Germany as an Anachronism Marx, Social Science and the State

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On the 20th February 1866, Marx confessed to his *dear fellow* Friedrich Engels that for his work to be properly conceived, he cannot go into depth into every single detail. But – he adds – the composition, the structure, is a triumph of German scholarship [*deutsche Wissenschaft*], which an individual German may confess to, since it is *in no way* his merit but rather belongs to the nation. Which is all the more gratifying, as it is otherwise the *silliest nation* under the sun!

Marx considers science the most significant product to emerge from Germany, a fact which is made evident by his genuine enthusiasm for the experimentations of Christian Friedrich Schönbein and Justus von Liebig, namely, the intersection of chemistry and agronomy. Marx concludes: '*I feel proud of the Germans. It is our duty to emancipate this 'deep' people*' (Marx to Engels 2/20/1866 in MECW 42: 232). One could read the shift here, from German to English, as intended to establish a certain ironic distance from the ambition expressed within the statement. Throughout the torturous writing-process of *Capital*, it was the thought of Liebig and Schonbeing in particular which had a significant impact on Marx, such as to elicit his declaration that they were 'more important for this matter than all the economists put together' (Marx to Engels 2/13/1866 in MECW 42: 227). Yet in spite of their 'depth' it was understood that the Germans were nevertheless difficult to emancipate, given the extent to which they had been hypnotized by '[their] own Christian-Germanic brand of bad luck' (Marx 1847b: 332) and one which provided an irreducibly German way of thinking about society and the state. Therefore, Marxian enthusiasm reserves itself not to all the branches of German science, but almost exclusively for the experimental sciences (Guerraggio and Vidoni 1982): this includes geology, whose vocabulary can be found in the Marxian concepts of 'social formation' and 'ideal average' (Haug 2013: 41–45), chemistry, agronomy (Marx 1878), mathematics (Marx 1983). This is without forgetting the importance of the cameralistics for the development of the Marxian concept of technology (Marx 1981). Indeed, science and technology are themselves revolutionary forces because they change the material conditions of the production of existence. As Marx proclaimed during an event at the Chartists' *The People Paper*, the daily newspaper: 'Steam, electricity, and the self-acting mule were revolutionists of a rather more dangerous character than even citizens Barbes, Raspail and Blanqui' (Marx 1856b: 655).

The entanglement of science's revolutionary character with the conditions of German society was for Marx, an anachronism, and for him, this was exemplified in the case of the response to the revolution of 1848. Germany failed to erase the aristocratic estates' feudal rule resulting in 'a parody

[1] The author wants to thank Alice Figes for her help in translating the Italian.

of the French revolution of 1789' (Marx 1848f: 294). For German society, the past continues to dominate.

Whereas 1648 and 1789 gained boundless self-confidence from being at the apex of creation, it was the ambition of the Berlin revolution of 1848 to constitute an anachronism. Its light was like that of the stars which reaches us, the inhabitants of the Earth, only after the bodies from which it emanated have been extinct for a hundred thousand years. The March revolution in Prussia was, on a small scale – just as it was on a small scale in everything – such a star for Europe. Its light was that of the corpse of a society which had long ago decayed. (Marx 1848e: 162).

It was the Prussian bourgeoisie to be held responsible. After 1848, the bourgeoisie managed to find itself at the head of the state thanks to what had effectively been a 'passive revolution' in the Gramscian sense: they had transitioned the contents of the old world into the new world. The bourgeoisie behaved like an estate in a class-society; it opposed the people and was prepared to compromise with the monarchy; it represented 'renewed interests within an obsolete society' (Marx 1848e: 162). It was this archaic and historical domination over the elements of the 'new', which Marx came to define as 'anachronism' across several of his works. (Marx 1867a: 75). Rather than being demonstrative of an ineluctably fallen past, anachronism underscores the extent to which the past continues to exert a bind over the present. As a result, even the very possibility of constructing one's own history is dependent on the capacity to free oneself from the 'tradition of all the dead generations [which] weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living' (Marx 1852a: 103). Thus, for Marx the logic of history is not progressive – 'in spite of the pretensions of *Progress*, continual retrogressions and circular movements occur' (Marx and Engels 1845: 83). Rather, history is determined by the need to extricate itself from the constantly resurfacing past (Ricciardi 2019). It is precisely this understanding of History which establishes the specific closure of the future that characterises Marx's work. Not by chance, the greatest example of anachronism Marx identified was that of 'dead labour', the control of capital over living labour. Anachronism is thus not a 'figure' within the philosophy of history as such, but a determining element of the very environment in which historical action takes place. For this reason, there is no dominant teleology in Marx, granting meaning from the outside to individual and collective actions.

> *History* does *nothing*, it 'possesses *no* immense wealth', it 'wages *no* battles'. It is *man*, real, living man who does all that, who possesses and fights; 'history' is not, as it were, a person apart, using man as a means to achieve *its own* aims; history is *nothing but* the activity of man pursuing his aims. (Marx and Engels 1845: 93; see also Bensaïd 2007).

Only from such a reading of history can one understand Marx's attitude towards the social sciences of his time. Indeed, as evident in the *Manifesto*, it was a form of knowledge which

engendered no particular enthusiasm, not even in a naive sense, on the part of Marx and Engels. They were even sceptical of the syntagm 'social science' as employed by Saint-Simon, Fouret and Owen which, for them, was formed by the need to discover inevitable laws of society's development. 'Social science' is a science of society [*gesellschafltiche Wissenschaft*] and society is the true and only subject of history. Society with its class conflict, with its backward relationships, with its evolutionary tendencies, becomes the object of a science which does not contemplate 'any historical initiative or any independent political movement' on the part of the proletariat.

Indeed, social science, and Saint Simonian science in particular which 'glorified in dithyrambs the productive power of industry' (Marx 1845: 282), considers capitalist society as the fulfilment of history, affirming it as a necessary and definitive order, which, for this very reason, can only be perfected. Social scientists and socialists therefore conceive the evolution of society as dependent upon their theories. 'They therefore search after a new social science [*soziale Wissenschaft*], after new social laws [*soziale Gesetze*], that are to create these conditions'. It is for this reason that they cannot accept the autonomy of the proletariat, which for Marx, is the effective negation of existing society. 'Future history resolves itself, in their eyes, into the propaganda and the practical carrying out of their social plans' (Marx and Engels 1848: 515). Insistence on the current initiative and refusal to accept the possibility of societal planning are at the basis of the Marxian conception of action itself. The voluntaristic trait is in fact never absolutized, by virtue of the fact that it is confronted with a set of unintentional forms of action which constitute society. For this reason, Marx conceives 'the evolution of the economic formation of society … as a process of natural history' which 'make[s] the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them' (Marx 1867a: 10).

Now that for Marx the domain of human activity has assumed the name and exclusive form of society, it is the latter which we must consider in order to understand anachronism's political effects. For Marx, Germany is not simply a 'late-comer' nation, but rather the society that most clearly demonstrates the overall potency that the past can exert. The same semantics of society that emerged in Germany during the 1840s is for Marx characterised by the need to eradicate forms of the past, as bequeathed by that society. This process of discursive societal development refers to the definition of a complex semantic field in which terms such as work, property, socialism and communism converge in a plethora of contradictory modalities. This occurs amidst daily political controversy, in which criticism serves to mark out a distance, to literally establish partisanship. Here however the party struggle cannot be understood as a clash between factions or even as the strategic use of knowledge to obtain a position of power (so Lacascade 2002: 163ff). The theoretical move carried out by Marx in the 1840s went beyond merely the internal, conflictual relations of the heterogeneous socialist

universe, one which he knew and frequented, but aimed to redefine the very language which would give political character to the social phenomena in question. This set of semantic innovations carried out in the *Manifesto* (Koselleck 2004: 90) would not have been possible without those conflicts, which are nevertheless incorporated and summarised explicitly within the text. The histories of society, which in Germany became common and widespread literature, confirmed an expectation of change directed towards the 'social' – not simply the adjective of society – but a term destined to mean what exceeds it, contradicts it, what can develop it or at the same time deny its structure. As Karl Grün writes, the language of society has passed from the cultured circles of the capital-city to the wider public, 'which ravenously pounces on everything that bears the word 'social' on its forehead, because a sure instinct tells him what secrets of the future are hidden in this little word' (Grün 1845: 123).

This consideration is part of review of the Theodor Mundt's history of society who, together with Lorenz von Stein, undoubtedly represents one of the greatest propagators of social and societal vocabulary. Differently from Stein, he situates socialism and communism within a history, not as yet part of an opening born by the epochal contradictions of capitalism, but which together with the impact of an inexhaustible research of happiness and liberty, finds through work his only possible satisfaction. The 'concept of society is essentially the idea of free personality itself' (Mundt 1844: 179). Only a property obtained by work could be the guarantee of a free personality. The inseparable link between property and work, as also affirmed by Stein albeit on a much more concrete level, necessitates defence against communism which has carved out the role of '*advocatus diaboli* of society' (Mundt 1844: 427), while socialism recognizes the state's ability to constantly re-establish the dynamics of the societal order.

Marx recognizes the value of these innovations within political semantics. In a letter to Feuerbach he acknowledges that he discovered society through the critique of theology. 'The unity of man with man, which is based on the real differences between men, the concept of the human species brought down from the heaven of abstraction to the real earth, what is this but the concept of *society*!' (Marx to Feuerbach 8/11/1844 in MECW 3: 354). With respect to Hegel, there would be the 'establishment of *true materialism* and of *real science*', given that Feuerbach makes the 'the social relationship [*gesellschaftliches Verhältnis*] of 'man to man' the basic principle of the theory' (Marx 1844a: 328). The critique of theology not only serves the critique of politics that Marx himself assigned as a task in those years, but also leads to the discovery of society. Seen from such a perspective, the same reckoning with the Hegelian left reveals itself to be more than a battle over the current effectiveness of philosophical categories. For Marx, it is a question of affirming the conflictual character of society, which is not simply a new plan of mediation between equal

individuals, but the loci in which relations of power and domination are established. This is clear in Marx's review of Friedrich List's *Das nationale System der politischen Ökonomie,* which, in addition to being a decisive criticism of the national possibility of accumulation, marks the refusal of giving ethical as well as economic meaning to work. Consequently, he identifies the fundamental dynamics of society within the connections and oppositions between work and property. With respect to List, Marx grapples with the specific ethical conception of work, which in Germany dominated in a multiplicity of forms throughout the 19th century. Work thus comes to be considered as the necessary basis of private property, not only as a condition of possibility, but as a process of appropriation which determines the dynamics of society.

If it is desired to strike a mortal blow at private property, one must attack it not only as a material state of affairs, but also as activity, as labour. It is one of the greatest misapprehensions to speak of free, human, social [*gesellschaftlich*] labour, of labour without private property. 'Labour' by its very nature is unfree, unhuman, unsocial [*ungesellschaftlich*] activity, determined by private property and creating private property. Hence the abolition of private property will become a reality only when it is conceived as the abolition of 'labour' (an abolition which, of course, has become possible only as a result of labour itself, that is to say, has become possible as a result of the material activity of society and which should on no account be conceived as the replacement of one category by another). (Marx 1845: 278–279)

If work is not the ethical foundation of society but a condition of submission and domination, namely society's asocial nucleus, society therefore cannot be founded on the mysticism of the productive forces as inaugurated by Saint-Simonism, which in the following decades will come to have an increasingly decisive influence in Germany. Thanks to such a mysticism of society, the 'bourgeois sees in the proletarian not a *human being,* but a *force* capable of creating wealth', a force that is literally separated from the very individuals who endure it. Instead, they are compared with other forces, and in case of necessity, they can be replaced with alternatives. Only as a functional equivalent, in fact, the proletarian 'has (enjoys) the honour of figuring as a *productive force*' (Marx 1845: 286). Thus, it is the rupture that Marx establishes between work and property which is what irremediably distances his discourse on society from that of the social sciences and socialists. For Marx, society is not a system of order that finds its fulfilment in the state. Socialists like Hermann Semmig argue instead that Communism should be the 'completion of the rule of law, not its dissolution' (Semmig 1845: 168), because it should aim to moderate the negative effects of property, not to abolish it. If not, it ends up opposing the overall property [*Gesamteigentum*] of the individual, producing despotic effects capable of annihilating individuality. Socialism, on the other hand, would be a process of the rationalization of existence, society according to its true order. However, this order

is not immediately evident and cannot be affirmed without the support of science, specifically German science, entrusted with the task of resolving the contradictions of the societal relations and of continually re-establishing the conditions for its reproduction. Indeed, it is precisely because science becomes the most important aspect of the social order, which elicits Marx to comment that:

> 'German science' here, therefore, presents a social order [*Ordnung der Gesellschaft*], in fact 'the most reasonable social order'; '*in the shape of* socialism'. Socialism is reduced to a branch of that omnipotent, omniscient, all-embracing German science which is even able to set up a society (Marx and Engels 1845-46: 458).

Socialism would be nothing more than a society that is scientifically governed thanks to an ostensibly neutral structure, which becomes the instrument for the resolution of conflict. Marx's own distancing from such an approach emerges first in the confrontation with Bruno Bauer who in his self-critique of his *Jewish Question*, admits that he should not have spoken 'of the form of the state, but of society, which excludes no one, but from which only those who do not wish to participate in its development are excluded' (Bauer 1845: 15; see also Tomba 2002). Society thus results in representing a non-political space, because it establishes voluntary criteria of belonging; it does not express the series of constraints that can be traced back to the state, particularly in its German constitutional form. As Gabriel Riesser points out, criticizing Bauer's positions, the link between society and constitution allows 'an accommodation between the claims of reason and what is historically given, and anyone wishing to build a social order on rational principles could not achieve the fictions and balances of the constitutional structure' (Riesser 1843: 30). Critique alone is therefore not sufficient to resolve the problem of the state, not even if one thinks, as Bauer does, of being able to build a 'shape of the world' on a basis that is not 'merely legal, but societal [*gesellschaftlich*]'. In this respect, philosophical criticism not only claims to establish the shape of the world, but also conceives the shape of the world to be a society, understood as a subject that produces itself and without the need for the violence of state power. Precisely against this conception of society, Marx objects that societal normativity produces hierarchies and exclusions unknown to the state organization of power alone. 'Society behaves just as exclusively as the state, only in a more polite form: it does not throw you out, but it makes it so uncomfortable for you that you go out of your own will' (Marx and Engels 1845: 96). It is thus impossible for Marx to think of state and society as distinct. The state and its form are a problem of society. 'Only *political superstition* still imagines today that civil life must be held together by the state, whereas in reality, on the contrary, the state is held together by civil life' (Marx and Engels 1845: 121).

The analysis of society for Marx therefore provides proof of the structural dependence of the state on a life that is civil because it is societal. In this way, the history of the state is reconfigured,

which can no longer be considered independent. Indeed, when it claims to be, it results in disclosing the state as a necessary anachronism of society. Indeed, Lorenz von Stein already speaks of a 'state moment [*staatliches Moment*]' within the 'science of industry'. While Marx considers these statements imprecise, he credits Stein with having understood that 'the history of the state is intimately connected with the history of national economy' (Marx and Engels 1845–1846: 503). For Stein, however, the 'state moment' is a decisive one for the societal order, because it produces the only mediation in a domain that would otherwise be irremediably at prey to conflict. For Marx, on the other hand, the state does not express (and therefore equally cannot represent) an autonomous and superior entity with respect to social struggles. Society can therefore be understood to directly express its political character. Yet it is one which does not consist in the production of 'unity' as such, but rather, alone consists in the radical split through which it is constituted.

The German *Nationalökonomie* fails to recognise the substantive character of this split. It is for this reason that Marx generally does not consider it even worthwhile to critique the thought of its exponents. Only in 1881, when discussing Adolf Wagner's criticisms of *Capital*, did Marx explicitly highlight their diverging conceptions of history. For Marx, political economy is not a historical science given that it restores the meaning of the historical process from its methodological basis. It investigates and criticizes the relationships of a given period, showing their transitory and contingent character. Marx can affirm from this that his '*analytic* method, which does not proceed from *man* but from a given economic period of society, has nothing in common with the German-professorial association-of-concepts method' (Marx 1881–1882: 547). Furthermore, when criticizing the contrast between the 'logical' and the 'historical' as conceived by Rodbertus, Marx argues that history presents a coherence which can be discovered and described as a result of scientific method. Yet he is not conceiving of science as something which precedes and remains superior to the relations of society. Rather, he is positing that within a given 'social formation' some phenomena obtain a certain legitimacy which makes them 'as the *concrete* character of the *thing*, as a character appertaining essentially to *the thing itself*, although this objectivity does *not* appear in its natural form' (Marx 1881–1882: 551). Until historical and political conditions similar to those in France or England arose, political economy in Germany, rather than being seen as a science of social objectivity, was still considered a 'foreign science'. Indeed, for Marx, when those conditions are finally fulfilled economic science loses all explanatory capacity.

> Political Economy remains within that horizon (sc. a bourgeois horizon), in so far, i.e., as the capitalist régime is looked upon as the absolutely final form of social production, instead of as a passing historical phase of its evolution, political economy can remain a science only so long as the class struggle is latent or manifests itself only in isolated and sporadic phenomena (Marx 1867a: 14).

Just as the idea of a historical 'lag' does not depend on a timeline of economic development, so the limit of economics, as a science, does not depend on internal coherence. In both cases, the measure is the class struggle. It is the process by which, according to Marx, the guiding principle of the political is constantly redefined (Balibar 2014; Demirovic 2014). The Marxian political is not oriented to decision-making and therefore to political unity, but rather to the deconstruction of the conditions of production and reproduction of society. The class struggle is not simply a conflict, but a 'break' that reproduces itself continuously within the fabric of society: it is not a way of moving forward with history, but the potential repeal of its path as determined by capital. It is not only in Germany that the political economy constantly presents society as an interweaving entity, a fabric, even in moments of rupture. It is precisely this societal tension which appears as anachronism during a time in which class struggle challenges the established relations of power and domination.

It is also for this reason that Germany cannot simply be deemed the place of historical backwardness, of representing a delay in the progressive development which universal history is destined to overcome with time. Rather, Germany is proof that universal history proceeds in a plurality of ways. The specific case of Germany reveals the constitutive incompleteness of universal history itself. Germany, in fact, still occupies an *ancien régime,* which universal history nevertheless claims, in both critique and practice, to be outdated, and yet one which remains impossible to eradicate.

> This struggle against the limited content of the German *status quo* cannot be without interest even for the *modern* nations, for the German *status quo* is the *open completion of the ancien régime*, and the *ancien régime* is the *concealed deficiency of the modern state* [*der versteckte Mangel des modernen Staaten*] (Marx 1844c: 178).

The German status quo reveals something about the state in general as a typically modern political structure. It posits that the constitutive link between science and politics does not necessarily fuel constant progress as promised by universal history.

> If therefore the *status quo of German statehood* expresses the *perfection of the ancien régime*, the perfection of the thorn in the flesh of the modern state, the *status quo of German political theory* expresses the *imperfection of the modern state,* the defectiveness of its flesh itself. (Marx 1844c: 181; see also Engels 1847).

As Marx states even more clearly in *The Jewish Question*, it is the very notion of sovereignty in question. The individual should be the foundation of sovereignty. Yet in order to be so 'the imaginary member of an illusory sovereignty, is deprived of his real individual life and endowed with an unreal

universality' (Marx 1844b: 154). That is, the modern state cannot correspond to its presuppositions given that it is a historical product which already exists in the age of the *ancien régime*. Its laws, despite its universalistic logic, nevertheless inevitably continue to privilege only some. For these reasons, Germany plays the role of the uncanny which reveals to the 'people of modernity' a past that has not yet been overcome. Moreover, precisely because of such a history and subsequent structure of the state, it can in fact, never be overcome. 'The present German regime, an anachronism, a flagrant contradiction of generally recognised axioms, the nothingness of the *ancien régime* exhibited to the world' (Marx 1844c: 178). Beginning from Hegel, Marx defines Germany as the spectacle that merely mimics an ancient, estate-based society. If it no longer makes sense to reenact the behaviors of an era that has now passed, performing 'modern acts' entails running into a double anachronism which affects both the past and the present: 'The pretensions of universal essentiality are uncovered in the self; it shows itself to be entangled in an actual existence, and drops the mask just because it wants to be something genuine' (Hegel 1977: 450; but see also Kouvélakis 2000: 36ff). In other words, all that occurs in Germany, from the customs union to industrial policy, is forced to reconcile itself to a political context which fails to acknowledge it, and to necessarily relie upon a state repeatedly occupied with outdated functions.

Germany clarifies the ever-present past of the state precisely because far from being the Steinian 'state moment' that can govern conflict in society, the state is the fulfillment of the domination that arises in society. The state never presents itself as abstract and impersonal power, but exercises its dominion overall, even if it is constantly to the advantage of some. Germany is the constant refinement of this *ancien régime* which reveals the modern state's structural defect, that is, the necessarily incomplete dialectic of the universal and the particular within it. For this reason Marx shortly afterwards defines the proletariat as a 'universal estate' and one which leads to the dissolution of society. This is not a semantic oscillation, but an occasional reconfiguration of the term's meaning, given that a few lines earlier Marx had employed 'class' to define the proletariat itself. The reference to the universal estate is intended to break the apparent uniformity of society. An estate embedded in the structure of the bourgeois order is therefore the bearer of its decomposition. Calling it an estate after having spoken of 'universal emancipation' and a 'class burdened by radical chains' entails demonstrating how it disrupts the path of bourgeois civil society. Now in a class-divided society, it presents itself as an estate, with the pretense of representing '*in fact* the dissolution of that world order' (Marx 1844c: 187). It is not yet a question of class struggle, a syntagm that Engels and Marx will begin to use only leading up to 1848, but of a subjective presence which challenges the universalist claims of the state.

The conditions through which the proletariat can reproduce itself is what dominates their own general condition. Simultaneously, and in spite of the distance, the world market connects these conditions. Difference and universality are the characteristics which for Marx distinguish the empirically universal individuals produced by capitalist relations. First, difference means that each of these individuals legitimately claims to change their material condition. Yet they must recognize their dependence on world-historical conditions over which they have no power individually. 'Thus, for instance, if in England a machine is invented which deprives countless workers of bread in India and China, and overturns the whole form of existence of these empires, this invention becomes a world-historical fact (Marx and Engels 1845–1846: 27). The 'transformation of history into world history' is by now an established fact for Marx. The lexical tension that he identifies between a historical-world universality, and one linked to the abstraction of law and the state has immediate political ramifications. It is a tension between a possibility of global connection that moves from the differences of single individuals, and one that must necessarily ignore them, literally required to abstract from such differences. This gap in the understanding of the universal becomes for Marx a constant, which, redefining the space and time of the subjects' action, prevents us from thinking about the modification of their material conditions as the result of an act of will or its absence. Instead, we are faced with a systematic domination, unfolded in space as it is articulated according to its specific and composite temporality. The politics of this situation cannot in any case be unilateral, that is, it cannot assume that 'the principle of politics is the *will'.* (Marx 1844e: 199).

For Marx, this is not an occasional acquisition, but one which remains fundamental for his conception of politics. This is evident both in the polemic of 1844 with Arnold Ruge and in the 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program*. On the question of the Silesian weavers' revolt, Ruge had conceived it as the inability of the Prussian state to represent the perspective of the 'universal'. He consequently asked the administration to take charge of the 'pauperism question' and so to resolve it as an issue of public conscience. To enter into the world, however, the latter would require a social revolution capable of healing the conditions of 'terrible isolation of men from the community [*Gemeinwesen*], but this revolution is impossible without the political part (i.e. without the organising vision from the point of view of the whole)' (Ruge 1844: 4). For Marx, however, (indeed which explains the vehemence of his response) the Silesian weavers turned not against the monarch nor the aristocracy, 'but against the bourgeoisie', demonstrating their ability to more directly grasp who constitutes the enemy: the industrialist ('the invisible enemy'), and the banker ('the hidden enemy'). Their revolt was not sought to bridge the gap from the political institutions, as Ruge claimed; what they detested was not the lack of participation in the sphere of the state, but the need to act against their own condition within society. Thus, it appears that two tensions persist throughout Marx's work. The

struggle against what he will call the natural laws of capitalist production requires intense long-term action to modify the conditions of the domination of capital; however, this is not possible without the revolt against political power, knowing, however, that its exclusive action is powerless in the face of those laws. The limit of mere government action is so apparent for Marx that he defines the behavior of the German administration as 'unpolitical', one which does not understand that the needs of an industrial territory, required to be treated as 'as a matter of general concern', and not as 'any local distress due to flood or famine'. The political act is necessary, but at the same time it is always insufficient. It is effectively an 'infantile disorder' of the proletariat. 'Because it thinks in the framework of politics, the proletariat sees the cause of all evils in the *will*, and all means of remedy in *violence* and in the *overthrow* of a *particular* form of state' (Marx 1844e: 204). The point of significance regarding this initial debate on the European question of the German proletariat is summed up, for Marx, in the fact that being included in the state's representative institutions, does not, however, eradicate the isolation between individuals, the isolation fostered by the mechanism of the state. Simultaneously, it would confirm the position of the government as representative of an indifferent universality:

> Therefore, however *partial* the uprising of the *industrial workers* may be, it contains within itself a *universal* soul; however universal a *political* uprising may be, it conceals even in its *most grandiose* form a *narrow-minded* spirit (Marx 1844e: 205).

Over thirty years later many of these arguments would return. First, it would be the criticism of work as articulated in the review to List. 'The bourgeois have very good grounds for ascribing *supernatural creative power* to labour' (Marx 1875a: 81), while work represents the orientating benchmark of individuals within society. From this presupposition, each acquires the right to a certain share of the social product. 'This *equal* right is an unequal right for unequal labour'. In other words, law makes individuals equal who, rather than being different for their own nature, are also materially different in their position within the process of societal production. The law prevents differences from appearing in connection to the relationship of class, because it always brings them back to the individual domain. The law therefore constantly shatters every aspect of individuality in order to allow it to be equated with others. The law 'guarantees' that difference, that is the different share of social product that everyone receives, becomes the measure of equality, precisely because it makes that share the very measure of individuality. 'To avoid all these defects, right would have to be unequal rather than equal', irrespective of whether this evidently contradicts its own assumptions.

Such an impossible equality is central to the issue of transition that Marx here discusses. It is not a question that can be planned and therefore governed by a single and central subject. The

transition cannot follow the pattern of the social sciences that design societies, then trying to implement them. This would again be the socialism of German social science which thinks that 'with state loans one can build a new society just as well as a new railway'. However, it is not a question of the mechanism's deficiency as such, but rather the incoherency of the universal subject which it claims to represent. And this requires considering the material composition of the people, which far from being a homogeneous unit is empirically divided into a multitude of social figures, to such an extent that to guarantee its freedom of action, the state can only ignore their differences (Ricciardi 2012). The question of how the order of society could be configured differently cannot be answered 'by a thousandfold combination of the word people with the word state' (Marx 1875a: 95). In any case, given the situation in Germany, a democratic republic cannot be confused with a 'state which is nothing but a police-guarded military despotism, embellished with parliamentary forms, alloyed with a feudal admixture and at the same time already influenced by the bourgeoisie, and bureaucratically carpentered' (Marx 1875a: 96). Nevertheless, even in the democratic republic, which 'vulgar democracy' sees as the 'Millennial Kingdom', that is, as the definitive political form in which the evolution of the modern state culminates, the class struggle is a problem that state mediation cannot solve. Once again, Germany as 'anachronism', is not to be limited to its past but in fact indicates a constitutive deficiency of the modern state and its politics.

List of abbreviations

MECW: *Marx Engels Collected Works*. London: Lawrence and Wishart; New York: International Publishers, 1975-2004.

Karl Marx Works.

1837
Marx to his Father, 10–11 November. In MECW (1975), Volume 1: 10–21.

1842
a) Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly. Third Article Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood. In MECW (1975), Volume 1: 224–263.
b) The Philosophical Manifesto of the Historical School of Law. In MECW (1975), Volume 1: 203–210.

1843
Marx to Feuerbach, 3 October. In MECW (1975), Volume 3: 349–351.
Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. In MECW (1975), Volume 3: 3–187.

1844
Marx to Feuerbach, 11 August. In MECW (1975), Volume 3: 354–357.
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