

authorized it to undertake state responsibilities? How great a burden is “too great,” and how temporally far removed is “too far,” for current and future subjects to be held liable for paying the costs of the state’s actions?

A Hobbesian diagnosis of the pervasive indeterminacy of Fleming’s theory is that it lacks a coherent method, or principled approach to theory construction. Detaching Hobbes’s concept of authorized representation from the theory that gives it sense leaves a vacuous, circular notion of statehood (the state is that which is represented by an entity authorized to represent the state) according to which, implausibly, *anything* could count as a state, and so necessitates Fleming’s scramble to constrain its content by appeals to contingencies of existing international legal practice—however indefensible—and to his own, equally contingent, personal moral intuitions. Whereas Hobbes’s leviathan is fundamentally a unique mechanism for the legitimate resolution of any possible dispute within a society at a time, Fleming’s state is a formless fiction itself the object of irresolvable disputes. Make what you will of Fleming’s theory of the state, but let us not implicate Hobbes in it. That theory yields, not Leviathan, nor Leviathan on a Leash, but at most, Behemoth in a Bog.

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Marcello Musto: *The Last Years of Karl Marx: An Intellectual Biography*. Translated by Patrick Camiller. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020. Pp. xii, 194.)

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This short chronicle of Karl Marx’s life and work during his last three years (1881–1883) sheds light on an unexamined period. Elegantly written, the book has been meticulously researched using the resources of the still emerging *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe*, unsent letters, notes, and other materials. Musto guides the reader through Marx’s continued scholarly work during this period and also through his pains and losses, such as that of his wife and daughter, both named Jenny. Well received in Italy when it first appeared in 2016, the book has been translated into six languages, including the English edition.

Generalists who study social and political life will find the book to be of great interest. This work among others documents a moment when Marx’s reputation is in transition. As Musto writes, “of the classics of political,

economic, and philosophical thought, Marx is the author whose profile has changed the most in the opening decades of the twenty-first century" (2). Scholars now have both better texts and a more open approach to the figure, newly emergent from the weight of the ideological commitments of editors and, indeed, nation states.

Musto's book joins other new interpretations of Marx—most notably, those of Kevin Anderson, Michael Heinrich, William Roberts, and Kohei Saito—that look critically at the later years of Marx, albeit with different foci. While Anderson highlights the anthropological material that Marx studied in this period, and Saito looks at his notebooks on ecology, Heinrich and Roberts study the thought of *Capital*, in particular.

Musto's work about the last three years of Marx's life shows how all of these topics are enduring themes right up until the very end. Marx remained interested in anthropology, including that of non-Western societies, and especially their property and gender relations. He continued his studies of the natural sciences and capital's propensity to stretch the limits of the earth, and was interested, in 1880, expressly in the use of solar energy and Podolinsky's claim that it was the form of energy most suited to the socialist political form (117).

Musto also offers a distinctive addition to the debates around *Capital*. One of the controversies for specialists is whether and how to treat *Capital* as a work. Famously, da Vinci carried around his paintings from residence to residence for years and sometimes decades, constantly making both large and small additions and modifying details. So too with Marx's three-volume work *Capital*, only the first volume of which he finished, though this epithet is really appropriate only in comparison with the other two. In these debates, Musto thus lands firmly on the side of incompleteness (78). But however incomplete, this work is not without contours. Musto sketches how Marx himself, dissatisfied with the French translation of *Capital*, rewrote the translation in 1878, with additional material and significant modifications, especially regarding capitalist accumulation (93).

The most important contribution of Musto's study to the ongoing reclamation of Marx as a figure is the discussion of Russia in chapter 2. A society's conversion into a socialist political form is known in the literature as the transformation problem. Musto argues that in his later years Marx himself understood that this conversion was enormously complex. Marx paid direct attention during this period to the case of Russia, a country which, already in 1881, was experiencing significant political shifts. In the wake of these shifts, Marx corresponded directly with the leading figures who sought to interpret them. Musto details the correspondence thoroughly.

The picture that emerges is neither that of the fatalist Marx dooming Russia to pass through capitalist development's worst excesses before a socialist revolution could emerge, nor that of the nostalgic Marx waxing poetic about the natural socialism of the rural commune. Instead, Marx understood that political forms emerged in dialogue with an environment, and he eschewed both the grand

philosophies of history and their romantic counterparts. As Musto writes, “Just as Marx never showed a wish to envisage what socialism should be like, he did not assert in his reflections on capitalism that human society was everywhere destined to follow the same path or to pass through the same stages” (59).

Musto thus makes a strength of what is usually claimed to be a liability of Marx’s theory: that he does not sketch the communist future. Just as capitalism permeates different historical and geographical environments differently and at a different pace, albeit with some common features, Marx’s nimble historical understanding means that we are more likely to confront communist futures rather than a single monolith.

Musto also emphasizes Marx’s insistence on the progressive elements of the capitalist social form itself, especially in its unequaled productive powers (57) and in its advancement of equality in gender relations (58). Of course Marx was capitalism’s greatest critic, but he was also its poet and, in other ways, the first to describe it profoundly.

Musto’s account portrays a polymath and polyglot at the end of his life, poised on the edge of a wide readership that would come only in the next century. Some of the popularizations of Marx’s philosophy that had begun at the end of his life even irked him: he wrote, “What is certain is that I am not a Marxist” (121).

The book is full of other wonderful themes of Marx’s thought, including his continual attention to capitalist crisis (40); his discussion of how the colonial situation allowed savvy capitalists to pit foreign against native labor (89); and, of course, his enduring and unsullied commitment to a politics of anti-racism (45). There is no part of the world Marx was not interested in, and during this period his studies included the United States, Ireland, India, and Egypt in addition to Russia. Musto is right, in the conclusion to the book, to highlight the continued relevance and explanatory power of Marx’s key concepts (125).

The book also has wonderful personal touches that make Marx come alive: the renewal he undertook late in life of his studies of chemistry and calculus; the piece of Leibniz’s wall he kept in his study (15); his enduring friendship with Engels; and a hilarious set of observations about the gambling he did while stranded, briefly, in Monte Carlo (113). For this reason, the book can be accessed by a general reader as well as an academic one.

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