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## Introduction to Cerroni

Etienne Balibar

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## Introduction to Cerroni

The essay by Umberto Cerroni that we are now translating was originally published in the volume of his essays *Teoria Politica e Socialismo* (Rome, Editori Riuniti, 1973). The initial background of Cerroni is the one constituted by the school started by Galvano Della Volpe, and some of the fundamental characteristics of his present theoretical approach continue reflecting the basic premises of the Della Volpean school. Cerroni published several works on political theory that exercised a considerable influence in Italian Marxist thought. We have to mention, among them, *Kant e la Fondazione della Categoria Giuridica* (Milan, 1962); *Marx e il Diritto Moderno* (Rome, 1962) and *La Liberta dei Moderni* (Bari, 1968).

The Della Volpean school arose as an explicit attempt to oppose the historicist approach which had constituted the hegemonic trend in Italian culture and which reached the peak of its influence around the late 1950's. The Italian historicism had its roots in the Neo-Hegelianism of Naples, started by B. Spaventa and continued by Giovanni Gentile and Benedetto Croce. At the same time, within Marxist theory, the tradition initiated by Antonio Labriola and continued by Gramsci opposed the economism of the Second International on the basis of an historicist conception grounded in an analysis of the peculiarities of Italian society. This heritage was later taken up by Togliatti who, at the end of World War II, starting from the consideration of the historical peculiarities of the Italian case (backwardness of the South, regional contradictions, insufficient capitalist development), elaborated a specific Italian road to socialism, articulated around the basic notion of 'progressive democracy'.

At the beginning of the 1960's the vigorous expansion of neo-capitalism led to a change of outlook: to the assertion that this neocapitalist expansion was causing Italy to lose its peculiarities and that, therefore, it was in the *general* characteristics of Monopoly Capitalism where the explanation for the conflict newly developed in Italy was to be found. This intellectual climate prepared the conditions for the decline of historicism and, consequently, allowed

for a growing influence of Della Volpean thought, the latter presenting itself as a theoretical alternative explicitly opposed to historicism.

The philosophical enterprise of Della Volpe is essentially contained in his major work *La Logica come Scienza Storica*. This book tries to show that Marxian thought includes a rejection of dialectics, since it is based in the principle of non-contradiction. What Galileo carried out regarding the natural world, Marx carried out in regard to the historical world; it is possible, therefore, to speak of Marxism as 'moral Galileism'. The fundamental feature of the theoretical revolution represented by Marxism is, according to Della Volpe, the rejection of all logical apriorism. This rejection is based in the 'extra-mental' character of the historical process, and in the concept of 'determinate abstraction' vis-à-vis the indeterminate abstraction that characterises traditional speculative thought.

This theoretical perspective was applied by Della Volpe to the study of the political world and the State (*Rousseau e Marx*, 1956; *La Libertà Comunista*, 1963). Della Volpe tries to show that in Marx's *Kritik* of the Hegelian Philosophy of the State, we do not find a generic critique of the State (an indeterminate abstraction) but rather a critique of the representative State (a determinate abstraction). Because of this, Della Volpe criticizes the Engelsian attempt to develop a theory of the genesis of the State applicable to the whole of history.

Cerroni modified the Della Volpean heritage in various respects, and also developed a new conception regarding the problem of the withering away of the State. But, in spite of this, the general assumptions of the Della Volpean approach continue to shape Cerroni's work (especially when he identifies the young Marx's critique of the State as a critique of the representative State). At the same time, the strongest theoretical effort of Cerroni is directed towards showing the 'mutual implication' between the Capitalist mode of production and the representative State. This relation is not understood as a kind of mechanical determination in which the latter is a mere superstructural representation of the former. It is, rather, considered as a relation of mutual implication, in which the representative State is a structural component of capitalism. The analysis, from this point of view, of the diverse juridical forms that constitute the modern State is the most important contribution that Cerroni has made to Marxist political theory. A rejection of the various instrumentalist conceptions of the State is also implicit in this point of view, as well as a rejection of such alternatives as the workers councils, which try to immediately surpass the organisational structures of the State. The problem of democracy

is, therefore, stated in a new perspective which involves a critique of the inherent contradictions of the principle of representation.

E. L.