## Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right By Karl Marx Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher, February 1844

For Germany the *critique of religion* has been essentially completed, and the critique of religion is the essential precondition for all criticism.

Secular errors are discredited once their sacred expressions have been refuted. Man, who sought a superhuman being in the fantastic reality of heaven and found nothing there but a reflection of himself, will no longer be inclined to find a mere nonhuman semblance of himself where he seeks and must seek his true reality.

The basis of antireligious criticism is the recognition that man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man insofar as he has not yet found himself or has already lost himself again. But man is not an abstract being encamped outside the world. Man is the world of man — the state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they themselves constitute an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual point d'honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal source of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of a human essence that has yet to attain its true realization. The struggle against religion thus implies a struggle against the world whose spiritual aroma is religion.

*Religious* suffering is both an *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed, the heart of a heartless world, the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people.

Calling for the abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people amounts to demanding people's *real* happiness. To call on people to abandon their illusions about their condition is to call on them to *abandon a condition that requires illusions*. The critique of religion is therefore, in embryo, *a critique of this vale of tears* of which religion is the *halo*.

Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers from the chain, not in order that man shall continue to bear the chain without fantasy or consolation, but so that he will cast off the chain and pluck the living flower. The critique of religion disillusions man so that he will think, act and shape his reality like a man who has lost his illusions and regained his

senses, so that he will revolve around himself as his own true sun. Religion is only the illusory sun around which man revolves so long as he does not revolve around himself.

The *task of history* is thus to establish the *truth about this world* once the *otherworld* has proved illusory. The immediate *task of philosophy*, which is in the service of history, is to unmask human self-alienation in its *secular forms* now that it has been unmasked in its *sacred forms*. Thus the critique of heaven is transformed into a critique of earth, the *critique of religion* into the *critique of law*, and the *critique of theology* into the *critique of politics*.

The following exposition, which is a contribution to this undertaking, does not deal directly with the original, but with a copy, the German *philosophy* of law and the state, for the simple reason that it deals with *Germany*.

If we were to begin with the German status quo itself — even if we did so in the only appropriate way, i.e. negatively — the result would still be an *anachronism*. Even the negation of our present political situation is nothing but a dusty reality in the historical junk room of modern nations. If I negate powdered wigs, I am still left with unpowdered wigs. If I negate the German situation of 1843 I have scarcely arrived at 1789 in the French calendar, much less at the vital center of the present day.

Indeed, German history prides itself on having followed a path that no other nation in history has ever followed, or will ever follow again. We have shared the restorations of the modern nations without ever having shared their revolutions. We underwent a restoration, first because other nations dared to carry out a revolution and then because other nations suffered a counterrevolution; in the first case because our rulers were afraid, and in the second because our rulers were no longer afraid. Led by our shepherds, we never found ourselves in the company of freedom except once — on the *day of its burial*.

A school of thought that justifies the infamy of today on the grounds of the infamy of yesterday, a school that stigmatizes as treason every cry of the serf against the knout once that knout has become a time-honored tradition, a school to which history only shows its a posteriori as the God of Israel did to his servant Moses, namely the historical school of law — this school would have invented German history were it not itself an invention of that history. Like a Shylock — but in this case a servile Shylock — this school swears on its bond, its historical bond, its Christian-Germanic bond, for every pound of flesh cut from the heart of the people.

Others, in contrast, good-natured enthusiasts who are German chauvinists by blood and free-thinkers by reflection, seek our history of freedom beyond our history — in the

primeval Teutonic forests. But what difference is there between the history of our freedom and the history of the wild boar's freedom if it can be found only in the forests? As the proverb puts it, the forest only echoes back what you shout into it. So let us leave the ancient Teutonic forests in peace!

But by all means let us make war on the conditions in Germany! These conditions are below the level of history, beneath any criticism, but they are still an object of criticism, like the criminal who is below the level of humanity but still an object for the executioner. In the struggle against these conditions, criticism is not a passion of the head, it is the head of passion. It is not a scalpel, it is a weapon. Its object is its enemy, which it wants to destroy, not just to refute. For the spirit of these conditions has already been refuted. In themselves they are not objects worthy of thought, they are mere phenomena that are as despicable as they are despised. Criticism does not need any further elucidation of this subject-matter, it has already dealt with it. Criticism is in this case no longer an end in itself, it is now only a means. Its fundamental impulse is indignation, its fundamental task is denunciation.

The point is to convey the stifling pressure that all the different social sectors exert on each other, the omnipresent apathetic ill-humor, the complacent, self-deluding narrowness of spirit, all incorporated in a system of government which lives by preserving all this wretchedness and which is itself nothing but *wretchedness in office*.

What a spectacle! A society fragmented by ever-increasing social divisions, each opposed to all the others by petty antipathies, uneasy consciences and brutal mediocrity, and all, precisely because of their mutual ambivalence and suspicion, treated (with minor formal variations) as if their very existence was a *privilege* that they owed to their *rulers*. And they are forced to recognize and acknowledge the fact that they are *dominated*, *ruled* and *owned* as a *blessing from heaven*! Situated above all these sectors are the rulers themselves, whose greatness is in inverse proportion to their number!

Criticism dealing with these conditions is a *hand-to-hand fight*. In such a fight the point is not whether the opponent is a noble or equal or *interesting* opponent, the point is to *hit* him. The Germans must not be allowed a single moment for self-deception or resignation. Their oppression must be made even more oppressive by making it known, their shame must be made even more shameful by making it public.

Every sphere of German society must be shown as a shameful sector of German society. These petrified conditions must be made to dance by singing them their own tune! The people must be taught to be *terrified* at themselves in order to give them *courage*. This will fulfill an imperative need of the German nation, and the needs of nations are themselves the ultimate causes of their satisfaction.

This struggle against the limitations of present German conditions will not be without interest even for the *modern* nations, for these conditions represent an *undisguised* continuation of the ancien régime, and the ancien régime is the hidden flaw of the modern state. The struggle against the German political present is a struggle against the modern nations' past, and those nations are still upset by any reminders of that past. It is instructive for them to see the ancien régime, which has played a tragic role in their own history, now playing a comic role as a German ghost. The history of the ancien régime was tragic as long as it was the established power of the world and freedom was merely a personal fantasy, i.e. as long as that regime believed and had to believe in its own validity. As long as the ancien régime was the existing world order, struggling against another world that was just emerging, its error was historical, not personal. That is why its downfall was tragic.

In contrast, the present German regime is an anachronism, a flagrant contradiction of generally recognized axioms, an example of the nullity of the *ancien régime* exposed for all the world to see. It only imagines that it still believes in itself, and asks the world to share its illusion. If it believed in its own *essence*, would it try to *disguise* that essence as an alien essence and seek refuge in hypocrisy and sophistry? This modern *ancien régime* is only the *clown* of a world order whose *true heroes* are dead. History is thorough and goes through many stages when carrying an old form to the grave. The last stage of a world-historical form is its *comedy*. The gods of Greece, already mortally wounded in Aeschylus' tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, had to endure a second death — this time a comic one — in Lucian's *Dialogues*. Why does history take this course? So that humanity will leave its past behind *cheerfully*. This *cheerful* historical destiny is what we demand for the political authorities of Germany.

But as soon as criticism concerns itself with *modern* sociopolitical reality and thus begins to deal with truly human problems, it must either go outside the German status quo or approach its object indirectly. For example, the relation of industry, and of the world of wealth in general, to the political world is one of the major problems of the modern age. In what form is this problem beginning to engage the attention of the Germans? In the form of *protective tariffs*, of a *national economic system* of *prohibitions*. German chauvinism has been transferred from men to matter, so that one fine day our cotton barons and captains of industry found themselves transformed into patriots. So now that the German monopolists have been granted sovereignty abroad, their sovereignty within the country is becoming recognized. The German people are thus about to begin what the people of France and England are about to conclude. The rotten old conditions against which those countries are rebelling in theory, and which they only bear as one bears chains, are hailed in Germany as the dawn of a glorious future — a future which as yet

hardly dares to pass from the cunning theory to the most ruthless practice. While the problem in France and England is posed as a choice between *political economy* or the *rule of society over wealth*, in Germany it is posed as *national economy* or the *rule of private property over nationality*. In France and England, then, it is a matter of abolishing a monopoly that has already proceeded to its final consequences; in Germany it is a matter of proceeding to the final consequences of monopoly. There we see a solution, here as yet only a collision. This is a good example of the form modern problems take in *Germany*, an example of how our history, like some raw recruit, has so far had to stay behind to repeat exercises that are already hackneyed old routines in other countries.

If German development as a whole remained at the level of German political development, a German could play no more significant role in the problems of the present than a Russian can. But if the separate individual is not bound by the limitations of his nation, still less is the nation as a whole liberated by the liberation of one individual. The fact that one of the Greek philosophers was a Scythian did not enable the Scythians to advance a single step toward Greek culture.

Fortunately we Germans are not Scythians.

Just as the peoples of antiquity lived their previous history in imagination, in *mythology*, we Germans have lived our future history in thought, in *philosophy*. We are *philosophical* contemporaries of the present without being its *historical* contemporaries. German philosophy is the *ideal prolongation* of German history. When, therefore, we criticize the posthumous works of our ideal history, philosophy, instead of the uncompleted works of our real history, our criticism is among the questions of which the present age says: *That is the question*. The advanced nations are witnessing a *practical* attack on modern political conditions; in Germany, where those conditions do not yet exist, the same movement has begun as a *critical* attack on the philosophical reflection of those conditions.

The German philosophy of law and the state is the only German history that is on the same level as official modern reality. The German nation must therefore examine not only its present conditions but also its dream-history; it must subject to criticism not only these existing conditions but also their abstract continuation. Its future cannot be limited either to the direct negation of its actual political and legal conditions or to the direct actualization of its ideal political and legal conditions, for the direct negation of its actual conditions is already present in its ideal conditions, and it has almost outlived the direct actualization of its ideal conditions by watching developments in neighboring nations. It is with good reason, therefore, that the practical political party in Germany demands the negation of philosophy. Where it goes wrong is in limiting itself to a demand that it does

not and cannot achieve. It believes that it can implement this negation by turning its back on philosophy and muttering a few trite and angry remarks about it. Because of its narrow outlook it does not recognize philosophy as a part of *German* reality, it even imagines that philosophy is *beneath* German practical life and its associated theories. You demand that we make *real seeds of life* our point of departure, but you forget that the real living seeds of the German nation have up to now only flourished inside its *cranium*. In short, *you cannot supersede philosophy without realizing it*.

The same mistake, but with the factors *reversed*, has been made by the *theoretical* political party, which has its origins in philosophy.

In the present struggle this party saw only a critical struggle of philosophy against the German world. It failed to recognize that philosophy as it has existed up till now is itself an integral part of this world, that it functions as its ideal complement. Though critical of its opponents, it was uncritical toward itself. It took the presuppositions of philosophy as its point of departure, and either took for granted the conclusions arrived at by philosophy or else presented demands and conclusions drawn from elsewhere as if they were philosophical demands and conclusions. But these demands, insofar as they have any validity, can be achieved only by the negation of hitherto existing philosophy, the negation of philosophy as such. We shall save for later a more detailed examination of this party. Its basic defect can be summed up as follows: It imagined that it could realize philosophy without superseding it.

The criticism of the German philosophy of law and the state, which was given its most consistent, profound and comprehensive expression by Hegel, is both a critical analysis of the modern state and the reality connected with it and a decisive negation of all previous German forms of political and juridical consciousness, whose most refined and general expression, raised to the level of a science, is precisely the speculative philosophy of law. Only Germany could have developed the speculative philosophy of law, that abstract and high-flown thought about the modern state, the reality of which remains in the beyond (if only beyond the Rhine). Conversely, the German conception of the modern state, which disregards actual people, was possible only because and insofar as the modern state itself disregards actual people or satisfies the whole person only in an illusory manner. In politics, the Germans have thought what other nations have done. Germany has been their theoretical consciousness. The abstraction and arrogance of its philosophy have marched in step with the one-sided and stunted character of its reality. If, therefore, the current German political system represents the consummation of the ancien régime, the perfected form of that thorn in the flesh of the modern state, current German political theory reflects the imperfection of the modern state, the damaged condition of the flesh itself.

As the resolute opponent of the previous form of German political consciousness, the critique of the speculative philosophy of law does not remain within its own sphere. It introduces *problems* which can be solved only by means of *practice*.

The question then arises: Can Germany attain a practice on the level of its principles, i.e., can it carry out a revolution that will raise it not only to the *official level* of the modern nations but to the *human heights* that will be the near future of those nations?

The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons. Material force can only be overthrown by material force. But theory itself becomes a material force once it has gripped the masses. Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates *ad hominem*, and it demonstrates *ad hominem* as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp things by the root. But for man the root is man himself. The radicalism of German theory, and thus its practical energy, is clearly proven by the fact that it takes as its point of departure a decisive and *positive* transcendence of religion. The critique of religion culminates with the teaching that *man is the highest being for man*, and thus with the *categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions* in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, contemptible being — conditions which can hardly be better described than by the exclamation of a Frenchman when it was proposed to introduce a tax on dogs: "Poor dogs! They want to treat you like humans!"

Even historically, theoretical liberation has a specific practical significance for Germany. For Germany's *revolutionary* past is itself theoretical — namely, the *Reformation*. Just as the revolution then began in the brain of a *monk*, so now it begins in the brain of the *philosopher*.

Luther succeeded in overcoming the servitude based on *devotion*, but only by replacing it with a servitude based on *conviction*. He shattered the faith in authority by restoring the authority of faith. He turned priests into laymen by turning laymen into priests. He freed man from external religiosity by making religiosity the innermost essence of man. He unchained the body by enchaining the heart.

But if Protestantism was not the true solution, it did at least pose the problem correctly. It was no longer a matter of the layman's struggle against the *priest outside himself*, but of his struggle against his *own internal priest*, against his own *priestly nature*. And if the Protestant transformation of the German laymen into priests liberated the lay priests — the *princes* together with their clergy, the privileged and the philistines — the philosophical transformation of priestly Germans into men will liberate the *people*. But just as this liberation did not stop with the princes, the process of *secularization* will not stop with the *confiscation of church property* that the hypocritical Prussian regime has

begun. The Peasant War, the most radical event of German history, suffered defeat because of theology. Today, when theology itself has suffered defeat, the most unfree period of German history, our present *status quo*, will be shattered by philosophy. On the eve of the Reformation, official Germany was the most unquestioning slave of Rome. On the eve of its revolution, it is the unquestioning slave of powers far inferior to Rome — Prussia and Austria, country squires and philistines.

A major difficulty, however, seems to stand in the way of a *radical* German revolution.

For revolutions require a *passive* element, a *material* basis. Theory can be fulfilled in a people only insofar as it fulfills of the needs of that people. But will the enormous gap between the demands of German thought and the responses of German reality be matched by a corresponding gap between civil society and the state, and between civil society and itself? Will the theoretical needs become immediate practical needs? It is not enough for theory to seek its realization in practice; practice must also seek its theory.

Germany did not go through the intermediate stages of political liberation at the same time as the modern nations. It has not yet reached in practice the stages it has gone beyond in theory. How can it do a *somersault*, not only over its own limitations, but at the same time over the limitations of the modern nations, when it first needs to attain and experience those more advanced limitations in order to liberate itself from its own present limitations? A radical revolution must be a revolution of radical needs, but the preconditions and breeding ground for such needs appear to be lacking.

But if Germany has accompanied the development of the modern nations only with the abstract activity of thought, without taking an active part in that development's real struggles, it has nevertheless shared the *sufferings* of that development, without sharing in any of its accomplishments or partial satisfactions. Abstract activity has led to abstract suffering. This is why Germany will one day find itself at the stage of European decadence without ever having attained the stage of European liberation. It will be comparable to a *fetish worshipper* suffering from the diseases of Christianity.

If we now examine the *German governments*, we find that the existing state of affairs, the situation in Germany, the outlook of German culture, and lastly their own fortunate instinct, all lead them to combine the *civilized defects of the modern political world* (whose advantages we do not enjoy) with the *barbaric defects of the ancien régime* (which we enjoy in full measure); so that Germany ends up sharing more and more of the irrationalities of those political systems that have advanced beyond its own status quo without ever sharing in any of their rational aspects. For example, does any other country in the world share so naïvely all the illusions of the constitutional state without sharing

any of its realities as does "constitutional" Germany? And is it any accident that the idea of combining the torments of censorship with the torments of the French September laws (which presuppose freedom of the press) was the invention of a German government? Just as you could find the *gods* of all nations in the Roman Pantheon, you will find in the Germans' Holy Roman Empire all the *sins* of all the forms of the state. That this eclecticism will reach yet undreamed of heights is guaranteed in particular by the *political-aesthetic gourmandizing* of a German king who proposes to play all the roles of royalty — whether feudal or bureaucratic, absolute or constitutional, autocratic or democratic — if not in the person of the people, at least in his *own* person, and if not for the people, at least for *himself*. *Germany*, a world of its own embodying all the defects of the present political age, will not be able to overcome its specifically German limitations without overcoming the general limitations of this age.

A radical revolution that would bring about universal human liberation is not a utopian dream for Germany; what is utopian is to envision a partial, merely political German revolution, a revolution that would leave the pillars of the building standing. What is the basis of a partial and merely political revolution? Its basis is that one part of civil society liberates itself and attains general social domination; that one particular class, proceeding from its particular situation, undertakes the general liberation of society. This class emancipates society as a whole, but only insofar as the other members of society find themselves in the same situation as this class, e.g., insofar as they possess money and education or can acquire them at will.

No class of civil society can play this role unless it can arouse a moment of enthusiasm in itself and in the masses — a moment in which this class fraternizes and merges with society in general, becomes identified with it and is perceived and acknowledged as its general representative; a moment in which its demands and interests are truly the interests and demands of society itself, a moment in which it is truly the head and the heart of society. It is only in the name of general interests that a particular class can lay claim to general supremacy. Revolutionary energy and self-confidence do not in themselves suffice to win this emancipatory position, the position that enables a single class to politically exploit all the other sectors of society in its own interest. For a popular revolution to coincide with the liberation of a particular class of civil society, for one class to be acknowledged as the representative of the whole society, all the defects of society must be concentrated in *another* class, a particular class must be recognized as the general stumbling-block, embodying all the general limitations; a particular social class must be looked upon as the *notorious crime* of the whole society, so that liberation from that class appears as a general liberation. For *one* class to be the liberating class par excellence, another class must be clearly recognized as the class of oppression. The

negative significance of the French nobility and clergy determined the positive significance of the class that stood next to them and opposed them — the *bourgeoisie*.

But no particular class in Germany has the consistency, the lucidity, the courage or the determination that would mark it as the negative representative of society. No class has the breadth of spirit that could be identified, even for a moment, with the spirit of the people, the genius capable of raising material force to the level of political power, the revolutionary boldness that shouts in the face of the adversary the defiant words: I am nothing and I should be everything. The essence of German morality and honor, in classes as in individuals, is that modest egoism which asserts its own narrowness and allows that narrowness to be asserted against it. The relation of the various sectors of German society is therefore epic rather than dramatic. Each of them begins to be aware of itself, and to establish itself alongside the others with its own particular claims, not when it discovers that it is oppressed, but when external circumstances have created some lower social stratum that it in its turn can oppress. Even the moral self-confidence of the German middle class is based only on its awareness that it is the general representative of the philistine mediocrity of all the other classes. Thus, it is not only the German kings who accede to the throne in an untimely and inopportune manner — every sector of civil society suffers a defeat before it gains a victory, creates limitations for itself before it has overcome the limitations facing it, and exposes its pettiness before it has proved capable of expressing its magnanimity. Every opportunity of a great role has always vanished before it was ever really available because by the time any class begins to struggle against the class above it, it is already entangled in a struggle against the class below it. The princes are struggling against the monarchy, the bureaucrats against the nobility, and the bourgeoisie against them all, while the proletariat is already beginning to struggle against the bourgeoisie. No sooner does the middle class dare to conceive of the idea of liberation from its own standpoint than the development of social conditions and the progress of political theory reveal that that standpoint is already outdated, or at least problematic.

In France it is enough for somebody to be something for him to want to be everything. In Germany no one has the right to be anything unless he first renounces everything. In France partial liberation is the basis for universal liberation; in Germany universal liberation is the essential precondition for any partial liberation. In France it is the reality of gradual liberation, in Germany the impossibility of gradual liberation, that must give birth to complete freedom. In France every class is *politically idealistic* and sees itself first of all not as a particular class but as the representative of the general needs of society. The role of *liberator* therefore passes in dramatic fashion from one class of the French nation to the next, until it finally comes to the class that no longer tries to implement social freedom on the basis of conditions assumed to exist beyond man

(though they are actually created by human society), but rather organizes all conditions of human existence on the basis of social freedom. In Germany, on the contrary, where practical life is as lacking in intelligence as intellectual life is lacking in practicality, no class of civil society has feels the need or capacity for general liberation until it is forced by its *immediate* situation, by *material* necessity, by its *very chains*.

Where, then, is a *real* possibility for liberation in Germany?

Answer: In the formation of a class with radical chains, a class of civil society that is not a class of civil society, a class that is the dissolution of all classes; a sector of society that has a general character because its sufferings are general, a sector that does not claim any particular right because the wrong it suffers is not any particular wrong but a general wrong; a sector that no longer claims a historical status, but only a human one; that is not narrowly opposed to particular consequences, but is fundamentally opposed to the very foundations of the German political system; a sector, finally, that cannot liberate itself without liberating itself from all the other sectors of society, thereby liberating all those other sectors at the same time; a class, in short, that embodies the total loss of humanity and that can therefore redeem itself only through the total redemption of humanity. This dissolution of society as a particular class is the proletariat.

The proletariat is only beginning to appear in Germany, as a result of recent *industrial* development. For the proletariat does not result from *naturally arising* poverty, it is created by *artificially produced poverty*. It does not consist of the mass of people mechanically oppressed by the weight of society, but of the masses generated by the *disintegration* of society, and in particular by the dissolution of the middle class (though its ranks are also, of course, gradually being increased by the victims of natural poverty and of Christian-Germanic serfdom).

When the proletariat proclaims the dissolution of the existing social order, it is only stating the secret of its own existence, for it is the actual dissolution of that order. When the proletariat demands the negation of private property, it is merely advocating as a principle for society what society has already made a principle for the proletariat — a propertylessness that the proletariat already involuntarily embodies as the negative consequence of this society. The proletarian then finds himself possessing the same right with regard to the world that is coming into being as the German king has in regard to the present-day world when he calls the people his people just as he calls a horse his horse. By declaring the people his private property, the king is simply declaring that the property owner is king.

Just as philosophy finds its *material* weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *intellectual* weapons in philosophy. Once the lightning of thought has struck deeply into the virgin soil of the people, the *Germans* will be liberated and transformed into *human beings*.

## Let us sum up the result:

The only possible *practical* liberation of Germany is a liberation that proceeds from the theory that man is the highest being for man. Germany will not be able to liberate itself from the *Middle Ages* unless it liberates itself at the same time from the *partial* victories over the Middle Ages. In Germany *no* form of bondage can be broken without breaking *all* forms of bondage. Germany, which is renowned for its *thoroughness*, can make nothing less than a *thoroughgoing* revolution. The *liberation of Germany* will be the *liberation of man*. The *head* of this liberation is *philosophy*, its *heart* is the *proletariat*. Philosophy cannot be realized without abolishing the proletariat, and the proletariat cannot be abolished without realizing philosophy.

When all the essential conditions are fulfilled, the *day of the German resurrection* will be announced by the *crowing of the Gallic cock*.