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THE "SOCIAL QUESTION," 1820–1920*

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INTRODUCTION

In 1921, John A. Ryan, a priest and professor at Catholic University in Washington, DC, and one of his students, the Reverend Raymond McGowan, published *A Catechism of the Social Question*. The first question in it reads, "What do we mean by the social question?" Answer: "A *question* denotes a problem or a difficulty which demands solution. A social question is one that concerns society, or a social group. The social question means certain evils and grievances affecting the wage-earning classes, and calling for removal or remedy."[1]

The *Catechism* points to an essential feature of the "social question": it was not viewed as a question to be answered, but as a problem to be solved, an evil to be remedied. Those who wrote on the "social question" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries generally thought there was something fundamentally wrong with the circumstances of their time. A sensuous anxiety thus pervades their treatment of it. "They say the social question is as old as the world," the Italian writer Edmondo de Amicis told a group of students at the University of Turin in 1892;

> However, what in my opinion is really just of our age ... is the dissatisfaction of mind and heart, that dark and constant struggle between consciousness of civic duty and the benefit of the individual, the confused feelings of guilt, the uncertain notion of something great and fateful.[2]

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1 John A. Ryan and R. A. McGowan, *A Catechism of the Social Question* (New York, 1921), 5, original emphasis.

2 Edmond de Amicis, "Úvahy o socialné otázce," *Athenaeum, Listy pro literaturu a kritiku vědeckou*, 15 Oct. 1892, 8–13, at 10–12. All translations are my own.

De Amicis warned his young audience, poised as they were to enter active economic and political life, that the "social question" was "a question for everyone." It would entail a constant struggle that transcended events, politics, and even entire movements. Its ominous power, de Amicis believed, was a product of "the stature obtained by the principle of equality," which contrasted sharply with the gross *inequality* of power that gold had given to those who possess it in great quantities, power even over the state. Neither the principle nor the contrast was "as old as the world," de Amicis said, and added to the inventory of decisive recent developments the organization of workers and the proliferation and widespread dissemination of periodicals.[3]

If part of what was new about the "social question" of his time was the propagation of ideas through periodicals, then the fate of de Amicis's lecture came to embody his message. Two years later, the Czech translation of his speech on the "social question" appeared in Prague in a relatively young periodical called *Athenaeum*, edited by the Czech sociologist and statesman Tomáš Masaryk. Within a few years, Masaryk published his own (seven-hundred-page!) work on the "social question." He opened with the following elaboration of the term "social question":

> Social question—that is the overpowering fact of all economic and social, material and moral misery that we all have constantly before our eyes everywhere . . . Social question—today that means unease [*Unruhe*] and dissatisfaction, yearning and fearing, hoping and despairing, suffering and frustrated fury [*Ingrimm*] of thousands. Millions . . .[4]

In this conduit between de Amicis and Masaryk we find a theme central to the emergence and character of the "social question": a fearful dissatisfaction that was self-consciously very much of its time.

There is no shortage of treatments—historical or ortherwise—of the "social question."[5] Yet although historians continue to reflect on it, we have not considered how *its formulation as such* emerged and lent shape and stature to thought in the period. As the above examples reveal, the phrase "the social question," though it could and did accommodate a variety of definitions,

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3 Ibid.

4 T. G. Masaryk, *Die philosophischen und sociologischen Grundlagen des Marxismus: Studien zur socialen Frage* (Vienna, 1899), 1. The book was first published in Czech in 1898. See Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Otázka sociální: Základy Marxismu sociologické a filosofické* (Prague, 1898).

5 To name just a few: Ive Marx, *A New Social Question? On Minimum Income Protection in the Postindustrial Era* (Amsterdam, 2007); Robert Castel, *From Manual Workers to Wage Laborers: Transformation of the Social Question* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2003); Pamela M. Pilbeam, *French Socialists before Marx: Workers, Women and the Social Question in France* (Montreal, 2000).

possessed above all a *structuring tendency*. As statesmen and intellectuals engaged with the "social question," they were drawn down forking paths and made to choose: between "science" and "philosophy," ideas and ideologies, the old and the "now," theory and practice. The "social question" did not tell them which to choose, but necessitated the making of *those* choices.

The span of this essay (1820–1920) marks neither the birth nor the disappearance of the "social question," but rather the arc of time over which it emerged as such and across which its structuring presence can be amply observed. The approximation of a *moyenne durée* defined by its engagement with the "social question" is tempting for another reason: the largely outdated English word "querist" (questioner) in historical usage was often preceded by negative-connotative adjectives such as "impertinent," "insatiable," "troublesome."[6] I use the word *querist* occasionally here in reference to period commentators on the "social question." My object is to invoke precisely the "insatiable questioner" and the atmosphere of a century flush with such characters.

AT THE ROOT OF THE QUESTION

There are two ways to approach the origins of the "social question." One can seek the roots of the term's usage, or go a step further and, by examining the rhetorical and ideational features that later typified it, seek to uncover its deeper provenance. Here I will do both, beginning with the latter. I would identify two unlikely predecessors of the "social question": these are the "corn question" and the "bullion question" in Britain.[7] Both were related to the strain on the British currency precipitated by the Napoleonic Wars, and both were hotly discussed in the press and in pamphlets, as well as in the British parliament, culminating in the Coinage Act of 1816.

In 1810, W. Huskisson, a member of the Bullion Committee, published a long pamphlet under the title *The Question concerning the Depreciation of our Currency Stated and Examined*. He explained,

> when the many evil consequences of an erroneous, or even an unsettled state of the publick mind upon a question of such vast importance are considered; I trust that I shall

[6] OED, *querist*, n. The Latin "querela" or "questus" both mean "complaint." See F. E. J. Valpy, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Latin Language* (London, 1828), 388–9.

[7] On the "corn question" see, for example, Henry Parnell, *The Substance of the Speeches of Sir H. Parnell, Bart., in the House of Commons, with Additional Observations, on the Corn Laws* (London, 1814), 3.

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be justified in submitting, what was originally prepared for an indulgent and limited circle only, to the examination and judgement of a more extended and impartial tribunal.[8]

Huskisson's reference to a "more extended and impartial tribunal" is indicative of how querists would conceive of public opinion as judge or jury in the arbitration of questions.[9] Whereas the preliminary arbiter and forum for discussion of questions had been treaty negotiations or Parliament, in Britain, at least, that was changing.

In response to Huskisson's pamphlet, the Scottish politician and proto-statistician Sir John Sinclair wrote that he had meant to defer propagating his views on these "important subjects, until the question came to be discussed in Parliament, where the solidity of the arguments to be adduced on either side must ultimately be determined," but he came to believe that a more timely intervention was warranted:

> It seems to me ... incumbent upon those, whose attention has been directed to such inquiries, to lay before the public, a clear and explicit declaration of their sentiments on the subjects of coin and paper currency, and that with as little delay as possible, on two grounds, recognized by Mr. Huskisson; 1. The importance of the question; and, 2. ... On the decision of that question depend ... the interests and the comforts of every class of society ...[10]

Sinclair thus emphasized how the question demanded serious and urgent attention; to ignore it would be a catastrophe for all. It was therefore, he insisted, of relevance to "every class of society," just as de Amicis would later say of the "social question."

In 1811, the report of the Bullion Committee was discussed in the British House of Commons by Lord Viscount Castlereagh and George Canning, among others, whose speeches were published as pamphlets and were themselves reviewed in the periodical press.[11] Like Huskisson before them, the "question" formulation,

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8 W. Huskisson, *The Question concerning the Depreciation of our Currency stated and examined* (London, 1810), ii.

9 See, for example, Leopold Leon Sawaskiewicz, *Why the eastern question cannot be satisfactorily settled: or, reflexions on Poland and France* (London, 1840), iv; Fedor Ivanovich Fircks (baron), *La question polonaise au point de vue de la Pologne, de la Russie et de l'Europe* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1863), 85, 5–6.

10 John Sinclair, *Remarks on a Pamphlet Intitled, "The Question Concerning the Depreciation of the Currency Stated and Examined" by William Huskisson, Esq., M.P. Together with Several Political Maxims Regarding Coin and Paper Currency, Intended to Explain the Real Nature, and Advantages, of the Present System* (London, 1810), 24–5.

11 See Robert Stewart Castlereagh, *The Substance of a Speech Delivered by Lord Viscount Castlereagh In a Committee of the House of Commons, May 8, 1811; on the Report of the Bullion Committee* (London, 1811); George Canning, *Substance of two speeches, delivered*

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a parliamentary commonplace ("the present question"[12]), was manifest. "The object of the right honourable gentleman is to settle the publick mind on a question on which there is great division of opinion," declared Canning.[13] "[O]ne cannot well imagine anything more fatally injurious to the prosperity of a state," said Castlereagh, "whose power in war, and whose advancement in peace so intimately rests upon its public credit, than having a question, such as this, hung up in suspense."[14]

The tenor of urgency to solve the question with alacrity *or else* became another common attribute of the way the "social question" was discussed; that is, within a broadly irritative genre. A typical expression of this feature can be found in the work of the German-born antiliberal Dominican theologian and sociologist Albert M. Weiss writing in 1892: "Everything, the whole of it, is sick, not merely economic and moral [*sittliche*] life, but society itself. And it is equally true when it is said that solving the social question is the most pressing task [*Aufgabe*] of the time."[15]

The earliest mention I have found of the "bullion question" as such dates from 1811.[16] By 1816, the regular treatment of it in the periodical press and pamphlets brought the poet and historian Robert Southey to disparage it along with the "corn" and "population question" as "the fleeting fashion of the day."

> The same temper of mind, which in old times spent itself upon scholastic questions, and at a later age in commentaries upon the Scriptures, has in these days taken the direction of

in the House of Commons, by the Right Honourable George Canning, on Wednesday the 8th, and Monday the 13th of May, 1811, in the committee of the whole house; to which was referred, the report of the committee, appointed in the last session of Parliament "To inquire into the cause of the high price of bullion, and to take into consideration the state of the circulating medium, and of the exchanges between Great-Britain and foreign parts" (London, 1811). For reviews of the above see the *Monthly Review or Literary Journal*, 66 (1811), 326–8.

12 See, for example, Canning, *Substance of two speeches*, 36, 46.

13 Ibid., 126.

14 Castlereagh, *The Substance of a Speech*, 4.

15 Cited in Joseph Biederlack, *Die sociale Frage: Ein Beitrag zur Orientierung über ihr Wesen und ihre Lösung* (Innsbruck, 1921), 9.

16 Although the phrase appears in the title of Davis Giddy's *A Plain Statement of the Bullion Question in a Letter to a Friend*, it does not appear in the body of the text. The nearest approximation is on the first page, where the author seeks to "induce a wish, and afford a clue, for examining the Question through all its details of documents, &c." Davis Giddy, *A Plain Statement of the Bullion Question in a Letter to a Friend* (London, 1811), 1. That same year no less a figure than the English scholar of political economy and demography Thomas Robert Malthus employed the term "bullion question" in a review of Giddy and five other pamphlets. See Thomas Robert Malthus, "Pamphlets on the Bullion Question," *Edinburgh Review or Critical Journal*, 18 (May–Aug. 1811), 448–70. Again, however, the term appears in the review title, but not in the body of the text.

metaphysical or statistic philosophy. Bear witness, Bullion and Corn Laws! Bear witness, the New Science of Population! And the whole host of productions to which these happy topics have given birth, from the humble magazine essay, up to the bold octavo, and more ambitious quarto.[17]

Southey's allusion to "scholastic questions" refers to a method of argumentation based on Aristotelian rhetoric called the *quaestio disputata* and commonly used in medieval universities from the twelfth century to the seventeenth by figures such as Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham.[18] The reference reveals how scholastic questions—on the origins of evil in the world, or the nature of divine and human love, for example—were both predecessors and foils to the later "social question." In the introduction to his work *Principles of Political Economy*—written in 1819—Malthus responded to Southey's dismissal of the new questions, mounting a spirited defense of political economy as a "practical" science, "applicable to the common business of human life":

I cannot agree with a writer in one of our most popular critical journals, who considers the subjects of population, bullion, and corn laws in the same light as the scholastic questions of the middle ages, and puts marks of admiration to them expressive of his utter astonishment that such perishable stuff should engage any portion of the public attention ... The study of the laws of nature is, in all its branches, interesting ... but the laws which regulate the movements of human society have an infinitely stronger claim to our attention, both because they relate to objects about which we are daily and hourly conversant, and because their effects are continually modified by human interference.[19]

With the appearance of the corn, bullion and population questions, defenders of the "new science" of political economy were brought to a self-conscious contrast with earlier scholastic questions. Timeless questions were not the stuff of the nineteenth century. Malthus understood "practical" questions to be both of the moment and perpetually changing as a result of "human interference." Unlike those that had come before, the nineteenth century's questions would be self-consciously *of their time*.

17 Robert Southey, Article 8, "The Poor," *Quarterly Review*, 29 (1816), 187–235, at 235.

18 See Brian Lawn, *The Rise and Decline of the Scholastic "Quaestio Disputata": With Special Emphasis on Its Use in the Teaching of Medicine and Science* (Leiden and New York, 1993), esp. 70, 74, 86. It is worth noting that the scholastic method of disputation has even deeper roots, in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, for example.

19 Thomas Robert Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy Considered with a View to Their Practical Application* (London, 1836), 9–10.

ZEITFRAGEN (QUESTIONS OF THE TIME)

There are two patterns that emerged within the discussion of "questions"—both present in de Amicis's lecture—that produced an emphasis on the uniqueness of "now." The first relates to the way questions were historicized even as they were invented; the second is in the way period commentators used questions to define what made their own time distinct from earlier times. De Amicis's elaboration of what was new about the "social question," for example, makes more sense if considered in light of the earlier self-conscious divergence of querists like Malthus from their scholastic predecessors.

We begin with historicization: at the very instant the phrase was born—likely around the 1810s—the "social question" was endowed with a history that backdated it by decades, sometimes centuries, before its actual emergence as such. De Amicis thus referred to it as being "as old as the world." The backdating was not necessarily conscious, for many of the issues that informed discussions of the "social question" had been in circulation prior to their crystallization under that heading. The emergence of the phrase itself is significant, however, in that it marks an effort to raise the profile of particular issues into the realm of significant concerns, or problems of both domestic and international importance,[20] and to usurp the role of the scholastic question. Accordingly, the function of backdating was to create a sense of urgency, of it being "high time" to find a solution.

Backdating could also serve a far more ambitious purpose; insofar as it was used to explain why action was necessary *now*, it became incumbent upon the *querist*, viz. Edmondo de Amicis, to explain what was *different* about *now*. In so doing, commentators on "questions" regularly offered a variation on the Hegelian historical dialectic. One of the earliest references to "the social question" appears in an article by the Romantic writer Charles Nodier, in the Paris *Revue politique* from 1831. Nodier wrote, "I believe in Saint-Simon, the god of the nineteenth century, and I firmly believe that no other god of the same kind is going to come and simplify the social question and reduce it to its most basic terms."[21]

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[20] An 1837 issue of the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* introduced a new regular heading, "European Questions and Problems," to its readership. The editors explained it as follows: "Under the heading of questions and problems we mean subjects in which the well-being and interests of Europe are heavily implicated, and will focus on and observe particularly those that are currently on the agenda, or, as they say in parliament, on the table." Therewith the editors posited a necessary link between European interests and questions, a move that required those who would weigh in on questions to demonstrate that question's impact on "the well-being and interests of Europe." "Europäische Fragen und Probleme," *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung*, 91 and 92 (27 Feb. 1837), special *Beilage*, 362–3.

[21] Charles Nodier, "De la fin prochaine du genre humain," *Revue politique* (Paris), 20 May 1831, 224–40, at 240.

The idea that the "social question" did not lend itself to reduction and simplification is comparable to the way Malthus spoke of the "bullion question." "In political economy," wrote Malthus in 1819, "the desire to simplify has occasioned an unwillingness to acknowledge the operation of more causes than one in the production of particular effects ... I have always thought that the late controversy on the bullion question presented a signal instance of this kind of error."[22] The drive to generalize and simplify, Malthus argued, was one that political economy had inherited from philosophy and had led to "crude and premature theories."[23]

The critique of simplification also foreshadowed some of the later thinking—inspired by Hegel—that the times had changed the "question," and that it must therefore be rethought. The German Jewish socialist and philosopher Ferdinand Lassalle deliberately avoided using the phrase "solution of the social question" as he found it misleading. In a note to a speech he delivered to a worker's organization in Frankfurt am Main in 1863, he declared, "The definitive 'solution of the social question' will be the work of generations and will be the result of a series of provisions [*Einrichtungen*] and measures *that must develop organically upon the earlier ones.*"[24]

A few years later, in 1868, Ernst Becher published *Die Arbeiterfrage in ihrer gegenwärtigen Gestaltung und die Versuche zu ihrer Lösung* [The Worker Question in Its Present Form and the Attempts to Solve It]:

> [E]ach time has its own tasks to fulfill, its own questions to solve which sum up the character and meaning of [that time] ... the struggle and pursuit of what is newer and better, the battle of other ideas and principles against the legacy of vanquished forms of life and axioms, but nowhere yet nearing completion.[25]

Becher presented the worker question—commonly ranged under the umbrella category of the "social question"—as part of an interminable process, forever incomplete, requiring constant engagement.

The "proud edifice of the present time" would meet with certain destruction in the face of the problems society faced, wrote Gustav Müller, a self-declared "common man of the people," in his 1894 book *Die einzig mögliche und wahre*

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22 "The principal cause of error, and of the differences which prevail at present among the scientific writers on political economy, appears to me to be a precipitate attempt to simplify and generalize." Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy*, 4–5.

23 Ibid., 5.

24 Ferdinand Lassalle, *Arbeiterlesebuch: Rede Lassalle's zu Frankfurt am Main am 17. und 19. mai 1863, nach dem stenographischen Bericht* (Berlin, 1874), 41 n., italics in the original. The comment appears in an annotation to the speech written by Lassalle himself.

25 Ernst Becher, *Die Arbeiterfrage in ihrer gegenwärtigen Gestaltung und die Versuche zu ihrer Lösung* (Pest, Vienna, and Leipzig, 1868), 1–2.

Lösung der sozialen Frage: Ein Lichtblick in dem wirren Getümmel der Welt in der Gegenwart (The Only Possible True Solution to the Social Question: A Ray of Hope in the Confused Tumult of the Present Time).[26] The present circumstances, he continued, "cannot be sustained indefinitely . . . but with inherent inexhaustible force, new life will grow up from the rubble."[27]

In a book on the "social question" from 1919, the German theosophist Rudolf Steiner used a biological metaphor to make the same point. "Just as an organism becomes hungry some time after being full, so does the social organism proceed from order to disorder. There can no more be a universal medicine for [maintaining] order in social relations than there is a food that will satisfy for all times." The "social question," though hardly a new development in human societies, had to be solved repeatedly and differently each time in accordance with the conditions of that time. As such it was "a component of the entire recent life of civilization" (*ein Bestandteil des ganzen neueren Zivilisationslebens*).[28]

So it was that the timeliness of the "social question" produced a corollary sense of timelessness, that it must always be remedied over and over again. This was no less true for conservatives and progressive religious figures. "The modern world, modern society, modern nations suffer from a very serious chronic illness," wrote the Spanish antiliberal Catholic priest Félix Sardá y Salvany in 1890; "the true social malady of our time is impiety . . . a chronic, habitual and inveterate malady."[29] "There will always be a social question," declared two Amercian priests in their 1921 *Catechism of the Social Question*.[30]

A PARTICULARLY UNIVERSAL QUESTION

While I believe the "deep provenance" of discussions of the "social question" is to be sought in the debates around the "bullion question" in Britain, the origin of the actual phrase "social question" is significant for different reasons. Among the first mentions of it that I have been able to locate appeared in France (*question sociale*) in a review of several books on public education from a conservative periodical, *L'Ami de la Religion et du Roi* (Friend of Religion and of

[26] Gustav Müller, *Die einzig mögliche und wahre Lösung der sozialen Frage: Ein Lichtblick in dem wirren Getümmel der Welt in der Gegenwart* (Leipzig, 1894), 6.

[27] Ibid., 7, 14–15.

[28] Rudolf Steiner, *Die Kernpunkte der sozialen Frage in den Lebensnotwendigkeiten der Gegenwart und Zukunft* (Stuttgart, 1920), 10.

[29] Félix Sardá y Salvany, *Le mal social: Ses causes, ses remèdes: Mélanges et controverses sur les principales questions religieuses et sociales du temps present* (Paris, 1890), 3, 7.

[30] Ryan and McGowan, *A Catechism*, 46.

the King), published in Paris in 1816.[31] The author noted that M. Dampmartin, author of a *Letter to the Gentlemen of the Chamber of Deputies Concerning Public Education* (1815), "above all wanted to offer some views on education which thoroughly address this major social question."[32] On 19 March 1826, the French newspaper *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* (Paris) registered the ongoing concern regarding "how to fight a legal question with a social question during revolution."[33] In both cases, the reference is to "*a* social question" in the typological sense, rather than to "*the* social question" as a thing unto itself.

The first references I have found to "*the* social question" date from 1831 and are related to the fallout of the July Revolution in France. The term likely spread from French into English through newspaper reports on the events in France.[34] It seems that the first reference in German did not appear until nearly a decade later, in Heinrich Heine's *Pariser Korrespondenz* from 1840.[35]

The "social question" had two lives: one as a category question ("*a* social question"), the other as a single question or aggregate of many questions ("*the* social question").[36] But what *was* the "social question"? The cacophony of competing definitions did not escape period commentators, who noted the confusion precipitated by its ubiquity as much as by its haziness. A German leaflet published in Cologne in 1849 opened with the lament,

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31 *L'Ami de la Religion et du Roi, Journal Ecclésiastique, Politique et Littéraire* (Paris), 156 (7 Feb. 1816), 385–96, at esp. 389.

32 Anne-Henri Cabet Dampmartin, *Lettre à Messieurs de la Chambre des Députés sur l'éducation publique et sur le choix des instituteurs* (Paris, 1815). No reference to the "social question" appears in the actual text.

33 "Paris," *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* (Paris), 20 March 1826, 2.

34 See, for example, "Disturbances at Lyons (from the *Moniteur* of Friday, Nov. 25)," *Courier* (London), 28 Nov. 1831, 4. "A social question is more important than a political one." Note this is still a reference to "*a* social question," rather than "*the* social question." There were others, however, wherein references were to "*the* social question," e.g. "Events at Lyons," *Courier* (London) 20 Dec. 1831, 2. It may also be worth noting that in a letter from 1830, John Stuart Mill wrote in reference to events in France that "all the great questions of legislation, education, & social improvement in general will be brought on the tapis successively." John Stuart Mill, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 12, *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill 1812–1848 Part I*, ed. Francis E. Mineka, Introduction by F. A. Hayek (Toronto, 1963), 64.

35 Wolfram Fischer, "Der Wandel der sozialen Frage in den fortgeschrittenen Industriegesellschaften" (1977), in Karl Hohmann and Horst Friedrich Wünsche, eds., *Grundtexte zur sozialen Marktwirtschaft*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart, 1988), 103–30, at 104.

36 Fischer, ibid., 104–5, writes of this phenomonen in the German context in a brief conceptual history of the "social question." Rudolf Steiner spoke of "*the* social question" as a "Wirtschafts-, Rechts-, und Geistesfrage." Steiner, *Die Kernpunkte*, 18.

Such an endless number of words have been spoken, screamed, written, printed on these social questions that the people's conceptions [*Begriffe*] are completely confused and it is necessary to start at the very beginning if one hopes to reach any clarity in the matter. *What is it with the social question actually?*[37]

Defining the question in the initial pages of an intervention served to clear the decks rhetorically of competing conceptualizations, offering an explicitly simplified definition, frequently a declared return to first principles.

"The first condition," wrote the German economist and statistician Hans von Scheel in his 1871 book *Die Theorie der sozialen Frage* (The Theory of the Social Question), "of making the science and practice of solving the question easier is undoubtedly the correct formulation of the question [*Fragestellung*]."[38] Most works addressing the "social question" therefore dedicated introductory segments to its definition. Von Scheel observed that although everyone thinks they have a rough idea as to what the "social question" is, even "scientifically educated" (*wissenschaftlich gebildeten*) people are not very clear on the matter, nor did the rapidly proliferating literature on the subject offer much of a foothold in his view.[39]

The positing of a general confusion and superfluity of amateur interventions made way rhetorically for the relatively simplified, clear, and elegant intervention of the commentator *du jour*. To dispel the "vagueness or confusion of thought" that the phrase "The Social Question" conveys, wrote the American professor of education Ira Howerth in 1906, "A discussion ... which aspires to be popularly helpful may as well begin at the beginning and state the question, if possible, in easily comprehensible terms."[40]

Such simplification and clarification strategies generally involved breaking the "social question" down into—or positioning it above—various component parts, such as the worker or labor question, the woman question, and the agrarian question.[41] Von Scheel observed the variety of subquestions that were variously ranged under the umbrella category of the "social question": "the worker question, the woman question, the apartment question," etc.[42] Some went

[37] *An die Urwähler: Die sociale Frage*, Cologne, 1849, available at http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:hbz:061:1–172096, 1, accessed 27 July 2014, italics in original.

[38] Hans von Scheel, *Die Theorie der sozialen Frage* (Jena, 1871), 4.

[39] Ibid., 1.

[40] Ira Howerth, "The Social Question of Today," *American Journal of Sociology*, 12/2 (Sept. 1906), 254–68, at 254.

[41] See, for example, de Amicis, "Úvahy o socialné otázce," 13.

[42] Von Scheel, *Die Theorie der sozialen Frage*, 2. See also Sándor Giesswein, *Társadalmi problémák és keresztény világnézet* (Budapest, 1907), 128.

even further, viewing the "social question" as truly all-encompassing. Addressing future Catholic priests in 1895, the German Jesuit scholar of canon law and sociologist Joseph Biederlack wrote, "The worker question is just a part, and the workers' pay question is even just a small part, of the social question."[43] The "social question," he argued, takes on a tremendous scope once one grasps the roots of today's social and economic defects; it extends even into the realm of morals and ethics, law, science, and the state, and is also therefore a "religious question," "because it encompasses within itself the most important questions of ethics, philosophy of law, and statecraft [*Staatslehre*]."[44]

Expanding definitions into the realm of morality and ethics gave conservatives and progressive religious figures alike a foothold in discussions of the "social questions" of the time. In their *Catechism of the Social Question*, the Catholic priests Ryan and McGowan addressed the aggregate nature of the "social question." "Are there not many social questions?" is the second question in the catechism, to which the answer is: "Yes. Any important difficulty, grievance, or problem, which affects a social group, and arouses a demand for relief or solution, may properly be called a social question."[45]

CONTRADICTIONS, DEFECTS AND RULING IDEAS

In addition to tracing origins and offering definitions, querists were similarly preoccupied with causes. What gave rise to the "social question"? There was a remarkable degree of consensus that the cause was a tension or contradiction between the spirit of the time and the conditions of the time. As de Amicis understood it, the "principle of equality" and the fact of inequality rendered a paradox that was the "social question" of the time.

De Amicis's ideas had a longer pedigree. In his book on the "social question" from 1871, von Scheel wrote that the "modern culture state" placed "the equality of all before the law and the freedom of the individual ... as fundamental conditions of the spiritual and material development of the people."[46] But because there was a "double organization of the population within the sate ... a political and an economic," the principle of freedom and equality was unevenly applied across the political and economic realms, producing a contradiction "unique to modern society." "[O]ut of legal freedom and equality there emerged economic

[43] Biederlack, *Die sociale Frage*, 2–3. He went on to define different parts of the "social question." These included the agrarian question, the craftsman question (*Handwerkerfrage*), the worker question, and the woman question.

[44] Ibid., 7–10.

[45] Ryan and McGowan, *A Catechism*, 5.

[46] Von Scheel, *Die Theorie der sozialen Frage*, 8.

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un-freedom and inequality." This in turn, von Scheel believed, gave rise to the "social question":

> [E]very contradiction, as soon as it becomes conscious, becomes a thought problem: a question. And in this way the formulation of the social question of the present time reveals itself to us very simply and specifically: it is the contradiction between national economic development and the societal development principle—which appears to us as an ideal—of freedom and equality. The study and solution of this contradiction is the study and solution of the contemporary social question.[47]

These themes resurfaced regularly. In 1894, Gustav Müller wrote that the "social question" was "a consequence of the sharpened capacity to grasp the stark defects [*Mißstände*] of the present which impose an incontrovertible certainty that conditions as they are today cannot continue to exist for all eternity."[48] A year later, Josef Biederlack, like de Amicis and Müller before him, emphasized that the social question stemmed from "economic and social defects [*Mißstände*]" resulting from the contemporary "one-sided development of money capitalism."[49] And shortly thereafter, Ludwig Stein, a Swiss Hungarian rabbi, sociologist, and philosopher, saw an irreconcilable contradiction between the ideals of freedom and equality at the root of the "social question."[50]

It is worth pausing here to consider a couple of features of the way "now" was defined against previous times in these passages. One is the repeated reference to contradictions and defects; the other, related phenomenon is how these contradictions and defects were viewed as stemming from a disjuncture between ideas or principles, namely the principle of equality (and freedom), and socioeconomic reality. The first—which amounted to a pathologization of the present—was regularly manifest in expressions of agitation, confusion, despair, and disorientation of the sort described by de Amicis, Masaryk and others.

No less forceful than the perceived disjuncture between ideas (or ideals) and reality was the concomitant sense that principles or ideas had themselves become agents in human history. This belief pervaded many of the late nineteenth-century discussions of the "social question." Consider, for example, this passage from the preface to an 1896 book on *The Labour Question in Britain* by the French sociologist Henri de Tourville, disciple of the French Catholic sociologist and economist Pierre Guillaume Frédéric le Play:

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47 Ibid., 15–16.

48 Müller, *Die einzig mögliche und wahre Lösung*, 7.

49 Biederlack, *Die sociale Frage*, iii, 1.

50 Ludwig Stein, *Die soziale Frage im Lichte der Philosophie: Vorlesungen über Sozialphilosophie und ihre Geschichte* (Stuttgart, 1897), 466.

> A great event occurs which gradually reconciles the most opposed sentiments. Who did it? No one and yet every one, not through any conscious desire preceding and preparing the issue, but through some need which demanded a solution and through the satisfaction of which greeted it when found. Powerful forces are at work, overruling the will of the masses as well as of the classes, and pointing to the influence of the laws which shape the conditions of human life.

De Tourville concluded, "No one now leads the world, either from above or from below."[51] Instead, it was ideas that ruled the day.

The notion of a "ruling idea" is likely descended from an array of sources: the *genius saeculi* ("spirit of the century") that became the *Zeitgeist* (or the "spirit of the times") with Herder in the 1760s, which Goethe then satirized in his *Faust* (1808) as none other than the "rulers' own spirit."[52] This notion of the rulers' spirit was reversed in Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821), when he wrote of the *Weltgeist* or "world spirit," that "states, nations, and individuals . . . are forever the unconscious tools and organs of the world spirit [*Weltgeist*] at work within them."[53] According to these discussions of the "social question," then, one was either being ruled *by* or being ruled *through* the spirit of the time,

Given the parallel and complementary evolution of socialism and the "social question" (which I will elaborate forthwith), it is perhaps not surprising that "ruling ideas" also lie at the very heart of socialist thought. In 1845 and 1846, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote "The German Ideology," in which they put forward the notion that every age had its own "ruling ideas" (*herrschende Gedanken*), which were the ideas of the ruling classes. These could then be separated ("abstracted") from the ruling individuals and relations of the time, such that "one could, for example, say, that during the time of aristocratic rule, the notions of honor, loyalty, etc. reign, while under bourgeois rule the notions of freedom, equality, etc. reign." But there was a problem; Marx and Engels noted that "although every shopkeeper can tell the difference between what someone says they are and what they really are, our historiography has not yet come to this

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51 Henri de Tourville, "Preface to the French Edition," in Paul de Rousiers, *The Labour Question in Britain* (London, 1896), vi–xiv, at vi.

52 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Eine Tragödie*, "Der Tragödie Erster Teil, Nacht" (Stuttgart, 1971), 19. "Was ihr den Geist der Zeiten heißt, / Das ist im Grund der Herren eigner Geist, / In dem die Zeiten sich bespiegeln. / Da ist's denn wahrlich oft ein Jammer! / Man läuft euch bei dem ersten Blick davon. / Ein Kehrichtfaß und eine Rumpelkammer / Und höchstens eine Haupt- und Staatsaktion/ Mit trefflichen pragmatischen Maximen, / Wie sie den Puppen wohl im Munde ziemen!"

53 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Leipzig, 1911), 272.

trivial realization. It takes every epoch at its word, what it says about itself and imagines of itself."[54]

With Marx and Engels, the inherent disjuncture between the explicit nature and the and implicit nature of "ruling ideas" resembles what von Scheel would later call "a thought problem": the seed of a question. "The German Ideology" was never published during the lifetime of its co-authors, or rather only in part. But the explication it contained of the contradiction between the "ruling ideas" of the time and reality was already at the core of discussions of the "social question."

Certainly there were others around mid-century who spoke of "ruling ideas." In the early 1850s, the Hungarian statesman József Eötvös published a two-volume work on *The Ruling Principles of the 19th Century and Their Influence on the State*. Among the "ruling principles" he enumerated were freedom, equality, and nationality, which "stand in contradiction with one another such that their realization must needs result in the undoing of every large state."[55] It was nevertheless the contradiction between ruling ideas, rather than between those ideas and the reality, that constituted the problem of the time, according to Eötvös. About a decade later, in 1865, Eötvös wrote another book in which he revisited the theme of "ruling principles."[56] "Such principles," he told his readers, "as have become general principles cannot be repressed, nor can their consequences be averted; and no one people or state, however powerful it may be, can close itself off from the impact of such principles."[57]

Eötvös's notion that the "ruling principles" of the time had an inexorability all their own appears in subsequent treatments of the "social question," such as de Tourville's, and later in a book by the Hungarian papal prelate and Christian-socialist politician Sándor Giesswein from 1907. "The planet that reigns over the principles of our time is the social problem,"[58] Giesswein wrote. "The social question cannot be solved by a return to the unrecoverable conditions and property relations of primitive society, but rather by the more even and healthy development of modern society and a higher degree of culture."[59] Giesswein,

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54 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The German Ideology," available at https://www.uni-due.de/einladung/Vorlesungen/hermeneutik/marxid.htm, accessed 27 July 2014.

55 József Eötvös, *A XIX. század uralkodó eszméinek befolyása az álladalomra*, vol. 1 (Pest, 1854), 574–5.

56 József Eötvös, *A nemzetiségi kérdés* (Pest, 1865), 9.

57 Ibid., 7, 158.

58 Giesswein, *Társadalmi problémák*, vii.

59 Sándor Hegedűs, "A földbirtok és a társadalmi kerdés," *Budapesti Szemle*, 23–4 (1876), 272–96, at 296. Giesswein's intervention engages implicitly with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men*, written in 1754 as part of a question competition for the Academy of Dijon. In it Rousseau claimed that the basis

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like others of his time and before, believed that the "solution" to the "social question" must be rooted in *present conditions* rather than in a return to the state of nature. The "ruling ideas" of the time demanded such. And should the tensions and contradictions between "ruling ideas" be successfully managed, a great benefit would redound to all. If not, the result would be catastrophic for all.[60] The promise of utopia with the proper solution of the "social question" was almost always accompanied by a threat of disaster on a vast scale should the proper solution not be found. If catastrophe is to be averted, wrote Howerth, it would require that "the people generally" dedicate themselves to "much general study of the social question."[61]

THE NEW UNIVERSALISM AND POPULAR PEDAGOGY

In 1821, the Swiss liberal Charles Victor de Bonstetten wrote a book entitled *Etudes de L'homme, ou, Recherches sur les Facultés de Sentir et de Penser*, in which he sought to define the relationship between"ruling ideas" (*idées dominantes*) and "public opinion." The latter, he wrote, "is the summary product of everyone's attitudes toward the ruling ideas of society. Ideas are to opinion what elements are to matter."[62] De Bonstetten here provides a bridge between the post-scholastic "practical" tenor of early questions—such as the "bullion question"—which were discussed in the interest of informing and swaying public opinion on matters of presumed importance to everyone, and the abstract "ruling ideas" to which were attributed an increasing amount of power in the shaping of events.

The tension between idea and practice—as well as attempts to reconcile the two—were central to the way the "social question" was discussed in the nineteenth century. To achieve this reconciliation, a number of querists dreamt of common social action that would bring idea and practice into longed-for harmony.[63] In an essay on William Shakespeare from 1863, Victor Hugo wrote, "At the point where the social question has arrived, everything should be joint action. Isolated forces cancel, the ideal and the real are integral. Art should help science. Both wheels of

for differences in wealth emerged in the moment that man left the state of nature by developing the notion of private property, which required abstraction and the creation of "society" out of individuals. This, Rousseau believed, also marked the origin of society, and hence of the possibility of the "social."

60 Giesswein, *Társadalmi problémák*, 3–4.

61 Howerth, "The Social Question of Today," 254.

62 Charles Victor de Bonstetten, *Etudes de L'homme, ou, Recherches sur les Facultés de Sentir et de Penser*, vol. 1 (Geneva, 1821), 257.

63 "The social question is thus now and forever more the question of *establishing harmony in the integral life* [*Gesammmtleben*] *of the people*." Becher, *Die Arbeiterfrage*, 2–3, italics in the original.

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progress are turning together."[64] To that end, Hugo intoned the illegitimacy of a strictly economic approach to the "social question," arguing that economics had too long ruled the debate.

> The social question was too reduced to the economic point of view, it is time to go back to the moral point of view ... Start with: extensive public education [for] if the intellectual condition improves, the material condition will also improve. Rest assured, if your soul grows, your bread also whitens.[65]

In other words, it was not enough to create a new system, one had to create a new kind of person.

"In France," wrote Henri de Tourville in the preface to a book on *The Labour Question in Britain* from 1896,

> the education of all the classes is radically and appallingly wrong ... This is essentially the source ... of the whole Social Question ... A great enterprise has grown up, but there is something wrong with its working. After blaming all the forces of nature, and after appealing to all of them, it has at last been realized that what is wanting is the man.

He proposed altering education of the youth to turn out a type of man like the Anglo-Saxon "splendid savage."[66] Similarly, "Legal and economic remedies would not of themselves solve the social question," wrote Ryan and McGowan in their 1921 *Catechism of the Social Question*. "They are of considerable value, but there must also be a change in the spirit and ideals of men and women."[67]

The shift away from political and economic "solutions" had other implications, for it implied that any solution to the question must entail the *creation* of a self-conscious society. The science of "current political economy" is "defective" for the purpose "of handling the Social Question," wrote the English economist and reformer J. A. Hobson in 1901. "A satisfactory answer [to the Social Question] cannot consist in the theoretic solution of a problem; it must lie in the region of social conduct ... the reins of Science and Practice are drawn together."[68]

The scientific metaphor, as described, here self-consciously shifts from mathematics (economics) to biology. "The method must be that of an organic science, reorganizing organic interaction and qualitative differences, not the purely mathematical or quantitative method which current economic science tends more and more to employ."[69] With this shift came also a devaluation of

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64 Victor Hugo, "William Shakespeare," in *Oeuvres complètes de Victor Hugo, Philosophie*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1937), 3–233, at 173.

65 Victor Hugo, "Post-scriptum de ma vie," in ibid., 473–628, at 534.

66 De Tourville, "Preface to the French Edition," xi, xiii.

67 Ryan and McGowan, *A Catechism*, 46.

68 J. A. Hobson, *The Social Problem: Life and Work* (London, 1901), 3–5.

69 Ibid., 91.

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day-to-day political "solutions" to the "social question." The "social question" was no longer a problem to be solved so much as an ill to be remedied.[70] "Society is sick," wrote Ernst Becher in 1868; "Then comes the question regarding the causes, character and cure of the sickness: *the social question*."[71]

The transference of this kind of biologized approach was skeptically received by several commentators on the "social question." Ludwig Stein believed that the shift to biology was merely a new approach to an old problem that had preoccupied both Plato and the scholastics:

> It would be a mistake to consider the progress of philosophy to be absolute in the sense that certain scholastic questions have been definitively closed and removed from the scientific program thanks to the insights of our time. Every age rather throws up these as yet unsolved questions again in its own fashion.

What religious dogma had been in the Middle Ages and mathematics in the seventeenth century, biology was in the nineteenth century, namely the search for a new path to the universal.[72]

The theosophist Rudolf Steiner was much more critical of the move in his 1919 book on the "social question":

> When—as often happens—one simply transfers what one thinks he has learned about the natural organism onto the social organism, he merely shows that he does not wish to acquire the ability to see the social organism as autonomous and a thing unto itself and to probe its particular laws.[73]

Society has its own laws, Steiner argued, but at the same time he clung to the biologization of the "social question" by speaking of it as periodic rather than episodic: like hunger rather than like a mathematical equation to be solved once and for all.

Insofar as the object was to create a new kind of person, education was the frequently offered remedy. "The Social Question finds, perhaps, its clearest unity in that common education of the intelligence and goodwill of the citizen," wrote Hobson. "Society as an organism must be animated by a common moral and intellectual life, vested in individuals who are working in conscious cooperation for a common end." This could not be achieved by politics, Hobson felt, for "Turning to concrete politics . . . The [t]he problem drives back into the region of individual character and motive."[74] Hobson's disparagement of "politics"

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70 See, for example, Sardá y Salvany, *Le mal social*.

71 Becher, *Die Arbeiterfrage*, 2–3, italics in the original.

72 Stein, *Die soziale Frage im Lichte der Philosophie*, 515–17.

73 Steiner, *Die Kernpunkte*, 42.

74 Hobson, *The Social Problem*, 298–299.

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echoes Southey's critique of Malthus on the "bullion question": a longer, broader view was required.

Educating the public—*creating* society—was not merely considered to be the form that a solution to the "social question" should take; it was also the form that discussions of the "social question" *themselves* took. To that end a new didactic genre was developed, one that had a precedent in the earliest treatments of the "bullion question," wherein commentators stressed the necessity of exposing the matter to public opinion and wondered about the timing and the form their interventions should take (parliamentary debate being considered necessary, but insufficient). In line with the tendency to at once engage, educate, and convince a reading public not only on certain questions, but on certain principles and ideas (ruling ideas), a popular pedagogical literature began to emerge, descended from the almanac, the catechism, and the pamphlet, but with shades of the university lecture hall also present.

And yet, initially at least, the university lecture hall was the direct adversary of those seeking to raise the profile of the "social question." Among the earliest references to "the social question" appeared in 1831 in the *Encyclopédie moderne ou dictionnaire abrégé des sciences, des lettres et des arts* (1831), under the entry for "Université." The distinction between scholastic and practical questions discussed by Malthus is found here in a critique of the university, where scholastic questions had been born and whence they were propagated. "Real education, of the sort that created men, that shaped events, no longer has anything in common with this newly restored frame that is still called 'University'," the encyclopedia's authors argued;

> Intelligence grows through other channels; the developments that moral science has undergone ... had the main effect to appreciate the need that mankind has for work. This new knowledge puts the social question where it should be, that is to say, in the position of the highest foresight or the highest theory, the only universal.[75]

Here again, the scholastic tradition (of the universities) is supplanted by a new universalism in the form of the "social question."

When the next surge of revolutionary activity began in 1848, its leadership declared that a new kind of universal knowledge was required to solve the "social question." In a speech delivered by Adolphe Thiers to the French National Assembly on 13 September 1848, he spoke of the "social question" as "a vital question for the future of the republic," one that was not a question of political economy, or customs duties, or economics, but rather "a societal [*gesellschaftliche*], political philosophical, metaphysical question; a question that

75 M. Courtin, ed., *Encyclopédie Moderne ou Dictionnaire Abrégé des Sciences, des Lettres et des Arts*, vol. 23 (Paris, 1831), 275.

encompasses all these relationships within itself." As de Amicis would later do, Thiers warned his audience that the acuteness of the question was undeniable: "and you know," he continued, "what an enormous significance the social question has attained in the events that have moved France and the world."[76]

In Thiers's speech, as in Hugo's, there is a rejection of political economy in favor of a more all-encompassing mode of understanding and addressing the "social question," one informed by empiricism as much as by idealism. For some who followed the interventions of Thiers and the socialist Louis Blanc in the French National Assembly during the 1848 revolutions, this meant socialism. "Socialism," the German translator of their speeches declared in early 1849,

> is a science whose propositions [*Sätze*] were not invented in an academic's study, nor can they be proven by logic quibbles or erudite citations. It is a science that grows directly from the life of the people and can only develop and refine itself in real daily interaction with the world.[77]

But insofar as these thinkers were critical of the out-of-touch nature of university training and demanded a more universal and practical form of education, they also sought to change its intended audience and therewith the language and genres in which it addressed itself to that audience. Thus was born a popular pedagogical genre of a new sort. In a series of lectures meant for the general education of women published in Germany in 1856, for example, the author (Karl Biedermann) included a lecture on "The Social Question, Its Meaning, and Attempts to Solve it."[78] No one, a range of authors intoned, could afford to ignore the "social question." In the words of von Scheel writing in 1871, "it is the duty of every educated person to inform themselves on the nature of the social question or at least to orient themselves with respect to it."[79] Driven by this imperative, a number of works appeared written in a popular didactic genre, variously seeking to imitate and to transform the university.

The literature on the "social question" includes many works written in this new genre. De Amicis's intervention counts as one, having been plucked from its university lecture-hall setting and republished in multiple translations. In 1895, Josef Biederlack compiled a series of lectures he had given at the theological seminary in Innsbruck under the title *Die sociale Frage: Ein Beitrag zur Orientierung über ihr Wesen und ihre Lösung*. Originally, the lectures were

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[76] Adolphe Thiers, "Rede in der National-Versammlung, am 13. September 1848," in Adolphe Thiers and Louis Blanc, *Louis Blanc und Thiers über die sociale frage . . . Aus dem französischen* (Breslau, 1849), 7–39, at 7–8.

[77] Ibid., iii.

[78] Karl Biedermann, *Frauen-Brevier: Kultergeschichtliche Vorlesungen* (Leipzig, 1856), 334.

[79] Von Scheel, *Die Theorie der sozialen Frage*, 1.

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intended to prepare future priests for confronting "the great problem of our time,"[80] but the book was so popular it went into several editions, and was still being published after the Great War. As for McGowan and Ryan's 1921 *Catechism of the Social Question*, the didactic nature is inherent to the form. In the opening remarks on "How Best to Use the Catechism," the authors recommend that "groups of people study it together."[81]

A QUESTION OF DISCIPLINE AND IDEOLOGY

In continental Europe, at least, a whole new discipline—sociology—took shape around discussions of the "social question."[82] A flirtation with philosophy as an analytical frame for the "social question" contributed in no small part to the legitimization of sociology as a field unto itself.

In 1897, Ludwig Stein—who worked as a journalist and publicist in addition to writing works in philosophy and sociology—published a series of lectures he had given over the course of the 1890s, the overarching title of which was *Die soziale Frage im Lichte der Philosophie: Vorlesungen über Sozialphilosophie und ihre Geschichte*. In it, he sought to offer a philosophical treatment of the "social question" in the popular pedagogical genre.[83] Stein opposed what he saw as the "Prostitution of the intellect [*prostituirung des Geistes*] that puts on the makeup of science and wants to show off with sociological phraseology." In line with the critique of day-to-day politics offered by many other commentators on the "social question," Stein felt that philosophy lengthened and expanded the perpective on the *Tagesfragen*. The "partisan thinker" (*Parteimann*), he wrote, "gets drunk on the political orgies of his time and lurches blindly on to the nearest goal. Meanwhile, the philosopher in the midst of the political bacchanalia surrounding him, calls for foresight and sobriety."[84]

A reviewer of Stein's book, Erich Adickes—himself a German Kantian philosopher—was not impressed. He believed that Stein's book had failed to be a true work of philosophy: "*because of its sociological content it should not*

[80] Biederlack, *Die sociale Frage*, iii.

[81] Ryan and McGowan, *A Catechism*, 4.

[82] Perhaps more than one discipline owes its existence to discussions of the "social question," as Elizabeth Sage has argued that *la question sociale* has been "definitional to the discipline" of economics, as well. See Elizabeth M. Sage, *A Dubious Science: Political Economy and the Social Question in 19th-Century France* (New York, 2009), 112.

[83] Stein, *Die soziale Frage im Lichte der Philosophie*, 10.

[84] Ibid., 28.

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be considered philosophy insofar as sociology should be considered an autonomous science."[85]

Adickes claimed that the legitimacy of philosophy as a discipline was threatened by works such as Stein's. The philosopher's "universalist tendency" must be preserved, but not by having philosophers "play the master" and "interject" in every area of scientific inquiry, seeking to "reach the top" of an area of knowledge without making the difficult ascent via "experience." Instead, there must be a kind of division of labor between disciplines, one in which their areas of competence do not significantly overlap, for the position of the philosopher could only be considered secure "if it is apportioned a particular jurisdiction [*Arbeitsgebiet*]," Adickes concluded.[86] In this way, every discipline could have its own particular stake in the universal. "Every discipline must study its object, pose its questions, exploit its discoveries and solutions in light of the ideal of a scientific *geralized view* [*Gesammtansicht*] of the world of experience," he wrote.[87]

Tomáš Masaryk also read Stein's book, and in his own work on the "social question" included a footnote on the relationship of sociology with philosophy, especially philosophy of history (*Geschichtsphilosophie*). "Nowadays in Germany," he wrote in 1899, "sociology is penetrating more decisively into the older philosophy of history [*Geschichtsphilosophie*] and the juridically treated political science [*Staatswissenschaft*]." He noted the "confusing terminology"—*Socialphilosophie*, *Gesellschaftswissenschaft*—that surrounded the formation of the sociological discipline. "[I]ndeed," he wrote, "it is a matter of the constitution of sociology vis-à-vis the older philosophy of history and the German-developed fields of political and social sciences."[88]

For Masaryk, one key feature of Stein's work was the way it stressed the "Influence of socialism on sociology." Stein saw "in the existence of the proletariat and its aspirations [*Strebungen*] the justification for its own independent 'science of society' that of all the 'political sciences' [*Staats Wissenschaften*] will have the greatest future." Masaryk observed that "the newer sociology is in a close friend-or-foe relationship with socialism," defining itself within or against socialist ideas.[89] "Concretely and practically," Masaryk wrote, "the social question today

[85] Erich Adickes, "Ethische Prinzipienfragen," *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik*, 117 (Leipzig, 1900), 38–70, at 41, 44, italics in original.

[86] Ibid., 69.

[87] Ibid., 48, original emphasis.

[88] Masaryk, *Die philosophischen und sociologischen Grundlagen*, 79.

[89] Ibid., 79. Another reviewer of Stein's work noted that while many Anglo-American sociologists—foremost among them Herbert Spencer—had dissociated sociology from socialism, Stein accepted the kinship of the two. W. F. Willcox, review of *Die sociale Frage*

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is the problem of socialism," which is to say Marxism. His book on the "social question" was thus dedicated to relating "the sociological and philosophical foundations of Marxism."[90]

The notion that the "social question" and the other questions generally arranged under its aegis—i.e. the worker question—owed their existence to socialism was widespread among both proponents and opponents of social reform and more representative forms of government. In 1863, a pseudonymous Jean Ouvrier declared the "worker question" to be the invention of those who wanted there to be a "workers' movement": "One needed a workers' movement, so one created a worker question."[91] At the same time, advocates of social reform saw the association of reform with socialism as a means of demonizing reformers and portraying all discussions of the "social question" in a poor light. In 1871, for example, von Scheel remarked on the common belief that "the social question is naught but a phantasm of the so-called socialists and communists." Accordingly, "the tendency is to tar everyone who sees society as fundamentally in need of reform and who makes proposals to that effect with the epithet of socialists or communists and thereby to label them as hostile to public order and a threat to the state."[92] By the same token, the first edition of the *Bibliographie des Socialismus und Communismus*, published in 1893 by the librarian of the Viennese reading club for juridical and political life, included multiple entries for the "social question," as did the many subsequent editions.[93]

Perhaps the politics of nomenclature and association that surrounded the "social question" was the reason a few commentators—including Ferdinand Lassalle, Karl Heinzen, and Rudolf Steiner—kept the "social question" at an ironic distance, either by placing it in quotation marks or by self-consciously avoiding its use altogether.[94] While it may have seemed impossible to gain a sense

im Lichte der Philosophie by Ludwig Stein, *Philosophical Review*, 7/4 (July 1898), 410–15, 410.

90 This is evident especially in the title to the German version of the book, Masaryk, *Die philosophischen und sociologischen Grundlagen des Marxismus*.

91 Jean Ouvrier (pseud.), *Die politische Giftmischerei in der Arbeiter-Frage* (Berlin, 1863), 3. "Man brauchte eine Arbeiter-Bewegung und man schuf eine Arbeiter-Frage."

92 Von Scheel, *Die Theorie der sozialen Frage*, 1–3, 22–3. For further examples see also Ryan and McGowan, *A Catechism*, 28; Gaston Stiegler, "Coup d'oeil sur le socialisme contemporain," in Société chrétienne suisse d'économie sociale, *Quatre écoles d'économie sociale: Conférences données à l'Aula de l'Université de Genève, sous les auspices de la Société chrétienne suisse d'économie sociale* (Geneva, 1890), 57–8; de Amicis, "Úvahy o socialné otázce," 12.

93 Joseph Stammhammer, ed., *Bibliographie des Socialismus und Communismus* (Jena, 1893), 295–6.

94 Steiner, *Die Kernpunkte*, 5; Karl Heinzen, *Die Helden des teutschen Kommunismus: Dem Herrn Karl Marx gewidmet* (Bern, 1848), 74; Lassalle, *Arbeiterlesebuch*, 41 n.

of all that the words denoted, their capacity to excite tempestuous passions was undeniable.

A CENTURY OF QUESTIONS

The period spanning roughly from the 1820s to the 1920s was a great deal more than the salon of the "social question." It was the ballroom of a much grander century richly populated by other questions. It was a century in which a head of state addressed a representative body calling for a "final solution" to the "sugar question," a renowned lyricist waxed poetic about the "Eastern question," and a German novelist expressed his immoderate views on the "oyster question."[95] The century's most prominent figures put their pens to the "Jewish question," the "Polish question," and the "social question," among others. Alexis de Tocqueville, Giuseppe Mazzini, Karl Marx, Frederick Douglass, Otto von Bismarck, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Kraus, Joseph Conrad, and Leon Trotsky, to name a few, all weighed in on the questions of their time. Historians have written articles and books on "Freud's Jewish Question" or "Disraeli and the Eastern Question," or the relationship between the "Jewish question" and the "woman question."[96] Yet somehow one question has not been posed: why did people start thinking in questions, and what did it mean?

This essay has analyzed the particular genealogy and trajectory of the "social question," but its insights offer at least a partial history of the century of questions more generally. The roots of the "social question"—considered, as it was, to be one of the most all-encompassing of the nineteenth century's questions, and

[95] On the "sugar question," from a speech delivered by Napoleon III to the French Chamber of Deputies on the occasion of the opening of the legislative session in November of 1863. A translation of Napoleon III's speech is in FRUS, United States Department of State, message of the president of the United States, and accompanying documents, to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the first session of the thirty-eighth congress (1863), Supplement: France, [1321]–1329, 1323. Algernon Charles Swinburne, "The Question" (1887), in *The Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, vol. 6 (London, 1904), 359–62; see also W. Robertson Nicoll and Thomas James Wise, *Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century: Contributions towards a Literary History of the Period* (New York, 1967), 339–41. The "oyster question" engaged such prominent figures as the German novelist and poet Theodor Fontane and the German art historian Friedrich Eggers. See Theodor Fontane, Friedrich Eggers *et al.*, *Theodor Fontane und Friedrich Eggers: Der Briefwechsel: Mit Fontanes Briefen an Karl Eggers und der Korrespondenz von Friedrich Eggers mit Emilie Fontane* (Berlin, 1997), 251 n.

[96] Jay Geller, "*Atheist* Jew or Atheist *Jew*: Freud's Jewish Question and Ours," *Modern Judaism*, 26/1 (Feb. 2006), 1–14; Miloš Ković, *Disraeli and the Eastern Question* (Oxford, 2010); Wendy Brown, "Tolerance and/or Equality? The 'Jewish Question' and the 'Woman Question,'" *différences*, 15/2 (2004), 1–31.

indeed itself an aggregate of several questions—embrace the very foundation of the "question" mania that had blanketed much of the literate world by century's end.

Several of the features of the "social question" elaborated here are unique to it, among them its implication in the legitimization of sociology as a separate area of study distinct from (political) philosophy, and the sense of it being both "of its time" and ever in flux, requiring constant and renewed redress. These were not characteristic of the great geopolitical questions of the time, like the "eastern question" or the "Polish question," for which "definitive" and "final solutions" were taken to be not only possible, but also necessary and imminent. In an 1876 entry in his *Diary of a Writer*, no less a figure than the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote ecstatically of "the final solution of the Eastern question," with which "all other political strife in Europe will be terminated."[97] Indeed, thinking in formulas and "final solutions" was a common feature of this century of questions[98] that the "social question" only sporadically shared.[99]

Yet of the many phenomena discussed here—the definition of a "question" as a problem requiring a solution,[100] casting public opinion in the role of judge or

97 F. M. Dostoevsky, *The Diary of a Writer* (New York, 1954), 428.

98 See, for example, Walter Scott, *The Eastern or Jewish Question Considered: And, What the Bible Says about Coming Events* (London, 1882), 3; Rostislav Fadeeff, *Opinion on the Eastern Question* (London, 1871), 16.

99 It was not unheard of for commentators to speak of the "final solution" of the "social question," but relatively uncommon. Writing on the "woman question" in 1872, for example, the German women's rights activist and writer Louise Büchner mentioned the "final solution" of the "social question." Louise Büchner, *Ueber weibliche Berufsarten* (Darmstadt, 1872), 6.

100 Examples of this are far too numerous, but here are a few: Karl Marx's reflections on the Polish question in the context of the 1848 Frankfurt Assembly: "As it is closely connected to the Polish *question*, the Poznan question could only be resolved if merged with the entirety of this *problem*." From an article published in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, 19 Aug. 1848, cited in Karl Marx, *La question polonaise devant l'Assemblée de Francfort* (Paris, 1929), 26. See also Staphanie Laudyn, *A World Problem: Jews—Poland—Humanity* (Chicago, 1920), 5–6, wherein the author writes, "In studying the *question*, I have realized that the relation of the Jews in regard to Poland is exactly the same as their relations to the world at large. For that reason, the *problem* at issue intimately concerns other nations; in fact, affects their creeds, their ideals and aspirations." Emphasis added.

jury,[101] backdating,[102] aggregation,[103] scientization shifting from an interpretive frame influenced by economy/mathematics to one more commensurate with

[101] The earliest pamphlets on questions speak of the importance, indeed the overwhelming "force" [*Gewalt*], of public opinion. *Un mot sur la question polonaise en 1829* (Paris, 1829), 8; *Ueber die polnische Frage* (Paris, 1831), 3. "I raise my voice fearlessly before the high tribunal of public opinion," declared Leopold Leon Sawaskiewicz in a pamphlet from 1840 on the Eastern question as it related to the Polish question. Sawaskiewicz, *Why the eastern question cannot be satisfactorily settled*, iv. See also Tomasz Wentworth Łubieński, *Kwestya Polska w Rosyi: List otwarty do rosyskich publicystów* (Kraków, 1898), 10–11, 19; M. P. Pogodin, *Pol'skoi Vopros, sobraniye razsuzhdenii, zapisok i zamyechanii* (Moscow, 1867), iii.

[102] Just two examples must suffice here: although the appearance of the "eastern question" in state correspondence and published sources dates back to the 1820s and 1830s, most works on it trace its origins back at least to the emergence of tsarist Russia as a factor in the future of the Ottoman Empire with the Russo-Turkish war of 1768–74 and the subsequent treaty of Küçük Kaynarca of 1774. For early mentions of the "eastern question," see "French Policy towards Russia," *London Star*, 7 July 1829, 3; *Morning Chronicle*, 21 Jan. 1830, 6; *Albion and The Star*, 5 April 1833, 2; David Urquhart, John McNeill, and David Ross, *Eastern Question*, 16/89 (London, 1833); *Monthly Magazine or British Register (of Politics, Literature and the Belles Lettres)* (May, 1833), 592; *The United Service Journal and Naval and Military Magazine, 1833, Part II* (London, 1833), 401. For examples of backdating see Dr Richard Roepell, *Die orientalische Frage in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwickelung, 1774–1830* (Breslau, 1854), 15; Ludwig Freiherr von Pastor, Goldwin Smith, Frederick Ignatius Antrobus, and Ralph Francis Kerr, *The History of the Popes, from the Close of the Middle Ages: Drawn from the Secret Archives of the Vatican and Other Original Sources*, vol. 3 (London, 1899), 240. Many commentators on the Jewish question have traced its origins as far back as the very origins of Judaism, though it too was very much of nineteenth-century (1830s) vintage. For backdating see P. Horowitz, *The Jewish Question and Zionism* (London, 1927). The only thorough history of the "question" usage I have found thus far is an article on the semantic origins of the Jewish question by the Jewish historian Jacob Toury. He notes that, although there were semantic near misses during the revolutionary period in France, "a *question juive* did not emerge." Ultimately he places the origins of the slogan in the 1830s, concluding that "the 'Jewish question' as a slogan did not take roots until it had established itself as an anti-Jewish battle-cry," namely with two long essays published in 1838 in German titled *Die Jüdische Frage*. See Jacob Toury, "'The Jewish Question': A Semantic Approach," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 11 (1966), 85–106. My own research suggests that Toury's claims are a bit off the mark. See "To Correspondents," *The Times*, 23 April 1830, 4.

[103] The "formula—'the Eastern question'—comprises, perhaps unknowingly to itself, all other political questions, perplexities and prejudices of Europe." Dostoevsky, *The Diary of a Writer*, 428. At various times, the eastern question was discussed together with the Italian question, the Mexican question, and the Polish question. See Comte de Montalembert, *L'insurrection polonaise* (Paris, 1863), 19. See also C. Damotte, *Solution mexicaine: Question polonaise, union européenne* (Tonnerre, 1863), n.p. For an example of umbrella aggregation (of the sort that typified some discussions of the "social question") see Leopold Mandl, *Die Habsburger und die serbische Frage: Geschichte des staatlichen Gegensatzes Serbiens zu Österreich-Ungarn* (Vienna, 1918), 161.

medicine/biology,[104] a general sense of anxious irritation and the urgenct necessity of redress[105]—most were pervasive tropes within the genre of written and spoken interventions on "questions."

Within this century of questions the "social question" was considered a relative latecomer, both as a question in itself and as a typology.[106] The aggregate nature of the "social question" had parallels in, and even became a model for, aggregation and symbolic primacy among advocates of other period "questions." In 1882, an anonymous "Son of the East" wrote of the "Eastern question" that it "is not a single question, but a series of many problems and multiform views ... and

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[104] Following a long-standing preoccupation with viewing the "Eastern question" in terms of a "formula" with a "solution"—viz. F. Dumons, *Un Mot a propos de la Question d'Orient sur le Devoir de la France et l'Avenir de l'Europe* (Bordeaux, 1840), 10; Dostoevsky, *The Diary of a Writer*, 428. So prevalent was the use of "2 + 2 = 4" as a framework for understanding contemporary questions, in fact, that Fyodor Dostoevsky, in his 1864 novel *Notes from Underground*, decried its insidious pervasiveness. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground, and The Gambler*, trans. Jane Kentish (Oxford, 1991), 34. References to the Ottoman Empire as the "sick man of Europe" have made the "eastern question" especially rife with medicalized approaches, generally concentrated in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which Ottomanist scholars have characterized as the "eastern question paradigm" and the "eastern question school." See, for example, Christine May Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley, 2011), 116; Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London, 2011), 6. British statesman William Gladstone wrote of "one remedy" for the various questions ranged under the aegis of the "Eastern question." W. E. Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (London, 1876), 46. In the 1920 book *A World Problem: Jews—Poland—Humanity*, for example, the author makes an appeal for the application of scientific reason to the Jewish "problem": "To heal a malady, it is necessary to examine it carefully, analyze it thoroughly and expose its nature fearlessly, before applying the necessary remedies." Laudyn, *A World Problem*, 5–6.

[105] "There are few positions more embarrassing," wrote the Marquess of Salisbury in an essay on the Polish question from April of 1863, "than that of men who hold moderate opinions in regard to questions upon which excitement is running high." Robert Cecil, Marquess of Salisbury, *Essays by the late Marquess of Salisbury* (London, 1905), 3. "Master, what do you make of the Eastern question?"—"I think they should mark it not with a question mark, but with an exclamation point." Karl May, *Von Bagdad nach Stambul: Reiseerzählungen* (Vienna, 1882), 408. In Modern Greek, the phrase "You've made an eastern question (out of it)" (*Anatoliko zitima to ekanes!*) is a common idiom meaning "you've made a mountain out of a molehill." Dostoevsky, *The Diary of a Writer*, 429, characterized the Eastern question as a *piccola bestia* that had produced a "condition of general madness." Alexis de Tocqueville compared engagement with it to "banging one's head against the wall" (*se faire casser la petit fiole sur la tête*). Alexis de Tocquevill, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 7, *Nouvelle correspondance* (Paris, 1866), 313.

[106] Biedermann, *Frauen-Brevier*, 334.

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becomes a political, religious and social question."[107] In the foreword to his 1923 book *Pan-Europe*, the Austrian politician and philosopher Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi wrote, "Although in public discussion there is much talk of European questions, there is none of *the* European Question in which all of them are rooted, just as the many social questions are rooted in *the* Social Question."[108]

CONCLUSION

What sort of century was the century of questions? When J. A. Hobson wrote *The Social Problem* in 1901, he noted,

> The early political economists and social reformers assumed the positive attitude concerning themselves primarily with wealth in a narrower or wider sense; but it is significant of our more critical age that a Social Question has become almost synonymous with the treatment of want, the cure of disease rather than the enlargement of health.[109]

A "more critical age" was the era of questions framed as problems; the opportunity and aspiration of some revolutionary-era thinking had yielded to an anxious malcontent. As the very title of Hobson's book reveals, there were no more genuine questions, only problems. Whereas the work sets out to address the "social question," the title announces a treatment of *The Social Problem*.

The irritation with the status quo became, through the formulation and discussion of "questions," a general one. In a book by the German Mennonite preacher Leonhard Weydmann from 1834 on *The Questions of Our Tumultuous Time*, the author noted the "zeal" and "impatience," the "confusion of concepts and tangling of relations," that accompanied the "questions being discussed in our tumultuous time."[110] Weydmann offered a return to tradition and authority, and above all to God, for the querists were intent on destroying the existent stabilizing hierarchy and setting up in their place "forms whereby the distinction between governing and being governed well nigh disappears." Although their proposed "solutions" were different, in engaging with the querists detractors like Weydmann were drawn into the pathologization of the present. For them, it

[107] A Son of the East, *The Eastern Question; or, An Outline of Mohammedanism, Its Rise, Progress and Decay* (Boston, 1882), 8. See also ibid., 58: "The Eastern question is of such a complicated nature that it cannot be touched in one of its branches without affecting the entire series of problems which compose its entirety."

[108] Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Pan–Europe* (New York, 1926), xiii-xiv, italics in original.

[109] Hobson, *The Social Problem*, 6.

[110] Leonhard Weydmann, *Die Fragen unserer bewegten Zeit im Lichte des Evangeliums und mit beständiger Rücksicht auf die Urtheile der Reformatoren betrachtet* (Frankfurt am Main, 1834), 1–2.

became the irritation and anxiety caused by "questions" that were the problem with "now."

The perceived inclemency of the times was no microclimate suffered only by progressives and reformists, in other words, but one felt generally. "Everywhere an inner disharmony, an inner conflict [*Unfriede*] and drive for change [*Drang zur Veraenderung*]," wrote the German philosopher and mathematician Constantin Frantz in 1852.[111] In the words of Ernst Becher writing on the "worker question" in 1868, "a time which ... must bring the renewal process that has long been in the making to completion ... we therefore cannot view anything that the present confronts us with as a complete structure [*Gebilde*], but rather we must see in everything only the formations of transition."[112]

Today the academic landscape is strewn with markers for alternative chronologies—"long" and "short" centuries, wars starting or extending beyond their traditional textbook restraints, continuities and ruptures disproved. I have not sought to set up an alternative chronology of the nineteenth century, but rather to conjure a *different century entirely*, the century of *querists* and *questions*. This century was at once irritated and anxious, one that was becoming ever less hopeful, ever more fearful, one that had traded a preoccupation with equality for anxiety about inequality, and the certainty of mathematics for the relative uncertainty and pathologizing inclinations of biology and medicine. For those contemplating the "social question" in particular, it was a century that stopped believing in "solutions," even as it mass-produced them in speech and print.

[111] Gustav Adolph Constantin Frantz, *Die Staatskrankheit* (Berlin, 1852), 4.

[112] Becher, *Die Arbeiterfrage*, 2.

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