³ Hagen, 'Crisis'.

⁷⁴ Carsten, *Princes*, pp. 176ff.

But there is another reason these theories based on emerging nation-states such as England and France cannot be generalized. Europe still contained a number of 'composite states' (in Koenigsberger's phrase), of which the Spanish Empire and the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation were only the most outstanding examples.⁷⁵ In composite states, politics were channelled by a complex institutional framework of interlocking and competing levels of sovereignty. Indeed, the institutions of the Empire, it will be argued presently, were what gave the German crisis its peculiar form.

Yet even Polišenký's theory of the crisis in terms of Central European international politics fails to take account of Imperial institutions. He describes it as a 'political crisis of the old ruling classes' (principally the Thirty Years War), driven by a confrontation between a 'Spanish' (absolutist) and a 'Dutch' (parliamentary) conception of society.⁷⁶ But this thesis comes unstuck in the very places where explanation is most urgently required. Wallenstein was central to the Imperial (absolutist) war effort, yet was consistently opposed and ultimately murdered by the Spanish faction at the Imperial court. The changing alignment of Electoral Saxony, a key factor in the conflict, was informed by an almost equal suspicion of the threats posed by Catholic absolutism and Calvinist conspiracy to the Imperial constitution.⁷⁷ Bavaria, a mainstay of the Imperialist cause, far from being inspired by Spanish absolutism, was primarily motivated by Electoral ambitions internal to the Empire and by suspicion of Spain, which ultimately led it to ally with France. Central Europe's 'international crisis' cannot be explained by a clash of cultures: the constraints imposed by German Imperial institutions must be taken into account.

C. Germany and the sceptics

No theory of the crisis seems to work for Germany. But neither does the sceptical view. Germany shows unmistakable signs of a peak in social conflict in the first half of the seventeenth century. German societies were racked not only by a civil war which surpassed any other in Europe, but also by the ubiquitous peak in popular protest.⁷⁸ Half the peasants' revolts in Brandenburg between 1548 and 1620 took place in the two decades after 1600.⁷⁹ Peasant litigation and revolt in Vorderösterreich intensified after the turn of the century.⁸⁰ One compendium of supra-local German revolts shows four to six for each quarter-century after 1525, but thirteen for 1625-50.⁸¹ Revolts in small territories show an abrupt decline after mid-century, from nine revolts in the 1650s, to one or two each decade for the rest of the century.⁸² Schulze's analysis of German peasant revolts concludes that, while they were less violent, less frequent, and

⁷⁵ Koenigsberger, 'Crisis'.

⁷⁶ Polišenký, 'Thirty Years War'; 'Crises and revolutions'; 'Problematik', pp. 106ff, 116.

⁷⁷ Carsten, *Princes*, p. 226.

⁷⁸ This is best documented for France: R. Pillorget, *Les mouvements insurrectionnels de Provence entre 1596 et 1715* (Paris, 1975), enumerates 108 popular movements in Provence for the 'peaceful' period 1596-1635, but many more per annum 1635-48, and no fewer than 66 in the five years of the Fronde, 1648-53 (p. 988); Y.-M. Bercé, *Histoire des croquants. Etude des soulèvements populaires au XVIIe siècle dans le sud-ouest de la France* (2 vols., Geneva, 1974), counts almost five hundred revolts in southwest France in the period 1590-1715, of which sixty per cent occurred in the period from 1635 to 1650 (pp. 680ff).

⁷⁹ H. Harnisch, 'Klassenkämpfe der Bauern in der Mark Brandenburg zwischen frühbürgerlicher Revolution und Dreißigjährigem Krieg', *Jahrbuch für Regionalgeschichte*, 5 (1975), 171.

⁸⁰ C. Ulbrich, 'Der Charakter bäuerlichen Widerstands in vorderösterreichischen Herrschaften', in Schulze, *Aufstände*, p. 215.

⁸¹ Bierbrauer, 'Bäuerliche Revolten', p. 52.

⁸² Trossbach, 'Bauernbewegungen', pp. 255-7.

geographically more limited than revolts in England and France, they did clearly peak (at least in Upper Germany and the Habsburg lands) in the early seventeenth century.⁸³ The German economy, too, was clearly undergoing widespread and profound malaise in this period, although it varied across different territories. Even if the crisis only represents an economic *shift* from some regions to others, it would need to be explained and analysed. Whether or not we call it a 'general crisis', there is enough evidence of economic, social and political breakdown to require an explanation.

IV. A 'crisis of distribution'

Existing explanations fail because they cannot simultaneously account for the ubiquity of the seventeenth-century crisis and its variation across European societies. Steensgaard comes closest to explaining the *ubiquity* of the crisis when he shows its connections with the single common factor among seventeenth-century European societies, the immense growth of the state. Brenner comes closest to explaining its *variation* when he shows how the crisis was channelled by different social structures. Let us see whether we can explain the crisis better if we bring these together. Did the early seventeenth century see developments, particularly in German-speaking central Europe, which accelerated the pressures on both state and society?

Let us begin with Steensgaard's view of the crisis as one of distribution, caused by the growth of taxation and warfare. Taxes certainly rose throughout Europe in the early modern period, and they rose particularly fast in the first half of the seventeenth century.⁸⁴ This would not have been possible without a corresponding increase in the size of bureaucracies and, as Parker shows, the size of armies.⁸⁵ Germany moved in the same direction, but its route was determined by the interaction of *two* levels of state growth, the Imperial and the territorial. Taxation and war began to grow on the Imperial level in the sixteenth-century wars against the Turks and then against the protestants. Imperial activities stimulated territorial states to grow: directly, when Charles V deployed the precocious Spanish state against protestantism, and the German protestant princes mobilized in response; indirectly, when between 1519 and 1606 Imperial taxes increased sixfold, creating (as Schulze shows) the precedent and the need for an increase in territorial taxes.⁸⁶ But it was the tensions of the early

⁸³ Schulze, 'Europäische und deutsche Bauernrevolten', p. 27.

⁸⁴ Steensgaard, 'Crisis', pp. 36–44. For England, M. Braddick, 'State formation in early modern England', *Social history*, 16 (1991), suggests that between the 1590s and the 1670s the tax revenue of the state increased by a factor of sixteen (p. 2); according to J. Morrill, 'What was the English Revolution?', *History today* (1984), the English crown doubled its real income between 1603 and 1637 (pp. 11–2). According to E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Les paysans de Languedoc* (Paris, 1966), pp. 294, 481–2, direct taxation alone doubled as a share of gross product in Languedoc in the three decades before the Fronde; the figures in R. Bonney, *The king's debts: Finance and politics in France 1589–1661* (Oxford, 1981), suggest that total taxation in France may have more than doubled in the fifty years before 1630, and may have quadrupled from 1630 to 1640. According to F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II* (2 vols., London, 1972), 1, the Venetian and Spanish state budgets tripled in the second half of the sixteenth century, while prices rose by less than two-thirds (p. 33).

⁸⁵ According to N. G. Parker, 'The "military revolution, 1560–1660" – a myth?', *Spain and the Netherlands 1559–1659* (London, 1979), in the forty years before 1630, the armies of Spain increased by half again, those of France doubled, those of England and the Dutch Republic more than doubled, and those of Sweden tripled (p. 96); Parker argues that the cost of putting each of these soldiers in the field rose by a factor of five between 1530 and 1630.

⁸⁶ Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*, pp. 68–9; W. Schulze, *Reich und Türkengefahr im späten 16. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1978), p. 301.

seventeenth century, in particular the Thirty Years War, that entrenched the institutions and the consensus for fiscal growth on the territorial level, making it irreversible and ubiquitous.⁸⁷ In the decades before the war, and at latest by 1640, each and every German state grew immensely, whatever its prior level of development.

The Habsburg possessions developed early. By 1600, both Emperor (as territorial lord) and Estates had developed sophisticated administrative mechanisms to pay for the Turkish wars.⁸⁸ This aroused resistance, muted in Styria and the Austrias, more violent in Vorderösterreich, where the economic base and institutional mechanisms for high taxation were lacking.⁸⁹ But even the precocious Habsburg fiscal and administrative mechanisms were revolutionized after the Battle of the White Mountain by devices adopted from the practices of wartime, and from military entrepreneurs such as Wallenstein.⁹⁰

Bavaria was another early developer. The future Elector Maximilian wrote to his father in 1598, 'I see very well that among both spiritual and temporal lords only *ragion di stato* is considered, and that he is respected who has much land or much money, and as long as we have none, we will never have any authority among Italians or others, until we put ourselves into a better position in financial matters'.⁹¹ By 1618, Bavarian taxes had doubled. But here, too, it was the war which caused the real expansion, resulting in the bloody tax rebellion of 1633-4.⁹² In 1641 a Bavarian jurist wrote, 'the [war] "Contribution" has unfortunately become so common during this continual twenty-year war that the word is no longer Latin but rather to such an extent German that the peasants in the field understand it altogether too Germanly'.⁹³ By 1660, Bavarian peasants' payments to landlords had quadrupled since 1480, but their taxes to the state had risen by a factor of twenty-two.⁹⁴

In Saxony, the tax increases of the sixteenth century had been more moderate, and more easily assimilated by the country's industrial prosperity.⁹⁵ The Thirty Years War revolutionized the scale of taxation and the institutions for raising it.⁹⁶ Despite repeated parliamentary grants of debt relief and new taxes, many taxes were by the 1630s being levied without consent.⁹⁷ A new military tax imposed in 1646 became a regular quarterly levy which continued even when the war was over, enabling the establishment of a standing army⁹⁸, and increasing tenfold by 1700.⁹⁹

⁸⁷ Asch, 'Estates', p. 129; G. Schormann, *Der Dreißigjährige Krieg* (Göttingen, 1985), pp. 85-111; G. Livet, *La Guerre de Trente Ans* (Paris, 1963), p. 84; A. Loeb, *Der Sieg des Fürstenrechts auch auf dem Gebiet der Finanzen - vor dem 30jährigen Krieg* (Munich-Leipzig, 1916); and the summary in T. Mayer, *Handbuch der Finanzwissenschaft* (2 vols., Tübingen, 1952), I, 236-72.

⁸⁸ W. Schulze, *Landesdefension und Staatsbildung. Studien zum Kriegswesen des innerösterreichischen Territorialstaates (1564-1619)* (Graz/Cologne/Vienna, 1973), pp. 112ff. A parallel to this can be seen in the situation in the Netherlands, with its repercussions on the Spanish state, especially Castile.

⁸⁹ Ulbrich, 'Character', pp. 207, 213, 215.

⁹⁰ R. J. W. Evans, *The making of the Habsburg monarchy, 1550-1700* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 198-200; K. Richter, 'Die böhmischen Länder von 1471-1740', in K. Bosl (ed.), *Handbuch der Geschichte der böhmischen Länder* (Stuttgart, 1966-72), II, 293-313.

⁹¹ H. Dollinger, *Studien zur Finanzreform Maximilians I. von Bayern in den Jahren 1598-1618: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Frühabsolutismus* (Göttingen, 1968), p. 10.

⁹² Dollinger, *Studien*; also Carsten, *Princes*, p. 394.

⁹³ Quoted in Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*, p. 69; there is a pun on 'deutschlich', between 'Deutschlich' ('in German') and 'deutlich' ('clearly').

⁹⁴ Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*, p. 69.

⁹⁵ Carsten, *Princes*, p. 228.

⁹⁶ Electoral debts rose from 3.3m guilders in 1622, to 7.1m by 1628, to 11.9m by 1657, despite generous grants and taxes: *ibid.* pp. 229-30.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 232.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 239.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 232.

States without an advanced fiscal structure before 1618 were forced to develop one. In Württemberg, for instance, central and local bureaucracy had to grow rapidly to administer war taxes: by 1644, more was being spent in three months on billeting alone than in 1620 for an entire year's operations.¹⁰⁰ In Hessen-Kassel, taxes increased continually throughout the war despite the resistance of the Estates, and by 1648, a standing army of twenty regiments had been established.¹⁰¹ Peace brought only a temporary disarmament. By 1676 the army had returned to twenty-three regiments, soon supported by monthly military contributions.¹⁰²

Brandenburg is the most striking example of the effects of the war.¹⁰³ Because Brandenburg avoided the sixteenth-century wars, its administrative and fiscal apparatus remained unsophisticated. Unable to avoid the Thirty Years War, however, the state broke down altogether in the 1620s, and the territory was devastated.¹⁰⁴ The institutions which emerged at the end of the war reflected raw military and economic might: the post-war Brandenburg Recess, which granted state enforcement of serfdom in return for finance sufficient for a standing army, failed to restore economic or institutional powers to the peasantry or the bourgeoisie, and laid the basis for the strongest state in Europe.

The Thirty Years War can be viewed as an institutional hothouse. During the war, German princes increased their independence from subjects, began to disregard customary privileges, imitated the administrative and fiscal measures of military entrepreneurs and occupying powers¹⁰⁵, and raised standing armies which could be used both abroad and against their own subjects.¹⁰⁶ In this hothouse, tardy developers such as Württemberg were forced along toward fiscal, bureaucratic, and military centralization. Early-developing Austria, Bavaria, and Saxony grew huge bureaucratic and fiscal structures. In Brandenburg traditional institutions withered, clearing the ground for a sturdy and rapid growth of new ones after 1648. Even small principalities participated in the expansion of taxation and state spending, and reaped the social and economic consequences.¹⁰⁷

In German (as in other European) territories, this growth in taxation (and its expenditure on warfare) put pressure on an economy without large surpluses, often on economic sectors and social groups least able to bear it. It is thus hardly surprising that the period in which most of this growth took place also saw the peak of economic malaise and socio-political conflict – in German states just as in other states that participated in the war – which we call the seventeenth-century crisis.

But this is only part of the story. The growth of the state in early modern Europe affected more than taxation and warfare. The administrative instruments developed for *these* purposes could also regulate activities previously inaccessible to government,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 53.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p. 180.

¹⁰² Ibid. p. 182.

¹⁰³ P.-M. Hahn, 'Landesstaat und Ständetum im Kurfürstentum Brandenburg während des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts', in P. Baumgart (ed.), *Ständetum und Staatsbildung in Brandenburg-Preussen* (Berlin, 1983), pp. 41–79; Hagen, 'Crisis', pp. 314–8. ¹⁰⁴ Hagen, 'Crisis', pp. 314–5.

¹⁰⁵ F. Redlich, 'Contributions in the Thirty Years' War', *Economic history review*, 2nd ser. 12 (1959), shows the ways in which the new forms of finance developed during the war by Spinola, Mansfeld, Tilly and Wallenstein circumvented traditional institutional barriers to tax-raising, and were subsequently adopted by princes.

¹⁰⁶ Carsten, *Princes*, pp. 72–3; Asch, 'Estates', pp. 128–32.

¹⁰⁷ Trossbach, 'Bauernbewegungen', concludes that the common denominator explaining simultaneous waves of popular rebellion in small territories of different political structure and geographical position was 'taxation by Empire and Imperial Circle, which accompanied the great wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' (pp. 240–1).

and they could offer redistributive services to a wide range of favoured groups and institutions. Resistance to these *new* forms of redistribution, and competition to control them, were central elements in the crisis. It is here that Brenner's theory of social variation comes in, for this process was channelled by the different social institutions of each European society.

The economy was one of the most important arenas for the growing power of the state. In Germany, as elsewhere, the economy had grown rapidly in the sixteenth century, with increasing regional specialization, expanding trade,¹⁰⁸ and the growth of markets.¹⁰⁹ This economic growth created incentives to compete for political control of products, factor inputs, and the institutions governing their allocation. There is evidence to suggest that in Germany, as elsewhere, by the first half of the seventeenth century, this competition was contributing to the socio-political and economic malaise which we call the 'General Crisis'. But the social outcome of this competition, as Brenner pointed out, varied across European societies. In Germany, the competition was often won by *corporate groups* – village communities, small 'home towns', guilds, and merchant companies – which the state licensed to control each of the different economic sectors.¹¹⁰ Indeed, corporate groups were central to this competition: in 1643, Elector Friedrich Wilhelm of Brandenburg refused to hear a legal suit by a group of peasants against their lords, on the (controversial) grounds that 'We cannot in any way approve the peasants' independent undertaking, especially since they do not constitute a corporate body'.¹¹¹

Agricultural growth encouraged landlords in Germany, as elsewhere, to seek to use the new powers of the state to increase feudal burdens, extend monopolies, and curtail peasants' rights.¹¹² In turn, peasants lobbied, litigated, and rebelled, to defend themselves and to gain princely support for their own interests. Both groups secured some of what they sought. We saw earlier that German princes diversified their sources of social support, by deciding legal cases against landlords, remedying peasant grievances, and instituting policies of *Bauernschutz* which strengthened peasant families and villages, if only to preserve peasant production for state, as opposed to noble, extraction. But alongside *Bauernschutz*, German princes (particularly in the east) also enforced feudal regulations.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ P. Kriedte, H. Medick, J. Schlumbohm, *Industrialization before industrialization: Rural industry in the genesis of capitalism* (Göttingen, 1977), pp. 26ff; J. de Vries, *The economy of Europe in an age of crisis, 1600–1750* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 30ff.

¹⁰⁹ Kriedte, *Peasants*.

¹¹⁰ For studies of corporatism in action in German economies, see Walker, *German home towns*, and the literature surveyed in Ogilvie, 'Coming of age'. The extraordinary prominence of the corporation as an organizational pivot in German socio-political and legal structures is apparent from the work of O. von Gierke, *Das deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht* (4 vols., Berlin, 1868–1913); G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Leipzig, 1911), e.g. p. 394; W. Sombart, *Der moderne Kapitalismus* (2nd edn, Munich, 1928); A.W. Carus, 'Christian Thomasius, corporatism, and the ethos of the German professional classes in the early Enlightenment' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1981); and A. Black, *Guilds and civil society in European political thought from the twelfth century to the present* (Ithaca, 1984).

¹¹¹ Quoted in Hagen, 'Crisis', p. 317.

¹¹² Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*, pp. 69–73; for instance, one grievance of the rebellious Upper Austrian peasants in 1626 was their lords' use of legal monopolies to hinder access to the growing markets for agricultural products: Hoffmann, 'Typologie', pp. 314, 318.

¹¹³ These policies included the forcible conversion of leaseholds to hereditary tenures, the compulsory imposition of single-heir inheritance, the development of unified legal structures, and the strengthening of corporate village institutions: F. Lütge, *Geschichte der deutschen Agrarverfassung*, pp. 127ff; O. Hoetzsch, 'Der Bauernschutz in den deutschen Territorien vom 16. bis ins 19.

How the competition for control of agriculture was channelled by German social structures helps explain some characteristics of the crisis specific to Germany. Schultz points out that peasant revolts lasted longer and were more frequently associated with legal cases in Germany than elsewhere in Europe. *Bauernschutz*, by strengthening the corporate peasant village, provided a strong institution around which legal, as well as violent, resistance to landlords (and prince) could be organized over long periods.¹¹⁴ Secondly, from the early seventeenth century, German agriculture went into a long decline.¹¹⁵ Its stagnation may have been exacerbated by the way in which *Bauernschutz* strengthened communal regulation of agriculture and tended to make it the monopoly preserve of richer peasants,¹¹⁶ while refeudalization increased labour-intensity and discouraged agricultural innovation.¹¹⁷

Industries, too, became arenas of struggle in Germany among different corporate groups – communities, guilds, and merchant companies, competing for state monopolies, wage and price controls, subsidies, tariffs, entry restrictions, labour market regulations, and other legislative favours. Guilds survived in Germany and were strengthened by state legislation. The famous German ‘proto-industries’ early became the monopoly preserve of privileged corporate groups – the Wuppertaler Garnnahrung, the Calwer Zeughandlungskompagnie, the Uracher Leinwandlungskompagnie – which invested a great deal in lobbying, bribes, and loans to the state, and delivered local regulation in exchange for legislative favours.¹¹⁸

Although these institutional features of German industry are well-known, the literature does not analyse their macro-economic effects (e.g., on the adoption of new technology, and the growth of output and trade). Insofar as corporate competition for

Jahrhundert’, *Schwäbische Jahrbuch*, 16 (1902), 239–271; E. Patzelt, ‘Bauernschutz in Österreich vor 1848’, *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichte*, 58 (1950), 637–55; Hagen, ‘Crisis’.

¹¹⁴ Schulze, ‘Peasant resistance’; Schulze, ‘Europäische und deutsche Bauernrevolten’.

¹¹⁵ Conze, ‘Agrarian reforms’.

¹¹⁶ Lütge, *Agrarverfassung*; W. Abel, *Geschichte der deutschen Landwirtschaft vom frühen Mittelalter bis zum 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1959); E. Weis, ‘Ergebnisse eines Vergleichs der grundherrschaflichen Strukturen Deutschlands und Frankreichs vom 13. bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts’, *Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 57 (1970), 1–14; Robisheaux, ‘Peasants and pastors’; Robisheaux, *Rural society*.

¹¹⁷ J. Topolski, ‘La réfeodalisation dans l’économie des grands domaines en Europe central et orientale (XVIe–XVIIIe ss.)’, *Studia historiae oeconomicae*, 6 (1971), 51–63; J. Nichtweiss, ‘Zur Frage der zweiten Leibeigenschaft und des sogenannten preussischen Weges der Entwicklung des Kapitalismus in der landwirtschaft Ostdeutschlands’, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 1 (1953), 687–717; J. Kuczynski, ‘Zum Aufsatz von Johannes Nichtweiss über die zweite Leibeigenschaft’, in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 2 (1954), 467–71; Conze, ‘Agrarian reforms’.

¹¹⁸ H. Kisch, ‘From monopoly to laissez-faire: The early growth of the Wupper Valley textile trades’, *Journal of European economic history*, 1 (1972), 298–407; W. Troeltsch, *Die Calwer Zeughandlungskompagnie und ihre Arbeiter* (Jena, 1897); H. Medick, ‘“Freihandel für die Zukunft”: Ein Kapitel aus der Geschichte der Preiskämpfe im württembergischen Leinengewerbe des 18. Jahrhunderts’, in R. Vierhaus (Festschrift), *Mentalitäten und Lebensverhältnisse: Beispiele aus der Sozialgeschichte der Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 1983); J. Schlumbohm, ‘Seasonal fluctuations and social division of labour: Rural linen production in the Osnabrück and Bielefeld regions and the urban woollen industry in the Niederlausitz, ca. 1700 – ca. 1850’, in M. Berg, P. Hudson, & M. Sonenscher (eds.), *Manufacture in town and country before the factory* (Cambridge, 1983); Ogilvie, ‘Coming of age’; S.C. Ogilvie, ‘Women and proto-industrialisation in a corporate society: Württemberg woollen weaving, 1590–1760’, in P. Hudson & W.R. Lee (eds.), *Women’s work and the family economy in historical perspective* (Manchester, 1990).

extra-economic control of industry favoured established producers, limited output, and raised prices (as monopolies seek to do), and insofar as resources were invested in this competition rather than in productive ends, it would have contributed to the economic downturn.

To sum up: The century prior to the crisis saw a (probably not coincidental) confluence between the growth of the economy and that of the state. Economic growth increased the value of extra-economic control of economic resources. State growth increased the efficiency with which such control could be exercised. Together, these two growth curves gradually altered the balance of power among the relatively stable social groups and social institutions of the late medieval period. The consequent struggle among classes and re-positioning of institutions eventually issued in rebellion and civil war; and, in the economy, in rent-seeking, inefficiencies, and deadweight losses during the adjustment period. This process was channelled by social structures – in Germany, primarily by corporate groups – and this gave the crisis its special shape in different societies.

But taxation and economic conflict are still only part of the picture. The state was also expanding and disrupting the social balance in other ways, especially (as recent local studies reveal) in social and religious regulation. It did this by allying with the two institutions capable of regulating society on the local level: the community and the church. Communities could offer local-level implementation of measures desired by church and central state. The church disposed of immense property, political influence, and its own local-level personnel. In return for more effective enforcement of their own interests, community and church were progressively induced or compelled to place these at the disposal of the growing state.

This involved substantial redistribution of material resources and coercive power. Local community and church bureaucracies grew enormously, cooperated with the state, and widened their activities to education, marriage, the family, welfare, and health.¹¹⁹ The resulting information and control over social, economic and cultural activities made it possible for the state to redistribute power and resources within communities.¹²⁰ Direct or indirect control of ecclesiastical funds and properties helped the state financially.¹²¹ Not least, the spiritual influence of the church lent legitimacy to the political, social, economic and ideological agendas of those who could manipulate it.

This process helps to explain why religion was a mobilizing force in many conflicts associated with the seventeenth-century crisis. In Germany, the *ius reformandi* after 1555 (another artifact of the Imperial constitution) had strengthened territorial princes' control over the church.¹²² German state churches – Lutheran, Calvinist and Catholic alike¹²³ – increasingly imposed religious orthodoxy, social discipline, and bureaucratic

¹¹⁹ H. Schilling, 'The Reformation and the rise of the early modern state', in J.D. Tracy (ed.), *Luther and the modern state in Germany* (Kirksville (Missouri), 1986), esp. pp. 25–6; K. Blaschke, 'The Reformation and the rise of the territorial state', in *ibid.*, esp. pp. 64–5.

¹²⁰ Rebel, *Peasant classes*; Robisheaux, 'Peasants and pastors'.

¹²¹ Schilling, 'Reformation', p. 26; Blaschke, 'Reformation', p. 64.

¹²² H. Lehmann, *Das Zeitalter des Absolutismus* (Stuttgart, 1980), pp. 58–61; M. Heckel, *Staat und Kirche nach den Lehren der evangelischen Juristen Deutschlands in der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1968), pp. 67, 224ff.

¹²³ For an example of such regulation under Counter-Reformation Catholicism, see J. Bücking, *Frühabsolutismus und Kirchenreform in Tirol (1566–1665): Ein Beitrag zum Ringen zwischen 'Staat' und 'Kirche' in der frühen Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden, 1972), esp. pp. 63–98, 126–41, 175–89; for examples under Lutheranism and Calvinism, see Schilling, 'Reformation', p. 25; on the replacement of

control on their subjects.¹²⁴ Although this process began in the sixteenth century, the debate about the 'success' or 'failure' of the German Reformation¹²⁵ shows that it was often not until the seventeenth century that rulers, clergy, and local officials were able to make Reformation ideas effective on the local level.¹²⁶ It was then that it generated social conflict and provoked resistance.

Confessional regulation was a factor in many German peasant revolts (and territorial rebellions) of the period.¹²⁷ Where this regimentation was carried out in cooperation with local elites, as in Württemberg, Hohenlohe, Saxony, the Rhine Palatinate, and Brandenburg, it did not provoke open revolt, although there was more conflict than is usually recognized behind the facade of the harmonious peasant community. In other territories, especially those subjected to the Counter-Reformation, it led to severe revolts: in Upper Austria in 1588–92, in Upper and Lower Austria in 1594–6, in the Salzburg countryside in 1601–2, in Upper Swabia in 1605–8, in Upper Austria in 1626, in the Ennstal of Upper Austria in 1627, in the Hausrückviertel of Upper Austria in 1632, and in the Madeland in 1634–6.¹²⁸ Open revolt resulted where religious and social regulation were imposed abruptly, from the centre, and by outsiders – as Jesuits and Bavarians imposed it in Upper and Lower Austria, or Jesuits and Austrians in Bohemia, in the 1620s. It also arose where lords and townsmen, as well as peasants, were united against it, as in Upper Austria in 1597¹²⁹ or Upper and Lower Austria in 1626.¹³⁰ The chain of Bohemian uprisings before and during the Thirty Years War (in 1609, 1611, 1618, 1627–8, and 1632) can also be traced to an intensification of regulation which was not just fiscal and political, but also confessional and social.¹³¹

communal by authoritarian organization in early Calvinism, see H. Schilling, *Konfessionskonflikt und Staatsbildung: Eine Fallstudie über das Verhältnis von religiösem und sozialem Wandel in der Frühneuzeit am Beispiel der Grafschaft Lippe* (Gütersloh, 1981), p. 189; on the forcible regulation of local religious observance by Calvinist rulers, see G. Strauss, *Luther's house of learning: Indoctrination of the young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore, 1978).

¹²⁴ Rebel, *Peasant classes*; Robisheaux, 'Peasants and pastors'; Blaschke, 'Reformation'; Ogilvie, 'Coming of age'; Strauss, *Luther's house of learning*; K. Deppermann, 'Pietismus und moderne Staat', in K. Aland (ed.), *Pietismus und moderne Welt* (Witten, 1974); R.A. Dorwart, 'Church organization in Brandenburg-Prussia from the Reformation to 1704', *Harvard Theological Review*, 31 (1938), 275–90; D. Sabeau, *Power in the blood: Popular culture and village discourse in early modern Germany* (Cambridge, 1984); G. Strauss, 'Success and failure in the German Reformation', *Past and present*, 67 (1975); B. Vogler, 'Die Entstehung der protestantischen Volksfrömmigkeit in der rheinischen Pfalz zwischen 1555 und 1619', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 72 (1981), 158–196; T.M. Safley, *Let no man put asunder: The control of marriage in the German southwest: A comparative study 1550–1600* (Kirksville, Missouri, 1984); L. Roper, "'Going to church and street": Weddings in Reformation Augsburg', *Past and present*, 106 (1985), 62–101.

¹²⁵ See Strauss, 'Success and failure'; and J.M. Kittelson, 'Successes and failures in the German Reformation: The report from Strasbourg', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 78 (1983).

¹²⁶ Strauss, *Luther's house of learning*; Bücking, *Frühabsolutismus*, esp. p. 73; J.D. Tracy, 'With and without the Counter-Reformation: The Catholic church in the Spanish Netherlands and the Dutch Republic, 1570–1650', *Catholic historical review*, 71 (1985), esp. 554–9.

¹²⁷ Bierbrauer, 'Bäuerliche Revolten', p. 54; according to Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*, local 'irreligiousness, sectarianism, superstition and [religious] resistance' led to popular revolts against state imposition of religious orthodoxy in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (p. 126). ¹²⁸ Bierbrauer, 'Bäuerliche Revolten', p. 54 note 3, and Appendix pp. 65–6.

¹²⁹ Hoffmann, 'Typologie', p. 313.

¹³⁰ Rebel, *Peasant classes*.

¹³¹ J. Koci, 'Die Klassenkämpfe der Untertanen in den böhmischen Ländern während des Dreißigjährigen Krieges', in G. Heckenast (ed.), *Aus der Geschichte der ostmitteleuropäischen Bauernbewegungen im 16.–17. Jahrhundert* (Budapest, 1977), pp. 341–9.

These local-level processes thus had their counterpart on the grand stage of European politics. The Thirty Years War, like the English Civil War and many of the European popular rebellions of the mid-seventeenth century, was triggered and perpetuated at least partly by religious initiatives on the part of the state. The Bohemian Revolt was sparked by fear that the prince who was about to become Emperor would extend to the Empire the counter-reforming innovations he had introduced in his own Archduchy of Styria ten years earlier. The war spread to the rest of the Empire, and indeed the rest of Europe, because the casting vote in the Electoral College could shift the balance of religious power in the Empire. It was perpetuated by the transfer of Frederick V's electoral dignity to Maximilian of Bavaria (i.e., from Protestant to Catholic), and by measures such as the Edict of Restitution which threatened a massive redistribution of material resources. This is not to say that the seventeenth-century crisis was 'caused' by religious conflict, any more than it was 'caused' by military or economic conflict. The debate has resulted, I would suggest, precisely from the fact that the crisis arose from disequilibrium by a *variety* of new forms of coercion. The common feature was not the sorts of activities affected by this coercion – economic, political, or religious – but its common *source*, the rapid expansion of the state into new sectors of life, and the consequent disruption of the balance of power among social groups and institutions.

This common source is reflected in the timing of the waves of revolt in Germany, which corresponded to waves of state expansion. Around 1600, counter-reformation religious regulation in the Habsburg lands evoked a great wave of peasant wars. Between 1580 and 1620 high Imperial taxes and the intensification of territorial policy by the small lordships between the Upper Rhine and the Allgau caused a chain of smaller revolts.¹³² The Thirty Years War, with its fiscal and bureaucratic upheavals, saw a trebling of the frequency of revolts.¹³³ Immediately after the war, war-induced taxes and redistributive measures caused a new wave of popular revolts: in Kempten, in a number of Swabian principalities, and in western and central German territories.¹³⁴ These waves of state expansion *on a variety of different fronts* fed the tide of social conflict which peaked in the second quarter of the seventeenth century.¹³⁵

The variety of grievances behind the mid-century conflicts prohibits any narrow view of either the early modern state or the resulting crisis. The growth in taxation and war is only part of the story. We must also include the state's growing capacity to alter the allocation of power and resources among social groups by regulating economic transactions, religious beliefs, and social relationships. This revolution in state control called forth a backlash by affected groups, and a struggle among other groups for a share of the spoils. Because social and institutional structures varied, the crisis followed different paths in different European societies.

¹³² Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*, pp. 51–4; Schulze, 'Europäische und deutsche Bauernrevolten', p. 30.

¹³³ These were the Upper Austrian peasants' war of 1626; revolts in the Ennstal in 1627, in Krain in 1631, in the Hausrückviertel in 1632, in Upper Bavaria in 1633–4, in Lower Styria and Krain in 1635, in the Muehlviertel in 1635–6, in the Zillertal in 1645–7; and an attempted rebellion in Upper Austria in 1648 (Bierbrauer, 'Bäuerliche Revolten', p. 10 note 3, and p. 52).

¹³⁴ Trossbach, 'Bauernbewegungen', p. 240; Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*, p. 55.

¹³⁵ Harnisch, 'Klassenkämpfe', p. 171; Ulbrich, 'Charakter', p. 215; Bierbrauer, 'Bäuerliche Revolten', p. 52; Trossbach, 'Bauernbewegungen', pp. 255–7; Schulze, 'Europäische und deutsche Bauernrevolten', p. 27.

V. *The German crisis and its international outcome*

But why did it all happen at once? What accounts for the simultaneity of so many conflicts and dislocations? Attention to Germany can help us answer this central question. We have seen how German states and societies fit common European patterns; let us now examine how Germany was different.

One difference we have seen already: the 'corporative' social structure by which the competition for state redistributive measures came to be organized in German societies. Corporate privileges could be defended and widened only through continual appeal to the state. Particularly for peasant villages, this process of corporate appeal frequently involved playing off the territorial and the Imperial states against one another. The second way in which Germany was different was precisely the Imperial political framework.¹³⁶ As H. Weber has shown, the three main forces constituting the Reichstag – the Emperor, the Electors, and the territorial princes – were all attempting to expand their powers at each other's expense in the first half of the seventeenth century.¹³⁷ Emperor Ferdinand II expanded his control both in the Habsburg lands and, once in possession of Wallenstein's armies, in the Empire at large. The Electors sought to expand their powers against the Emperor by allying with the other German territorial princes, and against the princes by circumventing the Imperial Diet and negotiating directly with the Emperor.¹³⁸ And every German territorial prince was equipping himself with the new fiscal, military and administrative instruments of the early modern state, and resisting Imperial and Circle intervention in domestic affairs.¹³⁹ Emperor, Electors and territorial princes were also expanding their powers by concluding foreign alliances: the Emperor with Spain, Poland and the Papacy; Bavaria and Trier with France; and, of course, the Palatinate with the 'Calvinist International'. The Imperial framework was thus responsible for the way in which *two* levels of aggressively growing state – the territorial and the Imperial – interacted within German society.

These two German peculiarities – of social structure (corporatism) and of political framework (the Empire) – may or may not have been causally related. In any case, they combined to give a special severity to the German crisis. And in the end, it was this combination that triggered the cascade of uncontrollable warfare that accelerated the prior growth of European states to the point of a veritable revolution.

A. *The German economic crisis*

For one thing, they made the German economic downturn extraordinarily long-lasting and severe.¹⁴⁰ The Imperial framework perpetuated the survival of small sovereign states, but was too weak to break down their economic autarky. By way of response to the seventeenth-century economic downturn, the small German states used their new powers to intensify barriers against each other, even though their size made them especially dependent on inter-territorial trade. This hindered the regional

¹³⁶ Koenigsberger, 'Crisis', pp. 159, 166.

¹³⁷ H. Weber, 'Empereur, Electeurs et Diète de 1500 à 1650', *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 89 (1975), here esp. 292–3, 297.

¹³⁸ Weber, 'Empereur, Electeurs et Diète', pp. 292–3.
¹³⁹ Trossbach, 'Bauernbewegungen', p. 234, argues that this was also true of the smaller territories; it is confirmed in Ulbrich, 'Charakter'.

¹⁴⁰ See, for instance, Kriedte, *Peasants*; Rabb, 'Effects'; Kamen, 'Consequences'.

economic integration which reduced the severity of trade and subsistence crises elsewhere in Europe.¹⁴¹

Another factor contributing to the German economic downturn was, of course, the violent and protracted civil war, which was a conflict, not just among territorial states, in various alliances with outside powers, but *between* Imperial expansion and territorial state. Armies, famine, and pestilence destroyed labour, while warfare itself destroyed capital infrastructure and increased the riskiness of trade, investment, and technological innovation.¹⁴² And the war prompted many German princes to purchase concessions from influential social groups by agreeing to regulate the economy in their interests, fuelling the costly corporative conflict whose effects have already been mentioned.¹⁴³

B. The German popular revolts

Corporatism and the rivalry between Imperial and territorial state also shaped German revolts and rebellions. Peasant revolts in Germany were less frequent, violent, successful, or geographically extensive than those elsewhere in Europe; but were longer-lasting. They less frequently focussed around representative institutions or encompassed all social groups; they more often combined anti-seigneurial with anti-fiscal grievances; and they were almost invariably accompanied by litigation.¹⁴⁴

Many of these features arose from the fact that Imperial institutions provided legitimate ways in which rebellious subjects could appeal against decisions of their prince, and interested outside powers could intervene in territorial affairs.¹⁴⁵ Rebellious nobles, towns and peasant villages could appeal to the Emperor directly, to the Imperial supreme courts in Speyer, Wetzlar, Prague and Vienna, or – as in the Bohemian Revolt – to the Imperial constitution.¹⁴⁶ Appeals to the Imperial courts frequently led to the appointment of commissions of enquiry, administered and enforced by the Circles (i.e., by powerful neighbouring territories).¹⁴⁷ Toward 1600, such Imperial intervention in territorial revolts increased.¹⁴⁸ ‘During this period there was hardly a revolt which did not have a parallel court case,’ writes Winfried Schulze, ‘indeed the opportunities for resolving conflicts by litigation largely determined the tactics of the peasants’ resistance’.¹⁴⁹

German revolts were less violent, because this extensive ‘juridification’ led to a ‘tendency toward giving up force in favour of disciplined, long-term representation of

¹⁴¹ On the failure of inter-regional economic integration in Germany, see I. Bog, *Der Reichsmerkantilismus* (Stuttgart, 1959); on its success in the Netherlands, see J. de Vries, *The Dutch rural economy in the golden age, 1500–1700* (New Haven, 1974).

¹⁴² Rabb, ‘Effects’; Kamen, ‘Consequences’.

¹⁴³ Examples can be seen in Walker, *German home towns*; Ogilvie, ‘Coming of age’; Ogilvie, ‘Women’; Kisch, ‘Wupper Valley’; Medick, ‘Freihandel’.

¹⁴⁴ Schulze, ‘Veränderte Bedeutung’, p. 279; Barnett-Robisheaux, ‘Peasant revolts’, pp. 392–3.

¹⁴⁵ Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*, pp. 62–6; Schulze, ‘Peasant resistance’. An interesting example of how rebels used competing state powers for their own ends (in the Schoenberg unrests in Saxony between 1647 and 1680/1) is provided in G. Heitz, ‘Agrarstruktur, bäuerlicher Widerstand, Klassenkampf im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert’, in Schulze, *Aufstände*, p. 155.

¹⁴⁶ Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*, pp. 76–85, 95–111.

¹⁴⁷ Friedrichs, ‘Urban conflicts’, p. 101; Schulze, ‘Veränderte Bedeutung’, p. 283. According to Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*, p. 106, Imperial Commissions were active in all the peasant revolts that have been investigated for the period 1580–1615.

¹⁴⁸ Bierbrauer, ‘Bäuerlicher Revolten’, p. 59. ¹⁴⁹ Schulze, ‘Peasant resistance’, p. 83.

interests'.¹⁵⁰ Outright revolts in Germany were less frequent because juridification diffused, normalized and pacified popular resistance.¹⁵¹ Since litigation provided an alternative to escalation, and defined peasants' grievances in terms of particular legal relationships and corporate privileges, it tended to prevent German revolts from spreading to neighbouring territories.¹⁵² However, litigation and the other forms of outside intervention legitimized by the Imperial framework made German revolts last longer. The extreme case of this, of course, was the Bohemian Revolt which involved so many outside powers (first within, and then beyond, the Empire) that the ensuing conflict took thirty years to resolve.

German revolts seldom encompassed all social groups at once, because it was easier to appeal to an Imperial institution than to subdue conflicts sufficiently to form alliances, across corporate barriers, with other groups in the same society. German revolts seldom focussed around representative institutions (such as the declining Peasant Estates¹⁵³) because Imperial institutions promised rebellious subjects a better chance of being heard. And finally, German revolts often combined anti-seigneurial with anti-fiscal grievances because the Imperial framework sustained many small lordships, which used their growing bureaucracies to reinforce feudal burdens.¹⁵⁴

The war in the Empire also contributed to the special character of German revolts, creating both the strains which evoked them¹⁵⁵ and the resources, institutions, and authority that quelled them.¹⁵⁶ The battlefields of the Thirty Years War provided the army of 30,000 with which Emperor Ferdinand suppressed the Lower Austrian revolt in 1626, and the forces used by Maximilian and the Swedish occupation powers to quell the Bavarian tax rebellion in 1633-4. Thus revolts in Germany were less significant or successful than in other European societies.¹⁵⁷ The Imperial framework 'juridified' some of them, and engulfed the rest in conflict on a larger scale.

C. *The German civil war*

It was this larger conflict which most distinguished the German crisis, and which spilled over into Europe at large.

The Thirty Years War exceeded all other early modern European conflicts in violence, duration, and the extent to which outside powers became involved. Many of

¹⁵⁰ Trossbach, 'Bauernbewegungen', p. 254.

¹⁵¹ On the less violent nature of German revolts, see Schulze, 'Europäische und deutsche Bauernrevolten', pp. 42-3, and Trossbach, 'Bauernbewegungen', p. 246.

¹⁵² Trossbach, 'Bauernbewegungen', p. 247.

¹⁵³ Press, 'Herrschaft', pp. 189, 191, 205, 210.

¹⁵⁴ See Barnett-Robisheaux, 'Peasant revolts', pp. 391-2.

¹⁵⁵ War created fiscal, military and economic strains which begot revolts: see Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*, p. 55. The measures states took in the 1650s and early 1660s to repay war debts, reorganize government and administration, and consolidate the advantages gained by wartime fiscal and bureaucratic precedents and the breakdown of traditional institutions evoked a final severe wave of popular revolts: Trossbach, 'Bauernbewegungen', p. 236-240, counts 9 revolts in small German territories for the 1650s, 1 for the 1660s, 1 for the 1670s, 2 for the 1680s, 2 for the 1690s, etc. (pp. 255-60).

¹⁵⁶ Indeed, as Jean Bodin had written in 1576, 'the most certain means of protecting a state from rebellion, revolts and civil war, and of keeping the subjects contented, is to have an outside enemy' (*Six books of the republic* (Paris, 1576), vol. 5); quoted in H. Haan, 'Prosperität und Dreissigjähriger Krieg', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 7 (1981), 106.

¹⁵⁷ Trossbach, 'Bauernbewegungen', p. 246.

these characteristics can be attributed to the competition between the Imperial and the territorial state, and to the sheer complexity of their interaction and the number of sovereign entities involved – this is why the peace process took so long to resolve the conflict. In the war, internal and external resistance to the growth of the state coincided. The war began as an internal rebellion – the Bohemian Revolt – by nobles to whom Imperial institutions gave the right to elect their ruler. This rebellion became a civil war because both Emperor Ferdinand and Frederick V of the Palatinate appealed to institutions and legitimacy outside the territorial state of Bohemia, although within the composite state of the Empire. The Imperial constitution was invoked as a justification by all participants: by Emperor Ferdinand, as territorial lord, claiming the right to impose fiscal and confessional regulation; by the rebellious Bohemian nobility, claiming protection against Ferdinand's expansionist ambitions as territorial lord; and by protestant Electors and German princes, claiming protection against Ferdinand's expansionist aims as Emperor, particularly his claims to interfere within territorial affairs in matters of religion and internal revolt.¹⁵⁸ With the swing vote in the electoral college at stake, no major German state could afford to remain on the sidelines.

Nor could any state with an interest in strengthening or weakening the power of the church or of the Habsburgs – nor could any state in Europe, in short – afford to remain on the sidelines. So the German war became an international war. Spain and the Papacy could not resist the opportunity of turning back the clock on the gains of the Reformation in Central Europe, and obtaining a stranglehold on the United Provinces. France, Denmark, Sweden, and the United Provinces could not afford to watch the Habsburgs and the Papacy build a powerful territorial state in the centre of Europe. Even without the labyrinth of cross-alliances among German and non-German states, therefore, the Thirty Years War would have drawn in all the powers of Christendom, and some beyond.

But by intervening in such a violent, protracted and expensive conflict, European powers accelerated the expansion of their own state structures and strained their societies beyond endurance. It was the pressure created by the war which brought together so many currents of resistance to the growth of the state all over Europe at the same time. The war can be seen as shaping the crisis in Europe at large, by accelerating and synchronizing the growth of European states.

Changes in relations between states and societies, therefore, were omnipresent in early-seventeenth-century Europe, and (as we have seen) explain many features of the crisis. To the changes in taxation and the public sector, emphasised by Steensgaard, must be added changes in 'extra-economic' competition over economic allocation more widely, emphasised by Brenner. Indeed, as we have seen, studies of the growth of the state on the local level suggest that the resources at issue ranged beyond the economic, to control over almost all aspects of behaviour and belief. Resistance to such control, and a struggle among social groups for their share of its spoils, appears to lie behind the popular revolts, the civil wars, and the economic downturn.

This also explains why the crisis was different in each society: the relationship between state and society varied throughout Europe. In Germany, this relationship was complicated by widespread corporate privilege and by the Imperial structure, which provided two levels of state to which subjects could appeal to defend and extend

¹⁵⁸ A. Wandruszka, 'Zum "Absolutismus" Ferdinands II', *Mitteilungen des Oberösterreichischen Landesarchivs*, vol. 14, *Beiträge zur neueren Geschichte: Festschrift für Hans Sturmbberger zum 70. Geburtstag* (Linz, 1984), pp. 261–68, esp. p. 267.

their privileges. This fuelled an aggressive competition between Imperial and territorial state which exacerbated the German crisis to the point of civil war.

This war helped to bring relations between state and society in the different European countries to a crisis in the second quarter of the seventeenth century. The high stakes and tangled alliances of civil war within the Empire enticed (or compelled) other European states to intervene, expanding their own state structures in order to do so. The result, both in Germany and in Europe at large, was to produce an all but legendary pinnacle of human misery in an era when the state was expanding faster than the resources available to support it, and provoking costly social conflict over its control. The German crisis, which came to a head in the Thirty Years War, forced all European states to place intolerable pressures on their subjects. The German crisis, in short, exported disorder to the whole of Europe.