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The Christian State

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*The politically perfected, modern state that knows no religious privileges is also the
fully developed Christian state*

Marx and Engels 1845: 111

The secular state is the full realization of the Christian state—so argued Marx in
response to intense debates at the time concerning "the state." To understand this
argument more clearly, we need to ask, what was the "Christian state"? One may cast a
wide net and examine the Christian state from Constantine to Samoa, or one may
focus on the reality of post-Napoleonic Europe, especially the Prussian situation, where
the Christian state was deployed as a bulwark against the ostensibly corrosive effects of
liberal modernity. I focus on the latter, since it was the primary political context in
which Marx and Engels began to develop their thought. In the following, I begin with
some questions of definition, before dealing with the European Christian state as a
terminal point within the longer history of absolute states. Only then can we return to
Marx's forceful argument concerning the "Christian state." Throughout, we need to
keep in mind the sheer anomaly of the European situation in relation to global history,
an anomaly that perpetually threatens to universalize from a specific context (Diakonoff
1999: 3).

On Definition

I begin with some observations on definitions of "the state."[1] The modern tradition[2] is
usually assumed to have begun with Weber's influential definition, "the state is the form
of human community [*Gemeinschaft*] that (successfully) lays claim to the monopoly of
legitimate physical violence [*Gewalt*] within a particular territory" (Weber 2004: 33).
The problem here is twofold. First, too many rush to assume that Weber's (derived)
definition is a universal one. By contrast, Weber stresses that it is "specific to the
present"; that it applies to a "nowadays", that concerns the Western "modern state." This
particularity applies to the definitions that attempt to tweak Weber's, despite their
temptation to universalize (Poggi 1978: 86–116; Tilly 1985, 1990; Elias 2000; Bourdieu
2014: 4, 7; Corrigan and Sayer 1985; Foucault 2014).

Now we face the second problem. Weber is actually dependent on an even more influential definition by Friedrich Engels. In *The Origin of the Family* (Engels 1884: 268–72), Engels makes the following points:

1. The state arises from a society riven with "irreconcilable opposites," which are "classes with conflicting economic interests."
2. So that society does not tear itself to pieces, a power (*Gewalt*) is necessary to "alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of 'order'."
3. Power "alienates itself more and more" from society, so that the apparatus stands, as the organs of a society, "above society."
4. The state becomes a "means" or an "organization of the possessing class for its protection against the non-possessing class."[3]
5. The state divides its subjects "according to territory," not tribe or gens.
6. It "establishes a public power [*Gewalt*]," separate from the population and comprised "not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons and institutions of coercion of all kinds."
7. In order to "maintain this public power, contributions from the citizens are necessary—taxes."
8. With the advent of full communism, the state will "wither away."

Clearly, here we find some of the terms of Weber's definition, although he curiously neglects to mention Engels and dispenses with the obviously materialist parts. To recap, for Weber the key items are *Gewalt* (power, force and violence), territory and a self-justifying apparatus, which Weber interprets as "legitimacy," or the alienated and alienating bureaucratic apparatus with its rational-legal claims.

For the purpose of analyzing the Christian state, I am interested in the way Engels's multifaceted definition may be recast in light of subsequent Marxist debates concerning the state. These debates have worked with three distinctions, two of them obviously dialectical: dependency-agency; objective-subjective; power-apparatus. In terms of the first opposition (where we find points 1–3 of Engels's definition), the argument turns on whether the state is dependent on and determined by the social dynamics of class struggle, or whether the state is in some way separated from society as an alien body. As soon as it becomes alienated, the state may become a collective agent in its own right, influencing society in distinct ways. Engels's definition provides a narrative structure, with initial dependency leading to alienation and (implicit) agency by the state. The risk with such a narrative is that we lose the dialectical relationship between the two dimensions. Related, but distinct, is the second opposition, between objective and subjective factors. This tension appears in Engels's ambivalence concerning the notion of the state as an "organization of the possessing class" or as an "instrument" (point 4). The reason for describing this opposition as one between objective and subjective factors is as follows. On the objective side, the state is stamped and shaped by the objective realities of class, so much so that one may speak of a feudal, absolutist, Christian, or indeed bourgeois state. The subjective side appears with the suggestion that the state is a neutral instrument, which may be wielded by the subjective intention of one or another class against its opponent. If so, it entails an implicit awareness of the

crucial ideological role of the state, for the class in question must have a reasonably clear consciousness of what it wishes to achieve with this "instrument." Finally, the power-apparatus distinction appears in Engels's deliberations over the crucial term *Gewalt*, with the meanings of power, force and violence. However, this abstract force requires an apparatus to work, so Engels speaks of the "material adjuncts" and "institutions of coercion," as well as the specification of a territory and the demand for "institutions of coercion," as well as the specification of a territory and the demand for taxes (points 2, 5–7). The question remains as to whether *Gewalt* is distinct or whether it is manifested only through the apparatus.

These core features would define the terms for two lines of subsequent inquiry, the one running through Weber and the other through Lenin and into Marxist analyses.[4] But I am interested here in the implications for understanding the Christian state. At this point, I propose that such a state may be defined in terms of the tensions I have outlined; it has both distinct class actors seeking their own agenda, and is determined by specific structures that have an objective logic; it is a distinct entity (a collective subject) in tension with its dependency on the dominant economic realities; and while one may distinguish power and apparatus, the power (*Gewalt*) is actually found in the one may distinguish power and apparatus, the power (*Gewalt*) is actually found in the apparatus (as Engels already saw).[5] Whether it was a feudal leftover or a crucial form of the state in the transition to capitalism remains to be seen.

Holding Back the Tide?

My specific focus is the Christian state in Europe, which should be understood in light of the longer history of the much-debated absolutist state.[6] Indeed, the nineteenth-century Christian state was in many respects seen as the absolutist state's last stand as it sought to hold back the tide of liberalism, as well as more radical socialist movements. Let me set the scene briefly, beginning with what may be called an estatist–absolutist continuum. "Estatist" means an organization consisting of different and local "estates," whether family cliques, aristocratic (seigneurial) lineages, merchant concentrations, corporate elites and so on, while "absolutist" designates the effort to locate all, or at least as much power as possible, in the monarch. Rather than either/or, we find a continuum between both forms, with the various state formations in Europe tending to fall somewhere along the continuum. From the seventeenth century onwards, France, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Prussia and Russia developed absolutist states to varying degrees, while England, and especially the Netherlands, moved to more estatist forms, albeit not without efforts at absolutism. Many factors lead to absolutism, including: socio-economic developments; political compromises among the ruling class (between the monarch, the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie);[7] inculturation of this through the court; the threat and prosecution of war; and theoretical struggles framed in terms of theology and the classical tradition. At this point, I stress a particular feature of absolutism before turning to its specific religious articulation. Far from hindering the growth of capitalist social and economic relations, absolutist states often actively fostered them in a mercantilist form. The Prussian state is perhaps the most signal example (Mulholland 2012: 51–2), with Friedrich II (1712–1786) and especially Friedrich Wilhelm II (1744–1797) encouraging migration, funding infrastructure for

agriculture (drainage, land settlement and transport), and fostering manufacturing, shipping and mining. The strong state of absolutism was one path to capitalist modernity in Europe.[8]

The ideology, if not theo-political structures of the absolutist state, was in many respects modeled on the papacy, which was both a territorial and a spiritual state, run by God's "representative" on earth. With the recovery of Roman law by the "lawyer popes" of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Berman 1983; see also, Poggi 1978: 73)[9] and the claim—first made by Innocent III (pope from 1198 to 1216)—to be the "Vicar of Christ" rather than the lowly "Vicar of St Peter," the papal revolution set in train the later claims of absolute monarchs. As Jean Bodin had already put it in 1576, the monarch is the "image of God" and thereby "responsible before God [*responsable devant Dieu*]," albeit with the caveat that he is always subject to the laws of nature, which are of God, and cannot dispossess others, that is, aristocrats, of property at will (Bodin 1576 [1993]: 87, 218, 219).[10] Or as Friedrich Wilhelm I (1688–1740), the architect of the Prussian absolutist state, opined, "I must be served with life and limb, with house and wealth, with honour and conscience, everything must be committed except eternal salvation—that belongs to God, but all else is mine" (Anderson 1974: 226–7). Ultimately, deriving from Romans 13:1, it was assumed that the monarch would rule under the fear of God and his subjects in fear of him (Petterson 2014: 75–6).[11] Different theological traditions found enough ammunition to support various absolutist rulers (Wilson 2000: 47–9). Thus, France and Austria may have been Roman Catholic; Russia, Orthodox; and Denmark and Sweden, Lutheran, but the German states were divided between the three main Western European forms, with the Hohenzollerns in Prussia mostly Calvinist.[12]

Absolute states may have adapted in many ways to changing circumstances over the centuries, but the last serious adaptation was to claim, explicitly, the status of "Christian state" in the nineteenth century—although the roots run deep in previous centuries. The response was commensurate with the scale of the threat embodied in the French Revolution of 1789. The Netherlands may have been a constant liberal irritation, and the bourgeois revolution in England was somewhat removed due to the English Channel, but the cataclysmic end to the *ancien régime* in France produced an existential threat to every other such regime in Europe. Soon enough, Napoleon's armies rolled across the continent, reducing one country after another to vassal status, and instituting wide-scale reforms in many of the conquered territories. These were based on the Code Napoléon, instituted in France in 1804 and promulgated elsewhere. They included the clarity of written laws, modern property rights, a civil service based on merit, centralized government, financial reform, an effort to widen education, religious freedom and the state taking over many of the former roles of the church, which it now managed. With the defeat of *la grande armée* in Russia in 1812, sealed by the final defeat at Waterloo in 1815, the challenge seemed to have been overcome.

The Congress of Vienna (1814/1815) gave all the appearance of reasserting the old order, even though it took place before Napoleon's final defeat. Actively opposed to republicanism and revolution, the negotiators at Vienna—apart from territorial readjustments—sought to roll back the various liberal and republican reforms that had been spurred by the Napoleonic threat. The "rights" of the old ruling class were high on

the agenda and a consistent conservative order was promulgated. This included the importance of tradition, authority and religion for the preservation and reproduction of social order. All of this was cemented, many believed, by the signing of the Holy Alliance in September, 1815. Spearheaded by Alexander I, it included as its core Russia, Austria and Prussia, although at various times most other states in Europe signed. The text of the alliance claimed that the signatories took as their "sole guide" the precepts of "Holy Religion," that the monarchs in question were "merely designated by Providence" and that they were in turn subject to "no other Sovereign than Him to whom alone power really belongs, because in Him alone are found all the treasures of love, science and infinite wisdom, that is to say, God, our Divine Saviour, the Word of the Most High, the Word of Life." Humbly acknowledging the Bible's command to consider "all men" as "brethren," they agreed to do so with each other, but clearly not with their subjects.[13] With the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1853, brotherly love abruptly turned to antagonism.

One of the signatories of the original alliance was Friedrich Wilhelm III, who took his seat on the Prussian throne in 1797 and reigned until 1840. Since Marx and Engels grew up under this Prussian king's rule, with significant implications for their early writing and activism, I focus on developments in this particular Christian state. Like the other signatories, Friedrich Wilhelm III interpreted the alliance and the subsequent "congress system" (Jarrett 2013) as a counter-revolutionary mechanism seeking to prevent the corrosive forces of liberalism, secularism and revolution. Against this tide of modernity, he did his best to uphold and strengthen the monarch's authority. In many respects, this was an effort to compensate for a moment of weakness: after defeat by Napoleon in 1806 and at the mercy of energetic ministers, Friedrich Wilhelm III had given in to a series of reforms for almost a decade. These had been driven mainly by Karl Freiherr vom Stein and then Karl August von Hardenberg, who were influenced by Enlightenment criteria and Napoleonic practice. They proposed: governance through a cabinet system; collegiality; decentralization in administration; separation of the judiciary and equality before the law; removal of much feudal privilege for the sake of meritocracy; economic and educational changes; as well as the promise of constitutional reform to recognize wider suffrage. However, as soon as the ink was dry on the agreements of the Vienna Congress and the Holy Alliance, Friedrich Wilhelm III set about to repair the damage and restore his former prestige, aided and abetted by the rise of more conservative forces in leadership positions. A key component was the union of Reformed (Calvinist) and Lutheran churches in his realm.

Before I deal with the matter of church union, let me add a complicating factor, the pietistic revival of the 1810s and 1820s. This revival was the latest in a longer history of German pietism and revivalist waves, although now it was a response to the dislocations produced by the various industrial revolutions happening across Europe, as well as the "godless" revolutionary republicanism championed by the French. Pietism re-emphasized a religious form of Enlightenment inwardness: the personal walk with God, the inner life of faith and the central place of the Bible (Petterson 2014: 76–7). Pietism could well present a threat to the established order, but, as in the seventeenth and eighteenth century revivals, the nobility and intellectuals also saw the value of certain aspects of the pietistic tradition. It suited the reactionary agenda of the times,

with the despot himself given to similar bouts of fervor while simultaneously marking a profound transition to bourgeois forms of valorizing the private individual. Thus, the pietism of the early nineteenth century was not merely a revival from below, but also one fostered from above. Despite initial misgivings, Friedrich Wilhelm and his henchmen, influenced by the crown prince's overt support, realized the immense conservative potential of pietism, for it was compatible with both allegiance to a state and to a pietistic monarch himself. The slogan of a "Christian-German" state unifying "throne and altar" turned out to be as much a program for conservative church and pietistic leaders as it was for the king (Breckman 1999, 46).

To return to church union in Prussia, as a Reformed Christian of a conservative bent, Friedrich Wilhelm III felt that the primary path to restoring the traditional power of the monarchy lay in a unified Protestant Church with a distinctly orthodox nature. He had already marked his intention with a proposed new liturgy for both churches upon his ascent to the throne. But when the French were banished from Prussia, the process became urgent. The two main branches of Protestantism would be united under the *summus episcopus*, who happened to be the monarch himself. The process was ongoing and involved governance, state supervision and administration, vestments, liturgy, theological training and, last but by no means least, the naming of the new entity. It was initially called the *Evangelische Kirche in den Königlich-Preußischen Landen*, although this did not prevent struggles, schisms and congregational differences, with some deciding to unite and others remaining distinctly Reformed or Lutheran in different areas, albeit under the umbrella of the new arrangement. Friedrich Wilhelm III was closely involved throughout this process, seeing it as a central duty of the leader of a "Christian state." The core reason may be found in the question of singularity; if the monarch was Christ's representative on earth within a particular state, it would be problematic to have a multiplicity of church traditions. For Protestants at least, it would not do to have more than one, especially if the king himself was the head of the church. A singular despot needed a singular church, although he had to resign himself to the fact that the Roman Catholics had their own institution. His son would later claim to lead the Roman Catholics as well. So seriously did Friedrich Wilhelm III see his task, he felt called upon to imprison ministers who dissented from these new arrangements.

In 1840, Friedrich Wilhelm IV succeeded to the Christian state's throne. Already at the Congress of Vienna while still crown prince, he had expressed the opinion that the Holy Roman Empire had been in abeyance while Napoleonic reforms were sweeping Europe. With a fondness for the European Middle Ages, a nostalgia that is sometimes called "political romanticism" (Kroll 1990), he felt that the only way forward was to look back. One should proceed only on the basis of traditional laws and practices, including noble privilege. To this end, the only viable form of collegial governance would be assemblies or diets of provincial estates. He also carried this view through to wider European practices of governance, holding the belief, and failing to see it reinstated, that any emperor would be appointed by a College of Electors, as had been the practice of the Holy Roman Empire. The revolutions of 1848 both challenged his assumptions and revealed him to be a deft politician; he initially gave some ground to appease the revolutionary and liberal forces, but as soon as he felt he had the upper

hand he reneged on most of his promises. Thus, he spoke of German reunification, on which he was formerly less than enthusiastic, and recalled the Prussian National Assembly with a view to writing a constitution. All of this was put aside as soon as possible, except for governmental reform, of which he was the architect, meaning that he could bend the new constitution and the shape of the parliament to suit his deeply conservative bent. While the new *Landtag* had two houses, one by seigneurial descent and the other by severely restricted voting, it ensured that the monarch remained in the position of supreme power. As for those who had any involvement whatsoever in the 1848 revolutions, he saw to it that the courts and police hunted them all down. Among many others, Marx and Engels were forced to leave the German states as a result.

In relation to the key feature of the church, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, in a momentary show of tolerance early in his reign, overturned his father's treatment of dissenting clergy and groups. Now recognized, these groups came together under the umbrella of the *Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche*, while the main union church became the *Evangelische Landeskirche Preußens*. Nonetheless, Friedrich Wilhelm IV was generally more reactionary than his father (see further, Kroll 1990; Berdahl 1988; Blasius 2000). He may have dangled the occasional promise of a reform to keep the liberals hopeful, but he was bent on blocking any moves made by the newly wealthy bourgeoisie for actual political power. We are beginning to gain a sense of what the "Christian state" actually meant. A conservative Christian theology was not merely the ideological bulwark of the state; influencing the very apparatus of the state and the perception of its source of power and sovereignty. To give but a few examples, apart from seeing himself as God's representative on earth, Friedrich Wilhelm IV promulgated laws encouraging church attendance, strengthening the observance of Sunday rest, tightening conditions for divorce, purging the theological faculties, stressing firm belief for government appointments and the tightening of censorship—with restrictions on discussing, let alone organizing, republican, democratic and liberal—or more radical—ideologies. Forbidden too was philosophical materialism, whether it be the anti-clericalism of the French philosophers or the deism of the English empiricists. In short, theology was once again deployed to construct a "comprehensive system of sovereignty, borders and believers" (Petterson 2014: 76). The effect on young politicized intellectuals was immense. Marx found this out first-hand in his ill-fated editorship of the *Rheinische Zeitung* (1842–1843), while Engels had to publish his satirical pieces under pseudonyms (Engels 1839). Others, too, found conventional careers blocked, such as: Ludwig Feuerbach, the biblical critic; radical atheist Bruno Bauer (Marx's erstwhile teacher and mentor in Berlin); and David Strauss of *Das Leben Jesu* fame (Strauss 1835).[14] In effect, all one could do was debate theology, but not the Bible, for here one could argue, indirectly, over matters of politics, freedom of the press, the nature of the state, secularism and reason. As Engels observed, "the battle for dominion over German public opinion in politics and religion" is in fact a battle "over Germany itself" (Engels 1841: 181). It should be no surprise that the early works of Marx and Engels dealt so extensively with theological matters.

In light of this overview, I would like to return to the categories gleaned from Engels to define such a state, albeit with a twist: dependency-agency, objective-subjective and

power-apparatus. The Christian state was a peculiarly European development, as a late permutation of the absolutist state. Thus it was dependent upon specific historical events, most recently the Napoleonic wars. It also gained a distinct agency in promoting its own agenda, which appeared above all in the efforts to counter the developments of liberalism and republicanism further to the west, in the name of a certain perception of Christianity. Such agency overlaps with the subjective dimension, in which the ruling class made use of the state apparatus to promote its own agenda (Poggi 1978: 71–3). Crucially, this involved both ideological (theology) and economic features. In terms of the latter, the absolutist Christian states were not so much hindrances as a means for the developments of capitalist agricultural and industrial practices. The specific mechanisms may have differed, for instance, with "re-enserfment" [*Gutsherrschaft*] in the east, which was predicated on a shortage of labor and enclosures in the west, where labor was more plentiful (contra Brenner 1985). But the bottom line was the need for strong states with mechanisms of enforcement, the police, the judiciary and the civil service, in order to ensure the needed "security" for the production and exchange of commodities within and especially between states. This brings me to the objective nature of the state, which was inescapably enmeshed with the transitions of capitalism alongside feudal leftovers. In this respect, the absolutist Christian state was one form that the state took in the framework of capitalism. Finally, the apparatus was itself "absolutist," strongly geared to maintaining an adapting ruling class and ensuring that its agenda and power were vested in the hands of a monarch who ruled "by the grace of God." In short, it was a relatively strong state that drove through the economic, social and ideological programs it deemed necessary (Wilson 2000). Rather than a feudal hangover superimposed over the spread of capitalist economics and social relations, it was a transitional form of the state that enabled capitalism, if not the "first mature embodiment of the modern state" (Poggi 1978: 62).

Aufhebung of the Christian State

To all appearances, the Christian state may seem like a reactionary development in nineteenth-century Europe, especially in light of the 1848 revolutionary wave. Many at the time, and since, have seen it as a counterpoise to the liberal or bourgeois state that had appeared in France, the Netherlands and in North America. Accordingly, the Christian absolutist states could hold out no longer, falling in different ways into the patterns of the bourgeois state; but a different and more dialectical approach provides a better insight, and for this I turn to Marx's "On the Jewish Question."[15]

Marx argues that the full realization of the Christian state is the secular state, so much so that the proclaimed "Christian state" of his time was really a non-state (Marx 1844: 155–8). The argument is obviously dialectical; the very effort to bring about a Christian state in Prussia, in opposition to a liberal, secular state, brings about the latter. The true Christian state is both the negation of Christianity and its realization in a rather different form. How so? The Christian state, as envisaged in Prussia, was riven with contradictions: this-worldly politics versus other-worldly religion; a political attitude to religion versus a religious attitude to politics; the effort by the state to control

religion while avowing subservience to religious precepts; the inability to live out in civic life the high moral code of the Bible—turning the other cheek, giving your tunic as well as your coat, walking the extra mile. These contradictions could not be resolved in the current form of the Christian state. Indeed, they led to its undoing. The resolution is therefore "the atheistic state, the democratic state, the state which relegates religion to a place among other elements of civil society [*der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*]" (Marx 1844: 156). The immediate context was Marx's response to Bruno Bauer's argument for an atheistic secular state as the only possibility for emancipation, not for religion but "an atheistic secular state as the only possibility for emancipation, not for religion but "an atheistic secular state." For Marx, this is wrong-headed. The politically perfected modern state without religious privileges is, in fact, the Christian state in the plenitude of its development (Marx and Engels 1845: 111).[16]

Thus, the Christian state in nineteenth-century Europe was not, as even its leaders assumed, the anathema of the modern secular state. As the text of the Holy Alliance indicates, they may have thought they were taking a firm stand against liberalism, republicanism and revolution in the name of a conservative form of Christianity. The bourgeois state, with its peculiar forms of democracy and notions of the sovereignty of the people was to be avoided at all costs. Marx's argument, however, suggests otherwise; the modern secular state is the *Aufhebung*, the simultaneous negation and realization of the Christian state. The implications of Marx's argument are many. The initial contradictions of the Christian state may lead to its undoing and transformation into a secular state, but new contradictions and problems would still abound. These include the thorough alienation of life between the private individual and the citizen (this he borrows from Hegel), and the pervasiveness of religion in public life in new and unexpected ways, precisely through the privatization of religion (Franken 2016). Further, the lynch-mob—the *bellum omnia contra omnes*—known as "bourgeois civil society [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*]" depends heavily on religion, especially Christianity, for its very construction and nature.[17] Thus, it is not that bourgeois civil society somehow existed beforehand and religion had to find a place and voice in such a forum (Butler et al. 2011; Habermas 2002, 2008, 2013), but that the very nature of this supposed realm outside the state was shaped in the very *Aufhebung* Marx identified (Petterson in press). Even more, Marx already espied a point made increasingly today (Asad 2003; Taylor 2007; De Vries and Sullivan 2006): if the secular state is an attempted resolution of the tensions within the Christian state, it follows that secularism cannot escape religion, since religion is the reason the secular state exists at all.

A question remains: did Marx envisage that all secular, liberal states would be realizations of the Christian state? A minimalist position would suggest that some states may follow such a path. France, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Austria are obvious examples, although Marx witnessed only the violent transformation of the French Revolution. Yet, I suspect that Marx's argument is stronger than this. The signal of this maximalist position is his example of the United States, where he espies the sheer privatization, if not alienation, of religion as a personal and differential affair, so much so that religion flourishes in unexpected ways (Marx 1844: 155). The initial problem is that the United States did not pass through a period of absolutism nor, indeed, the Christian state, so it seems like an odd example. Would he not have been wiser to use France as an example? But this is precisely the point, even those states that

have not been absolutist Christian states express the truth of the Christian state, which is nothing less than the secular bourgeois state.

I close with an observation concerning Engels's definition of the state, which I have deployed to understand the Christian state. He may have done so based on Marx's notes on Lewis Henry Morgan, seeking to provide a definition that had a somewhat wider reference, but the reality is that his context also played a significant role. Engels witnessed the Christian state of Prussian absolutism, as well as the transformations enacted under Bismarck's muscular tenure. Thus, his definition is more immediately applicable to this context, between the end of absolutism and its transformation into a form of the bourgeois state. It is in this light that we should understand his suggestion that the state would eventually wither away and be consigned to the museum of antiquities. This also means that his definition is not really applicable to the possibility of a socialist state, concerning which he or Marx had little, if anything, to say.

Notes

1 While studies of the modern state tend to be the province of sociologists and political scientists, studies of the origins of states in ancient Southwest Asia tend to be the concern of archaeologists and anthropologists. Elsewhere, I have offered an assessment and contribution to the origins of states in ancient Southwest Asia (Boer 2015: 132–9).
2 By contrast, the pre-modern tradition saw the state in implicit (and at times explicit) theological terms as arising from a state of nature and entailing specific limits for the sake of the common good. Variations on this position may be found in Hobbes, Locke, Bentham, James Mill, John Stuart Mill, and Rousseau (Carnoy 1984: 12–23; Held 1984: 14–31).
3 In more detail: such a state is not only the state of the "economically dominant class," but this class, "through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class," which now "acquires a new means of keeping down and exploiting the oppressed class."
4 I have dealt with these two lines in more detail elsewhere (Boer In press).
5 I find this approach more useful than Ahdar's threefold schema: 1. The combination of form and content to produce a "clerocracy"; 2. Formal or *de jure*, which is in substance empty; 3. Substantive or *de facto* (Ahdar 1998–1999: 453–4).
6 Wilson offers a useful survey of the range of debates over absolutism, usefully distinguishing between the varied practices and the theories developed at the time (Wilson, 2000). I leave aside the longer tradition of the Christian state, beginning with the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century CE (although legend has it that Armenia was the first such state, when its ruler converted in 301 CE) to Samoa, which decided in 2017 to amend its constitution to identify it as a "Christian nation founded on God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Sanerivi, 2017).
7 Emphases vary, from subservience of the aristocracy, through enlistment of the bourgeoisie, to the continual struggles between different elements of the ruling class (Anderson 1974; Poggi 1978: 62–7; Wilson 2000: 29–34).
8 In this respect, I disagree with Anderson, who argues that absolutism was a feudal form of the state superimposed on emerging capitalist economics. This leads him to the curious position that the Russian Revolution was an anomaly (Anderson 1974: 39–40, 359–60).

9 Using the later Prussian example, Poggi reveals the origins of the fabled "rule of law" in this process (Poggi 1978: 74–7).
10 "Image" has a long lineage, stemming from the "image and likeness" of God in Genesis 1:26–7, although there it applies to the first human being and thereby all. The claim by the absolute monarchs did not attribute such a status to their subjects.
11 The claims—by monarchs and their ideologues—were of course greater than the reality, in which the monarch was actually constrained by all manner of forces (Henshall 1992; Collins 2009: xv; Wilson 2000).
12 Given that there were at any one time a number of God's agents on earth created some problems. As Reus-Smit drily observes, "Claiming that monarchs were God's lieutenants on earth was one thing, but establishing a reliable means to determine which of God's lieutenants was closer to the Divine was another" (Reus-Smit 1999: 102).
13 A translated text of the Holy Alliance may be found at http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/government/diplomatic/c_alliance.html (accessed August 11, 2018).
14 Strauss was sacked from the theology faculty at Tübingen, only to be given a lifelong pension after the abortive effort by liberals to gain him a position at Zürich. The crux of his argument, from which he retreated in subsequent editions (Strauss 1836, 1839, 1840), was that everyone was capable of being a "Christ"—a radically democratic idea that profoundly challenged the singular claim of the Prussian monarch (Massey 1983).
15 This argument contrasts with Marx's earlier criticism of the Christian state as a contradictory beast due to the exclusive particularity of different religions, so the only solution is a secular state that is indifferent to religion (Marx 1843: 116–18).
16 Engels makes a comparable point, arguing that the internal dynamics of Christian theology—a primary allegiance to God rather than an earthly master—necessitate the separation of church and state, apart from the contradictions of a Christian state as such (Engels 1843).
17 Poggi argues that bourgeois civil society first arose in the context of absolutist states (Poggi 1978: 77–85).

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