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## Historical Criteria of the Modern Concept of Revolution

There are few words so widely disseminated and belonging so naturally to modern political vocabulary as the term “revolution.” It also belongs, of course, to those strong expressions whose applications are quite diverse and whose conceptual unclarity is so great that they can be called catchwords. Clearly, the semantic content of “revolution” is not disclosed by such sloganistic use and utility. Rather, the term “revolution” indicates upheaval or civil war, as well as long-term change, and therefore events and structures which penetrate deeply into our daily life. Evidently, the platitudinous ubiquity of revolution and its occasionally very concrete meaning are closely related. The one invokes the other, and vice versa. The following semantic outline will address itself to this relation.<sup>1</sup>

The linguistic situation is variable. While practically every newspaper talks of the second industrial revolution, historical science is still arguing about the way in which the nature and inauguration of the first should be defined. This second industrial revolution not only relieves the human world of physical exertion, but also entrusts intellectual processes to automatic machines. Cybernetics, atomic physics, and biochemistry are all included in the concept of the second industrial revolution; the first is left far behind, involved as it is with the extension of human productivity beyond traditional needs through the use of capital, technology, and the division of labor. There is an absence of generally acceptable criteria of differentiation.

Likewise, we can read daily of the Marxist program of world revolution, originally formulated by Marx and Lenin and then, in par-

ticular, inscribed by Mao Zedong on the banners of the Chinese Communist Party. More recently, the concept of Cultural Revolution has become a part of the domestic Chinese situation, whereby the convulsion is evidently to be driven right into the Chinese mentality, dictating the revolution into the body of the masses. Everywhere the conditions for the extension of the proletarian revolution around the globe should be taken advantage of or created. Legal and illegal emissaries of the Communists charged with the realization of this program are active in many countries of the world, especially in underdeveloped parts. As is known, the realization of the alternative posed to Russia and China has itself limited the universal program in Asia.

The semantic content of the word “revolution” is thus by no means unequivocal. It ranges from bloody political and social convulsions to decisive scientific innovations; it can signify the whole spectrum, or alternately, one form exclusive of the remainder. A successful technical revolution, therefore, presupposes a minimum of stability, which initially excludes a sociopolitical revolution, even when the latter may be a precondition or consequence of the former.

Accordingly, our concept of revolution can conveniently be defined as a flexible “general concept,” meeting worldwide with a certain initial comprehension, but which in a more precise sense fluctuates enormously from country to country and from one political camp to another. It almost seems that the word “revolution” itself possesses such revolutionary power that it continually broadens itself to include every last element on our globe. We would then have a case of a political catchword continually reproducing itself by virtue of its composition, as well as urging a transformation of the situation itself. What is there in the world that could not be revolutionized—and what is there in our time that is not open to revolutionary effects? Posing this question to our concept refers us to modern circumstances.

If one can characterize our modern history as an era of revolution—one which has not yet come to its end—so a certain direct experience is embodied in this formulation. Typical of this experience is the fact that it can be subsumed under the concept of revolution, more indeed than is perhaps generally allowed. The concept “revolution” is itself a linguistic product of our modernity. That it is possible to distinguish political, social, technological, and industrial revolutions has been accepted since the last century. Only since the French Revolution has

the term *révolution* (the same whatever the language) gained the kind of ambivalent and ubiquitous semantic potentiality outlined above.

We will trace the history of our concept back before the period of the great French Revolution, so that we can separate out some peculiarities of modern experience and thus be able to recognize them more clearly.

## I

In 1842, a French scholar made a historically enlightening observation. Haréau recalled what had been forgotten at the time: that our expression actually signified a turning over, a return of the movement to the point of departure, as in the original Latin usage. A revolution initially signified, in keeping with its lexical sense, circulation.<sup>2</sup> Haréau added that in the political sphere, this was understood as the circulation of constitutions taught by Aristotle, Polybius, and their successors but which since 1789 and through Condorcet's influence was hardly comprehensible. According to ancient doctrine, there was only a limited number of constitutional forms, which dissolved and replaced each other but could not naturally be transgressed. These are the constitutional forms, together with their corruptions, which are still current today, succeeding each other with a certain inevitability. Haréau cited a forgotten principal witness of this past world, Louis LeRoy, who had argued that the first of all natural forms of rule was that of monarchy, which was replaced by aristocracy as soon as the former degenerated into tyranny. Then followed the well-known schema in which aristocracy was transformed into oligarchy, which was in turn displaced by democracy, which degenerated ultimately into ochlocracy, or mass rule. Here, in fact, no one ruled any longer, and the way to individual rule was open once more. Hence, the old cycle could begin anew. Here we have a model of revolution which found expression in Greek as *μεταβολη πολιτειων* or as *πολιτειων αηαχυχλωσις*,<sup>3</sup> and which subsisted on the experience that all forms of political association were ultimately limited. Each change led to a familiar form of rule within which men and women remained enthralled, and it was impossible to break out of this natural cycle. All variation, or change, *rerum commutatio*, *rerum conversio*, was insufficient to introduce anything novel into the political world. Historical experience remained involved in its almost natural givenness, and in the same way that the annual seasons

through their succession remain forever the same, so mankind *qua* political beings remained bound to a process of change which brought forth nothing new under the sun. In the course of the seventeenth century, the concept of revolution emerged to characterize this quasi-natural experience. LeRoy at that time defined the progression of constitutions as follows: *Telle est la révolution naturelle des polices. . .*<sup>4</sup> — this is the natural revolution of state constitutions, which continually transforms the condition of the commonality and finally returns to the point of departure.

The naturalistic undertone to this concept of revolution was by no means accidental; it derived directly from the cycle of the stars, among which, since Copernicus, even the earth could be counted. The path-breaking work of Copernicus on the circular movement of celestial bodies, *De revolutionibus orbium caelestium*, appeared in 1543 and opened the way for the concept of revolution which entered politics via the prevalent astrology of that time. Initially, revolution was a “physico-political” concept (Rosenstock-Hüessy). In the same way that the stars run their circular course independent of earthly men, while at the same time influencing or even determining their lives, this dual meaning resonated through the political concept of revolution from the seventeenth century on: revolutions do take place above the heads of their participants, but those concerned (for instance, Wallenstein) remain imprisoned in their laws.

Overtones of this double meaning can without any doubt be heard in our contemporary linguistic usage. But what distinguishes earlier usage from our own is the consciousness of a return, indicated by the syllable “re” in the word *revolutio*. It was in this sense that Hobbes described the twenty-year period, from 1640 to 1660, following the end of the great English Revolution: “I have seen in this revolution a circular motion.”<sup>5</sup> He saw a circular movement, leading from the absolute monarch via the Long Parliament to the Rump Parliament, then to Cromwell’s dictatorship, and back via oligarchic intermediary forms to the renewal of monarchy under Charles II. One of the victors, Clarendon (who still blamed the stars for the recent disorder), could quite consistently, after the final return of the Stuarts, celebrate the upheaval as a Restoration. That which is to us apparently incomprehensible was then placed together. The termination and objective of the twenty-year revolution was Restoration. Hence, monarchists and republicans stood closer together than they could then admit: it was

for both a matter—terminologically—of the restoration of ancient law, of a return to the true constitution.

The naturalistic metaphor of political “revolution” lived on the assumption that historical time was itself of a uniform quality, contained within itself, and repeatable. While it was always debatable at what point in the ebb and flow of a *revolutio* one would place the present or desired constitutional state, this remained, from the point of view of the circulatory process, a secondary question. All political positions remained preserved in a transhistorical concept of revolution.

Quite different expressions were usual for the bloody struggles themselves, and for the blind passion with which conflicts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were conducted.

As in the Middle Ages, so in the century of the terrible confessional confrontations, which successively and simultaneously laid waste to France, the Netherlands, Germany, and England: a range of definitions was employed. These definitions ranged from uprising and revolt to riot, insurrection, and rebellion, and on to *Zweiung*, internal and civil war. Civil war, *guerre civile*, *Bürgerkrieg*—these were the central concepts by which the suffering and experience of fanatical confessional struggles were precipitated, by means of which, moreover, they were legally formulated.

All of these expressions, which could be supplemented by a substantial series, shared a view of social organization based on a society of orders (*Stände*). While the mode of government might alter, the social order itself was seldom directly displaced by civil war; for the most part, the consequences were merely long-term. The legal resort of civil or confessional war was contained in the *ständisch* right of resistance, as claimed, for instance, by the United Netherlands. For the most part, the old civil war remained a war among qualified members of orders, i.e., a *bellum civile*, no matter what the extent of participation by the lower strata might be. The German “Peasant War” also constituted a constitutional analogue of *Bürgerkrieg*; only after 1789 was it dubbed a “revolution” and thus recouped within a philosophy of history. And if in Germany we do not refer to the Thirty Years War as a civil war—as corresponding events in neighboring countries are called—it is because the Imperial constitutional character of this war has altered with the termination of thirty years of struggle. What had begun as a civil war between the Protestant Imperial orders and the Imperial party ended with a peace treaty between almost sovereign

territorial states. Our religious civil war could thus be interpreted *ex post* as a war between states.

Thus for the period (to around 1700) we can conclude that the expressions “civil war” and “revolution” were not interchangeable but at the same time were not mutually exclusive. Civil war meant those bloody events whose legal title derived from the wane of feuding, from *ständisch* treaties, or from confessional positions. These legal titles constituted in concrete struggle a mutual exclusiveness, marking the current enemy as a rebel against the law. In this way State became the counterconcept to Civil War, appropriating all title of right claimed by the latter. The State, symbolically elevated in the Baroque era as a person, prohibited *bellum intestinum* by monopolizing the right of force domestically and the right to declare war externally.

Revolution, initially a transhistorical expression bound to natural factors, was consciously employed as a metaphor for long-term or especially sudden political events, to “upheavals.” To this extent it could contain elements of civil war. A German dictionary translated this linguistic borrowing in 1728 as follows:

Revolution, the upheaval, alteration or course of time, *Revolutio regni*, the change or overturning of a kingdom or of a land, if such suffers any special alteration in government and police.<sup>6</sup>

The dictionary of the French Academy in 1694 nonetheless gave as the real and primary meaning of this word the planetary *révolution*. It is against this background that the meaning of a revolution still existed. It referred to a model course of political constitutional struggle which remained entirely predetermined. Along with the repeatability of constitutional forms, political revolution could also be conceived as repetition. Social unrest and uprisings were, on the other hand, understood as “rebellion” and put down accordingly. One “possessed no word which could have characterized a transformation in which the subjects themselves became the rulers” (Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*). Social emancipation as a revolutionary process still lay outside experience. This would change in the course of the eighteenth century, in the epoch of Enlightenment.

With “revolution” the Enlighteners stood on firm ground, and the concept became modish. Everything that was seen and described was conceived in terms of change or upheaval. Revolution covered morals, law, religion, economy, countries, states, and portions of the earth:

indeed, the entire globe. As Louis Sébastien Mercier said in 1772, "Tout est révolution dans ce monde."

The concept, originally naturalistic and as such transhistorical, extended its partially metaphorical meaning: each and every thing was comprehended through it. Movement abandoned its naturalistic background and entered the reality of everyday life. In particular, the sphere of a genuine human history was opened up through its contamination by "revolution."

What was politically notable about this new general concept of movement was its stylization as a concept in contrast to that of civil war. To the enlightened friends of peace, civil wars appeared to be the inheritance of fanatical religious groupings which, with the advance of civilization, one simply left behind. In 1778, Wieland claimed:

The present condition of Europe [approaches] a benign revolution, a revolution that will not be brought about by revolt and civil wars, not by ruinous struggle of force against force.<sup>8</sup>

This touching optimism, shared by many of his contemporaries, was sustained by an alien experience which had provided the basis for a new model: the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England.<sup>9</sup> It had proved possible to overthrow a hated ruling house without bloodshed and replace it with a parliamentary form of government drawn from the upper stratum and based on the division of powers. Voltaire noted admiringly that a revolution had taken place in England, in contrast to other countries, which had seen only uprisings and inconclusive, bloody, civil wars. In many respects, "civil war" then acquired the meaning of a senseless circling upon itself, with respect to which Revolution sought to open up a new vista.

The further the Enlightenment advanced, the more civil war faded into historical reminiscence. The *Encyclopédie* dealt with war under eight different rubrics, but the concept *guerre civile* was not one of them. Civil wars did not seem possible any longer. In proportion to this, the concept of revolution was stripped of its political rigor, and it was possible for all those utopian hopes that make intelligible the élan of the years after 1789 to stream into it. It was expected, as in England, to be able to pluck the fruits of a revolution without having to undergo the terror of civil war. Should it come to the spilling of blood, then the example of the American independence movement appeared to guarantee a happy conclusion.

Certainly, there was no lack of warnings and prognoses foretelling the awfulness of civil war that lay behind the mask of radiant revolution. Leibniz was the first, in 1704 indicating with extraordinary clarity the character of the coming *révolution générale* in Europe;<sup>10</sup> Diderot delivered the most exact prognosis, depicting the future Napoleon as a dialectical product of fear and freedom; and Rousseau went so far as to prophesy the coming century. In 1762 he wrote: we are approaching the condition of crisis, and the century of revolutions. It is impossible to predict the revolutions singly, and just as impossible to anticipate them. It was certain that the European monarchies would be swept away, but what would follow them, no one knew. Diderot asked a similar question: "What will succeed this revolution? No one knows."<sup>11</sup>

Such questions, posed by the sharpest minds of the Enlightenment, and which are still not possible for us to answer today, opened up a new horizon of expectation. Since then, revolution obviously no longer returned to given conditions or possibilities, but has, since 1789, led forward into an unknown future. The nature of this future is so obscure that its recognition and mastery have become the constant task of politics. As Haréau retrospectively observed, "The word 'revolution' has lost its original sense." Since then, it had supplied a "fond mobile de la science humaine."<sup>12</sup>

## II

What features have characterized the conceptual field of Revolution since 1789? This is a question concerning a few common attributes which emerge from the testimony of those contemporary with the inception of our modernity.

1. The first point that must be noted is the novel manner in which, since 1789, "revolution" has effectively been condensed to a *collective singular*; as is already apparent in Mercier's dictum, everything in this world is Revolution. As with the German concept of *Geschichte*, which in the form of "history pure and simple" contained within itself the possibilities of all individual histories, Revolution congealed into a collective singular which appeared to unite within itself the course of all individual revolutions. Hence, revolution became a *metahistorical concept*, completely separated, however, from its naturalistic origin and henceforth charged with ordering historically recurrent convulsive experiences. In other words, Revolution assumes a transcendental sig-



nificance; it becomes a regulative principle of knowledge, as well as of the actions of all those drawn into revolution. From this time on, the revolutionary process, and a consciousness which is both conditioned by it and reciprocally affects it, belong inseparably together. All further characteristics of the modern concept of revolution are sustained by this metahistorical background.

2. The experience of *acceleration* also cannot be overlooked. Behind Robespierre's vow to his fellow citizens to accelerate the French Revolution in order that freedom might be gained the sooner, it is possible to detect an unconscious secularization of eschatological expectation. From Laktanz to Luther and Bengel, temporal abbreviation was taken to be a sign of the approaching destruction of historical time in general. But since the onset of such acceleration, the tempo of historical time has constantly been changing, and today, thanks to the population explosion, development of technological powers, and the consequent frequent changes of regime, acceleration belongs to everyday experience. The uniform and natural horizon of history has since been left far behind; the accelerative experience drew forth new perspectives imbued with the concept of Revolution.

Chateaubriand, for example, in 1794 outlined a parallel of the old and the new Revolution, so that he could, in the usual fashion, draw conclusions for the future from the past. Nevertheless, he soon had to recognize that the French Revolution exceeded all comparison. And so, thirty years later, Chateaubriand revised his superseded essay through the addition of notes which ventured progressive constitutional prognoses no longer dependent upon parallelism, that is, upon the repeatability of old revolutions.<sup>13</sup>

3. Characteristic of all prognoses made since 1789 is their incorporation of a coefficient of movement which is held to be "revolutionary," whatever the tendency out of which such prognoses issue. Even the state was swept into the grasp of "Revolution," so that it becomes quite understandable that the neologism *contrerévolutionnaire* was translated into German around 1800 as *Staatsfeind*, enemy of the state.<sup>14</sup> Whoever had respect for the state had to be "revolutionary," anticipating the definition of the Left-Hegelian position. It was not a question of whether the *Ständestaat* could further the revolution or prevent it. The alternative, rather, was transformation of the *Ständestaat* in a peaceful or a bloody fashion; or, as expressed by Struensee or Kant, revolution from above or below. Once the revolutionary trend

had been unleashed, the concept “reform” converged here and there with that of “revolution,” a convergence which, while often severely strained by political polemic, was in essence contained within a general impulse to plan the social future.

4. The degree to which the prospect of the future continually altered accordingly changed the view of the past. Therefore, a new space of experience opened up whose perspective was aligned with respect to the various phases of the concluded Revolution of 1789. According to interest and situation, one could identify oneself with one or the other stages of the last revolution and in this way draw conclusions for the future. The Revolution was transformed for everyone into a historicophilosophical concept, based on a perspective which displayed a constant and steady direction. There might be arguments over “earlier” versus “later,” or “retardation” versus “acceleration,” but the actual direction appeared to have been established once and for all. The Revolution limps, scoffed Rivarol; rights move continually to the left, but the left never to the right.<sup>15</sup> This opens a space within which, since then, all political events could become estranged in terms of a historical philosophy. But behind such expressions, which moved from the spatial to the temporal, an undeniable experience registers itself. Historicophilosophical perspectives share with prognoses an implicit and irreversible trend covering all tendencies simultaneously. Thus, the repeated contamination of revolution and evolution since the nineteenth century does not only indicate linguistic carelessness or political accommodation; the extensive interchangeability of both concepts indicates structural dislocations in the entire social structure which provoke answers differentiated only on a political plane. Evolution and revolution become, as antitheses, partisan concepts; their similar usage denotes the general expansion of a movement for social emancipation driven by industrialization.

5. We are therefore dealing with the path or the *step from political to social revolution* which marks the modern concept of revolution. It is quite obvious that all political unrest involves social elements. But what is new is the idea that the objective of a political revolution should be the social emancipation of all men, transforming the social structure. In 1794, Wieland had carefully registered this new vocabulary of revolution, at that time still a linguistic borrowing: the intention of the Jacobins was, he wrote, “to make out of the French Revolution a Social Revolution, that is, an overturning of all currently existing

states.”<sup>16</sup> The prevailing linguistic uncertainty does not conceal the actual state of affairs. Once the declaration of human rights had opened up the social space of expectation, every program strove for further realization in the name of freedom or equality or both.

It was Babeuf who first predicted that the French Revolution would not reach its conclusion until exploitation and slavery were abolished. In this way, an objective was established which, with the development of industrial labor, was bound to become an ever-stronger demand. From the 1830 revolution on, formulas proliferated according to which the trend leads from political to social revolution. One thinks, for example, of Lorenz von Stein, Radowitz, and Tocqueville. The young Marx coined the dualistic formula, “Every revolution dissolves the *old society*, and to that extent it is social. Every revolution overthrows the old power, and to that extent it is *political*.”<sup>17</sup> Thus he formulated in general terms something that could only be conceived in the aftermath of 1789.

In 1832, Heine had more strongly differentiated the temporal coefficients of both concepts of revolution:

The writer who wishes to bring about a social revolution may nonetheless be a century ahead of his time; the tribune, however, which has in view a political revolution cannot remove itself too far from the masses [i.e., from the immediate life of the present].<sup>18</sup>

The degree to which political and social revolution coincide, and whether they are at all dependent on each other, remain central questions of modern history. While the political emancipation of former colonies may be nearly complete, political freedom only becomes a reality if emancipation is continued as a social process.

6. Here we touch on a sixth feature, which arises directly out of the step from political to social revolution. If the declarations of the American, French, and Russian revolutions are taken literally, there is no doubt that their “achievements” are intended to be to the advantage of all mankind. In other words, all modern expressions of “Revolution” spatially imply a *world revolution* and temporally imply that they be *permanent* until their objective is reached. Today we may already place the Chinese Revolution within this sequence. Whatever the prospects are for the realization of this program, its continuity is identical with that of its predecessors.

Robespierre observed in lofty tones: “La moitié de la révolution du monde est déjà faite; l’autre moitié doit s’accomplir.”<sup>19</sup> He added the

naturalistic metaphor according to which the reason of man is comparable to the globe on which he lives. One-half of the globe is plunged into darkness, while the other half sparkles in the light. Here he contradicts himself in a worn allusion to older, naturalistic comparisons. Half of the earth will always be wrapped in darkness, only the half will continually change. No matter how much politicians since the time of Napoleon have pursued the goal of “setting an end to revolution,” the totalizing concept of world revolution has nevertheless established itself. Ever since the foundation of the various Internationales the concept of world revolution has entered programs of direct political action.

If earth is to be revolutionized in its entirety, it necessarily follows that the revolution must last until the time this goal is achieved. After the fall of Napoleon the supposition became rapidly established that the restoration was no end to revolution—as once had been the case—but rather signaled the entry into a new phase. In 1815, Koppe, councillor to the Prussian government, wrote that “Bonaparte is not, and never has been, anything other than the personification of the revolution in one of its stages. [His fall] might well end one stage of the revolution, but in no way the revolution itself.”<sup>20</sup> Already this turn of phrase makes clear that the modern collective singular “the revolution” implies its enduring nature: the history of the future will be the history of the revolution.

Immediately following the July Revolution of 1830 the expression “revolution in permanence” appeared.<sup>21</sup> Proudhon made use of it in a social-revolutionary fashion, as Marx was to do in 1850 in a similar manner.<sup>22</sup> The defeat to which the 1848 Revolution had led was used at that time by Marx to draw the dialectical conclusion that the victory of a truly revolutionary party was approaching. In this defeat, he wrote, it was not revolution that was vanquished. It was, rather, the prerevolutionary and traditional remnants.<sup>23</sup>

Whatever the disappointment provoking this analysis, the (permanent) revolution that survived the (actual) revolution of 1848–50 was a historicophilosophical category. It served in this fashion for the development of proletarian consciousness, and in this way even Marx resorted to the older sense of revolution as repetition, for he could not completely escape its distant echoes. The creation of a united and powerful counterrevolution, he suggested, clarified the lines of battle

so that the class enemy might be overthrown at the next, repeated, attempt.

What was novel about Marx, however, was his conception of the repetition represented by the actual revolutions of 1830 and 1848 as merely a caricature of the great French Revolution; on the other hand, he sought to effect this repetition in consciousness so that the past might be worked off. Marx sought to engender a learning process which would, through the acquisition of a new revolutionary language, found the singularity of the coming revolution.

Earlier revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to dull themselves to their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead.<sup>24</sup>

The social revolution must write off the past and create its substance out of the future. Socialism is the “revolution’s declaration of permanence.”<sup>25</sup> Within the declaration of the revolution’s permanence lies the deliberate and conscious anticipation of the future, as well as the implicit premise that this revolution will never be fulfilled. Here, Marx went beyond Kant, who in 1798 concluded from the failure of the first attempt that victory approached for “Revolution or Reform”; the “lessons of recurring experience”<sup>26</sup> would at some time or other, with certainty, produce their lasting effect. Marx, who had diagnosed the process of upheaval as a social and industrial revolution, found a most concise formula to characterize its individuality and futurity: however, this Revolution became for him a personified agent of history disengaged from reality in such a manner that communism, as a domain of freedom, remains unrealizable.

7. Behind this paradox of a utopia that sees itself compelled to constantly reproduce is hidden for us a further phenomenon, which can be treated as the seventh feature. Hitherto, Revolution has been presented as a metahistorical category which served to define social and industrial occurrences in terms of a self-accelerating process. It is precisely this formulation that becomes the conscious claim to leadership for those who believe themselves to be initiated into the progressive laws of a Revolution understood in this fashion. The noun denoting action, *Revolutionierung*, and its associated verb, *revolutionieren*, emerge. Also, since 1789 the instances of the word *Revolutionär*, another of the numerous neologisms in our semantic field, mount. This is a

concept denoting the *duty* of activism, a meaning earlier inconceivable, but which directly heralds the professional revolutionary as a figure molded in the course of the nineteenth century and typified by Lenin. Intimately bound up with this is the conception that men could make revolutions, an idea that was previously unutterable.

This feasibility (*Machbarkeit*) of Revolution offers merely the internal aspect of that revolution whose future laws revolutionaries were believed to have recognized. The explanation of how one must create (*produire*) and direct (*diriger*) a Revolution for the benefit of liberty comes from Condorcet. "Une loi révolutionnaire est une loi, qui a pour objet de maintenir cette révolution, et d'en accélérer ou régler la marche."<sup>27</sup> The transpersonal structures of Revolution and its growing manipulability stemming from knowledge of it appear to have mutually sustained each other. In 1798 the young Schlegel perceptively noted why Napoleon was able to assume a dominant role in the French Revolution: "Revolutions can create, develop and annihilate themselves."<sup>28</sup> This, quite apart from its historical accuracy, defines prognostically a feature of the modern professional revolutionary. To the extent that he knows how to efface himself, he is capable of "putting together" (*bewerkstelligen*) revolutions, as was formulated by a later writer, Weiting.<sup>29</sup>

The amalgamation of a general historicophilosophical perspective with especial revolutionary commitment also makes clear why it was increasingly possible to openly discuss and announce a planned inauguration of a "revolution" in the form of an uprising, without at the same time affecting the chances of success, as in August 1792 in Paris, and in Palermo in 1848, and in Petersburg in October 1917. Behind this combination, according to which the self-governing revolution was organized and must be organized, there is a criterion that we will deal with last of all: that of the *legitimacy* of Revolution.

8. In 1848, Stahl coined the expression *absolute revolution*,<sup>30</sup> indicating that legal title for all actions were derivative of the revolutionary movement. The historical derivation of law from the past was in this way carried over into a "warranty in permanence" secured historically-philosophically. Whereas the legitimacy of a Restoration remained bound to past tradition, revolutionary legitimacy became a coefficient of movement, mobilizing history in terms of the prevailing prospect of the future. Ranke still thought in 1841 that it is the "misfortune of the Revolution never to be at the same time legitimate."<sup>31</sup> It was Metternich, however, who recognized the position more clearly when

he sarcastically remarked in 1830 that it was the Legitimists themselves who legitimated the Revolution.

The concept of a legitimate revolution necessarily became a partisan historicophilosophical concept, since its claim to generality rested on the existence of its contrary, “reaction” or “counterrevolution.” While revolution was initially induced by its opponents as well as its proponents, once established in its legitimacy, it proceeded to continually reproduce its foe as a means through which it could remain permanent.

Here, the extent to which the concept of revolution has, since 1789, reassumed the logic of civil war becomes quite clear. For the modern professional revolutionary, the determined struggle by legal as well as illegal means belongs to the anticipated course of a revolution; the revolutionary feels free to use any means available because the revolution is, for him, legitimate. The elasticity and pliability of a historicophilosophical “reinsurance” depends on “the Revolution” providing a lasting title of legitimacy in the form of a metahistorical constant.<sup>32</sup>

In this way the historicophilosophical value of “civil war” is displaced. For instance, when Leninism declares and initiates civil war as the sole legitimate form of war (to abolish war altogether), the particular state and its social organization are not the only space of action and target of civil war. At stake is the abolition of domination in general: the fulfillment of the historical goal is thus posed as a global and infinite task.

Applied to our present international political situation, the question arises how the hypostasized legitimacy of civil war relates to the background legitimacy of permanent world revolution. Since the end of the Second World War, our planet has seen a raging succession of civil wars, burning on between the great power blocs. From Greece to Vietnam and Korea, from Hungary to Algeria to the Congo, from the Near East to Cuba and again to Vietnam—limited civil wars, whose awfulness is, however, boundless, stretch around the globe. We have to ask whether these numerous, regionally limited but globally conducted civil wars did not long ago consume and replace the concept of legitimate and permanent revolution. Has not the “world revolution” been reduced to an empty formula which can be appropriated pragmatically by the most diverse groups of countries and flogged to death?

The concept that contrasted with the civil wars of the past was that of the state. And the traditional doctrine of *Staatsräson* considered wars

to be a vent preventing civil wars. According to this theory, war served the purpose of social relief and was often enough—viewed eurocentrically—discharged abroad. In the epoch of European imperialism, this period already belonged to the past. But since the time when the infinite geographical surface of our globe shrunk into a finite and interdependent space of action, all wars have been transformed into civil wars. In this situation it becomes increasingly uncertain which sphere the social, industrial, and emancipatory process of revolution might occupy. In any case, “world revolution” is subject to political constraints because of the civil wars, which are not contained in its historicophilosophical program, it appears to conduct. This is apparent in the contemporary nuclear stalemate.

Since 1945 we have lived between latent and open civil wars whose terribleness can still be outbid by a nuclear war, as if the civil wars that rage around the world are, reversing the traditional interpretation, our ultimate savior from total destruction. If this infernal inversion has become the unspoken law of present international politics, a further question arises. What kind of political title does a civil war possess which feeds off both the permanence of revolution and the fear of global catastrophe? The clarification of the reciprocal relation of these two positions can no longer be the business of a *Begriffsgeschichte* as presented here.

We wish to guard against the acceptance or misinterpretation of all previous definitions as the reality of our history. Nevertheless, *Begriffsgeschichte* reminds us—even when it becomes involved with ideologies—that in politics, words and their usage are more important than any other weapon.



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## Historical Prognosis in Lorenz von Stein's Essay on the Prussian Constitution

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“It is possible to forecast the approaching future, but one would not wish to prophesy individual events.”<sup>1</sup> The truth of this statement, formulated by Stein in 1850, finds confirmation in his most important work. In terms of intellectual history, one might perceive in this pronouncement a secularized version of Christian prophets of doom whose lasting certainty always exceeded the accuracy or inappropriateness of individual short-term expectations. Stein's declaration was, however, based on diligent sociohistorical and administrative studies and acquired its sense of immediacy from the historical circumstances in which it arose. Stein delivered prognoses because he had made the movement of modern history—and hence its futurity—his diagnostic theme. In retrospect, it can be seen that his predictions have endured the test of history, more indeed than in a merely historiographic sense. The power of events, those of the past as well as of our present, has proved the truth of his prognoses.

Stein's long-term forecasts are an integral moment of our history, like those of Tocqueville, Bruno Bauer, Friedrich List, or Donoso Cortes. In their form of reflection and their vision, they belong to the revolutionary era; they point to our century and have only the slightest attachment to a previous epoch. The art of soothsaying and foreknowledge is an old one, in whatever form. What is the historical space in which Stein was able to develop his art to profound mastery? What distinguishes Lorenz von Stein from other historical thinkers?