

SOCIALISM AND PHILOSOPHY

LABRIOLA, ANTONIO, 1843-1904



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I

Rome, April 20, 1897.

Dear Mr. Sorel!

For some time I have intended to carry on a conversation in writing with you.

This will be the best and most appropriate way of expressing my gratitude for your preface to my essays. It is a matter of course that I could not silently accept the courteous words which you had heaped so profusely upon me. I could not but reply to you at once and acknowledge my obligation to you by a private letter. And now there is no more need of our exchanging compliments, especially in letters which either you or I may have occasion to publish at some future time. Besides, what good would it do me now to protest modestly and ward off your praise as it is entirely due to you that my two essays on historical materialism, which are but rough sketches, circulate in France in book-form. You placed them before the public in this shape. It has never been in my mind to write a standard book, in the sense in which you French, who admire and cultivate classic methods in literature, use this term. I am of those who regard this persistent devotion to the cult of classic style as rather inconvenient for those who wish to express the results of strictly scientific thought in an original, adequate, and easy manner. To me it is as inconvenient as a badly fitting coat.

Passing over all compliments, then, I shall express myself on the points which you have made in your preface. I shall discuss them frankly without having in view the writing of a monograph. I choose the form of letters because

interruptions, breaks in the continuity of thought, and occasional jumps, such as would occur in conversation, do not seem out of place and incongruous there. I really should not write so many dissertations, memorials, or articles, were it not for the fact that I want to reply to the many questions which you ask in the few pages of your preface, as though you were engrossed in doubting thoughts. ¹¹¹

But while I shall write the things as they come into my mind, I do not intend to lessen my responsibility for whatever I may say here, and shall continue to say. I merely wish to throw off the burden of stiff and formal prose which is customary for scientific exposition. Nowadays there is no petty postgraduate, however diminutive, who does not imagine that he is erecting a monument of himself for contemporary and future generations whenever he consecrates a ponderous volume, or a learned and intricate disquisition, to some stray thought or chance observation caught in animated conversation or inspired by some one who has a particular talent for teaching. Such impressions always have a greater suggestive power by force of natural expression which is a gift of those who seek the truth by themselves or tell others about it for the first time.

We know well enough that this closing century, which is all business, all money, does not freely circulate thought unless it is likewise expressed in the revered business form and endorsed by it, so that it may have for fit companions the bill of the publisher and the literary advertisements from frothy puffs to sincerest praise. In the society of the future, in which we live with our hopes, and still more with a good many illusions that are not always the fruit of a well balanced imagination, there will grow out of all proportion,

until they are legion, the number of men who will be able to discourse with that divine joy in research and that heroic courage of truth which we admire in a Plato, a Bruno, a Galilei. There may also multiply infinitely the individuals who, like Diderot, shall be able to write profound and beguiling things such as Jacques le Fataliste, which we now imagine to be unsurpassed. In the society of the future, in which leisure, rationally increased for all, shall give to all the requirements of liberty, the means of culture, and the right to be lazy, this lucky discovery of our Lafargue, there will be on every street corner some genius wasting his time, like old master Socrates, by working busily at some task not paid for in money. But now, in the present world, in which only the insane have visions of a millennium, many idlers exploit the public appreciation by their worthless literature as though they had earned a right to do so by legitimate work. So it is that even Socialism will have to open its bosom for a discreet multitude of idlers, shirkers, and incapables.

You complain that the theories of historical materialism have become so little appreciated in France. You complain that the spread of these theories is prevented by prejudices due to national vanity, to the literary pretensions of some, to the philosophical blindness of others, to the cursed desire to pose as something which one is not, and finally to insufficient intellectual development, not to mention the many shortcomings found even among socialists. But all these things should not be considered mere accidents! Vanity, false pride, a desire of posing without really being, a mania for self, self-aggrandisement, the frenzied will to shine, all these and other passions and *virtues of civilized man* are by no means unessential in life, but may rather constitute very often its substance and purpose. We know

that the church has not succeeded in the majority of cases in rendering the Christian mind humble, but has on the contrary given to it a new title to another and greater pretension. Well now... this historical materialism demands of those who wish to profess it consciously and frankly a certain queer humility, that is to say, as soon as we realize that we are bound up with the course of human events and study its complicated lines and tortuous windings, it behooves us not to be merely resigned and acquiescent, but to engage in some conscious and rational work. But there is the difficulty. We are to come to the point of confessing to ourselves that our own individuality, to which we are so closely attached through an obvious and genetic habit, is a pretty small thing in the complicated network of the social mechanism, however great it may be, or appear, to us, even if it is not such a mere evanescent nonentity as some harebrained theosophists claim. We are to adapt ourselves to the conviction that the subjective intentions and aims of every one of us are always struggling against the resistance of the intricate processes of life, so that our designs leave no trace of themselves, or leave a trace which is quite different from the original intent, because it is altered and transformed by the accompanying conditions. We are to admit, after this statement, that history lives our lives, so to say, and that our own contribution toward it, while indispensable, is nevertheless but a very minute factor in the crossing of forces which combine, complete and alternately eliminate one another. But all these conceptions are veritable bores for all those who feel the need of confining the universe within the scope of their individual vision. Therefore the privilege of heroes must be preserved in history, so that the dwarfs may not be deprived of the faith that they are able to ride on their own shoulders and make

themselves conspicuous. And this must be granted to them, even if they are not worthy, in the words of Jean Paul, of reaching to their own knees.

In fact, have not people been going to school for centuries, only to be told that Julius Caesar founded the empire and Charlemagne reconstructed it? That Socrates as much as invented logic, and Dante created Italian literature by a stroke of his pen? It is but a very short time that the mythological conception of such people as the *creators* of history has been gradually displaced, and not always in precise terms, by the prosaic notion of a *historical process* of society. Was not the French revolution willed and made, according to various versions of literary invention, by the different saints of the liberalist legends, the saints of the right, the saints of the left, the Girondist saints, the Jacobine saints? Thus it comes that Paine has devoted quite a considerable portion of his ponderous intellect to the proof, as though he were a proofreader of history, that all those disturbances might eventually not have occurred at all. By the way, I have never been able to understand why a man with so little appreciation for the crude necessity of facts should have called himself a positivist. It was the good fortune of most of your saints in France which enabled them alternately to honor one another and to crown one another in due time with their deserved diadem of thorns. For this reason the rules of classic tragedy remained gloriously in force for them. If it were not so, who knows how many imitators of Saint Juste (a truly great man) would have ended through the hands of the henchmen of the scoundrel Fouché, and how many accomplices of Danton (a great man who missed his place) would have donned the felon's garb at Cambaceres, while others might have been content to pit

themselves against the adventurous Drouet, or that pitiful actor Tellien, for the modest stripes of a petty prefect.

In short, to strive for first place is a matter of faith and devotion for all who have learned the history of the ancient style and agree with the orator Cicero in calling her the Mistress of Life. And therefore they feel the need of "making Socialism moral." Has not morality taught us for centuries that we must give to each one his dues? Aren't you going to preserve just a little corner of paradise for us? This is what they seem to ask me. And if we must give up the paradise of the faithful and theologians, can't we preserve a little pagan apotheosis in this world? Don't throw away the entire moral of honest reward. Keep at least a good couch, or a seat in the front ranks of the theatre of vanity!

And this is the reason why revolutions, aside from other necessary and inevitable causes, are useful and desirable from this point of view. With the sweep of a heavy broom they clear the ground of those who occupied it so long, or at least they make the air more fit to be breathed by giving it more ozone after the manner of storms.

Don't you claim, and justly so, that the whole practical question of Socialism (and by practical you mean no doubt a method which is guided by the intellectual facts of an enlightened consciousness based on theoretical knowledge) may be reduced to, and summed up in, the following three points: 1) Has the proletariat arrived at a clear conception of its existence as a class by itself? 2) Has it strength enough to engage in a struggle against the other classes? 3) Is it about to overthrow, together with the organization of capitalism, the entire system of traditional thought!

Very well!

Now let the proletariat come to a clear understanding of what it can accomplish, or let it learn to want what it can accomplish. Let this proletariat make it its business, in the inept language of the professional writers, to solve the so-called social question. Let this proletariat set before itself the task of doing away, among other forms of exploiting your fellow beings with false glory, with presumption, and with that singular competition among themselves which prompts some of them to write their own names into the golden book of merit in the service of humanity. Let it make a bonfire also of this book, together with so many others which bear the title of *Public Debt*.

For the present it would be a vain undertaking to try to make all these people understand this frank principle of communist ethics, a principle which declares that gratitude and admiration should come as a spontaneous gift from our fellow-beings. Many of them would not care to reach out for progress, were they sure of being told, in the words of Baruch Spinoza, that virtue is its own reward. In the meantime, until only the most worthy things shall remain as objects of admiration in a better society than ours, objects such as the outlines of the Parthenon, the paintings of Raphael, the verses of Dante and Goethe, and so many useful, secure, and definitely acquired gifts of science, until then, I say, it is not for us to stand in the way of those who have any breath to spend, or printed cards to circulate, and who wish to parade themselves in the name of so many fine things, such as humanity, social justice, and so forth, and even of Socialism, as happens frequently to those who compete for the medal *pour le mérite* and a place in the

legion of honor of the future proletarian revolution, though it may still be far off. Should not such men have a presentiment that historical materialism is a satire upon all their cherished assumptions and futile ambitions? Should not they detest this new species of pantheism, from which has disappeared, if you will permit me to say so – it is so utterly prosaic – even the revered name of God?

Here we must mention one important circumstance. In all parts of civilized Europe men's minds, whether true or false, have many opportunities to work in the service of the state and in all lines of profit and honor which the capitalist class has to offer. And this class is not near so close to its end as some merry prophets would have us believe. We need not wonder, then, that Engels wrote in his preface to the third volume of Marx's *Capital*, on October 4, 1894: "In our stirring times, as in the 16th century, mere theorizers on public affairs are found only on the side of the reactionaries." These words, which are as clear as they are grave, should be sufficient to close the mouths of those who boast that all intelligence has passed over on our side, and that the capitalist class will soon lay down arms. Just the reverse is true. There is a scarcity of intellectual forces in our ranks, the more so as the genuine laborers, for obvious reasons, often protest against the speakers and writers of the party. There is, then, no cause for surprise that historical materialism should have made so little headway from its first general enunciation. And even if we pass on to those who have done more than merely repeat or ape the fundamental statements in a way that sometimes approaches the burlesque, we must confess that all the serious, relevant, and correct things which have been written do not yet make a complete theory which has risen above the

stage of first formation. None of us would dare to invite comparison with Darwinism, which in less than 40 years has gone through so much of intensive and extensive development, that its theory has already an enormous history, a superabundance of material, a multitude of points of contact with other sciences, a great store of methodical corrections, and a great array of criticisms on the part of friend and foe.

All those who are standing outside of the socialist movement had and have an interest in combatting, misrepresenting, or ignoring this new theory. The socialists, on the other hand, have not had the time to devote themselves to the care and study which are necessary in order that any mental departure might gain in breadth of development and scholarly maturity, such as mark those sciences which are protected, or at least not combatted, by the official world, and which grow and prosper through the co-operation of many devoted collaborators.

Is not the diagnosis of a disease half a consolation? Do not physicians act that way nowadays with sick people, since they have become more inspired in their medical practice by that scientific sentiment which shall solve the problems of life?

After all, only a few of the various results of historical materialism are of a nature to acquire any marked popularity. It is certain that this new method of investigation will enable some of us to write more conclusive works of history than those generally written by literary men who ply their art only with the help of philology and classic learning. And aside from the knowledge which active socialists may

derive from the accurate analysis of the field on which they move, there is no doubt that historical materialism has directly or indirectly exerted a great influence on many thinkers of our day, and will exert a still greater influence to the extent that the study of economic history is developed and practically interpreted by laying bare the fundamental causes and intimate reasons for certain political events. But it seems to me that the whole theory in its most intimate bearings, or the whole theory in its entirety, that it to say, as a *philosophy*, can never become one of the articles of universal popular culture. And when I say *philosophy*, I know well that I may be misunderstood. And if I were to write in German, I should say *Lebens-und-Welt-Anschauung*, a conception of life and the universe. For in order to become familiar with this philosophy, one must have a deep mental power which must be accustomed to the difficulties of mental combination. The attempt to handle it might expose shallow minds, who are prone to make easy conclusions, to the danger of saying silly things of sacred reason. And we don't want to become responsible for the promotion of such literary charlatanry.

II

Rome, April 24, 1897.

Now permit me to pass on to the consideration of certain prosaically small things, which, however, as small things often do in the great affairs of the world, carry considerable weight in our discussion.

To speak of the writings of Marx and Engels, since they are particularly under discussion, have they never been read in their entirety by any one outside of the circle of the nearest friends and disciples, and outside of the circle of the followers and direct interpreters, of these authors? Have these writings, as a whole, never been the objects of comment and illustration on the part of people outside of the camp formed around the traditions of the German Social-Democracy? I refer especially to those who have done the work of applying and explaining those writings, and particularly to the *Neue Zeit*, the magazine which has held the front rank among the publications of the party. In short, the question is whether these writings have gathered around themselves what modern thinkers call a literary environment in any other country but Germany, and whether even in this country such a development has not been but partial, and accomplished by means which were not always above criticism.

And how rare are many of these writings, and how hard are some of them to find! Are there many who, like myself, have had the patience to hunt for years for a copy of the *Poverty of Philosophy*, which was but very recently republished in Paris, or of that queer work, *The Holy Family*; or who would

be willing to endure more hardships to secure a copy of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* than a student of philology or history would under ordinary conditions in reading and studying all the documents of ancient Egypt! I have the reputation of being a practiced hand at seeking and locating books, but I have never experienced more trouble than I did in the quest for that paper. The reading of all the writings of the founders of scientific socialism has so far been largely a privilege of the initiated! ^[2]

Is it a wonder, then, that outside of Germany, for instance in France, and particularly there, many writers, especially among publicists, should have felt a temptation to draw the elements for the formation of a Marxism of their own makings from criticisms of our adversaries, from incidental quotations, from hasty snatches taken out of special articles, or from vague recollections? This took place all the more easily, since the rise of socialist parties in France and Italy gave voice more or less to representatives of alleged Marxism, although in my opinion it would be inexact to call them so. But this gave to literary men of all sorts the easy excuse of believing, or making others believe, that every speech of an agitator or politician, every declaration of principles, every newspaper article, and every official party action, was an authentic and orthodox revelation of the new doctrine in a new church. Was not the French *Chamber of Deputies*, about two years ago, on the point of discussing Marx's theory of value? And what are we to say of so many Italian professors who quoted and discussed for years books and works which notoriously had never reached our latitude? Soon after that George Adler wrote those two shallow and inconclusive books of his, ^[3] in which he offered easy treasures of bibliography and copious quotations to all

who were looking for comfortable instruction and a chance to plagiarise. One might truly say that Adler had read much and sinned much.

Historical materialism is in a certain sense all there is to Marxism. Before it surrounded itself with a literature written by competent thinkers, who could develop and continue it, Marxism passed among the peoples of neo-latin speech through innumerable mistakes, misinterpretations, grotesque alterations, queer travesties, and gratuitous inventions. No one has a right to place these things on the ledger of a history of Socialism. But they could not but cause much embarrassment to those who were eager to create a socialist culture, especially if they belonged to the ranks of professional students.

You are familiar with the fantastic story told by Croce in *Le Devenir Social* of that blond Marx who is supposed to have founded the International at Naples, in 1867. I could tell other similar stories. I could tell you of a student who came to my house, some years ago, to have at least one personal look at the famous *Poverty of Philosophy*. He was quite disappointed. "It is a serious book on political economy?" he said. "Not only serious," said I, "but also hard to read and in many points obscure." He could not understand it at all. "Did you expect," I continued, "a poem on the heroes of the attic, or a romance like that of the poor young man?"

The farfetched title of *The Holy Family* has given to some an excuse for some queer tales. It is the singular fate of that circle of Young-Hegelians, among whom was at least one man of mark, Bruno Bauer, that they should be known to posterity through the ridicule which two young writers

heaped upon them. And to think that this book, which would appear dry, hard to understand, and harsh to most French readers, is really not very notable, except for the fact that it shows the way in which Marx and Engels, after they had thrown off the burden of Hegelian scholasticism, began to extricate themselves from the humanitarianism of Feuerbach! And while they were developing into what later became their own theory, they were still to a certain extent imbued with that *true socialism* which later on they themselves ridiculed in the *Manifesto*.

But apart from the ridiculous stories which have been circulated about these two, there is one which has developed in Italy, and there is nothing to laugh about. This is the case of Loria. It is so much the more sad, since just in these last years, in spite of the great difficulties surrounding it, a socialist party has been in process of formation in Italy, which in program and intent represents the tendencies of international socialism, so far as the conditions of our country will permit, and tries to accomplish its work. It is to be regretted that just at this period some people, either students or ex-students, should have taken it into their heads to proclaim Loria, now as the authentic author of the theories of scientific socialism, now as the discoverer of the economic interpretation of history, now as this, then as that, however contradictory it might be. Loria has thus been acclaimed, all in the same breath, but without his knowledge and consent, as a champion of Marx, as an enemy of Marx, as a substitute, a superior, and inferior of Marx. Well, this misunderstanding is now a thing of the past. And peace be to its memory. Since the *Social Problems* of Loria have been translated into French, many of your countrymen will wonder how it was possible that he could be mistaken, not

so much for a socialist of some sort – for this might have been considered a sign or design of ingeniousness – but as a man who continued the work of Marx and improved on it. The very idea makes one's hair stand on end.

However, so far as France is concerned, you may rest easy about these anecdotes of model intuition. For it is not only true that sins are committed outside and inside of the walls of Troy, but it is also an axiom which every one will accept who does not belong to the insane category of misunderstood geniuses, that no one comes too late into the world to do his duty. And in the present case it is so much less too late, as we may truthfully say in the words of Engels, written to me a short time before his death: "We are as yet at the very beginning of things."

And because we are still in the first beginnings, it seems to me that the German socialist party should consider it its duty to get out a complete critical edition of the works of Marx and Engels, in order that students may be able to occupy themselves with these theories with a full understanding of their causes and get their knowledge of them with as little inconvenience as possible from the first sources. This edition should be supplied from case to case with prefaces containing statements of fact, with foot notes, references, and explanations. It would alone be a meritorious work to deprive secondhand book dealers of the privilege to make objects of indecent speculation of the rarest copies of old writings. I can tell a story or two about that. Works which have already appeared in the form of books or pamphlets should be supplemented by newspaper articles, manifestoes, circulars, programs, and all those letters which, although written to private people, have a

political and scientific value because dealing with matters of public and general interest.

Such an enterprise can be undertaken only by the German speaking socialists. Not that Marx and Engels belong only to Germany, in the patriotic and chauvinist sense of the term, such as many mistake for nationality. The form of their brains, the course of their productions, the logical order of their mode of seeing things, their scientific spirit, and their philosophy, were the fruit and outcome of German culture. But the substance of their thought and teaching deals with social conditions, which up to the time of their mature years developed for the greater part outside of Germany. It is rooted especially in the conditions created by that great economic and political revolution which from the second half of the eighteenth century had its basis and development overwhelmingly in England and France. Both of them were in every respect international spirits. But nevertheless only the German socialists, from the Communist Club to the Erfurt program, and to the last articles of the prudent and experienced Kautsky, have that continuity and persistency of tradition, and that assistance of constant experience, which are necessary in order that a critical edition of these works may find in the things themselves and in the memories of men the data required for making it complete and true to life. And it is not a question of selection. The entire scientific and political activity, all the literary productions, of the two founders of critical socialism, even if they were written for the occasion of the hour, should be made accessible to the reader. It is not a matter of compiling a *Corpus juris* or a *Testamentum juxta canonem receptum* (a code of laws or a testament according to received canons). It is a matter of collecting an elaborate series of writings, in order that they

may speak directly to all who may wish to read them. Only in this way can the students of other countries have all the sources at their disposal. Those who got their learning in some other way, through unreliable reproductions or vague recollections, gave rise to the strange phenomenon that until very recent times there was not a single work on Marxism outside of the German language written on the strength of documentary criticism. And often such works came from the pens of writers of other revolutionary parties, or other schools of socialism. A typical case of this kind is that of the anarchist writers, for whom, especially in France and Italy, the founder of Marxism seems generally not to have existed at all, unless it be as the man who whipped Proudhon and who opposed Bakunin, or as the head of that which is the greatest crime in their eyes, namely the typical representative of political socialism and therefore – what infamy! – of parliamentarian socialism.

All these writings have one common foundation. And this is historical materialism, taken as a threefold theory, namely as a philosophical method for the general understanding of life and the universe, as a critique of political economy reducible to certain laws only because it represents a certain historical phase, and as an interpretation of politics, above all of those political movements which are necessary and serviceable for the march of the working class toward socialism. These three aspects, which I enumerate abstractly, as is always the custom for purposes of analysis, form one single unity in the minds of the two authors. For this reason, their writings, with the exception of Engels' *Anti-Dühring* and the first volume of *Capital*, never appear to literary men of classic traditions to have been written according to the canons of the art of book writing.

These writings are in reality monographs, and in most cases they are the outgrowth of special occasions. They are fragments of a science and politics in a process of continuous growth. Others, of course not mere chance comers, must and can continue this work. In order to understand them fully, these writings should be arranged biographically. And in such a biography we shall find, so to say, the traces and imprints, the marks and reflections, of the genesis of modern socialism. Those who are not able to follow up this genesis, will look in those fragments for something which is not in them, and ought not to be in them, for instance, answers to all the questions which historical and social science may ever present in their vast and variegated experience, or a summary solution of the practical problems of all time and place. To illustrate, in the discussion of the Eastern question, in which some socialists present the singular spectacle of a struggle between idiocy and heedlessness, we hear on all sides references to Marxism! ^[4] The doctrinaires and theorists of all sorts, who need intellectual idols, the makers of classic systems good for all eternity, the compilers of manuals and encyclopaediae, will in vain look in Marxism for that which it has never offered to anybody. These people conceive of thought and knowledge as things which have a *material existence*, but they do not understand that thought and knowledge are activities in process of formation. They are metaphysicians in the sense in which Engels used this term, which, of course, is not the only possible meaning. In the present case I mean to say that these men are metaphysicians in the sense in which Engels applied this term to them by enlarging upon that characteristic which Hegel bestowed upon ontologists like Wolf and others like him.

But did Marx, although he is unexcelled as a publicist, ever pretend to pose as an accomplished writer of history, while he penned from 1848 to 1860 his essays on contemporaneous history and his memorable newspaper articles? And did he, perhaps, fail in this, because it was not his vocation, and because he had no aptitude for it? Or did Engels, when he wrote his *Anti-Dühring*, which is to this day, the most accomplished work of critical socialism and contains in a nutshell the whole philosophy required for the thinkers of socialism, dream of exhausting the possibilities of the knowable universe in his short and exquisite work, or of laying down forever the outlines of metaphysics, psychology, ethics, logic, and whatever may be the names of the other sections of the encyclopedia, which were chosen either for intrinsic reasons of objective division, or for reasons of expediency, comfort, vanity, by those who profess to be teachers? Or is Marx's *Capital* perhaps another one of those encyclopedias of all economic learning, with which especially the professors, above all in Germany, overstock the market?

This work, of three large volumes in four not very small books, may be likened to a colossal monograph as distinguished from so many encyclopedic compilations. Its main object is to demonstrate the origin and production of *surplus-value* (under the capitalist system) and then to show the manner in which the surplus-value is divided by the combination of production with the circulation of capital. The basis of the analyses is the *theory of value*, which is a perfection of an elaboration made by economic science for a century and a half. This theory does not represent an empirical fact drawn from vulgar induction, nor a simple category of logic, as some have chronicled it. It

is rather the typical premise without which all the rest of the work is unthinkable. The matter of fact premises, namely pre-capitalist society and the social genesis of wage-labor, are the starting points of the historical explanation of the origin of present capitalism. The mechanism of circulation, with its secondary and minor side-laws, and finally the phenomena of distribution, viewed in their antithetical and relatively independent aspects, form the means by which we arrive at the concrete facts as they are given by the obvious movements of everyday life. The facts and processes are generally presented in their typical forms, the supposition being that all the regular conditions of capitalist production are in full force. Other modes of production are discussed only so far as they have already been outgrown and to show the way in which they were outgrown, or if they still survive, the extent to which they become obstacles of capitalist production is taken into consideration. Marx therefore quotes frequently illustrations from descriptive history, and then, after stating his actual premises, he gives a genetic explanation of the way in which these premises go through their typical development, once that the conditions of their interrelation are given. Thus the morphological structure of capitalist society is laid bare. Marx's work is therefore not dogmatic, but critical. And it is critical, not in the subjective meaning of the term, but because it draws its criticism from the antithetical and contradictory nature of the things themselves. Even when Marx comes to the descriptive portions of historical references, he never loses himself in vulgar conceptions, whose secret consists in avoiding an inquiry into the laws of development and in simply pasting upon a mere enumeration and description of events such labels as "historical process, development, or evolution". The guiding thread of the inquiry is the dialectic method. And

this is the ticklish point which throws into the saddest of confusions all those readers of *Capital* who carry into its perusal the intellectual habits of the empiricists, metaphysicians, and authors of definitions of entities conceived for all eternity. The fastidious questions raised by many concerning the alleged contradictions between the first and the third volume ^[5] of this work reveal themselves on closer scrutiny as results of a misapprehension of the dialectic method on the part of these critics. I refer here merely to the spirit in which the dispute has been waged, not to the particular points which have been raised. For it is a fact that the third volume is by no means a finished work and may be open to criticism even on the part of those who agree with its general principles. The contradictions noted by the critics are not contradictions between one book and another, are not due to a failure of the author to stick to his premises and promises, but are actual contradictions found in capitalist production itself. When expressed in the shape of formulae, these phenomena appear to the thinking mind as contradictions. An average rate of profit based on the total capital invested, regardless of its organic composition, that is to say, regardless of the proportion between its constant and variable part; prices formed on the market by means of averages which fluctuate widely around the value of commodities; simple interest on money owned as such and loaned to others for investment in business; ground-rent, that is to say, rent on something which was not produced by anybody's labor: these and other *refutations* of the so-called law of value are actual contradictions inherent in capitalist production. By the way, that term *law* confuses a good many. These antitheses, however *irrational* they may appear, actually exist, beginning with the fundamental *irrationality* that the labor of the wage worker

should create a product greater than its cost (wages) for him who hires it. This vast *system of economic contradictions* (thanks be to Proudhon for this term) appears in its entirety as a *sum of social injustices* to all sentimental socialists, *rational* socialists, and all shades of declaiming radicals. The honest people among the reformers desire to eliminate these injustices by means of honest legal efforts. When we now compare, after a lapse of fifty years, the presentation of these antinomies, in their concrete details as shown in the third volume of *Capital*, with the general outlines given in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, we readily recognise the nature of the dialectic thread which holds these analyses together. The antinomies, which Proudhon wanted to solve abstractedly on the ground that the reasoning mind condemned them in the name of justice (and this mistake assigns him a certain place in history), are now seen to be contradictions in the social structure itself, so that the very nature of the process engenders contradictions. When we realise that irrationalities are born of the historical process itself, we are emancipated from the simplemindedness of abstract reason and understand that *the negative power of revolution* is relatively necessary in the cycle of the historical development.

Whatever may be said about this grave and very intricate question of historical interpretation, which I shall not venture to treat exhaustively as an incident to a letter, the fact remains that no one will succeed in separating the premises, the methodical process, the inferences and conclusions of this work, from the actual world in which they are developed and the living facts to which they refer. No one can ever reduce its teaching to a mere Bible, or to a recipe for the interpretation of the history of any time and

place. There is no more insipid and ridiculous phrase than that which calls Marx's *Capital* the Bible of Socialism. The Bible, which is a collection of religious works and theological essays, was made in the course of centuries. And even if *Capital* were our Bible, the knowledge of Socialism alone would not make the socialists omniscient.

Marxism is not, and will not be, confined to the writings of Marx and Engels. The name stands even now as a symbol and compendium of a many-sided tendency and a complex theory. A great deal is still lacking before Marxism can become a full and complete theory of all phases of history which have so far been traced to their respective forms of economic production, a theory which shall regulate the pace of political development. In order to accomplish that, those who wish to devote themselves to a study of the past from the point of view of this new method of historical research must submit the original sources to a new and accurate test, and those who wish to apply it to the practical questions of present-day politics must find special modes of orientation. Since this theory is in its very essence critical, it cannot be continued, applied, and improved, unless it criticises itself. Seeing that it is a question of clarifying and deepening definite processes, no catechism will hold good, no diagrammatic generalisation will serve. I received a proof of this in the course of this year I proposed to lecture at the university on the economic conditions of Upper and Middle Italy at the end of the 13th, and the beginning of the 14th century, with the principal object of explaining the origin of the agricultural and city proletariat and thereby finding a practicable way of tracing the rise of certain communistic movements and revealing as a final conclusion the somewhat obscure vicissitudes of the heroic life of Fra Dolcino. It certainly was my intention to be and remain a Marxian. But I cannot avoid assuming the responsibility for

the things which I said at my own risk, because the sources on which I based my studies were those which are handled by all other historians, of all the other schools and tendencies, and I could not ask Marx for advice, because he had nothing to offer concerning these particular facts.

It seems to me that I have given a satisfactory reply to the principal question which recurs not only in your preface, to which I have particular reference, but also in various articles written by you for *Le Devenir Social*. Of course, I shall have to take up still other questions. But your principal question turned on this point: What reasons are to blame for the fact that historical materialism has so far been spread so little and developed so poorly? Without prejudice to the things which I shall say in my following letters – you see that I hold out a nice threat of still more wearying talk – you should experience no great trouble in making your own reply to another question which you asked especially in certain book reviews, and which runs about as follows (at least this is the way in which I interpret it): How is it that so many have tried to complete this imperfect understanding and elaboration of Marxism, now by the help of Spencer, now with positivism in general, now with Darwin, now with any other gift of the gods, showing an evident inclination – what shall I say – to Italianize, Frenchify, Russianize this historical materialism? Why did they forget two things, namely that this theory carries with it the conditions and expressions of its own philosophy, and that it is essentially international in origin and substance?

However, I shall have to continue my letters also for this reason.

III

Rome, May 10, 1897.

To speak once more of the two founders of scientific socialism, I must confess that I use this term not without apprehension, lest the false use made of it in certain quarters might have rendered it almost ridiculous, particularly when it is supposed to stand for a sort of universal science. If these two men had only been, if not saints of the legendary kind, at least makers of schemes and systems, whose classic form and sharp outlines would have lent themselves easily to admiration! But no, sir! They were critical and aggressive thinkers, not only in their writings, but also in their method of doing things. And they never exhibited either their own personalities or their own ideas as examples and models. They proclaimed indeed the revolutionary nature of the things in the social processes of history, but not in the spirit of men who measure great historical events by the yardstick of their fantastic and impulsive personality. Hence the scorn of the many! Had they been at least like those loving professors, who descend occasionally from their pedestals in order to honor poor and sinful humanity with their advice and strut around among them in the garb of a protector and guardian of the *social question*! But they did just the reverse. They identified themselves with the cause of the proletariat, and they became inseparable from the conscience and science of the proletarian revolution. While they were in every respect thorough revolutionaries (although not impassioned or emotional), they never suggested any conspiratory plans, or political schemes, but explained the theory of their new politics and aided in its practical application, in the way

which the modern working class movement indicates and requires as an actual necessity of history. In other words, incredible as it may seem, they were something more than *simple socialists*. And as a matter of fact, many who were *not* more than just *simple socialists*, or even still simpler makers of revolutions, often looked upon them, if not with suspicion, and least with contempt and aversion.

I should never get done if I tried to enumerate all the reasons which for many long years retarded an objective discussion of Marxism. You are well aware that certain writers of the left wing of the revolutionary parties in France treat historical materialism, not in the way that is customary in dealing with gifts of the scientific spirit, which are certainly subject to criticism like all of science, but as a personal thesis of these two authors, who, however notable and great they may be, remain for those people always but two among the other leaders of socialism, that is to say, two among so many other X's in the universe! ^[6] To be plain, I will say that only such good or bad arguments have been advanced against this theory as are always obstacles and stumbling blocks in the way of new ideas, especially among professional wise men. Frequently objections arose also from a very special motive. The theories of Marx and Engels, namely, were regarded as opinions of comrades and measured according to standards of sympathy or antipathy aroused by these comrades. Such are the bizarre results of premature democracy that we are not permitted to exempt anything from the control of incompetents, not even logic!

But there are other reasons. When the first volume of Marx's *Capital* appeared in 1867, it came to the professors and academic writers, especially of Germany, like a blow on

their heads. It was then a period of great inactivity in economic science. The historical school had not yet produced those ponderous, and often useful, volumes which later appeared in Germany. In France, Italy, and even Germany, the very commonplace productions of that *vulgar economy*, which had obliterated the critical spirit of the great classic economists between 1840 and 1860, were leading a precarious existence. England had taken to John Stuart Mill, who, although a professional logician, was always suspended between the yes and the no in matters of importance, like one of the well-known characters on our comic stage. No one had then given a thought to that new economics which the *Hedonists* have lately produced. In Germany, where Marx should have been read first, for evident reasons, and where Rodbertus remained almost unknown, the mediocre spirits ruled the situation, prominent among them that famous writer of erudite and minute notes, Roscher, who loved to encumber quite clear passages with nominal and often senseless definitions. The first volume of *Capital* appeared just in time to disillusion the minds of the professors and academicians. They, the learned bearers of titles, especially privileged in the so-called land of thinkers, were expected to go to school! They had either been lost in the minute particulars of erudition, or had tried to make a school of apologetics of political economy, or had bothered their heads to find a plausible way of applying to their own country the conclusions of a science grown in the entirely different conditions of another country. And thus all those professors of the land of the learned *par excellence* had forgotten the art of analysis and critique. *Capital* compelled them to begin their studies from the bottom. They had to get an entirely new foundation. For this work, while coming from the pen of an extreme and

determined communist, did not show a trace of subjective protest or scheming, but was a strictly and rigorously objective analysis of the process of capitalist production. There was evidently something more terrible in this revolutionary journalist of 1848 and exile of 1849 than a mere continuation or complement of that socialism which the bourgeois literature of all countries dreamed of having definitely overcome as a political expression since the fall of Chartism and the triumph of the sinister head of the *coup d'état* in France. It became necessary to study economics anew. In other words, this science opened once more a critical period. To give the devil his due, it must be admitted that the German professors after that date, that is to say, beginning with 1870, and still more since 1880, undertook the critical revision of economics with that diligence, persistence, good will, and laboriousness, which the learned of that country have always exhibited in all lines of research. Although anything written by them can hardly ever be fully accepted by us, it is nevertheless true that the field of economics was newly plowed by their labors in the manner customary among professors and academicians, and that now this science can no longer be committed to mind as easily as any lazy man's lesson. Of late the name of Marx has become so fashionable that it is heard in the lecture rooms of universities as one of the preferred subjects of critique, polemics, and reference, and no longer merely in terms of regret and vulgar invective. The social literature of Germany is now fully impregnated with memories of Marx.

But this could not take place in 1867. *Capital* made its appearance just when the *International* began to be talked about and make itself feared for a short while, not only on account of the thing that it stood for intrinsically, and what

it might have become had not the Franco-German war and the tragic incident of the Commune dealt it heavy blows, but also on account of the blood-curdling mouthings of some of its members and the stupid revolutionary maneuvers of some intruders. Was it not notorious that the *Inaugural Address of the International Workingmen's Association* (from which address every socialist may still learn much) came from the pen of Marx? And was there not good reason to attribute the more determined actions and resolutions of the International to him? Well then, if a revolutionist of such undoubted loyalty and acumen as Mazzini could not distinguish between the *International* to which Marx devoted his work and the *Bakunist Alliance*, is it a wonder that the German professors were disinclined to enter into a critical discussion with the author of *Capital*? How was it possible to get on terms of friendly discussion with a man who was, so to say, hung in effigy in all laws of exception made for the use of Favre and consorts, and was held morally responsible for all the deeds of the revolutionaries, even their errors and extravagances even though he had at the same written a masterly work, like a new Ricardo, who studied impassibly the economic processes after the manner of geometers? This fact is to blame for that queer method of polemics which made the intentions of the author responsible for his conclusions. It was alleged that Marx had thought out his scientific analysis for the purpose of giving strength to certain tendencies. This led for many years to the writing of sensational articles in place of objective analyses.^[2]

But the worst of it was that the effects of this grossly false critique made themselves felt even in the minds of socialists, particularly in those of the young intellectuals who took up

the cause of the proletariat between 1870 and 1880. Many of the fiery remodelers of the world undertook to proclaim themselves champions of Marxian theories, choosing as legal tender precisely the more or less spurious Marxism of our adversaries. The case is dearest in Germany where it left its traces in the party discussions and in its small literature. The most paradoxical point of the whole mistake is this: Those who incline toward easy inferences, as most newcomers do, thought that the theories of value and surplus-value, as ordinarily presented in popular expositions, contained here and now the canons of practical activity, the motive power, the ethics and legal basis, for all proletarian efforts. Isn't it a great injustice that millions and millions of human beings should be robbed of the fruits of their labor! This statement is so simple and so poignant that all the modern Bastilles ought to fall at the first scientific blast of the new trumpets of Jericho! This easy simplicity was strengthened by many of the theoretical errors of Lassalle, such as those which were due to his relative lack of knowledge, for instance the *iron law of wages*, a half-truth which becomes a total error when not fully explained, or those which in his case may be regarded as expedients of agitation, for instance his famous co-operatives with state help. Whoever is inclined to confine his whole socialist confession of faith to the simplest inference from the recognized exploitation to the demand for the emancipation of the exploited, which is inevitable only because it is just, has but to make another step on the slippery path of logic in order to reduce the whole story of the human race to a case of moral conscience and consider its successive development in social life as so many variations of a continued error of calculation.

Between 1870 and 1880, and a little after, a sort of new utopianism formed around this vague conception of a certain something entitled scientific socialism which, like fruits out of season, was very insipid. And what else is utopianism without the genius of a Fourier and the eloquence of a Considerant but a matter for ridicule? This new utopianism, which still flourishes here and there, has played quite a role in France. It has left its imprint in the struggles with other sects and schools fought by our brave friends in the Revolutionary Labor Party, who from the first endeavored to develop socialism along the lines of class-consciousness and the progressive conquest of political power by the proletariat. Only through the experience of this practical test, only by the daily study of the class struggle, only through testing and re-testing the forces of the proletariat so far as they are already organized and concentrated, are we enable to estimate the chances of socialism. Those who proceed differently are and remain utopians, even in the revered name of Marx.

Against these new utopians, against the outgrown representatives of the old schools, and against the various sidelines of contemporaneous socialism, our two authors continually applied the rays of their critique. In their long career they took their science as a guide for their practical work, and out of their practical experience they culled the material and received directions for deepening their science. They never treated history as though she were a mare which they could straddle and trot around, nor did they look for formulae by which to keep alive momentary illusions. They were thus compelled, by the necessity of circumstances, to measure swords in bitter, sharp, and relentless controversies with all those whom they considered as dangers to the

proletarian movement. Who does not remember, for instance, the Proudhonists, who pretended to destroy the state by reducing it by stealth, as though it were closing its eyes and pretending not to see? Or the one-time Blanquists, who wanted to seize the powers of state by force and then *start a revolution*? Or Bakunin who sneaked surreptitiously into the International and compelled the others to throw him out? Or here and there the pretenses of so many different schools of socialism, and the competition of so many leaders?

From the time that Marx routed the ingenuous Weitling in a personal debate¹⁰ to his trenchant critique of the Gotha program (1875), which was not published until 1890, his life was one continual battle, not only with the bourgeoisie and the politics represented by it, but also with the various revolutionary and reactionary currents which wrongfully or spitefully assumed the name of socialism. All those struggles were fought out in the International, and I speak of the International of glorious records, which left its imprint to this day on all the present-day activity of the proletariat, not of its subsequent caricature. The greater bulk of the controversies with Marxism, a Marxism which the imagination of certain critics has reduced to a mere variety of political schooling, is due to the traditions of those revolutionaries who, especially in the Latin countries, recognised in Bakunin their leader and master. What is it that the anarchists of our day are repeating but the lamentations and mistakes of those past days?

Twenty years ago, the majority of the Italian public, with the exception of those scientists who masticated over and over, in their homes, the things which they had read in books,

knew nothing of the two founders of scientific socialism but what had been preserved through recollections of the invectives of Mazzini and the malice of Bakunin.

And so critical communism, which has been admitted so tardily to the honor of discussion in the circles of official science, met in its own camp with the very worst of adversities, the enmity of its own friends.

All those difficulties have now either been overcome, or are at least for the greater part about to disappear.

Not the intrinsic virtue of ideas, which have never had any feet for walking, nor hands for grasping, but the sole fact that the programs of socialist parties, wherever such parties arose, assumed the same tendencies, induced the socialists of all countries, through the imperious suggestion of conditions, to place themselves at the visual angle of the Communist Manifesto. Don't you think that I wrote my essay in memory of this manifesto at an opportune time? The exploiting classes create for the exploited classes almost everywhere the same conditions. For this reason, the active representatives of these exploited travel everywhere the same road of agitation and follow the same points of view in their propaganda and organization. Many call this *practical Marxism*. Be it so! What good is there in quarreling about words? Even though Marxism reduces itself for many to mere words, or to the worship of Marx's picture, his plaster of Paris bust, or his features on a button (the Italian police frequently exhibit their deep feeling for such innocent symbols), the fact remains that this symbolical unanimity is a proof of the incipient unification in reality, and of the growing unity of thought and action in all proletarian

movements of the world. In other words, the international solidarity is shaping itself at long range through material conditions. Those who use the language of the decadent writers of the bourgeoisie, mistaking the symbol for the thing, are now saying that this is a personal triumph of Marx. It is as though one had said that Christianity was a personal triumph of Jesus of Nazareth (or why not say outright his success?), of Jesus who divested himself of his quality of the son of a god that assumed human shape, and who, in the soft and weak language of your Renan, became a man of such childlike divinity as to seem a god.

In view of this intuitive shaping of socialist politics, which is tantamount to proletarian politics, the divergences of the old schools have fallen to the ground. Some of these were in fact nothing but distinctions of the letter and vain hairsplitting, which had to give way to such useful distinctions as arise spontaneously through the different ways of handling practical problems. In the concrete reality, in the positive and prosaic development of socialism, it matters little whether all its heads, leaders, orators, and representatives conform to one theory, or do not conform to it, whether or not they profess it publicly. Socialism is not a church, not a sect, that must have its fixed dogma or formula. If so many speak nowadays of the triumph of Marxism, such an emphatic expression, when stated in a crudely prosaic form, simply means that henceforth no one can be a socialist, unless he asks himself every minute: What is the proper thing to think, to say, to do, under the present circumstances, for the best interests of the proletariat. The day has gone by for such dialecticians, or rather sophists, as Proudhon, for the inventors of personal social systems, the makers of private revolutions.^[9] The practical indication of

that which is practicable is given by the condition of the proletariat, and this is appreciable and measurable precisely because Marxism (I mean the thing, not the symbol) supplies us with a progressive standard by its theory. The two things, the measurable and the measure, are *one* from the point of view of the historical process, especially when they are seen at a convenient distance.

And you can actually see that to the extent that the outlines of the practical policy of socialism become distinct, all the old poetical and fantastic ideas are dispersed and leave but traces in phraseology behind them. At the same time the critical study of the science of economies has been growing in every respect in the field of academic research. The exile Marx has made himself at home, after his death, in the circles of official science, at least as an adversary who will stand no fooling. And just as the socialists have come by so many different roads to the understanding that a revolution cannot be made, but makes itself through a process of growth, so that public has been gradually developing for whom historical materialism is a true and distinct intellectual necessity. You have seen that many have stuck their noses into this theory during recent years, even though it was done badly or with evil intent. Now, if you take a good look, you will note that we have not gone backward. Since my young days I have often heard it related how Hegel had said that only one of his pupils understood him. This anecdote cannot be verified, because this one disciple has never been identified. But the same thing may repeat itself infinitely, from system to system, from school to school, for, as a matter of fact, intellectual activity is not due purely to personal suggestion, and thought is not communicated mechanically from brain to brain as such. Nor are great

systems diffused unless similar social conditions dispose and incline many minds towards them at the same time. Historical materialism will be enlarged, diffused, specialized, and will have its own history. It may vary in coloring and outline from country to country. But this will do no great harm, so long as it preserves that kernel which is, so to say, its whole *philosophy*. One of its fundamental theses is this: The nature of man, his historical making, is a practical process. And when I say *practical*, it implies the elimination of the vulgar distinction between theory and practice. For, in so many words, the history of man is the history of labor. And labor implies and includes on the one hand the relative, proportional, and proportioned development of both mental and manual activities, and on the other the concept of a history of labor implies ever the social form of labor and its variations. Historical man is always human society, and the presumption of a presocial, or super-social, man is a creature of imagination. And there we are.

Here I pause, mainly to avoid repeating myself, and to save you from a repetition of the things which I have written in my two essays. You certainly do not feel the need of such a repetition, and most assuredly I do not.

NOTES

1. For the better understanding of my letters I append the preface (III) that Sorel has written for the French edition of my two essays (Paris 1897, Giard et Briere).
2. Quite recently Franz Mehring has undertaken to publish a collection of all the less known writings of Marx and Engels from 1840 to 1850, and among them appeared also "The Holy Family." "The Poverty of Philosophy" is now published in English by the Twentieth Century Press of London.

3. I refer to the "Geschichte der ersten sozialpolitischen Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland," and "Die GrundlaKen der Karl Marxischen Kritik," which were pillaged also in Italy by cheap critics.
4. While I am arranging these letters for publication, at the end of September 1901 there comes to my desk "The Eastern Question, by Karl Marx, London, Sonnenschein edition, pages XVI and 656, in great octavo, with copious index and two geographical maps. It is a carefully edited reproduction, by Ealeanor Marx and Edward Aveling, of the articles which Karl Marx wrote from 1853 to 1856 on the Eastern question, mainly in the New York Tribune. It is a miracle of literary workmanship. I note in passing that when Marx wrote political articles he did not lose himself in a cloud of doctrinairism and exposition of principles, but aimed to make himself clear and understood.
5. I have in mind especially the polemic writings of Böhm-Bawerk and Kormorzynski. To my surprise, the work of the first-named, entitled "Karl Max and the Close of his System," has been treated very indulgently by Conrad Schmidt in the supplement of "Vorwärts," April 16, 1897, No. 85
6. I invite those X's to a joint concourse.
7. "Marx starts out from the principle.... that the value of commodities is exclusively determined by the quantity of labor contained in them. Now, if there is nothing to the value of commodities but labor, if a commodity is nothing else but crystalized labor, then it is evident that it should wholly belong to the laborer and that no part of it should be appropriated by the capitalist. Hence, if the laborer gets only a part of the value of his product, this can be only the result of usurpation." Thus wrote Loria on page 462 of the "Nuova Antologia," February, 1895, in the noted article, "The Posthumous Work of Karl Marx." I quote these words, which are not the only ones of this sort written by Loria, merely as an illustration of the way in which free versions of Marx may be given in the style of Proudhon. And on such free versions were based those mental vagaries from 1870 to 1880 which I mention later on.
8. The Russian Annencoff was a personal witness of this debate and referred to it later, among many other reminiscences of Marx, in the "Vyestnik Yevropy," 1880. (Reproduced in the "Neue Zeit," May, 1883.)
9. What I wrote in May 1897 was certainly not disproved by the events in Italy in May 1898. Those events were not the work of any one party, but a veritable case of spontaneous anarchy.

IV

Rome, May 14, 1897.

To return to my first argument, it seems to me that the following question is uppermost in your mind: By what means, and in what manner, would it be possible to inaugurate a school of historical materialism in France? I don't know whether I am at liberty to answer this question, without running the risk of being numbered among those journalists of the old school who, with imperturbable assurance, gave good advice to Europe at the imminent peril of being almost never heeded. As a matter of fact, they never were. I shall try to be modest. In the first place, it ought not to be so very difficult to find editors and publishers in France who should be willing to publish and spread accurate translations of the works of Marx, Engels, and others that may be desired. That would be the best way to make a start. I am aware of the fact that in the art of translating one comes across some queer difficulties. I have been reading German for more than thirty-seven years, and I have always noted that we people of the Latin tongue get into strange linguistic and literary byways, whenever we attempt to translate from the German. That which seems alive, clear, direct, in German, becomes often enough, when translated into Italian, cold, pointless, and even outright jargon. In such translations as are commonly current the convincing effect is lost with that of the meaning. In such a vast work of popularization as that which I have in mind, it would be desirable, aside from the faithful interpretation of the original text, to supply in the prefaces, foot-notes, and comments of the translated writings the materials for that

easy assimilation which is already in process or prepared in the writings grown on native soil.

Languages are not accidental variations of universal speech. They are even more than simple external means of communication expressing thought and mind. They are the conditions and limits of our internal activity, which for this reason, among many others, is not indebted to accident for the various national modes and forms. If there are any internationalists who ignore this, they should rather be called confusionists and ignorers of form. Of such are those who get their information, not from the ancient apocalyptic, but from that specious Bakunin who proclaimed even the equalization of the sexes. The assimilation of ideas, of lines of thought, of definite tendencies, of plans, which have found mature expression in the literature of a foreign language, is a rather difficult case of social pedagogy.

Since this last expression has slipped from my pen, permit me also to confess that it is not the continuous growth of success at elections which fills me more than anything else with admiration and vivid hope, when I closely examine the previous history and present condition of the German Social-Democracy. Instead of speculating over the vote as a measure of the future, according to the often erroneous calculations of inference and statistical combination, I feel a special admiration for this truly new and imposing case of social education. This is the great point that in such a vast number of men, especially of laborers and little bourgeois, a new consciousness is in process of formation, to which the direct influence of economic conditions, which cause them to struggle, and the propaganda of socialism as a means and

aim of development, equally contribute. This digression calls to my mind a recollection. I was either the first, or certainly one of the first, in Italy to call the attention of those of our laborers, who were and are able to move along the line of the modern proletarian class struggle, to the example of Germany. But it never entered my mind to assume that the imitation of Germany should relieve us in any way from spontaneous action. It never occurred to me to follow the example of those monks and priests, who were for centuries almost the exclusive educators of an already disintegrating Italy, and who blithely taught the art of poetry by ordering their pupils to learn Horace's *Art of Poetry* by heart. It would be queer, if you, Bebel, with your merits, activity, and wisdom, were introduced among us in the garb of another Horace! It would surprise even my friend Lombroso, who hates Latin worse than the starvation fever.

In short, there are still other difficulties, of a greater scope and weight. Even if able and experienced writers and editors, not only in France, but also in the other civilized countries, undertook to spread translations of all the works on historical materialism, it would only stimulate, but not form and keep alive in the various nations those creative energies which produce and nourish vigorously a certain intellectual movement. To think is to produce. To learn means to produce by reproduction. We do not really and truly know a thing, until we are capable of producing it ourselves by thought, work, proof, and renewed proof. We do this only by virtue of our own powers, in our social group and from the point of view which we occupy in it.

And now think of France, with its great history, with its literature, which was so dominant for centuries, with its

patriotic ambitions, and with its very peculiar ethnological and psychological differentiation, which shows itself even in the most abstract products of the mind! It would not become me, an Italian, very well to pose as the defender of your chauvinists, upon whom you heap so much well-deserved opprobrium. But let us remember what happened in the eighteenth century. The revolutionary thought came from more than one part of the civilised world, from Italy, England, Germany, but it was not European unless it assumed the guise of French spirit. And the European revolution was at bottom the French revolution. This imperishable glory of your nation weighs, like all glories, upon the people. It burdens you with a deep-rooted prejudice. But are not prejudices likewise forces, at least impediments of progress, if nothing else? Paris will no longer be the brain of the world, if for no other reason but that the world has no brain, except in the imagination of some shallow sociologists.^[1] Neither is Paris to-day, nor will it ever be in the future, that sacred Jerusalem of revolutionists from all parts of the world which it seemed to be once upon a time. At all events the future proletarian revolution will have nothing in common with an apocalyptic millennium. And in our day, special privileges are doomed for nations as well as for single individuals. So Engels observed, justly. By the way, it would be worth the while of you French to read what he wrote in 1871 concerning the Blanquists who were trying to foment a violent revolution, so shortly after the catastrophe of the Commune.^[2] But when all is said, when the peculiar conditions of French agriculture and industry are taken into account, which retarded so long the concentration of the labor movement, and when the proper blame is recorded against the various petty leaders and heads, who kept French Socialism so long

split and divided, then the fact always remains that historical materialism will not make any headway among you, so long as it gives the impression of being simply a mental elaboration of two Germans of great genius. By this expression Mazzini intensified the national resentment against these two authors, who, being communists and materialists, seemed made to order for the purpose of routing the idealistic formula of Patriotism and God.

In this respect, the fate of the two founders of scientific socialism was almost tragical. They were often regarded as the two Germans by so many who were jingoists even though revolutionaries. And Bakunin, whose mind inclined so strongly toward invention, to put it mildly, accused them of being champions of Pan-Germanism, although these two Germans, who left their country as exiles from the days of their young manhood, were received with studied silence by those professors for whom servility is an act of patriotism. As a matter of fact these professors avenged themselves. For Capital, whose entire presentation is rooted in the traditions of classic economy, not excluding the ingenious and often talented writers of Italy in the 18th century, speaks only with sovereign contempt of such men as Roscher and others like him. Engels, who devoted himself with so much ability to the amplification and popularisation of the results of researches made by the American Morgan, had the settled conviction that the thing which he justly called classic philosophy had reached its dissolution with Feuerbach. And when he wrote his *Anti-Dühring*, he showed a frank unconcern for the philosophers of that time, the neocriticism of his countrymen, an unconcern which is explicable, even if not excusable, in his case, but which is ridiculous in other socialists who affect to imitate him. Their tragic fate was, so

to say, inherent in their mission. They had given themselves heart and soul to the cause of the proletariat of all nations. And for this reason their scientific work finds in every nation only that reading public which is capable of a similar intellectual revolution. In Germany, where Social Democracy stands firmly in serried ranks, owing to historical conditions, among them above all the fact that the capitalist class has never been able to break its ties with the old regime (look at that emperor who speaks with impunity in the language of a vice-god and who is nothing but a Frederick Barbarossa acting as a commercial traveler for goods made in Germany), it was quite natural that the ideas of scientific socialism should find a favorable soil for their normal and progressive diffusion. But none of the German socialists – at least I hope not – will ever think of looking upon the ideas of Marx and Engels from the simple point of view of the rights and duties, merits and demerits, of comrades of the party. Here is what Engels wrote not so very long ago: ^[31] "It will be noticed that I do not call myself a social-democrat in these articles, but a communist. I do this for the reason that the name of social-democrats was given in those days to many who had not written upon their banners the demand for the socialization of all the means of production. By a social-democrat people understood in France a republican democrat, who had genuine, but indefinite, sympathies for the working class men like Ledru-Rollin in 1848, and like the socialist radicals in 1874, who were tainted with Proudhonism. In Germany, the Lasalleans called themselves social democrats. Although the great majority of these gradually recognised the necessity of the socialization of the means of production, nevertheless one of the essential points of their public program remained productive associations with state help. It was, therefore,

quite impossible for Marx and myself to choose such an elastic term for the designation of our specific point of view. To-day it is different and this term may pass muster. Nevertheless it will always be ill-fitting for a party whose program is not generically socialistic, but directly communistic, and whose ultimate political aim is to do away with all forms of state, and therefore also with democracy."

It seems to me that the patriots – I do not use this term derisively – have good ground for consolation and comfort. For there is no foundation for the conclusion that historical materialism is the intellectual patrimony of one sole nation, or that it was to become the privilege of any clique, circle, or sect. Its objective origins belong equally to France, England, and Germany. I shall not repeat at this place what I said in another letter concerning the form of the thought which developed in the minds of our two authors under the conditions created by the intellectual culture of Germany in their youth, especially by philosophy, while Hegelianism either lost itself in the walks of a new scholasticism, or gave way to a new and more ponderous criticism. But at the same time there existed the great industries of England with all their accompanying miseries, with the ideological counterbalance of Owen and the practical counteraction of the Chartist agitation. There were furthermore the schools of French socialism, and the revolutionary traditions of the West, out of which were just developing the forms of a truly proletarian communism. What else is Capital but the critique of that political economy which, as a practical revolution and its theoretical expression, had reached full maturity only in England, about the sixties, and which had barely begun in Germany? What else is the Communist Manifesto but the conclusion and explanation of that

socialism which was either latent or manifest in the labor movements of France and England? All these things were continued and brought to the point of critique, not excluding the philosophy of Hegel, by the immanent critical character of dialectic advance and its transformations. That is the process of that negation which does not consist in the contentious and oppositional discussion of one concept with another, of one opinion with another, but which rather verifies the things which it denies because that which is made negative by it either contains the material conditions or the intellectual premise for the continuation of the process.^[4]

France and England may resume their parts in the elaboration of historical materialism without seeming to commit an act of mere imitation. Should the French never write truly critical books on Fourier and Saint Simon, showing that they were, and to what extent they were, the precursors of contemporaneous socialism. Isn't there enough occasion to devote literary work to the events of 1830 to 1848, so that one may see that the theory of the Communist Manifesto was not their negation, but rather was their outcome and solution. Isn't there a demand for an exhaustive work on the coup d'état of Louis Napoleon, as a counterpart for the Eighteenth Brumaire of Marx, which, though a work of great genius and insuperable in its aim, is nevertheless largely a work of the hour and colored by publicist methods? Does not the Commune still await its final critical treatment? Has the great revolution of the 18th century, whose literature is colossal so far as its general history goes, but very small when it comes to details, ever been thoroughly treated with an insight into the class movements of which it consisted, and as a typical illustration

of industrial history? To be brief, does not the whole modern history of France and England offer to the students of those countries a far greater scope for the illustration historical materialism than that afforded until recently by the conditions of Germany? The conditions of Germany were, since the Thirty Years' War, greatly complicated through obstacles to progress and remained almost always enveloped in the mists of various speculations in the heads of those who lived under them and observed them. The Florentine chroniclers of the 14th century would be moved to merriment by those misty ideas.

I have dwelt upon these particulars, not in order to assume the airs of a counsellor of France, but in order to wind up with the statement that, with the present bent of Latin minds, it is not an easy thing to get them imbued with new ideas, if one undertakes to approach them merely with abstract forms of thought. But they will assimilate new ideas quickly and effectively, when offered in the shape of stories or essays which have some of the elements of art about them.

I return for a moment to the question of translating. Engels' *Anti-Dühring* is that work which ought to get an international circulation before any other. I know of few books which are equal to it in compactness of thought, multiplicity of view-points, and effectiveness in bringing home its points. It may become mental medicine for young thinkers, who generally turn with vague and uncertain touch to books which are said to deal with socialism of some kind. This was what happened when this book appeared, as Bernstein wrote about three years ago in the *Neue Zeit*, in an

article commemorating the event. This work of Engels remains the unexcelled book in the literature of socialism.

Now, this book was not written for a thesis, but rather for an anti-thesis. With the exception of some detachable portions which were made into a book by themselves and in this shape made a tour of the world (Socialism, Utopian and Scientific), this book has for its guiding thread the criticism of Eugene Dühring, who had invented a philosophy and a socialism of his own. But what person not living in the circles of professed scientists, and how many readers of other than German nationality, should take an interest in Mr. Dühring? Well, unfortunately every nation has too many Dührings. Who knows what book against some other know-it-all an Engels of some other nationality might have written, or might still write? The effect of this work on the socialists of other countries should be, in my opinion, to supply them with those critical aptitudes which are required for writing all other Anti-Somethings needed for the rebuttal of those who try to thwart or infest the socialist movement in the name of so many confused notions in sociology. The weapons and methods of critique will, of course, vary from country to country according to the requirements of local adaptation. The point is to cure the patient, not the disease. That is the method of modern medicine.

To try to act differently would be to invite the fate of those Hegelians who came to the fore in Italy from 1840 to 1880, especially in the South, for instance in Naples. Most of them were mere followers, but a few were strong thinkers. On the whole they represented a revolutionary current of great importance, owing to their traditional scholasticism, their French esprit, and their philosophy of the so-called common

sense. This movement became somewhat known in France. For it was one of these Hegelians, Vera by name, and not the profoundest and strongest of them, who supplied France with the most readable translations of some of the fundamental works of Hegel and accompanied them with copious comments.^[5] Now every trace, and even the memory, of this movement has passed away among us after the lapse of but a few years. The writings of these thinkers are not found anywhere but in the shops of antiquarians and second rate book dealers. This dissolution into nothing of an entire scientific school of no mean account is not due solely to the often unkind and little praiseworthy vicissitudes of university life, nor to the epidemic spread of positivism which gathers here and there fruits of a rather demi-monde science, but to deeper causes. Those Hegelians wrote, and taught, and held disputations among themselves, as though they were living in Berlin, or in Utopia, instead of Naples. They held mental converse with their German comrades.^[6] They replied from their pulpits, or in their writings, only to such criticisms as were made by themselves, so that they carried on a dialog which appeared as a monolog to their audience and readers. They did not succeed in molding their treatises and dialectics into books which looked like new intellectual conquests of the nation. This unpleasant and unattractive recollection came to my mind when I began writing the first of my two essays on historical materialism, and there is now no reason why I should not follow them up with others. But then I asked myself quite often: How shall I go about it to say things which will not appear hard, foreign, and strange to Italian readers? You tell me that I succeeded, and perhaps it is so. Would it not be a singular case of discourtesy, if I should be

my own judge and discuss the praise which you bestow upon me?

About five years ago I wrote to Engels: "In reading the Holy Family I remembered the Hegelians of Naples, among whom I lived in my earliest youth, and it seems to me that I understood and appreciated that book more than others could who are not familiar with the peculiar inside facts of that queer satire. It seemed to me that I had personally seen that quaint circle in Charlottenburg at close range, whom you and Marx satirised so funnily. I saw before my mind's eye, more than any one else, a certain professor of esthetics, a very original and talented man, who explained the romances of Balzac by deduction, made a construction of the cupola of the Church of Saint Peter, and arranged the musical instruments in a genetic series; and who by degrees, from negation to negation, by way of the negation of the negation arrived ultimately at the metaphysics of the unknowable which he, although unfamiliar with Spencer, but in a way himself an unglorified Spencer, called the unnameable. I, also, lived in my young days, as it were, in such a training hall, and I am not sorry for it. For years my mind was divided between Hegel and Spinoza. With youthful ingenuity I defended the dialectics of the former against Zeller, the founder of neo-kantianism. The writings of Spinoza I knew by heart, and with loving understanding I gave expositions of his theory of affections and passions. But now all these things seem as far away in my recollection as Primeval history. Shall I, too have presently my negation of the negation? You encourage me to write on communism. But I have always misgivings when it comes to doing things which are beyond my strength and which have little effect in Italy."

Whereupon he replied.... But I shall make a period here. It seems almost impolite to reproduce the private letters of a man, especially so soon after his death, unless the public interest urgently demands it. At all events, compared with writings which are purposely written for publication, quotations from private letters carry little conviction and little weight, even if they refer to current topics and are limited to questions of theory and science. With the growth of the interest in historical materialism, and in the absence of a literature which would illustrate it generally and specifically, it came about that Engels, during the last years of his life, was asked, and even tormented with endless questions, by many who enrolled themselves as voluntary and free students in the adventurous and outlawed university of socialism, of which Engels was a professor without a chair. This accounts for his published letters, and for many of them which have not been published. From those three letters, which were recently reproduced by *Le Devenir Social* from a Berlin review and a Leipzig paper, it appears that he was somewhat afraid lest Marxism might presently develop into a sort of cheap doctrinarism.

To many of those who profess to be scientists, not in the adventurous university of the coming people, but in that of present official society, it happens that they are caught on the wing by students and seekers of information and that, with one foot lifted, they answer every question as though they had the explanation for everything stamped upon their brains. The most conceited of the professors, not wishing to deprive science of its priestly saintliness and pretending that it consists wholly of materialised knowledge instead of being mainly a skill in directing the formation of knowledge, give offhand answers and thereby frequently succeed in satirising

themselves, after the manner of that delightful Mephistopheles in the guise of a master of all four faculties. Few have the Socratic resignation to reply: I don't know, but I know that I don't know, and I know what might be known, and what I might know, if I had made those efforts, or accomplished those labors, which are necessary in order to know; and if you will give me an infinite number of years, and an infinite capacity for methodical work, I might extend my knowledge almost indefinitely.

This is the substance of the practical mental revolution of the theory of understanding implied by historical materialism.

Every act of thinking is an effort, that is to say, new labor. In order to perform it, we need above all the material of mature experience and the methodical instruments, made familiar and effective by long handling. There is no doubt that an accomplished task, or a finished thought, facilitates the production of new thought by new forces. This is so, first, because the products of yesterday remain incorporated in the writings and other representative arts of to-day, and in the second place, because energies accumulated by us internally penetrate and endow labor, thereby keeping up a rhythmic movement. And it is precisely this rhythmic process which constitutes the method of memory, of reasoning, of expression, of communication. and so forth. But nevertheless this is not saying that we ever become thinking machines. Every time that we set about producing a new thought, we need not only the external materials and impulses of actual experience, but also an adequate effort in order to pass from the most primitive stages of mental life to that superior, derived and complex stage called thought, in

which we cannot maintain ourselves, unless we exert our will-power, which has a certain determined intensity and duration beyond which it cannot be exerted.

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So here we have arrived once more at the philosophy of practice, which is the path of historical materialism. It is the immanent philosophy of things about which people philosophize. The realistic process leads first from life to thought, not from thought to life. It leads from work, from the labor of cognition, to understanding as an abstract

theory, not from theory to cognition. It leads from wants, and therefore from various feelings of well-being or illness resulting from the satisfaction or neglect of these wants, to the creation of the poetical myth of supernatural forces, not vice-versa. In these statements lies the secret of a phrase used by Marx, which has been the cause of much racking for some brains. He said that he had turned the dialectics of Hegel right side up. This means in plain words that the rhythmic movement of the idea itself (the spontaneous generation of thought!) was set aside and the rhythmic movements of real things adopted, a movement which ultimately produces thought.

Historical materialism, then, or the philosophy of practice, takes account of man as a social and historical being. It gives the last, blow to all forms of idealism which regard actually existing things as mere reflexes, reproductions, imitations, illustrations, results, of so-called a priori thought, thought before the fact. It marks also the end of naturalistic materialism, using this term in the sense which it had up to a few years ago. The intellectual revolution, which has come to regard the processes of human history as absolutely objective ones, is simultaneously accompanied by that intellectual revolution which regards the philosophical mind itself as a product of history. This mind is no longer for any thinking man a fact which was never in the making, an event which had no causes, an eternal entity which does not change, and still less the creature of one sole act. It is rather a process of creation in perpetuity.

V

Rome, May 24, 1897.

Picking up my thread at the point where I dropped it the other day, I want to say that I think you are perfectly right in placing the problem of general philosophy on the order of business. I refer in this respect not only to your preface, the effect of which I am trying to heighten by my prolonged conversation in writing, but also to some of your articles in *Le Devenir Social* and to some of the private letters which you were kind enough to address to me. You have an idea that historical materialism may seem to be suspended in the air so long as it has for opponents other philosophies which do not harmonize with it, and so long as it does not find the means to develop its own philosophy, such as is inherent and irmanent in its fundamental facts and premises.

Have I grasped your meaning correctly?

You refer explicitly to psychology, ethics, and metaphysics. By this last term you intend to convey what I, owing to other mental habits and other methods of teaching, would call either the *general theory of cognition* or, or *the general theory of the fundamental forms of thought*. I prefer these, or similar, terms partly out of very great caution, partly for fear of being misunderstood, and also in order not to run foul of certain prejudices. However, I pass over such auxiliary terms as these. For on the field of science we are not bound to stick slavishly to the significance which terms have in the ordinary experience and the ordinary minds, unless they are terms of every day life which science uses the same as everybody else, when it calls bread – bread. But

those other terms were selected by ourselves, when we fixed and developed certain concepts which we desired to formulate comprehensively by means of convenient words. It would be absurd for us to try to deduce the meaning and essence of a science, for instance of chemistry, from the etymology of this word. For we should be face to face with the most ancient Egypt, instead of the name which signifies the yellow land on both sides of the Nile from its mouth to the mountains!

I shall let you enjoy the company of the *metaphysical* word in peace, if it suits you to rest content with that. Away with such frivolities! If anybody who wanted to extend his catalogue were to catch the *First Principles* of the now indispensable Spencer under the heading of *metaphysics*, he would do no more and no less than the librarian of Troy did, namely to paste so many labels on the various essays dealing with the first principles of philosophy (Aristotle used the same terms to denote them), and no amount of commentary by ancient writers, nor criticism by modern ones, has ever succeeded in bringing them up to the clearness and consistency of a perfect book. Who knows but many would now be glad to find out that, after all, the ancient Stagirite, who impressed his ideas upon the minds of mankind for so many centuries, and whose name was carried as a banner in so many battles of the mind, was but another Spencer of other times, who, solely through the fault of time, wrote in Greek instead of English, and not very good Greek either.

Tradition must not weigh upon us like a nightmare. It must not be an impediment, an obstacle, an object of a cult or of stupid reverence. We agree pretty well on that. But on the other hand, tradition is that which holds us fast to history, I

mean to say, it is that which unites us with painfully acquired stages, which facilitate labor and make for further progress. This distinguishes us from brutes. It is only the long centuries of travail which differentiate our history from that of animals. Really, no one who devotes himself to some study, be it ever so concrete, empirical, particular, minute, and detailed, anywhere in actual life, can fail to admit that there is a certain point where he feels the pressing want of reconsidering all general concepts (categories) recurring in particular acts of thought, such as unity, multiplicity, totality, condition, end, the reason of everything, cause, effect, progression, finite, infinite, and so forth. Now, even if we do not stop very long to consider these new and curious aspects, we are impressed with the universal problems of cognition. These problems appear to us as necessarily existing. It is this suggestion of inevitability which is the source and seat of that which you call metaphysics, and which may also be called differently.

The whole question is to know how these necessary data are handled by us. The characteristic mark of the classic thought, generally speaking, for instance of the Grecian, is a certain ingenuousness in the use and handling of such concepts. On the other hand, the characteristic mark of modern philosophy, again generally speaking, is a methodical doubt, a critical attitude which accompanies the use of these concepts like a suspicious and cautious guard and searches them internally as well as externally, in their wider bearings. The deciding factor in the transition from ingenuousness to critical analysis is methodical observation (which was limited in scope and means among the ancients), and even more than observation it is the careful and technically accurate experiment (which was almost entirely

unknown among the ancients). By experiment we become co-workers of nature. We produce artificially things which nature produces out of itself. Through the art of experiment things cease to be mere rigid objects of vision, because they are generated under our guidance. And thought ceases to be a hypothesis, or a puzzling forerunner of things, and becomes a concrete thing, because it grows with the things, and keeps on growing with them to the extent that we learn to understand them.

The art of methodical experiment ultimately leads us to the acceptance of the following simple truth: Even before the rise of science, and in all human beings who never embrace science, the internal activities, including natural reflection, constitute a process of growth, which takes place in us while we follow the satisfaction of our needs, and which implies the successive creation of new conditions.^[2] From this point of view, likewise, historical materialism is the outcome of a long development. It explains the historical rise of scientific knowledge, by showing that this knowledge corresponds in duality, and is proportional in quantity, to the productivity of labor. In other words, science depends on our needs.

Now I turn to you, and approve of the kick which you administer to *agnosticism*. For it is but the English counterpart of German neokantianism. There is but one appreciable difference. Neokantianism represents in the last analysis nothing but a certain academic line of thought, which has supplied us with a better knowledge of Kant and a useful literature of educated people. Agnosticism, on the other hand, on account of its diffusion among the people, is an actual symptom of the present condition of certain social classes. The socialists would have good grounds for believing

that this symptom is one of the evidences of the decadence of the bourgeoisie. It certainly stands in marked contrast to the heroic devotion to truth shown by the thought of the precursors of modern history, such as Bruno and Spinoza, or to that conventional assertiveness, which was typical of the thinkers of the 18th century, until the classic German philosophy gradually came upon the scene. It is still more at variance with the precision of the modern means of research, which in our times have increased to such an extent the dominion of human thought over nature. It lacks that characteristic which, according to Hegel, is essential for every philosophy, namely the courage of truth. It gives the impression of a cowardly resignation. Some of those Marxists, who go by a short cut from economic conditions to mental reflections, as though it were simply a matter of interpreting stenographic signs, might say that this *unknowable*, which is held so sacred by a vast number of quietists on the field of reason, is an evidence that the spirit of the bourgeois epoch is no longer able to see clearly through the world's arrangement, because capitalism, from which it receives its directions, is already in a state of disintegration. In other words, the bourgeoisie has an instinctive presentiment of its impending ruin and therefore delivers itself over to a sort of religion of imbecility. Such an assertion might even seem to be ingenious and fine, although it cannot be demonstrated. Still, it somewhat resembles that great number of absurdities which have been said by many in the name of the economic interpretation of history. ^[8]

On the other hand, I say that this agnosticism renders us a great service. By stating over and over again that it is not given to us to know the thing itself, the inmost nature of

things, the final cause and fundamental reason of phenomena, the agnostics arrive in their own way, by a different road, namely by regretting the impossibility of knowing this alleged mystery, at the same result that we do, only we do not regret, but rather seek knowledge without the assistance of the imagination. This result is that we cannot think anything except things which we ourselves experience, taking this word in its widest meaning.

Just see what happened on the field of psychology. On one side, the illusion was dispersed that psychic facts may be explained by the assumption of a supernatural entity. On the other side, the vulgar and more material than materialistic idea was abandoned that thought is a secretion of the brain. It was shown that psychic facts are coupled to a specific organism, that this organism itself was in a constant process of formation, that psychic facts are accompanied by internal nerve processes, so far as these processes are parts of consciousness. The gross hypothesis of mechanical materialism was rejected, according to which it was possible to observe the internal activity, its maintenance and complications as a function of consciousness, by external means, simply because we may discover from day to day the corresponding condition in the nerve centers. And so we have arrived at psychic science. It is incorrect, not to say erroneous, to call this science a psychology without the soul. It should rather be called the science of psychic products without the myth of spiritual substance.

When Engels, in his *Anti-Dühring*, used the term metaphysics in a deprecating manner, he intended precisely to refer to that way of thinking, conceiving, inferring, expounding which is the opposite of a genetic, and therefore

dialectical, consideration of things. The metaphysical way of thinking has the following characteristics: In the first place, it regards as self-dependent things, as things independent of one another, those modes of thought, which are in reality modes only to the extent that they represent points of correlation and transition in a process; in the second place, it regards these modes of thought as existing before the fact, as pre-existing, as types, or prototypes, of the weak and shadowy reality of sense perceptions. From the first point of view, for instance, such thoughts as cause and effect, means and end, origin and reality, and so forth, appear merely as distinct terminals of different, and sometimes opposite, kinds. Some of them seem to be only causes, others only effects, and so forth. In the second case the world of experience seems to be disintegrating and falling to pieces before our eyes, separating into substance and attribute, thing in itself and phenomenon, possibility and obvious reality. The critique of Engels demands substantially and realistically that terminal thought should not be considered as a fixed entity, but as a function. For such terminal concepts are valuable only in so far as they help us to think now, while we are actively engaged in proceeding with new thought.

This critique of Engels, which may be improved in many respects by more specific and precise statements, particularly as regards the origin of the metaphysical way of thinking, repeats in its own way the Hegelian distinction between *understanding*, which defines opposites as such, and *reason*, which arranges these opposites in an ascending series (Bruno would say: *The divine art of reconciling opposites*, and Spinoza said: *Every determination is a negation*).

The metaphysical way of thinking, when seen at a distance, has some things in common with the origin of myths. It is rooted in theology, which tries to make articles of faith (which auto-illusion presents as objective facts, while they are subjective assumptions) plausible to logical reason. How many miracles has that myth of *The Word* performed! Such metaphysical thoughts, using this term in a deprecating sense, as indicating a certain stage of thought which interferes with the formation of a new thought, are found in every branch of human knowledge. What an enormous amount of strength had to be spent by doctrinaire reflection on the field of language study, before the diagrammatic illusion of grammatical forms was replaced by their genesis! This genesis is now sought and located in the various stages of language composition, which is a process of work and production, not a mere fact. Metaphysics in this ironical sense exists, and will, perhaps, always exist, in the words and phraseology derived from the expression of thought. For language, without which we could neither grasp thought precisely nor formulate its expression, changes the thing it expresses at the same time that it pronounces it. For this reason language has, perhaps, almost a mythical germ. No matter how much we may perfect the general theory of vibrations, we shall always say: *The light* produces such and such an effect; *the heat* operates so and so. There is always the temptation, (or at least the danger), to personify a process, or its terminal points. By means of an illusory projection, relations become things, and by cogitating farther upon them these things become operative subjects. If we pay attention to this frequent lapse of our mind into the pre-scientific mode of using words, we shall discover in ourselves the psychological data for the explanation of the way in which forms of thought were transformed into

objective entities, under different circumstances and in other times. The Platonic ideas are typical of this case. I call it typical, because it is the most plastic. All history is full of such metaphysics, which is an evidence of an immature mind not yet sharpened by self-critique and re-enforced by experiment. The same reasons, among many others, place in the same class such things as superstition, mythology, religion, poetry, a fanatic worship of words, a cult of empty forms. This metaphysics leaves its traces also in that field of thought which we call nowadays, conceitedly, science.

Does not such a metaphysical mode of thought obscure the field of political economy? Does not money which is originally but a medium of exchange and transforms itself into capital only because it is combined with a process of productive labor, become in the imagination of some economists a self-originated capital, which secretes interest by some inherent power? For this reason, that chapter in Marx's *Capital*, which speaks of the *fetishism* of capital, is very important.^[9] The science of economics is full of such fetishes. The character of a commodity, which the product of human labor assumes only under certain historical conditions, under which human beings live when a definite system of social interrelations exists, is regarded by some as an intrinsic duality of the product from all eternity. Wages, which cannot be conceived unless some people are under the necessity of offering themselves for hire to other human beings, are regarded as an absolute category, that is to say, as an element of all gain, so that ultimately the capitalist schemer adorns himself with the title of a man who earns by his own merit the highest wages. And what about the rent of the land –of the *land*, mind you. I should never get done, if I wanted to enumerate all those metaphorical transformations

of relative conditions into eternal attributes of men and things.

What have the crude expounders of Darwinism made of the *struggle for existence*? An imperative, a command, a fate, a tyrant. They have forgotten about the material circumstances surrounding the mouse and the cat, the bat and the insect, the bumble bee and the clover. The process of evolution, which is a mutually balancing expression of infinite movements giving rise to many complicated problems not to one single theorem, is suddenly transformed into one fantastic *Evolution*. Consequently the vulgarisers of Marxian sociology render conditions, relations, interconnections of common economic life, into a certain fantastic something which dominates us, frequently because these expounders of Marxism lack literary ability. The whole thing is made to look as though there were still other matters to consider but merely the natural elements of the problem, such as persons and persons, renters and house owners, land owners and farm hands, capitalists and wage earners, gentlemen and servants, exploited and exploiters, in one word, human beings living in definite conditions of time and place, in various degrees of mutual dependence on account of the peculiar manner of owning and using the social means of production.

The undoubted recurrence of the metaphysical *vice*, which sometimes directly coincides with mythology, should make us indulgent toward the causes and conditions, whether directly psychic, or more generally social, which have in past times retarded the advent of critical thought, which is consciously experimental and stands cautiously on guard against verbalism. There is no use in going back to Comte's three epochs. Of course, the question of the quantitative

predominance of theological and metaphysical forms in the various epochs of human history must be discussed. But it must not be considered in the light of an exclusively qualitative difference from the so-called scientific epoch. Human beings have never been exclusively theological or metaphysical, nor will they ever be exclusively scientific. The merest savage, who is afraid of his fetish, knows that it costs less trouble to descend with the river than to swim against its current, and the performance of his most elementary labors implies a certain amount of experience and science. On the other hand, we have in our day scientists, whose minds are clouded by mythologies. Metaphysics, as the opposite of scientific accuracy, has not yet become so prehistoric a fact as to be on the same level with tattooing and cannibalism.

There is no one, I hope, who would place the definite victory over metaphysics entirely to the credit of historical materialism, at least over metaphysics as understood heretofore, according to Engels. This victory is rather a particular case in the development of anti-metaphysical thought. It would not have happened, had not critical thought developed long ago. We have to square accounts in this matter with the entire history of modern science. When Don Ferrante of the *Promessi Sposi* (in the 17th century, mind you) died of the pest while denying its existence, because it was not mentioned in the ten categories of Aristotle, scholasticism had already received the first hard and decisive blows. He was the last convinced scholastic, and I hope Leo XIII will not object to this statement because it interferes with his business. And from then until now we have a long history of positive conquests of thought, by which the essence of independent philosophy, which distinguished it from science, namely the theory of cognition, was either absorbed, or eliminated, or otherwise

reduced and assimilated. On this road of scientific thought we meet with such things as empirical psychology, language study, Darwinism, the history of institutions, and criticism, strictly so-called. I should also add positivism, were I not afraid of being misunderstood. As a matter of fact, taking positivism as a whole and summarily, it has been one of the many forms through which the thought of mankind has approached a conception of philosophy, which does not reason before the fact, but is the outcome of the immanent nature of things. We need not be surprised, on this account, if the generic similarity of historical materialism to so many other products of the contemporaneous thought and knowledge has led many, who deal with science in the style of literary men or magazine readers, into making the mistake of acting under superficial impressions, following the impulses of erudite curiosity, and flattering themselves that they could make the Marxian theory more complete by this or that addition. We shall have to put up with such tinkering for a while. Many are led into this error through the habit, which is at present common in all the branches of modern science, of considering everything from the point of view of evolution and growth. Since everybody is talking about evolution, the inexperience and superficial think that everybody means the same thing. You have very properly directed your attention to the various points of differentiation in historical materialism, which, let me add, are characteristic of a science which is based on dialectic and revolutionary communism. You did not propose to settle the question, whether Marx could go arm in arm with this or that other philosopher, but you rather strive to ascertain, what kind of philosophy is the logical and necessary outcome of the Marxian theory.

It is for these reasons that I have not objected, and do not object now, to the use of metaphysical language on your

part, taking this term in a sense which is not disparaging. Marxism deals fundamentally with general problems. And these refer, on the one hand, to the limits and forms of cognition, and on the other to the relations of mankind to the rest of the knowable and known universe. Isn't this what you intend to convey? For this very reason did I devote my attention to the most general questions in the second of my essays. But I treated the subject in such a way that my intention remained hidden.

Whoever considers historical materialism in its full significance, will find that it presents three lines of study. The first corresponds to the practical requirement of the socialist parties, demands the acquisition of an adequate knowledge of the specific conditions of the proletariat in each country, and adapts socialist activity to the causes, prospects, and dangers of complex politics. The second may lead, and will certainly do so, to a revision of the methods of writing history, for it tends to establish this art on the field of class struggles and social relations following from them, on the basis of the corresponding economic structure, which every historian must henceforth know and understand. The third consists in the treatment of the directing principles. In order to understand and follow these, we must of necessity be guided by the general points of view which you indicate.

Now, it seems to me – and I have furnished the proof in writing - that the adherence to general principles as such does not necessarily imply a return to a formal scholasticism, or to a disregard for the things from which these general principles are deduced, so long as we do not relapse into the ancient error of believing that ideas are a sort of supernatural agency standing above things, but still admit the inevitable division of labor. It is certain that these three lines of study were combined into one in the mind of Marx, and not only in his mind, but also in his works. His

politics were, in a way, the practical application of his historical materialism, and his philosophy was incorporated in his critique of political economy, for this was his method of dealing with history. But taking it for granted that such a universal comprehension is the characteristic mark of a genius who inaugurates a new line of thought, the fact is that Marx himself carried his theory to its full conclusion only in one case, and that is in *Capital*.

The perfect identification of philosophy, or of critically self-conscious thought, with the material of knowledge, in other words, the complete elimination of the traditional distinction between philosophy and science, is a tendency of our times. However, it is a tendency which remains mostly in the stage of mere desire. It is precisely this tendency to which some refer when claiming that metaphysics has been completely overcome. Others, again, who are more exact, suppose that a science in its perfect state will have absorbed philosophy. The same tendency justifies the use of the term *scientific philosophy*, which would otherwise be ridiculously absurd. If this expression can ever have its practical verification through the evidence of proof, it will be done precisely by means of historical materialism, as it was in the mind and in the writings of Marx. There philosophy is so much in the things themselves, and so permeated with them, that the reader of that work feels the effect, as though philosophizing were a natural function of the scientific method.

Should I stop here and make a confession? Or have I only to limit myself to an objective discussion with you of those points on which we can approach one another in our aims? If I had to be satisfied with the aphoristic expressions which are typical of a confession, I should say: a) The ideal of knowledge should be one in which the antagonism between science and philosophy is at an end; b) However, (empirical) science is in a process of

continual growth, multiplies in material and departments, and differentiates at the same time the instruments used in the various lines, while on the other hand the mass of methodical and formal knowledge continually accumulates under the name of philosophy; c) For this reason the distinction between science and philosophy will always be maintained as a provisional element, in order to indicate that science is always in process of growth and that this growth is largely accompanied by self-critique.

It is sufficient to look at Darwin, in order to understand how cautious we should be in affirming that henceforth science implies of itself the end of philosophy. Darwin has certainly revolutionized the field of the science of organisms, and with it the entire conception of nature. But Darwin himself did not have the full understanding of the import of his discoveries. He was not the philosopher of his science. Darwinism as a new view of life, and of nature, is beyond the personality and intentions of Darwin himself. On the other hand, some vulgar expounders of Marxism have robbed this theory of its immanent philosophy and reduced it to a simple way of deducing changes in the historical conditions from changes in the economic conditions. Such simple observations suffice to convince us that while we may affirm that a perfect science is a perfect philosophy, or that such philosophy signifies but the highest degree of elaboration of concepts (Herbart), we must not authorize any one, in making such a statement, to speak disparagingly of the thing we may call philosophy as a matter of differentiation. Nor should we believe every scientist who claims regardless of the mental development at which he may stop that he has triumphed over that bagatelle called philosophy or become its heir. And therefore you do not ask an idle question when you inquired in substance: What will be the spirit in which the advocates of historical materialism will look upon the remaining philosophies?

VI

Rome, May 28, 1897.

In the scientific biography of our two great authors there is a blank. A certain work of theirs wandered to the printer in 1847. But for accidental reasons it remained unpublished.^[10] In that work, which remained in the form of a manuscript, and which, so far as I know, was never seen by any other outside author since,^[11] they squared accounts with their own consciences by coming to an understanding about their position toward the other currents of contemporaneous philosophy. There is no doubt that this account was closed principally with the Hegelian conclusions and their materialistic counterpart in the theories of Feuerbach. Aside from general reasons connected with the philosophical movement of that time, this opinion is further strengthened by various passages from magazine and newspaper articles, which were recently published by Struve in the *Neue Zeit*, as souvenirs of former controversies of Marx. But what was the full mental position of these two writers? How far did their bibliographical horizon reach? What attitude did they assume toward the other scientific struggles, which later on blossomed out into so many revolutions, in the field of natural philosophy as well as in that of historical philosophy, and how much did they know about those things? We have no satisfactory replies to these questions. Of course, we understand that one might be sorry to have published in his young years some writings which one would write quite differently in his advanced years. But still it is so much harder for us to get access to them, when we wish to study these authors. Engels himself was of the opinion that this work had produced the desired effect,

inasmuch as it had cleared up the question for those who had written it.

Subsequently, after the authors had taken their own road, they did not write any more on questions of philosophy in the strict meaning of the term.^[12] Not only their occupation as practical agitators, as publicist writers, as devotees of the proletarian movement, influenced them in this respect, but also their own mental inclinations tended to take them away from the occupation of professional philosophers. It would, therefore, be a vain undertaking to search step by step for the personal opinions they entertained in their studies and reading of new conclusions of science, whether these were in line with their new method of historical research or opposed to it. It is certain that we must recognize as auxiliaries, and as cases analogous to the rise of historical materialism, the recently developed psychology, the trenchant critique of professional philosophy, the school of industrial history, Darwinism in its strict and wide meaning, the growing tendency in history to recognise natural phenomena, the discovery of the institutions of prehistoric times, and the ever increasing inclination to combine philosophy and science. But it would be ridiculous to apply the yardstick of an editor of some *Critical Review*, by which he measures new books, or of a professor who lays before his pupils the successive impressions of his own reading, to Marx and Engels. That is not the way to estimate the work which the two thinkers may have done, or actually did, in assimilating the fruits of contemporaneous science, these thinkers who looked at things from their own specific and specified point of view and used their historical materialism as an individualized instrument of research and analysis. This is substantially the mark of originality. To use this term

without such restrictions would be absurd. But while they gave up philosophical writing in the strict professional meaning of the term, they became the most perfect types of *philosophical scientists*. This scientific philosophy is for many but an unattainable desire, while others make of it a means of telling the plain truth about obvious facts of scientific experience in a new style of phraseological affectation. Sometimes it is a general form of rationalism, and after all it is not possible to grasp it, unless one makes himself familiar with the particulars of real life in the penetrating way, which is appropriate for a genetic method arising out of the nature of things. Engels wrote recently in his *Anti-Dühring*: "As soon as every individual science is confronted with the necessity of coming to a clear understanding of its position in the general interrelation of things and the knowledge of things, any special science of the general interrelation becomes superfluous. No portion of the entire philosophy of previous times will then remain independent, except the theory of cognition and its laws, in other words, formal logic and dialectics. All the rest of it will be absorbed by the positive science of nature and history."

Anything is possible for the erudite, the seekers of subjects for dissertations, the budding post-graduates. They have made a stew of the ethics of Herodotus, the psychology of Pindar, the geology of Dante, of the entomology of Shakespeare, and the pedagogy of Schopenhauer. For stronger and better reasons they may speak of the logic of *Capital* and construct a system of the philosophy of Marx, duly specified and classified according to the sacramental canons of professional science. That is a matter of taste. For my part, I prefer the artlessness of Herodotus and the ponderous style of Pindar to that erudition which extracts

their specific properties by the help of posthumous analysis. I prefer to leave untouched the individuality of *Capital*, to which have contributed, as to an organism, all the ideas and knowledge which are distinguished by the name of logic, psychology, sociology, law and history, in their strict meaning. Also that rare flexibility and smoothness of thought have contributed to it which form the aesthetics of the dialectic method.

Of course, this book is, and will always be subject to particular analysis, in spite of this. But it will never be refuted as a whole by the mere experimenters, the scholastics who love nice definitions that are not assimilated by the flow of thought, the utopian thinkers of all shades, especially the critical utopians and the libertarians, who are more or less anarchists without knowing it. It is an almost insuperable difficulty for some intellectuals to merge themselves in the reality of social and historical interrelations. Instead of taking society as a whole, in which certain laws are generated by a natural process and become the mutual relations of movements, many feel the need of looking upon things as fixed, for instance, egoism here, altruism there, and so forth. A typical case of this sort is that of the modern hedonists. They are not satisfied with studying the social combination as seen from the point of view of the economic interpretation, but resort to the expedient of evaluation as the logical psychologic premise of economics. This expedient supplies them with a scale, and they study its degrees as though these were the theoretical expressions of definite types. One might as well study formal aesthetics by studying only degrees of pleasure. By means of this scale, with its degrees of estimating needs, they measure the things which they call good. They examine the relations

of things to the various degrees of this scale, taking into account their available and obtainable quantities, and in this way they determine the quality of their values, the limits of their values, and their final value. After they have thus constituted political economics on a basis of abstract generalities, which are indifferent to the things which nature freely gives as well as to those which are produced in the sweat of the human brow (and by the thankless labor of history), they transform poor, obvious, and plain production, with its familiar common life, which the theoretical writers of classic economy and of critical socialism have analysed, into a particular case of universal algebra. Work, which is the very nerve of life from our point of view, because it is man in the making becomes from their point of view a means of avoiding pain or selecting the least pain. Amid this abstract atomistic of forces, estimates, and degrees of pleasure, a man loses sight of history, and progress resolves itself into a mere shadow.

If I had to give some sort of an outline, it would not be out of place to say that the philosophy, which historical materialism implies, is *the tendency toward monism*. And I lay a special stress upon the word tendency. I say tendency, and let me add, *a formal and a critical tendency*. With us it is not a question of relying on an *intuitive* theosophical or metaphysical knowledge of the universe, on the assumption that we have arrived without further ceremony at a comprehensive view of the basic substance of all phenomena and processes by an act of transcendental cognition. The word tendency expresses precisely that our mind has adapted itself to the conviction that everything can be conceived as in the making, that even the conceivable is but in the making, and that the process of growth is similar in

character to continuity. The thing which differentiates this conception of the genetic process from the vague transcendental imaginations of men like Schelling is the critical discernment. This implies a specialization of research and an adherence to empirical methods in following the internal movements of the process. It means giving up the pretense of holding in one's hand a universal diagram for all things. This is the way in which the vulgar evolutionists proceed. Once that they have taken hold of the abstract idea of growth (evolution), they catch everything with it, from the concentration of a nebula to their own fatuity. It was the same with the imitators of Hegel, with their everlasting rhythm of a thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The main principle of critical cognition, by which historical materialism corrects monism, is this: It takes its departure from the practice of things, from the development of the labor process, just as it is the theory of man at work, so does it consider science itself as work. It impresses the empirical sciences definitely with the implicit understanding that we accomplish things by experiment, and brings us to a realisation of the fact that things are themselves in the making.

The passage from Engels, which I quoted a while ago, might, perhaps, give rise to some curious results. Some people take your whole hand, when you offer them a little finger. If it is admitted that logic and dialectics continue to exist as independent lines of thought, does not that open a fine opportunity to rebuild the entire encyclopedia of philosophy? By doing over, piece by piece, or in every individual science, the work of abstracting the formal elements contained in them, vast and comprehensive systems of logic may be written, such as those of Sigwart and

Wundt. These are, indeed, veritable encyclopedias of the doctrine of the principles of understanding. Well, if that is all the professors want, they may rest assured that their chairs will not be abolished. The division of labor on the intellectual field permits of many practical combinations. If a man wants to make a compilation and diagrammatic outline of principles, by which we give ourselves account of a definite group of facts, for instance of a certain course of law, there is nothing to prevent him from calling his work the general science of law, or, if he likes, the philosophy of law, so long as he keeps in mind that he is simply arranging in a tentative way a certain class of historical facts, or that he is collecting a certain line of historical facts which are products of historical development.

A formal and critical tendency toward monism on one side, an expert ability to keep a level head in special research, on the other, that is the outcome. If a man swerves but a little from this line, he either falls back into simple empiricism (without philosophy) or he rises to the transcendental field of hyper-philosophy with its pretense that a man can grasp the whole world-process by mere intellectual intuition.

If you have not read Häckel's lecture on *monism*, do me the favor of reading it. It has been introduced into France by an enthusiastic Darwinian in sociology under the title *Le Monisme lien entre la Religion et la Science* (traduction de G. Vacher de Lapouge, Paris, 1897.) Häckel combines in his personality three different faculties: A marvelous capacity for specialised research and exposition, for profound systematization of special facts, and for a poetical intuition of the universe, which, while it is purely imagination, sometimes takes on the aspect of philosophy. But, my

illustrious Hackel, it surpasses even the strength of your excellent mind to explain the whole universe, from the vibrations of the ether to the formation of your brain! But why do I stop at your brain? Further on, from the origins of nations and states and ethics to our times, including the protecting principles of your university at Jena, to which you render homage on only 47 pages of octavo! Don't you remember all the riddles which the universe presents even to our advanced science? Or have you at your home a large armory full of those nightcaps, which Heine said the Hegelians used for covering up those riddles? Or don't you remember that case, which ought to appeal to you more directly, the case of that *Bathybius* which Huxley named after you, and which turned out later to be a mistake?

In short, this tendency towards monism must be accompanied by a clear recognition of the specialization of all research. It is a tendency to combine science and philosophy, but at the same time also a continual scrutiny of the concrete thought used by us, and of its bearing. This concrete thought can be very well detached from its concrete object, as happens in logic, strictly so called, and in the general theory of cognition, which you call metaphysics. We can think concretely, and yet at the same time ponder in abstract reflections over the materials and conditions of thinkable things. Philosophy is and it not.^[13] For any one who has not arrived at this understanding, it is something beyond science. And for any one who has arrived there, it is science brought to perfection.

Nowadays, as of yore, we may write treatises on the abstract aspects of some special experience, for instance on ethics or politics, and we may impress our work with all the

perspicuity of a system. But we must also keep in mind that the fundamental premises of our treatise are products of genetic interrelation. We must not fall into the metaphysical illusion that principles are eternal diagrams, or supernatural things outside of human experience.

So far as this is concerned, there is no reason why we should not enunciate a formula like the following: all the knowable may be known; and all the knowable will be known in an infinite time; and for the knowable reflecting about itself, for us, on the field of cognition, there is nothing of any higher importance. Such a general statement reduces itself practically to saying: Knowledge is valuable to the extent that we can actually know things. It is a mere play of fantasy to suppose that our mind recognises as a fact an absolute difference between the limits of the knowable and the absolutely unknowable. That is what you, von Hartmann, have been doing these many years by haunting the regions of the *Unconscious*, which you see so consciously in operation, and you, Mr. Spencer, who operate continually with the knowledge of the *Unknowable*, of which you at bottom know something, while you define the limits of cognition. Behind these phrases of Spencer hides the God of the catechism. It is, after all, nothing but the relic of a hyper-philosophy which devotes itself, like religion, to the cult of an *unknown*, which is yet at the same time declared to be *known* and transformed into an object of worship. In this state of mind, philosophy is reduced to a study of phenomena (the semblance of things), and the concept of evolution does not imply at all that real things are in process of growth.

In opposition to this mode of thought, historical materialism, the process of formation, or evolution, is real

and deals with reality itself. So is labor real, which is the self-development of man, who rises from mere life (animaldom) to perfected liberty (in communism). By this practical inversion of the problem of cognition we confide ourselves wholly to the hands of science, which is our work. Another victory over fetishism! Knowledge is a necessity for us. It is produced naturally, refined, perfected, strengthened by materials and technique, like any other human need. We learn by slow degrees the things that we must know. Experimental experience is a process of growth. What we call progress of the mind is an accumulation of energies of labor. It is this prosaic process, into which the alleged absoluteness of consciousness resolves itself, this consciousness, which was for the idealist a postulate of reason, or an ontological entity. ^[14]

A queer *thing* (that so-called *thing in itself*), which we do not know, neither today, nor tomorrow, which we shall never know, and of which we nevertheless know that we cannot know it. This thing cannot belong to the field of knowledge, for it gives us no information of the unknowable. That such ideas enter into the scope of philosophy is due to the fact that the consciousness of the philosopher is not quite scientific, but rather harbors still so many other elements, such as feelings and emotions, which generate psychic combinations under the influence of fear, or through fantasy and myths. These combinations hindered the development of rational understanding in the past, and still cast their shadows upon the field of studied and prosaic thought. We think of death. Theoretically it is immanent in life. Death, which appears so tragical in complex individuals, who seem to be the true and rightful organisms to common intuition, is immanent in the primitive elements of organic

substance, owing to the instability and slight plasticity of protoplasm. But the fear of death is quite different. It is the egoism of life. And so it is with all other feelings and emotions. Their mythical, poetical and religious antecedents have thrown, are throwing, and will throw their shadows more or less upon the field of consciousness. The philosophy of a purely theoretical thinker, who contemplates all things from the point of view of things in themselves, belongs in the same class as the attempt to apply abstract thought to the entire field of consciousness without meeting any byways or stops. Look at Baruch Spinoza, that true hero of thought, who studied in his own person the way in which the emotions and passions, as expressions of his internal mechanism, transform themselves for him into objects of geometrical analysis!

In the meantime, until the heroism of Baruch Spinoza shall become the matter-of-fact virtue of everyday life in the higher developed humanity of the future, and until myths, poetry, metaphysics and religion shall no longer overshadow the field of consciousness, let us be content that up to now, and for the present, philosophy in its differentiated and its improved sense has served, and serves, as a critical instrument and helps science to keep its formal methods and logical processes clear; that it helps us in our lives to reduce the obstacles, which the fantastic projections of the emotions, passions, fears and hopes pile in the way of free thought; that it helps and serves, as Spinoza himself would say, to vanquish *imaginationem et ignorantiam*.

NOTES

1. Long before symbolism and analogies with organisms became the fashion in sociology, I had occasion to criticise this curious tendency in an article reviewing the "Social Psychology" of Lindner (in "Nuova Antologia," December 1872, pages 971-989).

2. In an article entitled, "Program der blanquistischen Kommune Fluchtlinge," published in the "Volksstaat," No. 73, and later reproduced on pages 40-46 of the pamphlet, "Internationales aus dem Volksstaat," Berlin, 1894.

3. On page 6 of the preface of the pamphlet, "Internationales aus dem Volksstaat," which contains articles written by Engels between 1871 and 1875. This preface, mark well, bears the date of January 3, 1894.

4. For this reason Hegel and the Hegelians, who so frequently made use of word symbols, employed the term "aufheben," which may signify both to remove and elevate.

5. Vera wrote as late as 1870 a "Philosophy of History" in the style of the strictest Hegelian, for which I roasted him in a review written for the "*Zeitschrift für exacte Philosophie*," vol. X, pages 79, ff., 1872.

6. In fact Rosenkranz, one of the leading lights among the late followers of Hegel, wrote a special work on "Hegel's Naturphilosophie und die Bearbeitung derselben durch den italienischen Philosophen A. Vera," Berlin, 1865. I quote a few passages from this work which illustrate my point: "It is interesting to observe the way in which the German of Hegel comes to life again in the Italian language. Messieurs....(here follows a list of names)....and others rendered the thoughts of Hegel with a precision and facility which would have appeared impossible in Germany ten years ago." (Page 3.) "Vera is the strictest systematiser whom Hegel has ever found and who follows his master step by step with the greatest devotion." (Page 5.) "If after this any one excuses himself with the difficulty of understanding Hegel in German, he should be advised to read him in the Italian translation of Vera. He will understand that, always assuming that he has intelligence enough to understand any philosophy" (Page 9.)

7. "The plays of childhood – I am in earnest – are the first beginnings and first fundament of all serious things in life. They permit the immediate discharge and expression of the internal activities, stimulate successive acts of observation, and promote a gradual transition from one form of knowledge to another. At the summit of this process arises the illusion that the acquired control (of ourselves over ourselves) is an independent power and the constant cause of those visible effects, which we and others perceive objectively in our actions." This you will find on pages 13-14 of my work, *The Concept of Liberty. A Psychological Study*. Rome, 1878. It was written during the acute stage of the crisis in psychology.

8. Some of these absurdities were cleverly illustrated by B. Croce. See *The Historical Theories of Prof. Loria* (Naples, 1897); and *Concerning the Communism of Tommaso Campanella*.

9. At present the hedonists, operating with the reason of their time, explain interest as such (money which produces money) by means of the differential value between the good of the present and the good of the future. They make a psychological concept of the assumption of risk, and other considerations of matter of fact commercial practice. And then they operate upon such matters by the help of mathematical processes which are often factitious and fictitious

10. See Marx, "Critique of Political Economy," author's preface, page 13. Also Engels, "Feuerbach," author's preface, page 33.

11. I once asked Engels to show this manuscript, not to me, but to the anarchist Mackay, who was very much interested in Stirner. But Engels replied to me that the manuscript had been too much gnawed by mice.

12. Of course, we except from this statement the first chapters of *Anti-Dühring*, which are, moreover, of a controversial character, and Engel's "Feuerbach," which is substantially but an extensive review of a certain book, interspersed with some retrospective and personal observations of the author.

13. In saying this, I have in mind a queer book, of XXIII and 539 pages in large octave, written by Professor R. Whale, of the University of Czernowitz. I don't reproduce its title, which is very diffuse and argumentative. The book is published by Braumuller,

Vienna, 1896. Its object is to demonstrate that Philosophy has reached its end. The pity of it is that the book is philosophical from cover to cover. This shows that philosophy, in order to accomplish its own negation, must affirm itself!

14. The postulate of absoluteness was implied in the proofs of God's existence, especially in the ontological argument. In myself, a finite and imperfect being, with a limited knowledge, there exists the capacity to think of the infinite and absolutely perfect being, who knows everything. Therefore I am....also perfect! And so it happened that Cartesius committed the following singular misstep in dialectics which for him, however, remained simply a doubt (and which the critics have evidently overlooked): "But perhaps I may be something more than I imagine, and all the perfections, which I attribute to the nature of a God, may in some manner be stored up in myself, although they do not come forth as yet and do not show themselves by any actions. As a matter of fact, I experience already that my knowledge grows and perfects itself by degrees and I see no reason why it should not continue to grow in this way infinitely, nor why, having thus grown and become perfected, I should not acquire by this means all the other perfections of the divine nature, nor finally why the power which I have to acquire these perfections, if it is true that such a power is now in me, should not be sufficient to produce the corresponding ideas." (*Oeuvres de Descartes*," edition of V. Cousin, I, pages 282-83.)

VII

Rome, June 16, 1897.

I have had a nice experience. Before I got to the end of these letters, I had to discuss the very same subject, which is the topic of my conversation with you, in another place, in a different form, and not quite so pleasantly.

In one of the recent issues of the *Critica Sociale*, there appeared a sort of a message, sent forth by Mr. Antonino De Bella, a sociologist of Calabria, against those exclusive socialists, who, according to him, take the word of Marx for everything in every question. De Bella forgot to tell us, whether the Marx, to whom those whom he is raking over the coals appeal, is the genuine specimen, or another made to order, as it were, invented on purpose, a blond Marx, or some other. He considered me worthy of a place among those obstinate ones, to whom he addresses his admonition and advice, in order that they may perfect themselves by means of a wider culture in sociology and natural history. But he mentions only my name, without telling us to what particular book, saying, or action of mine he is referring. Then he adds a little of the usual rigmarole of sociology with a smattering of Darwinism and the inevitable long list of names of authors.

I thought it opportune to reply. In the first place, I wanted to tell him curtly that scientific socialism was not in such bad condition as to need his advice. Then I wanted to show that his suggestions referred either to things that were understood, or to things that were contrary to Marxism. And above all, since I was just engaged in a conversation with you

on the subject of socialism and philosophy, I thought it opportune to use a living illustration in bringing home some of the critical observations, which I am exchanging with you in this somewhat bizarre manner.

I enclose my reply, just as it appeared in yesterday's *Critica Sociale*. It is also a letter. And although it is not addressed to you, still you may file it along with the others, as though it were their continuation. It completes and sums up the others, with a few slight and excusable repetitions.

This special letter, which I sent to the editor of the *Critica Sociale*, is not particularly sweet. I did not write it exactly with the intention of doing Mr. De Bella a favor. It is ill-humored in some places. Perhaps this bitterness in my critique is due to the fact that, being deeply intent on the study of this grave problem of the relations of historical materialism to the other scientific thought of my time, I felt that the advice of Mr. De Bella was rather inopportune, at least so far as I was concerned, if for no other reason than that I had not asked it. Of course, it was not my intention that he should see what I was writing to you.

Rome, June 5, 1897.

Dear Turati!

I am not quite certain whether De Bella really means me, when he mentions my name. I am rather inclined to think that he is addressing his tirade to a strawman of his own making, on whose back he has pasted my name because it was handy. However that may be, as soon as he mixes my name up in his meditations, I cannot refrain from adding a postscript to your reply.

It is well known that I explicitly and publicly allied myself with socialist thought ten years ago.^[1] Ten years are not a very long time of my physical existence, since I count four more than half a hundred. But they are certainly a short span of my intellectual life. Before I became a socialist, I had had the inclination, leisure, time, opportunity, and obligation to square my accounts with Darwinism, Positivism, Neokantianism, and so many other scientific questions that developed around me and gave me occasion to develop among my contemporaries. For I hold the chair of philosophy at my university since 1871, and before that I had studied the things which are needed for a philosopher. When I turned to Socialism, I did not look to Marx for an ABC of knowledge. I did not look in Marxism for anything but what it actually contains, namely its determined critique of political economy, its outlines of historical materialism, and its proletarian politics, which it proclaims or implies. Neither did I look in Marxism for a knowledge of that philosophy, which is its premise and which it, in a way, continues after having inverted the dialectics of that philosophy. I mean Hegelianism, which flourished in Italy in my youth and in which I had been brought up, as it were. I don't say it with any intent to be spiteful, but my first composition in philosophy, dated May, 1862, is a *Defense of Hegel's dialectics against the return to Kant initiated by Ed. Zeller!* Therefore I did not have to familiarise myself first with the dialectic mode of thought, or the evolutionary or genetic method, whatever you wish to call it, before I could understand scientific socialism, for I had lived in this circle of ideas ever since I had begun to think consciously. I add, however, that while Marxism did not offer any difficulties to me so far as the intrinsic and formal outlines of its conception and method were concerned, I acquired its

economic content only by dint of hard work. And while I acquired this knowledge in the best way that I could, I was neither compelled nor permitted to confound the line of *development* germane to historical materialism, in other words, to confound *the meaning of evolution* in this concrete case with that almost diseased condition of some people's brains, especially in Italy, which leads them to speak of a *Madona Evolution* and to worship her.

What is it that De Bella wants of me? That I should go back to school like a plucked freshman and start my course over again? Or does he want me to be rebaptised by Darwin, reconfirmed by Spencer, thereupon to recite my general confession before my comrades, and prepare to receive the extreme unction from him? For the sake of peace I should be willing to dismiss all the other things. But I strongly protest against an appeal to the consciences of my comrades. I admit that there is some reason for strictness and often tyranny on the part of my comrades in matters of party politics, to a certain extent and under certain conditions. But that my comrades should have authority to speak with arbitrary decision in matters of science, simply because they are comrades.... Go away, science will never be put to a test vote, even in the so-called society of the future!

Or does he want something less presumptuous than that? Am I to affirm and swear that Marxism is not *the universal science*, and that the things which it studies are not *the universe*. All right, I grant that at once. And I defy the idea that I cannot grant that. I have but to remember the plan of study at the university and the numerous courses it includes. I grant even more than that. Here it is: "This doctrine

itself is only in its beginning and still has need of many developments." (*Historical Materialism*, I, page 97.)¹²¹

In fact, the thing that torments De Bella and others like him is precisely the chase after that *universal philosophy*, into which socialism might be fitted as the central point of everything. Go ahead! *The paper is patient*, say the German editors to budding writers. But I cannot refrain from making two remarks. The first is, that no wise man will ever succeed in giving us an idea of this universal philosophy in two columns of *Critica Sociale*. The second is a personal one. For twenty years I have detested systematic philosophy. This attitude of my mind made me not only more apt to accept Marxism, which is one of the ways in which the scientific mind has freed itself from philosophy as such, but has also made of me an inveterate opponent of the *philosopher* Spencer, who gave us still another *diagram of the universe* in his *First Principles*. And now I must quote from my own writings: "I did not come to this university, twenty-three years ago, as the representative of any orthodox philosophy, nor for the purpose of hatching out any new system. By a fortunate accident of my life I gained my education under the direct and straight influence of two great systems, which marked the close of that philosophy, which we now may call classic. I mean the systems of Herbart and Hegel, which brought to its extreme culmination the antithesis between realism and idealism, between pluralism and monism, between scientific psychology and phrenology of the mind, between a specialisation of methods and an anticipation of every method by omniscient dialectics. The philosophy of Hegel had already blossomed out into the historical materialism of Karl Marx, and that of Herbart into empirical psychology,

which, under certain conditions and within certain limits, is also experimental, comparative, historical, and social. Those were the years, in which the intensive and extensive application of the principle of energy, of the atomic theory, of Darwinism, and the rediscovery of the precise forms and conditions of general philosophy, revolutionized before our eyes our entire conception of nature. And in those times, the comparative study of institutions, aided by the comparative study of languages and mythology, then of prehistory, and finally of industrial history, overthrew most of the actual positions and hypotheses, upon which and by which people had hitherto philosophized concerning law, morality, and society. *The ferments of thought, those ferments which are implied by new or renewed sciences, did not approach as yet, nor do they approach now, a new development of systematic philosophy, which should contain and dominate the entire field of experience.* I pass by such philosophies for private use, and of private invention, as those of Nietzsche and von Hartmann, and save myself all criticism of those pretended returns to the philosophers of other times, ^[3] which produce a philology instead of a philosophy, as happened to the Neokantians."

"I pause here in order to call attention to the almost incredible mistake, by means of which many, especially in Italy, confound without further ceremony Positivism, as a certain philosophy, with the Positive acquisitions made by incessant experience in nature and society. To such people it happens, for instance, that they cannot distinguish the indisputable merit of Spencer, namely that of having contributed to the formulation of a general philosophy, from his incapacity to explain a single historical fact by means of his wholly diagrammatic sociology. They are unable to

separate that which belongs to the scientist Spencer from that which belongs to the philosopher Spencer. The latter is also a back number, for he is sparring with such categories as the Homogeneous, the Heterogeneous, the Indistinct, the Differentiated, the Known, and the Unknown. In other words, he is alternately a Kantian without knowing it and a caricature of Hegel."

"The lecture plan of the university should distinctly reflect the actual state of philosophy, which demands at present the insistence of thought on really known things. In other words, it demands just the reverse of any preconceived theories concerning cognition by means of theological or metaphysical cogitation." (*L'Universita e la Liberta della scienza*, Rome 1897, pages 15, 16, and 17.)^[4]

Ultimately, then, this so-called philosophy championed by De Bella is at bottom nothing but another edition of that trinity Darwin-Spencer-Marx, which Enrico Ferri set in circulation about three years ago with such suggestive eloquence, but with so little good luck.^[5] Well now, dear Turati, I honestly wish to assume the role of devil's advocate and admit that there is a germ of truth, a demand for the satisfaction of a real need, in these vague aspirations to a philosophy of socialism, and in the many silly things said in this respect (and some have almost gotten to the point of believing that it should be a sort of philosophy for the private use of the socialists alone). Many of these who embrace socialism, and not merely as simple agitators, lecturers, and candidates, feel that it is impossible to accept it as a scientific conviction, unless it can be combined in some way with the rest of that genetic conception of things, which lies more or less at the bottom of all other sciences. This accounts for the mania of many to bring within the

scope of socialism all the rest of science, which is at their disposal. This leads to many mistakes and ingenuities, all of which are explicable. But it also carries with it a danger. For many of these intellectuals may forget that socialism has its real basis in the present conditions of capitalist society and in the possible aims and actions of the proletariat and other poor people. Marx may become a mythical personage through the work of the intellectuals. And while they discuss the whole scale of evolution up and down, and down and up, the comrades may put the following philosophical thesis to a vote in one of their next conventions: The first fundament of socialism is found in the vibrations of the ether. ^[6]

In this way I explain to myself the ingenuity of De Bella. If Marx were still alive! Don't you see? He was born on May 5, 1818, and died on March 14, 1883, and therefore he might still be alive, as human life is measured. And if alive, I should continue, he could have completed volume III of *Capital*, which is so disconnected and so obscure. No sirree! says De Bella, he would have become a materialist! But gracious me! That is what he was since 1845, and he fell out with the radical ideologists of his acquaintance on account of it. And he would not only have become a materialist, according to De Bella, but also a positivist! Positivism! In vulgar chronology, this term signifies the philosophy of Comte and his followers. Now, it had given up its ghost ideally even before Marx died physically. What a fine sight! Materialism – Positivism – Dialectics, a holy trinity! And still another fine sight! The scientific papacy of Comte reconciled with the infinite process of historical materialism, which solves the problem of cognition differently from all other philosophies and declares: There are no fixed limits, whether *a priori* or *a posteriori*, to cognition, because human beings learn all that they must

know by an infinite process of labor, which is experience, and of experience, which is labor. ^[7]

Comte, on the contrary, proclaimed that the cycle of physics and astronomy was for ever closed, just at the moment when the mechanical equivalent of heat was found, and a few years before the brilliant discovery of spectral analysis. And in 1845 he declared the research after the origin of species to be absurd!

But, continues De Bella, historical materialism must study prehistoric society. And this is precisely where the devil plays his joke. *Ancient Society*, by Lewis H. Morgan, which was published in America and reached Europe in a few copies through the firm of Macmillan, London, (1877), was almost killed by the pitiless silence of the English ethnographers, who were either envious or afraid. But the results of Morgan's investigations went around the world precisely because Engels rescued them by his book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, (first edition 1884, fourth edition 1891). This book is at the same time a review, an exposition, and a supplement of Morgan's. It is a combination of Morgan and Marx. And what does Engels say of Morgan? That he had, "in a manner, discovered anew the materialistic conception of history, originated by Marx..." and, "in comparing barbarism and civilisation, he had arrived, in the main, at the same results as Marx." And why did Engels write his book? Because he desired to utilize the notes and comments left by Marx.

There! Ordinary chronology is of great importance, even for socialists.

And now let us turn to the inevitable Spencer. Is there any one outside of Italy who ever considered him a socialist? Is Spencer, perhaps, a philosopher of the other world? You can read him, and about him, in every language, not excluding

that of modernized Japan. He does not sin through lack of clearness. From my point of view, who loves succinct brevity, he rather suffers from prolixity and overdone popularization. The first of his known writings bears the date of 1843. That was the time when Chartism was at its height. This work is entitled, *The Proper Sphere of Government*. Spencer was in the eyes of the whole world as an admired contributor to the *Westminster Review*, the *Economist*, and the *Edinburgh Review*. And take note once more of the dates of his contributions, especially from 1848 to 1859. Has any one ever deceived himself in England as to the meaning and value of his social and political work. His *Social Statics* appeared in 1851, his *Psychology* (first edition) in 1855, his *Education* in 1861, the first edition of *First Principles* in 1862, his *Classification of Sciences* in 1864, his *Biology* from 1864 to 1867, not to mention his smaller essays, among the most notable of them his *Hypothesis of Development* (1852), his *Genesis of Science* (1854), and his *Progress and Its Law* (1857). Here I will close this enumeration, stopping at the works which appeared before the first volume of *Capital* was out (July 25, 1867). Surely it did not require the genius of a Marx in order to discover what I realized as a simple student of philosophy, namely, that those writings of Spencer, and the doctrine of evolution enunciated in them, are diagrammatical, not empirical, that Spencer's evolution is one of phenomena, not one of real things, that behind it stands the spectre of Kant's *thing in itself*, which he worshipped from the beginning in all his essays as *God or Divinity* (*Statics*, edition of 1851), and which he later circumscribed with the revered name of the *Unknowable*.

If Marx had ever reviewed the works of Spencer between 1860 and 1870, I will bet that he would have done it in the

following style: "Here we have the last advance of the shadow cast by the English Deism of the 17th century; here we have the latest attempt of English hypocrisy to combat the philosophy of Hobbes and Spinoza; here we have the last projection of Transcendentalism into the field of positive science; here we have the latest mixture of the egoistic cretinism of Bentham with the altruistic cretinism of the Rabbi of Nazareth; here we have the last attempt of the bourgeois intellect to save, by means of free research and free competition in this world, an enigmatical shred of faith in the next world. Only the triumph of the proletariat can secure for the scientific mind the full and perfect conditions of its existence, because the intellect cannot be clear until the conditions in which it works are made transparent." This Marx would have written, or could have written. But he was busy attending to the International, and Spencer had no time to take notice of this association.

On March 17, 1883, Engels spoke in Highgate Cemetery in memory of his friend Marx, who had died three days before, and he began his address with these words: "Just as Darwin discovered the laws of development in organic nature, so Marx discovered the laws of development of human history."^[8] Should not De Bella feel mortified on reading this?

Nor is this all. In his *Anti-Dühring* (first edition 1878, third edition 1894), the same Engels had already acquired all the fundamental ideas of Darwinism, which are required for the general orientation of a scientific socialist. It had taken him about ten years to acquire this new education in natural science, and he declared frankly that he was more at home in it than Marx, while Marx was better versed in mathematics. Nor is even this all. The first edition of *Capital* contains a characteristic and very original note concerning the new world discovered by Darwin. Understand well that these two

modest mortals, who never made any supernatural portions of the universe, were always referring to no other Darwinism but that prosaic one of the *Origin of Species*(1859), which consists of a series of observations and experiences on the limited field of reality, a reality which extends beyond the origins of life and precedes human history by a considerable length. They could not help perceiving that the Darwinian theories presented an analogous case to their epigenetic conception of history, which they had partly defined, partly just begun studying.^[9] They never heard anything of that Darwinism, which De Bella calls *the discoverer of the laws of entire humanity*, of that Darwinism, which is supposed to be good for everything, which is a gratuitous invention of scientific publicists and philosophical decadents. Did not their friend Heine tell them that the universe is full of holes, and that the German professor of Hegel's school covers these holes with his nightcap?

But let us leave aside the universe and its holes, dear Turati, and let us all do our duty. I always remember that strong invective, which the Hegelian B. Spaventa hurled about 30 years ago: "In our country they study the history of philosophy in the geography of Ariosto, and they quote as equals Plato and the Abbé Fornari, Torquato Tasso and Totonno Tasso."^[10]

VIII

Rome, June 20, 1897.

I must write a sort of postscript, which shall supplement my letter preceding the last one, so full of difficult questions.

Very naturally, I class among the products of our emotions, by which the scientific mind is obscured, also those complex sensations, which we ordinarily call optimism and pessimism respectively, and which represent certain inclinations, tendencies, evaluations and prejudices.

No one can find in those modes of expression, which oscillate between poetry and passion and always strike that uncertain note which cannot be reduced to precise terms, either a tendency to, or a promise of, a rational interpretation of things. Taken in their entirety, these emotions are combinations and expressions of infinite individual feelings, which may have their seat, as is plainly the case with pessimism, either in the specific temperament of some individual personality (such as Leopardi), or in the common conditions of large multitudes (for instance, the origin of Buddhism). In short, optimism and pessimism are essentially generalisations of emotions resulting from some particular experience or social condition, which are projected so far outside of our immediate environment as to make of them, as it were, the axis, the fulcrum, or the finality of the universe. By this means the categories of good and bad, which have really but a modest relation to our practical needs, finally become standards by which the whole world is judged, reducing it to such small dimensions as to make of it a simple basis and condition of our happiness or

unhappiness. From either point of view, the world seems to have no other meaning than that of good or bad, and the final outcome seems to depend on the prevalence or triumph of one over the other.

At the bottom if this mode of looking at things is always the primitive poetry which is never separated from myth. And such modes of conception form always the practical pith and suggestive power of religious systems, from the crude optimism of Mohammedanism to the refined pessimism of Buddhism. And that is very natural. Religion is a need precisely for the reason, and only for the reason, that it represents the transfiguration of so many fears, hopes, pains, bitter experiences of daily life into pre-ordained faiths and judgments. In this way the struggles of this world, so-called, are transformed into transcendental antagonisms of the universe, such as God and Devil, sin and redemption, creation and re-birth, the scale of atonements and Nirvana. This optimism, and this pessimism, which assume the shape of thought and surround themselves with a certain philosophy, are nothing but more or less conscious survivals of religion in another form, or of that anti-religion, which in a transport of passionate unbelief resembles faith. The optimism of Leibniz, for instance, is certainly not a philosophical function of his study of the differential calculus, nor of his critique of action at a distance, nor of his metaphysical theory of monads, nor of his discovery of internal determinism. His optimism is his religion. It is that religion which appears to him as the perpetual and lasting one. It is for him that Christianity which reconciles all Christian creeds, a providence justified by the view that this world is the best which can ever be and continue. This theological poetry has its humoristic, and therefore dialectic,

counterpart in Voltaire's *Candide*. Similarly the pessimism of Schopenhauer is not a necessary result of his critique of the Kantian critique, nor a direct function of his exquisite researches in logic. It is rather the expression of his petty bourgeois soul, unhappy, disgruntled, peevish, seeking satisfaction in the metaphysical contemplation of the blind forces of the unknowable (or the blind effort to exist). In other words, he seeks satisfaction in a form of religion to which little attention is paid, the religion of atheism. ^[11]

If we rise from the secondary and derived configurations and complications of religion or theological philosophy, to which optimism and pessimism belong, to the origin of these mental creations themselves, we find ourselves in the presence of a fact which is as obvious as it is simple. It is that every human being, on account of his or her physical condition and social environment, is led to make a sort of hedonistic calculation, in other words, to measure his or her needs and the means of satisfying them. The result is a more or less colored appreciation of the conditions of existence, and of life itself in its interrelations. Now, when intelligence has progressed so far as to overcome the incantations of imagination and ignorance, which link the prosaic poverty of ordinary life with fantastic transcendental forces, then the creative suggestions of optimism and pessimism can no longer exert themselves. The mind turns to the prosaic study of the means by which to attain, not to that fabulous entity called happiness, but to the normal development of human faculties. Under favorable, natural and social conditions, these faculties find in life itself the reasons for its existence and an explanation for its causes. This is the beginning of that wisdom, which alone entitles man to the name of *homo sapiens*.

Historical materialism, being a philosophy of life, instead of its mere intellectual phenomena, overcomes the antithesis between optimism and pessimism, because it passes beyond their limits and understands them.

History is indeed an interminable succession of painful struggles. Labor, which is the distinguishing mark of human life, has been the means of oppressing the vast majority. Labor, which is the prerequisite of all progress, has pressed the sufferings, the privations, the travail, and the ills of the multitude into the service of the comfort of the few. History is like an inferno. It might be presented as a somber drama, entitled *The Tragedy of Labor*.

But this same somber history has produced out of this very condition of things, almost without the conscious knowledge of men, and certainly not through the providence of any one, the means required for the relative perfection, first of very few, then of a few, and then of more than a few. And now it seems to be at work for all. The great tragedy was unavoidable. It was not due to any one's fault or sin, not to any one's aberration or degeneration, not to any one's capricious and sinful straying from the straight path. It was due to an immanent necessity of the mechanism of social life, and to its rhythmic process. This mechanism operates on the means of subsistence, which are the product of human labor and co-operation under more or less favorable natural conditions. Nowadays, when the prospect opens up before our eyes of organizing society in such a way as to give to every one the means of self-perfection, we see clearly the reasonableness of this view, because the growing productivity of labor supplies all the requirements for a higher culture of all. It is this fact on which scientific

socialism bases its right to existence, instead of trusting in the triumph of a universal goodness, which the utopian and sentimental socialists have discovered in the hearts of all and proclaimed as eternal justice. Scientific socialism trusts in the development of the material means which shall promote conditions, under which all human beings shall have leisure to develop in freedom. In other words, the causes of injustice (to use this term of ideologists) will be removed, such as class rule, bossism, the oppression of man by man. The injustices resulting from these causes are precisely the indispensable conditions for that miserable material fact, the economic exploitation of the working class.

Only in a communistic society will labor be no longer exploited, but rather rationally measured. Only in a communistic society will a hedonistic calculation become practicable, unimpaired by the private exploitation of social forces. Once that the obstacles to the free development of all are removed, those obstacles which now divide classes and individuals until they are separated past all recognition, every one will find at hand the means by which the faculties and needs of each can be measured by the requirements of society. To adapt ourselves to the practicable, and do it without any external compulsion, this is the standard of liberty, which is the same as wisdom. For there can be no true morality, unless there is a consciousness of determinism. In a communistic society the apparent antagonism between optimism and pessimism falls to the ground. For in that society there is no longer any contradiction between the necessity to work in the service of the collectivity and the self-development of the personality. That necessity and this personal freedom will be understood as one. The ethics of that society will abolish the

contradiction between rights and duties, for this contradiction is essentially the theoretical elaboration of the present antagonistic social conditions, in which some have the right to command and others have the duty to obey. In a society, in which goodness does not mean charity, it will not seem utopian to demand that each give according to his faculties and each take according to his needs. In such a society, preventive education will largely eliminate the sources of crime, and the practical education of co-operative life and labor will reduce the necessity of repression to a minimum. In short, punishment will appear as a simple safeguard of a certain order and will lose all character of a supernatural justice, which must be vindicated or established. In such a society, there will no longer be any need to look for any transcendental explanation of the practical fate of man.

This critique of the motive causes of history, of the reasons for the existence of present society, and of a rationally measurable and measured outlook upon the society of the future, shows why optimism, pessimism, and so many other fabrics of imagination had to serve, and must continue to serve, as expressions of emotions that stir minds under the influence of the struggles of social life. If this is what the transcendental thinkers, to whom you allude, mean, and if they intend to be the posthumous collectors of the sighs and tears of humanity in the course of the centuries, so be it. Poetical license is not forbidden, even to socialists. However, they will not succeed in putting the myth of eternal justice on its legs and sending it to fight against the reign of darkness. That grand and beneficent lady will never move a single stone of the capitalist structure. That which the metaphysical thinkers among the socialists call the evil,

against which the good is straggling, is not an abstract negation, but a hard and strong system of practical facts. It is poverty organized to produce wealth. Now, the historical materialists have so little tenderness of heart as to claim that this evil is actually the cradle of the future good. Freedom will come through the revolution of the oppressed, not through the goodness of the oppressors.

An easy relapse into metaphysics of the offensive kind is often the fate of even those studies which, according to their writers, represent the quintessence of positive and scientific procedure. This is the case, for instance, with many of the expounders of the much discussed and disputable criminal anthropology.

In its aims and tendencies, this science represents a notable factor in that salutary critique of criminal law, which gradually succeeded in overturning the foundations of the philosophical, and especially ethical, ideas concerning so simple a fact as the experience that there must be punishment so long as there is a society. In its method, however, it passes rarely beyond the field of statistical compilation, or beyond that mass of probabilities which constitute the various shades of study embraced by the general term anthropology. Hardly ever does it reach the degree of precision, which has enabled such analogous studies as psychic research, thanks to the marvelous progress in the anatomy of the central nerve system and in all departments of medicine, to contribute in a few years more to the development of psychology than was contributed by twenty centuries of controversy over the text of Aristotle, or the hypothesis of spiritualism, or that of purely rational materialism.

But this is not what I want to emphasize.

This doctrine carries with it a tendency to consider the recurrence of crime as a result of an innate predisposition of individuals who show certain characteristic marks. However, these marks are not in all cases objectively studied or well fixed. Still, there is nothing wrong about this.

The theory which lies at the bottom of the criminal law of those countries to which the effects of the bourgeois revolution have extended shares the merits and defects of that equalitarian principle of all so-called liberalism which can be only formal and abstract, considering the natural and social inequalities of men. Of course, this theory was an advance over the corporeal justice, and over the privileges of the clergy and aristocracy. And for this reason, a historical victory is proclaimed in the words: The law is equal for all. However, this theory reduces the function of punishment to a mere defense of the present system by means of established laws. It is content to punish only violations of this order, without penetrating to the problem of consciousness. It has been shorn of all religious character and no longer deals with the mind or soul. It is no longer the instrument of a church, of a creed, of a superstition. This criminal law is prosaic, just as prosaic as all of capitalist society. And this is another triumph of free thought, leaving out of consideration a few slight inconsistencies. In short, it is the act which is punished, not the man. It is the disturber of this order who is punished by the law that defends it. The punishment is not aimed at a man's conscience, be it irreligious, heretical, atheistic, or what not. In order to accomplish this result, this theory had to construct a typical equality of responsibility for all human beings, on the basis

of a free will, excluding only extreme cases of lack of mental control and liberty of action. ^[12] It is by this very means that vaunted and celebrated justice, through the irony of fate, transforms the principle of equality before the law into the grossest injustice. For human beings are in reality socially and naturally unequal before the law.

This dialectic has of late been discussed by sociologists, socialists, and critics of all sorts. They have built up a long line of argument against the existing law ranging from the mystical colored paradox that society punishes the crimes which it breeds to the humanitarian demand that equal education should vindicate the principle of equality before the law by creating the actual conditions for its practicability. The salient point of all this criticism is brought out by the consistent socialists, who realize that class struggles are an essential part of present society, and who do not expect to get equal justice for all either by the right to punish or by any other existing law. For to act otherwise would be like looking for an improbable society, in which divisions would be the causes of concord and union. This law of a mediocre justice, which is in constant conflict with itself, is the product of a society, in which the demand for equality is ever at war with itself. The lie becomes very plain in that fine discovery of the apologists of capitalism that after all the wage workers are free citizens, who accept servitude voluntarily by making contracts on equal terms with their equals, the capitalists. Still, we socialists don't wish to abandon this self-contradictory principle merely to throw ourselves into the arms of reactionaries, who are combatting it for other reasons and would abolish it in some other way. We rather look upon it as one of the negative

factors inherent in bourgeois society, as one of the historical means by which it is undermining itself.

Criminal anthropology came in good time to support with its special studies the critical claim that the law is not equal for all. To this extent it is a progressive science. To the social differences, which render the demand for an equal responsibility of all absurd, in proportion as the typical form of free will in sane minds varies, this science has added the study of presocial differences, which are the limits drawn around our will by our animal nature and which oppose an invincible resistance to all attempts to adapt ourselves to the demands of education. This is not the place to investigate, whether this science has exaggerated the extent of this animal nature, whether it has imperfectly interpreted the cases it wanted to study, and whether it has fantastically generalized the results of partial and not very accurate observations. The main point is that some of its methods throw it unconsciously back into the metaphysics it detests. In its legitimate efforts to combat the conception of justice and responsibility as entities, it makes the mistake of attributing too much to such natural facts as the disposition to commit crime, and denotes and defines them in such a way as to detract from those categories of social protection, which arise out of conditions of existence to which men have become accustomed after their birth. To be more explicit, excessive and unbridled license should be attributed to animal nature, but certainly not adultery, which is very clearly a social product. Rapacity should be classed as animal nature, but not theft in its economic aspects, including the forging of checks. A bloodthirsty temperament belongs in the animal category, but not the murder of kings, etc. It must not be said that these are merely verbal

distinctions. They touch the bottom of things. They concern the clear grasp of methodical limits. They show how important it is to remember that metaphysics is an atavistic evil, from which even those do not escape who are continually shouting: Down with metaphysics! The same has for a long time taken place in other sciences, for instance in general psychology, or in the special study of diseased minds. Many have attempted to localize psychic phenomena in the brain, instead of adhering to the most elementary facts, which, it is true, were but recently ascertained. They tried to locate the faculty of the soul, for instance the renowned physiologist Ludwig. In other words, they tried to determine the local seat of rationalist concepts, of things which did not exist in reality. Criminal anthropology still has to separate its categories and determine them critically. It must overcome the mistake of regarding as innate and natural facts the simple categories, which criminal law fixed and defined for practical reasons in order to apply them to the experience of mere social conditions.

IX

Rome, July 2, 1897.

You refer to those critics of different character and nature, who maintain, for many different reasons, that Christianity recoils from a materialistic interpretation of history, and who think that they have thereby raised an insurmountable objection.

Must I enter into these woods, which, though perhaps not impenetrable and wild, are certainly very dark for me? You know how repugnant all hard and fast systems are to me. I am not of the opinion – and it would be fatuous to think otherwise – that any theory of history will ever be so good and excellent in itself that it will be a key to the understandings of every particular phase of history, without first devoting ourselves to special research in such cases. Now, I have not made a special study of the history of the Christian church so far, and therefore I am not able to handle the subject with ease. The ordinary sort of objectors mouth about this subject on the strength of general impressions. In my young days, I read Strauss and the principal writings of the Tübingen school, just as all those did who studied German classic philosophy. And I might exclaim with many others, by slightly varying Faust's cry: "I, too, have unfortunately studied theology."

But later on I did not occupy myself any more with these matters. Still, I have adhered to the conviction that the Tübingen school was the first to begin definitely and earnestly that study of Christianity which alone has a claim to the term historical, and that latter-day progress in this

line, so far as any has been accomplished or is in process of accomplishment, consists mainly in corrections and supplements of the results of that school. The principal correction should be in my opinion the following: The scientists of Tübingen devoted themselves primarily, although not exclusively, to a study of the origin and development of *creeds and dogmas*, while later it became necessary, and is still necessary, to study the formation and development of *Christian associations*. To the extent that we approach this method of considering the question, which I shall call the sociological method for brevity's sake, we shall get nearer to an objective research. For an understanding of the *how* and *why* of the origin and development of the associations will give us the means to understand, for what reasons, and in what way, the souls, the imaginations, the intellects, the desires, the fears, the hopes, the aspirations of the members of these associations had to seek expression through certain creeds, adopt certain symbols, and arrive at the formulation of certain dogmas; in other words, how it happened that these associates had to piece together a whole world of doctrines and imaginary concepts. Once that this step has been made, we are on the road which leads directly to historical materialism. For we have then arrived at the general statement that ideas should be regarded as products, not as the causes, of certain social structures.

If I am mistaken – for, as I said, I understand comparatively little of these arguments – the recent studies of ancient Christianity have followed mainly this realistic line. And it seems to me that writers like Harnack are in the front ranks of this study. Incidentally I refer to the very remarkable work of the Englishman Hatch, which I have read. He demonstrates with the greatest lucidity and by means of

documentary evidence that the Christian association, beginning at a certain point after its first origins, developed and consolidated by means of adaptation to the various forms of corporative law which flourished in the different regions of the Roman empire. In other words, the movement adapted itself to the conditions peculiar to Roman law, or to local and national customs, especially to Grecian and Hellenist institutions. I hope our bishops may not take it amiss. The Holy Ghost will have come in by elevating the bishops above the remaining mass of the faithful, to the extent that the original democratic organization was transformed into a hierarchy by the differentiation into clergy and lay members (or common people). The name certainly indicates that the Christian organization was modeled after those bodies of boatmen, fish dealers, bakers, and others, who had their *episcopi et reliqua* (overseers and other folk).

At this point we must make another step forward. We must abandon the abstract concept of a uniform history of all *Christianity* and take up the particular history, in time and place, of *Christian associations*. These associations were first a part of that greater civilized, semi-civilized, or directly barbarian society, in which they developed during the first three centuries. Then it seems that they absorbed and molded all the complex relations of that semi-civilized or semi-barbarian society, as was the case, for instance, in the Latin West during the so-called Middle Ages. And finally, when the unity of Catholicism was broken by Protestantism, the liberty of conscience was recognized, especially after the *Great Revolution*. The Christian associations then became a settled part of the political and social life, playing a predominant role here, a minor role there, or remaining

insignificant in another place, as the case might be. It is along this line that the problem of the relations between state and church must be handled, for this is a question of historical relations, not of theoretical formulae.

This method is being more and more applied to the study and explanation of those material conditions, by which the Christian associations were created, perpetuated, and carried to partial or local dissolution, just as other forms of common life were. All the causes and reasons of these different changes become easily evident by this means. And then it is understood that creeds, dogmas, symbols, legends, liturgies, and other things of a similar nature, are matters of secondary consideration, the same as every other superstructure of ideas.

To continue writing history on Christianity as an entity means to multiply the errors of those men of letters and sages who commit the methodical mistake of writing histories of literature or philosophy as though these were independent entities. In these handiworks of manufactured wisdom it seems as though the poets, orators, and philosophers of different epochs, isolated from the other life of their respective times, were grasping hands across the centuries to form a chain of celebrities; or as though they had not succeeded in getting the material and opportunity for poems and philosophical essays out of the conditions and the stage of evolution of their period and had therefore tried to go off to some corner by themselves. This is the studied mark of learned compilations. Of course, it is very convenient to have on hand some manual containing all the information on that which we call French literature, say from *La Chanson de Roland* to the novels of Zola. But the

chronology of thousands of years does not run simply from one thing to another, nor does the gift of poetry vary simply from case to case. It is rather a question of transformations in the entire relations of life in all its great outlines. But literary expressions are but relative indices, specific sediments, particular cases, among this mass of social transmutations. It is very convenient, especially for the artificial cramming common in our universities, to reduce all that we mean historically by the term philosophy to a compendium. But who is there that is able to tell, after such instruction, how it happens that the individual philosophers came to hold so many different, and often contradictory, opinions? How is it possible to make one single line of independent progress out of the antique philosophy, which up to Plato constituted about all the science there was, then out of scholasticism made over by theology with an almost complete absence of science, then out of that philosophy of the 17th century which was a sort of mental exploration running parallel with the new contemporaneous science based on experiment and observation, and finally out of that new criticism which tends to make of philosophy a mere summary of the special knowledge of the individual sciences, which have become so widely differentiated?

In short, it is absurd to continue writing universal histories of Christianity, except it be done for academic convenience. I am not referring to those who think with the minds of believers. These think that the leading thread of such universal histories consists of the providential mission of the church through the ages. We have nothing to say, or to suggest, to people who think like that, and who look upon this ideal and eternal history as a sort of immanent or continuous revelation. They are standing outside of our

field. I am referring to those critics, who write universal histories of Christianity as though it were one homogeneous whole, although they know and admit that this material in their hands is a part of the variable and more or less necessary successive conditions of human life. How is it that they do not see that their continuous and straight line of presentation rests on a very slender thread of tradition and reflects a diagrammatic and vague picture of things which can hardly be reconciled?

The origin, growth, diffusion, organisation, or even disappearance (in some parts of the world, as in Asia Minor and North Africa) of the Christian associations, the various attitudes assumed by them toward the remainder of practical life, the many links that connected them with other political and social bodies and powers: all these things, which make up a true and lifelike history, cannot be understood, unless we take our departure from the complex conditions of each individual country, in which the adherents of Christianity were few, or many, or in which all the inhabitants and citizens were Christians, either members of some modest sect, or of imperious Catholicism, persecuted or tolerated, or themselves intolerant and persecuting others. Only in this way do we set foot on solid ground and are enabled to estimate objectively the historical claims of things. And from this position to that of historical materialism we advance with no more effort than is required in any other branch of our knowledge of the past.

In brief, the history of real life is a history of *The Church*, or of *the various churches*, that is to say, a history of a society which has a certain economic basis, which means a definite arrangement of its economy, and a definite mode of

acquiring, producing, distributing, and consuming goods (which rests on the control of *land* – Woe is me!). Others may continue to mean by Christianity exclusively a mere complex of creeds and of opinions concerning the destiny of mankind. But, to quote only one illustration, these creeds differ as much as does the free will of Catholicism after the council of Trent from the absolute predestination of Calvin. And it is time that those writers should become reconciled to the understanding that this complex of outlooks and tendencies arose and developed within the circle of definite associations, which differed continually in various respects, and which were always more or less surrounded by a vast and complicated historical *environment*, to use a favorite term of modern writers.

There is still another thing to consider. In that quarter of an hour of scientific prose, in which we are living at present, no thinking man will believe any more that the great mass of believers in those associations of Christians had any accurate understanding of the different dogmas, or of the subtle discussions of the learned and professors. We do not know anything very precise about the passions, interests, conditions of daily life, the natural and habitual state of mind, of the people of Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, and others, who gathered around the banners of Arius and Athanasius. We cannot describe these things as accurately as we can in the case of present-day Naples or London. But we shall never be credulous enough to believe that those crowds understood one word of the dispute waged over the question whether the substance of the Son was identical with that of the Father, or only similar to it. Nor shall we measure the real difference between the artisans of Geneva and those of Italy in the 16th century by the theoretical differences

between Calvin and Bellarmino. In this respect the history of Christianity remains very obscure, because it has been handed down in an envelope of ideological concepts, which were the dogmatic and literary reflex of the underlying development of the movement. Under these circumstances we know relatively little of the practical life of the Christian movement, and this little dwindles to a minimum the more we approach the first centuries.

Furthermore, the mass of the associates always preserved in their hearts, and carried into their inmost beliefs and into their legends, many of the superstitions and most of the myths which had been theirs before they were converted, and they had to use these, and create others, in order to make the metaphysical and abstract doctrines of Christianity in some way plausible for themselves. This came to pass quite visibly in the second half of the second century, when Christian society had lost some of the democratic character of comrades waiting for the coming of a *Kingdom of Heaven*, comrades who were all filled with the holy spirit, and began to assume the form of organized catholicism, not only in the orthodox meaning of the term, but also in the sense of a semi-political hierarchy of a multitude no longer composed of saints, hut of simple human beings. Then grew that transfer of local, national, and ethnological superstitions, which accompanied the gradual transformation of Christianity into an official and territorial church, to the extent that the capable thinkers were zealously and scrupulously picked out and separated from the great mass of those, who had simply to believe and conform to ready-made rites and formalities. Gradually the Western empire disintegrated, while the barbarians of the German and Slavic tribes were forcibly converted, and in

proportion grew the power of those creeds, which became the daily food of the masses, who were compelled to adopt symbols and ideas which were as far beyond their mental horizon as were those compounds of many different semi-philosophies. All these Christian populations lived, and continued to live, according to their manifold faiths. For this reason they effectually transformed the common elements of Christianity into ways and means for new and specious mythologies. In view of this independent barbarian life, the definitions of the learned and the decisions of the councils remained suspended in the air, became intangible conceptions for the multitude, and assumed the garb of utopian doctrines.

What, then, were the reasons and causes, the aims and means, which held the Christians together in those times, in which religion is supposed to have been the sole fulcrum and soul of all life? I will not discuss the insults and violent assaults, which form one of those thorny chapters, to which passionate adversaries of Christianity usually resort. I will leave aside this chapter, which unrolls before our eyes a history of the most odious tyranny, the most ferocious and inhuman persecutions, and the most refined hypocrisy. *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum!* So many evils could religion bring forth! The point which I wish to emphasize especially is that the principal force of cohesion is found precisely in those despised *material means*, the use, management, and control of which promoted the growth of the association into a powerful economic organization, with its own offices, its own hierarchy, its own law, its own servants, slaves, dependents, colonists, ministers, protégés and beneficiaries. Ecclesiastic property represents many stages of variation, from the

obolus of semi-communism to the legal corporation, and from this to the concentration of the serfs, to the constitution of the territorial complexes into latifundian estates, followed by feudalism with its tithes and trade in souls, up to the most modern attempts at industrial colonization (the Jesuits), and so forth. The poor were then, as they are largely now, held together by gifts of charity, assistance to the sick, destitute, orphans, widows, etc., by systematic management of the fields, the clearing of newly acquired lands and their cultivation. It is these means which made of the Christian association a vital thing, as they do of any other human collectivity. They permitted a handful of doctrinaires, especially in the Middle Ages, to press a vast economic association into the service of relatively higher, nobler, more altruistic and more progressive ends than fell within the scope of strictly feudal property in the hands of sovereign blackmailers, robbers, and pirates. The bourgeoisie, in its different stages, later made an end to this economy of the Christian people by more or less rapid and revolutionary steps. It incorporated this property in various ways in its private property and made it fluid under the capitalist system. Wherever ecclesiastic property partially resisted, or still resists, the blows of this progressive age, it did, and does, for the reason that it still performed some useful service, which other organizations, and the state that represents them, did not care to take upon themselves, or permitted to stay in the hands of the church by way of competition.

The story of this economy is the essence of that interpretation of changes in Christianity, which further critique must elaborate. None other than Gregorius Magnus, who so early held the conviction that the bishop of

Rome was destined to hold sway in the disintegrated empire of the West, and who is known generally to cultured persons by his visions, by his love of music, and by the apostolate of his delegate Augustine in Anglia, dictated the economic laws by which the ecclesiastic latifundia were administered. After the lapse of a few centuries, throughout all the adversities of the imperfect states and semi-political communities, which developed within the boundaries of the always unstable and badly reconstructed Western empire, it was this vast ecclesiastic property which, by its universal diffusion and penetration, gave rise to that diplomacy, which from Gregory VII. to Boniface VIII aimed to make an heir of Augustus out of the successor of Peter. This diplomacy was not what it was because its theory had been thought out by monks in their cells, or because Gregory VII and Innocent III were excellent men – of course, they were – but because the possibilities for a great scheme of organization were offered only by that vast economic system. But this system was combatted, not only by the other more or less powerful rulers of that time, but also by some portions of the plebeian population and of the just developing bourgeoisie, in the more developed industrial and commercial regions (for instance in Flanders, the Provence, North Italy), for various reasons, such as monkish asceticism, or the civil liberty of Christians. In fact, the humiliation heaped upon Boniface VIII in Anagni indicates merely the climax of the policy of Philip the Fair, who, as a very early harbinger of the revolutionary princes of the 16th century, for the first time had the hardihood to lay hands upon the substance of the Christian people.

And here I would fain stop in my digression. For this economic history has not yet been written, and I am not inclined to begin it with these passing hints.

However, it seems to me that the usual objectors will say: But will everything else be clear, after this economic history has been written? Here we have once more the ordinary case of those who build a house of cards in order to have the pleasure of blowing it over. To explain a process means generally to resolve it into its most elementary conditions, so far as we can discern and follow their successive phases (from the lowest to the highest limit), passing from cause to effect.

No one will dream of claiming, for instance, that if we are thoroughly familiar with the economic structure of the city of Athens between the close of the 5th and the beginning of the 4th century before Christ, we can then pass straight on to an understanding of the whole ideological content of every dialogue of Plato, without any further ceremony, that is, without the critical assistance of the intellectual elements gathered by tradition. We must above all be able to explain Plato, the man, his esthetic and mental disposition, his pessimism, his flight away from the world, his idealism, and his utopianism. All these things are products of conditions, which developed in the mind of the individual Plato as they did equally in so many other contemporaries of his, who otherwise could not have understood, admired, and followed him to the extent of creating around him a sect, which lived on for centuries with so many modifications. If any one tries to separate this ideological formation, from the environment in which it arose as a first precursor of Christianity, he would render it unintelligible, or almost absurd.

This applies still more to those dispositions and inclinations to fantastic or reflective thought, which gave rise to the need of so many creeds, symbols, dogmas, legends in so vast an association as the Christian was, with its many offices and its different relations. It is assuredly easier to understand the relations, which lead in a general way from certain determined material conditions of common life to all those ideas, than to explain the particular content of each individual idea. This difficulty of an adequate explanation is due to the fact that we are dealing with times of terrible catastrophes, of indescribable confusion, of decadence of the aptitudes for correct science; times, in brief, in which unprejudiced testimony, critique, and public opinion are almost always missing, and in which the strongest minds, isolated from life, incline toward the abstruse, the subtle, the verbalistic.

It is indeed the difficulty of explaining precisely the way in which ideas arise out of material conditions of life, which lends strength to the argument of those, who deny the possibility of clearly explaining the genesis of Christianity. In general it is true that the phenomenology, or psychology, of religion, whatever you wish to call it, presents great difficulties and carries within itself rather obscure points. It is not always an easy matter to understand fully, how the experienced facts of nature and social life are transformed, at certain determined times and under certain determined ethnological conditions, and after passing through the crucible of some particular fantasy, into persons, gods, angels, demons, and then into attributes, emanations, and ornaments of these same personifications, and finally into such abstract and metaphysical entities as The Logos, infinite Goodness, supreme Justice, etc. On this field of

derived and complicated psychic production we are still far removed from the most elementary conditions necessary to enable us by observation and experiment to follow the rise and development of the first sensations from one extreme to the other, that is, from the peripheral apparatus to the cerebral centers, in which the irritations and vibrations are converted into conscious apperception, into consciousness.

But is this psychological difficulty a privilege of the Christian creeds? Is it not characteristic of the genesis of all creeds, all mythical and religious imaginations? Are the very original creations of the most primitive Buddhism, or the more second-hand collections of Mohammedanism, perhaps clearer? Or, going beyond these great systems of religion, are the processes of fantasy in the creation of the most elementary myths of our Aryan forefathers perhaps clearer and more transparent at first sight? Is it, perhaps, easy to account for every detail in all the transitions of fantasy in the course of centuries and generations from the *pramantha*, that is, the stick used in making fire by rubbing and chafing it against another piece of wood, to the gradual rise of the hero Prometheus? And yet this is the best known myth of the Indo-European mythology. We have more data by which we can follow its successive embryogenetic phases, from the most ancient Vedic hymns in honor of the God Agni (fire) to the creation of the ethical and religious tragedy of Aeschylus, than of any other myth.

Furthermore, such psychic productions of men of past centuries present very peculiar difficulties of their own to our understanding. We cannot easily reproduce in ourselves the necessary conditions, by which we might approach their state of mind concerning those productions. Long training is

required, before we acquire that aptitude of interpretation, which is characteristic of the connoisseur of languages, of the philologist, the critic, the student of prehistory, or the mental attitude of a man, who through long training and repeated trials has acquired an artificial consciousness, as it were, which is congruous and consonant with the object of study.

Under these circumstances, Christianity (and I mean here the creed, the doctrine, the myth, the symbol, the legend, not merely the association in its *oikonomika*) becomes more easily intelligible to us to the extent that it approaches our own time. We are surrounded by it, and we have to consider all the time its consequences and its influence on the literature and various philosophies with which we are familiar. We can observe every day, that the multitude crudely combines ancient and modern superstitions with a more or less indistinct general acceptance of the underlying principle, which is common to all confessions, namely the principle of redemption. We can see Christianity at work and watch its accomplishments and its struggles. And we are enabled to draw conclusions from the present as to the past by analogy, which places us in a position to undertake the interpretation of more remote creeds. We also watch the creation of new dogmas, new saints, new miracles, new pilgrimages. And comparing this with the past, we may exclaim in most cases: *Tout comme chez nous!* Just what we see today! In other words, we have at our command a store of observation and experience in psychology, which permits us to bring the past once more to life with less effort than is needed for the purely documentary analysis of the conditions of most remote antiquity. How long is it that we understand anything definite about: the origin of language?

It dates from the very moment that we realized that we have no better means of experience in this respect than to study the way in which children still learn to speak.

The problem of the origin of Christianity is furthermore obscured for many by still another prejudice. They imagine that it is due to first causes which created it out of nothing, as it were. These people forget that those who became Christians did so by renouncing other religions; and that the problem of the origin of Christianity reduces itself above all to the prosaic task of studying the way in which the elements of former periods took on new shapes within the environment of that association, which formed the actual nucleus of the new organization. This event took place in historical times. And among those religions which preceded it, the most noted is that of advanced Judaism, whose great masses were waiting for the coming of a new Messiah, while its doctrinaires were splitting fine hairs. We are also fairly familiar with the cults, superstitions, and creeds of the various pagan religions in the Roman empire, and with the religious inclinations of many of the thinkers of that time, just as we know the leanings of the multitudes of that period, who were ever ready to accept new faiths, new promises, and *good tidings*.

It is, therefore, not a question of creation, but of transformation, and we carry on our inquiry on the same field as that of any other history. The question is, for instance, (to give a few general hints), how Jesus became the Messiah of the Jews (a primitive form of development), how the Messiah of the Jews became the Redeemer of all mankind from sin (Paul), and finally, how the *Word* combined with the NeoPlatonism of Philo (fourth

gospel). This is the outline of the ideological development. And on the other hand we must find out, how the primitive communistic association (a communism of consumption) of comrades expecting the impending end of the world and the final catastrophe (the Apocalypse) became a congregation (a church), which deferred the coming of the millennium indefinitely (the second epistle of Peter) and grew into an organization that evolved its own economy and progressively assumed more complicated attributes and functions. In this transition from a sect to a church, from naive expectation to a complicated doctrine, lies the whole problem of the origin of Christianity. With the expansion of the association came in due time an adaptation on its part to the prevailing forms of law, and the requirements of the doctrine fell in with the diffusion of decadent Platonism. Of course, we shall never be able to get close to those things with our vision and observation by an intuitive mode of chronicling. We shall never watch Philip, Matthew, Peter, James, and their next successors, in conversation, and so forth, in the way that we may observe Camille Desmoulins in a café of the Palais Royal, at 3 p.m., on Sunday, July 12., 1789. We shall not be able to follow the genesis and establishment of those dogmas as we may the compilation of the articles of the *Encyclopaedia*. For we are dealing with times of vague impressions and of fermentations such as have never been seen since. Great moral epidemics invade the souls of men. The most elementary relations of life approach a period of acute crisis. Under the surface of that civilization of the Mediterranean countries, which combined the political and administrative power of the empire with all that was most useful and refined in Hellenism, vegetated a thousand forms of local barbarisms and festering and rotten products of decadence. It is enough to remind the reader that

Christianity, as a thing in itself, took its start, both in fact and in name, from Antioch, that cesspool of all vices, and that Paul addressed his subtle meditations, which show him to us in the light of one of those Jews, who later compiled the Talmud, to the Galatians, that is, to Jews scattered through a country of real barbarians. Christianity was spread among the lowly, the outcasts, the plebeians, the slaves, the despairing multitudes of those large cities, whose vicious life is to a small degree revealed by the satires of Petronius and Juvenal, the Voltairian tales of Lucian, or the gruesome writings of Apuleius. Is there anything precise that we know about the conditions of those Jews in the city of Rome, among whom this new sad superstition, as Tacitus called it, first developed, that superstition which in the course of centuries grew into the most powerful social organism ever known in history? We cannot reconstruct those first origins by intuitive descriptions, but must have recourse to conjecture and combination. This is the main reason for the interminable literature on this subject. And it applies especially to the learned of Germany, who are in the habit of calling such critical and erudite literature *theological*, even though they are not believers themselves.

The relative obscurity of the first origins of Christianity gives rise in the minds of many to the queer belief in a *true* Christianity, which is supposed to have been quite different from that other which later assumed the name of Christian. This so-called true Christianity, or original Christianity, which is in its turn so obscure that every one can interpret it in his own way, serves often as a motive for the polemics of those rationalists, who hurl invectives against that historical church, which we know by experience,

and then extoll with a great flow of oratory that ideal church, which is supposed to have been the first *communion of saints*. This is but a historical myth, the same as the Sparta of the Athenian orators, the antique Rome of the decadent Ghibellines of the 14th century, and all other fantastic creations of a lost paradise, or of a future paradise which is as yet out of our reach. This historical myth has assumed various shapes. The sectarians, who revolted against Catholicism in its inception or in its prime, these sectarians, whose democratic equality under definite historical conditions, from the Montanists to the Anabaptists, rove in rebellion against the profanely worldly and hierarchically orthodox church, felt the need of reconstructing in their imagination the *true* Christianity, that is, the simple primitive life of the first evangelists. At the same time they wailed about the decadence, aberration, works of Satan, and the other things that happened after that time. It is this truest of true Christianities, which was often invoked by the naive communists, who drew pictures of their own aspirations in the absence of any other adequate ideas concerning the way of living under these disgraceful conditions of inequality in this unjust world. And these pictures could find inspiration and color in the evangelical poetry and in so many other true or fantastic records. This happened also to Weitling, who on his part composed a *Gospel of a Poor Sinner*. And why should I not mention those followers of Saint Simon, who fabulised about a *truer* Christianity of the future, into which they projected all the aspirations of their heated imagination.

For all these and other reasons, there is hung in the air, in the fantastic imagination of many, the picture of an ultra-perfect Christianity, which shall be different, or is absolutely

different, from the one which vulgar history knows and depicts, a Christianity that stoned Stephen, that instituted the Holy Inquisition, which dispatched so many multitudes of infidels to the other world; from the barefooted fisherman Peter, who played the part of a Sancho Panza by his cowardly denials, to Pope Pius, who consoled himself for the loss of his temporal power by assuming infallibility; from the spontaneous *agape* of the poor visited by the comforter to the Jesuits who arm squadrons and contract commercial loans, like daring harbingers of the colonial policy of the bourgeois world; from the Rabbi of Nazareth, who says that his kingdom is not of this world, to the bishops and other prelates who occupy in his name from one fifth to one third of the land, according to various countries, and who rule as its sovereigns and proprietors, enjoying even the *jus primae noctus*. Whoever believes in this so-called *true* Christianity, for one reason or another, even were it only for literary hypocrisy pure and simple, is naturally confronted by the obligation to explain whence the other less true Christianity came later on, which differed so completely from the one which we know. And it is evident that this true Christianity must become a miracle, if not of revelation, at least of human ideology. We are not obliged to furnish an explanation for this miracle, either in the name of materialism, or in the name of any other theory, for the same reason, that no rational mechanics is obliged to explain either the flight of Icarus or the hippogriff of Ariosto.

Nevertheless, we must not forget that this *true* Christianity, this ideal antagonist of the positive and realistically human Christianity, which we know and which developed under conditions accessible to our research, performed also a historical function, and serves to-day in our hands as a key,

by which we may enter into the state of mind and conditions of life of the primitive Christians. For this *true* Christianity is but a symbol of the various revolutions of the proletariat, the plebeians, the lowly, the manumitted, the serfs, the exploited, up to the 16th century.

I had occasion, as I said once before in another letter, to occupy myself at length in my academic lectures with Fra Dolcino, who marks the culmination and impending decline of the Apostolic sect. After I had described the general conditions of the economic and political development of Northern and Middle Italy, and those of the particular environment (or of the social classes) in which the Apostolic sect arose and developed, I had to explain, at a certain point, the doctrine by which Dolcino held together the ranks of his followers, who were intrepid and tenacious fighters to the last and worked like heroes, martyrs, and harbingers of a new order of human life. His doctrine was likewise one of those apocalyptic returns to a purely evangelical Christianity. It was a negation of everything which the hierarchy had established since Pope Sylvester (at least the legendary one), and this negation was reinforced by an apostolic ardor, which the spirit of battle transformed into a duty to fight. It is natural that the first explanation for these *ideas*, as the literary men would say, should be sought in similar, immediately preceding, movements of rebellion against the hierarchy. By a short step we come to the Albigenses, and by another short step to those confused and many-colored popular movements known under the common name of *Patarenian* movements. And on the other hand we must try to understand the mystic and ascetic agitation, which often came near disrupting the papal empire, from the theoretical communism of Joaquin of Fiore to the active resistance of the Friars. If we penetrate another step into this inquiry, it is not difficult to see that behind this

mystic veil of asceticism, and behind the exalted passion for *true* Christianity, there lurked those material conditions and material incentives, which rallied around certain symbols of revolt the lowly monks, the peasants of those countries, in which feudalism was still alive, the peasants of other countries, who, having been freed from feudalism, were forcibly proletarianised by the rapid formation of free communes, the poor people of these pitilessly corporate communes themselves, and finally, as ever, the idealists who espoused the cause of the oppressed as their own: in other words, all the elements of social revolution. From this close analysis we pass on to a more general, or, I should say, typical one. The movement of Dolcino is a link in that long chain of uprisings on the part of the Christian people, who revolted against the hierarchy with more or less good luck, and under complicated conditions, and who in the most acute crises came to the logical conclusion of espousing communism. The classic example, which was the most vigorous, as concerns circumstances of time, extension, and duration, is certainly the uprising of the Anabaptists. However, the revolt of the Dolcinians was by no means a small matter, especially since the valley of the Po, in the beginning of the 14th century, was precociously modern in its economic conditions.

Now, the instinct of affinity turned the minds of the representatives and leaders of revolting peoples to the image, or to the confused memory, or to an approximative reproduction in imagination, of that primitive Christianity, which consisted only of poor people, of afflicted and suffering humanity hoping for redemption from the miseries of this sinful world. True Christianity, to which these zealous rebels turned with so much ardor of faith and fantasy, out of sympathies arising from similar conditions, was a reality. It was a fact, not in the sense of an ideal or type from which

poor weak humanity had strayed on account of mistakes or bad will, but in the sense of a sober historical reality. Primitive Christianity was, with due allowance for historical differences, much closer in type, as a whole, in its aspects and incentives, to that which Montano, Dolcino, or Thomas Münzer wanted to re-establish at inopportune times, than to all the dogmas, lithurgies, hierarchic ranks, dominions and domains, political fights, supremacies, inquisitions, and other vanities, around which the sober and profane history of the church turns. In these attempts of the medieval rebels we see, as it were, a reproduction of an experiment of the past, we recognize what must have been, approximately, the original form of Christianity as a sect of perfect saints, that is, of perfect equals, without any differences of clergy and laymen, all of them equally partaking of the holy spirit, revolutionists and worshippers in one, all on the same level.

The most difficult and thorny problem in all the history of Christianity is precisely this: To understand by what means a sect of perfect equals was turned, in the course of but two centuries, into an association divided into hierarchic ranks, so that we have on one side the mass of believers, and on the other the clergy invested with sacred powers. This hierarchic division is completed by a dogma, that is to say, by regulations which suppress the spontaneousness of belief as a fact of personal practice on the part of the individual believers. A hierarchy means a rule by priests, an administration of things and government of persons by the clergy. This gives rise to political policies. And the inquiry into these policies is the pith of the history of the third century. The meeting of church and state in the fourth century is but the result of the intermingling of two policies, in which religion and the management of public affairs are finally merged in one. This transition from a free association to an organized semi-state, which is responsible for the fact

that the church has ever since dabbled in politics, either in support of the state, or against the state, or itself as a state, verifies but the truth of the statement that any organisation, which has things to administer and offices to fill, becomes of necessity a government. The church has reproduced within its confines the same antagonisms as any other state, that is, the antagonisms between rich and poor, protector and protected, patron and client, owners and exploited, princes and subjects, sovereigns and oppressed. Therefore it has had in its ranks class-struggles peculiar to itself, for instance, struggles between a patrician hierarchy and a plebeian priesthood, between high and low clergy, between catholicism and sects. The sects were largely inspired, up to the 16th century, by the idea of returning to the primitive Christianity, and for this reason they often colored their designs on existing conditions by ideological inspirations smacking of utopianism. The church, on the other hand, such as it grew to be, followed the methods used by the profane state and became a hierarchic congregation of unequals, instead of equals with the holy spirit, and exercised the rights of the privileged by means of oppression and violence, like a perfect empire, some parts of which were ceded to other rulers, with a superadded control of the souls, which must go hand in hand with a government of things, because souls cannot exist without material things. These human characteristics, which, once that a condition of economic inequality exists among men, make any religious association similar to any other government of things in this world, show at a glance that an association of saints can never have had any other but a utopian form, and on the other hand they show to us a constant tendency toward intolerance and toward catholicism in its various forms, to the extent that this association, forgetting the simple martyr of Nazareth, whose form has been left hanging pathetically

to the cross on the altars, has made its kingdom of this world.

To stick to an illustration, which is familiar to me through recent studies, the super-imperial papacy fell in the person of Boniface VIII, just as had been prophesied by Dolcino, who survived him for three years. But it did not fall in order to give way to the apocalypse. It is true, the humiliation of the exile at Avignon was inflicted upon the papacy, but not to give way to a new Caesarian empire, in keeping with Dante's utopia. The indications of the modern era, the forebodings of the bourgeois reign, were already manifest. Philip the Fair, who for a long time had been reaching out for that civil power, under which the bourgeoisie two centuries later went through the first stage of its political rule over society, condemned the Templars to death, as though he wanted to say that the heroic poem of the crusades ended by the hands of the Christians themselves. And in order that we might find the moral of the situation even in the anecdote, which always exposes and unmasks the strident passages on the irony of history, the agent of the Sire of France, who prepared the humiliation of Anagni, was not a captain of the feudal bands, but a civilian, who negotiated the money required to cover a bill of exchange delivered to a banker of Florence.

These legists, and princes usurping historical rights, and bankers accumulating money that later on became capital, were the people who initiated modern history, which is so transparent in the prosaic structure of its aims and means. On the ruins of corporate and feudal society as well as on the ruins of the patrimony of ecclesiasticism settled that cruel bourgeoisie which, suspicious of mysterious forces, inaugurated the era of free thought and free research. And now the bourgeoisie is waiting to be dethroned. But

assuredly this will not be done by *true* Christianity, nor by the truest of the true.

Whether the people of the future, of whom we socialists often entertain such exalted ideas, will still produce any religion or not, I can neither affirm nor deny. And I leave it them to arrange their own lives, which will not be easy, I hope, in order that they may not become imbeciles in paradisiacal beatitude. But I see this much clearly: Christianity, which in its entirety is up to now the religion of the most advanced nations, will not leave any room for any other religion after it. Whoever will not be a Christian henceforth will be without religion. And in the second place I note that the socialists have been wise enough to write into their platforms: Religion is a private matter. I hope that no one will interpret this statement in the sense of a theoretical point of view which might lead to the elaboration of a philosophy of religion. This wholly practical statement means simply that for the present the socialists are too busy with more useful and serious work than that kind which would liken them to those Hebertists, Blanquists, Bakounists, and others, who decreed the abolition of divinity and decapitated God in effigy. The historical materialists think, however, on their part and aside from all subjective appreciation, that the people of the future will very probably dispense with all transcendental explanations of the practical problems of daily life. *Primus in orbe deos fecit timor!* Fear was the first in this world to make gods. The statement is very old. But it is valuable, and therefore I perpetuate it.

X

Resina (Naples), September 15, 1597.

Dear Sorel! In re-reading, revising, retouching the letters which I addressed to you from April to July of this year – I intend to publish them – I find that they make up a sort of series and on the whole deal with the same subject. Of course, if I had the intention of writing a book worthy of some high-sounding title as *Socialism and Science* or *Historical Materialism and World Conception*, or the like, I should have to sift this matter anew by elaborate meditation. And then the thoughts at which I have here merely hinted, the statements which I have but roughly outlined, the observations which are often made incidentally, and the bizarre criticisms scattered here and there, in short all those things which came to me as I wrote with a flowing pen would assume quite a different form and would be differently arranged. But since, in conversing with you at a distance, I have made use of the liberties peculiar to conversation, I shall now, in making these fleeting letters into a little volume, head it with the modest and appropriate title: *a Discourse on Socialism and Philosophy, Letters to G. Sorel*.

It is the fault of the insistent advice of my friend Benedetto Croce that I commit this new literary sin. This blessed friend of mine became a torment and a cross to me. After he had read these letters, he did not give me any rest, until I promised him that I would publish them in book form. If I were to follow him, I should become in my old days a continuous and perpetual producer of printed matter. I have always preferred in the past to let the scattered manuscripts,

which I accumulated in the course of years in my capacity as a teacher and passionate connoisseur of literature, slumber quietly in my desk. But in the present case, Croce continued to plead that it was my duty, now that Socialism was spreading in Italy, to take part, in such a way and by such means as suited my inclinations, in the life of the party that was growing and gaining strength. And that may be so. Still it remains to be seen whether the socialists feel the need of and a desire for, my help and participation.

To tell the truth, I have never had any great inclination for public writing, and I have never acquired the art of writing in prose. I have always written the things as they came to me. I have always been, and still am, passionately fond of the art of oral instruction in every form. And attending to this work with great intensity, I have long lost the gift of repeating in writing the things which I used to express spontaneously, in ready and flexible speech, as fitted the occasion, pregnant with side issues and full of references. And who can really repeat such things from memory? Later, when I was born again in spirit and accepted Socialism, I became more desirous of communicating with the public by means of booklets, occasional letters, articles and lectures, and these grew in time almost without my being aware of it. Are not these the duties and burdens of the professional? Just then, about two years ago, my blessed Mr. Croce came along at an opportune hour with his advice that I should publish essays on scientific socialism, in order to give to my activity as a socialist a more solid footing. And, as one thing follows another, these chance letters may likewise be regarded as a subsidiary and supplementary essay on historical materialism.

It is evident, dear Sorel, that this discourse does not concern you, but only me. For I am seeking an excuse, as it were, to publish a new book, written by an Italian living in Italy. If these letters should be read by others in France besides you, those readers may probably say that I have not won them over to historical materialism, and perhaps they will justly repeat the observation of some critics of my essays to the effect that the intellectual moods of a nation are not changed by translations from a foreign language. ^[13]

While I am writing this with a view of bringing these letters to a close, I have some misgivings whether I might not want to continue them. Cannot letters be multiplied indefinitely, just like fables and stories? Fortunately I had made up my mind, when I first began, to take up in a general way the problems which you raised in your preface by touching upon such very difficult questions. So one reason for coming to a close is given by the outlines of your own article, to which I have referred from time to time. If I were to abandon myself to the sweep of conversation, who knows where I would stop! The letters might grow into a literature. You would not thank me for that a bit. But it would please Mr. Croce, who would like to fill everybody with his instinct for literary prolixity. In this respect he forms a queer contrast to the leisurely habits of leisurely Naples, where men, like the Lotus Eaters, who disdained any other food, live in sweet enjoyment of the present and deem to mock the *philosophy of history* in plain view of the statue of G. B. Vico.

But I really wish to come to a close, and so I must put down a few more brief remarks.

It seems to me, first of all, that you ask, not on account of any curiosity of your own, but because you artfully place yourself into the position of your readers: Is there any way to explain to us in an easy and clear manner in what consists that dialectics which is so often invoked for the elucidation of the gist of historical materialism? And I think you might add that the conception of this dialectics remains obscure for purely empirical scientists, for the still surviving metaphysicians, and for those popular evolutionists, who abandon themselves so willingly to a general impression of what is and happens, appears and disappears, is born and dies, and who mean by evolution in the last resort the unknowable, not the process of understanding. As a matter of fact, by the dialectics we mean that rhythmic movement of understanding which tries to reproduce the general outline of reality in the making.

For my part – if these letters were not too long to render such a thing improbable – should I ever feel like taking this matter up once more, I should, before answering such difficult questions, remember that Grecian poet, who, on being asked by the tyrant of Syracuse: "What are the gods?" asked first for one day's respite then for a second, then for a third, and so on to infinity. And yet the poets, who create, invent, praise, and celebrate the gods, ought to be more familiar with them than I could be with dialectics, if a man held me in a tight place and demanded imperiously that I should answer him. I should take my time, a method of procedure not out of harmony with dialectic thought, and I should say in so many words (and this reply is implicit): We cannot give ourselves an adequate account of thought unless it be by an act of thinking. We must become accustomed to the various modes of applying thought by successive efforts.

And it is always a dangerous thing to jump with both feet from the concrete application of a certain concept to the formulation of its general definition. And if I were hard pressed for a reply, I should, in order to save the questioner the trouble of long, arduous, and complicated study, recommend a perusal of *Anti-Dühring*, especially of the chapter entitled "The Negation of the Negation."

There, and throughout the whole book, it will be seen that Engels did not only make great efforts to explain what he taught, but also tried to combat the wrong use to which mental processes may be applied, as they are by people who, instead of arriving at concrete thoughts in which the mental faculty shows itself alive and fresh, have an inclination to fall into a priori diagrams, or into scholasticism. And be it said, without prejudice to the ignorant, that scholasticism was by no means exclusively confined to the learned of the Middle Ages, and is not worn merely as a priestly robe. Scholasticism may fasten itself upon any theory. Aristotle himself was the first scholastic. He was, indeed, a good many other things, above all a scientific genius. Scholasticism is even presented in the name of Marx. The fact is that the greatest difficulty in the understanding and further elaboration of historical materialism is not the understanding of the formal aspects of Marxism, but a possession of the facts in which those forms are immanent. Marx possessed some of these facts and elaborated them, and there are many others left which we must find out and elaborate for ourselves.

In the course of many years which I have spent in education I became firmly convinced of the great injury done to young minds by steeping them without warning in formulae,

diagrams, and definitions as though these were the forerunners of real things, instead of leading them by gradual and well weighed steps through a chosen department of reality and first observing, comparing, and experimenting with actual objects before formulating theories. In short, a definition placed at the beginning of a study is meaningless. Definitions take on a meaning only when genetically developed. In the course of construction it is often seen how injurious mere definitions are. The common interpretation given by untutored minds to certain passages of the Roman law is quite different from the real meaning. Teaching is not an activity which produces a bare effect by means of bare objects. It is rather an activity which generates another activity. In teaching we learn to understand that the first germ of all philosophic thought is always planted by the Socratic Method, that is, by the accomplished talent of generating ideas. ^[14]

In recommending *Anti-Dühring*, and the cited chapter, I do not mean to make a catechism of these things, but only to refer to them as an illustration of ability in teaching. Arms and instruments serve their purposes only so long as they are in use, not when hung on the walls of museums.

By the way, if I did not have to come to a close, I should like to dwell for a moment on that passage where you say that Italy deserves the homage of all, because it is the common cradle of all civilization. These words might seem rather high-sounding, seeing that you are speaking of socialism, which is really not greatly indebted to Italy. However, if it is true that socialism is the outcome of advanced civilization, then the mature and advanced of other countries may do well to turn their eyes occasionally upon this cradle. By

thinking now and then of Italy, which for centuries made the greater part of universal history, all will always be able to learn something from us. And then they will perceive that they already had this Italy at home as the forerunner of that which they now are. Some Frenchmen have been of the opinion that Italy had been transformed from a cradle into a tomb of civilization. And like a tomb it must appear to all strangers who visit it as though it were a museum, but are ignorant of our present history. And in this they are wrong, and, however learned these visitors may be, to that extent they remain ignorant of the actual life of our country, a life which seems that of one risen from the dead. And this, at least, is worthy of note.

In what does this rebirth of Italy really consist and what prospects does it hold out to those who watch the general progress of humanity without prejudice and preconceived notions? ^[15] I will not speak of the great difficulties, which must be overcome in the treatment of the actual history of each country from an objective point of view, that will not permit personal opinions to influence scientific research. In the particular case of Italy, we should have to go back to the 16th century, when the first beginnings of the capitalist era were inaugurated by the Mediterranean countries, in which Capitalism then had its principal seat. We should have to reach the positive and negative, internal and external, premises of the present conditions of Italy by way of the history of successive decadence. It is not necessary for me to say that my powers would not be equal to the task. I do not feel the slightest temptation to undertake it as an incident to an occasional and familiar discourse like the present. The man who can compress such a study into a book might claim to have made a contribution to the mental expression of the

actual situation and of the actual thought life of the Italians.^[16] Here we have often blind optimists or blind pessimists among us, in the sense in which unphilosophical people use these terms. For in Italy there exists not only a great deal of ignorance concerning the actual condition of other countries, but also a valuation of conditions at home by a standard, which is entirely ideal, hypothetical, and often utopian, instead of comparative and practical. It is indeed a singular case that here in our country, where the sciences devoted to the observation of nature, sciences really cultivated for particularistic and anti-philosophical reasons, have had such a rise, we should meet with so little positive understanding of present social conditions, while at the same time we have such an extra large number of sociologists, who supply the seekers for truth with definitions. But it is well known that the sociologists of all countries have a queer antipathy against the study of history. And yet this same history is in the opinion of the profane the very thing by which society has developed.

Finally, few clearly see the fact that the Italian bourgeoisie, which is already the object of scorn and hatred on the part of the lowly, freed slaves, and exploited, the same as in all other countries, and on the other hand is pushed and crowded by the small tradesmen, is unstable, restless, and diffident in its own ranks, because it cannot compete with the capitalists of other countries on equal terms. For this reason, and for the other that they have the Pope,^[17] with his still marketable commodities which only the theoretical thinkers of liberalist utopianism proclaim to be forever outgrown, this bourgeoisie, which must still rise, is intrinsically revolutionary, as the Manifesto would put it. And since they have not had a chance to be Jacobins, as they

would have liked very much to be, they have become used to the formula of a king by the grace of God and the nation, all in the same breath. Since this bourgeoisie could not count on a rapid development of industry on a large scale, which is in fact slow in coming, nor, consequently, on a rapid conquest of foreign markets, on account of the slow and uncertain progress of national economy which is largely agricultural, they practice the mediocre politics of expediency and spend all their talents in adroitness. This is the part played recently for a number of months by our navy in the Orient. It is playing the role of the fox in the fable, who declared that the grapes were sour, because he could not reach them. But this fox finds itself among other foxes, who guard the grapes or are about to seize them. And then the fox becomes an idealist for want of anything positive. This Italian bourgeoisie feels itself in the role of the whole nation, partly on account of the reactionary or demagogical abstention of the clericals from political activity, partly on account of the very slow development of a proletarian opposition. In the absence of party divisions in society, the bourgeoisie gave the name of parties to the factions that gathered around captains or proconsuls, enterprising or adventurous leaders. The first appearance of Socialism struck them like lightning.

On the other hand, those deceive themselves who believe that every commotion of the multitude in this country, such as we have witnessed several times in various places of Italy, is an indication of a proletarian movement, which has for its concrete basis the economic struggle and turns its aspirations more or less explicitly in the direction of the socialism of other countries. More often these commotions are like revolts of elementary forces against a state of things,

in which these forces do not find that controlling discipline which is typical of a bourgeois rule tending to train the proletariat in squads. Look, for instance, at the aggravated phenomenon of emigration, which, with a few exceptions, carries away men, who are able to offer to capitalist exploitation in foreign countries strong arms, incomparable diligence, and stomachs capable of any amount of privation. They are, in short, laborers from the fields who are superfluous, or artisans from decaying trades, whom the rule of capitalist education would join in squads for factory labor, if industry on a large scale were ready to develop that sort of thing, or whom our home capital would invite to our home colonies, if we had any, and if we had not been seized by the craze of founding colonies in places where it is almost impossible to do so. ^[18]

Italy has become during recent years, for very natural reasons, the promised land of decadents, self-glorifiers, shallow critics, fastidious and posing sceptics. The sane and veracious part of the socialist movement(which has no other duties to perform for the present under the prevailing circumstances but to prepare the small middle class for democratic education) therefore contains admixtures of elements, who would have to admit to themselves, if they wanted to be honest with themselves, that they are decadents, that they are not moved to bestir themselves by the strong will to live, but by a vague satiety with the present. They are merely satiated and bored bohemians.

But I must really come to a close. It seems to me, however, that I hear a small voice of protest coming from those comrades, who are always so ready to raise objections. And this voice says: "All this is sophistry and doctrinarism. What

we need is practice." Certainly, I agree with you, you are right. Socialism has so long been utopian, scheming, offhand, and visionary, that it is well to repeat now all the time that what we need is practice. For the minds of those who adopt socialism should never be out of touch with the things of the actual world, should continually study their field, in which they are compelled to work hard for a clear road. But my supposed critic should take care not to become a doctrinaire himself. For this term designates for those who understand it a certain mental disposition to lose one's self in abstractions and to claim that ideas which are pronounced excellent in themselves, and fruits which have been collected by experience at different times and places, can be applied straight to concrete cases and are good for all times and places. The practice of the socialist parties in their relations with other politics has so far been exercised rather in keeping with rational requirements than with science. It is the outcome of constant observation, of an incessant adaptation to new conditions. It is the tested fruit of the struggle for an alignment of often different and antagonistic tendencies of the proletariat in the same direction. It is the endeavor to bring practical plans to a realization by the help of a clear understanding of all the complicated and intricate interrelations which hold together the world in which we are living. If it were not so, with what right and by what claim could we speak of a vaunted Marxism? If historical materialism does not hold good, it means that the prospects for the coming of socialism are doubtful, and that our thought of a future society is a utopian dream.

Too often it is true, that all our contemporaneous socialism still contains within itself some latent germs of a new utopianism. ^[19]

This is the case with those who continuously harp on the dogma of the necessity of evolution, which they confound with a certain right to a better condition. And they say that the future society of collectivist economic production, with all its technical and pedagogic consequences, *will come because it SHOULD come*. They seem to forget that this future society must be produced by human beings themselves in response to the demands of the conditions in which they now live and by the development of their own aptitudes. Blessed are those who measure the future of history and the right to progress with the yardstick of a life insurance policy!

Those dogmatists of cheap ideas forget several things. In the first place, they forget that the future, just because it is a future which will be a present when we are of the past, cannot be used as a practical criterion for our present actions. It will be the thing at which we wish to arrive, but not the way by which to reach it. In the second place, the experience of these last fifty years should convince those, who can think critically, of the following truth: To the extent that the capacity for organization in a class party will grow among proletarians and small trades people, the process of this complicated movement will itself furnish the proof that the development of the new era will have to be measured by a standard of time considerably slower than that first assumed by the early socialists who were still tainted with Jacobine memories. It is evident that we cannot look forward across such long stretches of time with very great certitude. We must take into account the enormous complexity of modern life and the vast expansion of capitalism, or of bourgeois society. ^[20] Who cannot see that the Pacific is now taking the place of the Atlantic Ocean, just as the Atlantic once upon a time took the place of the Mediterranean Sea? Finally, in the third place, the practical

science of socialism consists in the clear observation of all the complicated processes of the economic world, and in a simultaneous study of the conditions in which the proletariat lives, becomes capable of concentration in a class party, and carries into this successive concentration the spirit which it needs in the economic struggle that shapes its own peculiar politics. Upon these present data we can base sufficiently clear calculations of our forecast and make connection with that point where the proletariat becomes dominant and shapes the political policies of the state. This point must coincide with the one where capitalism becomes unfit to rule. And from this point, which no one can very well imagine to be a noisy affray, we shall have the beginning of that thing which many, with tiresome persistency, call the social revolution *par excellence*, I don't know why, since the entire history is a series of social revolutions. To go beyond that point with our reasoning would be to mistake it for a fabric of our imagination.

The time of the prophets is past. Happy thou, Fra Dolcino, who in thy three letters ^[21] wast able to transfigure the fleeting incidents of politics (such as Pope Celestine and Pope Boniface VIII, the champions of Anjou and Aragon, the Guelfs and the Ghibellines, the poor plebs and the patricians of the communes, and so forth) into types which had already been symbolized by the prophets and the Apocalypse, measuring the periods of providence by successive corrections according to years, months, and days. But thou wast a hero. And this proves that these fantasies were not the cause of thy struggles, but rather their ideological envelope, by means of which thou gavest an account to thyself, in the way that many others did, for a whole century in advance of thyself and Francis of Assisi, of the desperate movement of the plebeians against the papal hierarchy, against the growing bourgeoisie in the communes, and the

rising monarchy. But all these envelopes have been torn, including the religion of ideas, as some would say who employ a hypocritical jargon out of superstitious reverence for the religion of others. Nowadays only the imbeciles are permitted to remain utopians. The utopia of imbeciles is either a ridiculous thing, or a pet idea of literary men, who pay a visit to that children's phalanstery which Bellamy built. Our humble Marx, on the other hand, wholly a prosaic man of science, went about modestly collecting in present society the indications for its transition into the coming society, for instance, the rise of co-operatives (real ones!) in England and similar things, and to him fell the task (especially by the work spent on the International) to be the midwife of the future, which is not quite the same as being its fanciful builder. He and Engels spoke of the society of the future, assuming the dictatorship of the proletariat as a fact, not from the intuitive point of view of one who thinks he can see it before him, but from the point of view of a principle of formation of the economic structure which should develop in opposition to the present society. ^[22]

For the rest, if any one feels the need of living in the future as though he could feel it and try it on his own skin, and if he stammers in the name of such ideas and wants to invest members of the future society with their rights and duties, let him go ahead. I hope he will permit me, who has also a sort of right to send his visiting card to posterity, to express the sentiment that the people of the future will not lay aside their human nature to such an extent as to be no longer comparable to us of the present, and that they will have enough of the dialectic joy of laughter left to crack jokes over the prophets of today.

Now I close for good. And it is for you to recommence, if you should ever desire to do so.

NOTES

1. "Since 1873 I wrote against the fundamental principles of the system of liberalism, and in 1879 I began to walk on the road of my new intellectual faith, which I still hold and which has been confirmed by further study and observation during the last three years." Thus I wrote on page 23 of my lecture "On Socialism," Rome, 1889. This lecture, which was in a way a confession of faith in a popular style, was supplemented by me with the pamphlet "Proletarians and Radicals," Rome, 1890.

2. "I make no vow to shut myself up in any system as though in a prison." Thus I wrote 24 years ago in my work *On Moral Liberty* (Naples, 1873), preface. And I can repeat that now. That book contains a detailed exposition of determinism, and was then supplemented by another work of mine, entitled "Morality and Religion" (Naples, 1873).

3. A return to other philosophies is nowadays also suggested by some socialists. The one wants to return to Spinoza, that is, to a philosophy, in which the historical development cuts no figure. Another would be content with the mechanical materialism of the 18th century, that is with a repudiation of any and all history. Still others think of reviving Kant. Does that imply also the revival of his insoluble antinomy between practical reason and theoretical reason? Does it mean a return to his fixed categories and fixed faculties of the soul, of which Herbart seemed to have made short work? Does it include his categorical imperative, in which Schopenhauer had discovered the Christian commandments in the disguise of a metaphysical principle? Does it mean the theory of natural rights, which even the Pope does not care to uphold any more? Why don't they let the dead bury the dead?

You have only the choice of two logical alternatives. Either you accept those other philosophies in their entirety, just as they were in their own time, and in that case you must say goodbye to historical materialism. Or you pick out from them what suits you, and cut your arguments to fit your choice, and in that case you burden yourselves with useless labor, because the history of thought is so constituted that nothing is lost of the things which were in the past the conditions and preparations for our present conceptions.

There is, eventually a third possibility, namely that of falling into syncretism and confusion. A good illustration of this type is L. Woltmann ("System des moralischen Bewusstseins," Düsseldorf, 1898), who reconciles the eternal laws of morality with Darwinism, and Marx with Christianity.

4. I would recommend to the reader my lecture on "La Laurea in Filosofia," (The Doctorate in Philosophy), which is appended to the above work. My friend Lombroso called it jokingly "the beheading of metaphysics."

>5. The lack of good luck was demonstrated by many articles which were written against this conception, beginning with Kautsky's strongly peppered and salted one in "Die Neue Zeit," XIII, Vol. I, pages 709-716, to that of David in "Le Devenir Social," December, 1896, pages 1059-65, not to mention the others. Incidentally, Ferri says in a footnote of his appendix to the French edition of his work "Darwin, Spencer, Marx," Paris, 1897: "Professor Labriola quite recently repeated, without proof, the assertion that socialism is not reconcilable with Darwinism (in his article on 'Le Manifeste de Marx et Engels,' in 'Le Devenir Social,' June 1895." Now it is true, that I take issue, in my essay "In Memory of the Communist Manifesto," with those who "seek in this doctrine a derivative of Darwinism, which is an analogous theory only in a certain point of view and in a very broad sense." (page 10) – But it seems to me that to deny its derivation and to admit its analogy does not mean to deny that it can be reconciled with Darwinism. Kindly see my essay on "Historical Materialism," chapter iv.

6. This philosophical thesis is, in a way, foreshadowed in the following words of Ferri, which conclude the aforementioned note: "Biological transformism is evidently founded on universal transformism, and at the same time it is the basis of economic and social transformism." Under these circumstances, Spencer is simultaneously a genius and an idiot, for he is the prince of evolution and yet he never could understand socialism!

7. Next I expect a twin-star Socrates-Marx. For Socrates was the first to discover that understanding is a process of labor, and that man knows only those things well which he can do. A book of mine on "La Dottrina di Socrate" bears the date of 1871, Naples.

8. See "Zuricher Socialdemokrat," March 22, 1883, page 1. I remark by the way that Darwin, who had died the year before, was born in 1809. Engels was born in 1820, like Spencer. They were all real contemporaries, of about the same age, and living in the same environment.

9. I have explained what I mean by "epigenetic conception" in a work entitled "The Problems of the Philosophy of History," Rome, 1887. This work is partly based on an older work of mine entitled "The Teaching of History," Rome, 1876.

10. The last named was a, music hall singer, and was, in his own cracked estimation, a precursor of Oscar Wilde.

11. I except the Philosopher Teichmüller, who studied and described only that form of active atheism, which is a religion and faith. On the other hand, the absence of all religion, which is characteristic of purely experimental sciences, corresponds to the indifference of the mind to all faiths or creeds. Atheism as an active creed was the source of that Parisian circle of writers, whose principal founders were the ingenuous Chaumette and the ambiguous Hebert.

12. "...The jurists generally do not pay any attention to this. Responsibility in the psychological meaning of the term signifies that an action is attributed to some person (to a person's will), to the extent that that person is conscious of his or her action and wills it. But since a responsibility in a psychological sense implies a responsibility in a moral sense, we must compare the will, which is the principle of action, with that sum of ideas which form the moral conscience of the person who acts. And such a comparison must clearly reveal the fact that the moral responsibility of each is reduced to an infinitesimal differentiation from individual to individual." See page 124 of my work on "Moral Liberty," Naples, 1873. This may be verified as we go along.

13. In this little volume I intended to solve exclusively such problems as were raised in my mind in various ways by the questions and objections of Sorel. The reader cannot, therefore, find any reply, either direct or indirect, in this book to the various criticisms aimed against my essays. Passing over mere carping reviews and leaving aside incidental polemics and the gratuitous impertinence of some unmannered writers, I sincerely thank Messieurs Andler, Durkheim, Gide, Seignobos, Xenopol, Bourdeau,

Bernheim, Pareto, Petrone, Croce, Gentile, and the editors of "Année Sociologique" and "Novoie Slovo," for the lengthy reviews with which they honored me. I cannot refrain from remarking that I have been the object of such opposite observations as the following: "You are too Marxian," and "You are no longer a Marxian." Both assertions are equally unfounded. The truth is simply I have first accepted the theory of historical materialism, and then I have treated it from the point of view of modern science and – according to my own intellectual temperament.

14. I would refer the reader to my work on *The Doctrine of Socrates*, Naples, 1871, especially to pages 56 to 72, where I discuss his method. I quote a few passages from this work, just to show the "Socratic element" in any form of thought.

"The primitive state of human consciousness, while typical of the primitive epoch of social development, still continues and perpetuates itself in subsequent historical periods, because it acquires a certain degree of lasting power through habit and fixes its expression in myths and primitive poetry. The successive rise and slow development of reflection ... do not wholly succeed in overcoming the diverse manifestations of the primitive and unreasoning mind. The transformation of ancient elements into consciously understood and expressed concepts does not take place until after a long process, an assiduous and incessant struggle through centuries. This process of transformation does not take place by the mere instrumentality of those internal motives of criticism and research which may be called theoretical. It is rather the necessary outcome of the "practical collisions between the will of the individual and the traditional opinions as expressed by customs." Still later it assumes the character of "a social struggle between class and class, individual and individual." In the history of this struggle, one of the elements of primitive life which offers the greatest material for contrasts ... is the language ..which assumes in later periods the appearance of a rule to which all individuals must necessarily and inevitably conform. But when men no longer agree instinctively in calling the same things just, virtuous, honest, etc., ... when they have lost faith in those abstract types of legend and myth, in which the primitive mind had deposited and expressed points of common agreement... then there rises ... in the individual the need of recovering that certainty, which came from the agreement on a natural and common criterion and he asks: What is it? This question manifests the logical interest of Socrates." (Page 59.) – "The

external sameness of a word, which preserves a certain appearance of uniformity in its constant phonetical value, helps but to increase the confusion and uncertainty. For we are first overcome by the illusion that the same words express the same meaning, but in the long run we acquire the conviction of the wide difference between our concepts and those of others. The first illusion thereby becomes so much more evident and finally it is entirely dispelled." (Page 62.) - "The question: What is it? comprises the entire inquiry into the worth of a concept, from its evident and determinable limits to the idea which we have of it. The content of a concept, which seems at first sight expressed by its simple denomination, must be in reality ascertained, in its essence and identity. And this cannot be accomplished by going from the top to the bottom. or, as we say, deductively, because we still lack the conviction of the existence of an unconditional and absolute logical value." (Page 65.) - "The point of departure, that is, the name which in its simple phonetic unity was at first the center of research, becomes ultimately the extreme limit of thought, which is placed at the end of research by making of it consciously the expression of a content due to deliberate thought. Then the concrete images, which at first arranged themselves doubtfully around a vague denomination, no longer dominate the new synthesis and are compelled to disband and seek a new location. And only the new element which is the outcome of research. or the constant content of the object of inquiry found by way of induction, can determine the co-ordination and subordination, in which the images shall exist side by side." (Page 66-67.)

15. When I first wrote these hasty outlines of the present conditions in Italy, I made them rather lengthy. Later, when I prepared these letters for the printer, I decided to make this outline shorter. For in the not very distant future I intend to publish another essay, in which I shall have occasion to speak at sufficient length of the remote causes and immediate reasons for the present conditions of our country.

16. I made this analysis, at least in a summary fashion, in the beginning of my academy course of 1897-98, which was devoted to the fall of the "Ancient Regime." In order to explain the catastrophic development of capitalist society in France, it occurred to me to preface it with a general description of what we call modern society. But the hampered or backward development of Italian life deprives many Italians of a clear vision of the capitalist world, and therefore

it suited me to give a precise statement of the causes, reasons, and manner of development of present conditions in Italy. Many Italian socialists did not see until recently that the obstacles to capitalist development are so many obstacles to the formation of a proletarian society capable of political action. To that extent they were and remained utopians, whether they liked it or not. At that time, in December, 1897, I could not foresee the hurricane, which broke loose in Italy in May, 1898. But this hurricane found me at least prepared – to understand it. And what else can me do under certain circumstances but to understand?

17. Several times I had occasion, from 1887 until now, to combat in speech and writing the attempts to reconcile Italy and the Vatican. But I never appealed in my polemics either to materialism or to atheism, and the like, as the ideologists generally do. I appealed always to the practical interests of our bourgeoisie, who, to say it in two words, cannot get along without two things at the same time, namely the Hymn of Garibaldi and the Royal March. The practical impossibility of a real conservative party is one of the characteristic marks of our country. For in order to conserve, we should have to destroy here. Moreover our priests, who are as prosaic as the other Italians, are always working for a Kingdom of Heaven on earth, manage affairs like belated humanitarians and import theology, sacred instruction, Christian democracy and confessional treasuries as articles of luxury from Germany and Austria.

18. "Italy has need of material, moral, and intellectual progress. I hope that you will see an Italy, in which the backward management of agriculture will be supplanted by machinery and chemistry on a large scale; and that you will see the generative power of electricity, which alone can make up for our lack of coal, hitched to the superior courses of rivers, or perhaps, to the waves of the sea and the winds. I look forward to a time when you will no longer see any illiterates in Italy, and therefore no longer any men who are not citizens and mobs who are not people. You will, perhaps, witness and take part in politics that will be directed in conformity with an understanding of growing culture and increasing economic power, instead of base alliances and fantastically adventurous enterprises ending in acts of prudence which seem vile." –Thus I spoke last year, in my inaugural address at the University of Rome, on November 14, addressing myself to the students. It was precisely these words which made such a stir. See "The University and the Freedom of Science," Rome, 1897, page 50.)

19. Bernstein wrote recently with great ability some ingenious articles in the NEUE ZEIT on the utopianism latent in some Marxists. And many, whom the shoe fitted, may have asked themselves: "Does that concern me?" (When I wrote this in 1897, I never dreamed that this Bernstein, whose critique I praised simply in so far as it was a critique, would be carried around the world as the greatest example of a reformist, by the salesmen of the "crisis of Marxism." – Note to the new edition.)

20. The multiplication of the centers of production and the resulting complexity of interrelations have also led to a change in commercial crises. In the place of the periodical spasms, which in Marx's time came every ten years in the typical example of England, we have now a diffuse and chronic state of depression. This has been turned into a weighty argument by those who combat the idea of catastrophes. In short, they attempt to make Marxism as a theory responsible for the errors of prevision and calculation, which Marx was liable to make, because he lived in a certain environment limited by space and time and circumstances.

21. Of one of these letters we have only fragments by indirection.

22. For information on this point see the quotations at the end of my essay on "Historical Materialism."

Appendixes

APPENDIX I

AUTHOR'S POSTSCRIPT TO THE FRENCH EDITION.

Frascati (Rome), September 10, 1898.

While Sorel has not given any sign of recommencing up to the present time, it may be that he will still do so. However, I have good reasons to fear that he will take quite a different road than I expected, if he should recommence, since now he is talking of his *Crisis of Scientific Socialism* (See his article in *Critica Sociale*, May 1, 1898, pages 134-138), which he wrote with reference to the same publications of Merlino, which he had so severely criticised the year before, in *Le Devenir Social* (October, 1897, pages 854-858).

But whether he does or does not recommence the discussion of the general problems which I treated in the foregoing letters addressed to him, I feel compelled to state at this place, in order to avoid misunderstanding and save the reader from mistakes, that I shall not follow him in his immature and premature lucubrations on the theory of value (in the *Journal des Economistes*, Paris, May 15, 1897; *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, Berlin, August, 1897, *Giornale degli Economisti*, Rome, July, 1898). Without entering into the merits of these lucubrations, a thing which cannot be done in passing, or as a pastime, I want to say that I don't care to share the indefinite company of Sorel merely for the pleasure of being quoted among the

examples for a *Crisis of Marxism* (See Th. Masarky, *Die Krise des Marxismus*, Vienna, 1898, French translation in the *Revue de Sociologie*, July, 1898, where Sorel is quoted in support of this precious literary discovery). In my opinion there are many *dramatis personae* in this alleged crisis, who either have not learned their lines very well, or are afraid to learn them, or recite them wretchedly.

The same reservation I must also make in regard to Croce, and I make it with some insistence, so far as his memorial on *The Interpretation and Critique of some Concepts of Marxism* is concerned, which was published in Naples, in 1897, and reproduced in *Le Devenir Sociale*, volume IV, February and March, 1898.

Although this work is supposed to be a *free review* of my *Socialism and Philosophy* (as the author himself says on page 3), the fact is that aside from some useful observation on historical methods and a few sagacious remarks on political tactics it contains theoretical enunciations, which have nothing to do with my publications and opinions, *but which are rather diametrically opposed to them*. Should I now engage officially in an explicit polemic against the whole dissertation, which is worthy of perusal for so many other reasons? But why should I? What good would it do? I gladly let the *free reviewer* enjoy his liberty of opinion, so long as it does not pass in the eyes of the reader for a complement of my own, and at that as a complement endorsed by myself.

However, I cannot confine myself to the general reservation, which is sufficient in the case of Sorel. I must rather take up a few general points of criticism.

I pass without further notice over the subtle and scholastic distinctions, upon which Croce insists, such as that between *pure* and *applied* science, *economic* and *moral* man, *egoism* and *utility*, *what we are* and *what we should be*, and so forth, because a tolerance of traditional scholasticism is largely a part of my profession. This scholasticism may serve to give to youthful ingenuousness its first training, but it is never a full and concrete science. How is the astronomer ever going to prevent people from saying that the sun rises and sets? I might refer to another case similar in logic and about in line with this one, treated in chapters VI and VIII of my essay on *Historical Materialism*. There I have shown, step by step, that the elements which are indispensable as a material for experimental and direct cognition, turn at a certain point into aspects, or into parts of a complex mental combination, as the case may be. But, I ask for the sake of greater clearness, how can a man, whose mind is still engrossed in such a narrow logic of first experimental cognition, undertake to grapple with the problem of Marxism, which stands above such vulgar distinctions, or, to be polite toward our adversaries, professes to stand above them? Is not this a fight with too unequal weapons? I should like to invite Croce to try his art of critique on some other field, to read critically some treatise on *Energetica*, for instance the recent one of Helm, to let Helmholtz, R. Mayer, and such men, go to the devil, and restore honor and worship the *common sense* for which *light* always shines and *heat* is always warm.

But where does Croce get the idea – and that when dealing with Marx – that aside from the various economies succeeding one another in history, of which the economy of capitalist industry is a particular case (but, mark well, the

only case which has so far produced its theory, represented by many schools and schools of schools), there exists a *pure economy*, which sheds light all of its own accord and explains all those cases, or let us say, all those forms of prosaic experience? An animal *in itself*, aside from the visible and palpable animals? And what is the content of this economy of superhistorical and supersocial man, who becomes more bothersome than all the supermen of literature and philosophy? Is it, perhaps, a naked doctrine of wants and appetites, based solely on the natural environment, but without any experience through labor, without tools, and without precise interrelations of common life and society? This conjecture might probably pass as an explanation of the psychology of prehistorical life. But no, this economy of man in himself is supposed to be perpetual and still existing. And here is where I get lost. For instance, he tells us on page 19: "I hold firmly to the economic *construction* of the hedonist principle, to *marginal utility*, to final utility, and finally to *the economic explanation of profit on capital as arising from different degrees of utility of present and future*. But this does not do away with the necessity of a *sociological* explanation of profits on capital. And this explanation, with others of the same nature, cannot be found in any other way than the one in which Marx sought it." My friend Croce is quite an insatiable fellow, and for this reason he might seem rather capricious to those who don't know him. He swallows at one month full a whole system of economics, a system which pretends to embrace all economic knowledge. This system, by the way, is well enough known in Italy, where it has prominent representatives, and even some who have continued and perfected it, such as Barone, who, it is claimed, elaborated

the theory of *distribution*. In affirming his confession of faith, which cannot help being full of gladness, seeing that it is hedonistic, he makes a special bid for admiration by his statement that he accepts the *economic explanation* (it could not well be other than economic) of "profit on capital as arising from different degrees of utility of the present and future goods." And now he might as well say that Marx was ignorant and wasted his time, when he devoted so much effort in his researches into the origin, production, and distribution of surplus value, for which he looked in an entirely different direction from Croce. For this, in the last analysis, was Marx's essential and specific contribution to economics as a critic and innovator. The blessed formula of M-M', that is, of money returned with more money, was so to say the fixed idea in the mind of the explorer Marx, the pivot of his entire research. Now Croce, having made his confession of faith as a convinced hedonist, acts like a man who has eaten and drunk his fill and wants to eat and drink some more by turning to Marx in the quest after a sociological theory, which should supplement the other one, which Croce so firmly and decisively accepts. Of course, Marx cannot tell him anything else but this: "Chase your hedonistic mincemeat to the devil. Don't ask me any questions about such nonsense. I can offer you only the direct opposite." In fact, Croce is compelled to make up a Marx more or less different from the real one, so that he may have a Marx whose principles may seem reconcilable with those undebatable ones of hedonism. In speaking of the way, in which Marx "could succeed in discovering and defining the social origin of profit, or surplus-value," he writes the following sentence: "Surplus-value, in pure economy, is a meaningless term, as the term itself shows, since surplus value is extra-value and passes out of the field of economics.

But it has a meaning, and is not absurd, as a concept of a distinction made in comparing one society with another, one fact with another, or two hypotheses with one another." And then he adds in a note: "I make amends for an error which I committed in one of my former essays, in which, while saying correctly that surplus-value is not a purely economic concept, I defined it further inexactly as a moral concept. And I should rather have said, as I say now, that surplus-value is a concept of a difference between economic sociology and applied economics, and not of pure economics. Morals has nothing to do with this, and it has no part in the entire analysis of Marx." I would advise Croce, when he writes his third memorial, to confess that he could make amends for his first error, for it was at least a generalization of an opinion commonly held by vulgar socialism, namely, that surplus-value is the thing, on account of which the exploited are protesting; but that he has no excuse for his second error, because he is no longer capable of deciphering his own thoughts. And this is true not merely because he continually confounds profit, interest, and surplus-value, but because he assumes in more than one place that there is such a thing as *a laboring society as a form in itself*. (perhaps in distinction from a society of saints in paradise? And he says: "Marx compared capitalist society with one of its own parts, isolated and elevated to an independent existence; in other words, he compared capitalist society with an economic society by itself (but only in so far as it is a laboring society)." And he continues: "The Marxian economy is one which studies the abstract laboring society."

If any one should feel the need of freeing himself from the accursed metaphysical bacillus, which is to blame for such

arguments as these, I would recommend to him as a remedy the perusal, not of the polemics of economists, not even those of Germany, who wrote their criticisms of the works of Dietzel, since these may seem doubtful, but of the *Logic of Wundt* (Vol. II, Part II, pages 499-533). In this *Logic*, by the way, you will find, on other pages than those just cited, that surplus value is precisely used as an illustration of a typical case of a social law. Would you believe it! And Wundt is not particularly kind, either to the sociologists, or to the so-called social laws.

Finally, then, this so-called pure economies, as it is called in Italy, which is always the land of emphasis or exaggeration, or this method of research and systematization, which developed on the weak, unfamiliar, or forgotten foundations laid by Gossen, Walrass, and Jevons, and is now vulgarly known by the name of the Austrian school, is merely a variety of theoretical interpretation for the same empirical facts of modern economic life which have always been the object of study of so many other schools. It is distinguished from the classic school (which was not so anti-historical as some would have us believe, and as R. Schüler showed in his work, *Die klassische Nationalökonomie*, Berlin, 1895) by a greater tendency to abstraction and generalization. It strives to make more evident the psychological stages which accompany the economic processes and relations. It uses and misuses mathematical expedients. It is not entirely superhistorical, although it often stages characters like Robinson Crusoe, whom it tries to hide afterwards under the cloak of subtle individualistic psychology. Indeed, it is so little superhistorical that it assumes from actual history two concepts and molds them into theoretical extremes, namely the liberty to work and the liberty of competition, which

have been carried to their maximum as hypotheses. For this reason it is palpable, comprehensible, and debatable on the points which it seeks to make, because it can be confronted with the experiences, of which it is often a forced and one-sided interpretation. The general public in France has now an opportunity to read a clear and full explanation of the theory of value of this school in E. Petit's book *Etude critique des différentes Théories de la Valeur*, Paris, 1897.

Returning to Croce, I do not know how to conceal my astonishment over his ridicule of Engels, who speaks of the science of economics as historical in one place, and as theoretical in another. For those who cling to words it will be enough to say, that *historical*, as applied in this case, is the opposite of the fixed and immutable idea of nature (such as the famous natural laws of vulgar economy), and *theoretical* is used as the opposite of the grossly descriptive and empirical method of knowledge. But that is not all. Every theory is but a more or less perfect presentation of the relative conditions of certain facts, which appear homogeneous, reconcilable, and connected in any field of knowledge. But all these various groups are elements of a process of development. Now, if some physiologist, after having explained the physical and mechanical theory of lung breathing, should close by saying that breathing is not dependent exclusively on lungs, and that lungs themselves are but one particular product in the general history of the growth of organisms, would you want to drag this physiologist as a defendant before the court of some other *pure* science, for instance, before the court of *purest physiology*, which studies the metaphysical entity *Life* instead of *living beings*?

In fact, Croce upbraids Marx in more than one place for not having established points of relationship between his method and the concepts of pure economy, in order to show "by a methodical exposition that the apparently most widely differing facts of the economic world are ultimately governed by the same law, or, what amounts to the same, that this law shows itself in different ways in passing through different organizations without any change on its own part, for otherwise the mode and criterion of the explanation itself would be missing." If Marx were in a position to reply to this, he would not know what to say. This is beyond Marx. Nor is it even a question any longer of such abstract generalizations of the hedonistic school as are commonly used in legitimate processes of abstraction and isolation by all sciences that seek to derive principles by starting out from an empirical basis. Here we find ourselves in the presence of an economic law which assumes the guise of an entity, as it were, and passes mysteriously through the various phases of history, in order that they may not have to part. That is the *pure possible*, which in reality turns out to be: the *real impossible*. Dühring is a back number, even if he is defended occasionally by Croce. Here it is a question of re-encountering difficulties in the preliminary conception of every scientific problem which exclude from comprehension not only Marx, but three quarters of the contemporaneous thought. The formal logic of blessed memory becomes the arbiter of knowledge. Let us remember, however, that Port-Royal "Logic" used to have an extended sale throughout France. You start out with a concept of the greatest extension and the smallest content, and by means of mechanically increased notations you arrive at a concept of the smallest extension and the greatest content. Then, if we come across a real process, such as the transition from

invertebrates to vertebrates, or from primitive communism to private property of the land, or from undifferentiated root words to differentiated verbs and nouns in the Aryan and Semitic groups, we do not regard these facts as the outcome of a slow and real process of actual development, but we take recourse to a nice and preconceived concept and write by a facile method of notation first an a, then an a', then an a'', and an a''' then an a'''' and so forth, and everything will be lovely. I think this will do on this point.

As a result, we come across the following somewhat queer statements: The society studied by Marx in *Capital* "is an ideal and diagrammatic society, deduced from a few hypotheses, which might eventually not have been realized in the course of history" (page 2). Here Marx becomes a theoretical illustrator of a sort of utopia. Then we read on page 4 that "Marx assumed outside of the camp of pure economic theory a proposition which amounts to the famous equality of value and labor." Indeed, where did he get it? Did he find it, perhaps, as some say, by "pushing to its ultimate consequences a rather unfortunate concept of Ricardo?" This Ricardo ought to be expelled in short order from the history of science, because he did not hit upon a more fortunate term. At another place (page 20, footnote) Croce takes issue with Pantaleoni, because this writer "combats Böhm-Bawerk and asks him, where the borrower of capital gets the money to pay interest with." Pantaleoni says indeed on page 301 of his *Principii di Economia Politica*: "The generative cause of interest is found in the productivity of capital in its capacity as a supplementary factor in a lucrative technical process requiring a certain time, not in the virtue of time, which would leave things as it found them." Here, and throughout one whole chapter, Pantaleoni repeats in the manner peculiar to his school, and in his own style, that

explanation of interest through the productivity of (*money*) *capital*, which came out victor as early as the 17th century in the controversies with the moralists and canonists and assumed its elementary economic form for the first time in Barbon and Massey. This is the only explanation which the economist can give, until the productivity of capital, which appears evident on the face of things is itself made an object of analysis. It is this which Marx has later carried out into the more general formula and genetic principle of surplus-value. In this same chapter, Pantaleoni engages in an able controversy against Böhm-Bawerk, who, to speak with Croce, "gives an (*economic*) explanation of profit on capital as arising from the different degrees of utility of the present and future goods." ^[1]

Would you enact for your pastime the following ideological farce: Assume on one side the legitimate expectation of the creditor, and on the other the honest promise of the debtor? Place these two psychological attributes, which speak so well for the excellence of their minds, in due evidence. Then suppose that both creditor and debtor are as perfect economic men as they must be presumed to be after they have been born with the trademark of Gossen stamped upon their brains. ^[2] Then add the notion of *abstract time*.

After thus constituting the Holy Trinity of expectation, promise, and time, attribute to it the power of converting itself into that *surplus of value* which must be contained, say, in the boots produced with the borrowed money. For the borrower, if he would pay off his debt with interest, must die of starvation, unless he can himself gain something by the transaction. But this is putting an iron collar upon science. In reality, time in economics as well as in nature is simply a measure of a process. Particularly in economics it is a measure of the processes of production and circulation (in other words, and in the last analysis, a measure of labor).

And time is also a measure of interest only to the extent that it enters into economics in this way. A time which operates as a real cause as *time in itself* is a creature of mythology. (On the mythical survivals in the representation of time read *Zeit und Weile* in the *Ideale Fragen* of Lazarus, Berlin, 1878, pages 161–232). If we are to return to mythology, then let us place that most ancient *Kronos*, whom the common Grecian people confounded with *chronos* (time), on his throne in heaven high above Mount Olympus. And if expectations, promises, and hopes are by themselves real causes of economic facts, then let us give ourselves without reserve to magic.

Either through inadvertence, or by means of a bizarre literary form, it appears as though Croce were butting his head against magic when he writes on page 16: "And if in Marx's hypothesis the commodities appear as labor jelly or crystallized labor, why might not they appear in another hypothesis as a jelly of wants, as quantities of crystallized wants?" Holy gods! Marx was not exactly a model of what one might call classic diction, especially so far as the plasticity, transparency, and continuity of his illustrations are concerned. Marx was a scientist. But his illustrations, while often bizarre, are never whimsical or facetious, and they always say something profoundly realistic. If you repeat this illustration of jelly, or paste, which, by the way, has nothing sacramental or obligatory about it, to the first shoemaker that you happen to meet, he will at once tell you that he understands it, and he may refer to his calloused hands, bent back, and perspiring brow and affirm that the boots which he produces contain a part of himself, his mechanical energy directed by his will according to a preconceived plan, which his brain activity carries out while he is engaged on his work. But so far none but wizards have believed, or pretended to believe, that we can transfer a part

of ourselves to some commodity by mere wishes, regardless of whether this commodity is produced or not.

Psychology will not stand any trifling. I would not undertake to say in so many words, how much of it should enter into the assumptions of political economy. But I am at least certain that most of the psychological concepts which hedonists and others are chasing in economics have an air of beings there on purpose to blind the unwary, a certain air of being thought out, not actually discovered, a certain air of having been imported from vulgar terminology, not critically evolved. It is another case of repeating that the craftsman should look to his tools. And I know furthermore that the whole gamut of human psychology runs from wants to labor, as it does in the case of the particular feeling of thirst, which is a desire to drink, which a baby does not yet associate with the idea of water, let alone with the movements necessary to procure it, while a provident laborer with mature will and intellect, a will in which experience and imagination, imitation and invention combine, digs a well or opens up a spring. It was the shortcoming of vulgar psychology that it attempted to reduce this living formation to a dry skeleton, and yet the economists of our day still show a great preference for the same thing in their particular lucubrations. *The psychology of labor*, which would be the crowning of determinism, remains yet to be written.

What good will this postscript do?, some readers may ask. Just this much: I am not the shield bearer of Marx, I am open to every critique, I am myself critical in everything I say, and therefore I do not forget the sentence that *to understand means to overcome*. But I am disposed to add that *to overcome one must have understood*.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE FRENCH EDITION

Rome, December 31, 1898.

This little booklet of mine, as the postscript also shows, was scheduled to appear in Paris in September of this year. Accidental causes retarded its publication.

In the meantime Sorel has delivered himself body and soul to the *crisis of Marxism*, treats of it, expounds it, comments on it with gusto wherever he gets an opportunity, for instance in the *Revue Parlementaire* of December 10, pages 597–612 (where he converts this *crisis* into one of *socialism*) and in the *Rivista Critica del Socialismo*, Rome, Number I, pages 9–21. And he establishes and canonizes it still more in his preface to Merlino's *Formes et Essence du Socialisme*. We are ultimately threatened with a congress of thinking secessionists.

There we have evidently a war of the Fronde before us!

What was I to do? Begin all over again? Write an anti-Sorel after I had written an avec-Sorel? I did not yield to the temptation. It is true that I had named my composition of a somewhat unusual make-up a Discourse. But a man discourses when he feels like it, not when he is commanded.

I merely ask the reader to look at the dates of these letters, or these little monographs in loose style, which I addressed to Sorel. These dates run from April 20, to September 15, 1897. I was writing to that Sorel. not to this new one. I was addressing the old Sorel, whom I had known in the pages

of *Le Devinir Social*, who had introduced me to the French readers in the quality of a Marxist, who had sent me letters full of fine observations and interesting critical reflections. It is true, he was full of doubts, and seemed at times impregnated with the spirit of a *frondeur*, but when I wrote with a mind intent on him, I did not think, in 1897, that he would so shortly become the *herald of a war of secession*. O how glad it will make the small lights of intellectualism, or those who need a testimonial to prove that they are not cowards! Sorel leaves at least a little ray of hope for us, when he writes: "I and some friends of mine shall try hard to utilize the treasures of reflexion and hypotheses collected by Marx in his books. This is the best way to derive advantage from a work of genius which has remained unfinished." (*Revue Parlementaire*, same issue, page 612). Well, there are thus many auguries for the new year, which commences tomorrow, in this benign and pitiful work of salvage, which, by the way, neither I nor a good many others like myself feel in need of.

I feel no rancor, but I certainly cannot help feeling some mortification. In offering these pages of somewhat unconventional composition to the French reading public, I fear that intelligent readers – and France has a greater abundance of them than any other country – will say to me: You are a pretty tolerable conversationalist, but a very poor teacher. You open your didactic dialogue with a friend like an erudite man, and now this friend runs over to the other side!

Is it not so, Mr. Sorel? Well, then, let us accommodate all parties. This dialogue has been only a monologue. I wish it were otherwise.

PREFACE OF G. SOREL

TO THE ESSAYS ON THE MATERIALISTIC CONCEPTION OF
HISTORY,

By Antonio Labriola, French Translation, Paris, Giard et Briere
1897.

Contemporaneous socialism presents a character of originality which has struck all the economists. It owes this character to the fact that it is inspired by the ideas enunciated by Karl Marx on *Historical Materialism*. Wherever these ideas have deeply penetrated into the consciousness of people, the Socialist Party is strong and alive otherwise it is weak and divided into sects.

The Marxian theses have generally not been well understood in France by the writers, who occupy themselves with social questions. Mr. Bourguin, professor at the university of Lille, wrote in 1892 ^[3]: "The thinkers among our socialists do not accept the blighting doctrine of their master, from which the idea of Right and Justice is so rigorously banished, without reservation. It is a strange garment, which they wear with little ease and which they will no doubt touch up some day in order to fit it better to their own figure." The writer was referring to an essay published in 1887 by Mr. Rouanet, in the *Revue Socialiste*, under the title: *Le matérialisme ?conomique de Marx et le socialisme fran?ais*.

Nearly all those who speak of historical materialism know this doctrine solely through this essay of Mr. Rouanet. This writer has occupied for a long time an important place in the advanced parties of France. He informed his readers that he had made a profound study of Marx and that he had devoted

himself to exhaustive researches, in order to understand Hegel. One would naturally think him to be well informed. ^[4]

Before beginning the perusal of the exposition, which Mr. Labriola gives in excellent, but very concise, terms of historical materialism, the French reader should guard himself against widely disseminated prejudices. For this reason I think it necessary to show here, how false and futile the *great objections* against the Marxian doctrine are. We must, therefore, pause to consider the ideas enunciated by Mr. Rouanet in 1887.

The prejudices existing among us have to a large extent a sentimental origin. Mr. Rouanet has gone to a lot of trouble to show that the Marxian doctrines run counter to the *French genius*. We hear this reproach repeated every day. In what consists this antagonism?

The problem of modern development, considered from the materialist point of view, rests upon three questions: 1) Has the proletariat acquired a clear consciousness of its existence as an indivisible class? 2) Has it enough strength to begin the struggle against the other classes? 3) Is it in a position to overthrow, together with the capitalist organisation, the entire system of traditional ideologies? It is for sociology to reply.

If a man adopts the principles of Marx, he can say that there is no longer any social question. He can even say that socialism (in the ordinary and historical meaning of the term), is outgrown. In fact, research then applies no longer to what *society should be*, but to *what the proletariat can accomplish* in the present class struggle.

This manner of looking at things does not suit the *French genius*, at least not those who have the pretension to claim that they represent it. In our country, the progressive parties contain an appalling number of men of genius, whose talent present society is misunderstanding, who have in their hearts an infallible oracle of Justice, who have devoted their lives to the elaboration of marvelous plans for insuring the happiness of humanity. These gentlemen do not wish to step down from their fastidious tripods and mingle with the crowd. They are made to lead, not to become the co-operators in a *proletarian task*. They intend to defend the rights of intelligence against those audacious ones who lack respect for the liberal Olympus, and who do not take sufficient account of *mentality*.

Add to this that these rare spirits have a naive faith in French supremacy, in the leading role of France^[6], that they have the superstition of revolutionary phraseology, and that they practice with devotion the cult of great men. They cannot forgive Marx, Engels, and especially Lafargue for lacking in respect for their own revered idols.

I do not belong to those who have a great admiration for French genius, so understood. Besides, I have reason to believe that this sort of French genius is not the kind possessed by those of my countrymen who devote themselves to scientific research and do not feel the need of posing as the spiritual leaders of the people.

The great reproach advanced against the doctrine of Marx from a scientific point of view is that of leading to fatalism. According to Rouanet, it is very close to Hegelian idealism, divested of its "nebulous transcendentalism."^[6] It has "the

same fatal succession of events, which are necessary phases of a process not enlightened by human will, and even a cult of force, that sombre god of iron, who is the blind instrument of the laws of the great Fate destined to fulfillment in spite of everything." One might make many objections to the idea which this French author makes for himself of the philosophy of Hegel. But a superficial perusal of *Capital* suffices to show that Marx never thought of the evolutionary apocalypse so generously attributed to him.

Determinism assumes that changes are automatically connected with one another, that simultaneous phenomena form a compact mass having a determined structure, that there are iron laws insuring a *necessary order* between all things. Nothing of the kind is found in Marx's doctrine. Events are considered from an empirical point of view. It is their interconnection which results in the historical law that determines the temporary mode of their generation. The demand is no longer that we should recognize in the social world a system analogous to the astronomical. We are only asked to recognise that the intermingling of causes produces sufficiently regular and characteristic periods to permit of their becoming objects for an intelligent understanding of facts.

Marx gives a very good view of the multiplicity of causes which have produced modern capitalism. Nothing proves that these causes must appear together at a determined date. Their fortuitous co-existence engenders the transformation of industry and changes all social relations.

But some insist and say that, according to Marx, all political, moral, esthetic phenomena are determined (in the strict

meaning of the word) by economic phenomena. What can such a formula signify? To say that one thing is determined by another without at the same time giving a precise description of the way in which they join is to utter one of those absurdities, which have made the vulgarisers of vulgar materialism so ridiculous.

Marx is not responsible for this caricature of his historical materialism. The fact that all sociological manifestations, in order to be made clear, must be placed upon their economic basis does not imply that an understanding of the basis obviates an understanding of the superstructure. The connections between the economic underpinning and the products resting upon it are very variable and cannot be translated into any general formula. This cannot be called determinism, since there is nothing to be determined.

Mr. Rouanet forms a very singular conception of the Marxian doctrine. He assumes that the means of production, the economic organisation, and the social relations, are beings, which succeed one another like palaeontological species by the mysterious road of evolution, and that the entire history of humanity is deduced from them by laws, which he does not know any more than I do, and which Marx has never divulged. Historical materialism would thus have an idealist basis, namely the fatal succession of the forms of production! That would certainly be a very singular conception.

A distinguished professor, Mr. Petrone^[1], agrees with Mr. Rouanet in maintaining that historical materialism fails when applied to the Christian Revolution. I believe, on the contrary, that the theories of Marx throw a certain light

upon this question, by showing the reasons which prevent the historian from fully understanding what took place. We cannot discuss the problem scientifically, because we lack the elements necessary for clearing it up. The Italian author places himself upon the Catholic standpoint. Mr. Rouanet invents a fantastic history. The scientists should keep still and wait until the monuments shall have revealed to us the economic conditions of the primitive church.

Mr. Bourguin wants to know ^[8] whether we must not count among the active forces "the more or less developed consciousness among the laborers of being objects of alleged exploitation." But is not the development of class-consciousness the pivot of the social question, in the eyes of Marx? One needs but to have a mediocre knowledge of the works of the great socialist philosopher to know that.

Can Marx be accused of having given too little attention to human mentality, he, who has shown the importance of the least creations of inventive genius? Nowhere does intelligence appear in such strong relief as in technology, whose historical role is placed in the front rank in a striking manner, in *Capital*. I know very well that the representatives of *French genius* have but little esteem for machine builders, who are incapable of declaiming formidable cantatas on the Rights of Man from the speaker's platform. But simple mortals believe with Mr. Bourdeau ^[9] that the steam engine "has exerted more influence on social organisation than all the systems of philosophy."

Does this mean that intellectual and moral products are without historical efficacy, as some pretend to be the result of historical materialism? Not at all. Such products possess the faculty of detaching themselves from their natural cradle

and assuming a mystical form, "as though they were independent beings able to communicate with mankind and one another." ^[10] After they have thus freed themselves, they are liable to enter into the most diverse imaginary combinations. No great revolution has ever taken place without producing many insistent illusions. It is again Marx who tells us so. But this statement goes against the grain of our men of progress. They don't like the idea of having ascribed to fantasy what they ascribe to reason. For to do so, means to lack respect for all the Titans of the present and past.

In his introduction to his translation of the selected works of Vico, Michelet wrote: "The word of the new science is that humanity is of its own making.... Social science dates from the day on which this great idea was expressed for the first time. Hitherto humanity thought that it owed its progress to the *hazards of individual genius*.... History was a sterile spectacle, at most a fantasmagoria."

How is history made? Engels tells us in the following passage: "The innumerable conflicts of individual wills and individual agents in the realm of history reach a conclusion which is on the whole analogous to that in the realm of nature, which is without definite purpose. The ends of the actions are intended, but the results which follow from the actions are not intended, or in so far as they appear to correspond with the end desired, in their final results are quite different from the conclusion wished." ^[11] This thesis is admitted by scientists without any difficulty. But it is full of despair for the great men whose genius is flowing over. Their plans cannot be realised as they have conceived them! And yet these plans are so well laid, that one cannot touch them without interfering with their efficacy and assailing Justice, whose authorised delegates these gentlemen are.

But let us leave aside all these vulgar objections and take up what constitutes in my eyes the vulnerable part of the doctrine, that part which the French critics have not yet examined.

Many scientists are disposed to admit the value of historical materialism as a training of the mind, and to recognise that the Marxian theses furnish useful hints for the historian of institutions.^[12] But it remains to find out what is the metaphysical basis of this theory. It serves no end to say that this search is superfluous, that we may follow the same method which was so successful in psychology after the discussion of the soul had been abandoned. But where is the metaphysician who remains entirely indifferent to the metaphysical problem ? Every one has his own hypothesis. And these hypotheses, often adroitly dissimulated, distinguish the various schools. Many mistakes have been made by a hasty application of historical materialism. Nearly all these mistakes may be traced to agnosticism, which the authors professed and which really concealed imperfectly elaborated working hypotheses.

On the other hand, if we examine the applications made by Marx, we find that he employed a great many psychological principles, which have not been generally enunciated in a scientific form. To the extent that we advance we will see the necessity of stepping forward from this provisional position and cutting solid timber for the support of historical relations.

Here, then, are two great blanks. The disciples of Marx should make efforts to complete the work of their master. This master seems to have feared nothing so much as the idea of leaving behind a system of too great rigidity and firmness. He understood that a theory is at the end of its career, when it is completed, and that the condition of all metaphysical science is to leave a wide door for further

development. The prudence of Marx was extreme. He did not try to terminate a single theory. Recent discussions show that he had not said his last word on value and surplus-value. How blind are, therefore, the critics who accuse the disciples of Marx of wishing to lock up the human thought in a ring fence built by their master!

In this work of perfection we must follow the example set by Marx and be prudent. The time has not come for the enunciation of the metaphysics and the definition of the psychology of historical materialism, so long as its basis has been studied only in a limited way.

Men of *great hearts* say that the spirit cannot rest content in this state of expectation, when it is a question of Morality and Right. Superficial critics are not slow in denouncing the absence of ideals, without asking themselves whether a reasonable theory of ethics can be independent of metaphysics, and whether the latter is worth anything without a scientific basis. One may admit the historical and social value of moral teaching^[13] without having the pretension of imposing upon it rules, laws, and postulates evolved out of the imagination. It seems rather that by giving to ethics a basis of metaphors, insufficient psychological theories, or declamations on *Nature*, the effect of this teaching is considerably curtailed. To bring morality down to earth, to divest it of all fantasy, does not mean to deny it. On the contrary it means to treat it with the respect due to the work of reason. Is it a denial of science to leave aside the speculations on the essence of things and to stick to realities?

Capital is full of appreciation for morality. It is, therefore, rather paradoxical to reproach Marx with having carefully avoided all consideration of Justice. Every one has his own interpretation for this word. Mr. Bourguin, in the above cited passage, stands on the ancient theory of a *moral sense*.

But this theory is out of date. Mr. Rouanet speaks ^[14] of "a natural justice, conforming to the law of social development, which is the free solidarity of the diverse parties constituting humanity as a whole and coming closer and closer together." This is evidently what Marx called "Humbug of juridical ideology dear to the French democrats and socialists. ^[15] The fact that the two above-mentioned authors are in agreement in imputing a certain moral character to the doctrine of Marx proves only that they do not find in *Capital* an expression of their personal theories on morality, which, moreover, have no value.

It is in the name of the metaphysics of morals that Jaurès took part in this debate and proposed to reconcile the materialist and idealist points of view. Nothing seemed easier to him. He affirms, first of all, that the disciples of Marx recognise the existence of a "direction in the economic and human movement." He asks that he be granted as an indisputable axiom that there is in history not only "a necessary evolution, but an appreciable direction and an ideal sense." To admit these premises would be to explain history by means of idealism, and only idealism. It would be a rejection of the doctrine of Marx. But if that is so, how can he reconcile them? Very simple. If we condemn all the ideas of Marx, we proclaim the author as a great man, as great a man as his disciples can desire. ^[16]

If we admit everything the famous orator demands, we shall be convinced that the "word Justice has a meaning even in the materialist conception of history!" This conclusion is true, only it has a different meaning from that of Mr. Jaurès. "Humanity seeks itself," he says, "and affirms itself, no matter how different may be its environment... It is the same sigh of suffering and hope which comes from the mouth of the slave, the serf, and the proletarian. It is the

immortal breath of humanity, which is the soul of the thing we call Right." Marx certainly never thought of that!

I have said enough to make it plain that historical materialism has been almost unknown in France. The book of Mr. Labriola brings the French readers in touch with new regions, through which the learned Italian professor conducts us with great ability.

The publication of this work marks a date in the history of Socialism. It is, indeed, the first time that an author of the Latin tongue studies in an original and profound manner one of the philosophical foundations on which contemporaneous socialism rests. The work of Mr. Labriola occupies a marked place in the libraries, by the side of the classic books of Marx and Engels. It constitutes a methodical elucidation and development of a theory, which the masters of new socialist thought have never treated in a didactic manner. His book is, therefore, indispensable for those who wish to understand proletarian ideas.

More than the works of Marx and Engels, the present work addresses itself to the foreign public with a taste for social problems. The historian will find in these pages substantial and precious hints for the study of the genesis and transformation of institutions.

G. SOREL.
Paris, December 1896.

Appendix 4

CONCERNING THE CRISIS OF MARXISM

An Article Published by Antonio Labriola in the *Rivista Italiana Di Sociologia*, Volume III, 1899.

I refer here to a book, which is neither brief, nor easy to read, written by Th. G. Masaryk, professor at the Bohemian university of Prague, and published quite recently. How voluminous it is may be seen at the foot of this page ^[17], where I give its title in full. I do not intend however, to write a mere review of this book. And if it should be said that the expression of a personal opinion on a book requires its review, I would reply that this one would have to assume the proportions and make-up of an article.

My name, and the title of my article, might lead one to infer that I was about to engage in party polemics. The reader may rest in peace. I shall not confound the pages of the *Rivista italiana di sociologia* with the columns of a political daily.

I will merely say in passing that the great uproar made curiously enough by the political press of Italy, whether daily or otherwise periodical, over the alleged death of Socialism on account of a so-called *Crisis of Marxism* appears to me as one more proof of that organic national vice which one might call the *right to ignorance*. Not one of those grave diggers of Socialism, who jumbled the most incompatible writers indiscriminately together in order to get a crowd around their crisis, thought of asking himself these simple

and honest questions: May the critique raised in other countries in matters of Marxism have any direct bearing upon Italy? Had, or has, this theory any solid footing and established spread in our country? And finally, has the Italian Socialist Party sufficient strength, and enough adherents among the masses, and does it carry within itself such development, complex conditions and political aims as reveal the precise and clear marks of a stable and durable proletarian organisation, so that a thorough discussion of the theory will amount to a discussion of things rather than of words? And, to go more to the bottom of the matter, can any one tell whether the whole thorny path of economic development has already been traveled, which led to the establishment of the so-called capitalist system in other countries, and of which Marxism is the critical reflex?

Whoever would have asked these and similar questions, would have come to the honest conclusion that there cannot be any crisis of a thing.... which does not yet exist.

It may be, or rather it is certain, that none of these necrologists of Socialism knew that the phrase of a *Crisis of Marxism* was coined and set in circulation by professor Masaryk, whose lot it was (quite unknown to him, as happens frequently to strangers in matters concerning Italy) to bring to our country a new and unexpected contribution to the *fortune of words*. But this is a fact. The expression – Crisis of Marxism – was invented by Masaryk in numbers 177 to 179 of the *Zeit* of Vienna, in February 1898, and these articles of his were later on gathered in one pamphlet ^[18] and published under the date of March 10. And mark well, the author of this discovery in literature did not have in mind to declare that Socialism was dying, but merely that it seemed

to him he was observing a crisis *within* Marxism. In fact, he concluded as follows: "I would admonish the enemies of Socialism not to nurse any vain hopes for their own parties on account of this crisis of Marxism, which may rather strengthen Socialism considerably, if its leaders will frankly criticise its fundamentals and overcome their defects. Like every other social reform party, Socialism has its fountain of life in the manifest imperfections of the present social order, in its injustice, immorality, and above all in the material, moral, and intellectual misery of the great masses of all nations." ^[19]

On those 24 pages, which were too few for the importance of the subject, the data concerning the *crisis* – so far as it related to the German social-democracy, and with a few references to French and English literature – were collected, enumerated, defined, in a rather hasty manner... But what avails it to speak of the little work of March 10, 1898, since these 24 pages have become 600 in the book of March 27, 1899, 600 mind you, which in turn is "too much enough," as a Neapolitan would say, both as concerns the substance of the subject treated and the patience of the average reader?

Professor Masaryk is a positivist. This term has in Italy an exceedingly wide and elastic meaning, but for him, as a professed philosopher, it means in so many words that he is standing on the line which leads from Comte to Spencer... or to Masaryk himself. I am not in a position to accord to him all the admiration which is, perhaps, due to him. For he has the habit of writing in Bohemian, which is rather inconvenient for me. Hitherto I had not read anything by him except his *Concrete Logic* in its German translation. Nor would I split hairs about the subtle meaning of his

expressions, because this book has been translated by Mr. Kalandra into a rather bureaucratic German. The work as a whole, as the author himself states in his preface, must not be considered under the aspect of composition and style. It is an ultra-academic production, with the customary division into introduction and sections. There are five of the latter, followed by a recapitulation, and they are subdivided into chapters, with subheadings of A, B, C, and so on, down to a division of the subdivisions into 162 paragraphs, with various bibliographies in a loose and in a concentrated order, and with a truly wonderful index, which makes you think of a lot of things which you don't find in the book on turning to it, and with the inevitable table of contents. In short, it is a book of comprehensive and instructive lessons, poised in tone, with occasional touches of lightness, and it is edited after the model of an encyclopedia. However, not all lessons can be referred to the same date. While this book, originally written in the Bohemian language and announced in the small booklet of the preceding year which may take its place for those who don't care to read 600 pages, was being printed in the German language, the now famous book of Bernstein (quoted in a footnote on page 590 of Masaryk's book) appeared, and the author felt the need of accommodating his friends with it in another place. ^[20]

The achievement of Masaryk is truly in a class by itself. He is not a socialist, he has an extensive knowledge of socialist literature, he is not a professional adversary of Socialism, he judges it from on high, in the name of *Science*. He was a member of the Reichsrath of Cisleithania, but is at the same time a nationalist and progressist, which, so far as I know, is never found as a combination in Young Czechs. At present, it seems to me, he is keeping himself aloof from politics. He

publishes a review which is somewhat similar to our *Nuova Antologia*. He is a scientist by profession, that is, a great reader and accurate reporter of what he reads, to the point of the minute detail of the smallest particle. And this is the first and principal defect of his book. The book discusses an infinite number of things, but it never gets to the real point. It is as though the author's view were obstructed by printed matter and obscured by the shadows of the writers, through whom he wends his way with so much obsequiousness for all, like a man whose eyes have lost all sense of perspective. Isn't it the principal duty of one, who undertakes to study the fundamentals of Marxism, to be in a position to answer the following question on the strength of a study of actual conditions: "Do you, or don't you, believe in the possibility of a transformation of the societies of the most advanced countries, which would do away with the causes and effects of class-struggles?" In view of this general problem the question of the mode of transition into that desired or foreseen future society is a matter of secondary importance. For that mode of transition is not subject to our judgment and assuredly does not depend on our definitions. So far as this general proposition is concerned, it is, I will not say a matter of indifference, but certainly of subordinate value, to know what part of the thought and opinions (many confound these two, unfortunately) of Marx and of his direct followers, and interpreters agree, or does not agree, with the present and future conditions of the proletarian movement. It is not necessary that a man should be a passionate partisan of historical materialism in order to understand that theories have a value as theories, that is, in so far as they throw light upon a certain order of facts, but that as mere theories they are not the *cause of anything*.

But Mr. Masaryk is also a doctrinaire, that is, a believer in the power of ideas, in other words, an academic thinker, for whom everything consists in a struggle for the general world conception. We need not be surprised, then, that he rejects with sovereign contempt the expression *mass instinct*. This critique, which derives from Science all its assumption of an impartial judgment of the practical struggles of life, and which ignores the guidance of thought by the natural course of history, is and remains essentially fallacious, because it keeps turning around Marxism, without ever touching its nerve, which is the general conception of the historical development from the point of view of the proletarian revolution.

In stopping to define Masaryk's particular achievement, I think I will pay him with Italian courtesy for his ignorance of my writings bearing upon his argument. If he had ever read them, he would, perhaps, see that one can even nowadays be an advocate of historical materialism, making allowance, of course, for the new historical and social experiences made in the meantime and with such a revision of concepts as follows naturally in the development of thought. And that one can be so without descending to a controversy dealing with minute points and coming to blows with the party press, and without proclaiming one's self as a discoverer or author of a crisis of Marxism. Theories which are in a process of development and progress do not lend themselves to erudite and philological treatment, such as may be accorded to past forms of thought, and to the things transmitted to us by tradition and called antique. But the intellectual temperaments of men differ so much from one another! Some – and these are few – present the public with the results of their own work and do not feel obliged to append

to it an intimate history of their readings down to a portrait of the pen used by them. Others – and these are the majority – feel the pressing need of putting the whole fruit of their reading into print. They are fastidious guardians of their notes and will not let the least part of their labors get lost, be it for the present or the future. Professor Masaryk, who stretches the discussion of some momentary proposition over 600 pages, is one of these. The proposition is simply this: What can an outsider make of Marxism at present, seeing that it is being discussed within the party? Professor Masaryk, who has read so much, cannot help considering also Marxism according to the sacramental formulas of philosophy, religion, ethics, politics. and so on to infinity. And the curious part of it is that he, who has so much deference for the bureaucracy of the universities and for the pigeon holes of scientific fetishism, declares finally that Marxism is a syncretic system (incidentally all through his book, and explicitly on page 587)! It had seemed to me that this theory was just exactly the reverse of syncretic, and rather so pronouncedly unitarian that it tends not only to overcome the doctrinaire antagonism between science and philosophy, but also the more obvious one between theory and practice. But Mr. Masaryk is what he is. So let us follow him through his pigeon holes.

We gladly leaves to others the pastime of occupying themselves with Socialism as a tendency to legal reforms after the manner of A. Menger. He declares that he does not interfere directly in questions of economics (in which, as a matter of fact, he seems to be lame on both feet.) He confines himself to discussing above all the philosophy of Marx, which exists even though it has not been expounded in a special work written for that purpose. And he studies on

600 pages the crisis so far as it is strictly "scientific and philosophical." (Page 5.) Do not expect, therefore, that our author should give you a concrete examination of actual conditions in the economic world from first hand study, nor a practical and comprehensive manual of social legislation. Whether the proletarianisation of the masses continues or not, whether Marx's theory of value is exact or not, these and other related questions, while of the greatest importance, do not interest him as a philosopher. (Page 4.) The practical result of his studies is merely to advise the socialists to stick to the program of Engels in 1895, that is, to parliamentary tactics. This is what they are actually doing all over the world, and, in my humble opinion, for the simple reason that they cannot do anything else without proving themselves either insane or senseless. However, Masaryk reinforces his advice with the admonition that the socialists should also drop the Marxian ideologies! Once more, then, it is not the natural course of the political changes of civilized Europe which has induced the socialists to change their tactics (the author could not tell us how long the present tactics will, or may, last), but it is the *ideas* which change and must change. Everything is merged in the struggle for the *Weltanschauung* (world conception) – see especially pages 586 to 592 – as is natural in a writer who holds so closely to the sacramental concepts of scientific classification (Page 4) and to the super-eminent position of philosophy.

The philistine, in his professorial subspecies, reveals himself here fully in his true nature. To be intimately familiar with socialist literature, and yet ignore the innermost soul and meaning of Socialism! If this meaning is once grasped, it is a matter of course that it changes scientific orientation completely, and changes also the position of science in the

economy of our interests. But Masaryk never gets so far, because he would have to leave the confines of definitions in order to do that. For this reason his book, while full of conscientious information and free from professional contempt of Socialism, amounts in intent and effect to an enormous plea of Positivism against Marxism!

Two observations occur to me at this point. The foregoing statement will sound strange to many in Italy, where it is customary to designate anything and everything by the term Positivism. On the other hand, I have said frequently that that mode of conceiving of life and the world which is understood by the name of historical materialism, has not come to perfection in the writings of Marx and Engels and their immediate followers. And I declare now more pointedly that the development of this theory proceeds still slowly, and will perhaps proceed at the same gait for a good while.

But such books as Masaryk's serve no good purpose. It is indeed an accumulation of objections in the name of Positivism, but not in the name of an authentic and direct revision of the problems of historical science, not in the name of actual political questions. The so-called crisis is not made the object of publicist examination, nor of sociological study, but is rather a blank space, or a pause, in which the author proceeds to deposit, or recite, his philosophical protests.

One essay, which is neither useless nor devoid of interest, is devoted to the first formation of the thought of Marx (pages 17–89). But the result is rather scant. "Marx ultimately found in the continuous mutation of the social structure the

historical reason of Communism, a something which imposes its sway of its own necessity. – According to Marx, philosophy is the natural copy of the world process. – Communism follows from history itself. –The materialism of Marx is a historical materialism.–" Such propositions as these, which reproduce at one stroke of the pen the fundamental thought of the author in question, should induce our critic, it seems to me, to examine the fundamentals of these conceptions, in order to overthrow them, if he can. And what does Mr. Masaryk do instead? A few lines further along he writes: "His philosophy, and that of Engels, bear the imprint of eclecticism." And thereupon he treats us under letter D of heading II to a Russian salad of controversial opinions of Bax, K. Schmidt, Stern, Bernstein, Plekanoff, Mehring, so far as they have discussed the question whether this philosophy, from a Marxist point of view, is, or is not, reconcilable with a return to Kant, Spinoza, or others. And he never remembers the poet who was present at the foundation of the university of Prague, in order to exclaim with him: Poor and nude goest thou, philosophy!

Somewhat disconnected is the treatment accorded by the author to historical materialism (pages 92-168). He speaks first of the different definitions and their clash, and comes finally to a critique founded on that old bore, the doctrine of factors, which he hides more or less under a rather doubtful and uncertain sociological and psychological phraseology. Lastly, the idea of an objectively unitarian conception of history is repugnant to our author, and it frequently happens that he confounds the explanation of historical mass effects primarily by way of changes in the economic foundation with the curt and crude explanation of some particular

historical fact out of particular and concrete economic conditions. We need not wonder then when we see he considers Marx as a sort of deteriorated Comte, who becomes an unconscious follower of Schopenhauer and accepts the primacy of the will, which doctrine, however, contradicts the sacred trinity of intellect, feeling, and will. Likely enough poor Marx did not know that man had not only an intellect, but also a liver, which is so much more surprising as he was himself suffering from liver trouble! Perhaps this is a good reason why he did not see that surplus-value is an eminently ethical concept!

A university professor who treats his subject matter as he does his profession, may easily be tempted to subject a certain author to the test of all the various doctrines which he, as a critic, is in the habit of studying and handling. And then it happens through a strange illusion of the erudite, that the terms of comparison, which are in the subjective mind of the critic, become surreptitiously terms of actual derivation. This happened also to Masaryk. Here we find him, just when he is right in the midst of his attempted comparisons, contradicting himself by the sententious statement (page 166) : "In fact, Marx molded into a formula something which was in the air, as the saying is, and for this reason I have not attributed much weight to particular influences on his mental development." Therefore, I would say, start all over again and try the opposite way. In the author whom you criticise this opposite process took place, for he rose from a critique of economy and from the fact of the class struggle to a new conception of history and by the same way further to a new orientation on the general problems of cognition (and, mind you, not by a modification of the thing which is technically called historical research).

But you do violence to the facts. You turn them upside down and you follow a course which is not the one chosen by the object of your critique. But of course, you, a professional philosopher, descend from the altitude of definitions to the particular thing called historical materialism. And with all due obsequiousness to red tape, you thus come to the theory of the class struggle as one comes to a corollary in logic.

In this case, likewise, a faithfulness to material exposition renders all the more conspicuous the incapacity for an intimate and vivid understanding. We meet here and there with a few useful remarks concerning the insufficient precision of such terms as bourgeoisie, proletariat, etc., and more valuable ones concerning the impossibility of reducing all of present society to those famous two classes, seeing that it is of a more complex and differentiated composition. In spite of all this he shows a singular inaptitude for grasping so simple an idea as the following: Seeing that social life is so intricate, the intentions of some individual may all be erroneous. This fact induces our author to say that Marxism reduces individual consciousness down to a pure illusion. It goes against his grain to believe that economic laws should be subject to a natural process of development. Well, then, let him prove that the succession of historical events can be changed by arbitrary acts. After claiming a spontaneousness (what is that?) of the forces which give an impulse to history, and proclaiming the aristocracy of the philosophical spirit, the author tells us that Marxian determinism is identical with fatalism, and then he confesses (page 234): "I explain the world and history theistically." Thank God!

Now we come at last to the main question, that is, the explanation of the capitalistic world (pages 235-313) and the

critique of Communism and the development of civilization (pages 313–386). This is the essential point for socialists, and they cannot be combatted on any other ground. But the author descended from the heights, and so let it be. I cannot deny – to begin with his conclusions – that there is some justification in his remarks about our excessive primitiveness and simplicity, especially as concerns the attempt of Engels to outline in brief the main phases of the history of civilization. The origin of the state, or of class society, by means of dominion and authority, assuming the presence of private property and the monogamic family, has various modes of development in particular and concrete historical cases, and no facile explanation will hold good in the attempt to make too simple diagrams plausible. It may happen that socialists will ordinarily, in everyday argument, see the intricacies of history in too simple a light and reduce them too much in size. This leads them to smooth the intricacies of present society too much into the same likeness, in an arbitrary manner. It is also certain that it will not do to refer continually to *the negation of the negation*, for this is not an instrument of research, but only a comprehensive formula, valid, indeed, but *post factum*. It is furthermore certain that Communism, that is, a more or less remote approach of present society to a new form of production, will not be the mental fruit of subjective dialectics. For this reason I believe – to be courteous in the use of arms against my adversaries – that there is but one sole mode of seriously combatting Socialism, and that is to prove that the capitalist system, for the present at least, has enough adaptability to reduce, for an indefinite time, all proletarian movements at bottom to meteoric agitation, without ever resulting in an ascending process, which will finally eliminate class rule with wage slavery. This is the gist

of the critical efforts of such schools as that of Brentano and his followers. But this does not seem to be the kind of bread that is suitable for the teeth of Mr. Masaryk, who reveals all his inaptitude for grasping the economic connection of his subject matter, especially in the chapter which he devotes to a criticism of surplus-value. (Pages 250–313.)

After wending his way through a mass of references concerning the vexatious question of the alleged fundamental difference between the first and third volumes of *Capital*, Masaryk repudiates the theory of surplus value as inexact, and then he affirms that Marx could not take his departure from the concept of utility, because his extreme objectivity prevented him from taking psychological considerations into account! Then he proceeds to give his own opinion as to the position which political economy should occupy among the sciences, assuming it to be dependent on the premises of general sociology. He rejects the idea that political economy is a historical science and reaffirms his belief in a pretended science of economics which, without being confounded with ethics, shall embrace the whole man, and not only man as a worker. He advances some sophistry on the impossibility of finding a measure of labor, so far as it, in its turn, is to serve as a measure of value, and considers surplus-value as a mental concept derived from the hypothesis of two classes engaged in a mutual struggle. By means of many subterfuges he writes an apology of the capitalist so far as he is enterprising, that is, a worker and manager. And while he fulminates against the parasitic class and against dishonest commerce, he demands ethics which shall teach to each his duty and place. He is kind enough to admit that Marx discovered the importance of small laborers, even though he is said to have fallen into

such little errors as Masaryk notes, for instance, the reduction of complex labor to simple labor, and above all the belief in a class-struggle when there is really nothing but a struggle between individuals.

But if it is so easy to reduce historical materialism to powder, if class-struggles as a dynamic of history are but an erroneous generalization of ill-understood facts, if the expectations of facts, if the expectations of Communism are practically utopian, if the theories of *Capital* are so obviously false, and if all the fundamentals of Marxism have now been destroyed, why does Masaryk take the pains to write another two hundred pages on rights, ethics, religion, and so forth, that is, on the systems which are called ideological? For my part, I should have been satisfied with the statements made, for instance, on pages 509-519, which fill a sort of blank intervening between the net work of paragraphs. There he tries to come to some final summing up, but through defects in his style there is too little concentration of thought and the summary lacks conciseness. This attempted summary gives a sort of a survey of the characteristics of Marxism and thereby brings the thesis of the author into a stronger relief.

Marx – this is the gist of this summary – marks the extreme limit of the reaction against subjectivism, so far as he regards nature as the primary and consciousness as the resulting thing. His is therefore an absolute positive objectivism. For him history is the antecedent and the individual the consequent. Hence his conception amounts to an absolute negation of individualism. The question of understanding is purely a practical one. Between the nature of man and human history there is a perfect accord. There is no other source of human consciousness outside of the one

offered by history. Man consists entirely of what man makes. Hence the economic foundation of all the rest. Hence labor as a leading thread of history. Hence the conviction that the various social forms are but different forms of organization of labor. Hence the point of view of Socialism, no longer as a mere aspiration or expectation. Hence the conception of Communism, not as a simple diagram of economic relations, but as a new consciousness exceeding the limits of all present illusions and as an application of positive humanitarianism. But this extreme objectivism is now breaking up by a return to Kant, that is, to criticism. Marx's work was incomplete. He could not overcome Hegel, he found no adequate expression for his tendencies, he relapsed into the romanticism of Rousseau, he tried in vain to extricate himself from Ricardo and Smith, whom he attempted to criticise, and he remained the author of an incomplete system. He personifies, as it were, a philosophical tragedy. He pressed old ideas into the service of new ideals, he could not find any other incentive for revolutionary work but an impulse toward hedonism, and therefore he remained aristocratic and absolutistic in his revolutionary passion.

So far Masaryk's characteristic. I leave it to some one with a faculty of adequate expression to give color to this outline. It certainly is calculated to call our attention to the great *tragedy of labor*, which runs through all history.^[21] But all this leaves our author unmoved in his academic pedantry. He does not oppose one conception to another in his rapid survey of a new interpretation of human destinies, but merely objects to it in the name "of the mission of our time to find a new synthesis of the sciences" (page 513). Then he calls in once more Hume and Kant, and asks the question:

What is truth? And then follows a discussion of the new *neo-ethics*, which must descend to give us a scientific critique of society. The new philosophy must solve the problem of religion, which Marx believed to have overcome, calling it a form of illusion. Pessimism is the dominant note of our time. Schopenhauer approached the truth somewhat by making of the will the root of the world. Marx was a pendant to him with his *unilateral* theory of labor. Marxism has the shortcoming of having remained negative. "*Capital* is but the economic transcript of Mephistopheles by Faust," (so he says on page 516, and if you don't believe me, go and see for yourselves!). And finally we learn – if I have understood him right – that the *crisis* consists essentially in a return to Kant and a leaning of the revolutionary spirit toward parliamentarianism. This, then, marks the beginning of the Masaryk epoch in the world's history.

Kant and the parliament, so let it be! But which Kant? Does he mean the Kant of the most private of private philistine lives in Königsberg? Or does he mean the revolutionary author of subversive writings, who seemed to Heine like one of the heroes of the Great Revolution? And which parliament of the ordinary and customary make-up is destined to transform history? Well, then, let us say Kant and the Convention. But the Convention followed after the revolution, that is, after the downfall of an entire social system, the ruin of a whole political order, the unchaining of all class passions...and that will do. Mr. Masaryk, as a professional academic sociologist, has the right to ignore that living, agitated, impulsive, passionate history, which pleases those other human beings who have a sympathetic feeling for human realities. He can, therefore, rest comfortably in the persuasion that the period of revolutions

is gone by for ever, and that we have definitely entered the period of slow evolution, the idyll of quiet and resigned reason.

Still, let us turn to his pigeon holes.

The course on the theory of the state and of law (pages 387–426) combats principally the point of view, according to which this or that is a secondary or derived form as compared to society in general. The state exists from the very beginning of evolution, and it will always exist because reason and morality approve of it (page 405); and man, "by his natural disposition, does not only like to command, but also to be commanded and to obey willingly." Natural inequalities justify hierarchy (page 406). And that settles it! But if that is true, why take such pains to demonstrate that law is not to be derived from economic condition? Why waste time in combating the equalitarian theories of Engels? To what end does he appeal to the awesome authority of Bernstein (page 409), who is said to have restored the state to honor (imagine, in an article in the *Neue Zeit!!*), declaring that it is a thing which the socialists no longer wish to abolish, but only to reform? It is easy enough for him to find himself in accord with the everyday mind, which does not hesitate to admit, just like Mr. Masaryk, that there are just inequalities, and among them some unjust ones. I wish he would tell us his measure of what is just!

I pass over the chapter entitled *Nationality and Internationality* (pages 426–565), in which the author, aside from exhibiting his indignation over the Slavophobia of Marx, makes some useful observations concerning those obstacles to internationalism which arise naturally from

peculiarities of the national mind, and I paused for a minute to consider the remarkable paradoxes which he pronounces in regard to religion (pages 455–481. Here he reveals himself as a true decadent. Catholicism and Protestantism are for him still the fundamental facts of life and have a preponderating influence on the destinies of the world! We are all either the one or the other. Indeed, all modern philosophy is protestant, and there is no catholic philosophy unless it be by default (and what about your Comte?). Marx contains an element of Catholicism, not only because he adopted French Socialism, which is Catholic and repugnant to the Protestant mind, but because he was authoritative, an enemy of individuality, an internationalist, and a champion of absolute objectivism (page 476). Just as the French revolution was largely a religious movement, so all contemporaneous Socialism carries within itself a religious element. Here and there he approaches the idea that Catholicism and Protestantism supplement one another. And likely enough the author thinks that the religion of the future is being prepared by Socialism, seeing that "faith is the highest objectivism of normal man, and for this very fact social... But the objectivism of Marx is too bilious." (Page 480.)

If religion is perennial, if the state is immortal, if law is natural, it remains to be seen whether ethics (pages 482–500) must not be super-eternal. The author claims for *moral consciousness* the privilege of an indisputable and first-hand fact. I need not stop to declare that one need not be a historical materialist, nor even a simple materialist, in order to assign to such an infantile opinion a place among the fairy tales. And for this reason I thank the author for his quotation of magazine articles, in which a Bernstein, a Schmidt, and socialists like them, are said to have advanced

ethical reasons against Marx's indifference to morality (page 497).

On pages 500–508 we find the shortcomings of Socialism in the matter of art.

All these reasons as well the statements of the author in section V concerning the practical politics of Socialism, which are treated under two heads, one of them entitled *Revolution and Reform*, the other *Marxism and Parliamentarianism*, make us acquainted with a doctrinaire handiwork of the finest verbalistic kind. That Socialism has developed during these last fifty years from a sect into a party is well enough known. That imperative and categorical Communism as conceived at one time has become Social-Democracy, is likewise known. That Socialist parties are at present engaged in a varied and differentiated practical work, is not only a historical fact, but also a making of history on their part. That in all these things mistakes are made and practical uncertainties encountered, is inevitable for human beings. But it is also true that, in order to understand these things, one must live among them and study them with the eye and intellect of the historical observer.

And what does Mr. Masaryk do? He sees nothing but divisions into categories. And so he comes to the idea of a transition from a systematical revolutionism to a negation of the possibility of any revolution, from romanticism to experience, from revolutionary aristocracy to democratic ethics, from a categorical imperative to empirical methods, from absolute objectivism to selfcritique, from Titanic conceptions to I don't know what, but we know only that "Faust-Marx becomes a voter" (page 562). You fortunate socialist voters, who complete the work of Goethe!

And then look at the specious method of the author. He assumes that the personality of Marx (whose biography he claims not to know for some reason, on page 517) is indefinitely prolonged, as it were, throughout all the actions and the expressions of the socialist parties and socialist press, and he places the words and deeds of all others to the account of the Marxism of Marx, as though they were his own alterations and revisions. But it seems that the Nemesis overtook him, because he wanted to be too much at one time, this Marx, namely a German philosopher and a Latin revolutionist, a Protestant and a Catholic – and the revenge of Protestantism overtook him (page 566), so that we have here the real device of the crisis, the plain meaning of the new Ninth Thermidor of Maximilian Carl Robespierre Marx.

It is not worth my while to follow the author in his ramblings through the whole socialist press and party documents in his attempt to rake together the proofs for the dissolution of Marxism by the work of the Marxists themselves, who are a sort of prolonged Marx. His thesis is that Socialism *becomes constitutional*. Everything is good enough to prove this thesis, even a call upon the testimony of Enrico Ferri, who is supposed to have said, I really don't know where, that a republic is in the private interest of the bourgeois parties. Therefore away with the republic! And this is the hope of the author: "That Socialism will lose the acute marks of atheism, materialism, and revolutionism, and develop ultimately into a true democracy, which shall acquire the proportions of a universal conception of life and the world, a politics *sub specie aeternitatis*," with an outlook upon eternity (page 858). So far as I am concerned, I must confess that I don't understand that.

I have read the 600 pages of Mr. Masaryk with unusual care and patience, considering that the nature of my occupations prevents me from perusing one and the same book all in one

sitting. I had a great curiosity to see it as soon as it was announced. So much had been said and gossiped about a crisis of Marxism by such a large number of persons of mediocre and little culture, which, besides, was almost always incongruous, that I thought I might learn a good deal from the masterpiece of the author of the new phrase in social science. I have been thoroughly disillusioned by the things which I have mentioned above.

Mr. Masaryk assuredly has nothing in common with the various kinds of professional ignorance and audacious assertiveness, which have produced so many *definitive* criticisms of Socialism in so short a time in our happy country, where all sorts of moral and intellectual anarchism are in flower. The author with whom I have been occupied shares nothing with the so-called crisis of Marxism in Italy but the outward label, and this label has reached us without a doubt by way of the French press.

The honest and modest intention of Masaryk was simply to preach the funeral service over Marxism in the name of another philosophy. He collected the material for his critique in patiently and minutely elaborated notes. It is clear from his whole context, and from the equanimity of his tone throughout the work, in what name and for what purpose he wrote this critique. The social question is one fact, Socialism is another fact, Socialism and Marxism are one (the author repeats this several times, and it seems to me he makes a great mistake), but the social problem must be solved in a different way than the one expected by Marxian Socialism. Therefore let us retouch, revise, and overturn the *Weltanschauung*, on which Marxism is based, and since the Marxists themselves are just discussing this question, let us step between them in this crisis as an arbiter.

What Masaryk personally wants in practice, we shall probably find out better some other time. And I confess that

I am not consumed by a desire to know it. But the perusal of his book has made me think of a whole century of the history of thought.

Positivism has from its beginning walked at the heels of Socialism. So far as the ideas are concerned, the two things were born about the same time in the vague mind of the genius Saint-Simon. They were in a way the reverse supplements of the principles of the Revolution. The antagonism between these two things developed in the varicolored following of Saint-Simon. And at a certain point Comte became the representative of the reaction (the aristocratic one, as Masaryk would say), which assigns to men their position and destination according to the fixed diagram of the system, in the name of classifying and omniscient science. To the extent that Socialism became the consciousness of the class-struggle within the orbit of capitalist production, and to the extent that sociology, often badly tried, rallied around historical materialism, Positivism, the infidel heir of the spirit of the revolution, retired into the supereminent pride of scientific classification, which deprecates the materialist conception of science itself, according to which it would be a changeable thing subject to the transformation of natural conditions, in other words, subject to labor. Masaryk is too modest a man to imitate the scientific infallibility of Comte, but he is enough professor to cling to the idea that the *Weltanschauung* is something above the social question of the humble laborers. Turn it whichever way you want to, there is always something of a priest in a professor. He creates the God whom he adores, whether it is a fetish or a sacred host.

And now we may say that we understand.

I might feel tempted to quote a few passages from my writings, which would show clearly the distinction

between *criticism* and *acrisis*. But it seems to me that I have gone far enough.

Since politics cannot be anything else but a practical and working interpretation of a certain historical moment, Socialism is today confronted – generally speaking, and without taking into account local differences of the various countries – by the following difficult and intricate problem: It must beware of losing itself in vain attempts at a romantic reproduction of traditional revolutionism (or, as Masaryk would say, it must flee from ideology), and yet it must take care at the same time not to fall into an acquiescent and willing attitude which would cause its disappearance in the elastic mechanism of the bourgeois world by means of compromise. Some people nurse the desire, the expectation, the hope, of such an acquiescence of Socialism, and these apologists of the present order of society have attributed great weight to the open literary controversies within the party, and to the modest book of Bernstein which was raised at one stroke to the honor of a historical work.^[22] This fact characterizes and condemns this book as well as so many similar expressions. But all this has nothing to do with Masaryk. Masaryk, as a professor in the exercise of his profession, has expounded philology by means of type.

ANTONIO LABRIOLA.
Rome, June 18, 1899.

NOTES

1. In revising the proof sheets it occurs to me that the reader might be in doubt about the character of this writer. Pantaleoni, whom I defend at this place, is himself a representative of that hedonism which Croce, employing the well-known illustration of the two foci of an ellipse, would like to reconcile with Marxism. He is even an extreme representative of that school. Pantaleoni is so extreme in his partisanship, that in his introduction to his course at Geneva, in this semester, (see his "Prolusione," reproduced in the November issue of the "Giornale Degli Economisti." page 407-431) he expels the name of Marx from the history of science – which cannot register any errors! – (See page 427.) He has a very poor opinion of the socialists, especially those of Italy, and regards them as fools, apostles of violence, and worse (see his letter of August 12, this year, on pages 101-110 of the work of professor Pareto on "La Liberté? Economique et les Evénements d'Italie," Lausanne, 1898, especially pages 103 and following).
2. I take pleasure in referring for this trademark to the strong criticism of the very sagacious Lexis in his article on marginal utility in the supplementary volume of the "Handwörterbuch" of Conrad.
3. Des rapports entre Proudhon et K. Marx, page 29.
4. I note by the way that Mr. Rouanet had read nothing by Marx but the "Communist Manifesto" and "Capital." Moreover, he had but a rather imperfect idea of the economic theories contained in this lastnamed work.
5. Only one country seems to me to have the right to claim an exceptional place in our modern civilization: Italy, the common fatherland of Free and cultured spirits.
6. Revue Socialist, May, 1887, p. 400.
7. Mr. Petrone is a free lecturer at the university of Rome. He has written a very interesting critical report on the book of Mr. Labriola in the "Rivista internazionale di science sociali e discipline ausiliarie," fourth year, volume XI, pages 551-560.
8. Des rapports entre Proudhon et K. Marx, page 25.
9. Journal des Débats, May 1, 1896.
10. Capital, French translation, page 28. Marx says this of commodities.
11. Feuerbach, "The Roots of the Socialist Philosophy," pages 104-105.
12. Mr. Petrone admits this without any difficulty. While Mr. Bourdeau says that the theses of Marx throw a new light on history. (Débats, October 13, 1896.)

13. On the great importance of morals on socialist philosophies read the fine observations of Mr. B. Croce in his *Sulla concezione materialistica della storia*, published in the *Atti della Accademia Pontaniana*, Vol. XXVI, 1896.
14. *Revue socialiste*, June, 1887, page 591.
15. Letter on the Gotha Program, published in *Revue d'conomie politique*, 1894, page 758. The German text appeared in the *Neue Zeit*, ninth year, Vol. I, number 18, pages 560-575.
16. This paradox was published in the *Jeunesse socialiste*, January, 1895, under the title of Idealism of History. Read the spirited reply of Mr. Lafargue in the February number.
17. *Die Philosophischen und sociologischen Grundlagen des Marxismus – Studien zur sozialen Frage*, von Th. G. Masaryk. Professor an der böhmischen Universität Prag, Wien, C. Konegen, pages XV and 600, in large octavo.
18. *Die wissenschaftliche und philosophische Krise innerhalb des gegenwärtigen Marxismus*. Vienna, 1898, 24 pages.
19. *Ibidem*, page 24. The same statement is now amply repeated in the present book near its close, especially on pages 59-92. To mention another little illustration of the fortune of a word, I observe that the crisis within Marxism has become the crisis of Marxism in the French translation of this work by Bugiel, Paris, 1898, (extract from the *Revue internationale de sociologie*, July number).
20. This was done in numbers 239 and 240, of April 20, and May 6, of the Vienna "Zeit". He had done the same in October of last year with the message of Bernstein to the national convention at Stuttgart. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
21. See letter IX of *Socialism and Philosophy*
22. With reference to the book of Bernstein see my article in *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, May 1899.