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THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE EDUCATION OF THE YOUNG MARX

You'll certainly fancy, my dear child, that I am very fond of books, because I trouble you with them at so unseasonable a time. But you would be quite mistaken. I am a machine condemned to devour them, and then throw them in a changed form on the dunghill of history.

(Marx to his daughter, Laura Lafargue, 11 April 1868)

The confession quoted above by way of introduction reveals with tragic sincerity the fatal passion of an overly avid reader, unlimited in curiosity certainly but fully conscious of the demanding finality of the work he had to accomplish: the scientific critique of an international system of social organization, “in which man is a humiliated, enslaved, abandoned and scornful being” (1844). Cultivating poetry and philosophy in a world felt to be unlivable

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meant becoming an accomplice of those individuals and institutions principally responsible for the barbarity called modern civilization. But to combat this, it was necessary to scour the murky historical horizon issued from a distant past where only great social revolutions marked the stages of a progression seen as ambiguous because realized by means of unspeakable phenomena of regression. Only one revolution took place under the contradictory sign of an emancipation with universal ambitions and of a decline with indelible consequences: the French Revolution. Conclusion as well as beginning, it was studied by Marx as a unique event, both in relation to its antecedents as well as its liberating promises. Although it is true that Marx “never wrote a history of the *ancien régime*”, a hardly significant remark, it is no less true that he *studied* and compiled, with the eagerness of a school-boy enthralled by history, an enormous mass of documentation that *can* “help understand how (the *ancien régime*) gave birth to the Revolution”, despite what François Furet might think (*Marx et la Révolution française*, Paris, 1986, p. 79). Moreover, the author of *Das Kapital* drew from the revolutionary history of France the inspiration for a “poetry of the future” in which the following vision was designed:

“The old bourgeois society, with its classes and its class antagonism, gave way to an association in which the free development of each individual is the condition for the free development of the whole” (1848).*

I. THE TRUMPET OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

In early October 1843, Marx left his native land, the Prussian Rhineland, for France. He moved to Paris, rue Vaneau (at that time the Faubourg Saint-Germain), accompanied by his wife, née

* The present article is a shortened version of a work intended for *Études de marxologie* (Cahiers de l’I.S.M.E.A., series S, no. 26, 1989) entitled “Marx penseur de la Révolution française”. See in the same volume the essay by Louis Janover, “Liberté, Égalité, Propriété et Bentham”. I refer as well to my work *Marx devant le bonapartisme*, Paris-The Hague, 1960; the topic proposed in the introduction deals with “Marx, historian of France”.

Jenny von Westphalen. He was associated with the former director of the *Deutsche Jahrbücher* (Dresden) and the *Anekdoten* (Zurich), Arnold Ruge and persuaded him to help create the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (Franco-German Yearbooks). It was no longer possible for him to pursue the activity of independent journalist in the Prussia of Friederich Wilhelm IV. "I can no longer do anything in Germany. Everyone is corrupt". The suppression of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, of which he had been editor-in-chief from October 1842 to March 1843, had seemed to him to be a "progression of political consciousness", a liberation dispensing him from performing "servile tasks" and from fighting with "stickpins instead of clubs".¹

Marx brought with him a number of papers, study materials for various ambitious literary projects that betray the young author's intention to pursue and complete in Paris reflections that had matured during his university years in Bonn and Berlin. Doctor of philosophy at 23 years of age, in Berlin he associated with the young Hegelians and in Bonn worked with Bruno Bauer, nine years his elder and well-known for his works of biblical criticism, after having combatted, as an orthodox theologian, the atheism of David Strauss, author of a *Life of Jesus* that had caused scandal. This "doctoral" milieu, which saw itself as speaking for liberal thought, welcomed their young colleague with a respect and admiration that is all the more surprising in that nothing yet allowed judging him on his results. But the testimony of some of these associates make it possible to surmise why the personality of the youthful dialectician held such fascination for his elders. This is what Moses Hess, already known for his radical ideas, wrote to his friend, the novelist Berthold Auerbach. "You will have the pleasure of meeting a young man who is now one of our friends even though he lives in Bonn where he will soon be teaching... He is someone who has made a profound impression on me... you can expect to meet the greatest and perhaps the *only authentic philosopher* now alive who will attract the attention of

¹ Karl Marx to Arnold Ruge, 25 January 1843, Marx/Engels, *Gesamtausgabe*, MEGA, III/1, 1975, p. 43.

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Germany when he soon is introduced to the public, in his writing as well as from the lectern. In his philosophical bent and education he goes beyond not only *Strauss* but also *Feuerbach*! If I could be in Bonn when he gives his logic courses, I would be his most faithful auditor. ...It is only today that I realize just how ignorant I am about true philosophy. ...Dr. Marx is my idol's name, a young man (about 24 years old at the most) who will give the final blow to medieval religion and politics. He combines the most profound philosophical spirit with the most biting irony; imagine Rousseau, Voltaire, Holbach, Lessing, Heine and Hegel combined in a single person—I said *combined*, not assembled by chance—and you have Dr. Marx”.²

What might have been the conversations between Marx and his visitor? Hess could not have known the doctoral thesis defended by Marx in April 1841 *in absentia* at the University of Iena. An unpublished work, it dealt with “the difference between the natural philosophy of Democritus and Epicurus”. Marx had left Trier to join Bruno Bauer in Bonn where he hoped to begin a career as philosophy professor and have his thesis printed. However, the ruin of his friend, who was denounced as a blasphemer by his colleagues of the theology faculty, put an end to this yearning. There remained the possibility of realizing a project, conceived as early as March 1841, to launch a philosophical review, “Archives of Atheism”. Ludwig Feuerbach was approached to take part in this undertaking. Engels would much later recognize that the *Essence of Christianity* had been the source of general enthusiasm. “We were all momentarily Feuerbachian”. This intellectual affinity explains Marx's decision to remain for almost a year near to Bauer and to collaborate with him on a pamphlet disguised as a vehement denunciation of Hegel's supposed atheism and Jacobinism. With the ironic title *The Trumpet of the Last Judgement, on Hegel the Atheist and Antichrist: An Ultimatum*, the two blasphemers, disguised as pious and intransigent defenders of the faith, vehemently attacked Hegel's

² Moses Hess to Berthold Auerbach, 2 September 1841, Moses Hess, *Briefwechsel*, The Hague, 1959, p. 79.

Philosophy of Religion.³ This “antichrist” would have found in the young Hegelians not adversaries but, on the contrary, allies working together in secret for the demolition of the Christian state. But the most dangerous enemies were the French; conquered by the Holy Alliance, the “people of the Antichrist” triumphed thanks to the German thinker. Filled with hatred for everything divine, Hegel reinvigorated the “decrees of the infernal Convention”.

After having vituperated the Hegelian philosophy denying all external authority to the benefit of the universal principle of interiority, the authors concluded their trial with a pseudo-condemnation in which the delinquent seemed guilty of the supreme crime against the spirit and the faith: glorification of the French revolution, which he considered the “redemption of humanity and the work in which philosophy has totally revealed its destiny for universal domination”. Hegel, the “ultra-Jacobin”, pushed the audacity so far as to see in France “a true Messiah for the people, in the Revolution the true redemption of humanity”. His disciples were unaware of the German character and its epigones, wrongly considering themselves oppressed by governments, yielding to all patriotic sentiments, tendencies and enthusiasms, such as the “insane Köppen” and the Germanophobe Arnold Ruge. When we realize that the former was at that time the intimate friend of the young pamphleteer and that the latter was, two years later, to become the co-editor in Paris of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, in which Marx was to break definitively and openly with Hegel’s political philosophy, the following warning takes on a symbolic value. “Who knows if there is not already among them (the Köppen and their companions, MR) the Dantons, the Robespierres and the Marats of tomorrow?”

Many expressions, artfully mixed with remarks borrowed from Hegel, were later to find a place in the writings of Marx, when the targets would be the companions of by-gone days, the Bauer

³ Bruno Bauer, *Die Posaune des jüngsten Gerichts. Ober Hegel den Atheisten und Antichristen. Ein Ultimatum*, Leipzig, 1842.

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brothers, Arnold Ruge, Max Stirner. This was to be the period of “getting even”, more precisely an examination of conscience in which the priority of philosophical studies was to give way to use of knowledge drawn as much from the historical literature as from the study of economists. But nothing that the “young” Marx has learned from his contact with the atheist theologian Bruno Bauer, and that he was able to teach him, in their shared struggle would be lost or erased after their separation when Marx attempted to propagate in his own country, by means of first-rate journalism, the liberal accomplishments of the French Revolution. Behind the exaggerations demanded by the nature of the text can be recognized the manner of the future analyst and critic of French materialism to understand the “real world” and to interpret the philosophical inspiration of the protagonists of the French Revolution. The fact of seeing in France the chosen land for all decisive social upheavals betrays Marx’s political intuitions with regard to the “historical” incapacity of the German bourgeoisie to overcome the bonds of Prussian absolutism.

“If you have read *The Trumpet* about Hegel, and if you do not know it yet, I must inform you, but under the seal of secrecy, that it was written by Bauer and Marx. I laughed to tears when I read it”. The author of these remarks, George Jung, a leading figure in the German Youth of Cologne, made this revelation to Arnold Ruge after having noted in a preceding letter that Marx, Bauer and Feuerbach were going to work together to create “a theological-political review” and that “the angels had better protect the Good Lord”, for “those three will no doubt chase him right out of heaven and even pin a lawsuit on him”.⁴ News of this sensational project had already reached Ruge, who had spoken of it to a friend. “Bruno Bauer, Marx, Christiansen and Feuerbach will shout it on the mountain, or have already done so, and they have made a flag of their atheism and their mortal destiny. God, religion and immortality have been dethroned; the philosophical Republic and the divinity of man have been

⁴ Georg Jung to Arnold Ruge, 18 October 1841. See M. Rubel, Introduction to *Oeuvres* of Karl Marx (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), t. III, 1982, p. LXXVI sq.

proclaimed". A few months later Bruno Bauer informed Ruge that his "theologian Marx", his "coprisoner in *Christo*" was still working on the second part of *The Trumpet*.⁵ This was the period when, according to a very detailed study of him, the apostate young-Hegelian Bruno Bauer "was fully under the influence of the most radical tendency of the French Revolution".⁶ And it was also the moment when the young doctor of philosophy seemed to his entourage to be driven by ideas of liberal radicalism like a thinker capable of resolving the "crisis of philosophy" by taking the lead among the "new philosophers" determined to go beyond the idealism of their master-philosopher Hegel and to move to the "*praxis* of the idea".⁷

The question of the Orient born in the 1839 Turkish-Egyptian conflict had culminated in 1841 in a dangerous tension between France and Germany. It had provoked in both countries a wave of patriotism and led representatives of the intellectual classes to make political professions of faith. In these circumstances of political crisis and crisis of philosophy, but also with the announcement of the definitive suspension of Bruno Bauer, recognized as "heretical" by the majority of his colleagues as well as by the government, Marx reached his decision to respond publicly to the expectations of his friends and admirers. All hopes of an academic career were now lost for him; he would apply his talents as writer and polemicist for serving a cause to which he would remain faithful until the end of his life: freedom of conscience. On 10 February 1842 he sent Arnold Ruge his first essay for the *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, a liberal profession of faith, the definitive nature of which was confirmed by its republication in 1851, three years after publication of the *Communist Manifesto*.⁸ The "Re-

⁵ Bruno Bauer to Arnold Ruge, 6 December 1841.

⁶ Ernest Barnikol, *Bruno Bauer, Studien und Materialien...*, Assen, 1972, p. 59.

⁷ Moses Hess, "Gegenwärtige Krisis der deutschen Philosophie", *Athenäum*, Berlin, 9 October 1841.

⁸ K. Marx, "Bemerkungen über die neueste preussische Zensurinstruktion", *Athenäum*, I, 1843; article included in the collection K. Marx, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Cologne, 1851.

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marks about the Recent Prussian Instruction on Censorship” fall into the tradition of “eternal” principles of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and could not be understood fully outside the context of the revolutionary history of France from 1789 to 1830 in its alternate phases of promised emancipation and of reactionary reality. The result of philosophical and legal studies, whose breadth can be measured from the notebooks made in preparation for his doctoral thesis and from articles on various subjects—philosophy, history of religion and of art, Hegelian philosophy of law, etc., the “Remarks” are essentially directed against a “pseudo-liberalism yielding concessions that sacrifice people, the instruments, while preserving the object, institutions”.

The insistence with which Marx, in criticizing the “antiliberalism” of the Prussian instruction, introduces into his critique of censorship a critique of the Christian State, presents the outlines of his future political theory, based on his prior study of the French Revolution. He had to suffer censorship decreed by a so-called Christian authority in order to ask himself about the relationship between morality and religion on the one hand, and on the other, between public law and the free exercise of the right of expression. Begun in Prussia, this study was completed in France where Marx, thanks to new readings noted in his study notebooks, discovered the intimate link between politics and economics, the truly definitive subject of his work.

The “Remarks” were meant to be followed by a “Study of Christian Art”, as second part of *The Trumpet*. The banning of this pseudo-orthodox pamphlet by censorship turned Marx away from this project. In any case he already had in mind another work for the *Anekdotia* of Ruge. “Another essay, that I had also intended for the *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, is a critique of Hegel’s natural law inasmuch as it concerns *internal* public law. Essentially it is a matter of combatting the ‘constitutional monarchy’ as a hybrid being, fundamentally contradictory, and implying its own negation. *Res publica* is completely untranslatable into German”.⁹ Without ceasing work on this essay, Marx submitted to

⁹ Marx to Ruge, 5 March 1842.

the *Rheinische Zeitung* a series of articles in which he pursued and completed the critique of censorship begun in his “Remarks”, examining discussions of freedom of the press and publication of the acts of the sixth Rhineland diet.¹⁰ This writing abounds in references to the French Revolution and its liberal spirit, manifestly inspired by the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which gives it the nature of an apologetic treatise on the principles and traditions of freedom of expression as cultivated in countries such as England, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland and America. As for France, Marx referred to the Charter of 1830 that definitively abolished censorship while maintaining strictures the 1817 laws had placed around the press: jury trial for press crimes, greater penalties for offenses against the person of the King and the dynastic regime, right of temporary suppression, increased bonds.

II. IN PRAISE OF DEMOCRACY

In several articles published by the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Moses Hess had tried to make readers of the newspaper understand that communist ideas responded to a need of the times and deserved to be taken seriously. In France workers were fully conscious of the goal of their struggle and were turning more and more frequently toward communism. During a scholarly congress in Strasbourg, where participants from numerous European countries had discussed the social situation of underprivileged classes, one topic had been “the class that possesses nothing” but that now demands its share of the wealth of the middle classes who hold power, similar to the experience of 1789 when the Third Estate demanded and obtained the privileges of the nobility. The *Rheinische Zeitung* had reported this discussion, leading the Augsburg newspaper to accuse its rival of having exposed to the public “communism in its *unclean* nakedness”. However, Marx noted, “the prophecy of Sieyès has been fulfilled and the third estate has become all

¹⁰ Karl Marx, “Die Verhandlungen des 6. rheinischen Landtags”, *Rheinische Zeitung*, Cologne, May 1842. Cfr. *Oeuvres*, III, 1982, pp. 138-198.

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and wants to be all”, and it is very clear that the warnings announced today from Strasbourg should not leave the public indifferent. But the problem is “too serious to be solved using over-simplified phraseology”, a problem that “two peoples are attempting to overcome”, France and Germany, as Moses Hess had shown.¹¹

From now on Marx’s struggle against Prussian censorship was nourished by ideas drawn from his first socialist readings, especially French ones, and by an increasingly critical analysis of Hegel’s political philosophy. The government was not long in demanding, under penalty of its being banned, that the Rhineland newspaper change its course, and shareholders were crying for a more moderate tone; at the same time the conflict with the “af-franchised” group led to withdrawal of most of the Berlin employees of the *Rheinische Zeitung*. In January 1843 the editorial staff received the fatal decision. The *Rheinische Zeitung* had to cease publication on the first of April. Marx, who had refused to bend to the hesitating attitude of the shareholders, offered his resignation and published a formal declaration along those lines.¹² He proposed to Ruge that they create the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* in Strasbourg. The many articles that appeared in the *Rheinische Zeitung* on the revolutions of 1789 and of 1830 had nourished his critical reflection on Hegelian conceptions of the State, orders and bureaucracy. There exists a highly important autobiographical document from this relatively short period between Marx’s resignation from the Rhineland newspaper in March 1843 and his move to Paris in October of the same year: the 1859 preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*, of which *Das Kapital*, book one, would, in 1867, be the continuation. In the biographical sketch that Marx traced for himself, one essential fact is lacking for an understanding of the research that was to lead, in 1843, to the discovery of the “materialist and critical

¹¹ Moses Hess, “Die Kommunisten in Frankreich”, *Rheinische Zeitung*, 21 April 1842, and “Die politischen Parteien in Deutschland”, *Rh. Z.*, 11 September 1842.

¹² *Rheinische Zeitung*, 18 March 1842.

conception of the world”, to use his own terminology devised in the years 1845-46.¹³

In fact, in addition to the “critical revision of Hegel’s philosophy of law”, during the period from March to October 1843 Marx had undertaken major historical studies, especially in the domain of the historiography of the French Revolution. It is even possible to think that his critical dialogue with Hegel—synonymous with a philosophical examination of conscience—shows the effects of certain historical readings from the same period, particularly the reading of Feuerbach’s “Provisional Theses for the Reform of Philosophy” (1843). Marx’s anti-Hegelian critique is not aimed simply at the “mysticism” of the master’s political philosophy, but also and especially at his method of transforming “ideas” and “concepts” into entities endowed with life, into hypostases or “objectified abstractions”. “In a mystical manner”, Hegel made the State into a personified subject, a “moment of mystical substance”—the monarch identified with the sovereignty of the State. Marx raises a dilemma. “Either there is sovereignty of the monarch or there is sovereignty of the people: this is the question”.¹⁴ This “critical revision” accomplished by Marx in his argument with Hegel in the name of his conception of democracy clearly reflects the influence of his early readings from historians of the French Revolution.

“In a monarchy, everything, even the people, is subsumed under one of its modes of existence, the political constitution; in a democracy, the *constitution itself* is alone the *sole* determination, namely the determination of the people by itself. In a monarchy we have the people of the constitution, in a democracy the constitution of the people. In democracy the *enigma* of all constitutions is resolved. The constitution is not only *of itself*, according to its essence, but based in the existence, the reality, constantly referred back to its real foundation, of *the real man*, the *real people*, and it is posited as the *actual* work of this people. (...)”

¹³ Cf. *L’Idéologie allemande*, in *Oeuvres*, III, p. 1200.

¹⁴ K. Marx, “Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie”, unfinished manuscript. Cf. *Oeuvres*, III, p. 900.

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This unfinished manuscript, which Marx would later consider a stage on the path that had led him to the materialist conception of history, represents an initial attempt at conceiving democracy as the ideal form of all constitutions of State. When he enriched his knowledge with the fruits of his historical and economic studies, he arrived at a concept in which the State appeared incompatible with the existence of democracy in the real sense of the term. However, the seed of his future “an-archism” is present in this first idealization. “In comparison with democracy, all other forms of government are like the Old Testament. Man does not exist because of the law, but the law exists in relation to man. Man has a human existence, whereas in other forms man has legal existence. This is the fundamental distinction of democracy”.¹⁵ A true union of the general and the particular, democracy does not tolerate the separation of the political man from the private man; property, contracts, marriage are not particular institutions existing apart from the political State since this is but a particular mode of existence of the people. And Marx noted, “The French realized that in a true democracy, *the political state disappears*. It is true in this sense that as political State, as constitution, it does not hold together. (...) In a democracy, the constitution, the law, the State itself—inasmuch as it is a political constitution—is nothing but a determination of the people by the people whose content is determined by the people”.¹⁶

This charge against Hegel contains the first elements of the “critique of politics” that Marx developed alongside the “critique of economics”. His many historical-political writings, just like *Das Kapital*, which remained unfinished, contained what could be called the “prolegomena to a theory of real democracy”. And it is not imprudent to affirm that among works read by Marx before delving into the historiography of the French Revolution, the Study of de Tocqueville in the search for an “image of democracy in America” profoundly marked the orientation of

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 902.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

his critique of Hegel. But it is thanks to the reading of a multitude of French socialist and communist authors that Marx was able to go beyond the aristocratic conceptions of the long-distance traveler, who saw in the “democratic revolution”, which he thought was happening in America, a future world that was more to be feared than hoped for.¹⁷

III. HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The influence of early readings of historians of the French Revolution can be felt especially in the last and longest part of the 1843 manuscript, in which Marx analyzes Hegelian theses on “legislative power” (§ 298-312).¹⁸ According to Marx the constitution “was not made by itself”, and a legislative power must have preceded the established power, one that remains *outside* the constitution but is subsumed in it. To achieve this new constitution, “a revolution in the rules has always been necessary”. It is, therefore, historically false to speak of “*gradual* transition”, for in order to have progress, the true basis of the constitution, the people, must become its principal element. Marx compared European and American institutions, like de Tocqueville who did not seek their roots in legal developments from the French Revolution. By examining the relationship between the constitution and legislative power in the case when “the political State does not exist other than as formalism of the real State” and when “the legislative power has an origin other than governmental power”, Marx was able to illustrate his argument, namely his critique of Hegel, through an important historical reminder.

It was the legislative power that made the French Revolution. It is legislative power, everywhere it has appeared in its particular form as the

¹⁷ “I confess that in America I saw more than America; I looked there for an image of democracy itself (...). I wanted to know it, if only to learn at least what we should hope for or fear from it.” Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, I, 1835, Garnier-Flammarion, 1981, p. 69.

¹⁸ K. Marx, *Oeuvres*, III, p. 930 sq.

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predominant factor, that has produced the major organic revolutions of universal import. It fought not against the constitution but against a specific anachronous constitution, precisely because legislative power was representative of the people, of the generic will. Governmental power, on the other hand, has produced only little revolutions, backward revolutions, reactions; it did not revolt in favor of a new constitution over an old one, but against the constitution precisely because governmental power represented a particular will, arbitrarily subjective, the magic element of the will. Correctly put, the question is simply this: does the people have the right to give itself a new constitution? The response can only be affirmative because as soon as the constitution ceases to be the real expression of the will of the people, it becomes in fact an illusion".¹⁹

Without referring directly to historians of the French Revolution or the other documentary sources of a philosophical or legal nature, time and again throughout his critique of the Hegelian concept of legislative power Marx uses arguments that animated post-revolutionary literature regarding constitutional and legal problems in societies that had preserved institutions of feudal law—such as corporations, orders (*Stände*), etc.—when popular objections of a general nature arose. And while he wrote that “the orders (*Stände*) are the contradiction placed at the heart of the State between civil society and the State”, he added immediately, “they are, at the same time, the demand for a solution to this contradiction”. Reproving the scorn with which the philosopher of the State spoke of the “masses”, the “rabble” and the “people”, Marx defends the “shapeless mass” whose movement and action could be “elementary, irrational, savage and terrible”. He accepts the separation of civil society from the political State as “two fixed antitheses (*Gegensätze*), two truly different spheres”, but, he adds, “in truth this separation really exists in the modern State”. Unlike the Middle Ages when the orders had a political existence because “their existence was the existence of the State”; unlike ancient Greece where civil society was the slave

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 934.

of political society, modern times know the political state in its separation from civil society, just as Hegel had correctly understood, but not without producing a fundamental contradiction. He posited a real separation as a “necessary moment of the idea” and as the “absolute truth of reason”, by making civil orders the representative element of an identity that, in reality, does not exist. Hegel “forgets that it is a matter of a reflexive relationship, and he makes civil orders as such into political orders, but always in the sense of legislative power, so that their very activity is the proof of separation”.²⁰

This “real separation” constitutes the essential feature of both social relationships and of individual existence in the modern State; and we can understand why Marx, after having acquired a wealth of knowledge about the history of the French Revolution as well as economics, by 1845 had chosen as theme and title for the principal work of his life, *Critique of Politics and of Economics*.²¹ His original contribution to a theory of the community liberated from servitudes imposed by the separation-opposition of civil society from the State, and hence of the citizen from the private person apparently existing in the same individual, consisted in having diagnosed the destructive effects of this antagonism, externally and internally.

When, a few months later, Marx wrote and published the “Introduction” to this text that had remained in a preliminary state, his thinking was enriched by the fruits of his Kreuznach philosophical readings, the results of which also being evident in *The Jewish Question*. But it is in the anti-Hegelian manuscript that can be found the epistemological and ethical presuppositions for analyses of the social and moral dichotomy that constitutes the substance of Marx’s unfinished work. And the more one reads

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 953.

²¹ The contract signed on 1 February 1845 in Paris with the publisher C.W. Leske of Darmstadt concerned a two volume work. This double “critique” was at that time only in outline stage. Cf. M. Rubel, *Oeuvres*, I, Introduction, p. LXIII sq.

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his commentaries, the more one sees that the influence of purely historical books grows in importance.

It is through historical progress that *political orders* have been transformed into *social orders*, so that individual members of the people, like Christians who are equal in heaven and unequal on earth, are *equal* in the heaven of their political universe and unequal in the earthly existence of *society*. The transformation as such of political orders and civil orders took place under an absolute monarchy. Bureaucracy established the idea of unity opposed to different states within the State. However, right alongside the bureaucracy of absolute governmental power, the *social difference* of orders remained a *political difference*, and this *in the very heart of* and alongside this bureaucracy. It was only the French Revolution that completed the transformation of *political orders* into *social orders*; in other words, it changed the *differences in the orders* of civil society into purely *social differences*, into differences of private life lacking in any importance for political life. And so was the separation of political life from civil society complete.²²

Although neither the term “social class” nor “proletariat” was used to describe an actual situation lending itself perfectly to this type of terminology, the logical rigor of his reasoning led Marx to move on from orders to classes and from civil society to the bourgeoisie. He amplified and furthered the idea of “separation”, so abundantly developed in the unpublished critique of Hegelian “mistification”, by adding to it the idea of “negation” or of “struggle”. And so the two essays published in Paris in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* can also be considered as the logical conclusion of a first period of reflection that culminates with the critical interpretation of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*.²³

By contrasting Hegel’s “logical mysticism” and idealization of the monarchical State with the dichotomy and alienation of real life, civil and political, in the modern constitutional State, Marx was led to seek in the history of the French Revolution ar-

²² K. Marx, *Zur Kritik...*, 1843, in *Oeuvres*, III, p. 959 sq.

²³ K. Marx, *On the Jewish Question* and *Toward a critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law*. Introduction, *Oeuvres*, III, p. 347-397.

guments going beyond the limits of criticism emanating from the power of the State. This orientation responds logically to the work of criticism of politics and economics, the objective of which had been formally stated in the Parisian *Jahrbücher*: human emancipation. Thus it is in light of this ethical postulate that the significance of Marx's historical readings should be judged, particularly his interest in the historiography of the French Revolution.

Assuredly *political* emancipation represents a great advance; it is certainly not the ultimate form of human emancipation as such, but it is the latest form of human emancipation within the world order as it has existed until now. Let us be clear on this point; we are speaking here of real, practical emancipation.

It is only when the real individual person has recovered the abstract citizen in himself that as individual person he can become a *generic being* in his own experience, in his individual work, in his individual relations. It is only when man has recognized and organized his "*own powers*" as *social* powers and ceases to cut himself off from social power under the guise of *political* power, it is only then that human emancipation will be accomplished.²⁴

IV. THE KREUZNACH NOTEBOOKS (JULY-AUGUST 1843)

These are five notebooks from I to V, about 260 pages of cramped writing, filled with passages from 23 historical and political works. Their principal subject matter is France, and other subjects include medieval and feudal Germany, England after the Norman Conquest, Sweden and its political and religious institutions from antiquity until the creation of the hereditary empire and the reign of nobility. The revolutionary perspectives of the United States of North America under an "accomplished democracy" drew the special attention of this gleaner of history to be "consumed" productively.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

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Although in July 1843 the French exile had not yet been decided upon, Marx and Ruge must have felt like Heine before his flight to Paris after the July revolution.

If one simply compares the history of the French Revolution with the history of German philosophy, one is tempted to think that, obliged to attend to so many real tasks in which they absolutely had to remain attentive, the French asked us to sleep and to dream for them; and our German philosophy is nothing other than the dream of the French Revolution. And so we had a break with reality and tradition in the realm of thought just as the French had it in the realm of society (...).²⁵

Marx's interest in France is indicated by the fact that the first two notebooks begin with a chronology covering nearly a thousand years of history, from 600 B.C. to 1589. The historian selected, Christof Gottlob Heinrich, master of Enlightenment philosophy, was the author of a history of France, for which he drew upon the most serious of primary and secondary sources to provide a detailed presentation of political, military and diplomatic events from the origins to the beginning of the 19th century.

The history of France is continued in the second Kreuznach notebook, dated "July-August 1843"; on the title page Marx listed the eight works studied, two German authors, five French authors and an English author.

With the work of Carl Friedrich Ernst Ludwig, *History of the Last Fifty Years*, Altona 1833 (voll. II), Marx begins his study of the history of the French Revolution, from the assembly of nobles to the fall of the Terror government.²⁶ From Rousseau's *Social Contract* he transcribed more than one hundred passages, and other no less important readings led him to think of the French Revolution not only as a man of his times but especially as a "rev-

²⁵ H. Heine, *Einleitung zu: Kahldorf über den Adel* (1831). The poet refers to the "philosophical Jacobins" of his country and sees in Kant "the Robespierre", in Fichte "the Napoleon" and in Hegel "the Orléans" of German philosophy.

²⁶ Cf. MEGA IV/2, 1981, p. 84 sq. The Kreuznach and Paris notebooks are reprinted in their entirety in MEGA IV/2, Berlin, 1981, pp. 9-298.

ealer” of the secret and of the nature of times to come marked by dominance of capital and of the sovereign State. Two works covered in the second Kreuznach notebook helped him to conceive the French Revolution from the two-fold perspective of its causal development and its emancipatory possibilities:

1. Jacques Charles Bailleul, *Examen critique de l'ouvrage posthume de M.me la baronne de Staël, ayant pour titre: Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française*. T. I-II, Paris, 1818.
2. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, New edition revised, corrected and considerably expanded by the author. T. I-IV, Amsterdam, Leipzig, 1763.

The second Kreuznach notebook ends with an index of ideas and reference to the respective pages, without mention of the authors; the matter researched covers ancient French history, the French Revolution, Poland and works of Montesquieu and Rousseau. Thus Marx could use this collection of passages in his later works. Here are a few key ideas:

1. *Estates General*. Taxes. Demagogues. The third estate alone is represented (in the assembly of 1357-1358). Third estate (1383). Assembly of nobles (under François I).
2. War of the peasants.
3. Parliament. Venality of judicial officers.
4. Nobility. The nobles as intermediate body. Feudal system. The Praguerie. The League of public welfare. Brittany. The three estates before the Revolution: private feudal rights. Origin of privileges. Syncretism of privilege. Nobles under the constitutional monarchy.
5. Bureaucracy. Civil servants. The mail and espionage.
6. Constitutional assembly. Fortune and representation. Report of the representative assembly to the sovereignty of the people. Representation (according to Rousseau).
7. Property and its consequences. The Saint Bartholomew of private property. Confiscation of clergy property and payment of creditors of

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 116 sq. Other topics: Metternich's politics, the family as first form of the State, the rights of individuals and of society, equality, and property, exercise of the general will, oligarchy and right, taxes, constitutional monarchy, etc.

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the State. The maximum and the system of Terror. Link between property and the system of master and slave (Daru). Property as condition for being elected. Possession and property (...).²⁷

With the third Kreuznach notebook (July 1843), Marx dealt with the history of England, making a compilation of two works, one of which covers the period “from the reign of Henry VII to the present time” (John Russell); he noted in particular the chapters dealing with the influence of the French Revolution on the internal situation of England. France occupies an important place in the fourth notebook (July-August 1843), with the passages noted covering the period extending from the Gallo-Romans and the Carolingians in the feudal period up to Philippe VI of Valois (according to the History of France by E.A. Schmidt).

A few months earlier, Marx had an exchange of letters with Ruge in which the topic was above all Germany that, “fifty years after the French Revolution”, had resumed “all the infamies of the old despotism”, of a Germany that was “absolutely philistine”, lagging “far behind the French Revolution, which had restored man”.²⁸ In the eyes of Marx it was clear that by going to live in Paris his work of politically engaged author would become part of the tradition of literary criticism that had been exercised by a number of his compatriots who had chosen exile before him, such as Börne and Heine. His last reading before his departure are proof to link the “great” revolution to an “unfettered criticism of the entire established order”, thus to the “criticism of politics” by means of the real struggles in which he fully intended to participate.

This ambitious objective required the use of serious historical sources, and Marx’s choice was excellent: Ernst Wil-

²⁸ Marx to Ruge, Cologne, May 1843, *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, Paris, 1844. *Oeuvres*, III, 337. In the same letter, in reference to Napoleon on the Bérézina watching “the squirming of drowning men” and exclaiming “look at those toads!”, Marx notes, “The only thought of despotism is to scorn men; it is man devoid of his humanity. (...) The despot sees men ever deprived of dignity. Before his eyes, and for him, they drown themselves in the muck of vulgar living, just like frogs”. *Ibid.*, p. 338.

helm G. Wachsmuth, author of a voluminous *History of France at the Time of the Revolution* (Hamburg, 1840-1844). Likewise he collected many passages from Leopold Ranke on the Restoration in France, on the 1830 Charter and on the “party of the revolution”. In one of Ranke’s remarks about the émigrés who had taken advantage of privileges granted by the 1830 Charter, Marx intervenes with a comment (a rare occurrence!) in a note whose theoretical premises can be found in the manuscript on Hegel’s political philosophy. Here are a few significant lines:

Under Louis XVIII, the constitution is a gift of the king (charter granted by the king), under Louis-Philippe, the king is a gift of the constitution (royalty granted). We can note in general that the transformation of subject into predicate and of predicate into subject, the inversion of the determining and the determined, always announces a coming revolution.²⁹

The restoration of the Bourbons and the July revolution, even interpreted by a conservative historian like Ranke, offered Marx a field of studies closely linked to his early readings in the realm of the historiography of the French Revolution. He was going to leave Germany for France, a country that “by its own revolutionary initiative and its social tendencies (was) called to serve as model for Germany”. It was in these terms that *La Revue Indépendante*, a bi-monthly review founded by Pierre Leroux, commented on the appearance in Paris of the *Annales de l’Allemagne et de la France*. There is nothing astonishing about the fact that, before going to Paris, Marx did not limit himself to the works of Ranke and that he consulted authors who could enrich his knowledge in the realm of European political history. And at the end of the fourth Kreuznach notebook there is a rich collection of passages from two works, the study of which was to enlighten his future work:

²⁹ MEGA IV/2, p. 181. By changing the moments of the idea of State into subject and the ancient political realities into predicate, Hegel expresses “the general character of time, his *political theology*”.

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- John Lingard, *History of England since the First Roman Invasion*, translated from English into German, 7 volumes, Frankfurt, 1827-1828.
- Erik Gustav Geijr, *History of Sweden*, translated from the manuscript, Hamburg, 1832.

For this fourth notebook, Marx made an index in five columns:

- I. The orders. Communes. Corporations and domination. Municipal power, etc., bourgeoisie.
- II. Constitution and administration. Feudal system. Charges of the court. Salaries of bureaucrats. State, king, bureaucrats. Parliament. Press. Human rights. Constitution of 1791.
- III. Liberty. Equality. Chamber of deputies. Constitution.
- IV. Legitimacy. Election. Representative constitution. Sovereignty of the people. House of commons. English constitution.
- V. Abolition of perpetual loans.

In the fifth and last Kreuznach notebook, on the title page, the following titles are listed:

- 1. Pfister: *History of the Germans*. 5 volumes.
- 2. Möser: *Patriotic fantasies*. 4 volumes.
- 3. *The Principle of Heredity*. Berlin 1832.
- 4. Hamilton: *North America*. 2 volumes.
- 5. Niccolò Machiavelli: *On the State*.³⁰

V. PARISIAN NOTEBOOKS AND EX-LIBRIS MARX

Just after moving to Paris, Marx envisaged writing a history of the Convention, after completing the reading on the French Revo-

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 221. Among the passages quoted, which cover 40 pages, two readings were of particular interest to Marx: the five volumes of *Geschichte des Teutschen* by J. Christian Pfister (Hamburg, 1829-1835) and the travel description by the Scotsman Thomas Hamilton, *Man and Manners in America* (1832), that Marx read in a German translation (1834), and for which a French translation appeared in the same year in Brussels. See M. Rubel, Introduction to this text (*Les hommes et les moeurs aux États-Unis*) edited by Slatkine Reprints, Geneva, 1979.

lution begun in Kreuznach. In *The Jewish Question* he had analyzed the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1791; he extended this reflection to the text of 1793, the constitution of Pennsylvania and that of New Hampshire in order to sharpen his criticism of political rights by affirming that “what are called ‘rights of man’ (‘rights of man’ distinguished from ‘rights of citizens’) are nothing other than the rights of a member of civil society, that is of a selfish man, of man separated from man and from the community”. “The right of man to private property is the right to enjoy his fortune and to use it *as he pleases*, without being concerned for others, independently of society. It is the right to personal interest”. The right to liberty is aimed at the “liberty of man as monad turned in on himself”; it is the “right of the *narrow-minded* individual, closed in on himself”; “equality” is precisely “liberty” thus defined, namely, “each man is considered exactly the same as a monad turned in on himself”; with the idea of “security” bourgeois society “does not rise above its selfishness; it is rather *the guarantee* of its *selfishness*”.³¹

If in this critique of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen Marx revealed the limits of political rights, he is far from denying their importance as a means of struggle within the existing “world order”. By denouncing the “selfishness” of the “political association” whose purpose is supposedly “the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man”, he contrasted the ethics of the universal community of emancipated persons with the morality of civil-bourgeois society.

Of the 400 titles listed in an inventory of Marx’s personal library of books and documents that he used during his time in Kreuznach, Paris, Brussels and Cologne between 1843 and 1849, more than 200 deal with the French sphere: the historiography of the revolutions of 1789 and 1830 is represented by some fifty works, some of which are in several volumes. It is necessary to add to this number a series of writings coming from socialist and communist literature, as well as an important section of memoirs of

³¹ *The Jewish Question*, cf. *Oeuvres*, III, p. 368.

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authors such as Beaumarchais, Grégoire, Peuchet, Cardinal de Retz, Princess de Lamballe, Duke of Saint-Simon, *l'Abbé Ter-rai* (by Coquereau), etc. To measure the dimensions of the literary project of which the Convention was to be the central theme, it suffices to refer to the remarks of Arnold Ruge who described the behavior of his former companion, after the collapse of the *Jahrbücher*, as follows:

Marx's excessive sensitivity (...) manifested itself most often when he had worked to the point of making himself ill and had not gone to bed for three or even four nights.

And he also noted that Marx wanted,

... to write the history of the Convention, and he assembled the materials necessary for this and adopted quite fruitful points of view. (...) He wants to use his stay in Paris for this work, which is perfectly justified.³²

The sole concrete trace of this project is a manuscript, an apparently preparatory work among others that have remained unknown until now. It is made up of notes on the *Mémoires* of René Levasseur (de la Sarthe).³³

In six pages of a 28-page notebook, Marx wrote in two columns, filling the left column with passages quoted in the original language and the right columns with quotations in German translation with a few changes from the French text. The first original quotation suggests the meaning that Marx intended to bestow upon his work. "What is today taken as the madness of a few exalted maniacs was the common feeling of an entire people and in a certain sense its manner of existing".³⁴

Marx decided to abandon the project of a "history of the Convention". During his "critical review of Hegel's philosophy of

³² A. Ruge to Ludwig Feuerbach, 15 May 1844.

³³ René Levasseur (de la Sarthe), ex-member of the Convention, *Mémoires*, t. 1-4, Paris, 1829-1831. MEGA IV/2, p. 283-293.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

law”, he had understood that what the Berlin professor meant by “civil society” (“following the example of the English and the French of the 18th century”) could not be explained by a “general evolution of the human spirit”; to the contrary, the development of social, political and intellectual life of every human group is rooted in the “economic structure”, in other words in “the material conditions of life”, whence the necessity of turning to a study of economics. Marx had been preceded in his new intellectual orientation by Engels who had published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* the “brilliant sketch of a critique of economic categories”.

One fact confirms the abrupt forsaking by Marx of the work of historian; the twelve pages following the passages from the *Mémoires* of Levasseur are filled with quotations from the French edition of Adam Smith’s work, *The Wealth of Nations*. Marx had begun his compilation in Paris in another notebook dating from the spring of 1844, at a time when the study of economics was already guiding his passion for reading, as attested by the notebooks from Paris and from Brussels where critical commentary accompanies the quotations. The history of the French Revolution was by now an integral part of Marx’s thinking, and the “critique of politics” remained inseparable from the “critique of economics”. It was not by chance that the contract signed with Leske the publisher just before his obligatory departure for Paris covered a work that in its title combined this two-fold critique, making it clear that for its author it was a single subject, the same matter.

Probably written toward the beginning of his stay in Brussels (February 1845), the eleven notes condense the fruits of his historical studies since his forced departure from the Rhineland newspaper in March 1843. Marx delineated the thematic scope of the problems to be dealt with in the work promised to the publisher Leske, and it is clear that the French Revolution was at the heart of his reflection.

1. *History of the genesis of the modern State or the French Revolution*. The presumptuousness of the political sphere—confusion with the ancient State. Revolutionaries and civil society. Division of all elements into civil and political beings.

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2. *Proclamation of the rights of man and the Constitution of the State.* Individual freedom and public power. *Liberty, equality* and unity. The sovereignty of the people.
3. The *State* and *civil society*.
4. The *representative State* and the *Charter*. The constitutional representative State, which is the democratic representative State.
5. The *separation of powers*. Legislative power and executive power.
6. *Legislative power* and legislative bodies. Political clubs.
7. *Executive power*. Centralization and hierarchy. Centralization and political civilization. Federal system and industrialism. *Public administration* and *communal administration*.
8. *Judicial power* and the *law*.
- 8.1 *Nationality* and the *people*.
9. *Political parties*.
- 9.1 The *right to vote*, the struggle for the *abolition* of the State and of civil society.³⁵

CONCLUSION

The historiography of the French Revolution profoundly marked

Marx's political theory. The principal stage of political emancipation, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, while establishing legally the internal dichotomy—or alienation—of modern man and the separation of modern society into classes, was the signal for a social movement dedicated to human, and thus total, emancipation. To adhere to the view of integral liberation—with as a result the appearance of the “well-rounded (*allseitig*) individual!”—implied for Marx adherence to the revolution, having hallowed the right to free expression and free association, “bourgeois” conquest, necessary condition for an equally important and significant conquest. The frequenting of French socialist literature and the working-class environment of Paris enriched Marx's humanist culture, acquired for the most part thanks to his earlier intellectual masters—such as Epicurus, Lucretius, Gassendi and Spinoza—with a new dimension, that

³⁵ K. Marx, *Oeuvres*, III, p. 1027 sq.

of a utopia implicitly understood as an ethic of emancipation of the “immense majority”, whose disciple had drawn substantial elements from the teachings of Godwin and Owen, of Charles Fourier, Pierre Leroux and Babeuf. In thinking of Kant Marx was tempted to discover in the tissue of revolutionary history the secret, called “law”, of a movement of emancipation, which in the final analysis is in keeping with the becoming aware of a “categorical imperative”. The political activity of Marx, theoretician of the capitalist manner of production and of “scientific socialism”, was combined with a permanent combat against the three principal forms of negation of the Charter of the Rights of Man: Prussian absolutism, Russian Czarism and French Bonapartism.

As paradoxical as it might seem, Marx the “communist” had to struggle throughout his career as man of science and as political militant in order to have his “bourgeois” claims triumph, in other words the ideals proclaimed by the fundamental charter of liberal democracy, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. His combat as spokesman for freedom of the press and respect for common law; his role as militant in the League of Communists, his activity as leading member and leader of the International Workingman’s Association accompanied and illustrated the laborious gestation of a scientific work that, despite its incomplete nature, makes of Marx, thinker of the French Revolution, a pioneer in political theory and one of the most astute critics of the wiles of politics.

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