

# Karl Marx

selected writings

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## **Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction**

The following article was first published in the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher*. It was intended originally as an introduction to Marx's unfinished manuscript on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, and was written very early in 1844 under the impact of Marx's first few months in Paris, where he had moved in October 1843. The article begins with a series of brilliant epigrams on religion—a subject Marx considers adequately dealt with by his Young Hegelian colleagues. In the main body of the article Marx describes, in the first part, the current situation in Germany: intellectually very advanced owing to the ideas of Hegel and the Young Hegelians, but politically very backward. In the second part, he discusses the revolutionary possibilities latent in this contrast. From an analysis of the French Revolution Marx draws the optimistic conclusion that Germany is much more fitted than France for a radical revolution. His reasons are the absence of a strong middle class in Germany and the possibility of an explosive union between German philosophy and the 'class with radical chains'. This is the first occasion on which Marx proclaims his adherence to the cause of the proletariat: he had been in close contact with working-class revolutionaries since his arrival in Paris.

As far as Germany is concerned, the criticism of religion is essentially complete, and the criticism of religion is the presupposition of all criticism.

The profane existence of error is compromised as soon as its heavenly *oratio pro aris et focus* [prayer for hearth and home] is refuted. Man has found in the imaginary reality of heaven where he looked for a superman only the reflection of his own self. He will therefore no longer be inclined to find only the appearance of himself, the non-man, where he seeks and must seek his true reality.

The foundation of irreligious criticism is this: man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is indeed the self-consciousness and self-awareness of man who either has not yet attained to himself or has already lost himself again. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society. This state, this society, produces religion's inverted attitude to the world, because they are an inverted world themselves. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, its universal basis for consolation and

justification. It is the imaginary realization of the human essence, because the human essence possesses no true reality. Thus, the struggle against religion is indirectly the struggle against the world whose spiritual aroma is religion.

Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless circumstances. It is the opium of the people.

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about their condition is a demand to give up a condition that requires illusion. The criticism of religion is therefore the germ of the criticism of the valley of tears whose halo is religion.

Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers from the chains not so that man may bear chains without any imagination or comfort, but so that he may throw away the chains and pluck living flowers. The criticism of religion disillusions man so that he may think, act, and fashion his own reality as a disillusioned man come to his senses; so that he may revolve around himself as his real sun. Religion is only the illusory sun which revolves around man as long as he does not revolve around himself.

It is therefore the task of history, now the truth is no longer in the beyond, to establish the truth of the here and now. The first task of philosophy, which is in the service of history, once the holy form of human self-alienation has been discovered, is to discover self-alienation in its unholy forms. The criticism of heaven is thus transformed into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics.

The following exposition—a contribution to this task—does not deal with the original but with its copy, the German philosophy of the state and law. The only reason is that it is dealing with Germany.

If we wanted to start with the German *status quo* itself, the result would still be an anachronism even if one did it in the only adequate way, i.e. negatively. Even the denial of our political present is already a dusty fact in the historical lumber-room of modern peoples. Even if I deny powdered wigs, I still have unpowdered wigs. If I deny the situation in the Germany of 1843, I am according to French reckoning, scarcely in the year 1789, still less at the focal point of the present.

Indeed, German history can congratulate itself on following a path that no people in the historical firmament have taken before it and none will take after. For we have shared the restorations of the modern peoples, without sharing their revolutions. We have had restorations, firstly because other peoples dared to make a revolution, and secondly because other peoples suffered a counter-revolution; once because our masters were afraid and once because they were

not afraid. With our shepherds at our head, we continually found ourselves in the company of freedom only once—on the day of its burial.

There is a school that justifies the abjectness of today by the abjectness of yesterday, a school which declares every cry of the serf against the knout to be rebellious as long as the knout is an aged, historical knout with a pedigree, a school to which history, like the God of Israel to his servant Moses, only shows its posterior. This school, the Historical School of Law, would have invented German history had it not been itself an invention of that history. It is a Shylock, but a servile Shylock that for every pound of flesh cut from the heart of the people swears upon its bond, its historical, Christian-Germanic bond.

Easy-going enthusiasts, on the other hand, Germanophiles by blood and liberal by reflection, look for the history of freedom beyond our history in the primeval Teutonic forests. But how is the history of our freedom different from the history of the wild boar's freedom if it is only to be found in the forests? Moreover, it is well known that the forest echoes back the same words that are shouted into it. So peace to the primeval German forests!

But war on the situation in Germany! Of course. It is below the level of history and below any criticism, but it remains an object of criticism just as the criminal, though below the level of humanity, yet remains an object of the executioner. In its struggle against this situation criticism is no passion of the head, it is the head of passion. It is no surgical knife, it is a weapon. Its object is its enemy that it does not aim to refute, but to annihilate. For the spirit of this situation is refuted already. In itself it is not an object worthy of thought but an existence as despicable as it is despised. Criticism does not itself need to arrive at an understanding with this object for it is already clear about it. It no longer pretends to be an end in itself but only a means. The essential feeling that animates it is indignation, its essential task is denunciation.

The point is to describe the counter-pressures of all social spheres, a general passive discontent, a narrowness that both recognizes and yet misconceives itself, all contained in the framework of a government that lives from the preservation of all mediocrities and is itself nothing but mediocrity in government.

What a charade! Society is infinitely divided into a multiplicity of races which stand opposed to each other with petty antipathies, bad consciences, and a brutal mediocrity. It is precisely the ambivalent and suspicious attitude to each other that leads their masters to treat them all without distinction, although with different formalities, as persons whose existence has been granted as a favour. And even the fact that they are dominated, ruled, and possessed they must recognize and profess as a favour of heaven! And on the other side are the masters themselves whose greatness is in inverse proportion to their number.

The criticism that tackles this state of affairs is engaged in a hand to hand

battle, and in a hand to hand battle it does not matter whether the opponent is equally noble, well born, and interesting—the point is to hit him. The point is not to allow the Germans a moment of self-deceit or resignation. We must make the actual oppression even more oppressive by making them conscious of it, and the insult even more insulting by publicizing it. We must describe every sphere of German society as the disgrace of German society, we must force these petrified relationships to dance by playing their own tune to them! So as to give them courage, we must teach the people to be shocked by themselves. We are thus fulfilling an inevitable need of the German people and the needs that spring from the true character of a people are the final bases of its satisfaction.

Even for modern peoples this struggle against the narrow content of the German *status quo* is not without interest; for the German *status quo* is the unabashed consummation of the *ancien régime* and the *ancien régime* is the hidden deficiency of the modern state. The struggle against the German political present is the struggle against the past of modern peoples, and they are still burdened with reminiscences from this past. It is instructive for them to see the *ancien régime*, that played tragedy in their history, play comedy as a German ghost. Its history was tragic so long as it was the established power in the world and freedom was a personal fancy; in a word, so long as it believed and had to believe, in its own justification. So long as the *ancien régime*, as the existing world order, was struggling with a world that was just beginning, then there was on its part a universal historical error, but not a personal one. Its demise was therefore tragic.

The present German regime, on the other hand, an anachronism in flagrant contradiction to all generally recognized axioms, the nullity of the *ancien régime* exhibited for all the world to see, only imagines that it believes in itself, and requires this imagination from the rest of the world. If it believed in its own nature, would it try to hide it under the appearance of an alien nature and seek its salvation in hypocrisy and sophistry? The modern *ancien régime* is only the comedian of a world order whose real heroes are dead. History is thorough and passes through many stages when she carries a worn-out form to burial. The last stage of a world-historical form is its comedy. The gods of Greece who had already been mortally wounded in the *Prometheus Bound* tragedy of Aeschylus, had to die once more a comic death in the dialogues of Lucian. Why does history follow this course? So that mankind may take leave of its past joyfully. It is this joyful political function that we vindicate for the political powers of Germany.

But as soon as modern socio-political reality is submitted to criticism, as soon, that is, as criticism raises itself to the level of truly human problems, it finds itself outside the German *status quo*, or it would conceive of its object at a level below its object. An example: the relationship of industry and the world

of wealth in general to the political world is one of the chief problems of modern times. In what form does this problem begin to preoccupy the Germans? Under the form of protectionism, a system of prohibitions and a national economy. German chauvinism has left men for matter, and so one fine morning our cotton knights and iron heroes found themselves changed into patriots. So people are beginning in Germany to recognize the interior sovereignty of monopoly by according it an exterior sovereignty. Thus we are now starting to begin in Germany when France and England are beginning to end. The old and rotten state of affairs against which these countries are in theoretical rebellion and which they only tolerate as one tolerates chains, is in Germany greeted like the rising dawn of a beautiful future that scarcely dares to pass from artful theory to implacable practice. While in France and England the problem is: political economy or domination of wealth by society, in Germany it is: national economy or domination of nationality by private property. Thus in France and England the problem is to abolish monopoly that has progressed to its final consequences; in Germany the problem is to progress as far as the final consequences of monopoly. There the problem is to find a solution, here it is to provoke a collision. This is a sufficient example of the German form of modern problems, an example of how our history, like a raw recruit, has so far only had a job of performing trivial historical drill after everyone else.

So if developments in Germany as a whole did not go beyond German political development, a German could no more take part in contemporary problems than can a Russian. But if the single individual is not bound by the limits of his nation, the whole nation is even less liberated by the liberation of an individual. Scythians made no progress at all towards a Greek culture because Greece counted a Scythian as one of her philosophers.

Happily we Germans are no Scythians.

As the ancient peoples have experienced their pre-history in imagination, in mythology, so we Germans have experienced our future history in thought, in philosophy. We are philosophical contemporaries without being historical ones. German philosophy is the ideal prolongation of German history. So if, instead of criticizing the incomplete works of our real history, we criticize the posthumous works of our ideal history, philosophy, then our criticism will be at the centre of the question of which the present age says: that is the question. What in developed peoples is the practical conflict with the modern state institutions, in Germany, where these institutions do not even exist, it is a critical conflict with the philosophical reflection of these institutions.

The German philosophy of law and of the state is the only theory in German history that stands *al pari* [on an equal footing] with the official modern present. The German people must therefore add this dream history to its existing circumstances and submit to criticism not only these existing circumstances but

at the same time their abstract continuation. Its future can limit itself neither to the immediate negation of its real political and juridical circumstances nor to the immediate completion of its ideal political and juridical circumstances, for it has the immediate negation of its real situation in its ideal circumstances and has already almost left behind the immediate completion of its philosophy by looking at neighbouring peoples. Thus the practical political party in Germany is justified in demanding the negation of philosophy. Their error consists not in their demand, but in being content with the demand that they do not and cannot really meet. They believe that they can complete that negation by turning their back on philosophy and murmuring at her with averted head some vexatious and banal phrases. Their limited vision does not count philosophy as part of German reality or even fancies that it is beneath the level of German practice and the theories that serve it. You demand that we start from the real seeds of life, but forget that until now the real seed of the German people has only flourished inside its skull. In a word: you cannot transcend philosophy without realizing it.

The same error but with inverted factors is committed by the theoretical party that originates in philosophy.

It saw in the present struggle nothing but the critical struggle of philosophy with the German world and did not reflect that previous philosophy itself has belonged to this world and is its completion, albeit in ideas. It was critical with regard to its opposite but not to itself, for it started from the presuppositions of philosophy and remained content with the results thus obtained. Or else it presented demands and conclusions got from elsewhere as the demands and conclusions of philosophy, although these, supposing them to be well founded, can only be obtained by the negation of previous philosophy, of philosophy as philosophy. We reserve for later a more detailed description of this party. Its principal fault can be summed up thus: it thought it could realize philosophy without transcending it.

The criticism of the German philosophy of the state and of law which was given its most consistent, richest, and final version by Hegel, is both the critical analysis of the modern state and of the reality that depends upon it and also the decisive denial of the whole previous method of the German political and legal mind, whose principal and most general expression, raised to the level of a science, is precisely the speculative philosophy of law itself. Only Germany could give rise to a speculative philosophy of law, this abstract and exuberant thought of the modern state whose reality remains in the beyond, even though this is only beyond the Rhine. And inversely the German ideology of the modern state that abstracts from actual men was only possible because, and in so far as, the modern state itself abstracts from actual men or satisfies the whole man in a purely imaginary way. In politics the Germans have thought what other people have done. Germany was their theoretical conscience. The



abstraction and conceit of its thought has always been in step with the reality of its narrow and trivial situation. So if the *status quo* of the German political system expresses the consummation of the *ancien régime*, the completion of the thorn in the flesh of the modern state, then the *status quo* of the German political consciousness expresses the incompleteness of the modern state, the defectiveness of its very flesh.

Even were it only a decided opponent of the previous methods of the German political mind, the criticism of the speculative philosophy of law cannot end with itself, but in tasks for which there is only one solution: *praxis*.

This is the question: can Germany attain to a *praxis* that will be equal to her principles, i.e. can she attain to revolution that will not only raise her to the official level of modern peoples but to the human level that is the immediate future of these peoples?

The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, supplant the criticism of weapons; material force must be overthrown by material force. But theory, too, will become material force as soon as it seizes the masses. Theory is capable of seizing the masses as soon as its proofs are *ad hominem* and its proofs are *ad hominem* as soon as it is radical. To be radical is to grasp the matter by the root. But for man the root is man himself. The manifest proof of the radicalism of German theory and its practical energy is that it starts from the decisive and positive abolition of religion. The criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that man is the highest being for man, that is, with the categorical imperative to overthrow all circumstances in which man is humiliated, enslaved, abandoned, and despised, circumstances best described by the exclamation of a Frenchman on hearing of an intended tax on dogs: Poor dogs! They want to treat you like men!

Even historically speaking, theoretical emancipation has a specifically practical significance for Germany. For Germany's revolutionary past is theoretical, it is the Reformation. Once it was the monk's brain in which the revolution began, now it is in the philosopher's.

Certainly, Luther removed the servitude of devotion by replacing it by the servitude of conviction. He destroyed faith in authority by restoring the authority of faith. He turned priests into laymen by turning laymen into priests. He liberated man from exterior religiosity by making man's inner conscience religious. He emancipated the body from chains by enchaining the heart.

But even though Protestantism was not the true solution, it formulated the problem rightly. The question was now no longer the battle of the layman with the exterior priest, it was the battle with his own interior priest, his priestly nature. Protestantism by turning laymen into priests emancipated the lay popes, the princes, together with their clergy, the privileged and the philistines. Similarly philosophy, by turning the priestly Germans into men, will emancipate the people. But just as emancipation did not stop with the princes, so it



will not stop with the secularization of goods involved in the spoliation of the church that was above all practised by hypocritical Prussia. The peasants' war, the most radical event in German history, failed then because of theology. Today, when theology itself has failed, the most unfree event in German history, our *status quo*, will be wrecked on philosophy. On the day before the Reformation Germany was the most unconditional servant of Rome; on the day before its revolution it is the unconditional servant of less than Rome, of Prussia and Austria, cabbage squires and philistines.

However, there appears to be a major obstacle to a radical German revolution. For revolutions need a passive element, a material basis. A theory will only be realized in a people in so far as it is the realization of what it needs. Will the enormous gulf between the demands of German thought and the replies of German actuality match the same gulf that exists between civil society and the state, and within civil society itself? Will theoretical needs immediately become practical ones? It is not enough that thought should tend towards reality, reality must also tend towards thought.

But Germany has not scaled the intermediary stages of political emancipation at the same time as modern peoples. Even the stages that she has passed beyond theoretically have not yet been reached in practice. How can she with one perilous leap not only go beyond her own barriers but also beyond the barriers of modern peoples, barriers which must in reality appear to her as a desirable liberation from her real barriers. A radical revolution can only be a revolution of radical needs, whose presuppositions and breeding-ground seem precisely to be lacking.

Germany, it is true, has only accompanied the development of modern peoples by the abstract activity of thought, without taking an active part in the real struggles of this development. But, on the other hand, it has shared the sufferings of this development without sharing its joys and its partial satisfactions. Abstract activity on the one hand is matched by abstract suffering on the other. Germany will therefore one fine morning find herself on a level with European decadence before it has ever stood on the level of European emancipation. She could be compared with a fetishist who suffers from the maladies of Christianity.

If we consider first the German governments, we find that the conditions of the age, the situation of Germany, the outlook of German culture, and finally their own happy instincts drive them to combine the civilized deficiencies of the modern political world, whose advantages we do not possess, with the barbaric deficiencies of the *ancien régime*, which we enjoy to the full. Thus Germany must participate more and more in the unreason, if not in the reason, even of forms of state that go beyond her present *status quo*. Is there, for example, a country in the world that shares so naïvely as so-called constitutional Germany all the illusions of the constitutional state without sharing its realities? Or did it

not have to be the brain wave of a German regime to link the terrors of censorship with those of the French September laws which presuppose freedom of the press? In the Roman Pantheon the gods of all nations were to be found, and in the Holy Roman German Empire are to be found the sins of all forms of state. This eclecticism will reach a height as yet unsuspected: this is guaranteed by the politico-aesthetic gourmandizing of a German king who thinks to play all the roles of monarchy, the feudal as well as the bureaucratic, the absolute as well as the constitutional, the autocratic as well as the democratic, in his own person if not through the person of the people, and for himself if not for the people. Germany is the political deficiencies of the present constituted into a world of their own and as such will not be able to overthrow specifically German barriers without overthrowing the general barriers of the political present.

It is not the radical revolution that is a Utopian dream for Germany, not universal human emancipation; it is the partial, purely political revolution, the revolution which leaves the pillars of the house still standing. What is the basis of a partial, purely political revolution? It is that a part of civil society emancipates itself and attains to universal domination, that a particular class undertakes the general emancipation of society from its particular situation. This class frees the whole of society, but only under the presupposition that the whole of society is in the same situation as this class, that it possesses, or can easily acquire, for example, money and education.

No class in civil society can play this role without arousing a moment of enthusiasm in itself and among the masses. It is a moment when the class fraternizes with society in general and dissolves itself into society; it is identified with society and is felt and recognized as society's general representative. Its claims and rights are truly the claims and rights of society itself of which it is the real social head and heart. A particular class can only vindicate for itself general supremacy in the name of the general rights of society. Revolutionary energy and intellectual self-confidence alone are not enough to gain this position of emancipator and thus to exploit politically all spheres of society in the interest of one's own sphere. So that the revolution of a people and the emancipation of a particular class of civil society may coincide, so that one class can stand for the whole of society, the deficiency of all society must inversely be concentrated in another class; a particular class must be a class that rouses universal scandal and incorporates all limitations; a particular social sphere must be regarded as the notorious crime of the whole society, so that the liberation of this sphere appears as universal self-liberation. So that one class *par excellence* may appear as the class of liberation, another class must inversely be the manifest class of oppression. The universally negative significance of the French nobility and clergy determined the universally positive significance of the class nearest to them and opposed to them: the bourgeoisie.

But not only is every particular class in Germany lacking in the consistency,

insight, courage, and boldness that could mark it as the negative representative of society; they are also lacking in that breadth of mind that can identify, even if only for a moment, with the mind of the people, that genius that can infuse material force with political power, that revolutionary zeal that can throw at its adversary the defiant words: I am nothing and I should be all. The principal element in the honest morality of not only individual Germans but also of classes is that modest egoism that parades its narrowness and lets it be used against itself. Thus the relationship of the different spheres of German society to each other is not dramatic but epic. For each begins to be conscious of itself and to take up a position near the others with its particular claims, not as soon as it is oppressed but as soon as the conditions of the time without any co-operation create a lower social stratum which they in their turn can oppress. Even the moral self-awareness of the German middle class rests simply on the consciousness of being the representative of Philistine mediocrity of all other classes. It is thus not only the German kings that ascend the throne *mal à propos* [inopportunely]; it is also every sphere of civil society that is defeated before it has celebrated its victory, that has developed its own limitations before it has overcome the limitations that confront it, that shows its narrow-mindedness before it can show its generosity. The result is that even the opportunity for an important role is past before it was to hand and that, as soon as that class begins to struggle with the class above it, it is engaged in a struggle with the class below. Thus the princes are fighting against the king, the bureaucracy against the nobility, the bourgeoisie against all of them, while the proletariat is already beginning its fight against the bourgeoisie. The middle class scarcely dares to conceive of emancipation from its own point of view, and already the development of social circumstances and the progress of political theory declare this point of view itself to be antiquated or at least problematical.

In France it is enough that one should be something in order to wish to be all. In Germany one must be nothing, if one is to avoid giving up everything. In France partial emancipation is the basis of universal emancipation; in Germany universal emancipation is a *conditio sine qua non* of every partial emancipation. In France it is the reality, in Germany the impossibility, of a gradual liberation that must give birth to total freedom. In France every class of the people is politically idealistic and is not primarily conscious of itself as a particular class but as a representative of general social needs. The role of emancipator thus passes in a dramatic movement to different classes of the French people until it comes to the class which no longer realizes social freedom by presupposing certain conditions that lie outside mankind and are yet created by human society, but which organizes the conditions of human existence by presupposing social freedom. In Germany, on the contrary, where practical life is as unintellectual as intellectual life is unpractical, no class of civil society has the need for, or capability of achieving, universal emancipation until it is

compelled to by its immediate situation, by material necessity and its own chains.

So where is the real possibility of a German emancipation?

We answer: in the formation of a class with radical chains, a class in civil society that is not a class of civil society, of a social group that is the dissolution of all social groups, of a sphere that has a universal character because of its universal sufferings and lays claim to no particular right, because it is the object of no particular injustice but of injustice in general. This class can no longer lay claim to a historical status, but only to a human one. It is not in a one-sided opposition to the consequences of the German political regime, it is in total opposition to its presuppositions. It is, finally, a sphere that cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating these other spheres themselves. In a word, it is the complete loss of humanity and thus can only recover itself by a complete redemption of humanity. This dissolution of society, as a particular class, is the proletariat.

The proletariat is only beginning to exist in Germany through the invasion of the industrial movement. For it is not formed by the poverty produced by natural laws but by artificially induced poverty. It is not made up of the human masses mechanically oppressed by the weight of society, but of those who have their origin in society's brutal dissolution and principally the dissolution of the middle class, although, quite naturally, its ranks are gradually swelled by natural poverty and Germano-Christian serfdom.

When the proletariat proclaims the dissolution of the hitherto existing world order, it merely declares the secret of its own existence, since it is in fact the dissolution of this order. When it demands the negation of private property it is only laying down as a principle for society what society has laid down as a principle for the proletariat, what has already been incorporated in itself without its consent as the negative result of society. The proletarian thus finds that he has in relation to the world of the future the same right as the German king in relation to the world of the past, when he calls the people *his* people as he might call a horse *his* horse. When the king declares the people to be his private property he is only confirming that the private property owner is king.

As philosophy finds in the proletariat its material weapons, so the proletariat finds in philosophy its intellectual weapons, and as soon as the lightning of thought has struck deep into the virgin soil of the people, the emancipation of the Germans into men will be completed.

Let us summarize our results:

The only liberation of Germany that is practically possible is the liberation from the theoretical standpoint that declares man to be the highest being for man. In Germany emancipation from the Middle Ages is only possible as an emancipation from the partial overcoming of the Middle Ages. In Germany no form of slavery can be broken without every form of slavery being broken.

Germany is thorough and cannot make a revolution without its being a thorough one. The emancipation of Germany is the emancipation of man. The head of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart is the proletariat. Philosophy cannot realize itself without transcending the proletariat, the proletariat cannot transcend itself without realizing philosophy.

When all interior conditions are fulfilled, the day of German resurrection will be heralded by the crowing of the Gallic cock.

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