THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE MOVEMENT IS EVERYTHING: RADICAL KANTIANISM AND THE IDEAL OF EMANCIPATION IN MODERN GERMANY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY

WILLIAM SPENCER LEVINE

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2019

For my parents

and for Morris, Jennie, and Frank

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

This dissertation is happily the product of more guidance, mentorship, and support than I reasonably could have expected to receive. First and last thanks go to my co-chairs, John McCormick and Sankar Muthu, who supervised this project with patience, generosity, and care. They allowed me to chase down my intuitions to see where they would lead, let me know when I had gone astray, and always encouraged me to see the larger whole in the individual parts of this dissertation. Linda Zerilli was an invaluable member of the committee and this project is far better for her keen ability to discern the key theoretical problem at issue in what sometimes must have appeared as a jumble of disparate ideas and to find the political stakes therein. I was pleasantly surprised when Warren Breckman came to a workshop presentation of the chapter on Heinrich Heine and offered me gracious feedback, and was even more pleased when he agreed to join the committee. His feedback and insight will help to further transform and refine the ideas developed here as they progress into their next phase.

Graduate school would have been a much poorer experience if not for the many friends and colleagues with whom I was able to discuss these ideas, from whom I learned a great deal, and who offered a great deal in the way of support and commiseration when it came time to take a break from this work. Tejas Parasher is a cherished friend and has been an indispensably supportive colleague, who initially introduced me to the thought of turning to Bernstein. Much of this project is informed by a running dialogue with my dear friend Alex Gorman, who remains, in the best way, the most Marxist person I know. I also thank Annie Heffernan, Ray Noll, Nazmul Sultan, Emma Mackinnon, Sam Galloway, Alex Haskins, Lucas Pinheiro, Gordon Arlen, Daniel Nichanian, Cameron Cook, Christy Brandly, Dan Luban, and Steven Klein.

I was fortunate to be able to prevent early versions of these chapters at the Harvard Graduate Political Theory Conference, The Purchase College Philosophy Society, The Northwestern Graduate Political Theory Conference, The Western Political Science Association, The University of Pennsylvania's Graduate Workshop at the Andrea Mitchell Forum for the Study of Democracy, and to a class on Philosophy of History at Northwester led by Professor Rachel Zuckert. My thanks to the organizers and to Ignat Kalinov, Agatha Slupek, Alan Kellner, Anthony Lanz, William Clare Roberts, and Rachel Zuckert. For their feedback on draft chapters of this dissertation, I would also like to thank Joshua Smeltzer and Bruno Leipold. For additional advice and feedback on various topics I've encountered throughout the dissertation, I would also like to thank Jennifer Pitts, Demetra Kasimis, Ben Laurence, Chiara Cordelli, and Jim Wilson.

My family has provided a constant source of support and encouragement. I thank my brother Philip for his insight on many a draft of these chapters and on many of the themes addressed here, as well as his ability to have an insightful opinion on a dizzying array of topics. I thank my brother Mark for his encouragement to reach for perspectives beyond the rarefied world of European intellectual history, and for being there to pick me up a number of times when I most needed it. I thank my sister for her humor and her reminders to not get lost in taking oneself too seriously. For their extraordinary friendship, I thank Darragh McNicholas, Baran Cansever, and Lora Cogswell.

I can trace the initial germs of this dissertation all the way back to my undergraduate years. Jennifer Uleman, Morris Kaplan, and Frank Farrell nurtured my initial love for philosophy and political theory and gave me the impetus to pursue graduate training and, ultimately, a career in academia. It is to them this dissertation is dedicated.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my parents, who, it is clear, had a much higher estimation of my capabilities early on than I initially did. Without their (sometimes frustratingly) unshakeable conviction that I could pursue my interests and succeed in those pursuits, this dissertation would surely not exist.

If much of this project is about how chance and the unexpected preserve the possibility of a better future, it is fitting that in the last year of writing it I met my wife, Dee Vaughn, assurance that the longed for but unexpected can occur and enrich our futures as a result.

Abstract

This dissertation turns to the reception of Kant's ideas among a legacy of thinkers in the tradition of radical social thought in modern Germany to ask how we should understand the role of substantive, philosophical accounts of emancipation in a modern, democratic politics. It turns to this legacy to provide a fuller picture of their conceptions of social transformation and Kant's unique place within them. Kant and his followers were distinct in advocating that we formulate emancipation as a contingent ideal, rather than the result of a larger historical process. The dissertation analyzes debates that unfolded between a range of intellectual schools in the tradition of radical social theory in Germany during moments of radical political upheaval and change: from the French Revolution to 1848 to World War I and Weimar. Returning to this history, I recuperate a tradition of political thinking that defended the necessity of ideals to popular movements for emancipation.

Although many twentieth century theorists understand Kant to represent a discredited mode of political theorizing that seeks to subordinate politics to morality or relies on a grand narrative of history, this dissertation shows how theorists in the nineteenth and early twentieth century repeatedly turned to Kant to critique these impulses in the burgeoning utopian and Marxist social movements of their day. At various periods of social crisis in Germany, a range of political thinkers turned to Kant's *Critical* philosophy to argue that emancipation was not the inevitable outcome of reason or history, but a contingent end that must be pursued through collective democratic efforts. Turning to thinkers from Kant to Heinrich Heine and Eduard Bernstein to Carl Schmitt, this dissertation recovers a legacy of political theorizing that sought to understand the limits and possibilities of popular agency in moments of social crisis in modern Germany. In returning to this archive, I argue for the importance of an account of political ideals that sees them as dependent on

the kinds of collective action available to agents embedded in contexts of plurality and contingency.

Introduction: After Utopia, Again

I. After Utopia, Again?

It is an unfortunate aspect of Kant's contemporary legacy that it is has been so thoroughly severed from the radical tradition he inspired. Although Kant today survives as the intellectual progenitor of fair-minded and reform-oriented political theories, such as those of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, one of the most immediate impacts of Kant's political theory was as inspiration to young radicals like Fichte, Schlegel, the Young Hegelians, and even the young Marx. This, of course, reflects one of the most enduring tensions of Kant's political thought. In his own politics, Kant was a reformist, apologist for enlightened monarchy, and opponent of the right to revolt, in addition to being a radical republican—the "Old Jacobin" himself, who reportedly defended the French Revolution into the twilight of the terror and whose students saw in his kingdom of ends a vision of the future to inspire a revolution. The enduring puzzle of Kant's support for the French Revolution and condemnation of the right to revolt reflects this fundamental ambivalence in his political thought.[1] For Kant, the mere fact of our rationality implied some point in the future where our capacity to set free, rational ends in full coordination with others would reach its culmination in a future society of free, rational beings. But Kant was deeply skeptical and indeed often denied that it was within the power of human agents to achieve this future, which he suggested we should merely hope would come about. It is thus, perhaps, the peculiar fate of Kant's ideas that they are

[1] See Katrin Flikschuh, "Reason, Right, and Revolution: Kant and Locke," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 36, no. 4 (2008), 375-404. See Also, L. W. Beck, "Kant and the Right of Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32, No. 3 (1971) 411-22; Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism*: *The Genesis of Modern Political Thought, 1790-1800*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 36-8; Christine M. Korsgaard, "Taking the Law Into Our Own Hands: Kant on the Right to Revolution" in *The Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 233-64; Lea Ypi, "On Revolution in Kant and Marx," *Political Theory* 42, no. 3 (2014), 262-287

now both derided as a delusive utopianism and presented as inspiration for the liberal ideas now cast as the only viable alternative to the excesses of political utopianism.

This simultaneous association and disassociation of Kant's ideas from the tradition of radical social thought in Germany is significant both to the history of ideas and to contemporary political theory. Contemporary anti-Kantians cast his effort to imagine an ideal future as a pernicious form of political delusion that is either so radical as to be utopian in its dreams of universal human emancipation, or not radical enough in its fantasies about current institutions being potential sites of transition toward an (equally unfeasible) liberal utopia: whatever we make of Kant's ideas, they cannot have any genuine transformative potential. This fate relates to a broader sense of impasse that bedevils advocates of radical social transformation today and empowers its critics, a sense which stems from the widespread contention among theorists that our moment is uniquely bereft of the capacity to imagine *any* alternative futures. For theorists skeptical of the demand for radical social transformation in general, this is cause for celebration, a form of liberation from a baleful kind of political delusion of the sort that afflicted Kant. The loss of utopia means our sober reconciliation to the forms of power and conflict that characterize politics, one that can motivate the effort to combat the most harmful misuses of this power. For theorists who find the prevailing order intolerable but intractable, the resources left available to us might enable critique, but cannot marshal it into a vision of substantive political change. Thus, even as these theorists allow that critique might help us to generate claims about the need to change the social order, they nevertheless evince a deep skepticism about our capacity to envision a direction for such change.

At work in all of these theories is the assumption that our efforts at radical social transformation fundamentally rely on our capacity to project some utopia or set of ideals into the

future, the very aspect of Kant's thought to which they are most hostile. For theorists who mourn the loss of utopia, our inability to credence any new utopias stems from the failure of the old ones amid the persistence of the forms of domination they were meant to upend. And yet this claim gives rise to an odd sense of teleology, in which past efforts at emancipation gained their credibility from a sense of possibility we now know to be impossible, an open-ended future which we now know to be closed. It would appear to imply the frankly odd assumption that past efforts at emancipation never had to wrestle with failures of their predecessors, that their tactics and aims all shared the same, basic utopian design, or that they never encountered social structures that seemed insurmountable and stagnant.[2] This entire conceptual scheme appears to be based in a false picture of the role of substantive conceptions of emancipation in politics, one related to an incomplete memory of the accounts of social transformation offered in the movements so many now regard as discredited.

This dissertation turns to the reception of Kant's ideas among a legacy of thinkers in the tradition of radical social thought in modern Germany to ask how we should understand the role of substantive, philosophical accounts of emancipation in a modern, democratic politics. It turns to this legacy to provide a fuller picture of their conceptions of social transformation and Kant's unique place within them. Indeed, Kant and his followers were distinct in advocating that we formulate emancipation as a contingent ideal, rather than the result of a larger historical process. For Kant and his followers, unlike many of their eventual Marxist interlocutors, the task of imagining alternative futures was an important one, but its importance stemmed from the need for

[2] Indeed, Susan Buck-Morss' image of Lenin counting down the days until the October Revolution lasted longer than the Paris Commune is instructive in this regard. See Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), pp.43

social actors to formulate action-guiding ideals in distinct contexts of agency: they advocated for these conceptions out of tactical, not theoretical, necessity.

I.

The turn to Kant to answer these questions may strike many theorists as counterintuitive. His ideas are often a ready target for critics of Enlightenment conceptions of emancipation and social transformation, which they cast as the product of a pernicious view of rationality endemic to the modern period. For these theorists, certain forms of Enlightenment reason led directly to the forms of domination that characterized the twentieth century.[3] Thus, Isaiah Berlin could agree with Horkheimer and Adorno, if on nothing else, that Kant's account of reason was symptomatic of an Enlightenment view of rationality that leads to totalitarianism. For others, Kant's views are symptomatic of a species of Enlightenment delusion that bewitches theorists with a false image of reason that promises access to transcendent moral truths, but in fact distracts us from the plurality and conflict over values that characterize modern political society and the forms of power that infuse it.[4] Both strains advocate a form of pessimism that provides resources to call into question and critique the prevailing political order, but premise our access to such resources on the disavowal of substantive visions of social transformation. Where one strain regards these dreams as discredited and suggests that their loss is a benefit to modern liberal societies, the other sees the

[3] Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" in *Liberty: Incorporating 'Four Essays on Liberty'*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002); Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno trans. Edmund Jephcott, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*, (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1995); David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*, (Durham, NC, 2004), Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986)

[4] William E. Connolly, *Pluralism*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005)

puncturing of Kantian delusion as a way of reconciling ourselves to a realism that must be pessimistic, or at least self-conscious that its utopias are a fantasy.[5]

Indeed, these rejections of Kantianism and the political philosophies with which it has become associated, variously decried as excessively moralizing to downright totalitarian, are bound up with a general anxiety about the possibility of achieving substantive, objective value schemes in modernity. In his essay on realism, "Realism and Moralism," Bernard Williams explicitly connects his rejection of Kantianism (and utilitarianism) with a Weberian picture of modernity and *Entzauberung* (disenchantment).[6] For Williams, politics must begin from the recognition that we find ourselves embedded in relations of power and normative theorizing must begin from the attempt to render those power relations legitimate, otherwise we ignore the contestation and pluralism over values that characterizes actual political life. William E. Connolly's work has identified modernity with precisely this condition of value pluralism and has suggested ways in which it can enable generative forms of politics, which inevitably requires us to scrutinize and reject Enlightenment visions of progress of the sort Kant espoused.[7] Chantal Mouffe connects the rediscovery of the political and the irreconcilable forms of conflict that characterize it with the post-socialist, post-cold war moment.[8] Raymond Geuss connects his commitment to a form of anti-Kantian realism inspired by Nietzsche and Williams with the failure of Marxism to provide a viable alternative *ethos* to the predominant system of values of the twentieth century.[9]

---

[5] Enzo Rossi, "Being Realistic and Demanding the Impossible" (January 3, 2015). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2555335 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2555335; Raymond Geuss, *A World Without Why?*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); David Owen, "Realism in Ethics and Politics: Bernard Williams, Political Theory, and the Critique of Morality" in Matt Sleat & Duncan Bell eds., *Politics Recovered: Realist Thought in Theory and Practice*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2018), pp. 73-92

[6] Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed*, 7-9

[7] Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, (New York, NY: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991); *Pluralism*, 114-119

[8] See Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, (New York, NY: Verso, 1993)

[9] Geuss, *A World Without Why*, 44-68

What distinguishes these theorists and others associated with realism and radical democracy is, among other things, their collective sense that, to riff on William Galston's formulation, reason underdetermines value, an anti-Kantian presumption if ever there was one.[10] This sets them apart from Neo-Kantians like Rawls and Habermas, often their explicit targets, who seek precisely to ground a conception of value in reason. For contemporary political theorists skeptical of our ability to ground a conception of value, politics must begin from the acknowledgment that we lack a mutual conception of the good. This underwrites their suspicion of political theories that claim to do so and their worry that such theories are a source of delusion, utopianism, or some other species of dangerous political energy. There is an important sense in which, for the value pluralist, any political theory that promises a vision of the good is inherently dangerous in its intrinsic claim to superiority over other such schemes.[11]

For these theorists, then, modernity is connected with the loss of substantive value schemes and, indeed, utopias, a loss they take to be liberating, rather than a source of mourning and disorientation, as a number of left historians do. Geuss's reflection on the relationship of his own Nietzsche-inspired, anti-Kantian realism to the legacy of twentieth century Marxism is especially instructive in this regard and supplies an important link between the resurgence of contemporary realism and the failed promises of Marxism. As Geuss puts it:

> What happened "to" moral philosophy is that Marxism, which to some extent came from outside the stuffy intérieur of academic philosophy, presented the only genuine and potentially viable attempt at reconstituting some notion of objective

[10] William A. Galston, "Realism in political theory," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, No. 4 (2010), 385-411, 396.

[11] There is also an important way, however, in which their claims are drastically underspecified. To say that reason *under*determines value is not to say that reason fails to determine value at all. Adherents of different value schemes can and should provide reasons for their commitment to their values and can engage in forms of democratic persuasion to convince others of them. Value *pluralism* too often turns into a form of value *neutrality* that leads the theorist to stand aloft from the world of politics and refuse judgment, a position which often leads to a comfort with putatively neutral liberal institutions that, in certain of their forms, can actually end up being hostile to substantive democratic values and serve to uphold and legitimate forms of domination associated with unequal forms of capitalist distribution.

> moral authority, an authority that was to be based on attributing to production an absolute social and political priority. if this attempt had succeeded, it would have changed the world and with it our intellectual and moral universe, but it failed.[12]

Motivating Geuss' realism is the frank acknowledgement that Marxism failed to deliver on its promises and we are left with the reality that there seem to be no other alternatives on the horizon. Thus, in an orientation toward theory reminiscent of another of his influences, Theodor Adorno, the only critical resources left allow us to debunk and critique the prevailing order, for Geuss, but also force us to be skeptical that we might ever transform it.

For theorists like Susan Buck-Morss, Wendy Brown, David Scott, Enzo Traverso, Massimiliano Tomba and others, however, the sense that the loss of utopia uniquely defines our historical moment provides motivation to revisit its history, often as part of a project to harness new political energies. Like Geuss, they tie the loss of our ability to imagine alternative futures to the concrete failures of Marxism in the twentieth century. As Brown writes in "Resisting Left Melancholia:"

> Certainly the losses, accountable and unaccountable, of the Left are many in our own time. The literal disintegration of socialist regimes and the legitimacy of Marxism may well be the least of it. We are awash in the loss of a unified analysis and unified movement, in the loss of labor and class as inviolable predicates of political analysis and mobilization, in the loss of an inexorable and scientific forward movement of history, and in the loss of a viable alternative to the political economy of capitalism. And on the backs of these losses are still others: We are without a sense of an international, and often even a local, left community; we are without conviction about the truth of the social order; we are without a rich moral-political vision to guide and sustain political work. Thus, we suffer with the sense of not only a lost movement but a lost historical moment; not only a lost theoretical and empirical coherence but a lost way of life and a lost course of pursuits.[13]

---

[12] Geuss, *A World Without Why?*, 46

[13] Wendy Brown, "Resisting Left Melancholy," *boundary 2*, No.3 (1999), pp. 22. The attitude of melancholia to which Brown refers seems to have been yet more prescient when she wrote this article in 1999, when centrist liberalism must have appeared particularly ascendant. The post-2008 resurgence of critiques of capitalism indicates, I think, a renewed sense of energy among the left, and yet the question of alternatives persists in spite of this new energy. See also Jodi Dean's critique of Brown in Jodi Dean, "Communist Desire," in Slavoj Žižek ed., *The Idea of Communism 2: The New York Conference* (London: Verso, 2013), pp. 77-102

Like Geuss, Brown connects our capacity to theorize about the possibility of political transformation today with the material dissolution of left politics in the twentieth century. But Brown argues that preoccupation with these losses can block our capacity to see possibilities for transformation in the present: coming to terms with loss need not lead to pessimism, on her account. But one of Brown's most vital insights is her claim that socialism's failure delegitimated the modes of analysis and philosophies of history that provided it an orientation to the future. Although she seeks to open up a space for new projects and modes of analysis, her project relies on there being a lacuna where they used to be.

For all of these theorists, then, the fate of left theory depends on the state of emancipatory political projects in the present: our political imaginations are stultified because our political projects have come to nil and disappeared. As Traverso writes, "the ghosts haunting Europe today are not the revolutions of the future but the defeated revolutions of the past."[14] Thus, he calls for a "revolutionary project in a nonrevolutionary age."[15] He argues that we need not abandon our dreams for emancipation, but must rekindle our historical memory of emancipatory striving to revivify dead traditions. For Buck-Morss the evaporation of the dream of mass utopia confronts both east *and* west, while David Scott argues that our post-*Bandung* moment leaves us facing the "slowly settling loss of any acceptable future," a phrase he borrows from Raymond Williams.

Tethering the possibilities of left theory to the state of left practice, however, leads to a kind of chicken-and-egg problem, where the left imaginary appears blank because of the dissolution of left practice, but left practice is directionless because of the paucity of left theory. Theorists like Buck-Morss and Scott avoid this problem by focusing on the historical trajectory of

[14] Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 20
[15] *Ibid.*

the radical tradition without trying to imagine its future. Brown provides a set of questions that bedeviled left theory when she wrote her essay twenty years ago that still have yet to be answered. Traverso mines the history of left theory to uncover a more open-ended temporality that allows us to look back and take up its memory in the present, providing a compelling and plausible rejoinder to the loss of utopia. But he leaves it to others to reconstruct the theoretical resources that could provide radical theorists with a new set of tools to grasp the present and imagine a new future. For each, the dissolution of left practice leaves left theory at an impasse without a clear way out.

What these scholars leave undertheorized, however, is the relationship between theory and practice, even as they provide an important clue for an account of this relationship in their tacit assumption that theory is in an important sense practice-dependent. Imagining alternative futures might seem like a futile gesture for theorists because the pursuit of these visions is not a problem that can be solved in theory. If our assumption is that the role of theory is to guide action, it may well diminish our sense of the vitality of theory when it fails to do so. But for Kant, the mistake here is to give up on the imaginative pursuit of something new because it has not yet been achieved. After all, if it had been achieved, it would not be new and there would be no need for theory. As he writes of his own hopes for an emancipatory future:

> Empirical arguments against the success of these resolutions, which are taken on hope, accomplish nothing here. Because [the claim that] that which has not yet succeeded will therefore never succeed does not justify giving up on a pragmatic or technical intention (for example, that of flight with aerostatic balloons); much less a moral intention, which, if its realization is not demonstrated to be impossible, is a duty.[16]

For Kant, the question is not whether past efforts have failed, but whether they remain possible. To the extent that the failure of prior efforts at emancipation does not stem from some intrinsic impossibility, they remain available to both theory *and* practice. On a Kantian account, then, the

[16] Kant, "Theory and Practice," in *Practical Philosophy,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 307

burden of proof for skeptics of social transformation is that they reveal it to be impossible, otherwise they fail to appreciate its claim to novelty.

II.

Indeed, the turn to characterize our political moment as both uniquely bereft of utopian thinking and situated after the failure of prior utopias reveals something of a disconnect with the political traditions so many theorists regard as now discredited. The suggestion that the past century's failures all stemmed from a common investment in specifically utopian political projects obscures the incredible diversity of nineteenth (and twentieth) century struggles for emancipation and the political theories that motivated them, as well as the specificity of utopianism as an approach to politics.[17] Not only was the struggle for emancipation in the nineteenth century connected with a broad range of radical and reformist political theories, but it was also often both motivated by and connected to some of the most thoroughgoing and cold-blooded realisms in the history of political thought. Indeed, to assimilate all efforts at political transformation into the same erroneous utopian tendency and then lament that we are incapable of imagining alternative futures is to fall into the trap of Heinrich Heine's "Westphalian Friend, who, first, destroyed all of the lanterns on Grohnderstraße in Göttingen, and then delivered a long speech to us in the darkness about the practical necessity of lanterns – which he claimed to have thus destroyed for theoretical reasons, just to show us that without them we could not see."[18]

This is not to dismiss the sense that we find ourselves surrounded by the failed political projects of the prior century, but rather to caution against tracing those failures to one overriding

[17] See, for example, Warren Breckman, *Dethroning the Self: Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, (Cambridge, EN: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Frank Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth Century Thought*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1964); Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution*

[18] Heinrich Heine trans. Howard Pollack-Milgate, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, 87

tendency that leaves us incapable of pursuing anything beyond what already exists. The claim that our political moment is situated against the frustrated desires of prior moments of political striving is a claim one could make in most times and places, and especially throughout the twentieth century. Thus, Judith Shklar could ask in 1965: "what does the plaintive question, 'why are there no utopias today?' mean?" before reminding her readers that Karl Mannheim had already asked this question prior to 1930.[19] Lewis Coser and Irving Howe asked in *Dissent* Magazine in 1954, "is the idea of 'utopia' still a tolerable one?'"[20] And the Students for a Democratic Society asserted in their famous "Port Huron Statement" in 1962, a time few contemporary theorists would look back on as bereft of utopias, that "the decline of utopia and hope is in fact one of the defining features of social life today," where just six years later French students and workers would insist that we "Be realistic. Demand the impossible" in the Parisian streets of Mai '68. (Surely leading to a new generation who took note of their lack of utopian projects.)[21] David Scott, writing from the post-colonial perspective, characterizes our current political moment, "after *Bandung*," as he describes it, as lacking the capacity to imagine alternatives because of the failures of anti-colonial struggles.[22] And Susan Buck-Morss constructs our post-utopian moment at the heels of the Cold War, which ended thirty-five years after Shklar first wrote *After Utopia.*[23]

Part of the reason this framing is attractive, I imagine, is that it will likely always be true to the extent that one imagines that politics is the kind of thing that takes up projects which can be completed or fail. Thus, the sense that we cannot have utopias because all prior utopias failed has

[19] Judith Shklar, "The Political Theory of Utopia: From Melancholy to Nostalgia" *Daedalus* 94, No. 2 (Spring, 1965), pp. 367-381
[20] Lewis Coser and Irving Howe, "Images of Socialism," *Dissent 1*, No. 2 (1954), pp. 122-138
[21] Students for a Democratic Society, *The Port Huron* Statement, (New York, NY: Students for a Democratic Society, 1962); Enzo Rossi, "Being Realistic and Demanding the Impossible" (January 3, 2015). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2555335 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2555335
[22] Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 1
[23] Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*

less to do with the inherently tragic nature of our condition than because of its adoption of the very assumptions it wishes to critique. To reiterate an earlier point, utopianism offers a very specific model for thinking about political transformation, in which the rational mind draws up a blueprint for the future and politics becomes an instrument of its realization.[24] On this model, utopia becomes a point in the future in which the problems of politics are solved, where each aspect of the utopian vision has been fulfilled and the persistence of problems means either the failure of utopia or its incompleteness.[25] Buck-Morss captures this understanding of utopia nicely, writing:

> Whereas myths in premodern culture enforced tradition by justifying the necessity of social constraints, the dreamworlds of modernity—political, cultural, and economic—are expressions of a utopian desire for social arrangements that transcend existing forms. But dreamworlds become dangerous when their enormous energy is used instrumentally by structures of power, mobilized as an instrument of force that turns against the very masses who were supposed to benefit.[26]

Here, utopianism is associated with a longing for a political or social form beyond current conditions, one that contains within it the danger of an instrumental reason that can become dominating and hegemonic.

Thus, to suggest that we are situated at the failure of prior utopias, that our old projects failed and so we must be cautious about taking on new ones, is still to view politics in incorrigibly instrumental terms. As a result, we find ourselves stuck with utopia or the *status quo*, or at least wondering why we can no longer take any new utopian projects. Past political struggles that actually took off from a critique of utopian delusion suddenly become failed efforts to construct utopia, just as political agency in the present becomes a choice between utopia or the *status quo*.

---

[24] This, at least, is the vision of the Utopian socialists. See Friederich Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" in Robert C. Tucker ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co, 1978); Rainer Forst, *Justification and Critique: Towards a Critical Theory of Politics*, (New York, NY: Polity Books, 2013), 177-190; Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); Frank Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979)

[25] Forst, *Justification and Critique*, 177-190

[26] Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, xi

Any effort to articulate an alternative future is shut down because of its inherently instrumentalizing character, which will give way to conditions of domination worse than those from which we demand relief. Political agency and aspiration themselves become suspect and we are left suggesting that the best we can hope for from politics is some form of *modus vivendi*.[27]

III. The Ideal and the Real

At stake here are the philosophical underpinnings of how we understand ends in politics and the forms of political agency and historical transformation through which we might reach them. What should be an obvious point, but is a perhaps underappreciated one, is that the subject of *which* political philosophy one should adopt to understand political agency and transformation was deeply contested throughout the nineteenth century.[28] Utopians, Marxists, anarchists, Fabians, Kantian ethical idealists, and an extraordinarily large range of other philosophies, many of which continued to overlap with one another, all struggled for dominance throughout the nineteenth century. Marx's description of the working class's seizure of power at the height of the Paris Commune is illustrative in this regard:

> The working classes demanded no miracles from the commune. They had no quick and ready utopias to instate through popular referendum. They knew that to work out their emancipation and with it, a higher form of life, towards which the present society irresistibly strives through its own economic development; that they, the working class, have undergone a long series of battles, through which humans as much as their conditions will be entirely transformed. They have no ideal to realize:

[27] Bonnie Honig and Mark Stears, "The New Realism: From Modus Vivendi to Justice" in *Political Philosophy versus History? Contextualism and Real Politics in Contemporary Political Thought*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 177-206

[28] See Breckman, *Dethroning the Self: Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*; Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe 1850-2000*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002); David E. Barclay and Eric Weitz ed., *Between Reform and Revolution: German Socialism and Communism from 1840 to 1990*, (New York, NY: Berghann Books, 1998); James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought 1870-1920*, (New York, NY:Oxford University Press, 1988); Frank Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*; Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth Century Thought*; Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution*

> they have only to set free the elements of a new society, already developed in the womb of the collapsing bourgeois society.[29]

Here, Marx juxtaposes his own historical vision with both the readymade blueprint of the political utopia and the unrealized normative vision of the political ideal, implicitly offering us at least three philosophical frameworks through which to understand the efforts of the working class (and rejecting all but his own). Marx's allusions to the "economic development" of society leading towards "a higher form of life" and the working class "setting free" a new society reveal his underlying commitment to dialectics. For Marx, the working classes do not need any particular historical blueprint or vision of politics; they become agents of history in and through the dialectical antagonisms of the class struggle.

These three models, utopianism, Marxian dialectics, and Kantian ethical idealism, offer three distinct modes (among many) of understanding political transformation that gained traction in the nineteenth century. None of these political philosophies entailed any particular form of political agency; each could support quietism as much as revolutionary politics. The problem with utopianism, then, or any other form of emancipatory political theory thus cannot be its instrumentalizing tendency. The utopian can be a quietist adherent of the philosophy of progress, as can the Kantian ethical idealist. Likewise, a Marxist like Karl Kautsky could suggest that socialists need not do anything until capitalism's impending collapse, while Lenin could argue that the time had come for the vanguard party to take upon itself the weight of history and lead the revolution.[30] From the dialectical materialist point of view, what both drives and conditions the

[29] Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels – *Werke Band 17, 5,* (Berlin, DE: Karl Dietz Verlag,) 1973, pp. 343. My translation.

[30] On Kautsky, See Manfred Steger, "Historical Materialism and Ethics: Eduard Bernstein's Revisionist Perspective," *History of European Ideas 14,* No. 5 (1992), 650-652; on Lenin, See *The* Vladimir Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kaustky*, (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1975)

possibility of political change are material conditions in contradiction. The task of imagining alternative futures is not one that the dialectical materialist regards as important to politics.

What I want to suggest is that the problem with utopianism and the dialectics of Marx and Hegel, which Kant avoids, is not with the mere fact that they imagine an emancipatory future; it is that they see this future as the necessary culmination of a historical process. This might seem like a banal, or at least oft-noticed point, but what I want to stress here is their vision of historical necessity, in which acts of agency are expressions of necessity on the way to an emancipated future. They tend to think that some necessary processes drive history, leaving no room for the uncertainty of the Kantian ideal. Thus, the trouble with the suggestion that we are incapable of imagining new utopias is that it presupposes that our political task *is* to imagine new utopias, new states of historical completion. Likewise, whatever the continuing analytic merits of Marxism in the present, it still must reckon with the collapse of the Soviet Union amid its claim to have accomplished the historical mission of the proletariat. The idea that Marxism failed is intelligible because Marxism projected a historical end. It is worth re-interrogating the legacy of the Kantian ideal precisely because, while Kant and his followers may have imagined its fulfillment, they never promised it.

As I argue in Chapter One, Kant developed his vision of human emancipation out of the mere fact of our rationality, which he argued must have some kind of *telos*. But where subsequent thinkers sought to uncover some necessary, deterministic process through which reason or human freedom would reach its final culmination, Kant argued that this end could only appear to our finite, discursive intellects as a contingent possibility. Although Kant developed a concept of progress and natural teleology to argue that the full fruition of human reason in an emancipated society was the true end of nature, he also argued that this idea could only orient us speculatively

in theory and practice. After all, one of the consequences of the first *Critique* was that humans think through concepts that refer to objects of *possible* intuition. As a result, Kant could not appeal to any metaphysical guarantees to argue that progress was a necessary outcome of some larger process. As I argue, although he developed empirical arguments to suggest this might be the case, he could not posit them with any certainty. As a result, the ideal of emancipation was something humans must appeal to orient practical and theoretical reason under conditions of uncertainty.

However, the immediate post-Kantian tradition took off from the claim that Kant had failed to appreciate the role of the free rational subject in achieving the emancipated society in which the ideal and the real would be united, a metaphysical problem that also accounted for the passivity of his politics.[31] Kant had argued that rationality would reach its full fruition through historical processes that exceeded the ends and plans of any individual or collective; for many of his followers, however, these historical processes had reached a conjuncture that would require revolution. Indeed, what Bernard Yack has called the "Kantian Left" began, as he argues, from the attempt to resolve the yawning gap between the intrinsic goodness of the rational will and the irrational chaos of the causal natural world.[32] Kant's sanguinity about the status quo stemmed from his faith that its deficiencies would be resolved through some natural progressive mechanism, one that his students would assail with the recognition that free human actions must also play a role in the dialectics of history. Every assertion of the positive direction of the historical process could be met with counter-assertion of the role of agents in at least partially driving it.

Indeed, for Kant's radical students, it was his failure to appreciate the need for rational freedom to assert itself in the world that generated the antinomies and incompleteness of his

[31] See Eckart Förster trans. Brady Bowman, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*
[32] Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche*, pp. 98-118

thought and the perceived quietism of his politics. Kant's faith that the teleology of nature would lead to conditions under which the free will could assert itself ironically failed to appreciate the freedom of such a will. As Schlegel wrote:

> 'Perpetual peace is *guaranteed* by no less authority than the great artist, nature herself, Kant says on p. 108 [of his edition of *Perpetual Peace*]. As ingenious as the development of this splendid idea is, I still frankly confess what I find missing in it. It is not enough to show the *means* of its possibility, the *external occasions of fate* that lead to the gradual realization of eternal peace. One expects an answer to the question *whether the inner development of humanity* leads to it? The (postulated) *purposiveness of nature* (however beautiful, and indeed, necessary this view might be in other respects) is here completely beside the point; only the (actual) *necessary laws of experience* can provide a guarantee of future success.[33]

For Schlegel, the aspiration toward perpetual peace could not be reduced to faith in the fatalistic operations of natural progress, but concerns rather the purposive actions of human kind. Likewise, Fichte associated his *Wissenschaftslehre*, founded on the notion of a "self-positing I" seeking to overcome the limitations the natural world imposes on it, with the accomplishments of the French revolution and its embodiment of political freedom in the world.[34] The rift between the ideal and the real on which Kant premised his philosophy could be resolved if philosophy accounted for the subject's active role in asserting itself into the world in dynamic, dialectical interaction.[35]

If Kant developed a vision of politics premised on the idea that reason would reach its full realization at some future point, Hegel realized that this point would render all subsequent history intelligible in light of this realization, which he argued characterized his own moment. The rift between the free world of reason and the causal natural world that Kant's radical students had attacked could be resolved through a historical accounting of the process through which reason

---

[33] Friedrich Schlegel, 'Essay on the Concept of Republicanism occasioned by the Kantian Tract "Perpetual Peace"', in *Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.109

[34] See Allen Wood, "Fichte's Philosophical Revolution," *Philosophical Topics 19*, No. 2 (Fall, 1991), pp.1-28

[35] See Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution*, 98-118; Eckart Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*

sought to embody itself in the world up to its current moment. Thus, while Kant's radical students were still caught in a historical moment when they could imagine that their own exertions would secure reason's embodiment in the world, Hegel would claim to solve the antinomies of even their ideas, showing how reason had completed its journey. The irony, of course, is that Hegel would meet the same fate as Kant, as his own radical students among the so-called "Left Hegelians" would argue that Hegel's project had come too early and the revolution was still yet to come.

Chapter Two turns to the reception of Kant's political thought among Hegel, the Young Hegelians, and the early Marx, focusing on the trope, common among post-Kantians, that Kant's philosophy achieved in thought what the French Revolution achieved in practice.[36] I focus especially on the thought of the poet, journalist, and critic Heinrich Heine, who began as a student of Hegel, became a friend of Marx, and whose thought therefore helps trace the trajectory of post-Kantian thought from Hegel to Marx. For Hegel and his radical students among the Young Hegelians, the ideal of autonomy that the French Revolution had embodied in France had met its counterpart in Kant's depiction of a free rational subject liberated from metaphysical illusion and religious superstition. But while Hegel had argued that these two events constituted a distinct historical moment that anticipated its higher fulfillment in his own time, his radical students argued that the revolution in thought was still awaiting its revolution in practice. The ideal of freedom expressed in Kant's philosophy strained against the conditions of freedom they saw everywhere around them.

In *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, Heine traces the development of materialist philosophy in Germany out of Lutheranism and German idealism, which he suggests will lead to a revolution driving the reconciliation of the ideal and the real in a kingdom of

[36] Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution*, 98-108

autonomous rational subjects enjoying material equality. Heine thus takes up the trope that Germany is yet to enjoy its revolution, but sees in the revolution a conduit to a society of rational beings enjoying material equality. In Heine's Saint-Simonian and grandiose phrasing:

> We will found a democracy of gods, equally glorious, equally holy, equally joyous. You demand simple clothes, abstemious morals, and spiceless enjoyments; we, on the other hand, demand nectar and ambrosia, kingly robes, costly fragrances, sensuality and splendor, the dances of laughing nymphs, music, and comedies. – Please do not complain, o virtuous republicans! We respond to censorious reproaches like one of Shakespeare's fools: "Do you think that because you are so virtuous there shall be no more tasty cakes and sweet champagne on this earth?"[37]

Heine thus traces the transformation of Kant's political idealism into the idealistic dialectics of the post-Kantians and Hegel, which eventually becomes materialism in Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and his own philosophical outlook, clearing the way for the dialectics of Marx.[38] Indeed, Heine and Marx met each other in the early 1840's and enjoyed a brief but intense friendship and there is good textual evidence to suggest that Heine's writings influenced the young Marx.[39] Drawing attention to Marx's own argument about the revolution in thought in Germany in the "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," I then turn to Marx, Heine, and Ruge's reaction to the revolt of the Silesian Weavers in 1844, arguing that Heine and Marx converge in seeing the revolt as weaver's attempt to overcome the alienation inherent in their laboring practices.

For Kant's students, then, the gap between the ideal and the real that he posited was a tension to be overcome on the way to realizing their actual unity as reason completed its historical journey. As the post-Kantian tradition developed through the work of Hegel, the young Hegelians, and Marx, reason suddenly not only had a history, but a future, and it was one that would complete a historical cycle unveiling the underlying rationality in the actual. Humans, as rational beings,

---

[37] Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, pp. 58. On the Saint-Simonian influence on Heine's thought, see Breckman, *Dethroning the Self*, pp. 187-192

[38] Heine, *On the History of Relgion and Philosophy in Germany,* 76-121

[39] See Nigel Reeves, "Heine and the Young Marx," *Oxford German Studies 7*, No. 1 (1972), pp. 44-97

began their days in a world that appeared strange and foreign to them, ensnared in relations of domination among one another and their imposing natural environment. The germinal promise of Kant's political philosophy was that reason's history would reveal a key to its future, in which its unfolding hegemony would elevate it and everyone who partook in it above the realm of domination and into a world of free rational agency. All prior forms of domination could eventually be eliminated as reason struggled to realize its emancipation. Emancipation was not a contingent end to be pursued according to the imperfect plans of finite beings, but a *telos*, the historical destiny of reason awaiting its fulfillment.

Emancipation was thereby transformed into a future point, the impending solution to a concrete dialectical antagonism intelligible from the right philosophical perspective. As anyone familiar with the standard narrative of Marx's intellectual development knows, Marx turned Hegel's dialectic on its head. The flight of reason became the materialistic dialectic, in which the class struggles that were contingent upon prevailing relations of production would resolve themselves into a classless society where production was socialized. Now emancipation had a concrete political core observable in the forms of domination the owning classes exercised over the proletariat. Here was a portable concept that would eventually take flight through the twentieth century, drifting far from its origins in the tradition of German philosophy. It is as uncontroversial to recognize the centrality of Marxism to the emancipatory struggles of the twentieth century as it is to trace the dialectic and its promise back to the deficiencies of Kant's two-world view.

In the third chapter of this dissertation, I turn to the conflict over Kant's two-world view and its consequences for socialism as it broke out in the *Revisionismusstreit* [revisionism controversy] at the turn of the century. At stake in the revisionism controversy was the conflict over the Marx-Engelian thesis that capitalism was foredoomed to crisis and collapse, at which

point the proletariat could seize the means of production and achieve its emancipation. But the lapse of the socialist laws in 1890 and its subsequent victory of almost 20% of the vote in the following Reichstag election newly empowered the *Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands*, which continued to adhere to the crisis theory until Eduard Bernstein issued his "Problems of Socialism" series in the late 1890's.[40] Bernstein expressed the concern that Marx and Engels's predictions had not come true, and so he sought to 'revise' Marxism to turn emancipation into a political ideal, to be achieved through movement politics, rather than the prophesied outcome of a totalizing philosophy of history.

Bernstein turned to Kant to develop his critique of Marxist dialectics, a move which inspired other Neo-Kantian socialists, largely students of the Neo-Kantians Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp, to further develop Bernstein's relatively unsophisticated efforts at the same.[41] Although Bernstein would fall back on a version of Kant's two-world theory in which a transcendental realm of reason was able to stand aloft from the natural world of causality, Neo-Kantians like Karl Vorländer and Franz Staudinger worked to reconcile Neo-Kantian *Erkenntniskritik* with historical materialism. From their perspective, Neo-Kantian socialism required no presumption of a transcendental ego or noumenal self, as the fact that humans are already ends-setting beings was sufficient to show that we could formulate a socialist ideal. For Vorländer and Staudinger, socialist emancipation could only be intelligible as a contingent ideal to be achieved through the efforts of human agents under the right contexts of action. Historical materialism could help to clarify the underlying tendencies of political and economic development

[40] Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx*, (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 62
[41] Timothy Keck, "Kant and Socialism: The Marburg School in Wilhemian Germany," (PhD. Diss., University of Wisconson, Madison, 1975), pp. 257-301

and the right contexts of action under which the pursuit of socialist goals would be possible, but it could not develop any insight into a necessary historical process.

Chapter Four looks to the critique of the Kantian ideal of emancipation in the works of Carl Schmitt and György Lukács. I argue that both Schmitt and Lukács begin their critiques of Kantian reason and what they take to be its abstract, calculative nature from the notion that the ideal necessarily strives to become practice. For Lukács and Schmitt, ideals correspond to our sense of what 'ought' to occur, to the normative. In other words, ideals feed directly into *praxis*. This, indeed, is the core of Schmitt's worry about the ideal. For Schmitt, the only kind of normativity that is ultimately relevant to politics is the law. Political ideals oppose the state and seek to establish some new state in line with what the idealist thinks 'ought' to occur. Schmitt's worry is that this results in the instrumentalization of politics.

Where Schmitt's *Dictatorship* will articulate his anxiety that political ideals lead to the instrumentalization of politics, Lukács will affirm the need to instrumentalize politics, arguing that ethics are equivalent with socialist tactics. For Schmitt, political ideals feed into dictatorship because they threaten to overturn states and set up new ones that are instrumental to the pursuit of the emancipated society. But between the revolution and the emancipated society, the state is nothing more than a dictatorship. Indeed, Lukács will in fact argue that socialist tactics instrumental to the pursuit of emancipation are ethical by virtue of their aim. Where Schmitt worries that socialist ideals threaten to instrumentalize politics in pursuit of an emancipatory end, Lukács argues that such a state of affairs is inherently ethical because it aims at emancipation. If the point of ethics is to realize in the world what 'ought' to be, then socialist tactics are ethical to the extent that we ought to be emancipated.

But in connecting the ideal so intimately with the necessity of its realization, Schmitt and Lukács overlook the fundamental reason that motivates Kant to posit emancipation as an ideal: the uncertainty of its realization. In the epilogue, I turn to Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties* in addition to a number of the other texts and thinkers engaged in this dissertation to reflect on the fundamental Kantian point that we formulate emancipation as an ideal because it refers to an object of *possibility*. Lukács's conception of socialist tactics can lead, as Schmitt feared, into dictatorship and the instrumentalization of politics because Lukács sees these tactics in light of the necessity of our coming emancipation. And Schmitt's fear that ideals lead to the instrumentalization of politics in fact confuses the ideal with utopia: the point of the ideal is that it guides action and judgment in contingent contexts against an uncertain, open-ended future. Perhaps this can lead to circumstances in which we instrumentalize politics, but there is no intrinsic connection between emancipatory ideals and instrumental rationality. The point is that ideals are what we appeal to guide action when we cannot presuppose that the outcome they guide us toward will occur of necessity.

Chapter 1: Kantian Ideals

Kant's writings on history begin with optimism and end in uncertainty. His writings from before the *Critical* period remained broadly committed to the Leibniz-Wolffian idea that the world that exists is the best of all possible worlds and that it flows towards yet greater perfection. His late writings on politics and revolution begin, as I will argue in this chapter, from the hope and the worry that human reason will either reach its full fruition through providence or that human reason has no purpose and such providential hope is misplaced. For Kant, this is an insoluble dilemma. The human intellect exists in such a way that it cannot discover answers to these questions, and so we can only adjudicate between these two beliefs based on whether they satisfy a practical or theoretical interest of reason. This worry, I argue, emerges from an important dilemma that dogged Kant's investigations into history, politics, and human agency during his *Critical* period: of what use are the ends of reason if human agency appears completely unable to achieve them?

This dilemma emerges, for Kant, out of what is, for contemporary theorists, a likely unfamiliar set of intuitions about ideals in politics and their relationship with nature, history, and human agency. Contemporary discussions of ideals in politics often begin from the assumption that they sketch out a vision of the good that it is the task of politics to realize or that they provide a kind of code of conduct that political actors should abide.[1] Our task as political agents is to strive to bring our political ideal into reality, to work up our collective world so it matches our blueprint, or to operate within the boundaries it sets for permissible behaviors. Rawls, for example, argues

[1] Bernard Williams helpfully distinguishes between an "enactment model" and a "structural model" of political theory, where the first provides an end of which politics is the means and the second provides more of a code of conduct. Williams' distinction is helpful, but it falls apart very quickly when we start to think about the "structural" code of conduct as a kind of collective social goal that would specify the conditions a well-ordered society must meet to count as such. See Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 1-2

in *The Law of Peoples*, that the role of "non-ideal theory" is to deal with "questions of transition," which is what we as agents must do to bring about ideal conditions.[2] For most political theorists who take a post-metaphysical orientation that rejects the singular operations of History, both the promise and the risk of ideal theories is that they provide us with an antecedent picture of the good that we, as agents, are responsible for making into a reality.

Kant did not share these assumptions. In fact, as I argue, one of Kant's innovations in the Prussian intellectual sphere was to argue for a split between the real and the ideal, where the latter was something to be achieved in the future and which would be realized in our collective political lives. As I argue, few thinkers within the German Enlightenment dared to take on politics before 1779 for fear of censorship and reprisal and Kant was uniquely outspoken in arguing for a conception of political emancipation. Further, Many of Kant's interlocutors among the Prussian intelligentsia were adherents of the Leibniz-Wolff school, who thought that the existing world is the best of all possible worlds and the highest good already exists in the form of God. This is important for Kant's understanding of the function of ideals in political life because one of the contributions of the first *Critique* was to argue that knowledge of God was uncertain. Although, I argue, Kant ended up integration some Wolffian positions about natural purposiveness and divine

[2] John Rawls, *Law of Peoples*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 89. Interestingly, the context of Rawls' claim is his just war theory, and part of his question is how a 'well-ordered' people ought to act toward other peoples who are not so ordered. Presumably, Rawls imagines the U.S. to be such a well-ordered people and so the question of the non-ideal and the ideal is not one of how to bring his home country into the ideal, which might require a more careful consideration of issues of praxis than those he provides, but how conditions in other countries might match the conditions of those at home. The nature of the so-called "transition problem" has become central to contemporary debates about realism vs. ideal theory. This is, at this point, a very large debate, but for representative texts, See William A. Galston, "Realism in political theory," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, No. 4 (2010), 385-411; Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Benjamin McKean, "What Makes A Utopia Inconvenient? On the Advantages and Disadvantages of a Realist Orientation in Politics," *American Political Science Review* 110, No.4 (2016); Enzo Rossi and Matt Sleat, "Realism in Normative Political Theory," *Philosophy Compass* 9 No.10 (2014), 689-701 Marc Stears, *Demanding Democracy: American Radicals in Search of A New Politics*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 1-18; Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Laura Valentini, "Ideal Theory v. Non-Ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map," *Philosophy Compass* 7, No. 9 (2012), 654-664

providence into his mature political thought was that even this position was, for him, constitutively uncertain. The epistemological limits that Kant argued are intrinsic to our rational intellects preclude us, on his account, from ever being able to know whether or not nature was progressive. We might find evidence of such purposiveness in nature, indeed in the very fact that nature appears to us as if harmonious with human purposes, but this evidence will never count as certain knowledge. It must remain a heuristic assumption we make for practical or theoretical purposes. Reason, then, presents us with a picture of an end, but it is one that we appear unable to achieve using our own agency. Thus, Kant surmises, it must be an end that will reach its full efflorescence through the operations of nature.

This chapter examines Kant's political thought against this backdrop, charting the ways he responded to political and intellectual currents in his day uncover his efforts to balance his pessimism about human agency with his emancipatory ideals.[3] Although Kant often leans on a natural teleology, which he nonetheless regards as speculative, to reconcile the tension between his pessimism and his idealism, he also provides an account of the function of ideals under conditions of radical uncertainty within this account. After all, although Kant might be skeptical that humans will ever overcome their shortcomings and create the kingdom of ends of their own volition, this does not lead to him argue that they are not worth pursuing in the first place. Kant's claim is rather that these ideals are worth pursuing for their own sake; we allow them to guide our actions and ground our judgments not in pursuit of some additional end, but because they are themselves ends. Thus, to the extent that Kant provides us with a theory of the role of ideals, it is a theory that attempts to chart their function under conditions of radical uncertainty.

[3] For a contextual approach to Kant's political thought, See also Reidar Maliks, *Kant's Politics in Context*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Kant thus opens up a way of thinking about the role of ideals in political life that does begin from the presumption that they are to instrumentalize our collective life in pursuit of one overarching end. And though he does argue that they should guide action and ground judgment, I argue that his account of ideals does not see them as simple codes of conduct. For Kant, their function is to guide action and judgment in the present in order to orient us toward an uncertain future. For Kant, this means that we can seek out practices in our contemporary political situation that align with the norms that would be realized in our ideal future; these practices should help to approximate the ideal and are worth engaging in for their own sake.

As I argue at the end of this chapter, this is what distinguishes Kant and later nineteenth century Kantians' conception of political change from the Marxist and Hegelian tradition and it is where Kant sets up a problem that later Kantians will try to solve. Although Kant's conception of ideals as primarily guiding action and grounding judgment under conditions of uncertainty offers important resources for contemporary theorists, his account of natural teleology leads him to think about historical processes according to a model that contemporary theorists tend rightly to reject. And although, as I argue, his particular conception of what the ideal entails leads to an instructive emphasis on institutional politics and popular legislation, his emphasis on providence and his resistance to any kind of instrumental reasoning leads him away from thinking about how we might transform our collective material world. This is the gap that later Kantians will try to fill. Nonetheless, as I will argue, Kant's thought was unique both in foreground political emancipation as a concern and in its theory of how an ideal of emancipation might guide our practices.

Public Reason, Progress and the Origins of Political Critique in Prussia

In 1769, in an otherwise pleasant letter to his friend Christoph Friedrich Nicolai, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing unleashed his frustrations about the state of freedom in Germany:

> Say nothing to me of your Berliner freedom to think and write. You reduce it solely to the freedom to bring as many stupidities about religion to market as one wants … But let someone try just once to write about other things as freely as Sonnenfels in Vienna has written; let him try to speak the truth to the rabble of the court [*Hofpöbel*] as it is told to him; let someone in Berlin even appear to want to raise their voice for the rights of subjects [*Rechte der Unterthanen*], or against leaching and despotism, as has actually happened in France and Denmark, and they will soon know which land is the most slavish in Europe today.[4]

Although Frederick the Great is celebrated for ushering in an era of openness and free thought in Prussia, his kingdom was still a dangerous place for political and religious dissidents until late in his reign. Frederick's early reforms, which included banning torture and relaxing censorship and piety laws, were surely epochal and went far in easing the censoriousness and intolerance of his father's regime.[5] But these reforms did not extend as far as the freedom to critique the monarchy in public. You might not be tortured for doing so, but you were sure to face consequences, including censorship or worse. As Lessing lamented, freedom of thought meant little of political consequence beyond the freedom to critique religion. And even this freedom, as Thomas Saine notes, often meant only the freedom to belong to an unpopular sect of Christianity without being persecuted.[6]

Indeed, dissident and emancipatory political thought appears to have been rare in Germany prior to the 1780's, at least in public and without severe, life-threatening backlash.[7] While the Enlightenment flourished in Germany as in the rest of Europe throughout the 1750's and 60's, its main proponents focused on advancing the sciences and battling superstition and irrationalism. If

---

[4] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing ed. Karl Lachmann, *Sämtliche Schriften,* vol. 17., (Leipzig, DE: Göschen Verlagshandlung, 1904), pp. 298. My translation. I've retained the original grammar and orthography of the original German in the brackets.
[5] Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia 1600-1947*, (Cambrige, MA: Belknap Press, 2009), 251-256.
[6] Thomas Saine, "Was ist Aufklärung?" in Franklin Kopitzsch ed., *Aufklärung, Absolutismus und Bürgertum in Deutschland*, (München, DE: Nymphenburger Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1976), pp. 319-44
[7] L. W. Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and his Predecessors*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1969), pp. 320

there was a political valence to this work, its target was not the state, but the power that religious authorities were able to exercise over the unenlightened mind. Until 1784, Frederick the Great banned any public criticism of "court, administration, etc."[8] And although his decision to allow the radical Spinozist and reformer Johann Christian Edelmann to reside in Berlin on the condition that he did not publish was seen as progressive at the time, it also underscores the strict limits to tolerance for dissent.[9]

And yet as early as 1781, in the A edition of the first *Critique*, Kant still wrote of the freedoms to which citizens should have a right. In addition to the freedom to obey only those laws to which one could consent, he wrote:

> …there also belongs the freedom to exhibit the thoughts and doubts which one cannot resolve oneself for public judgment without thereupon being described as a malcontent and a dangerous citizen. This lies already in the original right of human reason, which recognizes no other judge than universal human reason itself, in which everyone has a voice; and since all improvement of which our condition is capable must come from this, such a right is holy, and must not be curtailed.[10]

Kant's call for the freedom to exhibit one's thoughts in public here is significant for a number of reasons. For one thing, despite Lessing's lament just ten years earlier that one could not write about the rights of *subjects* [*Rechte der Untertanen*] in Prussia, Kant is here using the language of the rights of free citizens [*freie Bürger*]. Further, although Kant focuses on a claim about freedom of thought and at least by implication, free publication, he also alludes to a right to the freedom enabled by submission to "a lawful coercion which alone limits our freedom in such a way that it can be consistent with the freedom of everyone else and thereby with the common good."[11] Indeed,

---

[8] Horst Möller, Aufklärung in Preußen: der Verleger, Publizist und Geschichtsschreiber Friedrich Nicolai, (Berlin, DE: Colloquium Verlag, 1974), pp. 210.
[9] Clark, 354; Saine, 332
[10] Immanuel Kant ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, *Critique of Pure Reason*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.268. Cited here as *CPR*.
[11] CPR, 650. Kant's language in this passage is a bit confusing. Although he begins the paragraph calling for the freedom to exhibit one's thoughts in public with the phrase, "to this freedom also belongs the freedom to exhibit one's thoughts and doubts in public," he does not actually claim in the prior paragraph that we have a right to the

elsewhere in the first *Critique*, Kant would defend the idea of a "Platonic republic" because it illustrated that political affairs must be measured against the idea of a constitution that could secure "the greatest human freedom."[12] Lessing had thought these topics off limits. And yet Kant, never famous for his boldness, was willing to at least flirt with them. What changed?

In 1777, Jean le Rond D'Alembert wrote to Frederick the Great to ask for his opinion of the events in America that would become the revolution and, during the course of their exchange, took the opportunity to suggest to the king a question for the Prussian Academy of Sciences to ask.[13] "In your academy, sire," D'Alembert wrote, "you have a class for speculative philosophy, which, under the direction of your majesty, you might propose very interesting and very useful subjects for the prize questions.—As for example—'Whether it be useful to deceive the people.'"[14] Although, over the course of their exchange, Frederick would grow increasingly frustrated with D'Alembert's impertinence, he did as D'Alembert requested and issued a cabinet order in 1777 mandating that the prize question for 1781 be whether it could be useful to deceive the people.[15] The Academy's final wording was: "Is it useful to the people to be deceived, either that they be led astray in new errors, or that they be maintained in those they already have?"[16] The question was one of the most popular in the history of the academy, eliciting at least 42 responses.[17] While five arrived too late and four had, against the rules of the competition, included the author's names,

---

freedom provided through what he will later call reciprocal coercion. Rather, he references it through a paraphrase of Hobbes to illustrate how the *Critique of Pure Reason* operates vis. public discussion analogously with how the social contract operates vis. the state of nature.

[12] CPR, 397

[13] D'Alembert to Frederick in Frederic II, King of Prussia, trans. Thomas Holcroft, *Posthumous Works Vol.X II*, (London, England: G.G.J. and Robinson, 1889), pp. 103-4.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Adolf Harnack, *Die Geschichte der Königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaft zu Berlin: im Auftrage der Akademie zu Bearbeitet Bd. 1*, (Berlin, 1900), pp. 417. Evidence of Frederick's frustration is indicated by a number of missing letters with increasingly apologetic responses from D'Alembert. Additionally, the translator notes that the editors of the original edition likely withheld some of the more threatening letters after Frederick took D'Alembert to have directly insulted him.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Harnack, 419

thirty-three were accepted. Of the thirty-three, twenty answered in the negative, while thirteen answered in the affirmative.[18]

Frederick's perhaps begrudging decision to turn D'Alembert's question over to the Academy lead him to call forth new, public debate about the meaning of *Aufklärung* in Prussia and the role of the people—about the role of reform and politics itself.[19] And there is evidence to suggest that it inspired Kant to begin his investigations into the public use of reason. Although Kant's most famous exposition of public reason came in 1784 in "What is Enlightenment?", his first discussion of it in a published work came in the first *Critique*, which he published in 1781, and reportedly drafted in a quick spell of four or five months around 1779.[20] He also seems to have taken note of the prize question prior to drafting the first *Critique*. There is a note in Kant's anthropology lectures dated to the late 1770's that asks, "whether it is permissible (judicious) to let errors remain untouched in the commonwealth or rather to disseminate them and to advance. *peccatum philosophicum* [philosophical sin]."[21] Erich Adickes, who composed the notes to vols. 14-19 of *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, claims that the prize question was the direct impetus for this note. Adickes claims further that Kant mentioned the prize question in a number of other places, some of which he dates to before the first *Critique*. Kant asks in the *Vienna Logic*, for example, whether it is "necessary for a teacher, and advisable, to leave prejudices untouched, or even to encourage them so that they gradually take deeper root in the minds of listeners[?] [This] amounts to asking if it is permitted to deceive the people for a good purpose."[22]

---

[18] Harnack, 420
[19] Zölner, James Schmidt, "The Question of Enlightenment: Kant, Mendelssohn, and the Mittwochsgesellschaft," *Journal of the History of Ideas 50*, No. 2(1989), pp. 269-291
[20] Ernst Cassirer trans. James Haden, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), *Kant's Life and Thought*, 136
[21] Kant ed. Adickes, *Kant's gesammelte Schriften Bd. 15/2*, (Berlin und Leipzig, DE: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1923), pp. 672. My translation.
[22] Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Logic*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 319

D'Alembert's prize question became a key stimulus for discussions of public reason and the meaning of *Aufklärung* throughout the 1780's and provided the atmosphere in which Kant could explore his ideas about politics and political transformation. Although D'Alembert himself was less politically outspoken and less radical than other participants in the Enlightenment, his efforts to prod Frederick to ask a question about deception spurred a major shift in Prussian public discourse. Though Kant was more cautious, the political stakes of his account of public reason were clearer. By 1784, he would cast public reason as the means through which humans could cast off their minority or *Unmündigkeit* to advance beyond the tutelage of both church *and state*. By 1793, he would call for rights and political freedoms. By 1795, he would call for a global confederation of republics. In each, public reason was a necessary, if not a sufficient, condition of human progress.

But public reason was not the only mechanism of progress that concerned Kant, nor was politics the only axis of progress that interested him. The question of the shape of human affairs was an important oft-revisited one among the Leibniz-Wolff school, to which Kant was in deep ways committed before his *Critical* turn. Followers of the Leibniz-Wolff school tended to agree that the existent world flowed toward perfection. They took their notion of perfection from Augustine's ontology, in which entities have degrees of existence that correspond with their goodness. As Martin Schonfeld writes, "the highest degree of being, the *ens realissimum,* and the highest degree of good, the *summum bonum*, converge and are identical with God."[23] Evidence of this movement toward greater perfection is clear in nature, which appears as though it were built to be harmonious with human ends and displays a high degree of purposiveness and order.[24]

[23] Martin Schonfeld, *The Philosophy of the Young Kant: The Precritical Project*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 109.
[24] Ibid.

In 1748, Johann Joachim Spalding brought the Leibniz-Wolff debates' dense and specialized inquiry into these issues down to earth in a more popular format in his *Meditations on the Vocation of Man*, which gained quick fame and spurred an important debate about its central theme.[25] Spalding's text asked whether we could discover a clear purpose for human life in this world. He answered in the affirmative, arguing that our purpose is clearly to seek moral perfection in imitation of God, which requires that we cultivate all of our capacities. Debate about the text began when the mathematician and philosophical skeptic Thomas Abbt questioned the theological foundation of Spalding's argument and highlighted an ambiguity about whether the question of our vocation applied to the individual or the species as a whole. Abbt wrote to Mendelssohn asking if the two of them could engage in a written dialogue about Abbt's claim, which resulted in his *Zweifel über die Bestimmung des Menschen* and Mendelssohn's *Orakel, die Bestimmung des Menschen betreffend*. The two texts were published in Nicolai's literary journal *Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend*.

Mendelssohn and Abbt's debate staged the kind of conflict between rational optimism and skeptical empiricism that Kant would try to resolve in the *Critical* philosophy and it became hugely influential for the German *Aufklärung*. Mendelssohn made a classically Leibnizian argument that the vocation of humanity is to aspire to the kind of perfection that the divine embodies and radiates forth. For his part, Abbt appealed to the ghost of Pierre Bayle, "who had maintained that history showed nothing more than the crimes and injustices of person against person," to argue that the brutality and injustice that humans exhibit should provide an argument against such optimism.[26]

[25] See John Zammito, *Kant, Herder, & The Birth of Anthropology*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 166-172
[26] Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*, 168

Especially important, for Abbt, was the reality of infant mortality, which he argued could admit of no compatibility with the idea of a benevolent God.[27]

Abbt, sadly, died shortly after his exchange with Mendelssohn, who was working on a book that would attempt, among other things, a more systematic reply to Abbt's concerns. Abbt's death prompted Mendelssohn to dedicate this book, *Phädon, or, on the Immortality of the Soul*, to his late friend. Against Abbt's skeptical invocation of examples like infant mortality to argue against human progress, Mendelssohn argued that we can just look to the dialectical relationship between humanity and nature for evidence of a divine and perfect creator.[28] If one looks at human history, one will find humans improving and perfecting their capacities through their investigation of nature. Nature, in turn, cooperates with human aims and exhibits a purposiveness and order that humans can investigate and systematize.[29] For Mendelssohn, nature is a site for, and incentive to, the cultivation of the human. And this cultivation is an intergenerational process that will be passed down through cultural transmission.[30]

For these theorists, the question of humanity's vocation was an ethical one grounded in the choice between a rationalism that saw the world's very existence as evidence of its participation in divine perfection, on the one hand, and a skepticism about metaphysics that nonetheless did not preclude us from "developing maxims [*Lebensregeln*], which are also correct and would be sufficient for [our] utmost happiness," on the other.[31] In a certain way, this debate was about the

---

[27] *ibid.*
[28] Moses Mendelssohn trans. Patricia Nobel, *Phädon,* or *On the Immortality of the Soul*, (New York, NY: Peter Lnage Publlishing, Inc., 2007).
[29] Interestingly, by the time of "Theory and Practice," Kant will be using these kinds of arguments *against* Mendelssohn, who eventually came to argue that humanity as a whole does not progress, but that individual humans and peoples progress and decline. Human progress oscillates within fixed limits without ever reaching a millenarian conclusion.
[30] One of Mendelssohn's arguments in *Phädon*, presumably a response to Abbt, is that, culture being the storehouse of knowledge, everyone participates in perfection to some degree, even if only in the slightest way (pp. 127-130).
[31] Thomas Abbt, "Zweifel über die Bestimmung des Menschen," (*Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend*, 1764), pp. 28

ideal, in the sense of the highest good or the *summum bonum*.[32] But the sense of this term does not map easily onto the position of the rationalists, who began from the premise that the highest good exists in the form of the divine and our world is just a less good and less real extension of divine being. For Mendelssohn, our ethical vocation is to imitate a highest good that already exists, where for Spalding humanity has no divinely granted vocation, but also does not need one for ethical life.

As Manfred Kuehn argues, Kant took up this debate in "Idea for a Universal History," but, as I argue, completely reoriented its terms and foundation. Kant *begins* from the premise that the highest good is not the divine, but an as-yet-unrealized idea of reason, the fulfillment of which would be a perfect *constitution.* Indeed, Kant's other and more obvious motivation for writing "Idea for a Universal History" was not this debate at all, but what was essentially a printed rumor in the *Gothaische Gelehrter Zeitung*, which stated that he believed the culmination of human history would be a perfect political constitution. It read:

> a favorite idea of Herr Professor Kant is that the final end of the human race is the attainment of the most perfect political constitution, and he wishes that a philosophical historiographer would undertake to provide us in this respect with a history of humanity, and to show how far humanity has approached this final end in different ages, or how far removed it has been from it, and what is still to be done for its attainment.[33]

What began as a debate about the divine foundation of our vocation to seek moral perfection ended, for Kant, as an argument about how the fulfillment of reason would be a guarantee of political freedom. In re-framing the debate, Kant introduced a rupture between the ideal and the real, where former came to represent pure unrealized possibility, and the latter the world as we know it, cut off from knowledge of the divine or the highest good.

---

[32] The aptness of the term 'Ideal' here is made more complicated by the fact that German, in which this debate was conducted, has two different words that distinguish between the two senses of the English word "ideal". The German word 'Ideal' means the best or the most perfect, whereas the word "*Ideell*" means belonging to the realm of thought, ideational. Kant never uses the term '*Ideell*,' but he often uses the term "*Ideal*" to mean both an idea and the highest good.

[33] Cited in Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 208

Progress, Purposiveness, and Pessimism

It is at this point that Kant's politics begin to intersect with his critique of metaphysics in ways that would be influential for the subsequent course of German intellectual history. If for the Leibniz-Wolff school the purposive course of nature toward perfection was a metaphysical truth, it was, for Kant, a heuristic assumption we have to make for practical and theoretical purposes in certain species of our judgments about nature and history. But where Mendelssohn and Lessing concerned themselves with questions about humanity's terrestrial purpose relative to the divine and the immortality of the soul, Kant added a focus on the outcome of the political realm. Even before Kant made much stronger and more open declarations of his republicanism, he developed a philosophy of history in which the human species' final purpose required, among other things, a constitution that would respect rights and individual freedom.

But, of course, Kant's claim that progress would lead humanity to the most perfect constitution was not his only departure from Mendelssohn, Lessing, and the Leibniz-Wolff school. The first *Critique* attacked the metaphysical foundations of the Leibniz-Wolff school and its claims about the existence of God, pre-ordained harmony, and progress. To be sure, progress remained central to Kant's political philosophy. But our claims about progress could not, for Kant, be metaphysical in the same way that they were for the Leibniz-Wolff school. The Leibniz-Wolff school thought that metaphysics could move from pure rational concepts to claims about the constitution of what is. It was precisely this concern that the first *Critique* had challenged. For Kant, claims about divine providence or perfection were merely speculative. We could regard the world 'as if' it was created by a divine source of goodness, who guaranteed its ultimate outcome, but only to the extent that such a perspective could be heuristic for theoretical and practical reason. Progress became a practical assumption, for Kant, not a knowledge claim.

Of course, some scholars take Kant to have a strong teleological account of progress. Thomas McCarthy, for example, writes that "Kant's reliance on a strong *teleology of nature* – summed up in the maxim that 'nature does nothing in vain' – with his frequent references to the purposes and plans of nature generates yet another array of problems" for his account of progress.[34] On this account, Kant's philosophy of history makes thick claims about the direction and purpose of nature. Kant counsels us to regard nature as purposive and progressive, for these readers, and to see it as flowing toward its final culmination in perpetual peace and the kingdom of ends. Proponents of this reading see it ultimately rooted in a theology in which God guarantees the course of human history. For these readers, Kant's account of progress should be troubling because it grounds claims about civilizational hierarchy and constructs a narrative of historical redemption in which the ultimate outcome of progress recuperates every atrocity.

Others emphasize the practical, heuristic side of his account of progress. On this reading, Kant bases his theory of progress in the demands of practical reason.[35] Although we cannot be sure that history is progressing, the structure of practical reasoning about morals entails that we understand it *as if* it were.[36] As William Connolly, one of Kantianism's contemporary critics,

---

[34] Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 65. See Also James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key: Vol. 2, Imperialism and Civic Freedom*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 25; Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory,* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016); Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 40-6. McCarthy's reading is puzzling because, although he acknowledges that progress is regulative, for Kant, rather than constitutive, he still construes Kant as making strong teleological claims about nature. McCarthy is not alone in this inconsistency, however, which seems to be endemic to critics of Kant's view of progress. Of course, as McCarthy also notes, this is because Kant frequently uses language that makes strong teleological claims about nature and because it comes to ground his developmentalist conception of European civilization. As McCarthy quite rightly points out, it is both puzzling and a major discredit to Kant that he used his account of progress to ground his racial theories despite its "lower epistemic status." From the perspective of my reading, this is all the more puzzling, as Kant's theory of progress was merely analogical. It could not make strong claims about nature.

[35] William E. Connolly, *Pluralism*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Loren Goldman, "In Defense of Blinders: On Kant, Political Hope, and the Need for Practical Belief," *Political Theory 40*, No.4(2012), 497-523; ; Axel Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Pauline Kleingeld, *Fortschritt und Vernunft: zur Geschichtsphilosophie Kants*, (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1995); Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*

[36] Goldman, 500

renders it, for the categorical imperative to be binding, it must be possible, "and for that condition to hold we must project the possibility of continual progress toward their attainment."[37] Likewise, Axel Honneth, a more sympathetic reader of Kant, follows Pauline Kleingeld in seeing two to three differing accounts of progress in Kant. One "justificatory model" posits a natural teleology to satisfy the theoretical interest of reason in resolving the gap between noumenal freedom and a causal natural world.[38] Another, familiar from Connolly's reading, sees a "practical moral justification" underlying Kant's account of progress; we look at nature as if it were progressing because such a perspective comports with an understanding of ourselves as moral agents that might somehow participate in creating a moral world.[39] The third that Honneth finds is a "system-bursting" conception of history that sees progress as one of the "implicit presuppositions" that a moral agent must make if they are to understand themselves as such.[40]

There is much to commend in each of these approaches to interpreting Kant's thoughts on progress. The teleological reading helps to expose the pernicious work that Kant's natural teleological claims are doing in his racial theories and his colonialist moments. And, of course, it emphasizes the many places where Kant does, in fact, make strong teleological claims. Still, as I will argue throughout the course of this chapter, while Kant does counsel that we regard nature as if it were the motor of human progress, he cannot be taken to be providing a strong, *metaphysical* teleology. My own argument thus leans toward the practical, heuristic reading. I will argue that the basic premises of the *Critical* philosophy entail that Kant simply cannot have a natural teleology, if we take that to mean that progress is a property of the phenomena or the things

[37] Connolly, *Pluralism*, 114-15
[38] Honneth, 2-3; Kleingeld, *Fortschritt und Vernunft*
[39] Honneth, 4-5
[40] Honneth, 9

themselves. His argument is rather that we must look upon nature *as if* it were progressing because such a perspective satisfies theoretical and practical interests of reason.

More essentially, though, I argue that these two strands of Kant interpretation reflect two sides of a deep tension within Kant's thought, which remains caught between the radical uncertainty the first *Critique* introduces and the Wolffian commitments he tries to salvage in his writings on progress (and elsewhere.)[41] These two sides, the metaphysical and the heuristic, reflect Kant's efforts to understand how the ends of reason could drive transformative political practices when we are presented with a world that appears to overcome all of our efforts to change it. Indeed, I argue that Kant turns to progress out of a deep pessimism about human agency, that is at the forefront of all of his post-1781 writings about history. He sums up this position most clearly in "Idea for a Universal History," where he writes that human actions appear "all to be made up, by and large, of foolishness, childish vanity, and, often enough, even of childish wickedness and destructiveness" and that the philosopher "cannot presuppose that human beings pursue any rational end of their own in their endeavors."[42] For Kant, then, progress is supposed to solve the potentially earth-shattering problem that human reason provides us with ends that human agency is inadequate to achieve. What good are our ideals if human agency is inadequate to achieve them?

The stakes of Kant's argument here are, for him, extraordinarily high. If the ends of human reason were to be unachievable through human agency *or* natural progress, the entirety of human existence would be futile, for Kant. This might sound hyperbolic. But it is the position he lays out

[41] Perhaps controversially, I would contend that this Wolffian strain runs through Kant's writings on theology, progress, and natural history. Kant is at pains to defend a conception of nature as progressive and pre-ordained by a divine intellect, but only for heuristic reasons. In this sense, I think there is a kind of post-metaphysical Wolffianism running through his thought.

[42] "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective" in Immanuel Kant ed. Pauline Kleingeld, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 4

in "Idea for a Universal History" and many of his other historical writings. I quote at length, as this passage summarizes the core of Kant's worry:

> Reason is the ability of a creature to extend the rules and ends of the use of all its powers far beyond its natural instincts, and reason knows no limits in the scope of its projects. Reason itself does not function according to instinct, but rather requires experimentation, practice, and instruction in order to advance gradually from one stage of insight to the next…if nature has limited the span of his life (as has in fact happened), it requires a perhaps incalculable number of generations, of which each passes its *Aufklärung* to the next, *in order to eventually bring the seeds in our species to the stage of development which fully corresponds to nature's purpose*. And this point in time must, at least in the idea of what the human being is, be the goal of his endeavors, *since otherwise* his natural dispositions would have to be regarded *as largely futile and pointless. All practical principles would thereby be abolished, and nature, whose wisdom otherwise serves as the basic principle for judging all other arrangements, would thus be suspected of childish play in the case of human beings alone*.[43]

For Kant, the dilemma is this: either the ideas of human reason will be accomplished through natural progress, or our rational existence is futile and humanity has no purpose. If human agency cannot realize the ends of human reason and progress will not do so either, that is, if human reason has a purpose it cannot fulfill, then it has no purpose at all. If humans have natural capacities that cannot be developed to their full fruition, then those capacities are literally pointless; their *telos* can never be fulfilled. If human reason could not lead us to construct a rational world, human reason would be one such pointless capacity. And if humans have capacities that cannot be fulfilled, then the maxim 'nature does nothing in vain' would be false, and human reason would be in vain. And if all such things held true, what reason would we have to believe in providence? And if we could not believe in providence, what kind of God could we believe in? Could we still believe in God? These, for Kant, are the stakes.

Now, my claim is that tucked into Kant's heuristic answer to the question of progress is an account of the function of ideals in politics under conditions of radical uncertainty. After all, one

[43] "Idea for a Universal History," 5. Translation modified.

of the problems that progress is supposed to solve for Kant is how the ideals of reason can be achieved if human agency cannot achieve them. But Kant's own articulation of this problem puts him in a strange position. His argument about progress is supposed to *preserve* an account of norms as binding on human agents, but it must do so against the assumption that human agency cannot achieve its ideals, as Kant makes clear in "Idea for a Universal History." Further, for Kant, we cannot truly know if progress will do so in our stead. As a result, to the extent that Kant gives us an account of the role of ideals in political life, it is one that must presuppose deep uncertainty about whether they can be achieved.

These issues become particularly prominent in Kant's writings after the French Revolution. After 1789, Kant not only had to think seriously about the question of how we might transform our political situation and achieve reason's ideals, but also had to defend his thought against conservative critics of *Aufklärung*.[44] The French Revolution and the backlash against it pushed Kant to develop his republicanism and he developed it in a way that set forth an image of an ideal republic that is supposed to ground our judgments about practical politics and guide our aspirations in the political realm, even if it we cannot achieve them on our own. These later writings sharpen a line of thought implicit in his pre-revolutionary writings that begins from Kant's paradoxical, even antinomial, position that human agency is inadequate to achieve humanity's ideals but that we nonetheless need to believe that they will be achieved.

Kant captures this position precisely in "Theory and Practice:"

> it might that against my hopes, history can raise many doubts, which, if they were convincing, could move me to give up on such an apparently futile task; as long as these doubts cannot be made entirely certain, I cannot replace duty (as *liquidum*) with the prudential rule that one should not practice what is impracticable.[45]

[44] Maliks, 9
[45] "On the Common Saying: That May be Correct in Theory, but it is of No Use in Practice" in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 306

Kant's claim here is quite different from his other arguments in favor of progress and, in its open-endedness, sits in tension with them. He does not argue, as he does so often in other writings, that we have strong, if inconclusive, reasons to look at nature as if it were progressing. Rather, he argues that we do not know if progress is possible or not, but we still have to act. And so far as we have to act, what reason do we have not to try to realize our ideals? All human agency might be a kind of acting into the dark, but we still need to act, and we say something about what we might achieve when we do.

Kant's writings on the role of ideals in politics, then, must answer the question of what utility ideals have if not to guide us into transforming the world so that it will match the ideal. After all, his claim cannot be that the ideal provides us with a sense of the direction of history such that, upon gaining awareness of its outcome, humans can seek to realize it. The antinomy Kant faces is precisely that reason provides humans with access to a rational end that we appear utterly incapable of realizing on our own. For Kant, unlike Marx, humans do *not* "make their own history," even though they know what its outcome ought to be.[46] Rather, reason provides us with a normative conception of politics that is supposed to be binding on us despite the fact that it seems beyond the grasp of our agency alone. Still, Kant's argument is not that we have to commit ourselves to the Sisyphean labor of attempting to "practice the impracticable."[47] We are not bound to norms for no reason. Rather, we follow them because they are, for Kant, goods-in-themselves.

But what does this actually mean? What does it mean to allow the image of an ideal politics to guide our actions, if not to realize such a politics in the world? As Kant writes in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, "what is incumbent upon us as a duty is rather to act in conformity with the idea of that

[46] Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" in Robert C. Tucker ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co, 1978)
[47] "Theory and Practice," 306. Translation modified.

end, even if there is not the slightest theoretical likelihood that it can be realized, as long as its impossibility cannot be demonstrated either."[48] Kant's logic here is performative. The goal is not to set forth the ideal as an end in an instrumental sense; one cannot perform a different task in service of the end, but only the end itself. And it cannot be a mimetic relationship, as Mendelssohn imagines our relationship with the divine to be and Marc Stears critically imagines contemporary proponents of ideal theory to believe.[49] For Kant, there is no antecedently given entity which we have to imitate with our behavior. Indeed, an essential feature of Kant's political thought is that the ideal is yet to be fully realized. Rather, we ought to act in conformity with the ideal because doing so translates it into the real, if only deficiently. In acting in conformity with the ideal, we bring it into being.

Kant provides a fuller account of the role of ideals under such conditions in the *Metaphysics of M*orals. In the conclusion to the section on "Cosmopolitan Right," Kant argues that if we cannot discover whether something is true or false, we can nonetheless ask "whether [we have] any *interest* in assuming one or the other … either from a theoretical or from a practical point of view."[50] The assumptions we make from a practical point of view are either pragmatic (technical) or moral. In the latter instance, for Kant, we have a duty to adopt such a view.[51] Importantly, though, Kant's claim is not that we thus have a duty to believe that our ideals will be realized. This

[48] *Metaphysics of Morals* in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996)
[49] Marc Stears, *Demanding Democracy: American Radicals in Search of a New Politics*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 9
[50] Metaphysics of Morals, 490 [6:354]; See Also "What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?" in *Religion and Rational Theology*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.18
[51] *Ibid*.

is not a plea that we adopt a cosmopolitan perspective or see the guarantee of a perpetual peace as providence itself.[52] "There can be no obligation," Kant writes, "…to believe something."[53]

We cannot be obliged to believe that our ideals will be fully realized in the world, but this does not release us from the obligation our ideals impose on us, so long as their realization might be possible. "What is incumbent upon us as a duty," Kant writes, "is rather to act in conformity with the idea of that end, even if there is not the slightest theoretical likelihood that it can be realized, as long as its impossibility cannot be demonstrated either."[54] Kant's demand is not on our beliefs, but on our actions. As Kant writes in regard to the specific ideal of a perpetual peace:

> Thus it is no longer the question, whether perpetual piece is a thing or an absurdity [*ein Ding oder Unding sei*] and whether we are deluding ourselves in our theoretical judgment when we assume the former. Rather, we must act as though the thing is, which perhaps is not; we must work toward the foundation and the constitution that appears to us to be the most fitting to it (maybe a republicanism of all states together and separately).[55]

So long as the realization of our ideals is not metaphysically impossible, we must still work to construct a world in which their possibility, however remote, becomes reality. Kant's language is precise here. We do not have to believe that perpetual peace is possible, but we do have to act as if it were real. In this sense, Kant's demand is even stronger. You do not have to believe that perpetual peace is real, but you do have to act as if it is.

Nonetheless, on a certain reading, Kant still seems to provide us a woefully inadequate model of political agency, one which enchains us to a model of individual ethical behavior that does not respond to conditions of domination or injustice and even appears to constrain the

---

[52] "Idea for a Universal History,"; "Toward Perpetual Peace," in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 331-7

[53] Metaphysics of Morals, 490

[54] Metaphysics of Morals, 491. The phrase translated here as slightest theoretical likelihood is rendered in the German as "*mindeste theoretische Wahrscheinlichkeit*" and impossibility is "*Unmöglichkeit*."

[55] Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 491. My translation. See Also *Critique of Practical Reason* in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 255

permissibility of our methods for doing so. After all, in conceiving of our political goals according to a model of ethical obligation, Kant would appear to suggest that the role of our ethical ideals is simply that we ought to perform them for their own sake and without regard to context. Thus under conditions of inequality, the task of the Kantian political agent is simply to treat others equally. And of course the obvious problem here is that simply treating others equally does nothing to remedy the background conditions that entrench relations of inequality in the first place.[56] Instead, this is a model of politics that, as Raymond Geuss writes, "tries to occupy a standpoint in which we consider only the normatively relevant features of a possible world, abstracting from the real world and the empirical accidents of concrete situations," and then exhorts us to mimic such features irrespective of what our concrete situation might be.[57]

But this misunderstands the nature of the role of norms in politics, for Kant, and the ideal that they express, which is supposed to set the conditions under which a people can form a common will and act collectively in the first place. Kant argues quite clearly that norms underdetermine judgment; the application of any general rule to a particular instance requires an act of judgment to do the applying. This means that Kant's ethics simply cannot remain abstract in the way that critics like Geuss and Bernard Williams imagine. While Kant does argue that a practice is "the realization of an end, which is thought of as the abidance of certain principles of procedure in their generality,"[58] he also argues that "to a concept of the understanding, which contains a rule, must

[56] One response to this criticism developed by neo-Kantians addressed later in this dissertation is that treating others equally *must* mean working to remedy such entrenched background conditions. See Henry van der Linden, *Kantian Ethics and Socialism,* (London, UK: Hackett, 1988); Timothy Keck, "Kant and Socialism: The Marburg School in Wilhemian Germany," (PhD. Diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1975),

[57] Raymond Geuss*, Outside Ethics,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp.*,* 21. Geuss makes a simple mistake in his language here. It cannot be the case that Kant's ethics "abstract" from the real world if the categorical imperative is given *a priori.* See Also Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, pp. 34-4; Williams on "Kantians" in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* and *In the Beginning was the Deed*

[58] "Theory and Practice" in *Practical Philosophy*, 279. Translation modified

be added an act of judgment by which to direct the subsumption."[59] The power of judgment must intervene between the general and the particular, the concrete instance.

The results of this are, as Kant points out, that one can be very schooled in theory but nonetheless be a poor practitioner, that for any given rule there will be a variety of ways to apply it, and that what will count as an acceptable application of the general will be much more ambiguous than we might expect. Why? Kant points out that the power of judgment must, to a certain extent, be *sui generis*, because the only way we could systematize the way we apply the general to the particular would be to come up with new principles to govern that application. But that would just beg the question. How would we know when to apply this new set of rules to the particular moment of judgment? We end up at a problem of infinite regress and so the act of judgment must simply do its work. As a result, Kant's conception of normativity actually *requires* that our judgments be contingent on a given concrete instance. Kantian normativity does not take flight from the world, but plunges us into it.

And it plunges us into it in such a way as to create the conditions for collective will formation and its execution. In this regard, Kant does not consign us to simply performing norms according to a model of individual ethical behavior, but rather exhorts us to embody the ideals that would help us to approximate a republic in which we only obey the laws to which we have given our consent.[60] Now, one might still object that Kant nonetheless constrains the range of permissible behaviors available to us despite the exigencies wrought by a condition of massive injustice. And this is a fair objection, but it is also one that will be applicable to any discussion of permissible political tactics other than an 'anything goes' position. The point, however, is that, far from being

[59] Ibid.
[60] Sharon Byrd and Joachim Hruschka, *Kant's Doctrine of Right: A Commentary*, (Cambridge, EN: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 145.

about individual ethical conduct, Kant's argument is rather more focused on securing the conditions of "omnilateral will formation," to use Ripstein's terms, so that majority consent can be secured *before* attempting to remedy conditions of injustice.[61] Such conditions of omnilateral will formation *are* the *sine qua non* of Kant's ideal.

Indeed, Ingeborg Maus argues that one central misunderstanding of Kant's conception of political agency stems from modern intuitions about legitimacy that privilege the right to resistance over the right to popular self-legislation.[62] For Maus, such a privileging reflects the modern "refeudalization' of modern industrial society," which marks a departure from Enlightenment notions of popular sovereignty. Likewise, Ulrich Thiele argues that even within Enlightenment political thought, modern scholars need to be alive to the difference between Montesquieuean (and Lockean) notions of separation of powers based on checks and balances and a Kantian/Rousseaian one based on a distinction between the (popular) sovereign and the state.[63] In the latter model, the right to resistance is not as central because the people are in the position of legislating for themselves rather than petitioning the state for recognition. Contestation then takes on a different form. Rather than individual groups petitioning the state for recognition or redress, the venue of political contestation then becomes the people itself, except in those cases where the executive attempts to usurp the legislative.

---

[61] Again, one might think that this places too high a burden on political agents under conditions of radical injustice. Does an oppressed minority need to secure the consent of a majority before resisting the condition of its oppression? Surely not. But it is unfair to imagine that Kant's claim is that, in the face of conditions of injustice, all we can do is focus on our ethical duty. The point is that the most fundamental condition in the way of justice, for Kant, is the absence of a rightful condition and so we must always first seek to establish such a condition.

[62] Ingeborg Maus, *Zur Aufklärung der Demokratietheorie: Rechts und demokatietheoretische Uberlegungen im Aschluß an Kant*, (Berlin: Suhrkampf, 1994) ; Ulrich Thiele, *Represäntion und Autonomieprinzip: Kants Demokratiekritik und ihre Hintergründe*, (Berlin: Duncker & Humbolt, 2003); Lea Ypi, "On Revolution in Kant and Marx," *Political Theory* 42, no. 3 (2014), 262-287; Maliks; Ripstein. See also Sankar Muthu, "Productive Resistance in Kant's Political Thought: Domination, Counter-Domination, and Global Unsocial Sociability" in Katrin Flikschuh and Lea Ypi eds., *Kant and Colonialism: Historical and Critical Approaches*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 68-98 for an account of the many forms of resistance outside of revolution that exist in Kant's work.

[63] Maus, 34; Thiele, 46

Indeed, Kant's *rejection* of the right to rebellion reveals the complexity of his thinking on the role of ideals in grounding judgment and guiding political transformation.[64] He premises one of his main arguments against the right to rebellion on his claim that norms underdetermine judgment. In a dispute between the people and the state, who is to decide which side is correct? Kant's argument is straightforwardly Hobbesian. When the people claim that their king is a tyrant, is this because he has truly violated the original contract, or because he is a king now "misliked?" Since the application of the category 'tyrant' to the particular king relies on a *sui generis* act of judgment, there is no way to adjudicate the dispute. In fact, one reason we have a sovereign in the first place, for Kant, is to provide a rightful condition in which we are not all judges in our own suits who must resort to violence when our claims are ignored. Under non-ideal conditions, the king must have the final say if we are ever to leave the natural condition.

In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, although he again unequivocally condemns revolution in all its forms, he nonetheless endorses reform as a plausible mode of striving to achieve the ideal and endorses a form of what he describes as lawful resistance. He writes:

> A change of a (defective) constitution, which might indeed be needed now and then, can thus only be met by the sovereign itself through *reform*, but not therefore performed by the people through revolution, and, when change occurs, it can only occur through the executive power.—In a constitution that is so constituted that the people can, through their representatives (in parliament) and against the executive and its representatives (the ministers), legally *resist* – which means, then, a limited constitution – there is still no active resistance (the arbitrary agreement of a people to force the government toward a certain active practice, and thus to perpetrate an act of executive authority itself), but only a *negative* resistance, that is, the *refusal* of the people (in parliament) to obey the demands the state has put forward as

[64] The literature on Kant and revolution is vast. Some representatives texts include: Katrin Flikschuh, "Reason, Right, and Revolution: Kant and Locke," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 36, no. 4 (2008), 375-404; L. W. Beck, "Kant and the Right of Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32, No. 3 (1971) 411-22; Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism*: *The Genesis of Modern Political Thought, 1790-1800*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) 36-8, Byrd and Hruschka, 181-4; Christine M. Korsgaard, "Taking the Law Into Our Own Hands: Kant on the Right to Revolution" in *The Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 233-64; Arthur Ripstein, *Force and Freedom: Kant's Legal and Political Philosophy*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 325-354; Ypi, "On Revolution in Kant and Marx"

necessary for the public administration.[65]

This is Kant's account of resistance in the ideal case, the 'state-in-the-idea,' as Byrd and Hruschka call it.[66] Kant appears to be saying that under a republican constitution, which is one in which the legislative and the executive are separate, the people, who legislate, can resist the executive when they take its judgments to be incorrect. In the background here is Kant's (Rousseauian) conception of the activity of legislation and execution, where the legislative creates laws through mutual consent that are universalizeable and conform to the principle of outer freedom. But since these laws are universal, the executive is responsible for applying them in particular cases and can err, in which case the people are entitled to resist through refusal. The legislative is allowed to disobey the executive. What it is not allowed to do is *usurp* the executive power and force the state to perform a particular end.

How this translates to the non-ideal case, however, is highly ambiguous, especially under different forms of government. One peculiarity of Kant's political theory is a distinction he draws between *Regierungsform* and *Regierungsart*, the form of government and the style of government.[67] A constitution can have a monarchical *Regierungsform* but a republican *Regierungsart*, in which the legislative and executive are separate, and still count as a republic. In such an instance, the manner of governance accords with the ideal, even though the form does not. But legislative authority always belongs to the people in a republic and their freedom comes from "obeying no other law than that to which he has given his consent."[68]As Byrd and Hruschka argue, it is important to note "that Kant does not say 'to which he *could have* given his approval' as he

[65] Metaphysics of Morals, 6:321-322. My translation. I have striven for literality in order to preserve the ambiguity of Kant's German. The Cambridge Edition translation is much clearer, but also does not quite convey the level of qualification and equivocation in Kant's claim.
[66] B. Sharon Byrd and Joachim Hruschka, *Kant's Doctrine of Right: A Commentary*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 143-163
[67] Thiele, Representätion und Autonomieprinzip
[68] *Metaphysics of Morals*, 68

does in both *Theory and Practice* and *Perpetual Peace*."[69] What does this mean for the non-ideal case? Under what conditions could a monarch orchestrate legislation in such a way that all the citizens could give their consent? And what would resistance through refusal look like under such conditions?

As Arthur Ripstein reminds, Kant claims in the *Metaphysics of Morals* that the latter parts of the book are "worked less thoroughly" and this may be such an instance, but what Kant's thought does reveal here is that his preference for reform over revolution is a preference for participation in legislation over contestation of the state. What Kant demands of our politics is that we strive to create a condition in which the people legislate and the executive merely executes. To the extent that the right to resistance means a right to overthrow the state and create a new one, Kant remains highly skeptical that such an activity will lead to the people becoming the lawgiver. After all, Kant argues, revolutions fail and their aims are usurped. To destroy the state is to destroy the conditions for collective action for the uncertain possibility that we might re-establish them differently.

Kant's intervention into both the *Abbt* debate and discussions about the Prussian public sphere, then, actually sets up the idea that reason provides us with a conception of the political good to which we can contribute, if not realize of our own volition. In this regard, Kant's question is an apparently paradoxical one about praxis under conditions where we begin from a sense that praxis is insufficient to transform the existent world into one that matches our ideal. It is a vision that is both radical and cautious, one with utopian aspirations to be pursued through mundane means. For Kant, the first demand on our political practice is that we seek a rightful condition, where there is rule of law against which we can seek to become co-legislators.

[69] Byrd and Hruschka, 145

As a result, Kant's model of political agency is one in which the people are to look for spaces of participation in politics in the precise sense of co-legislating with the state with the ultimate goal of becoming the legislators. This means developing practices in which we are able to treat each other as free equals while working to form a collective will in the hopes that the state will execute it. (The obvious drawback of Kant's focus on participation via co-legislation instead of resistance is that there are no mechanisms of power through the people can coerce the state into actually recognizing their collective will.) This also requires forming such a space and creating such a people. But what kind of practice would accord with such a vision? Well, implausible though it may sound to contemporary ears, this practice is public reason.

Public Reason, Was ist Aufklärung?, and the Politics of Reform in Prussia

It is important to remember that Kant had, in the wake of Frederick the Great's 1781 prize question for the Prussian academy of Sciences, defended public reason as a transformative political practice in the first *Critique*. Indeed, the prize question motivated the debates that would prompt him to return to this theme in "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" As James Schmidt shows, Kant and Mendelssohn both submitted their articles on the meaning of *Aufklärung* in response to a footnote in an article Johann Friedrich Zöllner wrote in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* to defend the presence of clergy at marriage ceremonies.[70] Although this might appear to be a fairly banal debate, its central issues represented larger concerns about the role of the state and clergy in public rituals and individual's lives. And this article itself stemmed from a longer debate within the *Berlin Mittwochsgesellschaft* [literally, Berlin Wednesday Society] about the function, nature, and limits of enlightenment. J. K. W. Möhsen had begun the debate with a lecture called "What is to be done towards the Enlightenment of Fellow Citizens?", in which he

[70] Schmidt, "The Question of Enlightenment," 275

cited the prize question and the winning essays, which took opposing sides, as permission to continue investigating the question of enlightenment.[71] Again, Frederick's question about whether it is permissible to deceive the people excited the hopes of *Aufklärer* who thought that, not only was it impermissible, but that combatting deception, superstition, and ignorance would lead to *Aufklärung.*

Indeed, as H. B. Nisbet argues, Kant's use of the term of *Aufklärung* to describe a transformative political process was perfectly in keeping with contemporaneous usages of the term. At the time, *Aufklärung* was, for many of its proponents, both a process and a practice, one that was supposed to lead to some form of "intellectual, moral, and cultural advancement, whether of individuals, of whole societies, or of past historical eras."[72] In "What is to be done?" Möhsen himself writes of *Aufklärung* in Berlin as a process wherein, "light will spread not only into the provinces, but throughout the entire land, and how fortunate would we not be if only a few sparks, fanned here, came in time to spread a light all over Germany, our common fatherland."[73] Although, as Nisbet points out, what this process entailed in practice was subject to fierce debate and eventual conservative backlash and moral panic, *Aufklärung* did not just name a period, but, to riff on Möhsen*,* something that was to be done.

Möhsen's choice to frame his essay as a question that was essentially about how educated and well to do Berliners could educate rural peasants and his invocation of Frederick are instructive in the way they capture the reformist and progressive attitude Frederick had inspired. Möhsen sees it as part of the project of *Aufklärung* itself to educate the entire citizenry, which he sees as a

[71] Schmidt, "The Question of Enlightemnent"
[72] H. B. Nisbet, "'Was ist Aufklärung?' The Problem of Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Germany," *Journal of European Studies 12, ,*No. 46(1982), pp. 77-96
[73] Johann Karl Wilhelm Möhsen, "What is to be done toward the Enlightenment of the Citizenry?" in *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996)

patriotic duty and part of a mission to promote "the best for our fellow citizens and for posterity."[74] And the sense of responsibility that Möhsen assumes was not accidental. The *Berlin Mittwochgessellschaft*, which he was addressing, was made up mostly of "civil servants, clergymen, and men of letters," that is, of citizens with leadership roles in society.[75] Part of their attempt to realize this mission was the publication of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* itself, in which the question of the meaning of *Aufklärung* was, of course, endlessly debated.[76] The *Berlinische Monatsschrift* was a vehicle to realize *Aufklärung*, both in determining what it means and in practicing it. As Christopher Clark notes, "many of the articles printed in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*…were in fact letters to the editor from members of the public."[77]

In this sense, the project of *Aufklärung* was like an early modernization project meant to educate the citizenry and reform the state. Many *Aufklärer* were civil servants and literati, some of whom, like *Berlin Mittwochgessellschaft* members Karl Svarez and Ernst Klein, were reformist members of the Prussian state.[78] Indeed, Klein and especially Svarez were, at Frederick the Great's behest, pivotal leaders in the effort to create the *Allgemeine Gesetzbuch für die Preußische Staaten*, a new unified code of laws for all of the Prussian states. In trend with the modernizing currents of the time, the laws were going to be written in German, rather than the traditional language of the court, French. And in keeping with the *Aufklärer*, as well as his own (relatively) enlightened views, Frederick allowed parts of the early drafts to be circulated among well informed, reform-minded scholars for their critique and comments and allowed other chunks to be released to the reading

[74] Möhsen, 51
[75] Schmidt, The Question of Enlightenment, 273
[76] Nisbet
[77] Clark, 249
[78] Schmidt, 273. Svarez was deeply influenced by the Leibniz-Wolff school's notion of a continual movement toward societal perfection.

public for the same purpose.[79] In so doing, Frederick was providing the *Aufklärer* with the opportunity to comment directly on legislation that would be transformational for Germany. The importance of this legislation cannot be underestimated. The *Allgemeine Gesetzbuch* would be the first unified law code for all Prussian states and, despite later becoming a frequent target of criticism, "endured as the foundation of the Prussian social constitution [*Sozialverfassung*] until at least 1900."[80] Indeed, The *Allgeimeinen Gesetzbuch* laid the foundation for the subsequent sixty years of reform movements, from *Aufklärung* to 1848.[81]

And even in this context, Kant's essay was, as Nisbet writes, "much more outspoken on political questions" than other attempts to come to grips with the meaning of *Aufklärung*.[82] Mendelssohn's entry into the debate, for example, was far more comfortable with status differences and hierarchy. He drew a distinction between culture and enlightenment, where the former educated humans in their practical affairs and the latter in intellectual ones. The two of them could lead humans to their 'destiny.' He drew a further distinction between the "destiny of man *as man* and the destiny of man *as citizen*." In this latter category, Mendelssohn argued that "each individual also requires, according to his status and vocation, different theoretical insights and different skills to attain them—a different degree of enlightenment."[83] The enlightenment of "man as *man* is universal," but the enlightenment of "man *as citizen* changes according to status and vocation."[84] In Reinhold's entrance into the debate, he claimed enlightenment as a process of elite-driven tutelage. "The philosopher teaches; the masses learn." For Reinhold, *Aufklärung*

[79] Hans Hattenhauer, "Einführung" in *Allgemeines Landrecht für die Preussische Staaten von 1794*; See Also, Horst Möller, *Vernunft und Kritik*, 301-305
[80] Reinhart Koselleck, *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution: Allgemeines Landrecht, Verwaltung, und soziale Bewegung*, (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1967), pp. 23
[81] *Ibid.*
[82] Nisbet, 91
[83] Moses Mendelssohn, "On the Question: What is Enlightenment," in Schmidt, *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions?*, 54-5
[84] Mendelssohn, 55

names the process by which the enlightened part of humanity, the philosophers, are able to wrest the masses away from their superstition and stupidity, and so to stop making a mess of things for the already enlightened. Kant's entry: "*Sapere Aude!* Have courage to obey your own understanding! is therefore the motto of the *Aufklärung*."[85]

Kant truly saw *Aufklärung* as a (preferable) alternative to revolution, as the culmination of progressive social and political forces in Prussia under the time of Frederick, which, he argues, need to be nurtured and allowed to germinate. *Aufklärung* is "the human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority [*Unmündigkeit*.]" Minority or *Unmündigkeit* is a state of dependence on others; it stems from the German word *Mund*, an old German legal concept designating the power that the head of the house has over the household.[86] To be *unmündig* is to continue to be under someone else's tutelage, a minor. *Aufklärung*, then, is the process through which humans learn to think for themselves, but more importantly, it is the process through which they wrest themselves away from the relationship of dependence and tutelage they have with figures of authority.[87] Kant sees the process of learning to think for oneself as a process through which all citizens, regardless of status or station, can learn to become fully autonomous and so rid themselves of their dependence on others.

Kant argues that this has to be a communal process. We need to reason publically so that we can create a culture that sustains these practices of free reasoning.[88] For Kant, it is difficult to

---

[85] Ak 8: 36. My translation
[86] https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Mund_Gewalt_Macht
[87] "What is Enlightenment," in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 17
[88] Kant makes a similar argument at the end of "What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?" See *Religion and Rational Theology*, 16. On Kant's 'subversive' use of the concept of *Öffentlichkeit*, See John Christian Laursen, "The Subversive Kant: The Vocabulary of 'Public' and 'Publicity'" in *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions*. For a compelling account of the importance of community and communicability to Kantian public reason, See Onora O'Neill, "The Public Use of Reason" in *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989)

enlighten oneself through the use of reason on one's own; it is hard to begin to act independently after having been dependent for so long. It takes courage to be one of the few using reason while everyone else remains in the dark.[89] "But that a public should enlighten itself is more possible," Kant writes, "indeed this is almost inevitable, if only it is left its freedom."[90] *Aufklärung* will spread so long as people are guaranteed freedom to think and write and speak on their own. If people are treated as free subjects, they will begin to act like free subjects.

Kant, then, argues that *Aufklärung* is a unique and transformative practice that realizes freedom in the public sphere and teaches people to be free, even as they must remain obedient in private.[91] But part of the effect of this argument is that subjects need to claim the public for themselves as a space of freedom. As Kant writes, he does not live "in an *enlightened* age," but "in an *age of enlightenment*."[92] Subjects have just begun to think for themselves and to claim the public as a space of freedom. What's more, Kant is sure to note, the *Aufklärer* [literally: enlighteners] are fortunate enough to live under a monarch that not only endorses, but often leads, their efforts. He lives, as he writes, "in the age of enlightenment or the century of Frederick."[93] Not only are subjects claiming the public as a space of freedom, but the king is giving it to them.

In illustrating the claim that the public can become a space of political freedom, while the private remains the space of political *Unmündigkeit*, Kant turns to a metaphor that, as I will argue, comes to do a lot of work for him. In describing the private use of reason, which designates the use of one's reason in one's official capacity as a civil servant, Kant explains that, "for many affairs…some members of the commonwealth must behave merely passively, so as to be directed

[89] Ibid.
[90] What is Enlightenment, 17
[91] As basically every scholar that has ever written about "What is Enlightenment?" has noted, Kant's distinction between public and private runs contrary to our intuitions about what these concepts mean. Private, in Kant's sense, means in one's capacity as a state official.
[92] What is Enlightenment, 21
[93] What is Enlightenment, 21

by the government…to public ends."[94] In private uses of reason, one subordinates oneself to "mechanism;" one becomes "part of the machine."[95] Still, even as part of the machine, one still remains free in one's public life. As Kant writes, "insofar as this part of the machine also regards himself as a member of the whole commonwealth, even of the society of citizens of the world…he can certainly argue without thereby harming the affairs assigned to him…as a passive member."[96]

As passive members of society, we are like cogs in a machine, our reason subordinated to an instrumental end. In this sense, we are not left to our freedom, nor should we expect to be. Our role is to execute the commands that are issued to us. Kant thus divides society into a space of freedom and a space of subordination. We are free to say what we would like in our public lives, but we must remain obedient in our private lives. "*Argue* as much as you will and about whatever you will, *but obey!*"[97] But Kant brings up this metaphor again at the end of the essay, in a passage that also invokes his natural teleology in an unfamiliar way:

> Thus when nature has unwrapped, from under this hard shell, the seed for which she cares most tenderly, namely, the propensity and calling to *think* freely, the latter gradually works back upon the mentality of the people (which thereby gradually becomes capable of freedom in acting) and eventually even upon the principles of *government*, which finds it profitable to itself to treat the human being, *who is now more than a machine*, in keeping with his dignity.[98]

The outcome of *Aufklärung* is the withering away of the 'machine.' Still, what drives this process is still not human agency, but nature. Public reason might be in conformity with the ends of nature, but it is also a practice worth engaging for its own sake and nature is still running the show. But there's also a performative dimension to this transformation. Thinking freely leads to acting freely; if we think freely about political matters, we will act as if we had political freedoms. Most

[94] What is Enlightenment, 18
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] What is Enlightenment, 22

importantly, however, is that one outcome of *Aufklärung* is that the government will find it 'profitable [*zuträglich*]' to treat humans in keeping with their dignity; humans will no longer be machines, but citizens, and the state will treat them as such. In other words, the space of freedom in society is supposed to overtake the space of un-freedom.

As Kant writes:

> The frame of mind of a head of state who favors [freedom of thought in matters of religion] goes still further and see that even with respect to his *legislation* there is no danger in allowing his subjects to make *public* use of their own reason and to publish to the world their thoughts about a better way of formulating it, even with candid criticism of that already given; we have a shining example of this, in which no monarch has yet surpassed the one whom we honor.[99]

Thus, for Kant, the public is not just a space for religious or intellectual freedom, but also a space of political freedom. In commenting on the King's legislation, the people can become, at least in some small way, self-legislating. Of course, it is not clear what in particular Kant is referencing here, but publication of the *Allgemeine Gesetzbuch* would appear to be a likely candidate. In any case, Kant argues here for a vision of a public political culture that would later become the foundation of his republicanism and his vision of how political practices can align with the ideal. For Kant, politics should be participatory and the public should be a space where people are able to form a collective will that the sovereign can then enact. Indeed, Kant even provides here a norm that should guide the king's legislation, writing, "but what a people may never decide upon for itself, a monarch may still less decide upon for a people; for his law-giving [*gesetzgebende*] authority rests precisely on this, that he unites in his will the collective will of the people."[100]

Of course, this might be a lot to read into Kant's small essay. But these points are in keeping with Kant's views at the time and, for the most part, his later works. In his notes on

[99] What is Enlightenment, 21
[100] What is Enlightenment, 20. Translation modified.

Achenwall dated to between 1784-1788, for example, Kant writes that "the people must absolutely be represented and, as such, not only through having the right to resistance, but also through having the authority to be able to, without sedition, recuperate its freedom and withdraw its obedience from the regents [of the state]."[101] Although he is not talking about the people commenting on the king's legislation or public reason, he is arguing, as he does in "What is Enlightenment," that the sovereign needs to represent the people and that they should be able to preserve this relationship through a right to resistance. Further, in this same set of notes, Kant argues that the state is patriotic, as versus despotic, when "the sovereign regards the country as its fatherland and its organization as its own person" and that "there can be despotic governments, but no despotic constitutions, that is, constitution through the collective will of the people and certainly in keeping with a formal rule."[102] The monarch needs to treat the people in keeping with their dignity, to represent their will, and to respect their freedom. In "What is Enlightenment," Kant sees *Aufklärung* as a process that can slowly create the correct kinds of political relations between the monarch and the people. The people become subjects worthy of freedom, who reason publicly, participate in governance, form a collective will, and see that will reflected in the monarch. And the enlightened monarch legislates patriotically, that is, "through the collective will of the people and certainly in keeping with a formal rule."[103]

Still in casting our "propensity and calling to think *freely*" as the "seed for which [nature] cares most tenderly," Kant is wrapping up the active, deliberate practice of public reason in his natural teleology. Nature provided us with the capacity to reason in public and so to use it to realize our freedom and improve our condition. Public reason is both a motor and a result of progress; we

[101] Ak 19:591; See Also Maliks, *Kant's Politics in Context*, 121. Kant argued for a right to resistance before ostensibly condemning it in the 1790's.
[102] Ak 19:595
[103] Ibdi.

should engage in it for its own sake and, when we do, we realize one of the ends of progress. Freedom of thought is something that nature endows us with as a way of realizing the ends of progress latent within the human capacity for reason. Kant voices a similar sentiment in the first *Critique*, where he argues for freedom of thought on the grounds that "everything that nature itself arranges is good for some aim."[104] For Kant, the very fact that we have the capacity to reason indicates that nature gave us such a capacity, and so it must serve as some kind of mechanism of progress. Public uses of reason, then, even if they appear to run against the grain of orthodoxy or dogma, should be permitted. Indeed, for the Kant of the first *Critique*, "all improvements of our condition" will come from the public use of reason.[105]

Kant's claim here reiterates the wager he sets up in "Idea for a Universal History," where our access to ideal, rational ends is either intended by nature, and so indicates that nature will guide them to fruition, or they are rather a "futile and pointless" capacity.[106] Thus, even as public reason appears to be an active and deliberate practice that humans can engage in to work toward the transformation of their conditions, the agency of this process still lies ultimately with nature. The very idea that public reason and *Aufklärung* are harmonious with the ideal we have access to through reason must, in fact, be taken as evidence that there is a natural teleological process occurring behind our backs and that this process will drive us to the ideal.

Transforming the Species?

But why can we not just see these practices as themselves mechanisms of political transformation, unaided by some other natural process? One answer that Kant gives repeatedly is that there is no practice adequate to the kinds of change that would actually count as progress

[104] Also in the third *Critique,* See Immanuel Kant trans. Paul Guyer, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000)
[105] KrV, 650
[106] "Idea for a Universal History," 5

because progress requires species-level transformation. As he writes in "Idea for a Universal History," "those natural predispositions aimed at the use of its reason are to be developed in full only in the species, but not in the individual."[107] Kant provides philosophical, but also political realist reasons for this position. Philosophically, Kant's claim is that the full fruition of our reason is a possibility latent within the rational capacities we all share; progress would have to be the full efflorescence of reason in the species because only then has *reason* achieved its *telos*. Politically, Kant argues that, so long as there are any non-republican states that have not joined the confederation of pacific republics, all republics are threatened. And likewise, if a people are able to transform themselves into a republic, they cannot be seen to have progressed and will remain threatened by the non-republican states of the world. Kant's pessimism about human agency, then, is not just about humanity's tendency to succumb to its darker impulses (although it is about that, too). It is also about the magnitude of the task before us and the almost laughably difficult collective action problem that the idea of collective species-wide practices of political transformation entails.[108]

And there is a yet more fundamental reason why humans cannot achieve such progress on our own, one built into the structure of reason itself. As Kant writes in "Theory and Practice:"

> Now we ask: Through which means may we sustain this perpetual progress towards the better and also even accelerate it? One sees at once, that this immeasurably distant achievement is not dependent simply on what we do (for example, on the education that we give to the youth) and through which method we should proceed in order to actualize it, but rather on what human nature does in and through us to coerce us onto a track that we would not easily end up on ourselves. Because from nature, or much more (because the highest wisdom of this goal demands it) from providence, alone can we expect a result [*Erfolg*] that moves from the whole and from there to the parts, contrary to humans with their plans, which move from the parts and surely remain absolutely stuck there. And as regards the whole, which is too big for them, their ideas can reach it, but their influence cannot, especially since,

[107] "Idea for Universal History," 5.
[108] See Sankar Muthu, "Productive Resistance in Kant's Political Thought: Domination, Counter-Domination, and Global Unsocial Sociability,", pp. 68-98

> with their mutually repugnant schemes, they would hardly unite of their own volition to realize the whole.[109]

Kant reiterates here the central problem he identifies in "Idea for a Universal History." We can reach 'the whole' with our ideas, but we cannot influence its outcome with our agency because it is too big for us. Reason provides us with a vision of the ideal, but it is too much for us to accomplish with our actions. As a result, though we might find practices that accord with the ideal, its realization cannot *depend* on our actions.

But this passage is especially significant because in its language and argumentation it reproduces one of the most fundamental, important, and influential arguments of the third *Critique*, one which would come to be central to the thought of Goethe, Hegel, Schelling, Fichte, and many others, and which provides one of the most important and foundational premises for Kant's theory of judgment.[110] This argument is the one that Kant offers in section 77 of the third *Critique*, in which he wants to show precisely why the concept of an end of nature is even available to us and what makes it possible. Kant argues that our intellect is peculiar in its ability to think through concepts and can conceive of an end of nature that appears us as a contingent possibility, an idea, that we cannot know will be achieved. Such an idea reveals to us the possibility of a natural end, but we cannot conceive of such an end as necessary.

Kant argues that to discover what is particular to our intellect we can conceive of a different kind of intellect, one that moves not from the particular to the general, like ours, but from the general to the particular, and which does not cognize a real world that could match a possible ideal, but for which all instances of the ideal would be also be instances of the real.[111] Such an intellect

---

[109] "Theory and Practice," 307. My translation. There are interesting but doubtless unintentional shades of similarity between Kant's claim here and Machiavelli's See Also Förster, 140-1. As this theme is important for Kant's conception of progress, I will return to it later.
[110] Eckart Förster trans. Brady Bowman, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).
[111] *Critique of Judgment*, 5:402-3, 5:405-5:410.

would not know possibility, only necessity, its ideas would be synonymous with the real, and it would be able to understand all features of the real intuitively, moving from the general the particular. As Kant writes:

> Now…we can also conceive of an understanding which, since it is not discursive like ours but is intuitive, goes from the **synthetically universal** (of the intuition of a whole as such) to the particular, i.e., from the whole to the parts, in which, therefore, and in whose representation of the whole, there is no **contingency** in the combination of the parts…Thus if we would not represent the possibility of the whole as depending upon the parts, as is appropriate for our discursive understanding, but would rather, after the model of the intuitive (archetypical) understanding, represent the possibility of the parts…as depending upon the whole, then, given the very same special characteristic of our understanding, this cannot come about by the whole being the ground of the possibility of the connection of the parts (which would be a contradiction in the discursive kind of cognition), but only by the **representation** of a whole containing the ground of the possibility of its form and of the connection of parts that belongs to that. But now since the whole would in that case be an effect (**product**) of the **representation**, of which would be regarded as the **cause** of its possibility, but the product of a cause whose determining ground is merely the representation of its cause is called an end…[112]

To make sense of Kant's argument, it is helpful to imagine a how a blueprint functions in relationship to the object that it represents. A blueprint for a watch, for example, provides us with an image of the whole watch as the assemblage of each of its parts. Each gear, spring, etc., in the watch gains its purpose in relation to the whole. In fact, it is only through knowledge of the whole that one understands the particular. This spring could serve any number of functions in any number of contexts, but through grasping knowledge of the whole, one understands the purpose of this spring in relation to the whole.

Kant's intuitive intellect operates in a similar fashion, but the analogy is not perfect and the discontinuities help to elucidate the way Kant imagines the intuitive intellect to work. While a blueprint of a watch might define the purpose of each part in relation to a whole, what it provides is nonetheless a (human) plan that still needs to be executed. For the intuitive intellect, knowledge

[112] *Critique of Judgment*, 276-7, [5:407-9]

and reality would be synonymous. It would not have plans because its thoughts would be identical with the real. Thus the intuitive intellect would have knowledge of the whole in relation to its parts, but the whole and its parts would not sketch out a possibility but would be reality itself. Further, in a watch, although each part functions in relation to the whole, the connection between part and a whole is not, strictly speaking, logically necessary. There are many different ways to arrange a given set of parts to produce a watch, many different possibilities. For Kant, such contingency would not conceivable to the intuitive intellect. Since the ideal and the real would be synonymous, the parts and their relation to the whole would be necessary by virtue of having been thought by the intuitive intellect.[113]

Why is this important to Kant's argument in "Theory and Practice?" Well, Kant argues in the third *Critique* that humans, as rational creatures, are the true ends of nature, and our purpose is to fully realize the possibilities latent within our capacity for reason. As he writes:

> In the preceding we have shown that we have sufficient cause to judge the human being not merely, like any organized being, as a natural end, but also as the **ultimate end** of nature here on earth, in relation to which all other natural things constitute a system of ends in accordance with which fundamental principles of reason, not, to be sure, for the determining power of judgment, yet for the reflecting power of judgment.[114]

Kant's argument here reiterates his claim from section 77, but now fills in what he means by "whole" and "part." For Kant, the "whole" here is the end or purpose of nature. Knowledge of the final purpose of nature is knowledge of the whole because it explains the purpose of the given and the function of each particular in the given in its relation with the whole. For Kant, the end of nature is the human being. But this end is one that must be realized over time. Humans will only attain our status as true ends of nature when reason achieves its full fruition in us, which means

[113] There is a separate question here about whether modal categories *tout court* would be available to such an intellect, but this is not one that need occupy us here.
[114] Critique of the Power of Judgment, 297

when we live in a cosmopolitan confederation of lawful republics in which we all treat each other according to the rational dictates of the moral law.[115] But it is a peculiarity of our intellect that we can discern this end, but appear unlikely to achieve it on our own. It is "too big" for us, as he writes in the "Theory and Practice," and though "our ideas can reach it," our actions cannot.

And it is this fact about our intellect, its limited and discursive nature, that grounds Kant's theory of the function of ideals in political life; it is this fact about our intellect that grounds his pessimism about the ability of human agency to achieve its ideals, about the indeterminacy of judgment, about the unknowability of progress, and the idea that we have access to ends of reason that we nonetheless cannot realize under our own power. A limited and discursive intellect like ours must think through concepts that refer to objects of *possible* experience. And when sensibility provides such an intellect with an actual object of cognition, if such an intellect is to judge this particular instance of a concept, it must apply its universal concept to the concrete particular. Since our concepts are not synonymous with the real, a gap remains between the general and the particular. And since our limited, discursive understanding thinks through concepts that refer to contingent possibilities rather than necessary realities, the idea we have of a final end in which our reason has developed fully is one that presents itself to us as not just an idea, but an ideal; it is an image of a contingent future in which our rational ends, our ideal, align with reality. And finally, it is because the realization of this ideal would require species-wide transformation such that our reason governs us through and through that Kant believes that it is beyond our capacity as agents to achieve it.

This is the fundamental paradox of Kant's account of progress and it is one that reproduces the "peculiar fate" to which Kant consigns us at the beginning of the first *Critique*. Our discursive,

[115] Critique of the Power of Judgment, 299-301 [5:431-5:434]

rational intellect makes possible the idea of a contingent, final end of reason, at the same time that its limited and discursive nature makes it impossible for us to conceive of such an end as necessary. We are able to conceive of the end, but we cannot reach it under our own power, and may indeed never know whether it will be achieved. And though we can regard our reason as evidence of progress because everything in nature appears to have a purpose and reason has not yet realized its purpose, this thought is bound to the alternative that the purposelessness of our reason indicates a purposelessness to nature.

Conclusion

It is this premise that distinguishes Kant and the Kantian tradition from subsequent thinkers in German intellectual history. Indeed, the attempt to resolve the gap between the intuitive intellect and our discursive understanding was, Eckart Förster shows, one of the central problems motivating Fichte, Schelling, and, of course, Hegel and Marx.[116] The tension between the ideal and the real is one that subsequent idealists, Hegelians, and then the Marxist tradition believed might be overcome through the dynamic and dialectical relationship between human reason and the natural world. Although it would not be a straightforward process of rational human agents turning the natural world into an instrument of utopian overcoming, it would nonetheless be a process in which the contradictions between human reason and the world that confronts it would be worked out through the dialectical process of history. For Kant, however, to the extent that we conceive of humanity as working through a teleological process that will culminate and its final fulfillment, the motor of this process seems not to be human agency, but nature itself. And what distinguishes Kant and the Kantian tradition from dialectical traditions is that even this expectation

[116] Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*

is constitutively unknowable, uncertain, and conjectural. It is something we might elect to believe for practical and theoretical reasons, but can never know.

The aim of this chapter has been to resituate Kant's conception of ideals within the broader philosophical architecture of his thought and the political situation to which he was responding. Doing so, I argue, reveals that Kant's understanding of how ideals function in politics begins from the premise of our constitutive uncertainty about, among other things, the future, and our inability to achieve our desired future using our agency alone. As such, ideals take on a different function in Kant's thought than they do either in contemporary ideal theory or in the tradition of utopian and dialectical political theories. For Kant, unlike utopians, we cannot instrumentalize our collective lives in pursuit of a single end, both because such an end seems uncertain and beyond the grasp of our reason, but also, and more importantly, because the end requires that we treat each other as ends rather than means. And unlike the idealist, Hegelian, and Marxist tradition, although we can develop beliefs about historical process, these beliefs will never count as knowledge, for Kant, and historical overcoming will never sanction the suspension of ethical obligation.

Kant, then, provides resources for a theory of ideals where their function is to guide action and ground judgment under conditions of uncertainty, where their primary function cannot be as instrumental ends. He orients us toward a conceptual framework in which ideals guide our practices so that they align with some desirable state of affairs and might even contribute toward its realization, but cannot themselves bring it into fulfillment. And he insists on the centrality of judgment to our political lives, showing how our judgments about politics entail the comparison of present realities with an ideal state of affairs that we might work to realize. Still, although Kant provides resources for contemporary theorists, his thought also has obvious drawbacks. After all, although Kant argues that we cannot know whether or not progress is occurring, he still provides

emphatic arguments that we have evidence to regard nature as if it is. This natural teleology puts the pressure for political change on nature, rather than human agency, and although his attunement to the limitations of human agency should be useful for contemporary theorists, his faith in nature is not.

Indeed, one central weakness of Kant's thought is its failure to theorize the effects of human agency on our collective world. Where Kant's pessimism about human agency blinds him to its generative possibilities, his optimism about natural progress leads him to attribute what good humans do produce to nature operating through us. This distracts him from the more complicated and contingent negotiation between human agents and our natural and built environment, the ways that we work it up productively only for it to get away from us, the ways that productive processes that we initiate turn against us. If Kant's theory of ideals is about praxis, it is, oddly and generatively, not about a form of praxis that intends to transform our material environment, but one that seeks to approximate our rational, ethical fulfillment. Kant leaves us, then, with a question: If our ideals guide action and ground judgment, what should our expectations be about the effects of our ethically minded actions and judgments on our collective world? This is the question that subsequent Kantian radicals will endeavor to answer.

Chapter 2: "The Oddest Analogies with the Material Revolution in France:" Hegel, Heine, and Marx on Kant and the Legacy of the Revolution

"The proposition that has become proverbial, *fiat iustitia, pereat mundus,* or in German, 'let justice reign even if all the rogues in the world perish because of it,' sounds rather boastful but it is true…"

- Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*

"I behold all the devils of truth dancing round me in triumph, until at last a great and proud despair masters my heart and I cry aloud: 'It has long been judged and condemned, this ancient society! Let it suffer what it does! Let it be crushed, this old world, where innocence perished, where selfishness flourished so mightily, where man was as a prey and plunder to man! Let them be radically destroyed, these whitened sepulchers, where falsehood and raging wrong were enthroned!' And blessed be the grocer who will make cornets of my poems for snuff or coffee for the poor honest old women who perhaps in our present unjust world must do altogether without such comforts. *Fiat Iustitia, pereat mundus.*"

- Heine, *Lutezia*[1]

Introduction

In his *Pictures of Travel*, amid a broader reflection on modernity and the loss of tradition and meaning it ushered across the world, Heinrich Heine draws an analogy between the figure of Napoleon and the intuitive intellect described by Kant.[2] Elaborating on a claim of Heine's *bête noir*, Madame de Staël, that Napoleon "was no ordinary man and that his spirit cannot be measured by any ordinary criteria," Heine writes:

> It is to just such a mind that Kant alludes when he maintains, "we can conceive of a kind of reason, which, not being discursive, like ours, but rather intuitive, moves from synthetic generalization, the contemplation of a whole as such, to the particular, that is, from the whole to its parts." Indeed, what we managed to fathom through slow, analytic reflection and lengthy argument, such a mind has simultaneously perceived and profoundly grasped. Thus its capacity to understand

[1] Heinrich Heine trans. Charles Godfrey Leland, *French Affairs: Letters from Paris in Two Volumes, Vol. 2: Lutetia*, (London, England: William Heinemann, 1893), pp. 12

[2] For an in-depth analysis of the reception of Kant's notion of the intuitive intellect in Heine, see Oliver Schlaudt, "Der 'intuitive Verstand' bei Heinrich Heine," *Philosophia Scientiæ 20*, No.1, pp. 59-75

> the present, to cajole its mind, never to insult the spirit of the time and always to apply it.[3]

Heine's description of Napoleon here, evocative of Hegel in its language and assumptions, casts him as a figure embodying the "revolutionary and counterrevolutionary" aspects of his time in a single person able to grasp intuitively what ordinary humans must arrive at through reason. Where Kant developed the idea of the intuitive understanding as a thought experiment to contrast with the finite and discursive nature of our own intellects, Heine employs the concept here rhetorically to capture the person of Napoleon embodying the contradictory impulses of a modernity quickly overwhelming the world.

Discerning "the spirit of the time" was a nagging concern of Heine's from his years as a student of Hegel until his protracted deathbed reconversion to Judaism in the late 1840's. Although never a systematic philosopher of any sort himself, Heine ascribed epochal significance to the tradition of classical German philosophy that reached a turning point with Kant and culminated in the philosophy of Hegel.[4] Heine was reared in this tradition and it was an interest he nurtured from his final year of secondary school, through to his years as a student of Hegel and Schelling, then as a popularizer, advocate, and, to be sure, critic of it in France in his polemics against Madame de Staël and Victor Cousin, and through to his brief association and contentious association with Marx and the Young Hegelians until around 1848.[5] For Heine, the tradition of German philosophy

---

[3] Heine, Travel Pictures, 88

[4] See Wieland, 233

[5] Wieland mentions Heine's encounter with philosophy in his secondary school education in Wolfgang Wieland, "Heinrich Heine und die Philosophie," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte 37*, No.2 (1963), pp.232-248. On Heine's time as a student of Hegel and Schelling, see Terry Pinkard, "Introduction," in Heinrich Heine trans. Howard Pollack-Milgate, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany and Other Writings*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. x-xiv. On Heine's relationship with Hegel and Schelling, as well as his conversion to Judaism, see Sammons.. Heine's polemics against de Staël and Cousin are *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* and *The Romantic School*. On his polemic against Cousin see Schlaudt. On Heine's relationship with the Young Hegelians, cf. Lucien Calvié, "Heine und die Junghegelianer," *Internationaler Heine-Kongress Düsseldorf 1972,* (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, Heinrich Heine Verlag,), pp. 307-317

that reached a transformation point in Kant told the story of reason realizing that the religious and metaphysical anchors it turned to for a foundation were illusory, and that its real foundation was its capacity for free self-determination. In Young Hegelian fashion, Heine saw this realization as the foundation for a revolution of the sort that had already occurred in France—humanity finally securing a world in which rational autonomy had ascended the throne.

Heine's works are sorely underappreciated as political theoretical texts. This chapter aims to recover him as an important, sympathetic critic of the tradition of German classical philosophy. I focus on Heine's careful analysis of the contradictions of Kantian reason, which, for Heine, can only free itself from illusion in the realm of reason by giving rise to new contradictions in the realm of agency. Heine, like Hegel, analogizes Kantian reason with the French Revolution on the grounds that both upended traditional modes authority and obedience grounded in religious notions of hierarchy. Where the French Revolution literally destroyed the institutions of the state that divine right secured and the religious institutions that secured divine right, Kant's revolution targeted the modes of religious belief and that upheld them. For Hegel, this moment of revolution was just one phase in a narrative that would reach its ultimate culmination in his recognition of the actual in the rational; it would find its ultimate reconciliation in Hegel's historical moment and philosophical project. But for Heine, Kant's revolution in thought led rather to a new contradiction, as reason was now faced with a world where its autonomy was everywhere denied and the conventional modes of authority that Kant had destroyed still held sway. Where Heine's Young Hegelian contemporaries would see this as evidence that the contradiction just had yet to reach its higher synthesis, Heine was an ironist, not a dialectician, and depicted it rather as a sense of impasse. Reason was free, but humans were not, and he was not as convinced as the other Young Hegelians that revolution was sure to solve that problem.

The first section of this chapter situates Heine's *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* within a longer lineage of efforts to depict Kant's philosophy as revolution in thought analogous with the French revolution in practice. As John Toews and others have shown, the analogy between Kant's philosophy and the French revolution is almost as old as Kant's philosophy itself.[6] For much of this tradition, philosophers drew the analogy between Kant's philosophy and the French Revolution to either warn of its dangers, or to show that the one entailed the other: Kant's philosophy required revolution because autonomous reason could only feel at home in a world that it had fully created. I follow this trope through to Hegel's interpretation of it in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and into the work of Heine. Hegel departs from the revolutionary interpretation, instead arguing that Kant's philosophy just becomes one among many waystations on the path toward the culmination of history in Hegel's own historical moment and philosophical project. Where Hegel takes up this analogy to cast both events as part of the same bygone historical moment, Heine takes it up to argue that the German revolution in thought was still awaiting its revolution in practice.

The next section analyzes Heine's reception of this trope, which, I have suggested, revolves around his interpretation of the contradictions of Kantian reason. Heine's interpretation of Kant draws an even tighter connection with the French Revolution and ascribes to it the same negative force that Hegel ascribed to the revolution. Heine offers an image of Kant as the destroyer of a transcendent God and the forms of authority he anchored, leaving us with an autonomous rational subject that, unlike for Hegel, has yet to reconcile itself with the world. For Heine, Kant's project is part of a general current in German philosophy that involves the disenchantment of the transcendent, the dawning realization that the divine is not to be found in some other-worldly

[6] Toews, 30-49; Yack, The Longing for Total Revolution, 107

realm. This leads eventually to the recognition of the identity between the ideal and the real in post-Kantian philosophy, which Heine interprets as the divinization of the material. Put less abstractly, this means the realization that the productive and autonomous forces that were conventionally ascribed to a transcendent God are actually properties of humanity and the natural world. For Heine, this requires a revolutionary project that demands the end of conditions in which the kings and especially the priests no longer dominate others and the entirety of the now-divine human race is able to enjoy conditions of resplendent material equality.

These abstract, quasi-mystical reflections on the situation of emancipated reason and dominated humanity crystallized into a much more concrete vision of social criticism in Heine's *Vormärz* period writings, the subject of the third section of this chapter. In these works, Heine focuses on the ways that dominating institutions estrange the dominated from their own agency, leading them to displace their desire for this worldly-emancipation into religious belief and nationalist identification. Heine's depiction of religion and politics as sites of estranged and displaced forms of identification and desire was a common left Hegelian move. But Heine refused to depict these contradictions as dialectical oppositions, rather mining them for tragedy, comedy, and a pronounced sense of ambivalence about the philosophical and political demand for emancipation: in much of his work, Heine casts emancipation as a moral necessity, but expresses uncertainty about whether it is practically possible or even desirable. This ambivalence softens in his most radical *Vormärz* writings, where he comes to sound a Marxist note. I argue that in this moment of convergence, Marx fills in the gaps of Heine's critique and develops an account of the ways that the displaced demand for emancipation alienates the proletariat from their own agency. I show Marx and Heine's analyses of the condition of the working class in Germany converges in their depictions of the weaver's revolt in Upper Silesia in 1844.

This chapter, then, seeks to make two main contributions. The first is to elaborate Heine's narrative analysis of the underappreciated revolutionary afterlife of Kant's *Critical* philosophy and, using Heine's later work, extend this history through to the early works of Marx. This turn to Heine advances the history of radical Kantianism that runs throughout this dissertation. Heine's overlooked work *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* also provides an important framework for understanding the reception of Kant among radical thinkers in Germany. Heine focuses on the revolutionary implication of Kant's discovery that humans could be radically self-determining, an insight he reads through a unique Hegelian and Saint-Simonian lens. This analysis feeds into the proto-*Ideologiekritik* one encounters in his later work. The second contribution revolves around the convergence of Heine's work with Marx's and elaborates Heine's theory of ideology. Heine develops a theory of ideology premised on the way that domination persists through estranging the oppressed from a desire for emancipation they express through religious and political belief. Unique to Heine's works, however, is a persistent skepticism about whether there exist forms of political agency adequate to the transformation that the world requires to accommodate self-determining, rational agents. I read Marx as taking up this question in his account of the relationship between ordinary human practices and the demand for emancipation.

"A Spiritual Revolution Begins in Germany"

In 1835, in *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, Heine wrote to his French audience:

> Lessing died in Braunschweig in the year 1781, misunderstood, hated, and in ill repute. In the same year, *The Critique of Pure Reason* by Immanuel Kant appeared in Königsberg. With this book, which, curiously, was not generally known until the end of the eighties, a spiritual revolution begins in Germany which has the oddest

> analogies with the material revolution in France, and to which the serious thinker must assign equal importance.[7]

Heine's claim here picks up on an analogy that was everywhere in Germany from the immediate post-Kantians to the period after Hegel. Since Kant's first *Critique* first began to gain real traction among German intellectuals, many had understood its claims to point towards a new phase of genuine liberation in both the intellectual and material spheres.[8] For the tradition of philosophy from Kant all the way to the Young Hegelians, the revolution provided a convenient metaphor for the epoch-making but unfinished project the *Critical* philosophy had bequeathed them, which they variously construed as signaling a revolution in German philosophy and in German political life.

At stake in this analogy for many post-Kantians from Fichte to Ruge was the incomplete and problematic conception of freedom they took Kant's account of a noumenal self amid a phenomenal world to entail and the way its antinomies might be overcome. The problem these theorists encountered revolved around Kant's efforts to show that reason could be self-grounding and self-determining. For Kant, the skeptical, rational mind could determine for itself what its limits and possibilities were. This challenged theological conceptions of authority based in claims to know the divine, as much as it did any form of political rule that hindered human autonomy. But for his followers, Kant's answers were incomplete because they relied on his account of a noumenal self, outside of space and time, that could only understand the world as it appeared to it, not as reason's natural home, and not as an object fundamentally shaped by rational freedom and

---

[7] Heinrich Heine trans. Howard Pollack-Milgate & ed. by Terry Pinkard, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 75

[8] On this point, See Dieter Henrich, "Die Französische Revolution und klassische deutsche Philosophie. Überlegungen zur Bestimmung ihres Verhältnisses," *Goethe-Jahrbuch 107*, pp.102-114; Harold Mah, "The French Revolution and the Problem of German Modernity: Hegel, Heine, and Marx," *New German Critique*, No. 50(1990), pp.3-20; Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 218; Warren Breckman, *Dethroning the Self: Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 187-192; John Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism 1805-1841*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 34

creation. Kant left open an insuperable gap between the ideal and the real that his followers thought they needed to close for philosophical and ethico-political reasons. And they offered two ways of closing it: The first was philosophy, which eventually would provide for the recognition of the identity between the ideal and the real, that rational freedom had embodied itself in the real world as it already existed. The second was revolution: reason could turn into a revolutionary will and create a home for itself in the world that it could then—and only then—recognize as its own.

Between these two approaches was thus a question about the social and political significance of the project that Kant bequeathed his successors when he posited a noumenal or ideal realm of freedom problematically situated in the real phenomenal world. What kind of emancipation did this project entail? What mode of social and political agency or philosophical insight would be adequate to achieve it? All agreed that Kant's gap between the ideal and the real needed to be closed. Somehow, the ideal needed to reconcile itself with its world, either through the right kind of philosophical system to prove their identity, or the right kind of revolutionary project to work up the real so that it could secure the ideal. Schelling, Hegel, and Hölderlin would take the former course; Heine and the Young Hegelians the latter. But what was not in doubt for either camp was that Kant's thought represented the dawning recognition of human freedom in world history, if imperfectly conceptualized in the noumenal self. The question was whether that freedom entailed a project for philosophical reflection or for *praxis*.

Indeed, the immediate post-Kantians depicted the *Critical* philosophy as a fundamental break from prior modes of thought, which, as John Toews argues, they construed as emancipating the self from religious oppression, political subordination, and even the causal natural world.[9] And the revolution offered them a convenient, epochal metaphor for drawing out its full political and

[9] Toews, 32-9; Henrich, "Die Französische Revolution"

social significance. As Bernard Yack suggests, it was "an accident of the time that brought Kant's philosophy to their attention at the same time as the Revolution was being fought in France."[10] No sooner did the revolution occur than did his students begin drawing connections between the events in France and the new ideas in Germany. Schelling drew the connection to German philosophy early on, and Fichte compared the revolution to his own thought, writing: "my system is the first system of freedom, which like the nation that tears of humanity's chains, tears off the fetters of the outer influences of the thing-in-itself, and stands humanity up on the first principle that it is an autonomous essence."[11] Hegel saw the analogy with Kant's work and wrote in a letter to Schelling in 1795, "from the Kantian system and its ultimate perfection, I expect a revolution in Germany that will proceed from principles that are already present and demand to be generally worked out and applied to all previous knowledge."[12]

As Yack argues, the combined events of the *Critical* philosophy and the French Revolution fed a sense of spiritual alienation among post-Kantians that they took the idea of a noumenal self to perfectly embody.[13] Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel each understood the revolution in France as an attempt to bridge this gap through *praxis*. Reason had attempted to stamp its will on the phenomena, negating the political institutions of the old world and creating one anew.[14] They thus saw the French Revolution as heralding their philosophical own projects, now oriented toward determining how rational subjects could be completely autonomous within distinct historical conditions and political communities.[15] As Toews argues, this would be accomplished through the

[10] Yack, 109
[11] Fichte cited in Henrich, pp.106. My translation. See also Toews, 35 and Yack, 108-9
[12] Hegel, cited in Toews, 34. See also Yack, 190.
[13] Yack, 107-118. See also Toews, 32-40.
[14] This is how Hegel describes the revolution later on in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, which I analyze below. See Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 459-62. See also Yack, 112.
[15] Toews, 37-8

development of a new religion that would lead to "the collective actualization of the ideal identity of freedom and unity," the discovery of humanity's freedom within its historical conditions.[16]

Still, it was easier for Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel to associate the promise of Kantian (in Fichte's case, Fichtean) philosophy with the French Revolution when the future of the revolution was still open, a position that would require more complicated philosophical argumentation after its culmination in the terror and Napoleonic rule. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel would famously describe the aftermath of the revolution in the terror as "the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water," a reference to executions by guillotine and the "republican marriages" that involved tying people together and throwing them in the river to drown.[17] Schelling's 1804 eulogy of Kant is instructive here in depicting the ebbtide of Kantian philosophy:

> It was in the midst of the strongest battles and counter-struggles that time brought about in the same moment that Kant appeared, in full harmony with his age, Germany as the highest herald and profit of his time…the great event of the French Revolution had a universal and public effect on [his philosophy] that he would never himself ascribed to it. Not without detecting a peculiar stroke of fate did many of his enthusiastic followers wonder about the revolutions, similar in importance, in front of their eyes without thinking that one and the same cultivated spirit had produced a revolutionary air—in keeping with the differences in the nations and their conditions—in the real there and here in the ideal…if the Kantian system appears to have entered its ebb alongside the French revolution, its authorities will not provide a reason for the withdrawal of their contingent support of it so much as search for an internal agreement and equality between the two, in which both share a merely negative character and an unsatisfactory resolution of the conflict between abstraction and reality, which was insurmountable in theory as much as in practice.[18]

---

[16] Toews, 40

[17] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit.,* 360; James Schmidt, "Cabbage Heads and Gulps of Water: Hegel on the Terror," *Political Theory 26*, No.1 (Feb, 1998), pp. 4-32

[18] Schelling, "Immanuel Kant," *Sämmtliche Werke vo. 4. Electronic Edition. Schriften zur Identiätsphilosophie 1801-1807*, (Charlotessville, VA: InteLex Corp, 2013). Accessed: http://pm.nlx.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/xtf/view?docId=schelling_de/schelling_de.04.xml;chunk.id=div.schelling.520;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.schelling.468;brand=default. See also Henrich, 107.

Schelling's testimony here tracks the tides of Kant's philosophy and ties its fate to that of the Revolution. Although Toews argues that the later events of the Revolution, like the Terror, did not deter Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Hölderlin and others from casting it as a harbinger of future emancipation in the 1790's, Schelling's depiction tracks later efforts to contextualize both events as the expression of a moment of negative freedom looking forward to its higher synthesis.

Hegel on Enlightenment and Revolution

Indeed, by the time of his mature works, Hegel would construct Kant's *Critical* philosophy and the French Revolution as part of the same bygone historical moment in which a lawless, negative freedom made its first appearance in the world before seeking more concrete form in a later phase of the dialectic. For Hegel, the contradictions of Kant's project merely expressed the tensions within his particular historical period and had since been resolved in a higher synthesis. Hegel's own philosophy could trace the historical contradictions motivating the form of freedom expressed in the revolutions in Germany and France and show how they ultimately resulted in his own philosophical project, which had reconciled the divide between the ideal and the real and revealed their underlying unity.

The project now was to recognize that rational freedom had come to embody itself in the institutions of Hegel's own time, a philosophical project that strained against the demand for a new revolution. Hegel developed this argument in two main works, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. In the *Phenomenology,* he cast Kant's practical philosophy as the resolution of the French Revolutionary demand for freedom through destruction of the old world into a moral worldview that identifies freedom with *Sollen*, which we can roughly translate as 'oughtness.' In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel likewise sees Kant as

the "speculative recognition" of the conception of freedom developed in and through the French Revolution, in which reason came to serve as the basis for the autonomy of rational subjects.[19]

For the Hegel of the *Phenomenology*, the French Revolution was the moment in history when *Geist* realized that the foundation of its freedom was in its own rational capacity for self-determination. Hegel sought to trace the development of this initial realization of freedom from its purely negative destructive expression in the revolution to its effort to seek alternate form in Kant's moral philosophy. For Hegel, the French revolution rebelled against an older set of hierarchical institutions, like the church and the aristocracy, that promised to reveal and secure the subject's place in the world. But these institutions were exposed as superfluous once the Enlightenment's skeptical attitude debunked the forms of faith and superstition that sustained them. In so doing, this skeptical attitude revealed both the superfluity of older modes of hierarchy, which were supported by irrational beliefs, and the capacity of the skeptical, rational agent to do such de-bunking.[20] As the realization of this capacity spread among the people, it came to realize that it was free and that the basis of its freedom was nothing more, and nothing less, than its capacity to determine itself.[21] And once this realization that freedom is its own basis occurred, Hegel writes, "the undivided Substance of absolute freedom ascended the throne without any power being able to resist it."[22]

For Hegel, the realization of what he calls "absolute freedom" occurred in two chief phases before it turned into the "moral worldview" expressed in Kant's ethics. The first moment occurred in the revolution itself, where freedom expressed itself through the destruction of all of the

[19] Cf. Mah, "The French Revolution and German Modernity," 8; Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 461
[20] My reading here is heavily indebted to Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 135-207
[21] This is a very rough summary of a very long argument in the *Phenomenology*.
[22] G.W. F. Hegel trans. A. V. Miller, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 10

institutions of the old world after realizing in the Enlightenment that its modes of hierarchy were illegitimately grounded in spurious modes of superstition. For Hegel, this moment of freedom through negation needed to be, as he writes, "a work which is a work of the whole" because what characterized it was the realization that the capacity for self-determination is *universal*. In this moment in the history of *Geist*, it realizes that freedom is equally available to all because all are able to express their freedom. Hegel writes of the revolution that "its purpose is the general purpose, its language universal law, its work the universal work."[23] Thus, freedom expressed itself in negating, destroying, and washing away all of the institutions of an old world.

But a problem began once absolute freedom destroyed all of the institutions of this prior world. How does absolute freedom express itself when there is nothing left to negate? As Hegel writes, "there is left for [absolute freedom] only *negative* action; it is merely the *fury of destruction.*"[24] Once absolute freedom had no more objects to negate, the people, acting in a universal mode, turned against its conceptual opposite, "the individuality of actual self-consciousness itself."[25] I understand Hegel to mean here the self-determining individual, whose efforts at *individual* self-determination must, in this instance, require opposing the general. And this is where the terror occurs. For Hegel, absolute freedom first expressed itself in "the destruction of the actual organization of the world" in the moment of revolution, but "exists now just for itself" and its "sole object" is individual self-consciousness."[26] Hegel writes that "its sole work and deed is therefore *death*, a death too which has no inner significance or filling…it is thus the coldest and

[23] Ibid.
[24] op cit., 359
[25] op. cit., 360
[26] op. cit., 359

meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water."[27]

But absolute freedom eventually came to see its effects on the world. It became "objective to itself," and saw itself reflected in its concrete effect on the world, death, and experienced "the *terror* of death," which "is the vision of this negative nature of itself."[28] Absolute freedom realized that it passed on from destroying the old world into just destroying for its own sake. It realized that there is a split between the idea it had of itself, the ideal of freedom, and its actual manifestation in the world, revolution and terror. In realizing this split, absolute freedom realized that it has an ideal essence that is different from its practical manifestation. As a result, absolute freedom transformed into the moral worldview. The moral worldview was able to integrate both the idea of universality and self-determination in the idea that we become self-determining in obeying a universal moral law and so avoided the trap of having to kill everything around it.

In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel condenses the argument of the *Phenomenology* and associates both events with the dawning of freedom in world history. In the *Lectures*, Hegel argues that the Enlightenment was the moment in history in which human thought became "conscious of its own inherent power" and its capacity to determine itself, which led it to scrutinize with suspicion a world that it had not determined for itself.[29] Hegel argues that the rational scrutiny that the Enlightenment cast on all of its prior beliefs led it to "extirpate all that was speculative from things human and divine."[30] This led to a historical moment in which reason became aware of its self-determining basis and sought to "manifest itself in outward existence,"

[27] op. cit., 360
[28] op. cit., 361
[29] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 457-459
[30] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 462

thereby achieving free rational willing.[31] Rational self-determination thus sought to imprint itself on the world and become free will. In order to assume a definite form, this will had to will *something* however. Reason could not move from pure thought into free will by willing itself. Hegel defers his account of the development of "abstract will" into a "definite form of Freedom" and explains that the same principle achieved "speculative recognition" in Germany through the work of Kant.[32] For Hegel, Kant's philosophy derives theoretical and practical reason from thought itself without situating it in its material context: for Kant, human agency in the material world emits from a space of pure thought beyond space, time, and nature.

Hegel's account of the revolution in thought and practice is necessarily retrospective: it claims a standpoint of historical completion from which—and only from which—these prior moments could be understood. Kant's philosophy, then, is not to be taken on its own terms as the expression of an as-yet unfulfilled ideal of freedom, but as a phase in the history of *Geist*'s realization, which will find its ultimate expression elsewhere. For Hegel, then, the revolution is a finished project. *Geist* realized that the basis of its self-determination was in freedom itself, but, seeing that unbridled freedom resulted in destruction, it resolved itself into the moral worldview, itself a step on the way to ethical community. The revolutionary project was merely the demonstration of freedom for its own sake. To the extent that the revolution had an end, for Hegel, it was in the dual recognition that the power of self-determination is such that it can serve as its own basis, but that it needed to find its expression in something other than its own negative power.

Hegel's backwards looking perspective is necessary to a broader project that aims to show how his view can reveal the rational in the actual, the ideal in the real, thus overcoming, among other things, conceptual problems in Kant's *Critical* philosophy. For Kant, as I argued in the last

[31] *Op. cit.*
[32] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 463

chapter, part of the reason that our political ends appear to us as ideals, both in the sense that they are notional and in that they are normative, is because of the way our intellects are structured. Humans have finite, rational intellects that think through concepts that refer to objects of possible experience, which we know to be real, or actual, when we encounter them sensibly. For Hegel and the other post-Kantians that came before him, the problematic consequence of Kant's idea here is that we can only know the world as it appears to us and not as a mind-independent reality. Thus, for Kant, our ideas about what our political world ought to look like, our political ideals, refer to a possible future, but this also entails that such a future is *merely* possible and we can only conjecture the processes through which the world of experience might come to match our ideas, whether through some natural process or through human agency. But Hegel understands himself to be writing in a moment where we can look back at our efforts to understand ourselves as rational agents thoughtfully interacting with the world to discover how Kant's division between thought and being is spurious and how the two are actually one. That is, once we arrive at the moment when we feel it necessary to do such looking back, we can complete the circle, so to speak, and understand how our rational intellects partake in a broader whole that consists of the unity of thought and being.

While Hegel's radical students tended to accept his arguments about the identity between the rational and the actual, they did not accept that this left them with a retrospective project, but rather interpreted it to mean that what begins as thought must become action. Indeed, the analogy between Kant's thought and the revolution was still widespread as late as the 1840's and 1850's and still signified to them an unfinished project of revolutionary emancipation. Moses Hess, for example, in his 1843 *Socialism and Communism* writes of a "division of labor" between the French and the Germans, where each devoted themselves to part of the task of emancipation, though "here

[in Germany] it was Kant," while in France, "it was the Revolution that became the aim and end of the previous century."[33] Bruno Bauer writes somewhat derisively that Kant's philosophy amounted to "the perpetual reiteration and restatement of the revolution of [17]89"[34] and Marx wrote in 1838 that "Kant's philosophy is rightly regarded as the German theory of the French Revolution."[35] Ruge likewise wrote in 1854 of "the revolution in theory that Germany has experienced since Kant, in laying the principles of socialism, democracy, and Humanism at the heart of the German people."[36] For these later thinkers, Kant's philosophy still seemed to be the theoretical counterpart to the French revolution and, as Ruge indicates, they would argue that it left them with a revolutionary task.

As Heine, who knew Hegel personally and had taken attended his 1822-1823 lectures on the Philosophy of History and, according to Terry Pinkard, likely his lectures on political philosophy, writes in *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, "do not take my advice lightly, the advice of a dreamer who warns you about Kantians, Fichteans, and *Naturphilosophen*. Do not take lightly the fantastic poet, who expects in the realm of appearance the same revolution which has happened in the province of spirit. Thought goes before deed as lightning before thunder."[37] Writing a number of years later, Ruge would write that the Hegelian philosophy showed how, "all philosophy is nothing other than the thought of its time" and while

---

[33] "Socialism and Communism" in Moses Hess, *The Holy History. Of Mankind and Other Writings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 99

[34] Bruno Bauer, *Russland und das Germantum*, (Charlottenburg: Verlag von Egbert Bauer, 1853), pp. 2. My translation.

[35] Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Marx-Engels-Werke Band 1*, (Berlin, DDR: Karl Dietz Verlag, 1976) pp. 380. My translation.

[36] Arnold Ruge, *New Germany, Its Modern History, Literature, Philosophy, Religion and Art***,** (London, England: Holyoake and Co. 97, 1854), pp.96. For Ruge's earlier opinions on Kant, i.e., before 1848 *See* Arnold Ruge, "Unsre Klassiker und Romantiker seit Lessing: Geschichte der neuesten Poesie und Philosophie" in his *Gesammelte Schriften 1,* (Mannheim, Preußen: Verlag von J. P. Grohe, 1846), pp.130-151, 207. Ruge has a sympathetic reading of Kant as one of the progenitors of the ideal of freedom and emancipation in Germany.

[37] On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany, 116. Heine was also a student of Eduard Gans (as was Marx) and a member of the Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden. See Jeffrey L. Sammons, Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography (New York, NY; Princeton University Press), pp .89-90

prior philosophies both "were and remained only thought," the Hegelian philosophy "represents itself as the thought, which cannot remain so, but out of its consciousness of itself…must become deed."[38] Again, Ruge's claim here is remarkably reminiscent of Heine. "The thought," Heine writes, "wants to be deed; the word wants to be flesh."

Heine's German Revolution in the Material World

Indeed, for Heine as for Hegel's other radical followers, their teacher's arguments about German philosophy delivering the insight that rational freedom reigned in the institutions of 1820's Prussia seemed absurd. As a result, while Heine takes up Hegel's analogy between Kant's philosophy and the Terror, he does so to argue that Kant's political thought is prefatory to an actual revolution in pursuit of genuine political freedom. And where Hegel positions Kant's philosophy as the moral worldview that follows the "absolute freedom" of the Terror, Heine casts Kant's deeds as another Terror in yet more grievous form.[39] Kant, Heine writes, "far surpassed Maximilian Robespierre in terrorism," because where Robespierre merely killed the King, Kant killed God.[40] Like Hegel, Heine believes that the consequence of this deicide is the nullification of a worldview that legitimates inequality and domination. But he departs from his former teacher, arguing that this freedom has yet to be realized in the world. As Heine puts it pointedly in his *Travel Pictures*: "What will the priests do when the kings realize that a dribble of consecrated oil makes no human head immune to the guillotine, and when more and more realize that you can't still your hunger with holy wafers?"[41]

[38] Arnold Ruge "Die Posaune des jüngsten Gerichts" *Deutsche-Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Kunst*, No.149, 1841. pp. 594. See Also Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 51
[39] On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany, 76-81
[40] op. cit., 79
[41] Heinrich Heine trans. Peter Wortsmann, *Travel Pictures*, (Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2008), 196

Through his reading of German intellectual history and Kant's place within it, Heine contests interpretations of its legacy that construct it as part of a finished project and seek to use it for anti-revolutionary aims. While he takes up the Hegelian narrative that understands Kant to have revealed a human capacity for self-determination, he argues that this capacity has never really been expressed in Germany. From Hegel's perspective, Heine remain would remain caught in the moment of "enlightenment and revolution" in the dialectic of history, where enlightenment skepticism unveiled the human capacity for autonomy that would motivate the revolution. But Heine's point in drawing the connection between the French Revolution in practice and the German Revolution in thought calls into question Hegel's reading here. For Heine, it is just obvious that the dominating institutions of the Middle Ages continued to persist in exploiting and oppressing the people of Germany and still needed to be washed away. Heine draws the analogy between the French revolution and Kant's philosophy rather to show that the Germans needed to first realize their autonomy intellectually *before* they could realize it in practice.

On Heine's account, the role of philosophy in Germany—and especially Kant's first *Critique*—has been as a sort of ideology critique, as it were, debunking the modes of pathological belief that render the people complacent with their own domination. Heine describes this trajectory, writing: "it seems to me that a methodical people like us had to begin with the Reformation, could only on that basis occupy itself with philosophy, and solely after its completion be able to pass into political revolution."[42] Kant's work is central to this narrative, for Heine, because it performs a necessary, negative function: It clears away the transcendent illusions supporting prior religious ideologies that worked in service of exploitative political institutions.

[42] Heine, *On the History*, 115

Kant's *Critical* philosophy is the "sword with which deism was executed in Germany,"[43] for Heine, where deism was the "keystone of the spiritual *ancient régime.*"[44]

Kant's *Critical* philosophy broke the hold of Christianity, with its renunciation of everything material and sensuous, on German religious and political thought, thus vanquishing the central source of ideological legitimacy for the prevailing Prussian state. For Heine, the problem with Christianity begins with its metaphysics, which is predicated on a fundamental split between the ideal and the real, or the spiritual and the material, where the spiritual is deified and the material condemned. This is "the real idea of Christianity," on Heine's account, its most core teaching.[45] The result of this split, for Heine, has been to lead Christianity to condemn and forsake everything worldly and material, leaving it in the hands of exploitative kings and aristocrats, who have since gained enough power to draw the support of later, unscrupulous Christians. Real Christianity is, in a literal way, for Heine, "all too sublime, all too pure, all too good for this same earth."[46] Drawing on some frankly anti-Semitic tropes, he writes:

> Christianity left matter, the worldly in the hands of Caesar and his Jews, and was satisfied with denying the former ultimate supremacy and openly denouncing the latter – but, lo and behold! In the end, the sword they hated and the money they despised achieved ultimate power, and the representatives of the spirit were forced to come to an understanding with them. Indeed, this understanding has become an alliance. Not just Roman priests, but also the English, the Prussian, in short, all of the privileged priests have allied themselves with Caesar and Co. to oppress their peoples.[47]

The hegemony of Christianity thus leads people to cede their own material interests to Caesarist politicians and their allies, paving the way for mass exploitation. Thus, even as deism advances a

[43] Heine, *On the History*, 78
[44] Heine, *On the History*, 75
[45] Heine, *On the History*, 13
[46] Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, 14
[47] Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany,* 55

vision of a watch-maker God, no longer the personal God of Christianity, Heine suggests that it retains a Christian metaphysics in which God is transcendent to the material world:

> The God of the deists rules the world from above, as if it were an establishment entirely separate from himself. The deists can only be differentiated from one another by the type of rule they envision. The Hebrews see God as a thundering tyrant; the Christians as a loving father; the students of Rousseau, the whole school of Geneva, as a wise artist who produced the world in about the same way as their papa made his watches, and as connoisseurs of art they admire the work and praise the master above.[48]

Thus, even as deism seek to provide a rationalist foundation for a belief in God, Heine suggests that it retains a problematic Christian metaphysics that estranges its adherents from their sensuous, worldly interests and desires.

This is why Kant plays such an outsized role in Heine's story, why he describes him as the German Robespierre, and why he describes the first *Critique* as "the sword with which deism was executed in Germany."[49] Like Hegel's French revolutionaries whose expression of absolute freedom took the form of the destruction that would pave the way for the moment in the history of *Geist* that culminated in Hegel's looking back, Heine's Kant destroyed the prior religious paradigms standing in the way of the people realizing that they do not have to renounce everything worldly and material. For Heine, the Christian religion stands in the way of the people's realization that they ought to construct a utopian earthly existence. Kant's accomplishment, like Robespierre's, then, is solely in clearing away the ideological institutions of the *Ancien Régime*. As Heine writes, "Kant…had only a critique, that is, something negative."[50]

Thus, for Heine, Kant's key accomplishment is contained in the section on phenomena and noumena and specifically Kant's argument that we cannot have knowledge of a transcendent God.

---

[48] Heine, *On the History*, 54
[49] op. cit., 78
[50] Heine, *On the History*, 89

Kant's argument gets rid of the kind of religious metaphysics that cedes the world to the oppressed, and so allows reason to ascend its proper place in human self-determination. Heine writes:

> Philosophy, before the appearance of Kant, had run around sniffing at things, collecting and classifying features of them. With Kant, this ended, and he led research back into the human mind and investigated what was revealed there. Thus, he compared his philosophy, not unjustly, to the method of Copernicus. Earlier, when the world was assumed to stand still, and the sun was assumed to revolve around it, astronomical measurements were not especially consistent. Copernicus let the sun stand still and the earth orbit it and look now everything worked out splendidly. Earlier, reason, like the sun, orbited the world of appearances and sought to illuminate it; Kant, however, let reason, the sun, stand still, and he let the world of appearances orbit around it and become illuminated whenever it entered into the realm of this sun.[51]

For Heine, Kant's greatest discovery is in his bifurcation of objects into objects of experience and objects in and for themselves: Its importance lay in demonstrating that we cannot claim to know a transcendent God. Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena renders everything noumenal and transcendent unknowable. Christianity, the core teaching of which is based in the notion of a transcendent God, thus predicates itself on "a fiction…a natural illusion."[52] Kant destroyed the ideological basis of Christianity, vanquishing its most core metaphysical and theological presumptions.

Heine sees Kant's project as terroristic, however, because the *Critical* philosophy offers nothing in its wake: Kant destroyed the ideological basis of *most* theologies and then lamely sought to resurrect God and the moral law in a gesture to deists that Heine finds disingenuous.[53] Indeed, Heine suggests that Kant only really destroyed the "cosmological" and the "physico-theological" proofs for God's existence, carefully suggesting that the "ontological" proof, which provides the basis for the pantheism Heine sees latent in Germany intellectual history, survives Kant's attacks.

[51] Heine, *On the History*, 83
[52] Heine, *On the History*, 84
[53] Heine, *On the History*, 87

Pantheism thus remains possible, for Heine, but deism has "faded into the realm of speculative reason."[54] And Heine casts suspicion on Kant's own attempts to resurrect God through a notion of practical faith. Inventing a now widespread story about Kant taking pity on his manservant Lampe, crushed to have lost his beloved God, Heine explains how pity led Kant to "rev[ive] the corpse of deism" in arguing that practical reason could provide sufficient grounds for a belief in a transcendent God.[55] "Did Kant," Heine asks:

> stage this resurrection not just for old Lampe but also for the police? Or did he really act out of conviction? Was his true intent in destroying all proofs of God's existence just to show us the difficulty of not being able to know anything about the existence of God? Here, he was almost as wise as my Westphalian friend, who, first, destroyed all of the lanterns on Grohnderstraße in Göttingen, and then delivered a long speech to us in the darkness about the practical necessity of lanterns – which he claimed to have thus destroyed for theoretical reasons, just to show us that without them we could not see.[56]

Kant's second *Critique* is the farce that follows the tragedy, to paraphrase Heine, a halfhearted attempt to resurrect the deistic God to cheer up his manservant and appease the police. Aside from its satirical overtones, however, Heine's point here is to call into question the productive task Kant's *Critical* philosophy and preserve his Robespierrean image. Heine wants to preserve his image of Kant's project as terroristic so that he can show how it paves the way for the germination of the idea underlying German intellectual history: pantheism.

For Heine, there has long been a pantheistic current with a latent revolutionary potential circulating through German intellectual history. Pantheism's revolutionary possibility lies in its potential to "rehabilitate matter," for Heine. That is, it can provide a theological and philosophical framework to reclaim the importance of the material world from the Christian renunciation of it. This is the key claim of *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*. For Heine, German

[54] *Op. cit.*
[55] *Op. cit.*
[56] *Op. cit.* My thanks to Warren Breckman for drawing my attention to the importance of this passage.

thought has, in fact, always contained within it an ideological remedy to Christian Manicheanism in the pantheistic beliefs that persisted underground in its intellectual life. Pantheism can rehabilitate spirit and matter, in Heine's parlance: It can show that there is not only no reason for the people to renounce their worldly, sensuous needs and desires, but that they indeed ought to nurture. He writes:

> We support the wellbeing of matter, the material happiness of peoples, not because we are contemptuous of the spirit, like the materialists, but because we know that the divinity of the human being is also revealed in his bodily appearance, that misery destroys or demeans the body, the image of God, and that the spirit is destroyed thereby as well. The great motto of the revolution expressed by Saint-Just: "Bread is the right of the people" reads for us "Bread is the divine right of the human being." We do not fight for the human rights of the people, but for the divine rights of the human. In this and several other things, we differ from the men of the revolution. We want to be neither *sans-culottes*, nor frugal citizens, nor parsimonious presidents; we will found a democracy of gods, equally glorious, equally holy, equally joyous.[57]

Heine represents pantheism as the merging of a holy, transcendent God with the material world, which results in a new religion that celebrates matter and seeks a political movement that will nurture humanity's material existence.

Although he initially couches his claim in an ironic appeal to religious mysticism and esotericism, Heine's argument is that the loss of belief in the Christian God should lead the people to realize that the properties it has traditionally attributed to a transcendent being are actually its *own* properties. As Heine writes:

> God is identical with the world. He manifests himself in plants…He manifests himself in animals …But most magnificently, he manifests himself in the human being, who feels and thinks at the same time, who knows how to differentiate himself as an individual from objective nature, and who, in his reason, already possesses the same ideas which exhibit themselves to him in the world of appearance. In the human being, divinity comes to self-consciousness, and such self-consciousness again itself reveals the divine by means of the human being. But this revelation does not occur in and through the individual human being, but rather in and through the entirety of humanity, so that each person only grasps and

[57] Heine, *On the History*, 58

> represents a part of the God-World-Universe, but all of humanity together will grasp and represent the entire God-World-Universe in idea and in reality…God is thus the true hero of world-history; it is his constant act of thinking, his constant action, his word, his deed. And one can justly say of humanity in its entirety, it is an incarnation of God![58]

The Hegelian influence here should be clear. The ideal God of Christianity and the profane, material world to which Christianity opposes it are not two, but one: the ideal and the real are actually united. Or, as Heine would put it later in his 1854 *Confessions* [*die Geständnisse*], "I learned from Hegel that it was not dear God who resided in heaven, as Grandmother thought, but I myself here on earth that was God."[59] For Heine, like Hegel, the result of German philosophy is the identity of the ideal and the real, but he rejects the more complex philosophical reading of this claim that Hegel provides. For Hegel, recall, our insight into the identity of the real and ideal is the result of a complex philosophical project that reveals the dialectical interaction between *Geist* and matter, ultimately demonstrating how reason came to embody itself in the institutions of early nineteenth century Prussia.

Heine construes the claim differently. For Heine, the identity of the ideal and the real means rather something more like the claim that there is nothing beyond what exists. He opposes it to the Christian claim of a transcendent realm of goodness opposed to a finite, sensuous, and material realm of evil. In positing the unity of ideal and real, spirit and matter, German philosophy has actually revealed that the properties conventionally attributed to a transcendent God are actually properties of humanity and its natural home. And Heine wants to show that transcendent heaven of which humans dream is actually their demand for this-worldly emancipation—the construction of heaven here on earth. For Heine, German philosophy is a kind of ideology critique, as it were:

---

[58] Heine, *On the History,* 57

[59] Heinrich Heine, *Düsseldorfer Heine Ausgabe Bd. 15*., (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1982), pp. 35, http://www.hhp.uni-trier.de/Projekte/HHP/Projekte/HHP/werke/baende/D15/index_html?widthgiven=30

it has cleared away the pathological modes of belief in the way of humanity realizing its own desires and its turning point came with Kant's critique of our capacity to know a transcendent God.

For Heine, then, the result of German philosophy is the realization that all of humanity has a claim to freedom and material enjoyment that it has up to now denied for itself on religious grounds, even as he wonders aloud with it will be possible to achieve it. Indeed, Heine qualifies the social vision he offers in *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in German* at the very moment he announces it, writing:

> Yes, I say it definitely, our descendants will be happier and more beautiful than we are. For I believe in progress. I believe that humanity is destined for happiness, and thus I hold a higher opinion of the divinity than those pious people who think that he made man only to suffer. Right here on earth, through the blessings of free political and industrial institutions, I would like to establish this state of bliss, which, in the opinion of the pious, will only occur at the Last Judgment, in Heaven. But perhaps my hope, like theirs, is foolish, and there is no resurrection of humanity, neither a political-moral nor an apostolic-catholic one.
>
> Perhaps humanity is destined to eternal misery, perhaps people are eternally damned to be crushed by despots, exploited by their accomplices, and mocked by their lackeys.[60]

Heine thus casts emancipation as the achievement of heaven on earth, even as he expresses uncertainty about whether this heaven is achievable. He thus ties the fate of Christianity to the revolution. If the revolution succeeds, then Christianity will be unnecessary and humans will have achieved freedom and resplendent material equality on earth, now the heaven that prior generations displaced into the afterlife. But if the revolution fails, a distinct possibility for Heine, Christianity will remain a necessary tonic to the misery and domination that have historically afflicted humans, its image of a suffering God offering comfort to suffering humans and its promise of heaven making life's iniquities just a bit more bearable. "The ultimate fate of Christianity," Heine writes, "thus depends on whether we still need it."[61]

---

[60] Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, 13
[61] Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany,* 14

In Heine's more radical rendering of Hegel's philosophy, then, the identity between the ideal and the real does not deliver insight into the completed project of philosophy, but rather into the notion that whatever possibilities for change might exist are immanent to their historical moment. Kant's contribution to this narrative is not a claim that we have access to an alternative future in the form of ideals of reason, but to lead to the realization that current desires for heaven are actually demands for this-worldly emancipation. Heine expresses this insight in the very structure of his work. He looks to subterranean currents with German religious and intellectual history to find an imaginary that had always seen the divinity in the material, the ideal in the real: the immanent dialectic of the German *Geist* was to culminate in the *practice* of a revolution that would restore matter to its rightful place. Kant's philosophical project was thus a turning point in the realization of this underlying revolutionary project to find that an alternative future had long been embedded in Germany's intellectual present.

Indeed, in an essay from the 1830's, around the same time he was writing *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, "Verschiedenartige Geschichtsauffassung," Heine sought to distinguish his own account of history from both cyclical and progressive accounts for this precise reason. The present was not a mere medium or instrument for the future, but had its own unique value and significance. "Life," he writes, "is neither end [*Zweck*] nor medium [*Mittel*]; life is a right. Life wants to assert itself against an ossified death, against the past, and this assertion is the revolution."[62] For Heine, the effort to assert the rights of life and the present is the revolution. Any conception of a future or progressive goal we might have stem ultimately from "merely conventional concepts" that capture neither the reality of historical change nor the necessity of

[62] Heinrich Heine, *Dusseldörfer Heine Ausgabe Bd. 10*, (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1982), pp. 302, http://www.hhp.uni-trier.de/Projekte/HHP/Projekte/HHP/werke/werkliste/S/index_html?widthgiven=30&pageid=D10S0301

revolution. The end or ideal is not some far off point of future redemption. Rather, it is contained within the very fact of life as it asserts itself in a singular present.

Thus, while Heine's depiction of the revolution as a moment of radical negation maintains something of Hegel's absolute freedom in its promise to wash away the institutions of the old world in preparation for the new, its anticipation of an uncertain future in which either the old stubbornly endures, a new project of emancipation takes flight, or yet new terrors conspire against us, it refuses to look beyond the moment of negation to its culmination in a subsequent phase of history. As Rudolf Malter argues, picking up on Heine's claim about thought driving history, thought does not remain 'mere thought' for him, but must become deed, a sense that Ruge will reiterate in 1840. But whether the pure manifestation of freedom in the world will lead to utopia or "the coldest and meanest of all deaths," like "swallowing a mouthful of water" remained an open question.[63]

Heine, Marx, and The Actual Desire for Emancipation

How, then, does Heine reconcile his uncertainty about the future with his claim "the world is the word's signature?"[64] Heine's uncertainty about whether we could obviate the need for Christianity reveals something about how he imagines the connection between thought and deed. Although much of *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* is about academic philosophy, his concern is less with building what contemporary theorists might call an ideal theory and more about how the prevailing social and theoretical imaginary expresses a desire for emancipation from material inequality. The image of a heavenly realm in which hunger and want would be eradicated is, to paraphrase Heine, the lightning before the thunder; it is the thought before the deed. This idea that the dreams of Christianity express an anticipatory social demand is

[63] Rudolf Malter, "Heine und Kant," *Heine-Jahrbuch 18*, (1979), pp. 35-65
[64] Heinrich Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, 77.

no better illustrated than in the opening of Heine's 1844 poem *Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen*, as he returns to Germany from his chosen land of exile, France, and describes how:

> a little harp girl sang,/she sang with true feeling/and a bad voice, though I was still stirred/by her playing/she sang of love and its sorrows/sacrifice and recovery/from up there in that better world,/where all pain disappears/She sang of the veil of tears/of pain, that soon melts away/of a beyond, where the soul indulges/reposing in true delight/she sang the old song of abdication [*Entsagungslied*]/the lullaby of heaven,/with which to sooth/the people when it whines./I know this wisdom/I know the text/And I also know the author/I know they secretly drink wine/while publicly preaching water/A new song! A better song!/My friends, I write to you!/We will soon construct/the kingdom of heaven on earth/We will be happy here/and will no longer starve/lazy stomachs should not gobble up/what diligent hands procured.[65]

Heine reiterates this theme, as well, in *Briefe über Deutschland* [Letters about Germany], in which he (positively) reassesses *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*.[66] On the subject of religion and political emancipation, he writes:

> The annihilation of belief in heaven has not only moral, but also political importance: the masses no longer carry their Christian guilt, their earthly wretchedness, and long for bliss on earth. Communism is a natural consequence of this changed world view, and it propagates itself all over Germany. It is even such a natural appearance that the proletariat in their battle against the status quo hold up the most advanced spirits, the great school philosophers, as leader; these philosophers go from doctrine to deed, the last goal of all thought, and formulate the program.[67]

Heine's writings here concretize the more abstract and metaphysical critique that he and the other young Hegelians would level against Hegel, showing how their insistence on the connection between the words and deed of their times is about how collective social wishes connect up with ordinary practices. This is no better illustrated than in the passage from *Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen* that immediately succeeds the opening, cited above, where Heine explains that, "while the little one sang of a desire for heaven,/the Prussian Customs officer

---

[65] *Deutschland: A Winter's Tale*, 29-31. My translation. I have striven for semantic accuracy, but made no effort to preserve the meter or rhyme scheme.
[66] Eberhard Galley, "Briefe über Deutschland und die Geständnisse," *Heine-Jahrbuch 1*, No. 1 (1963), pp. 60-84
[67] Heinrich Heine, *Dusseldörfer Heine Ausgabe Bd. 15*, pp. 170. My Translation.

was searching [his] trunk," for "lace, jewels, and forbidden books."[68] At the outset of the poem, Heine shows how the little girl's desire for heaven actually stems from the ordinary practices of oppression that characterize his world, the preachers who "drink the wine, while publicly drinking water" and the customs officer digging around in Heine's trunk for forbidden books. Heine's imagery shows how the suffering from which the little girl sings of relief is not intrinsic to humanity, but produced by avarice, power, and petty cruelty.

The critical force of Heine's poetry, its increasingly sharp criticism of the discrepancy between the real condition of the people and the false promises of those who try to succor them with pleasing imagery while nonetheless oppressing them, comes to a head in his *Silesian Weavers*, written in response to a worker's revolt in the town of Peterswaldau in Upper Silesia.[69] The revolt captivated the Prussian and French media and provided debates about the welfare of workers with increased urgency. The plight of the workers, hungry from being paid literal starvation wages and wearing rags, elicited the sympathy of even the King of Prussia, who issued a cabinet order to mandate that the weaver's poverty be remedied through charity, as, he thought, would befit a Christian nation.[70] Still, for expat socialist Hegelians for whom 'all thought is the thought of its time,' the revolution seemed to hold particular significance. Was this a sign that the revolution in thought would soon go over into practice?

Heine's response showcased his sense of revolution as the radical negation of the old at the same time it foregrounded the communist themes that had entered his political imagination. "In sad eyes there sheds no tear," he opened, "they sit at the loom and grind their teeth: Germany, we

[68] *Deutschland: A Winter's Tale,* 32
[69] Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia 1600-1947*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006; Hermann Beck, "State and Society in Pre-March Prussia: The Weavers' Uprising, the Bureaucracy, and the Association for the Welfare of Workers, *Central European History 25*, No. 3 (1992), pp. 303-331
[70] *Ibid.*

weave your shroud;/and into it we weave a threefold curse/." The weavers curse "God, king, and fatherland, the motto of the Prussian militia,"[71] through the act of weaving, laying "one curse upon the God to whom we prayed in Winter's chill and hunger's despair," one upon "the rich man's king . . . who pried the last penny from our hands and had us shot like dogs" and finally one upon "the false fatherland."[72] Like in *Travel Pictures* and *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, the moment of revolution represents the negation of 'old Germany,' its last death and funeral. But Heine's imagery here is crisper, more direct, and more obviously socialist; it is through the very act of proletarian labor that the weavers produce the funeral shroud of Old Germany. Heine's weavers are sad, but they are not crying, intent rather on ensuring that the God, king, and country that promised to relieve them of suffering while "shooting them like dogs" will be laid to rest, a curse upon wherever it is they will finally lay buried.

The Silesian Weavers was first published in the July 10, 1844 issue of *Vorwärts!* under the title *die Armen Weber* [the Poor Weavers] and unwittingly took a preemptive stance on a debate about theory, practice, and the political currents in Germany that would soon break out in those same pages. Heine's poem is clear in its sense that the weaver's revolt was a sign of things to come, but little more than two weeks later, Ruge would try and dampen such expectations, responding to an article in the Parisian republican outfit *Le Réforme* that saw it as a harbinger of the coming German revolt. Ruge's article, "The King of Prussia and Social Reform: by a Prussian," argued that the weaver's revolt was a "social revolution without a political soul."[73] Marx responded to Ruge with an amusingly distemperate, line-by-line takedown that he titled "Critical Marginal Notes to the King of Prussia and Social Reform: by a Prussian." (Ruge's article took up two

[71] Sammons, 260
[72] Heinrich Heine trans. Scott Horton, *Die schlesischen Weber* in *Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen* (1844) in *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. 4, p. 455. Accessed: https://harpers.org/blog/2007/12/heines-silesian-weavers/
[73] Arnold Ruge, "Der König von Preußen und die Sozialreform: Von einem Preußen." *Vorwärts*, 27 July 1844.

columns on the last page of the July 27, 1844 edition of *Vorwärts!* Marx's response took up the near entirety of the August 7th edition and about 2/3rds of the August 10th edition. Editions of *Vorwärts!* consisted of five leaves each, often divided into about 3 columns, although the layout tended to shift from issue to issue.)

To Ruge's comment that the social revolution lacks a political soul, Marx replied with a reiteration of one of the main themes of his "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right:"

> It has to be admitted that Germany is just as much *classically* destined for a *social* revolution as it is incapable of a *political* one…The disparity between the philosophical and the political development is not an *anomaly*. It is an inevitable disparity. A philosophical people can find its corresponding practice only in socialism, hence it is only in the *proletariat* that it can find the dynamic element of its emancipation. At the present moment, however, I have neither the time nor the desire to explain to the 'Prussian' the relationship of 'German society' to social revolution…He will find the first rudiments for an understanding of this phenomenon in my "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right."[74]

For Marx, Ruge had made the exact mistake that Marx warned against in the "Introduction." Although he agreed with Ruge that Germany was 'unpolitical' because it had not yet had its political revolution and so was not yet ripe for it, he was emphatic that this did not entail that Germany was not ripe for revolution *tout court*. Ruge thought that the weaver's revolt could not be a harbinger of things to come because it was 'a social revolution without a political soul.' Marx's reply was to say, in essence, that a social revolution doesn't need a political soul because its aim is not political emancipation. If the revolution comes to Germany, its aim will be human emancipation.

Like Heine, Marx also takes up the analogy between the French revolution in practice and the German revolution in thought in his "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of

[74] Marx & Engels, "Critical Marginal Notes on the Article 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian" in *Karl Marx-Frederick Engels Collected Works vol. 3*, (UK: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), pp. 202

Right" and, like Heine, he understands the revolution in thought to anticipate the revolution in practice. He also echoes Heine in arguing that the German revolution in practice will address the *material* in a way that the French revolution did not and he argues that the German revolution will be even more epochal than the French revolution. And where Heine writes that, "the Gallic rooster has now crowed for the second time, and in Germany, too, day is coming," Marx writes that, "the day of German resurrection will be proclaimed by the crowing of the Gallic rooster."[75] And, again like Heine, Marx argues that the critique of religion was a necessary step on the way toward the German revolution, although Marx's views are closer to the Heine of 1844 than the Heine of *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*.

Indeed, the convergence between Heine's work in the mid-1840's and Marx's may be due to the fact that this was the period when they became close friends, if only briefly. The two were in Paris at the same time for a duration of around ten months and their relationship was by all accounts extremely warm, which was somewhat rare for both of them, given their cantankerous and difficult personalities. There is an unverified story that Heine saved Marx's daughter Jenny when she was convulsing and there exists a verified letter in which Marx expresses his desire to pack Heine in his suitcase when it came time to leave Paris.[76] The resonances between their two bodies of work during this period are also striking, although it is hard to determine the degree and directions of influence, as they were both working through a body of ideas common in left-Hegelian and Parisian expat circles.[77]

---

[75] Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of the Philosophy of Right: Introduction," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 65; Heine, Introduction to "Kahldorf on the Nobility in Letters to Count M. von Moltke" in *On the History o Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, pp. 130

[76] Sammons, 262

[77] Nigel Reeves argues for Heine's extensive influence on the young Marx's writings, though he draws much of his evidence from a comparison of similarities in their texts. György Lukàcs' "Heinrich Heine as National Poet" is the classic statement on their intellectual similarities and not inaccurately paints Heine as a kind of missing link between Hegel and Marx, despite the protestations of subsequent generations of cold warrior Heine scholars. See Nigel Reeves, "Heine and the Young Marx," *Oxford German Studies*; Reeves, *Heinrich Heine: Poetry and Politics*.

And where Heine's analysis of the harbingers of revolution was, save the *Silesian Weavers*, fixated entirely on the *ideas* that would lead to the revolution, Marx was far more attuned to seeking out the *practices* that could germinate into revolution. For Marx, the function of the critique of religion was to "unmask human self-alienation," or the way that the people, like Heine's little harp girl, have displaced their desire for a new reality into the realm of ideas and illusions, in order to reunite the people with their actual desire for emancipation.[78] This critique had, for Marx, "essentially been completed."[79] The next task for the critic, for the Marx of the "Introduction," is to unmask how law and politics do a similar work of alienation or estrangement, in this instance the way that Germans have merely "thought what other nations have done."[80]

But the political deficiency of Germany, its utter backwardness, meant for Marx, that among nations, it was actually the *readiest* for revolution and was poised to be on the vanguard of human emancipation. Marx writes that Germany has "experienced the *pains* of [development] without sharing in its pleasures and partial satisfactions."[81] Germany combines all of the deficiencies of capitalism with the "barbarous deficiencies of the *ancien régime*." For Marx, this means two things, as becomes especially clear in his reply to Ruge. The first is that, although Germany is behind England and France in the development of its political institutions, it is apace with their inability to solve the social question, and German workers experience the same oppression that French and English workers do. The second is that, given that France and England's political institutions have not been sufficient to solve the social question, the Germans should not content themselves with merely political emancipation, which "leaves the pillars of the building standing," but should seek their *human* emancipation.

[78] Marx, "Introduction," 54.
[79] Marx, "Introduction," 53. Translation modified.
[80] Marx, "Introduction," 59
[81] Marx, "Introduction," 61

Like in Heine's *Silesian Weavers*, Marx imagines that the workers' labor has a revolutionary potential, but unlike Heine, Marx's imagination extends beyond the moment of negation and into an emancipatory future, nonetheless grounded in the "first order practice" of laboring itself.[82] In other words, as readers of Marx well know, the nature of the worker's oppression is, for him, grounded in the way that their laboring activity is turned against them. The system of capitalism and its support in the bourgeois state enchains them to a condition in which their labor produces wealth for others and only poverty and oppression for them; they are, as Marx writes in the "Introduction," the class that must say "I am nothing and I should be everything."[83] Marx imagines a future in which human emancipation means the reconciliation of workers' alienation to their laboring practices.

Still, Heine's *Silesian Weavers* also appears to track the very progression of critique that Marx describes in the "Introduction." Although Heine wrote the *Weavers* after Marx wrote the "Introduction" and we have no way of knowing whether Heine read it, the progression of the weaver's curse is to target first God (theology), then the king (law), and then finally the fatherland (politics). And each of the weaver's curses is accompanied by the worker's revelation that the claims of theology, law, and politics to protect them were belied by their actual conditions. They weave a curse to the god that they prayed to "in vain," one to the "rich man's king/Who did naught to soften" their "misery," and one upon the "false fatherland…where every flower buckles before its day."[84] Again, Heine's image is one where the workers realize the emancipatory power of their labor at the same time they realize the false claims of those who exploit them.

[82] I have taken the language of "first order practices" from Linda Zerilli, "Feminist Critique and the Realistic Spirit," *Philosophy & Rhetoric 50*, No.4 (2017), pp. 589-611
[83] "Introduction," 63
[84] Heine, "The Silesian Weavers"

Indeed, part of the work that alienation does against the laborers is to estrange them from their own knowledge, from what they already know in their own practices, defusing their revolutionary consciousness when it is most poised to ignite. Against Ruge, Marx in fact argues that the workers' actions in the revolt reveals their awareness of this fact (and the superiority of their political consciousness to that of the French and English). He writes: "the action itself bears the stamp of this *superior* character. Not only machines, these rivals of the workers, are destroyed, but also *ledgers*, the titles to property. And while all other movements were aimed primarily only against the *owner of the industrial enterprise*, the visible enemy, this movement is at the same time direct against the banker, the hidden enemy."[85] The revolution indicates to Marx that the workers' are awakening to what they have always known. As Marx renders it in the "Introduction," "just as philosophy finds its *material* weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *intellectual* weapons in philosophy."[86]

One way to read Marx here, I suggest, is that the task of the critic and, for Heine, perhaps, the poet, is to reveal how prevailing ideologies have estranged the masses from their own collective agency. In this regard, the function of his conception of emancipation is not to overwhelm democratic politics, but to activate it. Their dreams of a heaven that promises them relief from suffering is just their estranged demand for relief from their current suffering. For Marx, the task of the critic is to reveal to them how their practices, in both their productive iteration as labor and their destructive iteration as the violent rebellion against all of the structures that estrange them from their agency, actually embed a capacity for agency that could lead them to their emancipation. Marx, I suggest, points the way towards a realism that finds its substance not in the rejection of

[85] "Critical Marginal Notes," 201
[86] "Introduction," 65

lofty or unfeasible ideals, but in the attempt to connect our ideals to practices in which we're already enmeshed that could realize them.

Indeed, Marx's own vision of emancipation has an unavoidably utopian element to it. He writes in his reply to Ruge, for example, that "the community from which the worker is isolated by *his own labour* is *life* itself, physical and mental life, human morality, human activity, human enjoyment, *human* nature. *Human nature is the true community of men*."[87] Likewise in the "Introduction," Marx writes that the redemption that the proletariat will seeks is the "total redemption of humanity."[88] Marx's vision of a revolution that will reconcile a universal class to its own agency as a means of reconciling itself to its morality, activity, enjoyment, and nature takes on an unavoidably utopian dimension. It is hard not to see something unfeasible and remote in Marx's vision of a society in which the problem of human alienation has been solved *tout court*.

Conclusion

Again, though, Marx's insistence on imaging how remote ideals of emancipation connect up with "first order practices," to again borrow a phrase from Linda Zerilli, does something to bring them down to earth. For Marx as for Heine in his more radical moments, the imagination of a better future, terrestrial or divine, has a critical force; it is the negation in thought of the material practices and institutions that we regard as oppressive or otherwise ripe for change. The task of the theorist or the radical poet, for Marx and Heine, is to make sure that the people do not estrange themselves from their desire for emancipation and believe that it will be achieved through something other than their own collective agency. For the Young Hegelians, Hegel's insight was in showing that the French Revolution expressed a moment in which people realized their own

[87] "Critical Marginal Notes," 205
[88] "Introduction," 64

freedom. Their critique of this insight targeted Hegel's claim that we could be satisfied with the sublation of that freedom into an ideal realm.

The substance of their critique, then, is not to argue against the ideal as such, but to argue that the demand for social transformation contained within the ideal must be connected up with everyday practices. The task of imaging alternative futures, even if it succumbs to a kind of utopian wishful thinking, can never fully transcend its historical and practical context, but rather expresses the desire to transform—to 'negate' in Hegelian parlance—those features of our world from which our utopia promises to relieve us. In other words, what Heine and Marx teach contemporary theorists, then, is that, our ideals, no matter how remote they might seem, cannot transcend their own historical context, and that one task of the critic is to determine what they seek to express about our time, what desires they contain, and how those desires connect up with the ordinary practices that might lead us toward an emancipatory future.

Chapter 3: "Das Ziel ist Nichts, die Bewegung ist Alles:" Neo-Kantian Socialism and Its Ideals

It is perhaps a mark of the naive well-intentions that defined so much of Eduard Bernstein's challenge to Orthodox Marxism that, when he aired his initial critiques, he was surprised that they were not greeted with charity, but condemned as apostasy. Georgi Plekhanov, for example, reacted to Bernstein's critique by proclaiming his death: "Herr Bernstein has ceased to exist for the school of Marx, to which he once belonged. He no longer provides any grounds for irritation: after all one cannot feel irritation against the dead."[1] Taking a more despondent tone, Karl Kautsky asked: "what could be more depressing than such gross misinterpretations [of Marx] from a man who himself defended historical materialism for more than two decades?"[2] Max Adler argued for the need to ensure that the heretic's views did not reopen old wounds and infect the party program: "We use the fact that the program still carries within itself the traces of a bygone era of conflict [*vorausgegangenen Konfliktzeit*], when it was actually in need of reform, in order to secure it against all '*Bernsteinerei*' from now on…Nowhere does there exist a need to change our principles, given to us by Marx and Engels and faithfully expressed in the *Hainfelder Programm*."[3] Bernstein, of course, had nowhere questioned the ultimate goal of socialism, just the party's means of achieving it, and some of the premises from which those means were derived.[4] Why, then, the scandal? What had Bernstein done?

---

[1] Georgy Plekhanov trans Julius Katzer,, "Cant Against Kant or Herr Bernstein's Will and Testament," in *Selected Philosophical Works II*, (Moscow, 1976), pp. 352-378. Accessed: https://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1901/xx/cant.htm

[2] Kautsky cited in Manfred Steger, *The Quest for Evolutionary Socialism*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 96

[3] Max Adler, "Zur Revision des Parteiprogramms," *Arbeiter Zeitung 22,* No. 290 (October, 1901)

[4] Of course, Luxemburg and others questioned Bernstein's use of the slogan from which this chapter takes its title, "the goal is nothing, the movement is everything," arguing that it showed Bernstein forsaking the ultimate goal of socialism in favor of a comparatively flimsy liberalism. Bernstein would later explain that his intention was not to

Bernstein's efforts to critique Orthodox Marxism revolved around his rejection of the materialist conception of history and the forms of agency and social transformation it led the party to endorse. His question was whether Marxism could envision forms of political agency that did not depend on the inevitability of capitalist crisis; he asked whether, ultimately, Marxism could provide space for a kind of movement politics that would instead pursue a contingent socialist ideal it projected into the future. This required him to reject Marxist materialism and its claims of inevitable emancipation from capitalism and its crises. For Bernstein, socialism could not count on the ironclad predictions of the materialist concept of history, but must rather rely on the force of a set of ethical ideals that would guide its daily practices. But the problem here, as Rosa Luxemburg pointed out, was that this placed Marxism on unsure footing. Socialism, Luxemburg argued, could either be an objective theory that saw emancipation as "the result of the objective contradictions of the capitalist order" or, she wrote, it would be "anything you please," a set of merely subjective ethical maxims the efficacy of which relied on their own imagined persuasiveness.[5] At stake in Bernstein's provocations to an extent that he often seems not to have fully appreciated, then, were not just some tactical questions and a few finer points of high Marxist theory, but the very means through which socialists imagined their future and the certainty of the path that would take them there.

Depending on one's perspective, Bernstein had either attempted to awaken his fellow socialists to the fact that the achievement of socialism rests ultimately on the efforts of collective human agents to achieve their ideals, or he had attempted to divert attention from the fault lines within capitalism that would precipitate into crisis and demand a revolutionary response. Between

---

suggest that socialism lose sight of its goal, but that its goal could only be realized when it informed the movement in its contemporary, daily practices.

[5] H. Tudor and J. M. Tudor eds., *Marxism and Social Democracy: The Revisionist Debate 1896-1898*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 252

these two perspectives laid a chasm: Bernstein had not merely raised a question of tactics, but upset socialism's settled views on questions about science, truth, metaphysics, and knowledge—indeed, about the question of our access to the real itself and what it can tell us about our future. Bernstein's articles had incited such fury in his colleagues because, under the guise of asking about the party's tactics and the validity of some of Marx's positions, he had actually questioned, as he himself put it, "the teaching that was declared winner in the fight over [the system and theory of socialism]," Marxism.[6] To the Marxists of the second international, the victory of Marxism over other socialisms was the victory of scientific socialism over utopianism. Socialism ought to be Marxism because Marxism provided an account of the real as such. All other socialisms expressed nothing other than an arbitrary social wish.

Indeed, although it has become common for theorists to remember Marxism as one of the twentieth century's failed utopianisms, it staked itself out as a realism in the deepest sense. As Manfred Steger notes, the "Kautskyian-Bebelian-Luxemburgian understanding of the materialistic conception of history" based itself on Engels' "reductionist" account of the world.[7] For Engels, all that exists consists of matter and all material entities, humans included, obey the same set of physical laws. As Steger writes, "the eternal flux of matter would always, with 'iron necessity,' create and destroy its highest creation—the 'thinking mind.'"[8] Since everything is matter, history itself is nothing but the interplay of material forces. To the extent that Marx and Engels had discovered the laws of their operation, they had unearthed a set of laws as tangible and as determinative as those of Newton.

---

[6] Eduard Bernstein, "Wie ist Wissenschaftlicher Sozialismus Möglich?" in *Ein Revisionistisches Sozialismusbild: Drei Vortäge von Eduard Bernstein*, (Hannover, DE: Dietz Verlag, 1966), pp. 9
[7] Steger, "Historical Materialism and Ethics," 653
[8] Ibid.

This chapter reconstructs the broad history of the *Revisionismusstreit*, beginning with its origins in Marx and Engels' critiques of utopian socialism and following through the attempts of a group of largely forgotten Neo-Kantians to respond to it with a synthesis of Kant and Marx. Throughout the duration of the *Revisionismusstreit*, Neo-Kantian socialists attempted to open up the question of ideals as one distinct from the question of utopianism and to theorize the kinds of agency and social theory such a question entailed. As recent political theorists have sought to narrate the history of twentieth century emancipatory movements as a history of failed utopianisms, a history which they take to define our own problem-space this chapter seeks to recover the polyvalent political significance of these concepts as they were forged at the turn of the prior century.[9] Indeed, where some theorists have turned to this narrative to question anew how we might conceive of alternative futures and others have taken these failed utopias as reason to consider the limits that politics places on the possibility of emancipation, this chapter reaches back to the dawn of the twentieth century to find a similar debate, one where theorists were considering a similar set of questions, but provided a different set of answers, lost or distorted by the predominant currents of twentieth-century Marxism.

I focus especially on efforts to construct socialism as an ideal, often drawn from a self-consciously Kantian lineage, in order to excavate modes of appealing to ideals unfamiliar to contemporary political thought. Part of my intuition here is that what truly renders certain versions of Marxism unworkable to theorists today is not their utopianism, but the teleology that bedevils their underlying philosophy of history. This critique might appear overworked, but it is worth reemphasizing in the contemporary moment precisely as theorists find themselves struggling with Marxism because of a utopianism that never truly afflicted it. For Bernstein and Neo-Kantian "new

[9] Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*; Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age*; Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*

critics" like Karl Vorländer and Franz Staudinger, ideals offered a way out of the teleology and determinism that afflicted the Orthodox Marxism of the Second International, *as well as* the blueprint thinking associated with nineteenth century utopian socialism. As I will argue, Staudinger and Vorländer were especially instructive in their efforts to think ethical idealism together with Marxist materialism, offering ideas that can open up space for contemporary theorists. For these two Neo-Kantians, ideals were meant to guide action in the direction of socialist emancipation in distinct, contingent contexts of agency.

Socialism: Utopian and Scientific

For the Marxists of the second international, Bernstein's attempt to conceive of socialism as an ideal appeared to be a regress back to the socialism of its earlier utopian phase. In the *Communist Manifesto* and later works like Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Marx and especially Engels constructed a narrative in which their system of communism presented an advance over earlier 'utopian' forms of socialism, which earlier thinkers had tried to form before capitalism had advanced to a phase where the conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat had been set.[10] Thus, although honorable in their spirit and aims, these utopian forms of socialism had not yet sufficiently recognized the centrality of class antagonism to the project of emancipation. They imagined that the route to emancipation was through the subordination of wayward and unthought social mores to reason, which would emancipate the whole of society, from pauper to prince. Utopian socialism, then, set forth a vision of a society based in reason that it was the socialist's task to achieve.

[10] The original German title of Engels' text was *Die Entwicklung des Sozialismus von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft*, or *The Development of Socialism from Utopianism to Science*.

What might be surprising about Engels' position here, however, is that his concern with the dangers of utopianism in politics tracks the concerns of many contemporary theorists who concerned about the utopian dimension of Engels' own thought. For Engels, the problem with utopian political theorizing is that it imagines that reason is the mechanism through which humankind can achieve emancipation. A range of contemporary theorists share Engels' suspicion about utopianism as an approach to politics, but suggest that the problem is not the mechanism through which emancipation is to be achieved, but the fantasy of emancipation itself.[11] In this regard, for these theorists, what makes a theory utopian in an objectionable sense is not simply that it expresses the belief that *reason* is the mechanism through which societies can achieve emancipation, but that such a theory expresses a belief that emancipation is something for which we could plausibly strive.[12] On this latter, contemporary concern about emancipation, a theory then becomes utopian when it posits a collective, emancipatory social goal, whether or not that goal is to be achieved through rational design or political struggle.

Although concerns about the wishful dreams of emancipatory political theories are quite old in the history of political thought, theorists since the Cold War have suggested that an acute sense of the failure of past utopian projects defines our own political moment. Susan Buck-Morss captures this framing eloquently:

---

[11] Recent theorists have contested the rejection utopianism in the literature on realism, but most realists, even those searching for space for utopianism within politics, tend to agree that the "blueprint" drawing form of utopianism that Engels describes, which resembles ideal theory more than the kinds of literary utopias realists prefer, is the kind that ought to be rejected. For a subtle treatment of this issue, see Matthias Thaler, "Hope Abjuring Hope: On the Place of Utopia in Realist Political Theory," *Political Theory 46*, No. 5 (2018), pp. 671-697. See also Raymond Geuss, "Realismus, Wunschdenken, Utopie," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie 58*, No. 3 (2010), 419-29; Owen, "Die verlorene und die wiedergefundene Wirklichkeit: Ethik, Politik, und Imagination bei Raymond Geuss"; Rossi, "Being Realistic and Demanding the Impossible"; and McKean, "What Makes A Utopia Inconvenient? On the Advantages and Disadvantages of a Realist Orientation in Politics."

[12] See Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty;" Popper, "Utopia and Violence;" Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution*: *Philosophic Sources of Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*.

> The construction of mass utopia was the dream of the twentieth century. It was the driving ideological force of industrial modernization in both its capitalist and socialist forms. The dream was itself an immense material power that transformed the natural world, investing industrially produced objects and built environments with collective, political desire. Whereas the night dreams of individuals express desires thwarted by the social order and pushed backward into regressive childhood forms, this collective dream dared to imagine a social world in alliance with personal happiness, and promised to adults that its realization would be in harmony with the overcoming of scarcity for all.
>
> As the century closes, the dream is being left behind.[13]

This widespread sense that the prior century's utopian possibilities have dried up has left many with the sense that our own capacity to imagine alternative futures has been exhausted along with them. David Scott has rendered the question precisely, writing, "If our sense is (difficult as it may be to establish the verifiable empirical certainty) that our present constitutes something of a new conjuncture, and that consequently the old story about the past's relation to the present and to possible futures is no longer adequate, no longer provides or sustains critical leverage, how do we go about altering that story?"[14] Scott's question is capacious in inviting us to reimagine the entirety of the narrative with which we saddle ourselves in our own moment as it relates itself to its past and its possible futures, but for many theorists the key aspect of Scott's question is how we might imagine the future anew.

Now, in this section, I return to the Engelian critique of utopian socialism to expose a set of categories and alternatives that contemporary debates do not capture, and so exposes some of the limitations of current approaches to this issue. The Marxist idea of scientific socialism defies the critique of contemporary realists because it manages to be both realist and utopian at the same time. Is also reproduces without contradiction one version of the realist critique of ideal theory in its rejection of utopian socialism, while nonetheless remaining in many ways objectionable to

[13] Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, pp ix.
[14] David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 42

contemporary realists. Where contemporary realism looks to the fact of the matter about what currently *is* to set limits on how we imagine things *could* be, scientific socialism regarded its account of the real as the chief guarantee that its vision of a utopian future *would* be achieved. Both realism and scientific socialism reject idealism because they do not think that we can begin from a rational account of the world and then simply transform it so that it matches that account. Neither considers the alternative idealism found in the Neo-Kantians who synthesize Kant and Marx in response to *Revisionismusstreit*. This is an idealism in which the limits of our capacity to access the real is precisely what opens up the need for ideals in the first place; since the future is open-ended and our account of the real is always subject to revision, we need ideals to orient us against an uncertain future and imperfect knowledge of the world.

In *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels explains that the problem with utopian socialism is that it begins its account of how to transform society from a universal, transhistorical account of reason. Engels writes:

> The Utopian's mode of thought has for a long time governed the socialist ideas of the nineteenth century, and still governs some of them…To all these, socialism is the expression of absolute truth, reason and justice, and has only to be discovered to conquer all the world by virtue of its own power. And as absolute truth is independent of time, space, and of the historical development of man, it is a mere accident where it is discovered.[15]

For Engels, a theory becomes utopian when its account of social transformation and emancipation is disconnected from an account of the material world in its particular place and time. Absent a foundation in an account of the real, socialism risks becoming arbitrary and produces multiple conflicting visions of the good without any capacity to adjudicate among them. As Engels writes:

> With all this, absolute truth, reason, and justice are different with the founder of each different school. And as each one's special kind of absolute truth reason and justice is again conditioned by his subjective understanding, his conditions of

[15] Marx-Engels Reader, pp. 693

> existence, there is no other ending possible in this conflict of absolute truths than that they shall mutually exclude one another.[16]

For Engels, when socialism is untethered to a scientific account of the real that can provide the means to adjudicate among competing value claims, it ends up allowing multiple, conflicting conceptions of the good life, without being able to adjudicate among them.

Socialism: Utopian and Scientific is one of the most fundamental and classic statements of the materialist conception of history in Marxism and became the key formulation of dialectical materialism for the Second International. As a result, the dichotomy between scientific and utopian socialism was an important conceptual distinction to the Marxists of that period. A distillation of Engels' *Anti-Dühring*, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* was first published in a French edition in 1880, followed by a German edition in 1882, and was eventually translated into a total of 10 languages.[17] Only *The Communist Manifesto* rivaled it in influence, a fact that led Engels to remark in the introduction to the English edition that he was "not aware that any other Socialist work, not even our 'Communist Manifesto' of 1848 or Marx's 'Capital' has been so often translated.'"[18] As a result of Engels' polemic, the dichotomy between Marxism and utopianism would have been intuitive for many early Marxists.

Still, even as "utopian" would become an epithet that later socialists would hurl at one another in pitched ideological battles, Engels went out of his way to historicize utopian socialism as the too-early demand for emancipation arising before capitalism had solidified into its mature form.[19] Where Dühring dismissed the utopian socialists with insults and petty condemnations,

---

[16] *Ibid.*
[17] David Riazanov, *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, (New York, NY: International Publishers Co, Inc., 1927), pp. 210-11; Engels, "Introduction to the English Edition," *Socialism Utopian and Scientific,* (Chicago, IL: Charles H.K err & Co, 1908), pp. 11
[18] Engels, *op. cit.*
[19] On this point, see also Shlomo Avineri, "Marx's Vision of Future Society and the Problem of Utopianism" *Dissent 20*, No 3 (1973), pp. 323-331; David Leopold, "The Structure of Marx and Engels' Account of Utopian Socialism," *History of Political Thought 26*, No. 3 (2005), pp. 443-466

Engels showed how the inadequacy of the utopians stemmed from the early capitalist context in which they were working.[20] Against Dühring's *ad hominem* blustery, Engels staged the scientific superiority of Marxism, showing how it could account even for the deficiencies of competing frameworks.[21] For Engels, utopians did not recognize the centrality of the capitalist mode of production and class antagonisms to the struggle for emancipation because industry had not yet reached a point where the antagonisms could be apparent to them. As Engels writes, "at this time, however, the capitalist mode of production, and with it the antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, was still very incompletely developed . . . to the crude conditions of capitalistic productions and the crude class conditions correspond crude theories."[22]

Thus, while the utopian socialists began from the vague sense that something was awry in society that begged for its rational redesign, Engels suggested that Marxism develops from a concrete account of material contradictions that demand a resolution. The utopian denounced the existing order as irrational or unjust and appealed to people's minds with rational arguments and experimental communities; the scientific socialist was able to identify how the necessity of emancipation arose from the concrete historical condition of class struggle arising out the capitalist mode of production. Marx and Engels could set forth sophisticated analyses of transformations in the organization of labor and social reproduction, the credit system, and the essential contradiction between the system of production and the system of exchange. Scientific socialism replaced the rationalist presumptions of utopianism with an account of the actual material conditions of the proletariat and bourgeoise, which governed the possibility of concrete change.

---

[20] See Friedrich Engels, "Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works Volume 25*, (Electronic Book: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), pp. 31-2, 252-284. I refer to this text as *Anti-Dühring* from hereon, as is convention.
[21] Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 246
[22] Engels, "*Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 687

For Engels, the ideal of emancipation was meaningless unless wedded to an understanding of the laws immanent to the capitalist mode of production, which would overcome efforts at change and emancipation until their underlying contradictions finally led to crisis. As Engels writes:

> Since the historical appearance of the capitalist mode of production, the appropriation by society of all the means of production has often been dreamed of, more or less vaguely, by individuals, as well as by sects, as the ideal of the future. But it could become possible, could become a historical necessity, only when the actual conditions for its realization were there. Like every other social advance, it becomes practicable, not by men understanding that the existence of classes is in contradiction to justice, equality, etc., not by the mere willingness to abolish these classes, but by virtue of certain new economic conditions.[23]

Emancipation, while an attractive ideal in other times and places, only becomes a concrete possibility under specific historical circumstances, specific economic conditions. For Engels, political transformation is an arbitrary social wish unless the mode of production has begun to collapse and open up the possibility of change. Indeed, Engels suggests, in such moments, historical possibility becomes historical necessity. The crisis that will lead to system-wide transformation must eventually occur.

But why does Engels tether the possibility of emancipation to concrete economic circumstances? Why is agency foreclosed in all other scenarios? For Engels, the mode of production, as the process through which humans produce "the means to support human life," "is the basis of all social structure."[24] Since the mode of production organizes the creation of means necessary to support human life, it is an irreducible and inescapable social fact in which all individuals must participate, lest they starve. In the capitalist mode of production, Engels suggests, the means of production have become socialized: they are no longer the products of a single

[23] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels ed. Robert Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co, 1978), pp. 700
[24] *Marx-Engels Reader*, 700

individual, but now require the coordinated efforts of individuals aggregated into social units.[25] In each, the individual becomes part of a larger social whole, the worker in the factory and the capitalist in the system of exchange. Society becomes governed by products of its own making.

The larger social totality thus conditions the individual's agency. But Engels points out that, where production in the factory is organized, production in the society as a whole is anarchic. As a result of its uncoordinated nature, the capitalist is under constant pressure to adapt and find ways to increase profit, often in ways that immiserate workers and render them obsolete. Thus, an "antagonism" arises between the coordination of the factory and the anarchy of the market, where social production is tied to a system of (un)coordination that produces poverty. The means through which necessaries of human life are produced become organized in haphazard and arbitrary social totalities that no individual can escape and tears the social whole into crisis. "Active social forces," Engels writers, "work exactly like natural forces: blindly, forcibly, destructively, so long as we do not understand, and reckon with, them."[26] But as these forces lead society into a crisis wherein the proletariat grows and faces greater poverty, the bourgeoisie will find that it has obviated itself and the proletariat will seize control. For Engels, this will complete a dialectic in which human freedom, no longer being subordinated to an anarchic society of uncoordinated capitalism, will finally be able to organize and govern itself, and so become authentically self-determining.

Engels' dialectics of freedom, much like Hegel's, presuppose access to a view from which the contradictions and antagonisms of the dialectic have been worked out and the process has reached its completion; but unlike Hegel, who thought that his own time was just such a moment, Engels writes from the perspective of a future he merely predicts. And because he adopted the backward-looking perspective of the dialectician who had insight into the direction and result of

[25] *Marx-Engels Reader*, 701-709
[26] Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 712

the historical process, his predictions were made with the confidence of a man positing iron laws of necessity. The class antagonisms that Marx and Engels had discovered must ultimately result in the emancipated society from whose perspective Engels wrote. This was not a moral question, but a question of fundamental contradictions playing themselves out. Thus Engels could predict:

> Man's own social organization, hitherto confronting him as a necessity imposed by Nature and history, now becomes the result of his own free action. The extraneous objective forces that have, hitherto, governed history, pass under the control of man himself. Only from that time will man himself, more and more consciously, make his own history — only from that time will the social causes set in movement by him have, in the main and in a constantly growing measure, the results intended by him. It is the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.[27]

Engels thus made Marxism both anti-utopian and realist, though not in a way that shut down emancipatory ideals, but rather in a way that saw them as contingent upon the dynamics of broader social contexts. Indeed, to explain what he took to be the false rationalist presumptions of utopian socialism, Engels showed how they corresponded to a social context in which the opportunity for transformation had not yet appeared. The utopians were prescient in noticing that society seemed unjust or irrational and endeavoring to fix it, but the conditions under which the sources of these problems could be rendered apparent had not yet been reached. Given that society was an affront to the rational intuitions of utopian socialists, it must be reason that could remedy it, as no other source or solution was apparent. But Engels suggests that these primitive theories drew the utopians toward futile solutions that could only band-aid the problem. The real solution could only come from the social system itself, which would eventually collapse because of its ultimate instability in material contradictions.

Engels wedded the Marxist conception of social and political agency to a theory of crisis and immanent collapse. Since the mode of production was the basis of a social order that

[27] Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 715

determined the possibility of individual and collective agency, the only possibility for social change had to be built into the dynamics of the system itself. What's more, Engels argued that Marx had identified the dynamics of the system as a set of structural antagonisms between the system of production and the system of exchange. Not only would these antagonisms come to a head and lead to crisis, revolution, and then emancipation, they would do so soon. History had reached a point where the antagonisms were obvious enough for the Marxists to identify and describe them and the system was everywhere around them revealing its instability. Soon, it would collapse. But the crisis never came; capitalism adapted. This was Bernstein's observation and it would lead him to question the theory of crisis, revolution, and the materialist conception of history.

Crisis and Ideal

As Gareth Stedman Jones notes, the Engelian account of imminent crisis and collapse was convenient for the SPD when Bismarck's anti-socialist laws kept the party from holding any actual political power.[28] At that point, any theory predicated on crisis and eventual collapse without the intervention of the party would likely have appeared attractive indeed. But after the Reichstag refused to renew the socialist laws in 1890, the party not only regained its legal sanction, but achieved nearly twenty percent of the vote in the next Reichstag election.[29] Moreover, it seemed as though conditions for workers were improving materially, as well, and the thesis of their continuing impoverishment did not square with empirical reality. The party was gaining power and conditions were improving for workers. Further, as Peter Gay points out, "the party gave the appearance of being strictly devoted to revolutionary ends (it even rewrote its program in 1891 to

[28] Gareth Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx; Greatness and Illusion*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2016) pp. 562
[29] Gay, 62

underline its intransigence) while, in reality, it was becoming parliamentary and reformist."[30] A party premised on its antagonism to the existing state was now empowered within it. What, then, was the role of their parliamentary activities when they knew the state was going to collapse in any case? This was a tactical question that disturbed Bernstein. If the party held to the theory of imminent collapse even as it had the opportunity to slowly seize real political power, might it not forego an opportunity to gain the socialist state by other means?[31]

Here was a question that was both tactical *and theoretical*, reopening questions of normativity, agency, and the ideal, which the party had sidelined with Orthodox Marxism. For the Marxists of the Second International, emancipation was not a problem to be either discovered or solved through normative inquiry; it was a historical necessity.[32] While emancipation certainly had normative import, the question of ethics was immaterial to what was an inevitable process playing itself out. The claim that emancipation might occur through means other than capitalism's collapse was a challenge to the deterministic materialism of Orthodox Marxism, in which the agency of the proletariat was contingent upon the crisis of capitalism. To suggest that the party might achieve success through elections, trade unionism, and reform was to suggest that socialism was not a historical necessity, but a contingent end to be achieved through collective agency. A simple question about the role of parliamentary elections became a question about whether history was necessary or contingent, whether humans had free will, and what it would mean to pose socialism

[30] *Ibid.*
[31] Bernstein in Tudor, 74; Eduard Bernstein trans. Henry Tudor, *The Preconditions of Socialism,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 181-3; Manfred Steger, 72-74
[32] See Gay, 148. Gay rightly notes that Marxist materialism ran contrary to the idea that socialism was exclusively a moral idea, but he sometimes overemphasizes the extent to which Marx, Engels, and Second International Marxists saw the choice between morality and historical necessity as dichotomous. Many of them acceded to Bernstein at some point or another that socialism was a moral ideal, but suggested that this was a practically meaningless assertion from the perspective of tactics and social inquiry. The point is that, for the political agent, it is not a moral problem, but one that can only be solved through concrete mechanism of history.

as an ethical ideal to be achieved through politics, rather than the necessary outcome of world history.

In Bernstein's first series of articles questioning Orthodox Marxism, published in *die Neue Zeit,* the main periodical of the SPD edited by Karl Kautsky, Bernstein took aim at what he argued was a different form of utopianism plaguing socialist theory. "Modern Social Democracy," Bernstein wrote, "prides itself on having superseded the theoretical standpoint of utopian socialism, and no doubt it is quite right insofar as utopianism is a matter of drawing up models of the future state."[33] But Bernstein suggested that a different form of utopianism continued to haunt the party, one that operates through negation and places all of its faith in an impending but ineffable socialist state that will solve all problems. "Miracles are not believed," he writes, "just assumed."[34] This form of utopianism renounces any talk of the future as utopian and just assumes that once emancipation occurs, any and all problems of society will be worked out in a future socialist utopia about which little can be said. But the party had found itself with newfound political power, Bernstein argued, and could tangibly advance the causes and ideals of socialism through electoral politics, trade unionism, and other practical measures. In other words, the party had agency, but its lingering millenarianism left it lacking direction. The time had come, Bernstein suggested, to think about the ends toward which it was to use its power.

For Bernstein, the political power the SPD had acquired to advance socialist causes meant not simply that the party needed to reconceive of socialism as an ideal, but that to do so required opening up room for ideals in socialism. Marxist socialism was seen as anti-idealist and anti-utopian, owing to the materialist concept of history.[35] Bernstein had set out to clear the ground for

[33] Bernstein in Tudor and Tudor, *Marxism and Social Democracy*, 74
[34] *Marxism and Social Democracy*, 74
[35] See Manfred Steger, "Historical Materialism and Ethics: Eduard Bernstein's Revisionist Perspective," *History of European Ideas 14*, No. 4(1992), 647-663; Riazanov, 208; Steger, *The Quest for Evolutionary Socialism*, 91-93

part of this work in his first article on the *Problems of Socialism*, distinguishing the ideal from both the blueprint-drawing form of utopianism and its twin in a kind of Marxist apophasis. The ideal could thus be neither a picture of an end-state nor the negative vision of an emancipatory future in which all problems will of necessity be solved. But Bernstein also understood that to articulate socialist ideals required that he resolve them with materialism and the Marxist suspicion of ethics. Marxists were fervent that ethical ideals were immaterial to the historical laws governing sociopolitical transformation.[36] What was important to historical change was not the individual or collective normative hopes of this or that group of people, but the fundamental antagonisms that left society unsustainable until the crisis, the revolution, and its subsequent culmination in emancipation.

Although throughout the *Revisionismusstreit*, Bernstein and his interlocutors would eventually focus on complex metaphysical questions, the fundamental issue early on was whether the party would achieve emancipation through crisis and revolution or through gradual reform. Bernstein's presumption was that you could preserve the Marxist critique of capitalism and posit emancipation as a normative ideal governing the tactics of the movement, dispensing with the theory of collapse and its attendant metaphysical baggage, and still remain a Marxist.[37] Indeed, Bernstein would repeat clearly and *ad nauseum* that the final goal of the movement remained the proletariat's seizure of power and the collectivization of the means of production. But his interlocutors would have none of it. What was fundamental to Marxism, for them, was its claim to have discovered fundamental laws describing the antagonisms underlying, if not history, then at least the capitalist mode of production. To reject this was to reject Marxism.

[36] Steger, "Historical Materialism and Ethics"
[37] Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism*, ##

At stake in this part of the dispute, even more so than the underlying metaphysical puzzles, was how best to understand Marxism as a way of describing given contexts of social and political agency. Neither side thought of emancipation as a mere blueprint to be drawn up in our minds and then executed; both sides understood that agency was contingent on given material contexts. The question, however, was what the structure and scope of such contexts actually were. Key to this dispute was whether the evidence in their own historical moment suggested the direction of the economic and sociopolitical trends conditioning their political agency were towards gradual reform or eventual crisis, whether the process was evolutionary or dialectic. True, Bernstein and allies like Konrad Schmidt would debate endlessly with Orthodox Marxists like Kautsky and Plekhanov about the metaphysics of the materialist concept of history.[38] But their arguments also hinged upon competing interpretations of economic and political trends and, more centrally, what kind of agency would be adequate to overthrow capitalism. Bernstein claimed that capitalism was capable of adapting to its crises, which meant that socialists should seek to gain ever increasing amounts of political power to the point where they could simply sideline the capitalists and achieve control.[39] This conceit, and the presumptions it made about the relevant contexts of agency, came under attack from no more astute and vociferous a critic than Rosa Luxemburg.

Luxemburg argued that Bernstein's claims obviated the need for socialism in the first place: it depicted a capitalism in which conditions for workers were ever-improving and every crisis would be solved. She writes:

> Wherein lies the importance of the phenomena Bernstein cites as capitalism's means of adaptation: cartels, credit, improved communications, the elevation of the

[38] See, for example, Bernstein, "Die Notwendigkeit in Natur und Geschichte" in *Zur Gesichte und Theorie der Sozialismus*, (Berlin, DE: Akademischer Verlag, 1901); Georgi Plekhanov, "Bernstein und der Materialismus" in *die Neue Zeit 44*, (1897-98), pp. 532-55; Karl Kautsky, "Bernstein und die Materialistische Geschichtsauffassung," *Die Neue Zeit: Revue des gesitigen und ;öffentlichen Lebens 17*, Bd. 2 (1899), 7

[39] Eduard Bernstein trans. Henry Tudor, *The Preconditions of Socialism*, (Camrbidge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 79-97

> working class, etc.? Obviously in the fact that they remove or at least alleviate the internal contradictions of the capitalist economy and prevent their further development and intensification. Thus the elimination of crises means the abolition and contradiction between production and exchange on a capitalist basis. Thus the improvement in the condition of the working class, and the elevation of part of it into the middle classes, takes the edge off the contradiction between capital and labour. So if the cartels, the credit system, the unions, etc. abolish the contradictions of capitalism, if in other words they save the capitalist system from destruction, if they actually preserve it – which is, after all, why Bernstein calls them "the means of adaptation" – how can they at the same time be 'the prerequisite and to some extent the beginnings' of socialism?[40]

For Luxemburg, Bernstein's answer to capitalism just rendered its overthrow unnecessary. If capitalism can adapt to all of its underlying crises while improving conditions for its workers, why would it need to be overthrown or replaced? Luxemburg acknowledged Bernstein's claim that the socialists could still continue exposing that, even if their conditions were improving, the conditions under which workers produce surplus value for capitalists remained intrinsically *unjust*.[41] But, as Luxemburg writes, such a recognition would no longer be "the simple mental reflex of the ever-sharpening contradictions of capitalism and its imminent collapse (which is, in any case, prevented by the means of adaptation) it is rather a mere ideal whose force of persuasion depends upon its own imagined perfections."[42] Bernstein's framework undercuts the motive force of the ideal even as it renders the ideal the central motive of socialist emancipation.

For Luxemburg, then, the crisis theory need not be metaphysical to be deterministic and render ideals irrelevant to political change. In short, she suggested that there are no contexts of agency under which a politics motivated by socialist ideals could overcome capitalism. Either capitalism was internally contradictory and headed for collapse, in which case the crisis theory won out, or it was capable of adapting and improving conditions for workers, in which case it

[40] Luxemburg in Tudor and Tudor, *Marxism and Social Democracy*, 251
[41] Bernstein, *Problems of Socialism* in *Tudor and Tudor*, 237-8
[42] Luxemburg in Tudor and Tudor, *Marxism and Social Democracy*, 251

became harder to understand why capitalism would need overthrowing. Moreover, Luxemburg suggested, to say that capitalism could adapt to the crises it causes is still to suggest that capitalism is crisis-ridden.[43] Once again, Marxism is not about the collective ideal of emancipation, but about a concrete analysis of the social forces that would lead to emancipation.

Finally, even if one were to reject the thesis of inevitable collapse, Luxemburg argued that Bernstein's idealist reformism gives up on emancipation because it gave up on its antagonism to the existing order. For Luxemburg, the trouble is that if socialism is to be achieved, at some point the antagonism between the capitalist state and the socialists will have to reach a crisis point and require the overthrow of the capitalist state. Part of Luxemburg's point here draws on her claim that the existing state was irremediably capitalist: "We know that the state is not 'society' representing the 'rising working class.' It is itself the representative of capitalist society."[44] For Luxemburg, there can be no reform so long as the state is dedicated to securing and protecting the interests of the capitalist. This is a state that will have to be overthrown. But she also challenges reformism on a conceptual level:

> That is why people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform in place and in contradistinction to the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil…road to the same goal, but a different goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modifications of the old society…Our program becomes not the realisation of socialism, but the reform of capitalism; not the suppression of the wage labour system but the diminution of exploitation, that is, the suppression of the abuses of capitalism instead of suppression of capitalism itself.[45]

For Luxemburg, the choice between reform and revolution is the choice between fixing capitalism or implementing socialism. There is no other way about it. Either the socialist is committed to the

[43] Tudor and Tudor, 253-4
[44] Rosa Luxemburg, "Reform or Revolution" in *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg: Reform or Revolution and the Mass Strike,* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2008), pp. 58
[45] Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*, pp. 90

eventual overthrow of the capitalist state and the accomplishment of true democracy, or they are committed to the reform—and so perpetuation—of the existing system, in which case they cease to be socialist.

Of course, in the final summation of the Stuttgart party conference during which they debated Bernstein's views, the Austro-Marxist leader Victor Adler pointed out that, in the short term, reformism and crisis were in no necessary conflict. If capitalism is fundamentally unsustainable, reform efforts might forestall its collapse, but they could not prevent it. And if the collapse was not forthcoming, that supplied all the more reason for reformism. As Adler writes:

> Nobody in the party, in Germany or elsewhere, fails to treat 'the extension of the political and industrial rights of the workers' as the focal point of all our endeavors; and whatever we, as individuals, may think of the imminence or remoteness of the 'catastrophe,' we devote all our strength to the living standards and political power of the proletariat, as though that alone were the 'final goal.' And we toil at this feverishly and without pause, as though the 'catastrophe' were expected tomorrow.[46]

For Adler, both the question of the evolutionary transformation and ultimate overthrow were to a large extent immaterial to the immediate tactical questions facing the party. Though Adler remained committed to the theory of collapse even after the Stuttgart conference, he endorsed reformist tactics to improve conditions for the proletariat in the interim. (Of course, more activist and less millenarian crisis theorists like Luxemburg opposed all capitulation with the capitalists, only antagonism.)

Still, from Bernstein's perspective, the position of Luxemburg and Adler continued to hinge on a particular metaphysical position for its coherence: determinism.[47] Where the crisis theory crossed from sociological observation into metaphysics was in its certainty that the collapse

---

[46] Adler in Tudor and Tudor, *Marxism and Social Democracy*, 316

[47] Bernstein, "Die Notwendigkeit in Natur und Geschichte," *Zur Gesichte und Theorie der Sozialismus*, (Berlin, DE: Akademischer Verlag, 1901), pp. 332. See Also, Tracie Matysik, *Reforming the Moral Subject: Ethics and Sexuality in Central Europe, 1890-1930*, (New York, NY: Cornell University Press), pp. 185-6

would lead to socialist emancipation. That is, even if the Orthodox Marxists were right that capitalism would collapse, Bernstein was insistent that *they could not know whether the collapse would lead to emancipation.* In his own remarks sent to the Stuttgart conference (he had to mail them because he was still in England under exile), Bernstein suggested that many kinds of crisis would be quite bad for the socialists and that, "no-one can foresee whether, in the struggle for political rights, a conjuncture of circumstances will bring the working class to power."[48] None of Bernstein's Orthodox opponents were willing to entertain the idea that emancipation was anything other than, to use Luxemburg's terms, an objective necessity. Here was the central difference in their historical outlook. Although changing political conditions and a sense that Marx's predictions were not coming true had led Bernstein to his critiques, the real reason for positing socialism as an ideal was suspicion about determinism in the materialist outlook. The difference between his ethical reformism and the crisis theory was whether it was a historical necessity or a contingent end.

Neo-Kantianism and the Problem of Metaphysics

What, then, would it mean to posit socialism as an ideal? What would it mean to be a Marxist if you could not presuppose a future perspective from which current contradictions would be solved? In the critique of utopianism in Bernstein's initial *Problems of Socialism* series, he touched on an intrinsic problem with the conventional, deterministic view of socialism: it imagined that emancipation was an impending future point where, because the antagonisms had been resolved, no problems would remain. In its apophatic rendering of emancipation as a moment in which the contradictions of history finally met their final resolution, it cast emancipation as something more than a political aspiration. It turned it into a moment of historical redemption.

[48] Bernstein in Tudor and Tudor, *Marxism and Social Democracy*, 309

Hence Bernstein's critique of the other kind of utopianism haunting the party. It placed emancipation and its achievement beyond the work of politics. Adler could suggest that the crisis theory was in no tension with reformism because the crisis was not something that politics could affect.

This is what distinguished Bernstein's ideals from utopianism. The utopians thought that, since exploitation was a problem of insufficient reasoning, it could be solved through reason. And since Engels thought that exploitation was a problem of material contradiction, it would be solved as the material contradictions worked themselves out. What Bernstein was suggesting was that emancipation was not a historical knot to be untied, some manifest problem with a solution waiting on the other side: it was a contingent ideal that could only be accomplished through the work of politics. Bernstein's sloganizing claim that "this goal [of socialism], whatever it may be, is nothing to [him], the movement is everything," though frequently misinterpreted as instrumentalizing politics and an eventual source of regret for him, was meant to convey precisely this point.[49] As Henry Tudor notes, for Bernstein, "the end was not a remote future consequence of what was done in the present; it was achieved directly *in* what was done … ends and means were implicated in one another such that the ends pursued, could not be inferred from the means adopted, for the end of a political act…was the principle manifest in it."[50] In the face of a now open-ended future in which one could not have faith in a final redemptive moment, all you had was the perpetual realization of the ideal in contingent political acts with no promise of a final end. The goal was nothing; the movement was everything.

[49] Bernstein, "The Struggle of Social Democracy and Revolution: 2. The Theory of Collapse and Colonial Policy," in Tudor and Tudor, 159
[50] Tudor, "Introduction," *The Preconditions of Socialism*, xxix

But this assertion did nothing to answer Luxemburg's claim that ideals could not motivate a political movement, nor did it answer the metaphysical materialism of his Orthodox critics. As both Engels and Luxemburg had argued, what distinguished scientific socialism from utopianism and, by extension, idealism, was its claim to uncover immanent dynamics within the capitalist order that would lead to its collapse and transformation. This claim was founded not only on an analysis of capitalism as a social and economic phenomenon, but also on a deeper conception of materialism, according to which Marx had discovered the ironclad, historical laws governing relations of matter. Bernstein had to answer both Luxemburg's charge that he had no theory of social agency—that he relied instead on the perceived persuasiveness and rationality of his ideals—and the broader metaphysical materialism within Marxism that occluded any space for ideals to be a conceivable historical motor on a metaphysical level. On the first point, he conceded to Luxemburg and Kautsky that ideals could not in and of themselves motivate action. But he easily countered that socialist ideals could gain traction among the workers because they reflected their class interest in any case: the ideals of socialism *were* the interests of the working class, and would be hegemonic if only society was fully democratized.[51] Socialists needed only pursue the interest of the working class in its effort to realize true democracy.

But Bernstein also had to answer the deeper materialism of his critics and it was this aspect of the revisionism controversy that that led him to Neo-Kantianism and especially its great socialist progenitor: Friedrich Albert Lange. Indeed, in many ways, Neo-Kantianism was a natural place for Bernstein to turn. Lange himself was a socialist known for advocating a kind of gradualist reformism in works like his book, *die Arbeiterfrage*. And Bernstein had expressed a qualified appreciation for Lange in an article in *die Neue Zeit* in 1892, before the critique of Marx was even

[51] Bernstein, "Die Notwendigkeit in Natur und Geschichte," 334-335; *Preconditions of Socialism,* 198-203

on his radar.[52] Indeed, the affinity between Neo-Kantianism and socialism ran yet deeper, as many of its major proponents were socialists, especially Marburg school figures like Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp, the former of which habilitated under Lange and both of whom shared Lange's old chair at the University of Marburg.[53] Indeed, Cohen famously declared in his introduction to the first edition of Lange's *History of Materialism* that Kant was the "real and true originator of German socialism."[54] And Natorp declared himself both a democrat and a socialist in an article *Vorwärts!* in 1893.[55] Although Neo-Kantianism gained a reputation that persists today as stuffy, bourgeois, and remote from politics, Hermann Lübbe has argued that Neo-Kantianism actually amounted to a revival of political theory within German academic philosophy in the 1870's, one that was centered around a conception of ethical socialism.[56] For Lübbe, its defining feature politically was that it "proclaimed anew reason as an authority and measure of philosophical theories of sociopolitical reality."[57]

But Bernstein ignored the sophisticated ethical socialism of Cohen and Natorp, turning instead to Lange to develop a theory of free will premised on our access to a space of ideas independent of natural causality. Neo-Kantianism was important to Bernstein not for its ethics, but its potential as an answer to Kautsky and other Orthodox Marxist's insistence on the veracity and importance of Marxism as a scientific theory grounded in the materialist conception of history. In the reply to Bernstein in "Bernstein und die Materialistische Geschichtsauffasung," Kautsky had

[52] Bernstein, E., 1892, "Zur Würdigung Friedrich Albert Langes", *Die Neue Zeit*, 10: 68–78, 101–109, 132–141
[53] See Keck, "Kant and Socialism: The Marburg School in Wilhelmian Germany," pp. 1-18
[54] Cohen, cited in Van der Linden. Van der Linden, Harry. "Cohens sozialistische Rekonstruktion der Ethik Kants,"in *Ethischer Sozialismus: Zur politischen Philosophie des Neukantianismus*, ed. Helmut Holzhey (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), pp. 146-165. Trans. Van der Linden. English available at: https://www.academia.edu/27549387/Cohens_sozialistische_Rekonstruktion_der_Ethik_Kants
[55] Keck, 9
[56] Hermann Lübbe, "Die Politische Theorie des Neukantianismus und der Marxismus," *Archiv für Rechts und Sozialphilosophie 44*, No. 3 (1958), pp. 336
[57] *Ibid.*

accused Bernstein of using observations about the condition of capitalism during a cyclical upturn to try and falsify the claims of scientific socialism in general.[58] Bernstein, Kautsky argued, used some contingent observations about improving conditions for workers in a particular place and time to try and falsify materialism *tout court*, claiming that the increased autonomy and power of workers showed that there was a greater space for ethics in the workers movement than previously thought. For Kautsky, this amounted to saying that, since economic conditions for workers had improved and appeared to increase their power and autonomy, we therefore have reason to believe that humans have a freedom independent of natural causality.[59]

Kautsky was a thoroughgoing dialectical materialist and naturalist in the tradition of Engels. He believed that humans are essentially matter and so are subject to the same laws as any other material being.[60] The result of any science is, in fact, the discovery of these laws, which describe the relationship between appearances in the causal natural world. As he writes in "Bernstein und die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung:"

> But what does science [*Wissenschaft*] mean? Knowledge of the necessary, lawful connections between appearances [*Erscheinungen*]. Appearances we cannot yet investigate because they are too complicated, such that we can discover in them only contingency and arbitrariness, lay outside the area of science. The progress of science lay precisely in shrinking the realm of contingency and arbitrariness to extend that of known necessity. The great deed of Marx and Engels was precisely that that they were able, with more success than their forbearers, to include history in the realm of necessity and therefore to raise history into a science. Now comes Bernstein and posits that the scientific progress of both thinkers was in abolishing materialism from history.[61]

---

[58] Karl Kautsky, "Bernstein und die Materialistische Geschichtsauffassung," *Die Neue Zeit: Revue des gesitigen und öffentlichen Lebens 17*, Bd. 2 (1899), pp. 13
[59] Kautsky, "Bernstein und die Materialistische Geschichtsauffassung," 14
[60] On Engels' materialism, its influence on the Second International, and Bernstein's responses, See Manfred Steger, "Historical Materialism and Ethics: Eduard Bernstein's Revisionist Perspective," *History of European Ideas 14,* No. 5 (1992), pp. 650-652
[61] Karl Kautsky, "Bernstein und die Materialistische Geschichtsauffassung," *Die Neue Zeit: Revue des gesitigen und öffentlichen Lebens 17*, Bd. 2 (1899), pp.7

The consequence of Kautsky's argument was that there was no room for ethical idealism in Marxism. Marxism was a science based on evidence and an account of the causal natural world, and neither Marxism nor any other science provided a basis for an account of the kind of freedom Bernstein's idealism presupposed. Thus, Kautsky accused Bernstein of lapsing into a kind of ethical mysticism based on sophistic arguments about improving conditions for workers, which ignored the crisis and upturn (boom and bust) cycle of capitalism, as though capitalism itself would slowly deliver the emancipation of the working classes.

Bernstein thus turned to Lange and Kant to reiterate his contention that, in fact, materialism was unscientific and recent scientific research had begun to vindicate a kind of idealism. In his reply to Kautsky, Bernstein, drawing on a number of philosophers and scientists of the time, argued that:

> if knowledge of the dependence of human thought on the material world once constituted very meaningful progress and for many practical goals remains indispensable, so also advances to a height an ever-stronger reduction of physical determinism. The human as an individual remains dependent on his milieu, but the human spirit, its cognition pushes ever forwards, confronting the coarse powers of nature with ever greater sovereignty.[62]

Where Kautsky argued that science *just is* the recognition of the necessity behind otherwise disordered appearances, Bernstein responded that science was rather an empirical method that was now revealing the ultimate sovereignty of the human subject and its free will. Bernstein fell back on a quasi-psychological theory that founds space for freedom in the human intellect, which he associated with Lange and, to some extent, Cohen. For Bernstein, then, this was the way out of the determinism of the dialectic: the freedom of the human will.

[62] Eduard Bernstein, *Zur Geschichte und Theories des Socialismus*, (Berlin-Bern, DE: Akademischer Verlag für Sociale Wissenschaft, 1901), pp. 329-330

A debate about the long-term tactics and outlook of the worker's movement of the Social Democratic Party of Germany had suddenly come to hinge on the age-old metaphysical battle between materialism and idealism, a conflict about which Kant famously had something to say. Indeed, for the academic Neo-Kantians who were following the debate, Bernstein was a figure both exciting and mystifying. They expressed an appreciation for his invocations of Kant and Lange within the context of *SPD* controversies, but they were also critical of his particular efforts to use Kant to reject Marxism. After all, very little of what Bernstein said actually required the metaphysical argumentation that he set forth. The same was true of Kautsky. As Franz Staudinger would argue in an article titled "die Metaphysische und Praktische Freiheit" [metaphysical and practical freedom], there was no reason to believe that a theory of ideals required proof of metaphysical freedom.[63] And as Karl Vorländer would argue in a 1904 lecture, Marxist social theory did not need metaphysical support of the sort that Kautsky insisted on.[64]

Indeed, for the Neo-Kantians, who were committed to a thinker known for his rejection of speculative metaphysics on the basis of a critique of knowledge, the supposed incompatibility between Marx's social theories and Bernstein's idealism was based on a needless confusion. Of course the materialism of Engels and Kautsky was deterministic and provided no room for ideals. But necessity and causality are categories that structure our synthesis of appearances, not predicates of things-in-themselves: we cannot use the causal order of appearances to posit a metaphysical materialism.[65] And of course Bernstein's turn to posit a supersensible realm of thought independent of matter led him to ground ethics in an equally foggy realm of speculation. But the real issue at stake between Kautsky and Bernstein was not about metaphysical freedom,

[63] Franz Staudinger, "Metaphysische und Praktische Freiheit," *Ethische Kultur 7*, Nr. 20 (1899), 153-155
[64] See Karl Vorländer, *Marx und Kant*: *Vortrag gehalten in Wien am April 8, 1904*, (Leipzig, DE: Verlag der "Deutschen Worte," 1904)
[65] Staudinger, "Bernstein und die Wissenschaft," 645-647

but the practical, observable freedom available to the worker's movement: the question was not whether the workers were free of causality, but whether economic circumstances conditioned their political agency.[66] In short, the real contribution of Kant to the theory of Marxism was not the rejection of its basic tenets, but the effort to purge it of speculative metaphysics and reinforce its power as a theory of politics and society.[67]

For the Neo-Kantian *Neukritiker*, as they were sometimes described, Kantian *Erkenntniskritik* could resolve the false dilemmas of the controversy with the insight that historical materialism was, at base, a theory of society, not a metaphysic, and so was in no contradiction with critical idealism.[68] Indeed, after elaborating the historical materialist vision of society and social change in his 1904 lecture "Marx und Kant," Karl Vorländer, perhaps the best known of the Neo-Kantian Marxists, wrote:

> I truly would not know what a reasonable, so to speak, realistic, Kantian idealism could have against such a social theory, why, indeed, to use a much-used expression, they should not fully and entirely accept it. And so we see that contemporary social philosophers, whose scientific method is determined by Kantian *Erkenntniskritik*—I'm thinking here of the philosopher Paul Natorp in Marburg (Hessen), and the jurist Stammler in Halle, Professor Franz Staudinger in Darmstdt—recognize historical materialism as a meaningful scientific advance [*Fortschritt*].

For Vorländer and Staudinger, historical materialism, like any science or *Wissenschaft*, was simply a mode of investigating social relations that gained its *wissenschaftlicher* character from the effort to systematically discover laws explaining social phenomena.[69] (Vorländer is not being entirely straightforward in his description of Natorp and Stammler, however, as both were staunch critics of historical materialism). Kantian *Erkenntniskritik* as the Neo-Kantians understood it was

---

[66] Staudinger, "Metaphysische und Praktische Freiheit," 153
[67] See Vorländer, *Marx und Kant: Vortrag gehalten in Wien am April 8, 1904*
[68] *Neukritiker*: New or Neo-critics. *Erkenntniskritik*: Epistemological critique.
[69] Vorländer, *Marx und Kant*, 10-11; Staudinger, *Ethik und Politik*; Franz Staudinger, "der Streit um das Ding an Sich und seine Erneurung im sozialistischen Lager," *Kant-Studien 4*, No. 1-3 (1900), pp. 167-189

concerned with how knowledge of appearances was possible. To the extent that historical materialism is a mode of investigating the appearances, all critical idealism has to say to it is that we investigate the appearances as they appear to us, not as they are in themselves.[70] Thus, its main contribution was to suggest that Marxists were confusing historical materialism as a social theory with materialism as a metaphysics, and they could jettison the latter without doing damage to the former.

Indeed, it is one of the ironies of Bernstein's argument that it had no need for a theory of metaphysical freedom. In fact, he refused to ground it in any transcendental space of reasons, and provided a theory of socialist ideals that was largely contextualist and immanent. For Bernstein, socialist ideals simply reflected the ends of the worker's movement, which would naturally become hegemonic if the barriers in the way of true democracy were to be removed.[71] The worker's movement thus ought to focus on using whatever means were at its disposal to push for the full democratization of society including the workplace, the factory, and the means of production in general. Socialism was in the interest of society as a whole and the bourgeoisie's attempt to cling to power was the assertion of particular interests over the general. The interests of the working class aligned with the common interest of citizens *qua* citizens, rather than members of a specific class.[72] Indeed, there was very little in Bernstein's theory of ethics to even contradict Marxism or historical materialism, lending credence to Kautsky's claim that Bernstein erred in turning to improving conditions for workers to falsify metaphysical materialism. The only problem

[70] Vorländer*, Marx und Kant,* 12-14, Staudinger, "Der Streit um das Ding an Sich"
[71] See Bernstein, *Preconditions of Socialism*, 200-208, Bernstein, "A Statement," in Tudor & Tudor, 191-194, Bernstien, "die Notwendigkeit in Natur und Geschichte," 323-338
[72] Bernstein, ""die Notwendigkeit in Natur und Geschichte," 334-335

was that, from the Neo-Kantian perspective, Kautsky did not realize he made a different version of the same error, using a social theory of capitalism to posit a metaphysical materialism.

This is precisely what the so-called New Critics of the Neo-Kantian movement argued in response to Bernstein: if Bernstein saw in his ethical idealism a rejection of the materialist worldview, the New Critics saw the opportunity to think ethical idealism and Marxist materialism together. As Karl Vorländer put it in his *Kant und Marx: Ein Beitrag*:

> The particular social content of a time is always dependent on the prevailing historical-economic conditions. The most beautiful precepts of Marcus Aurelius or of Christianity or Kantian-Fichtean ethics could not save the world from impending catastrophe, if they did not appear as the vital driving forces of a mass movement. Without such close connections to reality our social thoughts and desires hang in the heavens of abstraction.[73]

For Kantian New-Critics like Karl Vorländer and Franz Staudinger, the key teachings of both Kant and Marx should lead to a worldview purged of metaphysical anchors like determinism or free will. Marx's materialism and Kant's critique of knowledge could be combined to reveal a world in which humans set ends for themselves that lead them to work up the material world in which they already find themselves enmeshed. As Staudinger writes:

> Nature itself builds no machines, writes no books, rules no states. That we do ourselves; and because we do this with plans and ends, and so with consciousness, we're inclined to put the activities of our mind [*Tätigkeiten unseres Geistes*] outside of nature, and to see ourselves as something that has nothing to do with natural causes. This self-deception, however, cannot stand firm as soon as we observe humans in connection with nature…This thought forces itself upon us most forcefully when we observe humans in their historical contexts and notice the influence they have on the particular thoughts and desires, not of the individual, but entire human groups.[74]

For the New Critics, humans are ends-setting beings embedded in distinct social and material contexts that serve as either impediments or enabling conditions of those ends. Each individual

---

[73] Karl Vorländer, *Kant und Marx*: *Ein Beitrag zur Philosophie des Sozialismus*, (Tübingen, DE: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1911), pp. 281. My translation.
[74] Franz Staudinger, *Ethik und Politik,* (Berlin, DE: Dümmlers Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1899), pp. 9

end is thus contingent on its concrete historical contexts, both in terms of its material surroundings, but also in terms of the ends of other individuals in society. Socialism is the condition under which each individual is able to set their ends freely and independently, a condition which, Staudinger suggests, leads to an ideal of the social and political coordination of ends-setting beings enjoying material equality.[75]

In a series of articles in *die Neue Zeit* and *Ethische Kultur*, Staudinger would argue for a partial synthesis of Bernstein *and* Kautsky in which ideals were ethical ends dependent upon distinct material conditions, a claim which required no presumption of metaphysical freedom. In response to Bernstein, Staudinger rejected the idea of the supersensible, writing that "supersensible can only rationally mean: not yet perceptible or ascertainable through the scientific method."[76] In "Bernstein and Ethics," he argued that Bernstein's claim for a realm of freedom aloft from the material causal world was fatally mistaken:

> Bernstein makes the mistake of speaking of independent activity; thus the ethical idea outwits the law of causality, the ethical idea is to a certain extent placed next to the economic idea as the second most effective power and the "iron necessity of history" is thereby shrunk. That does not work. The inviolability of the causal law, the universal unity of all events in one and the same causal context must be scrupulously maintained if science is not to degrade into empty talk. Here there is no way out.[77]

For Staudinger, what Bernstein must realize is that material economic conditions situated in a causal stream are the medium through which subjects that experience themselves as free realize their freedom. There is no need for any further metaphysical freedom.[78] For Staudinger, we find ourselves capable of articulating our will in practical and material contexts, where we find we must

[75] Staudinger, *Ethik und Politik,* 12-13; Vorländer, "Marx und Kant," 15
[76] Sadi Gunter [Franz Staudinger],"Bernstein und die Wissenschaft," *Die Neue Zeit: Revue des gesitigen und öffentlichen Lebens 17*, Bd. 2 (1899), pp. 644-653
[77] Franz Staudinger, "Ed. Bernstein und die Ethik," *Ethische Kultur 7*, No. 16 (1899), pp. 122
[78] Franz Staudinger, "Metaphysische und Praktische Freiheit," *Ethische Kultur 7*, Nr. 20 (1899), pp. 154-5

consider material conditions and the wills of others. The socialist ideal is given in this very situation. Insofar as we have to posit our individual wills, we encounter other wills with which we have to coordinate. This coordination will lead us to the final goal of the socialization of the means of production, as it is the only goal that resolves all conflicts between wills and allows for their complete and frictionless coordination.[79] Here, socialism is immanent to the fact of plurality, subjectivity, and our sense of ourselves as willing agents. It emerges from the context of plurality, with no additional metaphysics required.

Where Marxism met Kantianism, Staudinger suggested, is in the recognition that material economic conditions coordinate "ends concerning the production of the material conditions of life," and so the condition for the possibility of our ability to set and pursue ends—to be free—in the first place. Indeed, Staudinger argued that the "ideal in its most general sense is the striving after a transformation of the form of the given. In this respect, every goal that is not yet realized is ideal."[80] The ideal thus relied on the material as its practical condition, material cause, to use an Aristotelian term, and coordinating power.[81] As material social conditions change, so must also the rules of their coordination.[82] This gives rise to new ends and new conflicts between individuals' ends, which can only be transformed by changing the material conditions that coordinate—or fail to coordinate—such ends. For Staudinger, the Kantian strives for the coordination of each individual's ends such that they do not infringe upon one another, which guarantees universal and equal freedom. But he makes the essentially Engelian point that this coordination cannot occur

[79] Staudinger, "Ed. Bernstein und die Ethik," *Ethische Kultur*, 122
[80] *Ethik und Politik*, 63
[81] Staudinger, "die Materialistische Geschitsauffassung und praktische Idealismus," *Die Neue Zeit 16*, Bd. 2 (1898) 460-61
[82] Staudinger, *Ethik und Politik*, 12

under capitalism, where anarchy of the capitalist mode of production produces heterogeneous ends. As he writes:

> The idea of heterogony is the essential element in the so-called materialist conception of history, which the great socialists Marx and Engels founded…the leading role in the overall development is taken over by economic ends, i.e., those concerning the production of material livelihood. The manner through which humans produce their material lives, which is essentially determined by the state of technology, also conditions their juridico-political and intellectual lives and with the transformation of the means of production, so must the other relationships transform.[83]

Here, Staudinger offers a version of the materialist conception of history that is softly deterministic without being teleological and takes seriously Engels account of capitalism without taking on his dialectics.[84]

Staudinger was thus able to develop a vision of socialism that not only took seriously the idea that ideals and ends can guide human actions in nonetheless material contexts, but one that developed a an emancipatory ideal out of the facticity of its material context. For Staudinger, ideals are unrealized ends that rely on distinct material and social conditions for their realization. Socialism emerges out of the desire to coordinate ends so that society can guarantee equal freedom for all, where no one's will ends up dependent on the wills of others. This can only be realized when the means of production are socialized, otherwise the anarchy of production and the dependence of the worker on the will of the capitalist persist. For Staudinger, the ideal was a normative principle underlying our judgments in distinct material contexts. And when we uncover it and lend it systematic unity, it becomes an emancipatory ideal, an end that guides our judgments and agency in distinct material contexts.

---

[83] Staudinger, *Ethik und Politik*, 13. My thanks to Armin Wolking for help with this translation.
[84] Both Staudinger and Bernstein would try and provide a reading of *Anti-Dühring* that tried to reclaim it as a kind of idealist text because it makes reference to conscious humans making their own history. While I think there's something to this reading, I think it overestimates the degree of Engels' naturalism and determinism.

As Vorländer would argue, if one took historical materialism to be the claim that relations of production ultimately condition human social and political life, there was no reason it could not be united with Neo-Kantianism.[85] Both paraphrasing and endorsing an argument from the Italian Neo-Kantian Marxist Antonio Labriola, Vorländer argued that "historical materialism aims to be nothing more than a better explanation of the sequence of human events, is nothing other than an attempt to intellectually grasp the origin and development that social life experienced over the course of these past centuries."[86] In true Kantian fashion, Vorländer would argue that historical materialism gained its scientific character from its ability to lend unity to otherwise diverse and disorganized phenomena, "to shine a light on social events."[87] Like Staudinger, Vorländer would also argue that historical materialism could be softly deterministic. Economic conditions are not the sole determinants of "social-historical development," but we can trace back such development to such conditions "in the last instance."[88] Likewise, and in keeping with Staudinger, Vorländer argued that the ideological superstructure *reacts* to "pure economic factors," but that between the two exists a complicated evolutionary relationship.[89]

Indeed, for Vorländer, Engels' argument about the anarchy of production in society and the organization of production in the factory actually presupposes a worldview in which beings exist that are able to organize, make plans, and set ends. He writes:

> We have so far not yet seen how Marx and Engels were able to use their historical-philosophical outlook to ground socialism, which is in no way given in the idea of historical materialism. For our goal it is sufficient…to summarize it in its shortest form: Every level of social development will ultimately come into contact with the aforementioned 'substructure,' which, because its character over the course of time essentially changes, will necessary come into contradiction with the prevailing, but

[85] Karl Vorländer, *Marx und Kant*: *Vortrag gehalten in Wien am April 8, 1904*, (Leipzig, DE: Verlag der "Deutschen Worte," 1904), pp. 12. My translations unless otherwise indicated.
[86] Vorländer, Marx und Kant, 11
[87] *Ibid.*
[88] "Marx und Kant," 12
[89] *Ibid.*

> in point of fact outmoded, political-ideological 'superstructure'…The contemporary plan-less anarchy of production will and must transform into a systematically coordinated and centrally organized cooperative, the first precondition of which is the seizure of the means of production (thus of the ground and earth, raw materials, machines, transportation, and so on), through society.
>
> What interests us here from a philosophical standpoint about this theory, which is known to you all and the correctness and readiness for realization of which we are not to judge here, is that, here, next to the standpoint of pure becoming, a chain of causes and effects perpetually closing in on one another in a violent ring of development meets a moment, if also a bit hidden, in which a fully new moment appears. It lies in those two nondescript words: "systematically organize." To make plans, to consciously organize – that only a being that sets ends can do.[90]

For Vorländer, agency is the small space that opens up in the moment of contradiction in which a prior social form collapses in on itself and a new social form begins to arise. Thus, to a greater extent than even Staudinger, at least in this essay, Vorländer takes on the historical materialist worldview, but adds to it the Kantian idea that, to be intelligible, it must presuppose a being that can set ends. For Vorländer, the socialist ideal is entirely parasitic upon and immanent to material relations of production. Like Staudinger, Vorländer suggests that this ideal involves the harmonization of our ends, which can only be fully guaranteed with the socialization of the means of production. And like Bernstein, Vorländer argues that socialism requires the conscious and goal-directed action of ethically minded individuals. But Vorländer also seems to take on something of the crisis theory, suggesting that goal-directed activity becomes possible when the contradiction between relations of production and the prevailing ideology come to a tipping point.[91]

For Vorländer and Staudinger then, socialist ethics are immanent to the fact that we are ends-setting beings who share a common world. In their Neo-Kantian interpretation of socialism, socialism becomes the ethical demand that we coordinate our wills in order to achieve mutual autonomy. Taking up Engels point about the relationship between the anarchy of production in

[90] Vorländer, *Marx und Kant*, 15. My translation.
[91] This claim could comport with the crisis theory, but it could just as well work with Staudinger or Bernstein's sense that the lack of justice within the system has become obvious.

capitalism and the coordination of production on the shop floor, they suggest that capitalism will soon reach a point where the ideal of emancipation can take flight. But it is precisely because the crisis is impending that we need ideals, on their account. Thus rejecting Bernstein's 'evolutionary' conception of socialism, they are able to synthesize a Marxism that preserves the possibility of the crisis theory with one where we can appeal to ideals to guide us towards the next step after capitalism's collapse. If socialism is an ideal we hold out for and apply to a range of contexts of action, it is because we have yet to achieve it.

Conclusion

What is easy to miss about the critique of utopianism in Marxist theory that I have traced here is the degree to which it tracks concerns of recent theorists who scrutinize Marxism for its failed utopian ambitions. Both groups of theorists worry that utopianism and ethical idealism rely on an inadequate understanding of society and the forms of collective agency it both enables and renders impossible. For the Orthodox Marxists as much as contemporary liberals, realists, and radical democrats, utopianism relies on a blueprint of the future that cannot gain political traction or transformative potential. The Orthodox Marxists of the Second International agreed on a social theory based in the materialist dialectic, which envisioned that the coming capitalist crisis would enable the revolution for emancipation. Today theorists disagree on what constitutes an adequate political or social theory, but few subscribe to any that would cast emancipation as immanent to the current dynamics of social and political life.

Bernstein, Vorländer, and Staudinger worried that the Marxist critique of utopianism threatened to eclipse our capacity to actually pursue emancipation because it rendered collective agents incapable of imagining ends. Their solution was to try to recuperate an ethical idealism they took from Kant. Although Bernstein argued for a transcendental idealism in which the rational still

emitted from a space beyond space and time, Vorländer and Staudinger sought to think Marxist materialism and Kantian ethical idealism together. Their efforts resulted in a theory of socialist ideals in which they are radically contingent on given contexts of agency: their revision of Marxist social theory was minimal, seeking primarily to purge both Marxism and Kantianism of metaphysical assumptions and focus rather on an analysis of the given. To be sure, neither theory fully answers Rosa Luxemburg's concern that such a theory must rely on its own imagined persuasiveness rather than a grasp of society as such. The question for theorists today is whether this objection should lead to the pessimistic strain running through much contemporary theory, or an effort to determine whether there might be contexts of agency available today to pursue new ideals.

Chapter 4: Carl Schmitt and Georg Lukács on Emancipation and the Paradoxes of the Ideal

> "*Do not complain about the terrible pressure under which you live*, but rather know that your godlessness, your Protestantism, your racial mysticism, your relativism, your godless swindle with logic as with Kant, Wagnerism and other frauds [*Hochstapeleien*] are responsible."[1]

If, for the Neo-Kantians, the ideal held out the promise of ethical freedom and emancipation, by the time of the Great War, it would become the site of reason's paralysis, a stultified and bourgeois atavism that could not stand up to the new crises. Already in 1912 Carl Schmitt appealed to Neo-Kantianism to cast the ideal as a kind of madness, drawing on the philosopher and founder of *Kant-Studien*, Hans Vaihinger. The ideal was a kind of practical, heuristic fiction, for Schmitt, that reason relied on for its coherence: even madness could be useful to reason so long as it produced the right result.[2] For Georg Lukács, ethical idealism was the arch-symptom of reified consciousness under capitalism, in which the world is seen as an alien thing to be contemplated and investigated, not something fundamentally made by the proletariat and susceptible to their revolutionary will. The attitude of Lukács and the early Schmitt, the focus of this chapter, toward the old Neo-Kantian ideals broadly tracks the mood of their day, a ubiquitous sense of crisis amid the fevered search for new philosophies to comprehend it.[3]

Neo-Kantianism did not quite survive the first World War. Although most significant intellectual figures to emerge out of the interwar period had some significant connection to Neo-Kantianism and, indeed, the star of the Marburg School, Ernst Cassirer, continued to write all the way into the second World War, the centrality of Neo-Kantianism to German intellectual life had

[1] Carl Schmitt cited in Michael Dylan Rogers, "The Development of Carl Schmitt's Political Thought During the First World War," *Modern Intellectual History 13*, No.1 (2016), pp. 145
[2] Carl Schmitt, "Richard Wagner und eine neue Lehre vom Wahn," *Die Bayreuther Blätter 35* (1912)
[3] See, for example, Peter Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010)

already begun to wane before the war and was toppled soon after it.[4] Indeed, the biographies of most major Neo-Kantians end either with World War I or a few years after it: Hermann Cohen died almost symbolically in 1918, Natorp in 1924; Emil Lask, the great star of the Southwestern School and close friend of Lukács, was taken by the war in 1915; and the great sociologists it produced, Max Weber and Georg Simmel, were both deceased by 1920.[5]

But the death of Neo-Kantianism was more than an accident of their collective biographies, and its foundations were in crisis before the first World War. One of Neo-Kantianism's defining features was the search for the conditions of experience underlying scientific certainty. On what basis and in what sense were the results of science true?[6] This question was motivated by a deep anxiety. The ability of science to produce truth claims about the world appeared to be unrivaled by the nineteenth century, a fact threatening to eclipse all humanistic forms of knowledge, like philosophy.[7] Neo-Kantians thus sought to explain how science was able to produce truth, but had to do so using methods other than those of science, otherwise philosophy would collapse into mere psychology and other forms of scientific naturalism and materialism.[8] The Neo-Kantians were united in going "back to Kant" to argue that scientific truths depended on transcendental conditions of human experience, although the meaning of this claim was a source of contentious debate among

[4] See Gordon, *Continental Divide*
[5] On the history of Neo-Kantianism, see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism*, *1796-1880*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), Gordon, *Continental Divide*; Klaus Christian Köhnke trans. R. J. Hollingdale, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy Between Idealism and Positivism,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Ulrich Sieg, *Aufstieg und Niedergang des Marburg Neukantianismus: Die Geschichte Einer Philosophischen Schulgemeinschaft*, (Würzburg, DE: Königshausen und Neumann, 1994); Thomas E. Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860-1914*, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1978). See also Lukàcs's eulogy of Emil Lask in Georg Lukàcs, "Emil Lask: Ein Nachruf," *Kant-Studien 22*, No.1-2 (1918), 349-370
[6] See Frederick C. Beiser, "Normativity in Neo-Kantianism: Its Rise and Fall", *International Journal of Philosophical Studies 17*, No. 1 (2009), pp. 9-27, Willey, *Back to Kant*, pp. 153-179
[7] Beiser, "Normativity in Neo-Kantianism: Its Rise and Fall," 11-16; Köhnke, 151-283
[8] Beiser, "Normativity in Neo-Kantianism: Its Rise and Fall," 11-13

its various schools.[9] By World War I, however, this answer encountered a serious conceptual difficulty: if scientific truths depended on transcendental conditions of experience, how could philosophy account for the fact of historical change?[10] This is a now familiar dilemma. Put otherwise, how is it that humans have access to trans-historical, transcendent claims of truth, often weighted with ethical and moral value, when history shows the radical, unpredictable transformation of what we take to be both facts and values?

For Schmitt and Lukács, who came to philosophical consciousness as this question was germinating into a general sense of philosophical crisis, the early Neo-Kantian celebration of reason had already come to seem like a kind of delusion. Both thinkers associated rationalism with a bourgeois ideology of mechanism that appeared to them like an iron cage.[11] For the early Schmitt, the problem with rationalism was not primarily its inability to account for historicism, but its inability to account for its own limits in general. Following the Neo-Kantian Hans Vaihinger, the young Schmitt sought to expose how reason relied everywhere on practical, heuristic fictions that it needed to assume, but for which it could not account.[12] He focused especially on the inability of reason to ground practice. Rational norms and ideals rely on practices to have an effect on the world, but they cannot determine these practices: to apply the norm, the individual needs to decide when applies it to a particular, concrete instance. But rational norms and ideals cannot guide their own application, otherwise one ends up at the same problem, in which one is appealing to some

[9] Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism* , "Normativity in Neo-Kantianism: Its Rise and Fall;" Köhnke; Willey; Sebastian Luft ed., *The Neo-Kantian Reader*, (New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2015)
[10] Willey, pp. 153-179
[11] See John P. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 31-82
[12] See [Schmitt texts]. See also Ellen Kennedy, *Constitutional Failure: Carl Schmitt in Weimar*, (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 65-76; Reinhard Mehring, *Pathetisches Denken: Carl Schmitts Denkweg am Leitfaden Hegels: katholische Grundstellung und antimarxistische Hegelstrategie*, (Berlin, DE: Duncker & Humblot, 1989), pp. 25-33

rational norm to determine whether a rational norm applies to a particular case *ad infinitum*.[13] Schmitt's answer to this problem was to expose how reason relied everywhere on heuristic fictions, assumptions that guide practice in the absence of *rational* guidance. As Kennedy and others have noted, this early interest in Vaihinger fed Schmitt's later interest in myth and theology and, as Schmitt himself suggested, the need for the sovereign's decisions to anchor a normative universe.[14]

In some ways, Lukács's "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" can be read as an intellectual biography, detailing his struggles to overcome a politically impotent, bourgeois ethical idealism and realize the necessity of class struggle and revolution. Lukács was at first a product of Neo-Kantianism. A student of Georg Simmel and close friend of Emil Lask, Lukács was also a member of the *Webekreis* and a careful reader of especially Southwestern School figures like Windelband and Vaihinger and later recounted his own "youthful enthusiasm for the work of Dilthey, Simmel and Max Weber."[15] But Lukács would also later become concerned with the fictitious substrate of rationality, which he thought exposed not the limits of reason as such, but the flaw in the rationalist and ethical idealist picture of rationality. "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" was the result of Lukács' own protracted struggle between a personal ethics of individual obligation and a political ethics of collective struggle. The "Reification" essay, in providing his critique of western rationalism and its culmination in the Neo-Kantian tradition, charts his rejection of Neo-Kantian rationalism as symptomatic of capitalist reification: the reliance of reason on fiction does not expose its intrinsic limits, but rather shows the limits of the particular conception of reason that gains hegemony under capitalism, where

[13] For this argument, see Carl Schmitt, *Gesetz und Urteil: eine Untersuchung zum Problem der Rechtspraxis*, (München, DE: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1969)
[14] Kennedy, *Constitutional Failure*, 65-71; Mehring, *Pahtethisches Denken*, 25-33
[15] Georg Lukàcs, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay On The Forms of Great Epic Literature,* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1971), pp. 12

intractable philosophical problems arise out of the failure of rationalists to appreciate the productive, transformative power of class struggle.

For both Lukács and Schmitt, the ideal expresses a pernicious kind of alienation from the world, which is conceived of as an object for contemplation and not a venue for action. While post-Kantians like Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel also framed the ideal as expressing a kind of alienation, they took this to stem from the incompleteness of the Kantian project, which would require them to resolve the discrepancy between reason's picture of the world and the world as it was. For Schmitt and Lukács, however, the problem with rationalism and idealism went deeper: the inability of reason to ground itself, its underdetermination of action and reliance on heuristic fictions, called into the rationalist picture *tout court*. The Kantian ideal was no longer an unfinished project longing for its completion, but a symptom of a more general crisis in the bourgeois rationalist approach to theory *and* practice. Rationalists and ethical idealists committed themselves to obeying a system of norms that could prescribe to them how they ought to act on the basis of the rationality of that system. But the inability of reason to ground itself meant that they were rather committed to an empty, soulless mechanism, and an ethics that was not only powerless to realize the good, but could not even explain what the good was.

In the last chapter, I showed how Bernstein, Vorländer, and Staudinger all turned to a conception of the ideal to ground a socialist ethics. In this chapter, I turn to Lukács and Schmitt's efforts to show that ethical idealism is an ultimately paradoxical position, which cannot be sustained. The paradox lies in the nature of the demand that ethical ideals make on politics. The ideal represents some normative principle that we think ought to be realized in the world; it strives to demand practice. What kinds of practices, then, are sufficient to realize the ideal? For Schmitt and Lukács, Kantian ethical idealism fails to appreciate the gravity of the demand that normative

political ideals make on practices. The ethical idealist dramatically underestimates the nature of the practices necessary to realize the ideal in politics. For Lukács and Schmitt, the ideal is ultimately nothing more than a demand for *praxis*, not a vision of a far-off future point to be realized through daily political activities, which fail to take seriously the demand of the ideal that it be realized.

For Schmitt, in fact, the essence of the norm is its demand to be realized in the world and it can only do so through actual, concrete institutions. In his 1914, *Habilitationsschrift*, *Der Wert des Staates und die Bedeutung des Einzelnsen* [*The Value of the State and the Significance of the Individual*] Schmitt argued that the central institution responsible for realizing norms in the world was the state.[16] In fact, he defines the state as the power that is so capable and argues for a strict separation between ethics and law. The individual does not realize the norm through ethics; the state realizes the norm through law. For Schmitt, the effort to introduce ideals into politics independent of the law ignores the essence of the state in its ability to realize the norm. This argument will come to influence his 1921 *Dictatorship*, where he argues that the effort to overthrow the state in search of one that satisfies some ideal of legitimacy results in dictatorship: the revolutionary party overthrows the existing constitution and then becomes an instrument for the realization of a future state, collapsing the law into a kind of means-ends normativity. For Schmitt, the state is the only institution that can realize the law; the effort to realize some other norms leads to dictatorship.

For Lukács, the problem with ethical idealism is yet deeper: in looking to reason to imagine how the world might be changed, the idealist opposes a realm of transcendent moral truths to a world construed as merely given, obscuring the ordinary practices that actually construct the world.

[16] Carl Schmitt, *Der Wert des Staates und die Bedeutung des Einzelnen*, (Tübingen, Germany: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1914)

The idealist turns to reason as the space where an alternative might emerge, thus looking away from the practices that constitute the current order. For Lukács, however, the possibility of overcoming the current order is not located in a transcendent space of reasons, but is immanent to the practices of the proletariat, whose laboring practices construct the world as it has become. The real possibility of change is located within the proletariat, who already exercise their agency to construct a capitalist world despite themselves, and need to realize that their agency might be used to construct a different world. Like the Orthodox Marxists, Lukács does not regard the task of imagining alternative futures or new ideals as important to politics.

For both Lukács and Schmitt, then, the issue with idealism was its failure to contend with the concrete exigencies of *praxis*. Each sought to emphasize what it really takes to realize the ideal in the world, whether that means the power of the state securing normativity through the law, or the proletariat using its agency to achieve communism. And each thought that ethical idealism failed to contend with politics as such, relying on the access of individuals to some space of reasons intrinsic to the subject. For Schmitt as much as Lukács, the internal logic of any effort to think of politics as a medium to realize the ideal leads toward revolution and dictatorship, an insight that Lukács affirms and Schmitt abhors. The result of Lukács' protracted struggle with the ethical demands his time made on him was the affirmation of Marxism-Leninism, which led him to join the communists in the revolution in Hungary. As is well known, Schmitt's abhorrence of the ideal led him to affirm the state at all costs and plunge enthusiastically into the Nazi party. This chapter, then, interrogates Lukács and Schmitt's insistence that a politics of the ideal must ultimately be a revolutionary politics.

II. Lukács and Schmitt on Norm and Form: Schmitt

The predominant current of Neo-Kantian political thought in the period of Schmitt's early work sought to ground the ideal as a transcendent product of reason we needed merely to realize, a project against which Schmitt argued vociferously, asserting the primacy of practice over the ideal. Schmitt's earliest writings reveal a fascination with Vaihinger and his theory of heuristic fictions, which he expanded into an irrationalist critique of reason. Vaihinger's insight that reason needs heuristic fictions to sustain a connection with practice was equivalent to the insight that reason *depends* on the irrational, for Schmitt. This was among the earliest sources of his fascination with the decision and the point where law turns from an abstract ideational *thing* and into a concrete reality: what is important is the practice itself, not what guides it, which can be rational as much as irrational.[17] The apotheosis of this position is Schmitt's essay on Wagner's "Theory of Madness," in which he tried to connect the character of Sachs in Wagners's *Meistersinger* with Vaihinger's insight into the utility of fiction. Sachs' insight into the irrationality of all things shows that the significance of Vaihiner is the revelation of the "utility and applicability of madness, its *practical inevitability*."[18] But Schmitt's critical relationship with Neo-Kantianism went deeper. Although scholars have noted the influence of Max Weber on his thought, his early writings also show a sustained and critical engagement with other Neo-Kantians like Hermann Cohen, Rudolf Stammler, and Paul Natorp, three main targets of critique in *Der Wert des Staates*, and to a lesser extent Southwestern school figures like Heinrich Rickert and Emil Lask.

The two main theoretical works Schmitt produced in this period, *Gesetz und Urteil* [Law and Judgment] and *Der Wert des Staates* are both primarily jurisprudential texts, but he sought to connect their central themes with broader debates occurring in literature and academic philosophy. *Gesetz und Urteil* was a critique of the form of legal judgment that the prevailing "statutory

[17] See Carl Schmitt, *Gesetz und Urteil*, VII-VIII; Kennedy, pp. 65-76
[18] Carl Schmitt, "Richard Wagner und eine neue Lehre vom Wahn," *Die Bayreuther Blätter 35* (1912), pp. 239-241

positivism" of the time presupposed, but he expanded its main argument in his essays on Vaihinger; *Der Wert des Staates* carried through the critique of statutory positivism, but now also provided a critique of the Neo-Kantian identification of ethics with law.[19] In both texts, Schmitt developed a theory of normativity that prioritizes the practices that realize the norm over the norm itself. For Schmitt, norms are fundamentally reliant on practices for their actualization, but cannot determine the norm. Thus, the purpose and justification of the norm is the practice itself, which admits of no further rational justification: the judge's decision is the justification of the norm, not the other way around.[20] Likewise, for Schmitt, the essence of the state is its realization of normativity in the world. Schmitt does not prescribe any content to that normativity, but seeks rather to distinguish it from ethics and center it as the central force capable of rendering the norm real in the world.

The subtle political effect of the arguments of this period, however, is to insist on a strict separation between ethics and the law, and so ultimately to remove politics as a venue for the realization of ethical norms. Indeed, in *Der Wert des Staates*, Schmitt's own politics are clear, as he critiques both the perceived scientistic skepticism of his time and its individualism, while centering the church as the proper venue for ethics and the only institution capable of realizing ethics in the world.[21] The political, for Schmitt, cannot be a site for the realization of ethical life or earthly redemption and the best we can hope for is that the state will guarantee law. Contextualized within Schmitt's other literary and theoretical writings of the time, which show a development from a Vaihinger-inspired irrationalism to a politics centered on its absolute separation from ethics, the true venue of which was the church, Schmitt's jurisprudential texts

[19] See Peter C. Caldwell, *Popular Sovereignty and the Crisis of German Constitutional Law: The Theory & Practice of Weimar Constitutionalism*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997)
[20] Caldwell, 53
[21] Schmitt, *Der Wert des Staates*, 1-7

reveal the development of a politics already anxious about the intrusion of rationalism and its ethics into the domain of the political.

In these early, pre-World War I works, the problem posed by Neo-Kantian ethical idealists like Stammler, Cohen, and Natorp to Schmitt's own politics, however, was slight, merely theoretical, and abstract. It wasn't until *Dictatorship*, the full title of which, significantly, is *Dictatorship: from the modern concept of sovereignty to the proletarian class struggle* that the problem of the ideal took on acute political significance. In *Dictatorship*, Schmitt analyzes the problem of the norm and the ideal as it becomes temporalized: the ideal in modernity becomes a revolutionary project that its proponents aim to realize in the future. The problem of ideals is no longer a problem of the foundations of law in its connection with ethics, but the problem of the effort to realize the ideal through the process of history. Schmitt, I will suggest later, takes this historical framework from a source he subtly appropriates and barely acknowledges, Emil Lask's *Fichtes Idealismus und die Geschichte*. Lask's book traces the transformation of Kantian idealism into the problem of the realization of values, or *Werte*, in and through history. Taking Lask's historical framework in another direction, however, Schmitt argues that the modern effort to realize values in the temporal world outside of the concrete, existent state can only result in sovereign dictatorship, the destruction of an existing constitutional order in pursuit of an ideal, merely conjectural state, suspended somewhere off into the future.

Gesetz und Urteil was a response to the statutory positivist approach to law that was dominant in late Wilhelmine Germany. Statutory positivism, founded by Paul Laband, understood sovereignty to be "the highest earthly force" within a given area.[22] The sovereign state expressed itself through statutes and ordinances, which positivists understood to be the expression of the

[22] Caldwell, 28

state's will, which, Laband argued, was also the will of society itself.[23] As a result, for Laband, the constitution was subordinate to the state.[24] If the state was to remain the highest earthly power, then the constitution would have to be an expression of its will, which, Laband argued, it was.[25] But this meant that the only force that could change the constitution was the legislature, a means of changing the law that the state allowed.[26] As Peter Caldwell points out, this left no room for judicial review.[27] If judges were to begin reviewing statutes and determining whether they fit with the constitution, they would be granting themselves the power of the state, and thus usurping a power that was not theirs. But this had the odd consequence that the judge's role was reduced to applying the statute, with no room for interpretation. Like a factory worker in an assembly line hammering away at whatever part came down line, the judge was supposed to just look at a case and apply the relevant statute.

But as Schmitt and others noticed, legal statutes were by no means as unambiguous as the positivists seemed to assume. Though the positivists sought to fill this gap with a predictable and scientific method of legal interpretation, a younger generation of legal theorists began to mock their scientific pretensions and reveal the extent to which every legal decision was also an act of interpretation. As Caldwell writes, paraphrasing the early twentieth century legal theorist Hermann Kantorowicz, "a gap existed between concrete case and abstract norm, which the judge had to fill."[28] And so legal theorists that sought to respond to the problem these critics raised began to look for scientific criteria that would determine when a legal norm was applied in the right way.

As Schmitt writes in *Gesetz und Urteil*:

---

[23] Caldwell, 15
[24] Caldwell, 36
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Hermann Kantorowicz cited in Caldwell, 44

> The decisive question is this: when is a judicial decision correct? This ambiguous question, the sense of which should, in the course of this report, hopefully be clarified, should be given clear limits, and so should be put precisely: which normative principle underlies contemporary judicial practice?[29]

If Schmitt's answer made it appear as though he were going to search for a new scientific norm of judicial certainty, he was being misleading. For Schmitt, "the conventional remarks found in the law books and commentaries" claimed to provide a variety of interpretive means to arrive at a correct interpretation.[30] Each aimed to explain how to discover the true content of the law and claimed that "a judicial decision is correct when it correctly interprets the law."[31] But this was question begging. These books asked the wrong question. The question was rather, "when is [a judicial decision] correctly *decided?*"[32]

Schmitt's answer turned the question on its head. For Schmitt, "a judicial decision is correct today, if is to be accepted, that another judge would have decided the same way."[33] Notice that Schmitt's answer put the question back to the judge. Though Schmitt supplied a heuristic, the judge still had to *decide* whether they think that another judge would have agreed with their decision. As William E. Scheuermann writes, "legal norms, standards, and concepts were no longer 'containers into which the judge deposits a particular act.'" Instead, they represent mere 'instruments for justifying an expectation.'"[34] Judges had to ask *themselves* whether they thought another judge would have agreed with their decision. The positivists sought a principle that could determine a correct interpretation, but Schmitt gave them a principle of practice that still required a decision. Schmitt's answer preserved a level of contingency and willfulness in the act of judging, even as it was supposed to aid judges in making good decisions. As Schmitt writes, "the practice justifies

[29] Carl Schmitt, *Gesetz und Urteil,* 1. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
[30] *Gesetz und Urteil*, 11.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] *Gesetz und Urteil*, 68
[34] William E. Scheuerman, *Carl Schmitt: The End of Law*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), pp. 23

itself through itself."[35] *Gesetz und Urteil* was still interested in bringing some kind of scientific regularity and predictability to the law.[36] But Schmitt nonetheless founded this scientific aim on a fiction, the counterfactual heuristic fantasy of imagining what another judge would decide.

Schmitt's avenue toward this realization was Vaihinger's *The Philosophy of 'As If'* and it led him to argue in less formal, academic writing that the entire edifice of human knowledge depended on useful fictions. A fiction, Schmitt wrote, paraphrasing Vaihinger, is "a consciously false assumption, through which, however, a useful result should be reached."[37] He continues, "the technique of fiction runs through all sciences, through mathematics, through the natural sciences, through aesthetics, through jurisprudence, through practical ethics."[38] And Vaihinger showed both how these fictions are useful for practice, but also how they could lead to dogmatism. He "uncovers the important fact of the matter, which is how fictions, and hypotheses that are still in need of verification, can transform into dogmas, as they turn an 'as if' into a 'because.'"[39] In his 1911 essay "Der Addressat," Schmitt amplified Vaihinger's arguments to suggest that not only does the rational rely on the fictional, but that this meant that the rational and the irrational were more difficult to distinguish than one might expect. "The foundation and limits," Schmitt writes, "of the authority of fiction lies in its value for thought."[40] But even though fiction is not without value, it is still fiction. Schmitt wrote:

> The fundamental question of [*The Philosophy of As If*] and the material to which it gives rise arouses interest for everything that has to do with the practice of science, and, perhaps especially, for many, because epistemological problems have tried to be solved through psychological and biological approaches. But it is also noteworthy in its entirety, as a system of theoretical, practical, and religious fictions of mankind. Because it is, in any case, in its everyday relevance that the details can

[35] *Gesetz und Urteil*, 82. See also, Scheuermann, 23
[36] Ibid.
[37] Carl Schmitt, Der Addressat," *Die Rheinlande: Monatsschrift für deutche Art und Kunst 21* (Januar-Dezember 1911), 430
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Addressat, 430

> be seen and so also the extent to which its central thought is, as Wagner said, nothing 'ever succeeds without its own madness.'"[41]

While *Gesetz und Urteil* used Vaihinger to provide a standard of correctness for judicial interpretation, "Der Addressat" showed how Vaihinger revealed the madness within knowledge and every day experience. And though *Gesetz und Urteil* found Schmitt critiquing positivism only to recover its rationality, "Der Addressat" undermined the claim to scientificity of *Gesetz und Urteil*. Schmitt appealed to Vaihinger to show how our entire epistemology is shot through with a bit of madness.

This coda of Schmitt's early work, that our practices provide a justification for the norm in defiance of our ordinary intuition, became central to the account of law he would give in his 1914, *The Worth of the State and the Value of the Individual*. *The Worth of the State* sought to query the relationship between law and power, and critique theories that understood them to be equivalent.[42] "If the law is defined as power," Schmitt argued, "then [the law] is no longer essentially a norm, but essentially will and intention."[43] To define the law as power would mean that the state could do whatever it wanted and its actions would be lawful by virtue of the fact that the most powerful entity in the land had willed them. Schmitt writes, "for this theory, there is therefore no rebuttal to the authority of a power."[44] This argument had stark consequences for the statutory positivists, who thought that the law was valid because it was an expression of the state's will. As Schmitt writes, "whoever mounts the assertion that all law is necessarily positive law, that the justification for law is positive law's generation of cases, thereby admits to the power theory of law and negates the irreconcilable opposition between law and circumstance."[45] If the positivist understanding of

---

[41] Ibid.
[42] Schmitt, *Der Wert des Staates und die Bedeutung des Einzelnen*, My translation unless otherwise indicated. See also Kennedy, 65-73
[43] *Der Wert des Staates*, 21
[44] *Der Wert des Staates*, 16
[45] *Der Wert des Staates*, 20

law were correct, then the law would be completely non-normative. If the law was just what the state willed, then the state could will whatever it wanted to and it would have to be taken as valid law. As he writes, "every appeal to a law contains a reference to a power, every effort to recognize the law entails an effort against power."[46]

For Schmitt, then, the law and power are two different orders. "If the law could be deduced from the concrete circumstance," Schmitt wrote, "then there would be no law. The two worlds stand in such opposition that the sentence 'all law is only power' could be reversed into the thesis that 'all power is only law', which proves no connection or deducibility, only contradiction."[47] The law cannot be anything concrete or factual that limits power, because such a concrete or factual entity would again just be power itself. So the law must precede the concrete circumstance, it must be its own entity. "For the law," writes Schmitt, "there is no other world except that of the law, so the law cannot will itself into its own actualization." [48] "The norm," Schmitt writes:

> cannot will, cannot have any intention; only the bearer of an intention can be real. . . the norm stands over the mechanical nature of means and ends, but the empirical world can be the means of law in the sense of medium, in so far as, in it a goal should be actualized, which must be able to be designated *as* lawful, and *through which* precisely *power* can be so designated.[49]

For Schmitt, the law and its norms are pure normativity, pure 'ought'. Law is an entity unto and can only be actualized by the bearer of a will. But if the law is supposed to be something distinct from the will of its most powerful bearer, how could the norm ever become actual? Schmitt argued that the essence of the norm, its very definition, was to be "that which should be actualized."[50] Inherent in the norm is the demand for its own actualization; the norm *is* its demand to become

[46] *Der Wert des Staates*, 18
[47] *Der Wert des Staates*, 30
[48] *Der Wert des Staates*, 35
[49] *Der Wert des Staates*, 34-5. My Italics.
[50] *Der Wert des Staates*, 34

actual. And so, for a will or an intention to be normative, it just has to intend to actualize the norm. (Though, as soon as it is taken up as a will, it is no longer a pure norm.)

Now, for Schmitt, the law is normative, which means that, "the law is *something that should be actualized* as law."[51] And so, Schmitt writes, "the law, as a will that should be actualized, means nothing other than a norm, which becomes an intention, and so ceases to be a norm, when it is received by the empirical world of humankind."[52] Schmitt's solution to the problem of the norm's actualization, though complicated, is ingenious. Since the law is a norm, all one has to do to implement the law is to intend to implement the law, that is, to will the law's actualization. So the law can be, as the positivists argue, what the state wills, so long as the state wills the law. But why does this bring Schmitt beyond the positivists? In prescribing that the state will the law, Schmitt is providing a rubric through which the law can remain normative. Although the law is still what the state wills, it is not the law by virtue of the fact that the state willed it, but by virtue of the fact that it is normative.

Schmitt's argument comes around full circle when he returns to the question of the state. As Schmitt writes, "the state is the legal entity, whose sense exists exclusively in the task of actualizing the law."[53] The state is nothing but the highest power *that implements the law*. If a power did not implement the law, it would not be a state. And if there were a power above it, then it would not be the highest power and it would not be capable of implementing the law. He explains:

> The meaning [*Sinn*] of the state exists in its task of actualizing the law and operating in this direction. Why the state is the highest power follows from this purpose; why it must be the highest power emerges from the direction of its task, as the effect of this condition is to bring to the world of phenomena a factual power. The concept

[51] *Ibid.* My italics.
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] *Der Wert des Staates*, 52

> of the state belongs to the state in an exactly analogical position, as the concept of God is to the necessity of the realization of ethical life in the real world.[54]

The state exists by virtue of the fact that it implements the law. And the law is the law by virtue of the fact that it is that which should be implemented. Finally, when the state wills that the law will become actual, it wills a limit to its own power, because it governs itself by a system of norms. Again, Schmitt's answer preserves aspects of positivism at the same time it moves beyond them. The state *is* the highest power. And the highest power *does* will the law. But state is not the state *because* it is the highest power, but *because* it wills the law. The state becomes the state by virtue of the practice that constitutes it as a state.

But while Schmitt used this as an opportunity to critique the statutory positivist effort to collapse the law into a theory of power, he also used it to argue for a fundamental separation between ethics and the law. In the introduction to the text, Schmitt writes:

> In the middle point of this discussion stands the question of *Recht* as a norm indifferent to facts, not, however, toward the state as a reality. In opposition to this is the interest of this book in the question of the state, while *Recht* is executed only from that which follows from a legal-philosophical [*rechtsphilosophische*] definition of the state. This is where the difference between a purely juridical interest and a pure philosophical one appears to lie and indeed this difference leads to a consequence that this book was not able to escape: that *Recht* is able to stand independently of ethics, its dignity stems from itself, not out of a being-with ethics and not out of a connection with outer conditions to an inner freedom or to be recognized in the gradual transition from something into something else.[55]

Although Schmitt will have specific arguments against Cohen, Natorp, and Stammler, the presuppositions of his argument would lead naturally to this conclusion in any case. After all, for Schmitt, law gains its normative character not by adhering to any particular norm or ideal, but merely when the will of the state is that it actualize a norm. In other words, there is only the slightest theoretical difference between Schmitt's conception of law and the statutory positivists.

---

[54] *Der Wert des Staates*, 55
[55] *Der Wert des Staates*, 11

Functionally, anything the state wills is capable of becoming law, but theoretically the state's will transforms into law on the basis of the state's intention. Thus, where Kantian ethics is bound by a determinate set of norms and intentions, the only intention required of the state is that its will be normative.

But Schmitt also developed a more specific critique of Stammler, Natorp, and, to a lesser extent, Cohen that hinged on their conception of reason and its presumptions about humanity as the subject of law. Schmitt's critique of Neo-Kantianism in *Der Wert des Staates* focuses on their mutual contention that ethics and law are the same kind of legislation and share a foundation in practical reason.[56] For Schmitt, both Stammler and Natorp conceive of law in purely rationalistic terms that leads to absurd assumptions. Both theorists share the fundamentally Kantian presupposition that morality deals with interior legislation, or personal intentions and ends, and law deals with exterior legislation, what one actually does. But where Stammler grounds outer legislation in an argument about harmonizing individual wills, Natorp argues that outer legislation is about securing the conditions for the pursuit of ethics.[57] With regard to Stammler, Schmitt writes, dryly:

> A purely intellectual combination of any conceivable contents from many perspectives and goal is possible, viewed from an infinitely high, timeless vantage point. We are working perhaps secretly with the animal or plant world or even lifeless nature; we are maybe all tools of some kind of high rational will. But if law is going to be limited to humans, Stammler may not understand humanity as the *Homo Sapiens* of natural history or some other biological category, but only a rational essence…[58]

For Schmitt, Stammler's Kantian conception of law as the harmonization of potentially competing wills presupposes an entity inhuman in its machine-like obedience to some abstract conception of

[56] Schmitt, *Der Wert des Staates*, 60
[57] Schmitt, *Der Wert des Staates*, 61-2
[58] Schmitt, *Der Wert des Staates*, 63

rationality. For Schmitt, Stammler's conception of law applies to humans only insofar as they are rational, not the "real empirical individual" and bases his account of law itself on an abstract conception of the human, not the actual concrete entity.[59]

But Schmitt takes Natorp's argument more seriously, while sensing in it a greater danger. On Schmitt's recounting, Natorp argues that the law's function is to secure the outer conditions under which the individual can realize their autonomy through ethics.[60] But the ethical notion that this implies, for Schmitt, is abhorrent. It compromises the transcendence of the ethical, which cannot be reliant on any 'external conditions' for its realization. "An ethics that remains conscious of its autonomy," Schmitt writes, "and calls itself pure [*rein*] would have to be entirely independent of outer conditions that could compromise it."[61] Schmitt continues: "The authority and sublimity of the categorical imperative must be found in the fact that it is independent of the outer situation and that it preserves its authority without exception."[62] Here, as Schmitt's Catholicism blurs into his reading of Kant, he insists on an absolute separation between ethics, which is timeless and transcendent, and law, which deals with the our profane, temporal existence. Natorp's and Stammler's Kantian ethics threaten the transcendence of ethical life with a rationalist fantasy aimed at turning politics into an instrument of rationalist ethics.

But if Kantian rationalism was a key concern for Schmitt in *Der Wert des Staates*, it would ultimately be the later political movements that sought to overcome the paradoxes of rationalism in revolution and romanticism that became Schmitt's ultimate concern. By the time of *Political Romanticism*, Schmitt would begin to historicize the concerns and concepts already present in his works before World War I. Where these early works already sought to assert the autonomy of what

[59] Schmitt, *Der Wert des Staates*, 63-4
[60] Schmitt, *Der Wert des Staates*, 64
[61] Schmitt, *Der Wert des Staates*, 65
[62] Schmitt, *Der Wert des Staates*, 66

the later Schmitt would call "the political," Schmitt's Weimar works would diagnose contemporary efforts to transform politics into a venue for the realization of some other values as part of the historical condition of the modern. In *Political Romanticism*, Schmitt would trace this tendency to the attempt to overcome Kantian dualism and radical subjectivism, which resulted in what he described as "the irrationality of the real." This was a historical framework he would take from another Neo-Kantian theorist: Emil Lask.

Although Schmitt only appears to mention Lask sparingly in his works (one finds references at least once in *Political Romanticism*, *Dictatorship,* and *Political Theology*), Schmitt's arguments and even vocabulary in key passages in *Political Romanticism* and *Dictatorship* stem directly from Lasks' *Fichtes Idealismus und Geschichte*, which he either alludes to or cites in these moments. Schmitt's discussion of Kantian dualism not only draws on a vocabulary unmistakably taken from Lask, it also borrows his framework and reproduces many of Lask's own arguments. For example, Schmitt frames the problem of Kantian dualism as the "*Irrationalität des Realen*;" Lask titles the second section of *Fichtes Idealismus* "*Fichtes Rationalismus und die Irrationalität des Empirischen*."[63] (The 'irrationality of the real' is a formulation that unmistakably stems from Lask; it was perhaps his and Rickert's key problematic.[64]) Lask describes Fichte's "reinterpretation of the abstract-formal in a concrete-material", which resulted in the "hypostatization of the universal concept of the I into the totality of reason becoming the foundation of an emanationist dialectic;" Schmitt writes of Fichte's concept of the I as a "concrete, individual concept that emanates a concrete world."[65] Schmitt argues that attributes conventionally ascribed to God

[63] Carl Schmitt-Dorotić, *Politische Romantik*, (München & Leipzig: Verlag Duncker & Humblot, 1919), pp. v, 47-50; Emil Lask, *Fichtes Idealismus und die Geschichte*. (Tübingen & Leipzig: J. C. B. Mohr, 1902), pp. 77-100
[64] See Kavoulakos's discussion of Lask in Konstantinos Kavoulakos, *Georg Lukács's Philosophy of Praxis: From Neo-Kantianism to Marxism*, (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2018), pp. 20-35; Frederick C. Beiser, "Emil Lask and Kantianism," *The Philosophical Forum 39*, No. 2 (Summer 2008), pp. 286-7
[65] Emil Lask, *Fichtes Idealismus*, 85; Carl Schmitt trans. Guy Oakes, *Political Romanticism*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 53. I cite here the English translation based on the 1925 edition of *Politische*

become affixed to the concepts of "the people" and "history" in the eighteenth century; Lask argues that among Fichte's innovations was his resolution of Kant's antinomies in the notion that the collective, in the form of the nation and its *Volk*, overcomes the problem of irrationality in determining itself as the subject of history.[66]

Schmitt's use of Lask is of more than historical interest because it appears to be one of the sources of Schmitt's growing anxiety between 1919 and 1921 about politics becoming the venue for the realization of an absolute and god-like popular will, which threatens to upend the law into a state of permanent suspension. The innovation that Lask attributes to Fichte is Schmitt's great fear: the idea that the people are the subject of historical self-determination. For Schmitt, this transformation gives rise to the revolutionary tradition and the phenomenon of sovereign dictatorship, and it threatens to undermine the state as the actual venue for the realization of normativity in the world. In tracing the development of a concept of history and nationhood to the eighteenth-century reaction against Kantianism, Lask provides Schmitt with a historical narrative that explains the effort to supplant the state with a yet higher power: the people in its historical efforts at self-determination. As Schmitt's early work helps to reveal, this ignores the state's role as the only venue capable of actually securing normativity within politics and ignores the primacy of practice over the norm. The effort to assert the popular will aspires toward a legitimate constitutional order but results in dictatorship, terror, and the suspension of the law.

The argument of *Fichtes Idealismus und die Geschichte* is that Fichte's great intellectual innovation was to reveal how history could be a distinct form of inquiry, distinct from *Erkenntniskritik*, in which we see how human values objectify themselves in history through the

---

Romantik as *Political Romanticism* and the 1919 German edition as *Politische Romantik*. All translations cited as "*Politische Romantik*" are my own.

[66] Schmitt, Political Romanticism, pp. 51-60; Lask, *Fichtes Idealismus und die Geschichte*, 240-270. See also Beiser, "Emil Lask and Kantianism," 287-88

nation and the people. Lask situates Fichte's achievement relative to Kant's. Developing an argument largely drawn from his dissertation supervisor Heinrich Rickert – *Fichtes Idealismus und die Geschichte* was Lask's dissertation – Lask suggested that Kant's achievement was in the methodological dualism he posited between the human as a rational being and the human as a physical or biological entity.[67] In distinguishing between the human as a rational subject and the human as a biological entity, Kant's methodological dualism allowed for the study of human values and moral forms (as products of reason) as distinct from its biological being. For Lask, then, Kant's methodological dualism provided the foundation for the study of history as the study of the development of value-laden and ethically-weighted cultural forms. But Kant's methodological dualism resulted in the creation of a new difficulty, which was how to understand in what manner and through what mechanisms values actually become objective cultural forms. Kant offers us two units of analysis, the individual and the species, but neither make sense of observable modes through which values become realized in the world. Fichte's contribution was to argue for the separation of *Erkenntniskritik* from the study of history as the objectification of values in human communities over time. *Erkenntniskritik* looks at the rational foundations of human knowledge, but history is the study of the objectification of human values in historical totalities. It neither can nor needs to be reducible to the critique of knowledge, but can be a distinct form of inquiry.

Schmitt's reception of Lask's project is revealing both in what he chooses to take from Lask and what he leaves behind. Lask's project is both a work of intellectual history, which provides a narrative of post-Kantian attempts to overcome the antinomies of Kant, and a contribution to a strain of Neo-Kantianism interested in how values become objective. Lask's intellectual history focuses on Fichte's effort to overcome "the irrationality of the empirical" that

[67] *Fichtes Idealismus und die Geschichte,* 3; Beiser, "Emil Lask and Kantianism," 284

results from Kant's theory of the categories. The problem of "irrationality" arises out of Kant's argument that we only know the world as we think it through the categories of the understanding. As Lask explains, for Kant our intellect consists of "formal-logical operations of thought, strong as mere forms, as abstract knowledge-values, without hypostatization into independent reality," but this leads to the problem that the categories are rational and transcendent, while the appearances are contingent and so irrational.[68] The question Kant left his successors, then, is the relationship of the thought to the empirical. Is "knowledge dependent on being", or is "being dependent on knowledge"? Are the ideal and the real equivalent or does the ideal have limits that cannot grasp the real?[69] Lask situates Fichte within efforts to overcome this problem, from Schelling's positing of a "suprarational or irrational world power" to Hegel's "emanationist dialectic." And Fichte's contribution is to posit history as the domain through which values are realized historically through a "people as a historical unity," through a "political detour that reveals the reconciliation between values and actuality."[70]

For Schmitt, Lask's intellectual history helps to track a shift in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, as the conventional demiurge of theology, God, was replaced by two new demiurgic powers, history and the people [*das Volk*]. Schmitt develops this argument between the 1919 edition of *Political Romanticism* and *Political Theology*, in the middle of which he also published "Politische Theorie und Romantik" (1920) and *Dictatorship*.[71] In *Political Romanticism,* in an argument taken straight from Lask, Schmitt argues that the demiurgic conception of the

[68] Lask, *Fichtes Idealismus*, 30, 33-39
[69] Lask, *Fichtes Idealismus*, 68-9
[70] Schmitt, *Politische Romantik*, [1919 edition], 271, 272
[71] Carl Schmitt-Dorotić, "Politische Theory und Romantik," *Historische Zeitschrift 23*, (1920) pp. 377-397

people and the nation emerged from the post-Kantian reaction to Kant's opposition between, Schmitt writes:

> thinking and being, conception and actuality, spirit and nature, subject and object, which Kant's transcendental solution could not remedy. It did not return the reality of the outer world to the thinking intellect [*Geist*] because its objectivity lay in that it moved in objectively valid forms and the essence of empirical actuality, the thing in itself, was in no way grasped. Post-Kantian philosophy, however, consciously grasped at this essence of the world in order to sublate [*aufheben*] the irrationality of actual being.[72]

The Post-Kantian effort to overcome Kantian dualism and the problem of the "irrationality of the real," for Schmitt typified one mode of reaction against Kantianism that resulted in Schelling's positing of an "absolute reason" that overcame both poles in an "indifferent, absolute third." As a result, for Schmitt, "the highest and most secure reality of the old metaphysics, the transcendent God, was eliminated."[73] And this left the "question [of] who would take over its function as the highest and must secure reality and so the last legitimation point of historical reality."[74] For Schmitt, the post-Kantian effort to posit some historical totality that was able to overcome Kantian dualism in a new conception of the absolute opened up conceptual space for the positing of a new demiurge, history and the people.

But where Lask writes largely in appreciation of Fichte's historical project, Schmitt finds his and all of the other reactions against rationalism abhorrent, a historical transformation that seeks spuriously to overcome both God and the state as the highest earthly power. Schmitt sharpens this argument in *Dictatorship* in a long footnote on nineteenth century intellectual history in the midst of a key argument about Sieyès conception of *pouvoir constituant*, which I discuss later in this chapter. Schmitt writes:

---

[72] Schmitt, *Politische Romantik*, [1919 edition], 48
[73] Schmitt, *Politische Romantik*, [1919 edition], pp. 49
[74] *Ibid.*

> Two ideas here are present that drive the further development of the philosophy of the state in the 19th century, the people and historical development. The educational despotism of the philosophy of the enlightenment already makes itself dependent on the fulfillment of a task. It touches on the belief in the perfectibility of the human species, which led into the history of philosophy a development that went beyond the individual. In two entirely different systems of the nineteenth century, through Hegel and Comte, would the idea of development be systematically grounded…The element of the history of philosophy in the Kantian philosophy has often been outlined…Kant's philosophy of law is the sum of rational natural law, the starting point of which is the coexistence of humanity which is developed here to its highest consequence in wonderful clarity. Therefore in Kant there is neither emergency law (emergency law is for him coercion without right) nor grace [*Gnade*]. Against this, Fichte's crossing over into the philosophy of history is already conspicuously clear. Here Emil Lask's account can be referred to, to which is to be added that the main point is the concept of a dictator, a "tyrant [*Zwingherr*]," who stands "at the peak of their time and their people, "not with a calculating, independent will" realizing a "fancy [*Grille*]," but "enthusiastic [*begeistert*]" and with an "absolute" will" …The point at which the legal despotism of the Enlightenment becomes historical-philosophical cannot be spelled out more clearly[75]

Again, Schmitt's argument here appears to draw heavily on Lask and, in fact, his only modification is to connect Lask's argument with the concept of *Dictatorship*. Lask argues that both Kant and Fichte inherited the "idea of a divine world plan" which transformed first into the theory of the development of the species and then the nation; God's plan was secularized into a notion of the development of the species. "Kant," Lask writes, "also took up this form of the idea of society. The subject of historical progress should not be the individual, but the species . . . There the end-goal of all cultural work is to be reached not through the additive power of individuals, but through a unification of humanity into a moral whole."[76] But where Kant's focus on the species led him back into a speculative metaphysics of nature, Fichte, "much more thoroughly than Kant was able to do, in departing from Kantian formalism, grounded the methodological idea of the 'real' cultural

[75] Carl Schmitt-Dorotić, *Die Diktatur von den Anfängen des modernen Souveränitätsgedankens bis zum proletarischen Klassenkampf*, (München und Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1921), pp. 147. My translation. Cf. Lask, 237-239

[76] Lask, *Fichtes Idealismus*, 242

whole much more deeply," eventually in the developing concept of a nation as a historical totality.[77] And prefatory to this realization is his discovery of history as the medium through values can be realized in the world. This is why Fichte can argue, Lask argues, that the people can be "educated into freedom" and that history sometimes requires a usurper or tyrant, citing the same passage in Fichte that Schmitt will.[78]

For Schmitt, however, the effect of Fichte's accomplishment is not that it isolates history as a distinct venue through which values can be realized, but that it tracks a shift in the nineteenth century wherein the people and the concept of history take on the attributes conventionally ascribed to a transcendent God. Indeed, where Lask finds in Fichte a promising solution to the problem of how values get objectified in the world, Schmitt finds a political theology that renders the people the highest earthly power, which they wield over both Church and state. Read against the argument of *Der Wert des Staates*, Schmitt's anxiety should be obvious: the Neo-Kantian effort to use politics as an instrument for the realization of values threatens the capacity of the only two institutions that can actually do so: the church and the state. Politics cannot be a venue for the realization of values because values are transcendent and humans are profane; politics concerns our profane, dangerous nature, and ethics deals with our transcendent, immortal souls.

In the background here is ultimately a choice—a decision—about the kind of normativity that we think politics can realize. It is ultimately a choice about political theology and philosophical anthropology. In *Political Theology*, Schmitt writes:

> Every political idea in one way or another takes a position on the 'nature' of man and presupposes that he either 'by nature good' or 'by nature evil"…It was thus on pedagogic grounds that the ideal of a 'legal despotism' was justified: Uneducated humanity is educate by a legislator (who, according to Rousseau's *Social Contract* was able to 'change the nature of man'); or unruly nature could be conquered by Fichte's 'tyrant,' and the state became, as Fichte said with naïve brutality, an

[77] Lask, *Fichtes Idealismus,* 249
[78] Lask, *Fichtes Idealismus*, 238

> 'educational factory.' Marxist socialism considers the question of the nature of man incidental and superfluous because it believes that changes in economic and social conditions change man.

For the Neo-Kantian inheritor of the philosophy of the nineteenth century, the answer is clear. Politics can be a venue for the realization of ethical values because humans have access to a reason that prescribes them a moral law. But for the catholic theorist of law who sees in popular sovereignty the effort to supplant a transcendent God, the law must deal with humanity not as a "rational essence," as do Natorp and Stammler, or a malleable, educable thing, but with humans as they appear in all of their concreteness and particularity. To realize ideals is to either posit the goodness of humanity or its educability; for Schmitt, it is to deal with humans not as they are, but as the philosopher thinks they ought to be, even if that means upending the state in search for the constitution of a new terrestrial order.

III. Lukács and Schmitt on Norm and Form: Lukács

The introduction to Schmitt's *Dictatorship* begins from his interest in the meaning of dictatorship in the debate between Karl Kautsky and Leon Trotsky over the meaning of the dictatorship of the proletariat in their books of the same name, *Terrorism and Communism*.[79] Although he does not address communism or the proletariat for the rest of the book, Schmitt draws attention to the uniqueness of the Marxist conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a temporary state form instrumental to the realization of the emancipated society. As Schmitt writes:

> Now this proletarian state does not want to be something definitive, but rather something *transitional*. That way the essential circumstances, marginalised in the bourgeois literature, regain their own significance. Dictatorship is just a means to reach a certain goal, because its content is only determined by the interest of the intended outcome; in other words it is only determined by a set of specific circumstances. Therefore dictatorship cannot be genuinely defined as the suspension [*Aufhebung*] of democracy. Nevertheless, even the communist

[79] Schmitt, *Dictatorship*, *xl*. For the debate, see Karl Kautsky, trans. W. H. Kerridge, *Terrorism and Communism: A Contribution to the Natural History of Revolution*, (Manchester, UK: The National Labour Press, ltd., 1920); Leon Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*: *A Reply to Karl Kautsky*, (New York, NY: Verso Books, 2007).

> argumentation shows that dictatorship should only occur exceptionally, and through the force of concrete circumstances, because it is, by definition, only a matter of transition. This, too, is implicit in the concept of dictatorship and it depends upon *that from which* an exception is made.[80]

Proletarian class struggle results in dictatorship because it instates dictatorships that act in the name of a future society. The difficulty Schmitt sees in the Marxist conception of dictatorship is that it cannot secure the kinds of normativity that a permanent state could because its will is a technical end, not the oughtness of pure normativity. For Schmitt, the problem with Bolshevism was that it threatened to turn politics into an instrument of a normative end that, in reality, was pure utopianism. In place of the normativity the state could guarantee, one could only have class dictatorship and terror.

In "Bolshevism as a Moral Problem," Lukács writes of the desire of social democracy to put an end to all class struggles:

> Now the realization of this goal has become a distinct possibility. Consequently, we are faced with the following moral dilemma: If we take advantage of the given possibility for the realization of our goal, we have to accept dictatorship, terror, and the class oppression that goes withf it. The existing class oppression will then have to be replaced by that of the proletariat - to drive out Satan with the help of Beelzebub, so to speak - in the hope that this last and therefore most open and cruel of all class oppressions will finally destroy itself and in so doing will put an end to class oppression forever.[81]

Lukács's concern was reminiscent of Schmitt's, although he approached it from the perspective of ethics, rather than law. The question at stake was whether or not ethics could be suspended in pursuit of an ultimate and millenarian ethical goal, or whether ethical means could only be achieved through ethical tactics. But where Lukács differs from Schmitt is that he does not deny that socialist emancipation is forthcoming. What he questions is whether the most expedient and

[80] Schmitt, *Dictatorship*, xl
[81] Georg Lukàcs trans. Judith Marcus Tar, "Bolshevism as a Moral Problem," *Social Research 44*, No.3 (Autumn 1977), pp. 422

ethical means to achieve it is terror and dictatorship, or whether socialists should choose temporary alliances with bourgeois parties in the interest of ethics. Here, the question is a classic one of deontology or consequentialism: will the fulfillment of the final goal of socialism redeem the atrocities committed in its name, or are the atrocities deviations that contravene the ethical task they claim to accomplish?

Accounts of Lukács's life often begin with a description of his abrupt and enthusiastic turn to Marxism in 1918.[82] As Martin Jay writes, Lukács had "agonized" about choosing between ethical and idealism and a redemptive current of Marxism before his "sudden conversion" to the latter.[83] Prior to his conversion, Lukács saw socialism as a primarily ethical issue, one which we he analyzed in essays that turned to the tradition of German philosophy from a Neo-Kantian point of view. In essays from 1918 like "The Debate on Conservative and Progressive Idealism" and "Bolshevism as a Moral Problem," Lukács still understood politics in primarily moral terms. Reminiscent of Schmitt's claim about the law in *Der Wert des Staates und die Bedeutung des Einzelnen*, Lukács argued in "The Debate on Conservative and Progressive Idealism" that ethics issued from a space of pure 'oughtness,' pure normativity. In true Neo-Kantian fashion, this meant that ethics referred to the space of intentions where an end is pursued for its own intrinsic goodness, its own sake.[84] By the end of 1918, however, Lukács would see socialist ethics as equivalent with socialist tactics. Bolshevism was no longer a moral problem, but morality itself.

"The Debate on Conservative and Progressive Idealism" finds Lukács taking the very set of positions that he would critique in "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat."

[82] Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: Adventures of a Concept from Lukacs to Habermas,* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 81-5
[83] Martin Jay, "Fidelity to the Event? Lukàcs' *History and Class Consciousness* and the Russian Revolution" *Studies in East European Thought 70* (2018), pp. 200.
[84] Cf. Kavoulakos, *Georg Lukács's Philosophy of Praxis: From Neo-Kantianism to Marxism*

Indeed, from the perspective of that later essay, Lukács would have appeared in the grips of a bourgeois, reified form of consciousness in which reason was incapable of ever connecting up with a world it could only passively contemplate. The realm of ethics was held aloft from the realm of being, of the given. Ethics was the space of pure 'oughtness' to which we appealed when we wanted some kind of normativity to guide our practices. "Viewing its essence," Lukács writes, "though not existence, every activity carries within itself an oughtness-structure (Sollen)."[85] As in Schmitt's account, normativity was about whether the intention guiding an action was directed toward the good-in-itself, or toward some instrumental end.[86] Still, Lukács did not draw this distinction quite so sharply in thinking about the consequences of ethical idealism for politics.[87] From the perspective of ethical idealism, politics was a vehicle for the realization of the ideal in and through political institutions.[88]

In "Bolshevism as a Moral Problem" and "Tactics and Ethics," two essays which bookend Lukács's conversion from ethical idealism to communism, Lukács was dealing with the very problem that Schmitt would take up in *Dictatorship*. Although "Bolshevism as a Moral Problem" still appealed to ethics rather than law as the fundamental category of normativity, its question was whether or not it was ever acceptable to suspend norms in pursuit of their realization. On Schmitt's account, the transformation from the classical conception of dictatorship to the modern account of dictatorship concerned this very point. Where classical dictators suspended a constitution in order to save it, modern, sovereign dictators *destroyed* constitutions in pursuit of a new one.[89] For the Lukács of "Bolshevism as a Moral Problem," the realization of the ethical ideal of socialism still

[85] Georg Lukàcs trans. Victor Zitta, "The Debate on the Conservative and Progressive Idealism," *Revolution & Counter-Revolution*, (Mexico City, Mexico: Querétaro, 1991), 33
[86] Georg Lukàcs trans. Victor Zitta, "The Debate on the Conservative and Progressive Idealism," 34
[87] *Ibid.*
[88] Georg Lukàcs trans. Victor Zitta, "The Debate on the Conservative and Progressive Idealism," 34-36
[89] Dictatorship, xxxix-xlii; 120-4

could not redeem any straying away from the ethical path. By the time of "Tactics and Ethics," he would change his mind.

Read in light of the positions he would eventually elaborate more fully in "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," "Tactics and Ethics" shows Lukács's turn away from ideal reason and toward history as the legitimating force of revolutionary *praxis*. When all Lukács had to provide a sense of normative substance and intelligibility to political action was ethical idealism, Bolshevism was unintelligible except as an attempt to do violence in the name of the good. As Lukács writes in "Bolshevism as a Moral Problem," "Bolshevism rests on the metaphysical assumption that the bad can engender the good, or as Razumikhin says in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, that it is possible to lie our way through to the truth."[90] But for the Lukács of "Tactics and Ethics," the paradigm of ethical idealism necessarily conceives of politics through the rubric of individual choice and judgment. But is individual ethical judgment and action really sufficient to realize the ideal by virtue of which we are supposed to be ethical?[91]

In "Tactics and Ethics," Lukács argued that tactics in pursuit of socialist emancipation *are* ethical because they aim at realizing the good for which we are supposed to have ethics in the first place. To the extent that the prevailing order upholds a system of domination and socialist emancipation could liberate us from it, our relationship with the prevailing order determines the extent to which our behavior is in any sense truly ethical. To wit: conduct that will tend to uphold the existing order, even if performed by someone who objects to it in principle, will be unethical by virtue of preserving an ultimately unethical system. And the reverse of that claim leads Lukács to his radical conclusion: "it seems to follow from the above that we have also discovered the

[90] "Bolshevism as a Moral Problem," 424
[91] Georg Lukacs trans. Michael McColgan, "Tactics and Ethics," in *Tactics and Ethics: Political Essays 1919-1929*, (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1975), pp. 6

answer to the ethical problem: that adherence to correct tactics is itself ethical."[92] If ethics are about what 'ought' to occur in the world, then individual actions can only be judged ethical in light of their relationship with our future emancipation.

Lukács's ingenious move here, which he would develop at length in "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," is to suggest that the ideal of emancipation necessitates socialist *praxis* because the ideal only has normative force in light of its future realization. In other words, for Lukács, the point of the ideal is not to remain ideal, but to become actual. (Lukács's account of ethics here is, again, strikingly similar to Schmitt's notion of law.) An ethics that adhered to normative principles that were in no way meant to be action-guiding or, to use the language of classical philosophy, to strive toward the good, would be incoherent. To the extent that Lukács can show that socialist emancipation would a) realize the good in the world and b) is possible, he is able to show that socialist tactics are intrinsically ethical by virtue of the fact and to the extent that they realize socialist emancipation.

In light of this interpretation of "Tactics and Ethics," I want to suggest that part of the task of "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" is to show that socialist emancipation would realize the good in the world. Lukács, after all, appears to say as much in his 1920 essay "The Moral Mission of the Communist Party," writing, "the transition from the old society to the new implies, *not merely an economic and institutional, but also and at the same time a moral transformation*…for all its objective necessity, however, this transition is precisely the transition from bondage and reification to freedom and humanity."[93] Here, Lukács draws a distinctly moral contrast between a dominating and reifying society and an emancipated society of freedom and

[92] Lukàcs, "Tactics and Ethics," 6
[93] Lukàcs, "The Moral Mission of the Communist Party," in *Tactics and Ethics*, pp. 64-70

humanity. Socialist emancipation realizes the good; tactics instrumental to its realization are thereby ethical.

Lukács develops the concept of reification out of the commodity structure, which reduces qualitatively distinct objects, including humans themselves, into calculable and exchangeable quantities of value. As he writes in "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," "*objectively*, in so far as the commodity form facilitates the equal exchange of qualitatively different objects, it can exist only if that formal equality is in fact recognized—at any rate in *this* relation, which indeed confers upon them their commodity nature."[94] The commodity form thus entails a particular iteration of reason which stands aloft from the world and reduces all of its objects into discrete, calculable *quanta*. Capitalist society thus presupposes a system of exchange that requires the full rationalization of society. Labor power and production, the sites where the worker exercises his or her agency, become abstract systems of rules that produce objects of exchange assembled piecemeal in large, impersonal processes in which the worker is just a cog.[95]

The commodity form thus coordinates the capitalist mode of production, which is predicated on the labor of the proletariat creating surplus value for a class of bourgeois owners. *Reification is the process through which the proletariat is led to construct a world that dominates them*. It is a world in which they are alienated from their own agency because the commodity form divorces them from not only the products of their labor, but their labor itself, which they regard as a commodity as calculable and exchangeable as any other. As Lukács writes:

> By becoming aware of the commodity relationship the proletariat can only become conscious of itself as the object of the economic process. For the commodity *is* produced and even the worker in his quality as commodity, as an immediate producer is at best a mechanical driving wheel in the machine. But if the reification of capital is dissolved into an unbroken process of its production *and reproduction*,

[94] Georg Lukàcs trans. Rodney Livingstone, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics,* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), pp. 87
[95] "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat, 89

> it is possible for the proletariat to discover that it is itself the *subject* of this process even though it is in chains and is for the time unconscious of the fact.[96]

The proletariat is thus ensnared in a trap it remakes every day. The commodity form enshrines a system of exchange in which humans are forced into selling their labor power to earn money for their means of subsistence and other goods. But the result of this form of exchange is that the producers, the proletariat, end up manufacturing and reproducing the very system that dominates them. Once they become conscious of the fact of their exploitation, they will realize that they have been manufacturing their own domination. They will realize that they are *the true subject of history* and combat reification through revolutionary *praxis*.

For the Lukács of this period, then, to pose emancipation as an ideal is to become trapped in the very reified consciousness emancipation is supposed to overcome, one where reason is held aloft from a world that it can only passively contemplate and never truly change. Again, to borrow from Lukács's argument in "Tactics and Ethics," if emancipation is an *ethical* ideal because it is something that ought to occur and not just in the mind, but in the world, then tactics that will achieve emancipation are thereby ethical. Deontology leads directly to consequentialism. But if the ideal is just a rational ethical principle that we obey and from which we can never deviate because it is good in itself, it becomes another form of reified reason held aloft from a world, which again, it can only contemplate and not change.

For Lukács, the inability of abstract reason to justify itself is nowhere better expressed than in Kant's *Critical* philosophy, which views "rational knowledge as the product of mind."[97] Knowledge is the product of a rational mind that comprehends its objects and systematizes them into deductive systems. As Lukàcs writes, "for rationalism has existed at widely different times

[96] Lukàcs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 180-1. My Italics. Other emphases in original.
[97] Lukàcs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 111

and in the most diverse forms, in the sense of a formal system whose unity derives from its orientation towards that aspect of the phenomena that can be grasped by the understanding."[98] Rationalism aspires to a system of knowledge that would be identical with real, where deduction from one principle within a rational system can yield knowledge about other propositions without ever requiring the mediation of reality. The essence of rationalist thought is the idea that knowledge consists in our *intellectual* grasp of the real, our capacity to know it as an object of reason reducible to its adherence to rational categories.

The trouble for Lukács is that, when "rationalism claims to be the universal method by which to obtain knowledge of the whole of existence," it encounters antinomies that it must turn to the irrational to solve.[99] The paradigm case of this problem, Lukács suggests, is in Kant's *Critical* philosophy and especially its notion of the thing-in-itself, which he argues reveals its inability to ground itself. On Lukács' reading, the thing-in-itself reveals the inability of reason to account for all of the objects it can cognize in one systematic whole. The classical metaphysical questions like, God, immortality, and the soul are "mythological expressions" of total systematic rational knowledge of the world, which Kant's system precludes.[100]

But more fundamentally, for Lukács, the other role of the thing-in-itself stems from the fact that Kant's system cannot determine the relationship between rationality and the given. Lukács asks: does our capacity to understand the given through reason tell us about the rationality of the given, or is its rationality something we have constructed?[101] For Lukács, the issue is that, if the rationality of the given is something we have constructed, then the inability of reason to fully account for the given might lead us to reconsider whether the rationalist perspective holds up. In

[98] Lukàcs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 113
[99] Lukàcs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 114
[100] Lukàcs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 115
[101] Lukàcs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 116

other words, if the rationalist perspective continues to encounter antinomies and paradoxes and cannot even fully explain the reality it promises to explain, it may in fact suffer from fundamental flaws. The alternative would be that reason has discerned the underlying rationality of the given. But Lukács suggests that this is clearly not the case, because then reason would be a fully deductive system, akin to Kant's intuitive understanding or Hegel's absolute knowing, capable of accounting for the given in its totality. As Lukács points out, even Kant admits that reason is a construction that fails to fully account for the given as such, since his categories refer to objects of *possible* experience.[102] Kant's categories refer to objects that are wholly contingent. His system is not contiguous with what it claims to describe.[103]

On Lukács's interpretation of Kant, Kant turns to a conception of *praxis* in his account of ethics in the *Critique of Practical Reason* to overcome the antinomies of his thought, but ends up sharpening the division he posits between abstract, formal reason and the world it contemplates. He writes:

> Kant's formalistic ethics, adapted to the consciousness of the individual, is indeed able to open up the possibility of a metaphysical solution to the problem of the thing-in itself by enabling the concepts of a world seen as a totality, which had been destroyed by the transcendental dialectic, to reappear on the horizon as the postulates of practical reason. But from the point of view of method this subjective and practical solution remains imprisoned within the same barriers that proved so overwhelming to the objective and contemplative analysis in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[104]

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argues that the classic things-in-themselves—God, immortality, and the freedom—could never have any truth content, but could become practical postulates.[105] For example, I cannot have any true knowledge of God, but given that it is my ethical

[102] Lukàcs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 116-18
[103] Of course, this is precisely Kant's point.
[104] Lukàcs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 125
[105] On the postulates of pure reason, see Immanuel Kant trans. Mary Gregor, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 95-121

duty to promote the highest good, I can appeal to a conception of God as the ultimate guarantor that the highest good is possible to the extent that it guides and enables the pursuit of my duty.[106] But as Lukács points out, this only leads to a new iteration of the initial problem in Kant's *Critical* philosophy because the validity of the practical postulates are based on Kant's ethical conception of freedom, in which humans achieve their freedom when they act according to a purely formal moral law.[107] The problem here is that, in order to overcome its inconsistencies, Kant's system appeals to a concept of freedom that is, again, *merely formal*; freedom is now predicated on a formal ethic that *must* stand aloft from the given. Here we have a notion of free will premised on its disconnection from the actual, physical world.

"Tactics and Ethics" helps to shed light on Lukács's frustration with the reliance of Kantian ethics on a leap of faith, taken for practical reasons, in which God will guarantee the realization of the good. Indeed, this brings Lukács to his fundamental claim against Kant and the mode of rationality his thought epitomizes: his abstract, formal account of reason ends up at a conception of freedom that does not seem very free at all. Freedom becomes an empty formal principle expressing what *ought* to be, but is completely incapable of bringing the world in light with what *ought* to be. Freedom, for Kant, lacks the agency to change the world. It is to wed one's intentions to a normative principle and then pray that the world might one day change. "This sheds light," Lukács writes:

> on a new and significant structural aspect of the whole complex of problems: in order to overcome the irrationality of the question of the thing-in-itself it is not enough that the attempt should be made to transcend the contemplative attitude. When the question is formulated more concretely it turns out that the essence of praxis consists in annulling that indifference of form towards content that we found in the problem of the thing-in-itself. Thus praxis can only be really established as a

[106] Immanuel Kant trans. Mary. Gregor, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 105
[107] Lukàcs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 124-5. On Kant and the relationship between freedom and the pure form of the morality, see Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason,* 63

> philosophical principle if, at the same time, a conception of form can be found whose basis and validity no longer rest on that pure rationality and that freedom from every definition of content, In so far as the principle of praxis is the prescription for changing reality, it must be tailored to the concrete material substratum of action if it is to impinge upon it to any effect.[108]

Thus, Lukács arrives at the final point in his critique of Kant, the final moment at which, he supposes, he exposes its weakness. For Kant, freedom stands aloft from a world it cannot change. For Kant, freedom ends up being about ensuring that the will conforms to the empty formalism of abstraction rationality, rather than actually changing the world to be how it ought to be. Kantian reason is unable to account for its connection with the world because it does not have one; its internal development takes it inexorably further and further away from it. For Lukács, then, *praxis* can only be a solution the antinomies of Kant's philosophy if we come to understand how *praxis* changes the actual, material world.

Now, for Lukács, this will require exposing how the problems of Kant's metaphysics are solved when we understand that humans and the material word they construct are imbricated in one unceasing process of becoming. This, of course, is the point of Hegel's phenomenology and then, on Lukác's account, Marx's materialist reinterpretation of it. As Lukács writes, "the task is to discover the principles by means of which it becomes *possible in the first place* for an 'ought' to modify existence. And it is just this that the theory rules out from the start by establishing the mechanics of nature as an unchangeable fact of existence."[109] Kant's rationalism begins from a disavowal of humanity's capacity to change its material natural environment. It thus cannot grasp the dialectical relationship between the material world that humans build and the forms of consciousness this world inculcates and necessitates. Which, for Lukács, is to be expected, given that the agency of humanity in constructing its world has historically been hidden from it.

---

[108] Lukàcs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 125-26
[109] Lukác, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 161

Emancipation cannot be an ideal, for Lukács, because it is the process through which the proletariat rids the world of the reified form of reason that results in normative ends that are only ever held aloft from the world. Revolutionary *praxis* overturns every ideal because it overturns the contemplative attitude of reified consciousness. The proletariat, which daily makes and transforms the world, has the potential to overcome the contemplative attitude of reification precisely because the world is already not a simple object of contemplation for them. Their own reified consciousness is a form of alienation or estrangement from the agency that they already exert. "It is true," Lukács writes, "…that the basic structure of reification can be found in all the social forms of modern capitalism (e.g. bureaucracy.) But this structure can only be made fully conscious in the work-situation of the proletarian."[110]

Again, Lukács's argument recalls that of "Tactics and Ethics," as he dissolves socialist ideals into socialist tactics. As he writes, "when judging whether an action is right or wrong it is essential to relate it to its function in the total process."[111]Individual actions are only intelligible in light of their relationship with an emancipatory end. If ethics is about realizing what 'ought' to occur in the world, Kant's ethics are only a symptom of a reified consciousness that float free of a world it contemplates but never changes. Kantian ethics need to be transformed into socialist *praxis* because it is only through socialist *praxis* that emancipation will occur. Lukács thus collapses ethics into instrumental reason. Here, instrumental reason becomes ethics in light of its end, emancipation.

III. Carl Schmitt's Critique of Emancipation

For Schmitt, the question of *praxis* is not as easily soluble as Lukács makes it out to be. As Martin Jay writes, Lukács adheres to the "basic assumption that history can be written in the

[110] Lukàcs, "Reification and the Class Consciousness of the Proletariat," 171-2
[111] Lukacs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 198

manner of a realist novel told by an omniscient narrator, as an intelligible narrative concluding with an act of judgment by an imputed posterity that can share a unified perspective on what preceded it."[112] For Lukács, the practices of the proletariat work together to constitute social reality, which he conceives of as a concrete whole, or in his *parlance*, totality. The result of this claim is that the agency the proletariat mobilizes to create one social totality can just as well be used to construct a different one. Engaging in proletarian revolution is the means through which the proletariat will divert its agency from the task of reproducing capitalism and reorienting it toward the task of producing socialism. Once the proletariat realizes its agency in daily reproducing the capitalist form that exploits them, they will "become the identical subject-object of history whose praxis will change reality."[113] Lukács's theoretical framework is not one that Schmitt shares.

Indeed, what is it that the proletariat constructs? It is not just the capitalist order, Schmitt reminds, but *history itself*. In *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, Schmitt would further expand the line of argumentation he had initiated in his early works on Vaihinger and the Lask-inspired analysis of modern German political thought he developed from *Political Romanticism* through *Dictatorship* and then to his Weimar works. For Schmitt, the scientific character of Marxism came not from any commitment to positivism or the methods of natural science, but a belief in its capacity to unearth concrete contradictions in history, a reading surely alluding to Engels and likely from the debates of the *Revisionismusstreit.*[114] But what Schmitt focuses on especially is the claim that the "heart" of this commitment is the view that "humanity will become

[112] Jay, Fidelity to the Event? Lukács' History and Class Consciousness and the Russian Revolution," 201
[113] Lukacs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 197
[114] Schmitt, *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, 53

conscious of itself and that will occur precisely through a correct knowledge of social actuality."[115] In other words, it is when the proletariat becomes conscious of itself that it will become the subject-object of history. (There is reason to believe that Schmitt takes this reading from Lukács: his journals from 1923 indicate that he was reading and engaging with *History and Class Consciousness* quite closely.)[116] For Schmitt, Marxism crosses over into a rationalist metaphysics here, where, in place of an educational dictator making the people how they ought to be, the people need rather only to realize their position in history.[117]

Schmitt's arguments in *the Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* draw heavily on his arguments in *Dictatorship*, in which, recall, he argues that the rationalism of the Enlightenment led to a constellation of ideas in which the people and history gained attributes conventionally ascribed to a transcendent god. Here, this view of the people functions in a similar fashion as does the rational or the mythical in Vaihinger: their entire function is to guide practice, not to have any independent truth value. The concepts of history and popular agency to which Marxists appeal gain their value, for Schmitt, more from their theological and mythical significance than from any sociological value. These transcendent concepts become the foundations for sovereign dictatorships, in Schmitt's terminology, that overturn existing states and suspend the law in pursuit of a new constitutional order. As Schmitt makes clear in *Dictatorship*, in theory, these movements believe themselves to be devoting revolutionary energy to the creation of a new and better state for a new and better humanity. But in practice they result in dictatorships that gain their legitimacy not from their capacity to secure law, but from their promise to deliver to the people a new and

[115] Schmitt, *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, 54. Translation modified. The German reads: "Nach Marxistischen Glauben wird die Menschheit sich ihrer selbst bewußt werden, und zwar durch eine richtige Erkenntnis der sozialen Wirklichkeit." See Schmitt, *Geistesgeschichtliche Lage*, 67

[116] See Schmitt, *Der Schatten Gottes: Introspektionen, Tagebücher, und Briefe 1921 bis 1924*, pp. 229, 238, 478, 506, 515

[117] Schmitt, *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, 57

better constitution. Although Schmitt highlighted this as a historical problem arising out of the revolutionary traditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth century in *Dictatorship*, he would render his critique more explicit in *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*.

"The justification for dictatorship," Schmitt writes, "consists in the fact that, although it ignores the existing law, it is only doing so in order to save it."[118] But what if no such law exists? For Schmitt, dictatorship originated as a legal means to suspend the law so that a subordinate agent of the sovereign state, a dictator, could solve a concrete problem without the law getting in his or her way. "If the law is not capable of saving society," Schmitt explained, "then force intervenes, and thus whatever is necessary."[119] Dictators use any means at their disposal to eliminate a threat to the constitutional order and public safety, like invading forces or internal uprisings.[120] The classical, commissary dictator operated on behalf of the sovereign and the constitution, and ceded their power when the emergency had been eliminated. They were not themselves sovereign.

But as modern revolutions saw the people rising up to unshackle themselves from monarchy and the divine right of kings, Schmitt argued, the people found themselves in a unique situation that gave rise to sovereign dictatorship. Classical dictatorship, as Schmitt stressed, presupposed an existing order that was in need of saving. But modern revolutions did not just suspend the existing order, they eliminated it.[121] Though the people chose representatives to create a new order and so, like classical dictators, tied the power of these representatives to a concrete objective, the nature of this power, which destroys one constitution and is itself destroyed upon the creation of a new one, is to exist in between states of law. The sovereign dictator is a figure of radical, lawless sovereignty, the very essence of which is to oppose the law.

---

[118] Dictatorship, xliii
[119] ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Dictatorship, xxxix-xlii; 120-4

Sovereign dictatorship became possible, on Schmitt's account, because of a shift from theological to immanent concepts in the ideas of representation from which states derive their authority. For Schmitt, representation did not just describe a system where people elect an individual to act on their behalf, rather it explained how states could come to embody larger, metaphysical concepts that could lend them authority.[122] In a prior epoch of political thought, the absolutist state derived its power from God. The prince's power was thus all-encompassing and indefinite; the prince was God's representative. But things started to change around the time of the English Civil War. Schmitt writes:

> In the directives and constitution drafts left by Cromwell's army it states that 'the people' is the source of all political authority. Here the real problem of the state today – the relation between the people and its representation – replaces the monarchomachic problem – the relationship between the representatives of the king and government on the other.[123]

These constitution drafts imagined a conception of political authority derived from the people and not God. For Schmitt, this marked a shift in the theory of the state and its authority, and so in the entire problem space, to borrow a term from David Scott, of politics and sovereignty.[124] "The medieval mind," he wrote, "did not know the difficulty of distinguishing commissary dictatorship from sovereign dictatorship, or the latter from sovereignty itself."[125]

It did not make sense to speak of a sovereign dictator under absolutism and divine right, because rule by divine right was not instrumental to anything but itself. While absolutist monarchs could elect dictators, they could not themselves be dictators because their power was not tied to a specific task. As Schmitt writes, "to every dictatorship there is a commission, and the question is

[122] Dictatorship, 124-5; Duncan Kelly, "Carl Schmitt's Political Theory of Representation," *Journal of the History of Ideas 65*, No. 1, pp. 113-134
[123] Dictatorship, 113
[124] **Cite Scott here**
[125] Dictatorship, 112

whether a commission compatible with sovereignty exists."[126] Theological accounts of authority were not only compatible with absolutism, but they also rendered sovereign dictatorship unimaginable. Under what circumstances would a dictatorship emerge that was not subordinate to a higher sovereignty, i.e., a monarch? If absolutism existed, it appealed to God, not to an order that was yet to come. Even Cromwell, Schmitt argued, understood himself to be on a divine mission, despite the republican language in his army's drafts of a constitution.

Still, Schmitt saw in the constitution drafts of Cromwell's army the origins of a paradox that would render sovereign dictatorship possible. "The crucial sentence in the constitution drafts of that period," Schmitt explained, "is that the representatives of the people depend exclusively on those who have elected them." The people's representatives attain their power for the sole reason that the people have elected them. Their power depends on the people, not the King. But Schmitt noticed a contradiction in this idea. He wrote, "the power of the people's representatives over anyone (here the king is meant: the political enemy) is unlimited; but this has the unavoidable corollary that their dependence on the people they represent is likewise unlimited."[127] What could this mean? If the people elected their representatives, then the representatives' claim to rule would come directly *from* the people. But these drafts also claimed absolute power for the representatives, which meant that the representatives would wield absolute power *over* the people. So the only agency that could check the representatives was the same agency over which they wielded absolute power. The representatives' power 'depended' on the people only in a formal sense.

Schmitt saw this problem sharpened in the Abbé Sieyès' vision of popular sovereignty, which cast the people as a radical, creative force out of which a new constitutional order could

[126] Dictatorship, 119
[127] Dictatorship, 113

emerge, and which Schmitt saw as the intellectual origins of the French Revolution. Schmitt's reading of Sieyès begins with a problem. "According to [Sieyes]," Schmitt writes:

> All existing powers are subject to the validity of laws, rules and procedures, which these powers cannot change just by themselves, because the basis of the existence of such things is the constitution. On this view, a power founded on the constitution cannot be superior to it, because the latter, controlling as it does both the union and the separation of powers, is its own foundation. Therefore all constituted powers are opposed to a constituent power, which lays down the foundations of the constitution. This constituent power is unlimited and can do everything, because it is not subject to the constitution: it provides the foundation for the constitution itself.[128]

This is the problem that the documents of Cromwell's army could only intimate. Schmitt's reading of Sieyès is supposed to draw out a problem of sovereignty and Sieyès' solution to it. According to Schmitt's reading of Sieyès, all of the powers of the state and all of the institutions that express it stem from the constitution. The constitution is the highest power. But if the constitution is to be authoritative and legitimate, it must be founded on something, and that something must be a power higher than the constitution. For Sieyès, according to Schmitt, that power is *pouvoir constituant*, which names the people's capacity to destroy or create the constitution, if need be. But this is a power that cannot be institutionalized. It is pure creativity; it can only constitute and can never be constituted. If it were to be constituted, it could not be the highest power.

But if constituent power cannot be constituted, how could the people's will hold any meaningful content prior to the creation of the new constitution? When it destroys institutions, constituent power can only express itself negatively. What the people do not want becomes clear. But when constituent power creates institutions, Schmitt pointed out, it must do so through the medium of representatives. On Schmitt's account, "Sieyès introduced here the legitimacy of representation…they should not be messengers delivering an already existing will; rather they

[128] Dictatorship, 121

have to shape it first."[129] The people entrusted their representatives not just with creating a constitutional state, but with leading them to realize the kind of constitutional state that they want.

"A peculiar relationship with the omnipotence of the constituting will emerges," noted Schmitt, "from this state of affairs." Although the people's constituent power was to be the highest power in the constitution, it seemed as though the representatives were the ones that end up with sovereignty. Just as the constitution drafts of Cromwell's army called for representatives that depended on the people in form but wielded absolute power in practice, so did the people's representatives formally depend on the people but become sovereign in practice. In fact, Schmitt claimed that the *pouvoir constituant* must be unclear and that the representatives would have to be its shapers. If it were to have any content, it would not be unlimited. "In point of form," Schmitt concluded, "the representatives acting on behalf of the *pouvoir constituant* are, then, unconditionally dependent commissars, but, in point of content, their mandate is not to be limited."[130]

Schmitt's reading of Sieyès is the key to a central argument of *Dictatorship*. The immanent logics of representation to which modernity has given rise and their expression in ideas like constituent power renders law contingent on whatever it is that the people want. Earlier in the chapter, Schmitt argued that, "from the perspective of sovereign dictatorship, the entire existing order is a situation that dictatorship will resolve through its own actions."[131] To the democrat, an absolutist monarchy is a situation that needs to be overcome. The potential sovereign dictator sees the whole order as an illegitimate expression of power and a barrier in the way of a new constitution. "Dictatorship does not *suspend* an existing constitution," Schmitt noted, "rather it

[129] Dictatorship, 124
[130] Dictatorship, 125
[131] Dictatorship, 119

seeks to create the conditions in which a constitution . . . is made possible."[132] This means the elimination of the current order and the destruction of its laws. As a result, Schmitt argues, one cannot think of sovereign dictatorship from within the language of law. Its nature is to be antipathetic to the existing laws. "Consequently," Schmitt claims, "we would be dealing with sheer power."[133] But the power that the sovereign dictator claims is not just any power. It is the power to create and destroy constitutions, which means that, although it exists in opposition to the existing law, its essence is to create new laws. So while dictatorship is not just brute force, the sovereign dictator's power is constitutively opposed to any existing, i.e., already constituted, legal order. "This," Schmitt writes, "is the meaning of *pouvoir constituant*."

Schmitt's argument has two related and important consequences. The first is that, on his account, the logics of representation to which secular modernity has given rise lead to a form of authority that is necessarily opposed to existing law. This has, in turn, created a form of sovereign power that opposes *it*self to the law. And second, this new form of sovereign power and authority relativizes all legal orders, because any existing constitution has the potential to be a situation that a dictator must resolve. Where an absolutist monarchy that understands its sovereignty to stem to from divine right might meet an opposing army that also claims divine right, no sooner will one army win than will it claim sovereignty. But the sovereign dictator's goal is not to be sovereign. Sovereign dictatorship aims to create a new constitution and will suspend the law until it does so. Thus as modern concepts of authority shifted from God to the people, they created the conditions for a new form of power that sought to sovereign power to instrumental, but technical, aims.

[132] ibid.
[133] ibid.

But why is it bad to subordinate power to an instrumental end? For Schmitt the problem with these new, technical, and immanent logics of representation is that they changed not just the structure of sovereignty, but the law itself. As he writes in *Dictatorship*:

> Between the domination [*Herrschaft*] of the norm-to-be-actualized and the method of its actualization, a contradiction can emerge. In terms of the philosophy of law, here lies the essence of dictatorship: namely, in the general possibility of a break [*Trennung*] between the norms of law [*Normen des Rechts*] and the norms of the actualization of law [*Normen des Rechtsverwirklichung*]. A dictator that does not depend for its power on a normative representation yet to be applied, although one that could bring about a concrete success, and so does not have the goal of making itself redundant, is just an arbitrary despotism.[134]

As sovereign dictatorship came into being by tying its sovereignty to a technical end, it disrupted the relationship between the legal norm and the application of the legal norm. Under normal circumstances, the state and its citizens are supposed to obey the law, which rules unless the sovereign declares an exception. But for Schmitt, the law has two components, the legal norm itself and the norm of its application. The legal norm itself is inert. Though it exists as some written statute somewhere that specifies some prescription or injunction, it does not become actual unless someone applies it. The difference between the norm of law and the norm of its application is the difference between the law and its practice. Where one, as I will argue below, describes a system of pure normativity, the other describes the practice of turning those norms into an actual set of laws that govern the polity.

But given that sovereign dictatorship is sovereign by virtue of its goal and not by virtue of its legality, it cannot appeal to the normativity of law, but only to the normativity of means-ends rationality. For Schmitt, dictatorship relies on a concrete result. "But to bring about a concrete result means, however," Schmitt writes, "to intervene in the concrete course of events with means, the validity [*die Richtigkeit*] of which lay in their expedience and depends on the actual context of

[134] Dictatorship, xlii. Translation Modified.

this causal process."[135] So the dictator's actions are not valid by virtue of their legality, as the actions of a sovereign would be under a normal situation where the norms of the application of the law make reference to the norms of law, but by virtue of their capacity to accomplish some as yet unachieved end. Yet dictatorship "means…the suspension of the right of essential consideration [*Recht wesentlichen Rücksicht*] for the opposing will of a person bearing legal rights [*entgegenstehenden Willen eines Rechtssubjekts*], if this will stands in the way of the objective."[136] To the sovereign dictator, people do not bear legal rights. They either stand in its way or they do not. The dictator only sees means to an ends and obstructions in the way of its end. Dictatorship leads to an "unshackling of the objective from the law [*Entfesselung des Zweckes vom Recht*]."[137]

The state and the law it guarantees, then, cannot be rationalized for Schmitt; the state is where rationalism encounters its limits. Any effort to instrumentalize the state subordinates the highest power, the state, to a technical end and so to the very possibility of law.[138] The norm of law can only exist when a state exists to ensure the norm of its actualization. This requires that the state exist as the highest earthly power, otherwise some sovereignty could override it, or some technical end would render it a dictatorship, which would mean the state would have to nullify whichever law obstructed its contingent end. If the state is not the highest earthly power, then politics is pure contingency. The state's power is its own argument. Representation is simply a useful fiction.

Conclusion

There is a certain irony to the fact that, if Schmitt's critique of Lukács succeeds, it is because they share the view that the effort to realize a new state entails a conception of revolution.

[135] Dictatorship, 8. Translation Modified.
[136] *Dictatorship*, xlii. Translation Modified.
[137] *Dictatorship*, xlii. Translation Modified
[138] Cf. John P. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology*

For both Lukács and Schmitt, the effort to conceive of emancipation as an ideal is incoherent because it is in the nature of the ideal that it drives our practices. The essence of the ideal requires that it not remain ideal for long, but must transform quickly into the motive force of the effort to produce a new political order. For Lukács, this means that there is no distinction between socialist ethics and socialist tactics because our ethical being always unfolds within the context of a concrete totality. We cannot view individual ethical precepts in isolation, but must understand them in light of their role in either preserving or destroying the capitalist order. For Schmitt, this succumbs to a modernist, secular theology that threatens the authority of the state with the supposed authority of the people, in whose name a new political organ is supposed to act in pursuit of an indefinite future. In this regard, Schmitt's critique of Bolshevism is prescient.

But among the more puzzling aspects of Lukács's reification essay is its claim that his analysis of the proletariat's role in constructing history entails the revolutionary efforts of a vanguardist party, a claim he can only sustain through the manufacture of the troubled category of "imputed class consciousness."[139] For Lukács, even when the proletariat has not actually manifested its class consciousness, we can ascribe to them the views they "*would have* in a particular situation if they were *able to completely grasp*" their historical situation in its totality.[140] Thus, in a theoretical move reminiscent of the "educational dictatorship" Schmitt and Lask highlight in Fichte's political thought, Lukács argues that the vanguard party may act on behalf of the proletariat when it grasps the true essence of its condition, which the proletariat would itself realize were it to grasp it. Here, Lukács displaces the agency of the proletariat that constructs the capitalist world onto that of a party capable of representing it and in whose name it will pursue a new constitutional order.

---

[139] Lukàcs, *History and Class Consciousness*, 51-74; Jay, 203-4; Kavoulakos, 163-172
[140] Lukàcs cited in Kavoulakos, 163

But why should we suppose with Lukács and Schmitt that the insight into the proletariat's agency in constructing history should lead to a form of revolutionary politics, rather than other forms of democratic *praxis*? Lukács's insight into the agency the proletariat exercises in constructing the capitalist order through its laboring practices would seem to entail a more democratic vision, were it not for his theory of imputed consciousness. But both thinkers share a conception of the ideal in which its essence is to become practice and so politics must become a venue for the realization of the ideal. For Schmitt, this leads to the instrumentalization of politics, wherein any politics founded in popular sovereignty must overthrow the existing state to the extent that it is not democratic, a revolutionary event that will erect a dictatorship in its place. For Schmitt, a politics of the ideal leads to revolution because it replaces the normativity of law with means-ends technical rationality. Everything, including its subjects, become either an impediment to that state's project or an instrument for its realization.

What Schmitt's critique of constituent power misses is, ironically, the concrete fact of it; constituent power expresses itself in destroying the constitution. The people decide to suspend the law and then overawe the 'highest power.' Constituent power cannot then just be a fiction that lends authority to the representative, because it actualizes itself in the world in the destruction (and creation) of new legal orders. But this raises a question. If the people have the capacity to overawe the state, which is supposed to be the highest power, does their refusal to do so mean that they limit their own power? That, all along, they were the highest power? This cannot be determined beforehand, but then again, neither can the state's claim to be the highest power in the land. If power lives in its actualization, then we don't know what the highest power is until it expresses itself.

The point, then, is that, as much as the state, the people, in accepting the state's laws, also perform its laws, and so they let their will be known in their everyday practices of politics. Schmitt seems to miss this in The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy and indeed, throughout his works. Schmitt's diagnosis of the troubles of the Weimar republic, powerful though it may be, offers its readers a choice between two authorities, one that will rule them according to a mythos of nobility and authority and another that will wield sovereignty until the day of total emancipation. In either case, the people are the passive ground of some authoritarian logic of representation, rather than an active force, a potential constituent power, that performs its will in the everyday practice of politics. Perhaps the crisis of parliamentary democracy was not just that enlightenment ideals no longer held sway, but that the practices that they invigorated never became their own justification.

For Lukács, a politics of the ideal must end up at a politics of revolution because it is otherwise premised on its own unfulfillment, on the perpetuity of the forms of exploitation it otherwise decries as intolerable. For Lukács, recall, socialist tactics become socialist ethics because our effort to realize the ideal always occurs in a wider context: the question is not just about my own, individual obligation in this moment, but how my actions will tend to either preserve or dismantle prevailing systems of exploitation. Viewed from the perspective of actually realizing the ideal, my obedience to an ethical norm displaced into the future may actually be an impediment to its actual realization. Lukács's analysis of a proletariat that everyday constructs the form of exploitation that enchains it provides him with a view of the proletariat's radical creative power that can just as well create another order. The result, then, is that ethics demands participation in collective struggle to overcome an exploitative system and establish a new one. For Lukács, we either seek to overturn the forms of exploitation that capitalism sustains or we perpetuate them. There is no in between.

But Lukács writes from the perspective of the theorist attempting to grasp the "objective possibility" contained within the concrete circumstances of the proletariat, not from the perspective of the proletarian whose agency is always being used for ends that are not his own. Brecht's critique of Lukács is instructive here: "Man does not become man again by stepping forth from the masses but by sinking deeper into them."[141] Lukács premises his revolutionary politics not on the consciousness the proletariat has attained, but what it *would* attain with the theoretical insight of a Lukács. Here he steps from the ideal of actuality into the realm of possibility, from the real into the ideal. And in this regard, he undercuts the power of his own insight into the agency of the proletariat and their own creative capacity. As Brecht writes:

> For time flows on, and if it did not it would be a bad prospect for those who do not sit at the golden table. Methods become exhausted; stimuli no longer work. New problems appear and demand new methods. Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must change. Nothing comes from nothing; the new comes from the old, but that is why it is new… What was popular yesterday is not today, for the people today are not what they were yesterday.[142]

[141] Bertolt Brecht, "Against Georg Lukàcs," *New Left Review 84*, (March-April 1974), pp. 40
[142] Brecht, "Against Georg Lukàcs," 51

Epilogue

> "…For two thousand years people have believed that the sun and all the stars of heaven rotate around mankind. Popes, cardinals, princes, professors, captains, merchants, fishwives and schoolkids thought they were sitting motionless inside this crystal sphere. But now we are breaking out of it, Andrea, at full speed. Because the old days are over and this is a new time. For the last hundred years mankind has seemed to be expecting something."
>
> - Bertolt Brecht, *The Life of Galileo*[1]

If ideals are fundamentally dependent on practices as the theorists I have analyzed in this dissertation argue, then the reason for the sense of impasse bedeviling many theorists who find present conditions intolerable but apparently resistant to change should be clear: with the collapse of emancipatory movements came the loss of emancipatory ideals. As I suggested in the introduction, compounding this problem is a sense among contemporary theorists that it is difficult to reinvigorate the left imagination because its past emancipatory visions either resulted in disaster or were defeated by stronger forces. And it is for this same reason that theorists committed to different versions of what has somewhat derisively been called "Cold War Liberalism" are united in arguing that there is an intrinsic connection between left dreams of emancipation and left failure.[2] Either due its inability to appreciate ineradicable pluralism of values or its conceit that this-worldly emancipation can be achieved through a political domain that, in truth, has always been resistant to such projects, the utopian dreams and unitary conception of the good life that made up the historic left were always destined to collapse on the shores of the twentieth century, where, critics suggest, it ought to remain. But with the loss of a tradition that promised relief from capitalist exploitation has come the loss of resources to respond to the persistence of such

[1] Bertolt Brecht, *The Life of Galileo*, 6
[2] Jan-Werner Müller, "Fear and Freedom: On Cold War 'Liberalism,'" *European Journal of Political Theory 7*, No.1 (2008), pp. 45-64

exploitation and the varieties of social discontent, to riff on a phrase of Yack's, to which it still leads. Here again, the present condition appears intolerable but intractable.

In his book on the famous dispute between Heidegger and Cassirer at Davos in 1929, often taken to be the definitive end of Neo-Kantianism, Peter Gordon draws attention to Ernst Cassirer's claim in *Freiheit und Form: Studien zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte* that the central contribution of German intellectual history is a vision of the human intellect as fundamentally productive and *spontaneous.*[3] Cassirer writes:

> To the extent that it has been shown that a fundamental tendency is recognizable in Luther's religious principle and in Leibniz's concept of truth, in Lessing's theory of Genius and in Kant's thoughts about the spontaneity and self-legislating capacity of the spirit, in the form of Goethean poetry and its world view, as in the theory of freedom: here we can ground the confidence that the power that was in these works has not waned, but that all of them reveal the decisive turning point of German history.[4]

Here, the human intellect is tied to a particular conception of human freedom, one in which the capacity to judge, to act, to create, to begin anew, and to project intentions and plans into the future becomes fundamental. For Kant, this spontaneity stems from the synthetic activity of the subject, which actively but involuntarily synthesizes the objects of experience it receives through intuition.[5] This involuntary activity provides the foundation for voluntary, intentional acts of judgment and will. From spontaneity comes freedom, reflexivity, and critique: the intellect that synthesizes the world can also subject it to scrutiny and imagine its improvement and transformation. Max Horkheimer takes a similar view:

> The development of idealist philosophy in Germany, from the beginning with Leibniz to the present, has been able to confirm the insight that the world of perception is not merely a copy nor something fixed and substantial, but, to an equal

[3] Peter Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 18

[4] Ernst Cassirer, *Freiheit und Form: Studien zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte*, (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1922), 574-5. My translation.

[5] See John Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 54-5

> measure a product of human activity. Kant proved that the world of our individual and scientific consciousness is not given to us by God and unquestionably accepted by us, but is partially the result of the workings of our understanding.[6]

For Horkheimer as for Cassirer, the contribution of German idealism is the realization of human agency, which gained ever deeper dimensions in its later iterations.

The contribution of this vision of Kantianism to contemporary debates, then, I suggest, is in this notion that the spontaneous rational intellect never ceases to take stock of its world from the perspective of *its own activity*. Our reception of the world is always predicated on an originary act of synthesis; we are always constructing the world we seek to understand. Karen Ng associates this dialectic with the effort to realize the "actuality of human freedom—the critique of reason is at once the demonstration of a rational life as a free life," a project which she locates in Kant and especially his successors.[7] Ng focuses on how this process manifests in the tradition of ideology critique, but in general it offers a view in which humanity is never a mere spectator taking stock of the ontological conditions of world-hood; it is always first creating that world. Although this view begins with Kant's notion that we synthesize the world as an object of knowledge, it transforms into Hegel's view that we construct the world as a concrete totality, and in later thinkers like Marx and Lukács it becomes the view that proletarian labor is the essential activity that constructs the modern, capitalist world. But in each instance, the central point for this project is that our ideals—and, indeed, our entire capacity to think otherwise—depends on this dialectic, in which our ability to think otherwise is fundamentally premised on the fact that the world is something we collectively create.

---

[6] Max Horkeimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, (New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing Company, 158). See also Karen Ng's excellent "Ideology Critique from Hegel and Marx to Critical Theory," *Constellations 22*, No. 3(2015), pp. 393

[7] Ng, "Ideology Critique from Hegel and Marx to Critical Theory," pp. 393

If we take this view seriously, there is no reason why our ability to think otherwise would depend on the presence of contemporary efforts at emancipation or the continued relevance of prior theoretical frameworks. That is, if the world we subject to critical scrutiny is one that we participate in creating, then to suggest we are unable to imagine it otherwise is to disavow our own agency, our own role in creating the world we wish to critique. In this regard, the supposed melancholia afflicting left theory arises not out of the dissolution of past emancipatory projects, but from its amnesia around one of Marx's central teachings—the very one he inherited from the tradition of German philosophy: the genre of left-wing melancholia makes practice entirely dependent on theory, rather than the effort to critique contemporary conditions as products of our own agentic activity that contain within them the possibility of an alternative. To put this point more concretely, theorists end up concerning themselves with a past theoretical framework rather than analysis of the political present. As a result, rather than seeking an understanding of contemporary practices of exploitation, alienation, dispossession, and the ways that alternatives might emerge out of them, they lament the loss of a framework that would provide them with the ready answers to do so. But figures like Heine, Vorländer, Staudinger, even the Young Hegelians and the young Marx provide resources for developing a conception of ideals that are immanent to the practices and attitudes in which we already find ourselves enmeshed. Rather than seeing the ideal as an instrumental end we project into some far-off future, we might rather see it is as a contingent, contextual demand for relief from conditions we currently find intolerable. How we might articulate this demand and pursue such relief is an open question. The answer might not be revolutionary, but it will certainly be political.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Abbt, Thomas. "Zweifel über die Bestimmung des Menschen," (*Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend*, 1764)

Adler, Max. "Zur Revision des Parteiprogramms," *Arbeiter Zeitung 22,* No. 290 (October, 1901)

Bauer, Bruno. *Russland und das Germantum*, (Charlottenburg: Verlag von Egbert Bauer, 1853)

Bernstein, Eduard. *Ein Revisionistisches Sozialismusbild: Drei Vortäge von Eduard Bernstein*, (Hannover, DE: Dietz Verlag, 1966)

Bernstein, Eduard. *The Preconditions of Socialism,* trans. Henry Tudor, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

Bernstein, Eduard. *Zur Gesichte und Theorie der Sozialismus*, (Berlin, DE: Akademischer Verlag, 1901)

Brecht, Bertolt. "Against Georg Lukàcs," *New Left Review 84*, (March-April 1974), pp. 39-53

Cassirer, Ernst. *Freiheit und Form: Studien zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte*, (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1922), 574-5. My translation.

Engels, Friedrich trans. Edward Aveling. *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific,* (Chicago, IL: Charles H.K err & Co, 1908)

Frederic II, King of Prussia, trans. Thomas Holcroft, *Posthumous Works Vol.X II*, (London, England: G.G.J. and Robinson, 1889)

Hegel, G.W. F. trans. A. V. Miller, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977)3

Heine, Heinrich. trans. T.J. Reed, *Deutschland: A Winter's Tale*, (London, England: Angel Books, 1986)

Heine, Heinrich. *Düsseldorfer Heine Ausgabe Bd. 15*, (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1982), http://www.hhp.uni-trier.de/Projekte/HHP/Projekte/HHP/werke/baende/D15/index_html?widthgiven=30

Heine, Heinrich. *Düsseldorfer Heine Augabe Bd. 10*, (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1982), http://www.hhp.uni-trier.de/Projekte/HHP/Projekte/HHP/werke/baende/D10/index_html?widthgiven=30

Heine, Heinrich. *Die schlesischen Weber* in *Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen* (1844) trans. Scott Horton, in *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. 4, p. 455, https://harpers.org/blog/2007/12/heines-silesian-weavers/

Heine, Heinrich. Charles Godfrey Leland, *French Affairs: Letters from Paris in Two Volumes, Vol. 1: Letters from Paris*, (London, England: William Heinemann, 1893)

Heine, Heinrich, trans. Charles Godfrey Leland, *French Affairs: Letters from Paris in Two Volumes, Vol. 2: Lutetia*, (London, England: William Heinemann, 1893)

Heine, Heinrich. trans. Howard Pollack-Milgate, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Heine, Heinrich. trans. Peter Wortsman, *Travel Pictures*, (Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2008)

Hess, Moses. "Socialism and Communism" in Moses Hess, *The Holy History. Of Mankind and Other Writings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

Horkeimer, Max. *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, (New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1972)

Kant, Immanuel, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary. Gregor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

Kant, Immanuel. *Kant's gesammelte Schriften Bd. 15/2*, (Berlin & Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1923)

Kant, Immanuel, *Practical Philosophy,* ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

Kant, Immanuel, *Religion and Rational Theology*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

Kant, Immanuel, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, Pauline Kleingeld ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006)

Kautsky, Karl, *Terrorism and Communism: A Contribution to the Natural History of Revolution*, trans. W. H. Kerridge, (Manchester, UK: The National Labour Press, ltd., 1920)

Kautsky, Karl. “Bernstein und die Materialistische Geschichtsauffassung,” *Die Neue Zeit: Revue des geistigen und öffentlichen Lebens 17*, Bd. 2 (1899)

Lask, Emil. *Fichtes Idealismus und die Geschichte*. (Tübingen & Leipzig: J. C. B. Mohr, 1902)

Lessing, Gotthold Eprhaim, *Sämtliche Schrifte 17*, ed. Karl Lachmann (Leipzig, DE: Göschen Verlagshandlung, 1904)

Lukács, Georg, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics,* trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971)

Lukács, Georg, “Bolshevism as a Moral Problem,” trans. Judith Marcus Tar, *Social Research 44*, No.3 (Autumn 1977)

Lukács, Georg. “Emil Lask: Ein Nachruf,” *Kant-Studien 22*, No.1-2 (1918), 349-370

Lukács, Georg, *Tactics and Ethics: Political Essays 1919-1929*, trans. Michael McColgan (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1975)

Lukács, Georg, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay On The Forms of Great Epic Literature,* trans. Ann Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1971)

Lukács, Georg, “The Debate on the Conservative and Progressive Idealism,” *Revolution & Counter-Revolution*, trans. Victor Zitta (Mexico City, Mexico: Querétaro, 1991)

Luxemburg, Rosa. *Reform or Revolution* in *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg: Reform or Revolution and the Mass Strike,* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2008)

Georgy Plekhanov trans Julius Katzer,, “Cant Against Kant or Herr Bernstein’s Will and Testament,” in *Selected Philosophical Works II*, (Moscow, 1976), pp. 352-378, https://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1901/xx/cant.htm

Marx, Karl & Engels, Friederich. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co, 1978)

Marx, Karl & Engels, Friederich. *Marx-Engels-Werke Band 1*, (Berlin, DDR: Karl Dietz Verlag, 1976)

Marx, Karl & Engels, Frederick Engels. *Karl Marx-Frederick Engels Collected Works vol. 3*, (UK: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), pp. 189-206

Marx, Karl & Engels, Frederick. *Marx-Engels Collected Works Volume 25*, (Electronic Book: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010)

Mendelssohn, Moses. *Phädon,* or *On the Immortality of the Soul*, trans. Patricia Nobel, (New York, NY: Peter Lange Publishing, Inc., 2007).

Plekhanov, Georgi. "Bernstein und der Materialismus" in *die Neue Zeit 44*, (1897-98), pp. 532-55

Ruge, Arnold, *New Germany, Its Modern History, Literature, Philosophy, Religion and Art***,** (London, England: Holyoake and Co. 97, 1854)

Ruge, Arnold. "Der König von Preußen und die Sozialreform: Von einem Preußen." *Vorwärts*, 27 July 1844.

Ruge, Arnold. "Die Posaune des jüngsten Gerichts" *Deutsche-Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Kunst*, No.149, 1841, pp. 594

Ruge, Arnold. "Unsre Klassiker und Romantiker seit Lessing: Geschichte der neuesten Poesie und Philosophie" in his *Gesammelte Schriften 1,* (Mannheim, Preußen: Verlag von J. P. Grohe, 1846)

Schelling, Friedrich "Immanuel Kant," *Sämmtliche Werke vo. 4. Electronic Edition. Schriften zur Identiätsphilosophie 1801-1807*, (Charlotessville, VA: InteLex Corp, 2013), http://pm.nlx.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/xtf/view?docId=schelling_de/schelling_de.04.xml;chunk.id=div.schelling.520;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.schelling.468;brand=default

Schlegel, Friedrich. 'Essay on the Concept of Republicanism occasioned by the Kantian Tract "Perpetual Peace"', in *Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 81-93

Schmitt, Carl. *Dictatorship: From the origin of the modern concept of sovereignty to proletarian class struggle*, trans. Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014)

Schmitt, Carl. *Der Schatten Gottes: Introspektionen, Tagebücher, und Briefe 1921 bis 1924*, pp. 229, 238, 478, 506, 515

Schmitt, Carl. *Der Wert des Staates und die Bedeutung des Einzelnen*, (Tübingen, Germany: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1914)

Schmitt, Carl. "Der Addressat," *Die Rheinlande: Monatsschrift für deutche Art und Kunst 21* (Januar-Dezember 1911)

Schmitt, Carl. [as Carl Schmitt-Dorotić] *Die Diktatur von den Anfängen des modernen Souveränitätsgedankens bis zum proletarischen Klassenkampf*, (München und Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1921)

Schmitt, Carl. *Gesetz und Urteil: eine Untersuchung zum Problem der Rechtspraxis*, (München, DE: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1969)

Schmitt, Carl. "Juristiche Fiktionen," *Deutsche Juristen-Zeitung 18*, (1913), pp.803-805

Schmitt, Carl. [as Carl Schmitt-Dorotić] *Politische Romantik*, (München & Leipzig: Verlag Duncker & Humblot, 1919)

Schmitt, Carl. *Political Romanticism*, trans. Guy Oakes (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1986)

Schmitt, Carl. [as Carl Schmitt-Dorotić] "Politische Theory und Romantik," *Historische Zeitschrift 23*, (1920)

Schmitt, Carl. "Richard Wagner und eine neue Lehre vom Wahn," *Die Bayreuther Blätter 35* (1912)

Staudinger, Franz. *Ethik und Politik,* (Berlin, DE: Dümmlers Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1899)

Staudinger, Franz. "Bernstein und die Wissenschaft," *Die Neue Zeit: Revue des gesitigen und öffentlichen Lebens 17*, Bd. 2 (1899), pp. 644-653

Staudinger, Franz. "der Streit um das Ding an Sich und seine Erneurung im sozialistischen Lager," *Kant-Studien 4*, No. 1-3 (1900), pp. 167-189

Staudinger, Franz. "die Materialistische Geschitsauffassung und praktische Idealismus," Die Neue Zeit 16, Bd. 2 (1898), pp. 452-464

Staudinger, Franz. "Ed. Bernstein und die Ethik," *Ethische Kultur 7*, No. 16 (1899), pp. 121-22

Staudinger, Franz. "Metaphysische und Praktische Freiheit," *Ethische Kultur 7*, Nr. 20 (1899), pp. 154-5

Staudinger, Franz. "die Materialistische Geschitsauffassung und praktische Idealismus," *Die Neue Zeit 16*, Bd. 2 (1898), pp. 460-61

Trotsky, Leon. *Terrorism and Communism*: *A Reply to Karl Kautsky*, (New York, NY: Verso Books, 2007).

Tudor, H. & Tudor, J. M. eds., *Marxism and Social Democracy: The Revisionist Debate 1896-1898*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambrudgie University Press, 1988)

Karl Vorländer, *Kant und Marx*: *Ein Beitrag zur Philosophie des Sozialismus*, (Tübingen, DE: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1911)
-- *Marx und Kant*: *Vortrag gehalten in Wien am April 8, 1904*, (Leipzig, DE: Verlag der "Deutschen Worte," 1904)

Secondary Sources:

Allen, Amy. *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory,* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016)

Avineri, Shlomo. "Marx's Vision of Future Society and the Problem of Utopianism" *Dissent 20*, No 3 (1973), pp. 323-331

Barclay, David E. and Weitz, Eric ed., *Between Reform and Revolution: German Socialism and Communism from 1840 to 1990*, (New York, NY: Berghann Books, 1998)

Beck, Hermann. "State and Society in Pre-March Prussia: The Weavers' Uprising, the Bureaucracy, and the Association for the Welfare of Workers, *Central European History 25*, No. 3 (1992), pp. 303-331

Beck, L. W. *Early German Philosophy: Kant and his Predecessors*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1969), pp. 320
-- "Kant and the Right of Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32, No. 3 (1971), 411-22

Beiser, Frederick C. *Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism*: *The Genesis of Modern Political Thought, 1790-1800*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992)
"Emil Lask and Kantianism," *The Philosophical Forum 39*, No. 2 (Summer 2008), pp. 283-295
-- *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism, 1796-1880*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014)
-- "Normativity in Neo-Kantianism: Its Rise and Fall", *International Journal of Philosophical Studies 17*, No. 1 (2009), pp. 9-27

Berlin, Isaiah. "Two Concepts of Liberty" in *Liberty: Incorporating 'Four Essays on Liberty'*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002)

Breckman, Warren. *Dethroning the Self: Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, (Cambridge, EN: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

Brown, Wendy. "Resisting Left Melancholy," boundary 2, No.3 (1999), pp. 19-27

Buck-Morss, Susan. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000)

Byrd, Sharon B. and Hruschka, Joachim. *Kant's Doctrine of Right: A Commentary*, (Cambridge, EN: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Caldwell, Peter C. *Popular Sovereignty and the Crisis of German Constitutional Law: The Theory & Practice of Weimar Constitutionalism*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997),

Cassirer, Ernst trans. James Haden, *Kant's Life and Thought*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983)

Clark, Christopher., *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia 1600-1947*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006)

Coser, Lewis and Howe, Irving. "Images of Socialism," *Dissent 1*, No. 2 (1954), pp. 122-138

Connolly, William E. *Pluralism*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005)

Dean, Jodi. "Communist Desire" in Slavoj Žižek ed., The Idea of Communism 2: The New York Conference (London: Verso, 2013), pp. 77-102

Eley, Geoff, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe 1850-2000*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002)

Flikschuh, Katrin. "Reason, Right, and Revolution: Kant and Locke," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 36, no. 4 (2008), 375-404

Förster, Eckart trans. Brady Bowman, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012)

Forst, Rainer. *Justification and Critique: Towards a Critical Theory of Politics*, (New York, NY: Polity Books, 2013)

Galston, William A. "Realism in political theory," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, No. 4 (2010), 385-411

Galley, Eberhard. "Briefe über Deutschland und die Geständnisse," *Heine-Jahrbuch 1*, No. 1 (1963), pp. 60-84

Gay, Peter. *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx*, (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1962)

Geuss, Raymond. *Philosophy and Real Politics,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008)
-- A World Without Why?, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014)
-- "Realismus, Wunschdenken, Utopie," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie 58*, No. 3 (2010), pp. 419-429

Goldman, Loren, "In Defense of Blinders: On Kant, Political Hope, and the Need for Practical Belief," *Political Theory 40*, No.4(2012), 497-523

Gordon, Peter. *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010)

Gray, John. *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*, (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1995)

Harnack, Adolf. *Die Geschichte der Königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaft zu Berlin: im Auftrage der Akademie zu Bearbeitet Bd. 1*, (Berlin, 1900)

Henrich, Dieter "Die Französische Revolution und klassische deutsche Philosophie. Überlegungen zur Bestimmung ihres Verhältnisses," *Goethe-Jahrbuch 107*, pp.102-114

Honneth, Axel. *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

Honig, Bonnie. *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009)
-- *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993)

Honig, Bonnie & Stears, Marc. "The New Realism: From Modus Vivendi to Justice" in *Political Philosophy versus History? Contextualism and Real Politics in Contemporary Political Thought*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodor W, trans. Edmund Jephcott. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002)

Jacoby, Russell, *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005)

Jay, Martin, *Marxism and Totality: Adventures of a Concept from Lukacs to Habermas,* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984)
- "Fidelity to the Event? Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* and the Russian Revolution" *Studies in East European Thought 70* (2018), pp. 195-213

Katznelson, Ira, *Liberalism's Crooked Circle: Letters to Adam Michnik,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996)

Kavoulakos, Konstantinos. *Georg Lukács's Philosophy of Praxis: From Neo-Kantianism to Marxism*, (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2018)

Keck, Timothy, "Kant and Socialism: The Marburg School in Wilhemian Germany," (PhD. Diss., University of Wisconson, Madison, 1975)

Kelly, Duncan, "Carl Schmitt's Political Theory of Representation," *Journal of the History of Ideas 65*, No. 1, pp. 113-134

Kennedy, Ellen, *Constitutional Failure: Carl Schmitt in Weimar*, (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2004)

Kleingeld, Pauline, *Fortschritt und Vernunft: zur Geschichtsphilosophie Kants*, (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1995)

Kloppenberg, James T. *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought 1870-1920*, (New York, NY:Oxford University Press, 1988)

Köhnke, Klaus Christian. trans. R. J. Hollingdale, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy Between Idealism and Positivism,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992)

Korsgaard, Christine M. "Taking the Law Into Our Own Hands: Kant on the Right to Revolution" in *The Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008)

Koselleck, Reinhart. *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution: Allgemeines Landrecht, Verwaltung, und soziale Bewegung*, (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1967)

Koselleck, Reinhart, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, trans. Todd Presner, Kerstin Behnke, and Jobst Welge (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002)

Lenin, Vladimir. *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1975)

Leopold, David. "The Structure of Marx and Engels' Account of Utopian Socialism," *History of Political Thought 26*, No. 3 (2005), pp. 443-466

Löwith, Karl. *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth Century Thought*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1964)

Lübbe, Hermann. "Die Politische Theorie des Neukantianismus und der Marxismus," *Archiv für Rechts und Sozialphilosophie 44*, No. 3 (1958), pp. 333-350

Mah, Harold., "The French Revolution and the Problem of German Modernity: Hegel, Heine, and Marx," *New German Critique*, No. 50 (1990)

Maliks, Reidar. *Kant's Politics in Context*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014)

Malter, Rudolf. "Heine und Kant," *Heine-Jahrbuch 18*, (1979), pp. 35-65

Manuel, Frank. *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979)

Matysik, Tracie *Reforming the Moral Subject: Ethics and Sexuality in Central Europe, 1890-1930*, (New York, NY: Cornell University Press)

Maus, Ingeborg, *Zur Aufklärung der Demokratietheorie: Rechts und demokatietheoretische Uberlegungen im Aschluß an Kant*, (Berlin: Suhrkampf, 1994)

McCarthy, Thomas. *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

McCormick, John P. *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

McKean, Benjamin. "What Makes A Utopia Inconvenient? On the Advantages and Disadvantages of a Realist Orientation in Politics," *American Political Science Review 110*, No.4 (2016)

Mehring, Reinhard. *Pathetisches Denken: Carl Schmitts Denkweg am Leitfaden Hegels: katholische Grundstellung und antimarxistische Hegelstrategie*, (Berlin, DE: Duncker & Humblot, 1989)

Möller, Horst. *Aufklärung in Preußen: der Verleger, Publizist und Geschichtsschreiber Friedrich Nicolai,* (Berlin, DE: Colloquium Verlag, 1974)

Mouffe, Chantal. *The Return of the Political*, (New York, NY: Verso, 1993)

Moyn, Samuel. *The Last Utopia: Human Rights and History*, (Boston, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2012)

Müller, Jan-Werner. "Fear and Freedom: On Cold War 'Liberalism,'" *European Journal of Political Theory 7*, No.1 (2008), pp. 45-64

Muthu, Sankar. "Productive Resistance in Kant's Political Thought: Domination, Counter-Domination, and Global Unsocial Sociability" in Katrin Flikschuh and Lea Ypi eds., *Kant and Colonialism: Historical and Critical Approaches*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 68-98

Ng, Karen. "Ideology Critique from Hegel and Marx to Critical Theory," *Constellations 22*, No. 3 (2015), pp. 393-404

Nisbet, H. B. "'Was ist Aufklärung?' The Problem of Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Germany," *Journal of European Studies 12, ,*No. 46(1982), pp. 77-96

O'Neall, Onora. *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989)

O'Neall, Onora. "Abstraction, idealization, and ideology in ethics" in Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Problems, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

Owen, David. "Realism in Ethics and Politics: Bernard Williams, Political Theory, and the Critique of Morality" in Matt Sleat & Duncan Bell eds., *Politics Recovered: Realist Thought in Theory and Practice*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2018)

Pinkard, Terry. *German Philosophy 1760-1860,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Rawls, John. *Law of Peoples*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999)

Reeves, Nigel. "Heine and the Young Marx," *Oxford German Studies 7*, No. 1 (1972)

Riazanov, David. *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, (New York, NY: Interanational Publishers Co, Inc., 1927)

Rogers, Michael Dylan. "The Development of Carl Schmitt's Political Thought During the First World War," *Modern Intellectual History 13*, No.1 (2016), pp. 145

Rossi Enzo and Sleat, Matt. "Realism in Normative Political Theory," *Philosophy Compass* 9 No.10 (2014), 689-701

Saine, Thomas. "Was ist Aufklärung?" in Franklin Kopitzsch ed., *Aufklärung, Absolutismus und Bürgertum in Deutschland*, (München, DE: Nymphenburger Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1976), pp. 319-44

Sammons, Jeffrey L. *Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography* (New York, NY; Princeton University Press, 1979)

Scheuermann, William E. *Carl Schmitt: The End of Law*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999)

Schlaudt, Oliver. "Der 'intuitive Verstand' bei Heinrich Heine," Philosophia Scientiæ 20, No.1, pp. 59-75

Schmidt, James. "The Question of Enlightenment: Kant, Mendelssohn, and the Mittwochsgesellschaft," *Journal of the History of Ideas 50*, No. 2(1989), pp. 269-291

Schmidt, James. "Cabbage Heads and Gulps of Water: Hegel on the Terror," *Political Theory 26*, No.1 (Feb, 1998), pp. 4-32

Schmidt, James, ed., *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996)

Schonfeld, Martin, *The Philosophy of the Young Kant: The Precritical Project*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000)

Shklar, Judith. *After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957)

Shklar, Judith. "The Political Theory of Utopia: From Melancholy to Nostalgia," *Daedalus* 94, No. 2 (Spring, 1965), pp. 367-381

Sieg, Ulrich. *Aufstieg und Niedergang des Marburg Neukantianismus: Die Geschichte Einer Philosophischen Schulgemeinschaft*, (Würzburg, DE: Königshausen und Neumann, 1994)

Scott, David. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*, (Durham, NC, 2004)

Stears, Marc. *Demanding Democracy: American Radicals in Search of A New Politics*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010)

Stedman Jones, Gareth. *Karl Marx; Greatness and Illusion*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2016) pp. 562

Steger, Manfred. *The Quest for Evolutionary Socialism*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

Steger, Manfred. "Historical Materialism and Ethics: Eduard Bernstein's Revisionist Perspective," *History of European Ideas 14,* No. 5 (1992), 647-663

Thaler, Matthias. "Hope Abjuring Hope: On the Place of Utopia in Realist Political Theory," Political Theory 46, No. 5 (2018), pp. 671-697

Thiele, Ulrich, *Represäntion und Autonomieprinzip: Kants Demokratiekritik und ihre Hintergründe*, (Berlin: Duncker & Humbolt, 2003)

Toews, John. *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism 1805-1841*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1980)

Traverso Enzo. Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017)

Tully, James. *Public Philosophy in a New Key: Vol. 2, Imperialism and Civic Freedom*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

Van der Linden, Henry. *Kantian Ethics and Socialism,* (London, UK: Hackett, 1988)

Van der Linden, Henry. "Cohens sozialistische Rekonstruktion der Ethik Kants," in *Ethischer Sozialismus: Zur politischen Philosophie des Neukantianismus*, ed. Helmut Holzhey (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), pp. 146-165, https://www.academia.edu/27549387/Cohens_sozialistische_Rekonstruktion_der_Ethik_Kants

Wieland, Wolfgang. "Heinrich Heine und die Philosophie," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte 37*, No.2(1963), pp.232-248

Thomas E. Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860-1914*, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1978)

Williams, Bernard. *In the Beginning was the Deed*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005)

Wood, Allen. *Kant's Ethical Thought,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

Wood, Allen. "Fichte's Philosophical Revolution," *Philosophical Topics 19*, No. 2 (Fall, 1991), pp.1-28

Yack, Bernard. *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986)

Ypi, Lea. "On Revolution in Kant and Marx," *Political Theory* 42, no. 3 (2014), 262-287

Zammito, John. *Kant, Herder, & The Birth of Anthropology*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002

Zammito, John. *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 54-5

Zerilli, Linda. "Feminist Critique and the Realistic Spirit," *Philosophy & Rhetoric 50*, No.4 (2017), pp. 589-611