



 <https://doi.org/10.23925/1764-0892.2021.v1.n2.e61293>

THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE AND THE IDEAL: FRIEDRICH ALBERT LANGE'S POLITICAL TELEOLOGY AT THE INTERSECTION OF SCHILLER AND DARWIN

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ABSTRACT

Friedrich Albert Lange was a neo-Kantian and a socialist. Scholars have questioned whether there is a connection between these two aspects of Lange's work. The paper argues that such a connection is apparent once Lange's philosophy is understood in light of Schiller's Kantianism. According to Lange, Schiller's aesthetic redemption consists of two tasks: to create the beautiful image of an ideal reality; and to realize this ideal model in the actual world. Accordingly, I show that Lange's political analysis points to three different types of social evolution: 1) one corresponding to the natural state of humanity, based on Darwin's and Malthus's concept of the struggle for survival; 2) one corresponding to ideal evolution, in which all human beings achieve full development of their talents (first task of the esthetic redemption); 3) one corresponding to the actual

realization of this ideal, in which human beings advance step by step thanks to social experimentation and the resulting progress in knowledge (second task of esthetic redemption).

KEYWORDS:

FRIEDRICH ALBERT LANGE. NEO-KANTIANISM. SOCIAL DARWINISM.
FRIEDRICH SCHILLER. KANTIAN SOCIALISM. TELEOLOGY.

Grosses wirkt ihr Streit, Grösseres wirkt ihr Bund
(Schiller, *Der Spaziergang*)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. *Lange as philosopher and socialist*

Friedrich Albert Lange (1828-1875) was a highly influential figure in the philosophical milieu of the late nineteenth century because of his widely read *History of Materialism*¹. The book was a landmark of the “back to Kant” movement that emerged from the rubble of the “materialism controversy” (*Materialismusstreit*). In it, Lange argued that recent advances in sciences such as physiology were not at all a confirmation of the materialist worldview, but rather a confirmation of Kant’s insights. Of course, Lange acknowledged that in the first half of the century the biological sciences had abandoned the notion, typical of Romantic *Naturphilosophie*, of a life force animating living organisms and had

¹ The book was first published in 1866, followed by a second “improved and enlarged edition” in 1873-1875. After Lange’s death in 1875, the book remained very popular. It had several reprints in Germany, some accompanied by a biographical introduction by Otto Adolf Ellissen (author of Lange’s biography and curator of various unpublished manuscripts from his *Nachlass*), some by a critical introduction by Hermann Cohen, the main representative of the Marburg school of Neo-Kantianism. Lange’s book (in the version of 1873-1875) also had multiple editions in all major European languages, such as French (1877, 1911, 1921), Italian (1932), Spanish (1903), and Portuguese (1843-1844). The *History of Materialism* was also translated in English in 1877, and republished in 1892 and 1925, this latter edition with a lengthy Introduction by Bertrand Russell. I quote from the 1892 English edition, abbreviated as *HM*: Friedrich Albert Lange, *History of Materialism and Criticism of his Present Importance*, trans. Ernst Chester Thomas, 3rd ed., 3 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892).

fully embraced the mechanistic paradigm, according to which life can and must be explained on the basis of chemical and physical laws alone, leading to a resurgence of materialism. Nevertheless, he stressed that the physiology of the sense organs proved “that the quality of our sense-perceptions is entirely conditioned by the constitution of our organs” and, more generally, that “our whole experience is conditioned by our intellectual organization” (HM II 158), thus confirming Kant’s Copernican Revolution that we never know reality in itself, but only as it appears to us. For this reason, Lange famously claimed that “the physiology of the sense organs is developed or corrected Kantianism” (HM III 202).

However, Lange’s contribution was not limited to the epistemological debate stimulated by the development of physiological psychology. Indeed, Lange was also an active political figure in the burgeoning German socialist movement. In 1860, he joined the liberal *Deutscher Nationalverein* (later renamed as *Fortschrittspartei*). In 1862, because of his political activity, he had to give up his job as a teacher. As a result, he became co-editor of the liberal journal *Rhein- und Ruhrzeitung* and started working as secretary of the Duisburg Chamber of Commerce². The new job fostered Lange’s interest in political and economic issues. Following the example of the cooperative movement launched by liberal politician and economist Franz Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch, Lange helped found a consumer association and a cooperative credit union in Duisburg. However, in the following years, Lange became more and more convinced that the problems of the working class required radical reforms that the liberal parties were not willing to pursue.

² A collection of the articles published by Lange throughout the years can be found in Friedrich Albert Lange, *Über Politik und Philosophie: Briefe und Leitartikel 1862 bis 1875*, ed. Georg Eckert (Duisburg: Walter Braun, 1968).

Consequently, he came closer to the embryonic socialist movement and left the *Fortschrittspartei* and his job at the Chamber of Commerce, to concentrate on his work as a journalist and political pamphleteer³.

At that time, the German socialist movement was divided into two organizations: the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiter-Verein* (ADAV) founded by Ferdinand Lassalle; and the *Verband Deutscher Arbeitervereine* (VDAV). The former was a single centralized party, led first by Lassalle and, after his death in 1863, by his successor Johann Baptist von Schweitzer. The ADAV was based mainly in Prussian territory and preached a fiery socialism centered on two demands: universal suffrage and cooperative factories financed by the state. For these reasons, Lassalle and Schweitzer advocated a strong central state under Prussian leadership and collaborated with Bismarck against the liberal party hoping to obtain social reforms in return (which did not happen, since Bismarck, having consolidated his position in the successful wars against Austria and France, adopted increasingly anti-socialist policies). On the other hand, the *Verband* was a loose confederation of local workers' clubs. Among its leaders were liberal philanthropists such as Leopold Sonnemann, Ludwig Büchner, and Ludwig Eckardt, and more socialist-oriented figures, such as Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel, all united by an interest in the social question but also by a distaste for Lassallean socialism and Prussian hegemony. Eventually, the socialist current prevailed and led to the founding of an avowedly social democratic party in Eisenach in 1869, which later merged with the ADAV in 1875 to form the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD)⁴.

As a representative of the Duisburg consumer association, Lange attended the 1864 Congress of the *Verband* in Leipzig. During the meeting, a heated discussion ensued between supporters of two policy options: "state aid"

³ On Lange's life see the detailed biography by Otto Adolf Ellissen, *Friedrich Albert Lange: Eine Lebensbeschreibung* (Leipzig: Baedeker, 1894). On Lange's political evolution see in particular 113 ff., 121 ff. and 133 ff.

⁴ For a detailed account of the development of the German socialist organizations in the second half of the nineteenth century see Roger Morgan, *The German Social Democrats and the First International: 1864-1872* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

(*Staatshilfe*), defended by the more Lassallean-oriented, who aimed for top-down reforms and state-financed factories, and “self-help” (*Selbshilfe*), defended by the more liberal-oriented, who advocated grassroots initiatives such as cooperatives and workers’ associations. Lange participated in the debate and took a mediating position. At the end of the Congress, he was also elected to the Standing Committee of the *Verband*.

As a result of these events, Lange wrote *The Worker Question*⁵. The book was “an improvisation that served a practical purpose” (AF III), namely showing that – once the worker question is properly understood – the opposition between state-help and self-help turns out to be a false opposition. However, since the book went almost unnoticed among its original target of workers, Lange revised it twice, turning it into a more philosophical work, that aimed at the “theoretical exposition of the essence and roots of the worker question” (AF III).

In the following years Lange continued his political and philosophical activities. He joined the First International in 1866, corresponded with Marx and Engels, and published a work on *J. S. Mill’s Views on the Social Question*⁶. However, he could not fully identify with the socialist movement of his time. Because of his independent position and the increasing political repression in Bismarck’s Germany, he had more and more difficulty carrying out his work. Therefore, he decided to leave the country and move to Switzerland, where he had grown up. He continued his political and journalistic work, focusing on local issues, and eventually returned to teaching. He returned to Germany in 1872, when he was offered a chair at the University of Marburg, where he remained until his death in 1875.

⁵ The first edition of *The Worker Question* was published in 1865. Then, Lange reworked the book in two different editions (1870, 1875). A fourth edition, also revised, was published posthumously in 1879 on the basis of Lange’s notes. The first version of *The Worker Question* was republished in 1910, edited and annotated by Franz Mehring, an important member of the German social-democratic party, and later founder of the German communist party along with Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. I quote from the third edition, abbreviated as AF: Friedrich Albert Lange, *Die Arbeiterfrage. Ihre Bedeutung für Gegenwart und Zukunft*, 3rd ed. (Winterthur: Bleuler-Hausheer, 1875).

⁶ Friedrich Albert Lange, *Mills Ansichten über die soziale Frage und die angebliche Umwälzung der Sozialwissenschaft durch Carey* (Duisburg: Falk & Lange, 1866). Abbreviated as MA.

1.2. *The enigma of Lange as Kantian socialist*

As we have seen, Lange was both a neo-Kantian and a socialist. This made him the first socialist neo-Kantian and, consequently, a point of reference for the cultural-political trend of the turn of the century that saw the convergence of Kantian socialists (i.e., ‘revisionist’ Marxists who were increasingly interested in Kant’s philosophy as a possible moral and epistemological complement to historical materialism, such as Eduard Bernstein and Kurt Eisner) and socialist Kantians (i.e., neo-Kantian philosophers interested in the political implications of Kantian ethics for social issues, such as Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp)⁷.

Indeed, Lange is frequently mentioned by the main representatives of this Kantian-socialist trend⁸. Significantly, Bernstein concluded his book manifesto by rephrasing the famous call “Back to Kant” as “Back to Lange”, demanding that “social democracy” learn from Lange’s “outstanding combination of an upright and fearless championing of the working-class struggle for emancipation with a great scientific freedom from prejudice”⁹. Hermann Cohen recognized in Lange a “philosophical guidepost for his time”, thanks to his combination of political and scientific work¹⁰. And even Karl Kautsky, who was the most important

⁷ For an account of this trend from a philosophical perspective see Thomas E. Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860-1914* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978). See also the collection of essays written by Kantian socialists and socialist neo-Kantians: Rafael de la Vega and Hans Jörg Sandkühler, eds., *Marxismus und Ethik: Texte zum neukantianischen Sozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974).

⁸ There was also an interpretative trend that denied Lange’s socialism to regard him and, more generally, all socialist-neo-Kantian thinkers as bourgeois, moved by the ‘opportunistic’ objective of avoiding the class revolution through shallow reforms. Most of these writings were published during the seventies in East Germany on the occasion of the centennial of Lange’s death, i.e. in a time where research was often evidently swayed by the prejudice of orthodox political readings. Examples of this trend can be found in: Friedrich Richter and Vera Wrona, “Neukantianismus und Sozialreformismus”, *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 22, no. 3 (March 1, 1974): 269–88; Manfred Buhr, “Neukantianismus”, in *Philosophisches Wörterbuch*, ed. Manfred Buhr and Georg Klaus, 11th ed. (Leipzig, Das europäische Buch, 1975), 863–65; Joachim H. Knoll and Julius Hans Schoeps, *Friedrich Albert Lange: Leben und Werk* (Duisburg: Walter Braun, 1975).

⁹ Eduard Bernstein, *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* [1899], En. tr. *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation* (New York: Schocken, 1961), 223–224. See also Eduard Bernstein, “Zur Würdigung Friedrich Albert Lange’s”, *Die Neue Zeit* 10 (1892 1891): 68–78, 101–9, 132–41.

¹⁰ Hermann Cohen, *Einleitung mit kritischem Nachtrag zur neunten Auflage der Geschichte des Materialismus von Friedrich Albert Lange*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Brandstetter, 1914), 111.

ideologist of the SPD at the turn of the century and the forefront in the battle against the Kantian 'revisionists', admitted that Lange's *Worker Question* "enjoyed great prestige in party circles in the seventies"¹¹.

As for the socialist neo-Kantians, suffice it to say that one of the major works of this current was Cohen's *Critical Introduction to Lange's History of Materialism*. In this essay, Cohen emphasized the importance of the second two formulations of the categorical imperative, which refer to the idea of humanity and the duty to always treat man as an end in himself and never as a means. For Cohen, these formulations imply that "the worker can never be counted as a commodity, not even for the higher purposes of supposed national prosperity; he must always be considered and treated as an end"¹² Therefore, Kantian ethics provides a moral foundation for socialism, and Kant himself should be considered "the true and proper originator of German socialism"¹³.

At first glance, the situation seems clear: Lange's early Kantian socialism influenced, or at least anticipated, the later convergence of Kantianism and socialism in the late nineteenth century. However, when one looks more closely, things become rather puzzling.

The first problem is the connection between Kantianism and socialism in Lange's thought. For example, the neo-Kantian philosopher Karl Vorländer claimed in his book *Kant und Marx* that "Lange did not draw any lines of connection between socialism and Kantianism, i.e. between the theory of socio-economic development on the one hand and epistemology and ethics based on epistemology on the other"¹⁴. This opinion is also shared by the SPD leader Franz Mehring, who stated that there is no connection whatsoever between Lange's Kantianism and his socialism, since he was only interested in "Kant's epistemology in order to dampen the disdainful arrogance of scientific

¹¹ Karl Kautsky, *Vermehrung und Entwicklung in Natur und Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: J.H.W. Dietz, 1910), 5.

¹² Cohen, *Einleitung mit kritischem Nachtrag zur neunten Auflage der Geschichte des Materialismus von Friedrich Albert Lange*, 113.

¹³ Cohen, 112.

¹⁴ Karl Vorländer, *Kant und Marx; ein Beitrag zur Philosophie des Sozialismus* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1911), 122.

materialism, which was raging in the house of philosophy like a bull in a china store"¹⁵.

Indeed, in a superficial reading of Lange's two major works, it is not easy to see what the connection is between his philosophical and political ideas. One reason why the connection between Lange's Kantianism and socialism is not immediately apparent is that he did not insist on the themes that were typical of the representatives of the later Kantian-socialist current. To varying degrees, all of these thinkers repeated the core idea that Cohen sets forth in his *Introduction to Lange's History of Materialism*. However, Lange did not explicitly point out this connection between the categorical imperative (or, more generally, Kantian ethics) and the socialist drive to overthrow the exploitative capitalist system. Moreover, in some passages of his works he even makes negative comments about Kantian ethics (or so it seems). In fact, at the very beginning of the section on Kant in the *History of Materialism*, Lange writes:

The whole of the practical philosophy is the variable and perishable part of Kant's philosophy, powerful as were its effects upon his contemporaries. Only its site is imperishable, not the edifice that the master has erected on this site. Even the demonstration of this site, as of a free ground for the building of ethical systems, can scarcely be numbered among the permanent elements of the system, and therefore, if we are speaking of the salvation of moral ideas, nothing is more unsuitable than to compare Kant with Kepler, to say nothing of Newton and Laplace. Much rather must we seek for the whole importance of the great reform which Kant inaugurated in his criticism of the theoretical reason; here lies, in fact, even for ethic, the lasting importance of the critical philosophy, which not only aided the development of a particular system of ethical ideas, but, if properly carried on, is capable of affording similar aid to the changing requirements of various epochs of culture (HM II 155, my emphasis).

Critical remarks also appear in the discussion of Kant's argument that transcendental freedom exists in the noumenal realm. Here Lange condemns Kant's argument, stating, "This whole train of thought is wrong from the very outset" (HM II 230). Finally, Lange concludes the chapter by stating that "the

¹⁵ Franz Mehring, "Die Neukantianer", *Die neue Zeit*, 1899, 33–37. Essay also published in Vega and Sandkühler, *Marxismus und Ethik*.

lasting achievements of Kant's philosophy lie in the criticism of the pure reason, and even here only in a few fundamental principles" (*HM II* 233).

This leads us to the question whether there is any connection at all in Lange between his Kantianism and his socialism? And whether the connection lies in the very Kantian ethics that Lange apparently rejects?

Needless to say, these questions have been addressed before by scholars. Harry van den Linden claims that "Lange can hardly be called a Kantian socialist, even though he was an ethical socialist"¹⁶. Similarly, Frederick Beiser states that the Kantian socialism of Lange is a myth that arose from two facts – that Lange was a socialist and a neo-Kantian – while failing to mention the "third stubborn fact that [...] Lange himself never really connected his neo-Kantianism with his socialism"¹⁷. Despite this statement, Beiser himself highlights the political implications of the *History of Materialism*.

Thomas E. Willey, on the other hand, argues for a connection between the two sides of Lange's philosophy, although he does not explain in detail where this connection lies. Moreover, Willey speaks of the "commonsense flavor and philosophical imprecision of Lange's ethics" and ultimately blames Lange for the inconsistency between the claim that Kant's merits lie in his epistemology and not in his ethics, and the generic Kantian afflatus Lange displays in his social and political engagement¹⁸. Helmut Holzey confirms that there is an unspoken yet undeniable connection between Lange's socialism and his neo-Kantianism, but he is silent on Lange's critique of Kant¹⁹.

A more detailed examination of the connection between Lange's philosophy and his political engagement has been presented by Klaus Köhnke. Köhnke rightly emphasizes that both of Lange's books "are in fact essentially

¹⁶ Harry Van der Linden, *Kantian Ethics and Socialism* (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett, 1988) 294.

¹⁷ Frederick C. Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism. 1796-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) 357.

¹⁸ Willey, *Back to Kant*, see in part. 88 and 99 ff.

¹⁹ H. Holzey, *Philosophische Kritik. Zum Verhältnis von Erkenntnistheorie und Sozialphilosophie bei F. A. Lange*, in J. H. Knoll - J. H. Schoeps, eds., *Friedrich Albert Lange: Leben und Werk*, (Duisburg: Walter Braun, 1975), 207–225.

political in content”²⁰, and he rightly identifies the “standpoint of the ideal” as the common thread in Lange’s philosophy. However, Köhnke only addresses the negative side of Lange’s argument. As we will see, Lange distinguishes between two realms: the domain of science, whose goal is to know the world; the realm of the ideal, in which reason is free to create, but which has no meaning in terms of knowledge, but only practical value. According to Köhnke, Lange employs this distinction for the purpose of a “critique of ideology”²¹, namely, to combat the *Weltanschauungen* of the time that - despite being creations of the free activity of reason - claimed to be true. Thus, for Köhnke, the hallmark of Lange’s philosophy is “this skepticism - if not indeed hostility - brought to bear on all religious, *weltanschaulich* and metaphysical dogmatism”²².

As a result, Köhnke correctly states that the ‘standpoint of the ideal’ does not mean “a withdrawal from politics”, but he sees Lange’s philosophical-political engagement primarily in the attempt to “strictly segregating the world of exact inquiry from that of ethical convictions, that of science from that of *Weltanschauungen*”²³. There is some truth in Köhnke’s account, but it is also one-sided because it fails to mention the *positive* political implications of the ‘standpoint of the ideal’, which is not merely a means of criticizing the then-current *Weltanschauungen*. Köhnke was probably half aware of this omission when he wrote, almost apologetically, that Lange’s ‘standpoint of the ideal’ “is an incomprehensible obscurity from which the whole study of Lange has had to suffer”²⁴.

Since Köhnke failed to appreciate the positive role of the ‘standpoint of the ideal’, he ended up reductively regarding Lange as a sheer skeptic, a naturalist, and a determinist about free will²⁵. Maybe he could have found the key to Lange’s ‘standpoint of the ideal’ if he had looked at Lange’s *Introduction and Commentary*

²⁰ Klaus Christian Köhnke, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy between Idealism and Positivism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 157.

²¹ Köhnke 160.

²² Köhnke 161.

²³ Köhnke 164.

²⁴ Köhnke 160.

²⁵ Köhnke 163 and 164.

to Schiller's *Philosophical Poems*²⁶. As Beiser rightly notes, "The first chapter" of the book contains Lange's "most detailed account of the relationship between the two halves of the intellectual sphere" – the real world and the ideal world – and without it "one half of the entire *globus intellectualis*, the poetic half, and its relation to the other scientific half" are "left in darkness"²⁷.

Although the book has a different goal than to solve the puzzle of Lange's social Kantianism, some useful insights about the relationship between Lange's Kantianism and his political conceptions can be found in Bjarne Jacobsen's *Max Weber und Friedrich Albert Lange*, who correctly frames the issue by starting from the dichotomy of facts and values.²⁸

While writing this paper, I came into contact with Elisabeth Theresia Widmer, who was working on Lange from a similar perspective to mine. We developed our ideas independently, but reached similar conclusions (namely, the conviction that there is indeed a strong connection between Lange's epistemological ideas and his political ideas, and the identification of this connection in Lange's Schiller-influenced esthetical ethics). Thus, I recommend reading her essays as well as her forthcoming book, which contain a very clear and detailed analysis of both Lange's philosophy and his political views²⁹.

Last but not least, the most comprehensive work on Lange is Frank Freimuth's book *Friedrich Albert Lange. Denker der Pluralität*. Freimuth rightly identifies the connection between Lange's epistemology and his political views

²⁶ Lange began writing the book in 1866, with plans to publish it the next year. However, other political and scientific commitments got in the way, so he continued to postpone the work. In 1873 he still talks about this project in a letter to a friend. The draft of the book was then published after Lange's death by the author of his biography, Otto Adolf Ellissen. See Friedrich Albert Lange, *Einleitung und Kommentar zu Schillers philosophischen Gedichten* (Bielefeld, Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing, 1897) IX-X. From now on quoted as: *EKS*.

²⁷ Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism. 1796-1880*, 394.

²⁸ Bjarne Jacobsen, *Max Weber und Friedrich Albert Lange: Rezeption und Innovation* (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitätsverlag, 1999). See especially the sixth chapter.

²⁹ Elisabeth Theresia Widmer, "Friedrich Albert Langes Materialistisch-Poetische Kant-Interpretation Und Die Konsequenzen in Der Ethik", in *Kant Um 1900. Hallesche Beiträge Zur Aufklärungsforschung*, ed. Hauke Heidenreich and Friedemann Stengel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021); Elisabeth Theresia Widmer, "Psychophysiological Transcendentalism in Friedrich Albert Lange's Social and Political Philosophy". *Journal of Transcendental Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (2022): 253–75. Elisabeth Theresia Widmer, *Left Kantianism in the Marburg School* (forthcoming).

in the dynamic between reality and ideals that underlies Lange's "theory of cultural evolution"³⁰. Moreover, Freimuth also explains at length the positive sides of Lange's political theory by summarizing his view of the emancipation of mankind under the ideal of humanity. It is all the more surprising, then, that even Freimuth does not fully appreciate Lange's conception of the political role of ideals. Indeed, he repeatedly asserts that for Lange ideals remain "politically unavailable"³¹, basing his claim on Lange's assertion that "ideas ignite from ideas and cannot be effectively generated in society by any calculation of the intellect" (AF 142). It is significant that immediately after this passage Lange calls into play Schiller's notion of "esthetic redemption", noting that it is "in all probability more closely connected with the solution of the social question [...] than one might think at first sight" (AF 142). And it is also significant that Freimuth completely undervalues the role of Schiller for Lange's thought, since he hardly mentions him in his book.

For me, this is further proof that the main flaw of the research on Lange so far is that it did not take Lange's debt to Schiller seriously. On the contrary, I believe that only by framing Lange in light of Schiller's influence is it possible to obtain a complete understanding of his philosophy and – particularly – of the connection between his epistemological views and his political beliefs. I will try to demonstrate this thesis by dividing my paper into two parts: a first aimed at reconstructing Lange's philosophy as a form of Schillerean Kantianism, and a second aimed at showing how Lange applies this philosophical framework to the realm of politics, leading to an analysis of the problems of society and a proposal for overcoming them.

2. LANGE'S SCHILLEREAN KANTIANISM

2.1. *The dualism between the real world and the ideal world*

³⁰ Frank Freimuth, *Friedrich Albert Lange - Denker Der Pluralität. Erkenntnistheorie, Paedagogik, Politik* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995), 109 ff.

³¹ Freimuth, *Friedrich Albert Lange - Denker Der Pluralität*, 146, 176.

Lange himself tells us right away how to interpret his philosophy in the Preface of the first edition of the *History of Materialism*, where he writes: “Among all Kantians, the one who comes closest to my view is none other than Schiller, and I only regret that the plan of my work precluded a closer examination of the philosophy of the great poet”³². It is therefore obvious that the key to Lange’s thinking lies in the posthumous *Introduction and Commentary to Schiller Philosophical Poems*, where he presents his own version of Kantianism by presenting Schiller’s Kantianism³³.

Let me quote in full the passage in which Lange summarizes the kernel of truth of Kant’s philosophy:

The core of this doctrine, once freed from Kant’s one-sidedness and errors, is [1] that the whole world of appearance, as we perceive it with our senses and our understanding, is completely conditioned by the arrangement [*Einrichtung*] of our understanding and our senses, [2] and that we, therefore, cannot know the true essence of things (the ‘thing in itself’), [3] but that our knowledge is by no means ambiguous and worthless, but rather governed by laws which are invariable, necessary and inseparable from our essence. [5] This empirical knowledge is the only way in which we obtain knowledge of things at all, even though it does not show us things as they are in themselves, but rather as man must necessarily see them because of his organization. [6] Metaphysics, which seeks to these limits, inevitably goes astray, especially when it seeks to prove that our ideas of God, freedom, immortality, etc., correspond to a reality external to us. [7] If, on the other hand, we limit our inquiry to our reason itself, asking what ideas our reason necessarily produces even if they do not correspond to any reality, then even metaphysics still has a positive meaning; it is even the highest of all sciences, even if it teaches us only the arrangements [*Einrichtungen*] of our own reason (EKS 3-4).(EKS 3-4).

³² Friedrich A. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart* (Iserlohn: Baedeker, 1866) V.

³³ Throughout the paper I will deal only with Lange’s interpretation of Schiller. Since Schiller is a widely studied and discussed thinker, trying to address all the controversies regarding the interpretations of his work and his relationship with Kant would have taken us too far from the topic of the paper. For the same reason, it would also be beyond the scope of this paper trying to provide a bibliography to Schiller’s philosophy. Suffice it to say that, in writing this paper, I found especially useful Frederick Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Anne Margaret Baxley, “Pleasure, Freedom and Grace: Schiller’s ‘Completion’ of Kant’s Ethics”, *Inquiry* 51, no. 1 (February 1, 2008): 1–15; María Del Rosario Acosta López and Jeffrey L. Powell, *Esthetic Reason and Imaginative Freedom: Friedrich Schiller and Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018).

For Lange, Kant showed us the productive power of human reason, which acts according to necessary laws. When the power of reason is applied to the empirical data produced by our sense organs, we can construct a knowledge of the world that is objective, not because it grasps the object in itself, but because it is determined by the lawfulness of reason and constrained by sensory experience. If, on the other hand, this power is left free to invent, it produces ideas which are also necessarily determined by our reason, but which have no cognitive value. These ideas, however, are of practical importance. For this reason, Lange refers to these products not only by the Kantian term “ideas” (i.e., necessary creations of our reason aimed at the unconditioned or the totality of conditions, with regulative but not cognitive significance), but more often by the term “ideals”, to emphasize their practical relevance (later neo-Kantians of the Southwestern school will call them “values”)³⁴.

Lange believes that the fundamental mistake of philosophy is to forget that ideas do not concern existing reality. Kant himself made this mistake when he tried to use the moral certainty of the ideas of God, immortality, and freedom to let us “glimpse the suggestion” (*EKS* 4) of their actual existence in the noumenal realm. He “used the infinite empty space beyond human experience to make room for the construction of his intelligible world [...] by means of the categorical imperative” (*HM* II 282). In doing so, he undermined his entire philosophy, for he tried to assert an actual knowledge of both the unknowable realm of things in themselves and the moral ideas freely created by human reason. For Lange, it is therefore not surprising that Kant was followed by a whole generation of philosophers who claimed absolute knowledge, for he dealt the first blow to the dividing line between the real world and the intelligible world, which he himself had the merit of drawing (see *EKS* 6).

³⁴ Ollig and Beiser are absolutely right in stating that the fact that Lange taught at Marburg before Cohen should not lead us to conclude that he was the father of Marburg school of neo-Kantianism, since his philosophy is rather the clear forerunner of the theory of values typical of southwestern neo-Kantianism. See Hans-Ludwig Ollig, ed., *Der Neukantianismus* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1979), 19; Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism. 1796-1880*, 356. On the topic see also Chiara Russo Krauss, “Friedrich Albert Lange’s Theory of Values”, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 31, 2023, 528-49).

For Lange, there are two separate realms. The domain of science aims at “the agreement of our reason with itself in judging the phenomenal world” (*EKS* 9). In this domain, “the way we acquire knowledge is unchanging and, in a sense, perfect, while the result is a fragment of ever-increasing dimension and highly variable form” (*EKS* 7). Scientific knowledge accumulates facts that are accepted as true by all people. Therefore, this knowledge is certain, but fragmentary. However, the creation of ideas is not entirely banished from this domain, since we always need large points of view “for the apprehension and appreciation of the individual” (*HM* II 239n). Therefore, Lange writes that “every true scientific induction is at once the accomplishment of a given task” – “the task of establishing the utmost possible harmony between the necessary factors of knowledge, which are independent of our will” – “and a product of the speculative mind”, i.e., of our free and creative reason (*HM* III 335-336). In other words, our speculative mind uses ideas to unify and organize facts, giving different forms to our knowledge. For example, one such idea with great heuristic value is materialism. The idea of a world made of atoms “is to us a necessary representation, in so far as we try to represent scientifically the causal connection of phenomena” (*HM* II 323). But precisely because science also needs these ideas, we should be careful not to confuse them with actual reality and to mix factual data with hypothetical assumptions.

This is even more true in the other domain, where we use our ideas to create all-encompassing perfect systems. In this case, we are not guided or constrained by sensory experience. Thus, each thinker is free to decide which ideas to place at the center of his system, and then develop them further to build his own speculative worldview. Lange writes:

Here the result of the spiritual work, the system, presents itself in complete perfection; its form is absolute only because it is produced individually, by a variable process defined by subjective progress. Therefore, its validity, and thus its period of effectiveness does not extend further than the circle of their school and all those individuals who are just prone to a similar style of architectonics (*EKS* 7, my emphasis).

Since the aim here is not to contribute to the ever-increasing accumulation of durable, objective, and universally valid scientific knowledge, but to construct a complete and perfectly formed system of ideas shaped by the character of the individual who designed it, Lange claims that this kind of thinking “falls under the general concept of poetry [*Dichtung*]” (EKS 8).

Like all works of art, these systems of ideas should not be judged by their claims to *truth*. Rather, they appeal to the “esthetic sense”, that is, to the “perception of the formal perfection of the whole”, of the necessary connection of the parts in the whole (EKS 10). Therefore, even though Lange claims that “strictly speaking, any such system has its full meaning only for the individual who created it” (EKS 7), it may also resonate with other people, especially people belonging to the same culture and the same epoch of the author. To use the words Lange employs in his discussion of religion, this is “a matter of taste; only that, of course, it is not the subjective taste of an individual that is the real determinant, but the whole state of culture in a nation, the dominant forms of the association of ideas, and a certain fundamental disposition of mind, which is the result of innumerable factors” (HM III 283).

Many interpreters of Lange make the mistake of believing that he rejects the philosophies of thinkers such as Fichte, Hegel, or even the ethics of Kant. But Lange only criticizes their claim to truth or, worse, to unconditional truth, while he thoroughly recognizes and even praises their importance as products of poetic reason that have been able to inspire whole generations (HM III 288). What is venerable about these philosophies is their esthetic value and their practical effect on the course of history, while what is reprehensible is their confusion of the poetic and scientific realms. Had they admitted their belonging to the ideal esthetic realm, they would have been *irrefutable* because there would have been no truth-content to refute. However, since they mistakenly claimed to be true, they were and are *bound to be refuted*, thus undermining also the reception of their positive esthetic and practical content.

This already helps to shed light on the passage I quoted in the Introduction, in which Lange seemingly criticized Kant’s moral philosophy. We can now see

that Lange was simply distinguishing the *scientific*, and thus *imperishable*, content of Kant's philosophy (the recognition that human knowledge depends on the lawful functioning of our faculties) from its *poetic*, and thus *transitory* content. Lange compares Kant's critical philosophy to the works of Kepler, Newton, and Laplace because its "lasting significance importance" lies in its scientific truth, which was later confirmed by physiological psychology. On the other hand, Kant's "practical philosophy is the variable and perishable part of Kant's philosophy" because, like all works of art, it is an individual creation that appeals to the soul and tastes of a particular era and culture. Yet, precisely because it is a genuine work of art, Kant's ethics had "powerful effects upon his contemporaries" (HM II 155). Thus, as this passage shows, Lange does not reject the importance of Kant's moral philosophy at all:

And therefore the false subtleties in his deduction of freedom may speedily be forgotten; the sublimeness with which he conceived the idea of duty kindled a flame in youthful minds; and many a passage of his writings, in all the simplicity of their awkward expression, exercised an entrancing influence, as of a heroic song, upon those spirits that were seized by the ideal character of the age. [...] Especially has Schiller, with a spiritual divination, seized the core of his doctrines and purified them from scholastic dross (HM II 232).

As we can see, in addition to acknowledging Kant's merits, Lange also points to Schiller as the true heir to Kant's legacy. For Lange, Schiller avoided Kant's errors by renouncing the claim to provide true knowledge about the world. Especially in his philosophical poems, he devoted himself to the free creation of the ideal world and presented it in the most appropriate form: that of art. In doing so, Schiller "firmly maintained the boundary between idea and reality" (EKS 21). For Lange, the kernel of truth of Schiller's philosophy is best presented in the poem *The ideal and life*, which describes "the contrast between an imperfect reality and an imagined perfection [*gedachten Vollkommenheit*]" (EKS 71). Lange emphasizes in particular that for Schiller "the perfect *form* (idea) of things becomes the *ideal* for us human beings when we contemplate it in our spirit

and elevate it to the model [*Vorbild*] or goal of our creation and action" (EKS 67). As Schiller wrote in the key passage of his poem:

Nur der Körper eignet jenen	Over our bodies only have they
Mächten,	sway
Die das dunkle Schicksal	Who weave Destiny in dark array;
flechten,	But secure from Time's uprooting
Aber frei von jeder Zeitgewalt,	storm,
Die Gespielinn seliger Naturen	Blessed Nature's play-companion
Wandelt oben in des Lichtes	hight,
Fluren,	Wanders through the upper fields
Göttlich unter Göttern, die	of light,
<i>Gestalt.</i>	Godlike midst the Gods
Wollt ihr hoch auf ihren Flügeln	themselves, the <i>Form</i> .
schweben,	Would you on her fleet wings
Werft die Angst des Irdischen	mount the skies?
von euch,	Cast away the earthly weight that
Fliehet aus dem engen,	whelms,
dumpfen Leben	And from Life, the dull and hollow,
In des Ideales Reich!	rise
	Into the Ideal's realms!

Schiller's first merit, then, in Lange's eyes, was to retain Kant's dualism between the phenomenal and the intelligible world without succumbing to the temptation to ascribe cognitive value to the latter, but correctly regarding it correctly as a poetic creation.

2.2. *The idea of freedom*

Even though Lange speaks of the world of ideas as the domain of poetry and art, there is no doubt that this is also the realm of morality. As he explicitly writes:

The same principle which rules absolutely in the sphere of the beautiful, in art and poetry, *appears in the sphere of conduct as the true ethical norm which underlies all the other principles of morality*, and in the sphere of knowledge as the shaping, form-giving factor in our picture of the world (HM III 337, my emphasis).

Frederick Beiser, who has written one of the best existing accounts of Lange's philosophy, suggests that Lange refrains from establishing an ethics because he did not explain "what standards determine values and ideals" and simply "shifted away from moral to esthetic criteria"³⁵. Therefore, according to Beiser, by "subordinating the moral realm to the esthetic one" Lange left "no place for the realm of morality"³⁶. However, I believe that, beyond all his vague appeals to the power of poetry, it is nonetheless possible to work out the basic ideas of Lange's ethics.

First of all, Lange shares Kant's view that freedom (understood as autonomy, self-determination) is the central idea of ethics. He fully endorses the separation between the necessity that governs human behavior in the phenomenal world and the freedom we must ascribe to ourselves in the ideal world. It is true that Lange criticizes Kant's deduction of the ideas of God, freedom, and immortality, but he does so for two reasons. First, because Kant, as we have seen, hinted at their actual existence in the noumenal realm. Second, because Kant attempted to *deduce* them as necessary products of our reason. However, this does not mean that for Lange these ideas *are not* necessary products of our reason. As Elisabeth Widmer points out, for Lange the problem with Kant's transcendental philosophy is its method (namely, deductive reasoning), not its *results*³⁷.

The problem with Kant's moral ideas is similar to that with his deduction of categories. Lange believes that the a priori features of our faculties cannot be pulled out of a hat by pure deduction, but can only be discovered by induction,

³⁵ Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism. 1796-1880*, 392-93.

³⁶ Beiser, 395.

³⁷ Widmer, "Friedrich Albert Langes Materialistisch-Poetische Kant-Interpretation und die Konsequenzen in der Ethik".

analyzing the psychological or even the physiological functioning of the human mind. He writes:

It may, indeed, seem very obvious that the rudiments of our knowledge a priori must be also discovered a priori by pure deduction from necessary concepts; and yet this assumption is erroneous. Nothing is more easily conceivable than that the a priori propositions are only to be discovered by the road of experience (*HM II 192*).

Thus, there may well be categories of our understanding and moral ideas that are a priori insofar as they are necessary products of our psycho-physical organization, but they must be discovered empirically (see also *HM II 224-225*).

Keeping this in mind, we see that Lange only rejects the hypothesis that the idea of God is a necessary product of the human mind (of course, psychologically, it is still a necessary product of Kant's mind and, esthetically, a necessary component of Kant's philosophical system, since all works of art are based on the necessary connection of their parts). For Lange, the empirical fact that there are a large number of thinkers who refuted the idea of God is evidence that this is not a necessary product of our psychological organization. Therefore, Lange writes:

As to the idea of God, so far as a rational Creator is opposed to the world, there is no such natural disposition. This is proved not only by the Materialists through their mere existence; it is proved also by many of the greatest thinkers of ancient and modern times, Demokritos, Heraklitos, Empedokles, Spinoza, Fichte, Hegel (*HM II 226*).

Regarding the second idea of Kant's ethics, that of the soul, Lange states that it can be legitimate and even "probable", but not in the moral domain, but as a scientific concept, i.e., as a "unitary subject for the multitude of sensations" (*HM II 226*). This means that the concept of soul can be considered as a necessary idea insofar as we must relate all sensations to a single individual entity that experiences them, even if this entity is not an actual reality but only a regulative principle to unify these sensations.

When he finally turns to the idea of freedom, Lange accepts Kant's entire argument up to the part where Kant hints at the actual existence of freedom.

In the phenomenal world, everything hangs together as cause and effect. To this the human will is no exception. It is entirely subject to the law of nature. But this law of nature itself, with the whole succession of events, is only phenomenon, and the natural disposition of our reason necessarily leads us to assume besides the world that we perceive with our senses another imaginary world. This imaginary world, so far as we form any definite idea of it, is a world of illusion, a figment of the brain. [...] We must judge quite otherwise in the sphere of practice, in the struggle with our own passions, in education, or wherever we are concerned not to judge as to the will, but to exercise a moral effect. There we must start from the fact, that we find within ourselves a law that unconditionally prescribes to us how we ought to act. This law, however, must be associated with the conception that it can also be carried into effect. 'Thou canst, for thou oughts', says the inner voice. [...] For this reason, therefore, we must, with regard to the morality of our conduct, transfer ourselves entirely into the intellectual world in which alone freedom is conceivable. *So far Kant's doctrine of freedom is perfectly clear and – apart from the question of the apriority of the moral law – invulnerable (HM II 226-229, my emphasis).*

This last reference to the apriority of the moral law relates to the same problem of the categories. Even if the categorical imperative is the condition of possibility of morality and is thus a priori and, in this sense, absolutely valid, it can only be discovered empirically, by showing that all men (or at least the great majority of them) actually feel this duty. Nevertheless, Lange remains in some ways sympathetic to Kant's assumption of a moral law common to all, for he writes: "Kant has this on his side, that in every educated individual the moral law attains to consciousness. Its content may in many respects be very various, but the form is there. The fact of the inner voice is certain" (HM II 283).

However, what interests us in this context is the issue of freedom. As we just saw, Lange regards Kant's doctrine on the topic "invulnerable" insofar as it limits itself to posit freedom in the intelligible ideal world. Lange only complains about Kant's "doctrine of the 'objective reality' of the idea of freedom" because it "only serves to darken the real question" (HM II 229n). The real question is that the idea of freedom is indeed *necessary*. In fact, it is the very basis of the ideal world. In the real world, everything that happens is entirely determined and

nothing can be different from what it is. On the other hand, the basis of the ideal world consists in the possibility of taking a step back from the pervasive determinism of natural phenomena, so as to look at the world not as it is, but as we want it to be and imagine it should be. Hence, freedom is first and foremost this ability to ideally detach ourselves from the natural necessity of which we are part, to create a new world in our image, according to our moral and esthetic values.

Even more than Kant, it was Schiller, the “poet of freedom” (HM II 233), who vividly portrayed this liberty which is the source of all that is good, beautiful, and holy, by showing how it springs from our poetic drive. Freedom may be a demand and a condition of practical reason, but it is created by man’s artistic thought. As Schiller himself explains in a letters to Humboldt, the “freedom of thought [*Freiheit der Gedanke*]” he speaks of in *The Ideal and Life* refers “much more to the esthetic realm than to the moral”³⁸. Already in his poem *The Artists*, Schiller attributed to art everything that elevates man above the animal and the necessity of nature³⁹:

Die Kunst, o Mensch, hast du allein.	‘Tis art, O Man, you have alone.
Nur durch das Morgentor des Schönen	Only through beauty’s morning gate
Drangst du in der Erkenntnis Land.	Didst thou the land of knowledge find.
[...]	[...]
Ihr holdes Bild hieß uns die Tugend lieben	To virtue’s love her gracious image bade us

³⁸ See Humboldt to Schiller, Tegel, 21 August 1795, and Schiller to Humboldt, Jena 7 September 1795 (Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Studienausgabe in 3 Bänden: Ästhetik und Literatur*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer [Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Bücherei, 1970]). Letters mentioned in EKS 31 and 73.

³⁹ For a thorough discussion of this problem see Friedrich Schiller, *On the Esthetic Education of Man* [1795] (Penguin Books, 2016), letters XXVI and XXVII.

Lange follows Schiller in uniting the moral domain and the esthetic realm under the common banner of human freedom (see *EKS* 77) and singling out the artistic drive as the first spark of that freedom. True to his claim that the most necessary ideas of human reason – if they are truly a priori conditions of our mind, arising from our psychophysical organization – can be traced empirically, Lange also suggests that Schiller’s idea of art as the first glimmer of humanity may be confirmed by the increasing discoveries of the artistic creations of primitive man (*HM* III 101-102).

In summary, we can say that Lange, like Schiller, retains Kant’s notion of the necessary idea of freedom, but also reframes it by making it not a moral postulate deduced from duty (with a problematic claim to truth), but the source of spontaneity, which characterizes man as the only animal capable of rising to the ideal realm, which is the realm of both ethics and art. Consequently, as Elisabeth Widmer rightly notes, Lange’s “aim is not to refute free will on the basis of natural causality, in order to understand human beings exclusively as determined beings” (like many interpreters wrongly claimed), rather, “his aim is to detach the freedom of will from the claim to truth that Kant ascribes to practical freedom on the basis of the moral law, in order to give it an esthetic value instead”⁴⁰.

2.3. Ethical materialism vs ethical idealism

So far we have seen that Lange places ethics in the domain of the ideal, which arises from man’s creative freedom. Now we must see what moral ideas grow on this ground. For this purpose, it is best to start from the moral doctrine that Lange wants to refute and that he addresses by various names, including “ethical materialism” (*HM* III 231ss).

Like theoretical materialism, ethical materialism postulates an atomistic worldview (*AF* 44-45), based on two fundamental ideas: first, that reality consists

⁴⁰ Widmer, “Friedrich Albert Langes Materialistisch-Poetische Kant-Interpretation Und Die Konsequenzen in Der Ethik”.

of single entities separate from one another; second, that the complexity and diversity of the phenomena that populate the world arise and can be explained *solely* from the dynamics between these single entities, without recourse to a higher principle. In the case of theoretical materialism, of course, these entities are literal atoms that collide with each other and give rise to the things that make up the universe, such as objects and living beings, as well as sensation and reason. In the case of ethical materialism, these single entities are the individuals, who are closed in themselves and separate from each other, being moved only by their self-interest (see *HM* III 236s., 251, 301). According to ethical materialism, the collision between the egoisms of individuals eventually is capable by itself of producing complex social structures with relative internal equilibrium (associations, states, economic systems, cultures, ethical beliefs, etc.). Thus, ethical materialism boils down to the two principles of egoism (according to which self-interest is the only motive of human action) and natural harmony of interests (according to which the egoism of all individuals reaches a productive equilibrium *by itself*, without resorting to other, non-egoistic motives).

As with theoretical materialism, Lange attributes various fundamental mistakes to ethical materialism, but also acknowledges a positive function as long as it is properly understood and kept within its limits. Like theoretical materialism, ethical materialism is an idea that can serve a heuristic function by creating an abstract model of phenomena that extrapolates and focuses on certain aspects of them. Theoretical materialism abstracts away from all so-called secondary qualities to view things simply in terms of quantitative properties and this allows the formulation of physical laws in mathematized form. Ethical materialism abstracts away from all motives that move people to create a hypothetical model of what would happen if they acted only out of self-interest. This is precisely the endeavor of classical economic theories. Lange writes:

The economics of egoism proceeds from the axioms that [...] everyone strives to obtain the highest possible return from the other for the lowest possible effort of his own, and that through the free play of these opposing efforts the

most favorable result, the highest possible total output, is achieved (MA 10, see also HM III 233 ff.).

For Lange, this model has positive scientific utility in that it can shed light on some aspects of human behavior, because selfishness is, after all, a motive. Lange even concedes that because of the importance and prevalence of selfish drives, “the economics of personal interest is likely to remain, at all times, the first, indispensable part of economics” (MA 12). The fundamental problem, however, is to confuse this *ideal* model with reality itself, forgetting that it has been worked out only by abstraction from all other interests that move people. For this reason, Lange also calls this doctrine a “dogmatics of egoism” (MA 14, see also HM III 233 ff.) because, like all kinds of dogmatism, it insists on taking an ideal construct as actual reality.

Thus, even if ethical materialism can be a useful scientific hypothesis, it is false for two reasons: 1) because it confuses this hypothesis with an actual reality; and 2) because in doing so it ignores the diversity of human interests. However, there is a third reason why ethical materialism is false. It is wrong in claiming that complex human institutions can arise and be explained solely by the natural force of egoism. Lange points out that “it would lead to vain sophistries to attribute all institutions devoted to fraternity, such as public relief for the poor, to egoism” (MA 15). In any society, “by no means all legitimate needs are satisfied [by egoism], and so far as they are satisfied, this is done in innumerable cases not by the mere maxim of self-interest, but by means of sympathy, friendship, gratitude, benevolence, and other motives opposed to egoism” (HM III 259). Indeed, Lange emphasizes that “very many arrangements now carried by interest originally sprang from humanity, the desire for knowledge, and sympathy” and “would never have come about without these human qualities” (HM III 259).

For Lange, a *form* (i.e., a whole based on an organizing principle) cannot arise from a sum of distinct and inert entities, but is the invention of our form-creating esthetic drive. This applies to our cognition of the external world, but also to the practical, social, and political domain. If humans acted solely on their

natural instincts, like animals, our communities would be no different from theirs. If there is a society at all, if there are political institutions, it is not because of our selfish animal instincts, but because of our ideal drive, which urges us to create unity and to unite with our fellow human beings. As Lange writes, “man belongs to the state-forming creatures according to his *spiritual* nature” which urges him to “cooperate with his fellow men, to end the struggle of all against all by a settlement, to prevent robbery by the cooperation of all who are threatened, and to promote profit by the division of labor” (AF 266).

Like theoretical materialism, ethical materialism completely disregards the ideal domain of men and attempts to reduce them to completely natural beings. In doing so, both materialisms fail to recognize not only the existence of ideals, but also that they themselves are products of that spiritual side of man which is constantly creating ideas to bring order and unity to the chaos of experience. Like atoms, egoism is not an actual thing in the world, but an *idea*. Therefore, if both materialisms are based on ideas, they should not disregard the function of ideas as ordering principles, and the importance of the ideal domain in general, for in denying the ideal domain, they deny the existence of their own basis.

Once the door to the ideal realm is opened, it is possible to acknowledge all motives that move man, including *moral* motives in the strict sense of the word. Indeed, for Lange there are two fundamental tendencies in the human soul: the egoistic tendency and an opposite tendency, namely “what Adam Smith meant by ‘sympathy’, Feuerbach by his doctrine of ‘love’, and Comte by the principle of ‘altruism’” (HM III 260). Lange, for his part, hints at this anti-egoistic tendency with various terms, such as “fraternity” or “communism”, by which he means the perspective that proceeds “from the whole and its interests” rather than “from the ego and its interests” (MA 6n).

For Lange, both tendencies stem from the fundamental relationship between the subject and the object:

Where does Egoism come from? Obviously, in the first place, from this, that *the representations of pain and pleasure and our impulses and desires, for the most part, are fused with the image of our body and its movements.* The body thus

becomes the central point of the phenomenal world; a relation which, as we may certainly assume, has also its foundation in the nature of things in themselves. Without following these indications further, we must first point out that *all representation involving pleasure and the contrary by no means have direct reference to our body*. The more refined pleasure of the senses, delight in the beautiful especially, fuses not with the representative image of the body, but with that of the object [...] Accordingly, the much-abused pleasure of the senses forms in itself a natural counterpoise to absorption in the Ego, and only by means of reflection can it again afford nourishment to Egoism (*HM III 245*, my emphasis, translation modified).

From this it is also clear why Lange, like Schiller, makes such a strong connection between esthetics and ethics: both imply a form of self-oblivion, whether in contemplating beauty or in encountering others. Indeed, for Lange, “moral development” occurs “through the contemplation of the world of man and occupation with its phenomena and problems”; in particular, he writes that “absorption in this object, as it is likewise presented to us by the senses as part of our own nature, is the natural germ of all that is imperishable and worthy of being preserved” (*HM III 245*). This does not mean, however, that Lange regards ethical and esthetic contemplation as a way of transcending the limits of reason and grasping objects directly, for in these cases, too, we are dealing with a “silent and continuous transference of our consciousness to the object of this human world of phenomena” (*HM III 246*). In other words, by making the world our own, by giving ourselves to it, by contemplating the world permeated by our ideas, we find the “true source of moral elevation” that “eliminates the preponderance of Egoism” (*HM III 246*). This self-giving in the object embraces not only esthetics and ethics, but also knowledge. Indeed, “intellectual progress” and “moral progress [...] spring from the same root: absorption in the object, loving comprehension of the whole phenomenal world and the natural inclination to shape it harmoniously” (*HM III 247*). In this way we reach the highest ideal: “the unity of the true, the good, and the beautiful” (*HM III 285*).

However, let us focus on the ethical side of Lange’s discussion. As he explains also in his book on Mill, connection with our fellow human beings is the fundamental feature of all morality:

If one searches for the immutable moral element underlying the impulses of conscience, one is always led back to the relationship of the individual to other individuals and to a higher totality to whose interests the individual interest must bow. Even Kant, the preacher of the categorical imperative, who regarded the moral law as something given a priori, nevertheless found the actual meaning of the law in the formula: "Act in such a way that the motives of your actions could equally be laid at the basis of a universal legislation". Thus, *it is always the consideration of the individual for the whole that is decisive for morality* (MA 21, my emphasis).

Even though egoism and sympathy are both *ideas* that spring from man's creative reason, there is another and higher sense in which only sympathy is a human *ideal*. Egoism may very well be an *idea* for science, namely as a heuristic means of explaining certain features of human behavior, but it can never be an *ideal* in the more sacred sense of the word, since ideals in this second sense are always the fruit of our striving for wholeness. Egoism can never be a true unifying principle, it can never be an image of complete perfection toward which men must direct their efforts. It can never be such an ideal, because we strive for unity, harmony, the creation of forms, and egoism is contrary to this drive. Proof of this is the fact that dogmatic egoism must be counterbalanced by the ideal of natural harmony of interests. However, since this supposed harmony is based on a conflict of interests, it is not really an ordering principle. Therefore, sympathy proves to be a higher ideal than egoism, since it is in accord with our poetic drive that strives for unity among people. Indeed, the image of a peaceful society based on brotherhood among citizens, on the principle of "one for all and all for one" instead of "no one gives anything for nothing" (MA 20, 244) is an inextinguishable and ever-reviving ideal, as evidenced by the persisting role of communist utopias in the history of thought. As Lange writes, "The dreams of Plato, Thomas More, and the more recent communists are inspired by thoughts that never die out in humanity and which, although they never reach their full realization, never remain without influence on the course of history" (MA 8)⁴¹.

To sum up, we can say that Lange believes that humanity cannot do without the fruits of its own creative reason. Theoretical materialism and ethical

⁴¹ On the positive function of utopias see also AF 41-44.

materialism, though themselves constructions of this creative drive, neglect this fundamental fact and claim to rely on nature itself. On the one hand, even though complete adherence to reality is impossible – because we know the world only through the medium of our psychophysical organization – the attempt to stay true to nature is important in the domain of science. On the other hand, in the ethical and esthetic domain, we should follow our ideal impulse to the ultimate, highest ideals. For Lange, man is always caught in this tension between the necessity of nature and the freedom of the ideal. Although the natural world is the basis of our existence, everything that is valuable – indeed, the very fact that there are values – depends on man's ideal drive, on the fact that we are able to ideally detach ourselves from the bare natural necessity in order to imagine and set our own goals. Therefore, dogmatic egoism, which denies the existence of ideal purposes, is wrong in two respects. First, it is factually wrong because ideals exist (and egoism, too, is an idea). Second, it is morally wrong because it pushes people away from the highest ideals and leads them to pursue an impossible and meaningless adherence to nature instead of striving for self-positing moral purposes.

For Lange, the condition of possibility of ethics is freedom, that is, the ability to break away from natural necessity, but the first moral act, the source of all ethics, is the decision to orient our lives according to ideals and to try to give form to a formless world. For this reason, Lange claims that even the ethics of sympathy is not a true ethics as long as it tries to base sympathy on factual grounds and considers it a purely natural feeling. Thus, the theory of sympathy lacks the fundamental step of moving toward the formative power of ideals:

But the morality which results from the principles of natural altruism not only harmonizes, as we have already shown, very well with physical Materialism, but it even bears itself a Materialistic character, *so long as the ideal is missing*, according to which man endeavors *to order his relations to his fellow-men*, and generally *to establish harmony in his phenomenal world*. So long as morality merely insists that we should yield to feelings of sympathy, and counsels us to care and to work for our fellow-men, so long it still bears an essentially Materialistic character, however much it may counsel self-sacrifice instead of enjoyment; *only when a principle is set up as the central point*

of all our efforts do we get a formalistic tendency (HM III 276, my emphasis, translation modified).

Hence, there are two meanings of ethical materialism. In the first and narrower sense, ethical materialism is the same as the dogmatics of egoism. In the second and broader sense, ethical materialism also includes the moral positions (such as the doctrine of sympathy) that renounce the standpoint of the ideal and abandon the aspiration to shape the human world according to higher unifying principles. As Lange writes: “The ethics of Materialism remain indifferent with regard to the *form* in which its doctrines establish themselves; they hold to the matter, to the content of the individual element, not to *the way in which the doctrines shape themselves into a whole of a definite ethical character*” (HM III 276, my emphasis). Conversely, true ethics is based on “the germ of this *consideration for the whole*”, which “must be given in our organization prior to all experience, because otherwise *the beginning of ethical experience would be altogether inconceivable*” (HM III 277, my emphasis, translation modified).

As Kant taught (and Schiller reaffirmed), what matters in ethics is not the mere external and contingent conformity of certain actions to moral principles, but the fact that the will itself has decided to act in accordance with the demands of reason. Only in this way is it possible to become a truly self-legislating moral person. Thus, sympathy alone is not sufficient if it does not spring from the decision to follow the ideals of reason rather than natural dispositions. Indeed, following Schiller, Lange believes that natural dispositions may well be consistent with our rational ideals, but it is these ideals that make them moral⁴². Therefore, he writes:

⁴² For Schiller, there are “three sorts of relation” between “the sensuous part of man” and “the reasonable part”: “[1] Either man enforces silence upon the exigencies of his sensuous nature, to govern himself conformably with the superior exigencies of his reasonable nature; [2] or else, on the contrary, he subjects the reasonable portion of his being to the sensuous part, reducing himself thus to obey only the impulses which the necessity of nature imprints upon him, as well as upon the other phenomena; [3] or lastly, harmony is established between the impulsions of the one and the laws of the other, and man is in perfect accord with himself” (Friedrich Schiller, “On Grace and Dignity”, in *Complete Works of Friedrich Schiller*, vol. 8 [1795; New York: P.F. Collier, 1902], 202). Kantian ethics – or, at least, a certain interpretation of it – matches the first option, where duty suppresses the sensuous motives. Conversely, Schiller supports the third option, according

But even sympathy is not the same thing to the Materialist as to the Idealist. Büchner says in one place that, sympathy is at bottom only a refined egoism", and this may, in fact, be very well admitted, at least for his Materialistic conception of it. Then sympathy naturally begins in the narrowest circles of common interests, e.g., in the family, and it is consistent with the grossest egoism towards all beyond this circle. *The Idealist, on the contrary, is at a bound in the universal. [...]* The natural feelings which awake in narrower circles are forthwith referred to a universal cause and *connected with an idea which claims unconditional validity. The image of an ideal perfection springs up in the soul, and the contemplation of this ideal becomes a guiding star in all his acts* (HM 304, my emphasis).

From this it is also clear why ethics and esthetics are intertwined. Not only do they both spring from human freedom, but they both aim at the whole. Lange writes, "The ideal, form-creating element underlies the effort after harmony in the moral world, as much as it does the aspirations of art" (HM III 260, translation modified). In ethics, this striving for wholeness manifests itself in two ways: as the ideal of unity among human beings, and as the more general imperative to give shape to our lives according to the ideals. We are moral people not because we accumulate a lot of good deeds, but because we strive to bring unity to our behavior by making moral ideals our guiding principles. In this way, we make our own lives a work of art. Again, Lange echoes Schiller, whose ethics focused more on unity of moral character than on deeds or intentions. As Schiller wrote in *Grace and Dignity*, "the destiny of man is not to accomplish isolated moral acts, but to be a moral being"⁴³. Hence, the goal of human beings should be to become a "beautiful soul", in which "it is not this or that particular action, it is the entire character which is moral"⁴⁴.

2.4. Bridging the gap between the real and the ideal world

The above analysis has pointed out the cornerstones of Lange's ethics. 1) First, the condition of possibility of ethics is human freedom, understood as the

to which reason is the only instance of morality, but the goal is to develop and educate our sensuous motives, so as to bring them in line with the moral demands of reason.

⁴³ Schiller, "On Grace and Dignity", 206.

⁴⁴ Schiller, 209.

ability to ideally detach ourselves from the necessity of actual reality and reimagine the world as we would like it to be, so as to set these ideal images as self-given purposes. 2) Specifically, our ideal drive strives for wholeness, form, harmony, or whatever we want to call it. The important thing is that we long to combine what is separate into a higher unity, and that this unity cannot arise from the parts themselves, but must be freely created by our reason. Therefore, the beginning of all ethics is the adoption of ideals as form-giving purposes, as organizing principles for our lives and our world. 3) From this need for wholeness it follows that the most important ethical ideal is brotherhood among men, the striving not for one's own self-realization but for the realization of all men. Consequently, sympathy may be regarded as the fundamental moral feeling, but not in so far as it is *a natural feeling*, but in so far as it is a feeling consistent with our *ideal purposes*.

Lange's moral philosophy is not at odds with Kant's ethics, at least in the modified version of it provided by Schiller. Both Schiller and Lange agree with Kant in regarding self-determination, autonomy as the fundamental feature of morality: in the moral domain, we are free insofar as we set our own purposes, rising above natural necessity. However, following Schiller, Lange does not emphasize the coercive power of duty on our natural inclinations (as, on the contrary, Kant does), but stresses the connection between ethics and esthetics, since both have the never-ending task of transfiguring reality, turning it from the domain of natural necessity into the domain of freedom and self-given rules. In so doing, the tension between the phenomenal world and the intelligible world is neither erased (which would mean completely turning away from Kantianism) nor appeased by appealing to the noumenal realm or God's providence (like Kant wrongly did, and Schiller and Lange want to correct). As Lange writes: "Kant wished to avoid the obvious contradiction between the Ideal and Life; but this is impossible" (*HM* II 230). Indeed, Kant needed the loopholes of the noumenal freedom and God's providence because he did not have any other way to reconcile the sharp opposition between the natural world and the world of reason

that he himself traced. On the other hand, Schiller proposed a possible reconciliation for this opposition through the notion of “esthetic redemption”.

As Lange explains, Kant’s purely ethical approach remains paralyzed because of the impossible task that arises from the gap between the demands of moral law on the one hand and our sensuous nature on the other. Conversely, Schiller gives us “two tasks: one for life in reality, the other for life in the realm of the ideal” (EKS 32). First, in the “realm of the ideal” we must envisage the reconciliation between the natural domain and the moral demands of reason; we must create an image of man in which both sides are fulfilled and in harmony. And this is the goal of art. In this way, the moral law ceases to appear as a coercive force looming over us, because the esthetic vision of this ideal reconciliation turns the fulfillment of the moral law into something desirable. In other words, the moral law is no longer feared, but loved. Only when this first task is accomplished does it become possible to turn to the second task, namely, the realization of the moral law in the “life of reality”, for now humanity is no longer paralyzed by fear of the distant moral law and the hopelessness of the task of its application in such an imperfect world, but is driven to its realization by love of the beautiful image of this reconciliation (EKS 30-34, 70-71)⁴⁵. For Lange, this is the core of Schiller’s “esthetic redemption”, as expressed in a key passage of *The Ideal and Life*:

Wenn ihr in der Menschheit	When you, in Man’s nakedness,
trauriger Blöße	with awe
Steht vor des Gesetzes Größe,	Stand before the grandeur of the
Wenn dem Heiligen die Schuld	law,
sich naht,	

⁴⁵ Lange’s conception of Schiller’s “two tasks” is another way to express the inherent duplicity of Schiller’s philosophy, namely the fact that he regards “the esthetic as both means and end” (Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 12). Indeed, on the one hand, the esthetic dimension consists in the purely ideal domain and in the perfect image of the full realization of humanity. And, in this sense, it is an end. On the other hand, since precisely this perfect image moves us to try to realize the ideal in the actual world, the esthetic dimension may also be regarded as a means to end.

<p>Da erblasse vor der Wahrheit Strahle Eure Tugend, vor dem Ideale Fliehe mutlos die beschämte Tat. Kein Erschaffner hat dies Ziel erflogen, Über diesen grauenvollen Schlund Trägt kein Nachen, keiner Brücke Bogen, Und kein Anker findet Grund.</p> <p>Aber flüchtet aus der Sinne Schranken In die Freiheit der Gedanken, Und die Furchterscheinung ist entflohn, Und der ewge Abgrund wird sich füllen; Nehmt die Gottheit auf in euren Willen, Und sie steigt von ihrem Weltenthron. Des Gesetzes strenge Fessel bindet Nur den Sklavensinn, der es verschmählt, Mit des Menschen Widerstand verschwindet Auch des Gottes Majestät.</p>	<p>When to Holiness guilt draweth near, Pale grow Virtue in Truth's searching ray, And before the Ideal far away Flee the blushing deed pursued by fear! No, creature has reached the mark, Over this gulf, by wakeful horrors bound, Carries us no bridge's arch nor bark, And no anchor finds the ground.</p> <p>But afar from prisons of the mind Flee, till freedom of the thought you find! And the phantom that once scared is flown, And the eternal gulf itself doth fill. Seize the Deity with potent will, And it quits its universe's throne. For the stern Law's iron fetters span But the slavish thought on which it trod; Vanishes before resisting Man All the grandeur of the God.</p>
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Accordingly, Lange notes that in Schiller “a moral task is solved in an esthetic way, rather than – as Kant would have it – in a purely moral way” (EKS 31). Thanks to esthetic redemption, humanity can achieve the “overcoming of the law [*Aufhebung des Gesetzes*], of Kant’s imperative”, much as Christianity preached the overcoming of the Mosaic law. Thus, Lange emphasizes that Schiller called Christianity the “only esthetic religion”⁴⁶.

The passage about Schiller’s “two tasks” is the key to understanding Lange’s own view of the connection between the natural world and the ideal world, which – according to what has been said so far – seem to be separated by an unbridgeable gulf. If ideals were to remain eternally in a separate world, they would indeed have no meaning. But ideals are not eternally confined in a separate world, for viewed from another perspective, they are empirical thoughts in the human mind and, thus, things in the actual world. Therefore, the ultimate testing ground of ideals is, and can only be, in the phenomenal world, because we are beings who live and act in this phenomenal world.

We can follow Lange’s reasoning in his critical discussion of Kant, where he addresses the idea of the moral law:

In every moral struggle we have to do, not with the *will in itself*, but with our *representation* of ourselves and of our will, and this representation remains unavoidably phenomenon. [...] The whole difference between an automaton and a morally acting man is undoubtedly a *difference between two phenomena*. In the phenomenal world those notions of value have their root, by which we find here a vapid play and there sublime solemnity. We conceive the one and the other with our senses and ideas, and establish a distinction which is not in the least impaired by the circumstance that we find in both the common feature of necessity (*HM II 231*, translation modified).

The moral ideals that inhabit the intelligible world are, from another perspective, phenomena of actual reality. Their value derives from the intelligible domain, but they are able to affect reality only because they are themselves part of it. In particular, the higher their value in the ideal world, the greater their effectiveness on the natural world. In Lange’s own words:

⁴⁶ Schiller’s letter to Goethe, 17 August 1795, quoted in EKS 33.

But just because man conceives the unconditional fulfilling of the moral law as possible, *a conditional influence also is exercised upon its real, and not its merely imaginary, accomplishment*. The representation of the moral law we can only regard as an element of the empirical mental process, which has to struggle with all other elements, with impulses, inclinations, habits, momentary influences, and so on. And this struggle, together with its result – the moral or immoral act – follows in its whole course the universal natural laws to which man in this respect is no exception. The representation of the unconditional has, therefore, in experience only conditional force; but yet *this conditional force is all the stronger, the more purely, clearly, and strongly the man can hear within himself that unconditionally commanding voice* (HM II 228, my emphasis, translation modified).

Ideals are products of our brain, which drives us to act by creating an image of a non-existent perfect model. Their falseness, therefore, in no way implies that they are ineffective. On the contrary, the more ideals rise above reality, the more effective they become. As Lange writes, “The more freely synthesis exerts its function, the more esthetic becomes the image of the world, the more ethical is its reaction upon our activity in the world” (HM III 338).

If ideals were to act on the real world *qua* ideals freely created by human spirit, they would break the chain of natural necessity and the distinction between the two realms. But insofar as they are themselves part of this natural necessity *qua* thoughts dependent on the human brain, they can act within natural necessity without disrupting it. As Lange explains in another section of his book:

The phenomenal world – however much it is mere appearance – is yet a *connected whole*, into which no foreign members may be introduced without risk of ruining the whole. But the man who once soars aloft into the world of ideas is continually in danger of confounding it with the sensible world, and thereby of falsifying experience or of passing off his speculations as “true” or “correct” in that prosaic sense in which these terms belong *only to the knowledge of the senses and the understanding*. [...] There exists, however, a connection between our ideas and this knowledge – a connection in our mind, whose creations only transcend nature *in their meaning and intention*, while, *as thoughts and products of human organization*, they are equally members of the phenomenal world, which we find everywhere cohering by necessary laws. In a word, *our ideas, our brain-fancies [Hirngespinnste], are products of the same nature which produces our sense-perceptions and the judgments of our understanding*. They do not arise in the mind quite casually,

irregularly and unexpectedly, but they are, properly considered, products of a psychological process, in which our sensible perceptions likewise play their part. The idea is distinguished from the fancy by its *value*, not by its *origin* (HM II 339-340, translation modified).

In summary, our brains are constantly generating thoughts of all kinds according to processes governed by the necessary laws of nature. However, we are free to the extent that we ascribe value to some of these thoughts and regard them as ideals, as self-positing purposes of our actions. Of course, this process of assigning value is also a psychological process, subject to the laws of nature, but this does not cancel out the other side of the coin, namely the value that these thoughts have from the standpoint of the ideal as freely chosen purposes.

Even though ideals have no truth-value as representations of actual reality, they do have a fundamental connection with the real world insofar as they are a part of it and are therefore not only *products* of the infinite causal chain, but also *agents* within it. In this sense, no ideal is ever without effect. In emphasizing this, Lange addresses the adherents of materialism who deny the role of ideals as causal factors and regard them as useless fantasies. On the contrary, Lange believes that no complete *scientific* understanding of human behavior is possible without taking into account the ideals as actual causal forces in the phenomenal realm⁴⁷. For this reason, as we have seen, he criticizes classical economic theories based on the dogmatics of egoism, pointing out that “if one wants to dispense completely with the effect [*Mitwirkung*] of ethical motives, one thereby foregoes a deeper understanding of many economic phenomena” (MA 15).

Indeed, it would be quite strange to argue that only selfish thoughts have an impact on human behavior, thus distinguishing between thoughts that have causal efficacy and thoughts that have none. Instead, “the course of the representations involved with the consciousness of freedom and responsibility has just as essential an importance for our conduct as those representations in which a temptation, an impulse, a natural stimulus to this or that action, comes

⁴⁷ On the topic see Chiara Russo Krauss, “Fatti e ideali nella conoscenza storico sociale. Friedrich Albert Lange come possibile fonte di alcuni problemi weberiani” In G. Morrone, C. Russo Krauss, D. Spinosa, R. Visone (eds.), *Costellazione Max Weber*, Napoli: FedOApress, forthcoming.

immediately into consciousness" (HM III 197). It should be the task of psychology to investigate this dynamic within the individual mind. In particular, a science that equates to "what Kant called 'Pragmatic Anthropology'; i.e. [...] a science of man as a 'freely acting being'" should investigate the "motives which guide the individual in his actions" (HM III 194). In other words, one of the tasks of pragmatic anthropology should be analyzing the effects of the ideals on human society, regarding them not from the standpoint of the ideal, but from the standpoint of science, as real causal factors.

As criteria by which we judge what we dislike about reality and how we would like it to be, ideals indeed play a fundamental role in changing the world and thus have a huge effect on the course of history. We can even say that every real change in history is due to ideals. More precisely, the impact of ideals on history is variable, because the more people create poetic ideals that touch the hearts of the people of an era, and the more people make those ideals the goal of their actions, the greater the effect of ideals on the course of history. In other words, the more humanity acts according to esthetic and ethical ideals, the more important these ideals become in the causal chain of events and thus in shaping our society. Thus, those ideals, which were once purely poetic inventions, become part of the actual world once people have realized them through their actions.

In short, we can say that the purpose of ideals is not to *represent* reality, but to *become* reality; but they can become reality only if they offer us the (beautiful) image of a reality that does not yet exist.

As evidence of the connection between ideals and historical development, Lange points out that all great periods of change are accompanied by great idealistic enthusiasm. As he writes, "the force of the ideal drive periodically waxes and wanes, like the ebb and flow of the tide, and the spring tides in this change are the revolutions in history" (AF 68). The main example is the French Revolution and the subsequent period of unrest in Europe. Despite widespread criticism of religion, for Lange this period was anything but materialistic. On the contrary, people were moved by a "genuine Idealism"; moreover, "the

movement, as ever, became in its progress more idealistic" (*HM II* 260-261). Concerning Germany, Lange notes that in this period "the influence of our great poets combined with the political, ecclesiastical, and social efforts of the time [...] but the watchword was given [...] by the philosophy of Hegel", who painted this period as a "great transitional stage between a lower stage and a higher and purer stage of unity" (*HM II* 288-289). Therefore, Hegel's philosophy was a true force of change in Europe, even though he betrayed these ideals by criticizing popular movements and supporting absolutist monarchies, thus marking "the end of the idealistic period in Germany" (*HM II* 245).

Since ideals are forces of change, every true idealist is at his core a revolutionary. As Lange writes, "the Idealist, with regard to the state, to civic life, to conventional morality, is the bearer of revolutionary ideas" (*HM II* 342). On the other hand, since materialist philosophies deny the importance of ideals, they also involve a "praise of the present" a "cult of actuality" (*HM III* 332), and are therefore inherently conservative, whether they color their conservatism with an undertone of optimism (according to which the world is good as it is) or pessimism (according to which things are bad but we cannot change them anyway) (see *MA* 114-115).

It is against this background that we understand the "two tasks" that Lange, following in Schiller's footsteps, assigns to humanity. First, we should strive to create ideals capable of touching the hearts of our fellow human beings by painting the picture of a beautiful, harmonious society. Then, after this esthetic ascent to the "realm of the ideal", we should return to the "life of reality" and, reinvigorated by these ideals, try to put them into practice and realize them (which also requires a proper understanding of the world from a scientific point of view). Schiller correctly portrayed this connection between the ideal world and the real world when he emphasized the esthetic-practical function of ideals as beautiful images that serve to break the paralyzing effect of the awareness of the contrast between the wickedness of the world and the purity of our moral demands. But Schiller also got carried away with his belief in the esthetic realm and ended up with too narrow a conception of the second task. Instead of

acknowledging that the realization of ideals cannot do without political activity, he emphasized only the role of esthetic education. In Lange's words, "Schiller had become completely absorbed in the thought that the barbaric cruelty of our states can only be overcome by the cultivation of the beautiful; that we cannot work better on the future realization of the state of reason than if, instead of seeking freedom by political means, we rather work quietly on the esthetic ennoblement of the mind" (EKS 21).

Although Lange points out that Schiller made this mistake only in his philosophical treatise, *Letters on the Esthetic Education of Man*, and not in his philosophical poems (see EKS 21), he nevertheless turns to Fichte for a better model of a politically engaged philosopher. Consequently, Lange criticizes the short composition *To a World-Reformer (An einen Weltverbesserer)* – in which Schiller mocked Fichte – and notes that the latter's efforts "have by no means remained in vain", since he "actually contributed mightily to the spiritual uplift of the nation in the wars of liberation" (EKS 58). Fichte is praised even more openly in the last part of the *History of Materialism*, where Lange writes:

Fichte was entirely in earnest with his requirement of a transformation of the human race by the principle of humanity itself in its ideal perfection as opposed to the absorption of the individual in self-will. Thus, the most radical philosopher of Germany is at the same time the man whose feelings and thoughts form the profoundest contrast to the interest-maxims of political economy and to the whole dogmatic theory of Egoism. It is not, therefore, without significance that Fichte was the first in Germany to raise the Social Question, which would, indeed, never exist if self-interest were the only spring of human actions, if the, abstractly considered, perfectly correct rules of political economy, as the only ruling laws of nature, everlastingly and invariably guided the machinery of human toils and straggles, without the higher idea ever asserting itself, for which the noblest of mankind have for thousands of years suffered and wrestled (*HM* III 249-350)⁴⁸.

Despite this criticism of Schiller, I hope to have shown that the philosophical framework of Lange's political commitment becomes clear when

⁴⁸ This eulogy of Fichte, in addition to that of Hegel already quoted, should be enough to dismiss Köhnke's thesis that the political implications of Lange's philosophy consist in a critique of ideology.

his philosophy of the ideal is understood in light of Schiller's influence. For Lange, humanity must realize ideals, but it can achieve this purpose only if it is moved not by a pure moral duty (as Kant asserted) but by a drive that is both ethical and esthetic and thus capable of moving both our reason and our senses (as Schiller taught). However, the dual task of Schiller's esthetic redemption does not eliminate the gap between the real world and the ideal world. Therefore, there is no guarantee that we will succeed in realizing the ideals. No noumenal realm, no providence, no God secures the reconciliation of freedom and necessity, of moral law and reality, of reason and sensibility. This reconciliation can only be the never-ending task of humanity, which strives to shape the world according to its own ideals of goodness, beauty, and truth.

3. LANGE'S POLITICAL TELEOLOGY

3.1. The struggle for existence and natural teleology

According to the philosophical framework we sketched in the previous section, Lange's political theory needs three things: 1) a scientific understanding of the actual state of society; 2) the image of an ideal model of society; 3) a program of how to realize this ideal model. However, as Freimuth notes, Lange "considered the social question in the context of a broader theory of sociocultural development"⁴⁹. Indeed, since man is a historical being, every society is characterized not only by the internal relationship of the forces at play, but also by whether and how this relationship determines the further development of society. Consequently, Lange's political theory also includes: 1) an analysis of the natural development of society; 2) the image of an ideal model of the development of society; 3) a proposal for a possible synthesis of the natural and ideal forms of the development of society.

Let us start with the scientific analysis of the current state of society.

As we have already mentioned, Lange, while denying that selfishness is the sole motive of man, concedes that "the economics of personal interest is likely to

⁴⁹ Freimuth, *Friedrich Albert Lange - Denker Der Pluralität*, 105-6.

remain, at all times, the first, indispensable part of economics" (MA 12, my emphasis). Even if we regard humanity from the idealizing perspective of universal history, according to which human beings progress to a state of greater freedom and more perfected humanity, we must still acknowledge that they start from an original state of nature and animality. Therefore, in any case, we must admit that the starting point, the original condition of humanity, is no different from that of all other living organisms driven by self-preservation⁵⁰. Thus, any study of history and society should recognize this primary fact and first provide a theory of man in his natural, selfish behavior. This is all the more true when one considers that man's natural condition is never truly abolished and that any progress toward the ideal of humanity is an achievement that can also be lost (HM III 104-105).

Against this background, we understand why Lange begins his social analysis with a Darwinian-Malthusian account of humanity. Apart from the "perverse practical application" that Malthus derived from his views (namely, the idea that states should inhibit population growth), the "correct theoretical element" of Malthusianism for Lange consists in the "simple truth that human beings, too, though to a lesser extent than almost all other organisms, tend to multiply more than the food to be obtained from a given land permits, and that for this reason they have always been and still are subject to the struggle for existence" (AF 14, 35)⁵¹. Later, Darwin used this Malthusian framework to show that the purposefulness of nature comes about precisely thanks to: 1) "the overproduction of life-germs [*Lebenskeimen*] and living beings" (AF 19); and 2) "the enormous waste of ever new life-germs and the prompt extermination of the innumerable germs and living beings which are not brought by a lucky throw into the narrow path of favorable development" (AF 1). Thanks to the overproduction of living beings, a large number of organisms are created, of which only those survive that happen to be born in an environment suitable for

⁵⁰ On Lange's view about universal history see the chapter "The relation of man to the animal world" (HM III 83 ff.), where Lange also deals with Kant's writings on the topic (HM III 85 ff.).

⁵¹ See also the discussion of Malthusianism in *Mill's Views on the Social Question*, in particular in the third chapter (MA 110 ff.).

their constitution. Thus, it is a natural necessity that “amongst the countless cases the favorable ones too must happen” (*HM III 36*), but it is due to chance that certain organisms encounter environmental conditions that enable them to thrive. Of course, Lange concedes that

what we call Chance in the development of species is no chance in the sense of the universal laws of Nature, whose mighty activity calls forth all these effects; but it is, in the strictest sense of the word, chance, if we regard this expression in opposition to the results of a humanly calculating intelligence (*HM III 35*).

In fact, for Lange there are two basic types of teleology. Human teleology, in which “the purposeful [*zweckmässig*] design of things [...] arises from the fact that they are created by a thinking being according to the idea of purpose” and natural teleology, in which “the purposeful design of things”,

arises by chance, as a special case among thousands and thousands of unfit [*unzweckmäßig*] formations, which we no longer see, simply because they did not possess the conditions of purposiveness in themselves and therefore had to perish, for it is precisely the distinguishing characteristic of the ‘purposeful’ formations that they are able to preserve and reproduce themselves (*AF 28*)⁵².

So, both kinds of teleology are capable of reaching purposes, but they do it in two completely different ways. Nature reaches purposes thanks to the law of large numbers; humans do it through the conscious search of means to ends. In

⁵² In his account of Lange’s philosophy, Beiser writes: “All teleological explanation is for Lange anthropomorphic, because it explains events by analogy with human intentions” (Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism. 1796-1880*, 373 my emphasis). Even though it is undoubtedly correct that Lange criticizes the application of *anthropomorphic* teleology to the explanation of natural process, I do not agree that he regards *all* teleology as anthropomorphic. Indeed, in a footnote of the second edition of the book, Lange explicitly responds to Albert Wigand, who claimed that in Lange “the greatest purposelessness and fortuitousness are represented as the character of Nature” (Albert Wigand, *Der Darwinismus und die naturforschung Newtons und Cuviers. Beiträge zur methodik der naturforschung und zur speciesfrage.*, vol. 1 [Braunschweig: F. Vieweg und Sohn, 1874], 421). Lange replies that, on the contrary, he is “chiefly concerned to exhibit sharply the contrast between the way in which Nature and that in which man pursues a purpose. [...] That Nature does in fact attain her purpose, as Wigand observes, as it were against my view, is the obvious presupposition of the whole inquiry” (*HM III 34*). This shows that Lange does not believe that Darwinism eliminates the concept of purpose from natural explanations, but only raises the need to distinguish the ways in which nature and human beings reach their purposes.

a sense, we can even say that natural teleology is more perfect than human teleology because, eventually, it inevitably reaches its purposes, whereas human teleology is always at risk of failure. As Lange writes, “The mechanism by which nature attains its ends is through its *universality* at least as high, as human purposefulness through its *rank*” (HM III 67). On the other hand, what makes natural teleology a lower form of finalism compared to human teleology is the amount of destruction and suffering it entails: the “eternal slaughter of the weak” only enables the preservation of the “favorable special case in the ocean of birth and death” (HM III 36). From this other perspective, then, we can say that nature reaches its purposes by means that are “the lowest that we know” (HM III 36).

We will deal with human teleology later. Since man, as we have seen, is primarily an animal, he is subject to the mechanism of natural teleology based on the Malthusian law of population and the Darwinian struggle for existence. Therefore, the first part of *The Worker Question* presents

the first, admittedly still very inadequate, attempt [...] to understand also the course of historical-cultural evolution, the development of the higher spiritual disposition in individuals as well as in whole classes, the formation of the great faculties, etc., according to the same principles as the origin of the species from the struggle for existence (AF 31).

i.e., the two principles of “production and annihilation” (AF 46).

This does not mean, of course, that for Lange there are no other factors involved in the cultural development of mankind, such as ideal purposes. Nevertheless, it is important to properly understand man’s natural, animalistic dispositions for two reasons. First, because they are what impede the spiritual development of humanity. Lange writes: “It is the burden of the ordinary struggle for existence that opposes the uplifting forces; were it not for the concern for physical existence, the noblest qualities could develop in each individual with that perfection which corresponds to his innate disposition” (AF 47). Secondly, and most importantly, since man is a biological organism, the first spark of his intellectual and spiritual development could only come about through natural causes. We cannot assume a divine intervention that transforms the human beast

into a man thanks to the gift of the ideal-creating reason. Therefore, we must assume that the ideal development of humanity began not on ideal grounds, but on natural and even beastly grounds. In other words, the rational tools and even the ideals that we may now use to elevate ourselves above the struggle for existence must have emerged from the very struggle for existence. In the words of Lange:

The first step towards the possibility of the civilization of man was presumably the attaining of superiority over all other animals, and it is not probable that he employed for this end essentially different means from those which he now employs with the object of lording it over his kind. Cunning and cruelty, savage violence and lurking knavery must have played an important part in those struggles (*HM III 109*).

In *The Worker Question*, Lange addresses precisely the issue of how the struggle for existence produced the development of culture. According to classical economic theories,

culture begins with the 'primitive hunter' or the 'primitive fisherman' who, thanks to chance or to a cleverly designed instrument or to greater strength and dexterity, has acquired more supplies than he needs and now gives part of them to another in need, in return for certain services (*AF 63*).

However, Lange believes that it is "much simpler and more appropriate to the circumstances of rude primitive peoples" to assume that "a bold robber – or, what is the same thing, a conqueror – subdued others by force and made them work for him as slaves in exchange for the protection of their lives" (*AF 63*). In this way, "the robber, freed from the immediate necessity and care of daily bread by his slaves, has leisure to train [*bilden*] his body and spirit and to elevate [*heranbilden*] himself in his privileged position to a nobler being" (*AF 63*).

Lange thus refuses to assume that the first ennobled individuals possessed any superior trait that made them better hunters or fishers, and instead hypothesizes that they were simply even crueller than their peers. According to the blind mechanism of natural teleology, we should also suppose that thousands and thousands of cruel individuals have tried to subjugate their fellow men

before eventually some of them succeeded in obtaining a privileged position thanks to a series of fortuitous favorable circumstances. So we cannot even say that the fittest, most gifted individuals necessarily – or even deservedly – became the conquerors, those of noble lineage.

For Lange, such a “level of education” could not “be achieved in any other way *under the same conditions*” (AF 63, my emphasis). That is, this forcible subjugation was the only way in which the spark of humanity could emerge from the animality of primitive people embroiled in the struggle for existence. Therefore, “however much we may hate their origin”, we must acknowledge that the “noble and princely families of all ages”, which “evolved from such refined human predators”, were “the chief bearers of culture, and in some respects even of moral culture; for it is only in their carefree and privileged existence that those traits of magnanimity, chivalry, self-sacrificing bravery, and proud candor seem to have developed which, *under more favorable conditions*, have become the common property of all better men” (AF 63, my emphasis).

Since the essence of the ideal freedom of humanity is the possibility of rising above the necessity of nature, it is almost self-evident that it arose when the first humans found a way to avoid the necessary search for the means of survival by forcibly delegating it to enslaved fellow humans. However, Lange does not retract his Schillerean view that freedom began with poetry; but he does specify that while we would have “no spiritual development without poetry”, “we would also hardly have a developed poetry without privileged heroes and heroic dynasties” (AF 64), that is, without individuals who felt the need to picture themselves in the role of idealized characters because they no longer felt the pangs of hunger.

We may say, then, that “slavery” was “the very starting point of the higher spiritual development of our race”, even though “our feeling resists letting the good come out of the bad in this way” (AF 62). This does not mean, however, that we should justify or even admire our beginnings, for “the bad is no less bad and hateful because the good has come out of it” (AF 62). When we hypothesize about the beginnings of humanity, we must assume that the first spark of humanity, in

the higher sense of the word, was not an intentional result, but rather the fruit of the blind natural teleology. If we look back to our origins, “then a certain *purposefulness* unmistakably reveals itself in those terrible sacrifices; however not that of human careful calculation, with which we are familiar, but again and again that gigantic and ruthless mechanism which, in the slow course of the eons, unfolds itself toward its ends, creating and destroying again as it is echoed by the cries of the creature” (AF 65).

A major consequence of this original subjugation is that it triggered a process of differentiation among people. Now a part of humanity is subjugated and suffers in the struggle for existence, while another part of humanity is in a privileged position, which means that it can avoid the struggle for existence in order to devote itself to the pursuit of nobler ideals. An example of this process is ancient Greece, where the development of the classical ideal of humanity did not occur *despite* the acceptance of the slave system, but *thanks to* that very system (see AF 22).

The process of differentiation between people is exacerbated by the fact that the gulf between the privileged and unprivileged classes tends to widen, as the former have a competitive advantage. Since “the inheritance of property and rights plays an incomparably greater role in man than the direct inheritance of physical and spiritual qualities” and since “an inherited capital can be used to awaken a higher sense in the descendants of the owners by means of instruction and education in the broadest sense” (AF 68), we can even surmise that if an opposite tendency were not in play thanks to the ideal of the unity of mankind, the differences between the classes would increase more and more and eventually lead to completely different human races. In fact, the privileged classes would use their privilege to develop their qualities, while the workers would fall behind due to their constant physical exploitation and spiritual inactivity (AF 56-59).

This differentiation between people leads to a complication of the struggle for existence, which is now accompanied by a “struggle for the privileged position” (AF 46 ff.), or as many struggles as there are privileged positions.

Indeed, Lange writes, “the struggle for existence among men takes on a peculiar form because of the infinitely many gradations of the social condition of individuals” (AF 263). This struggle for privileged position is based on the same Malthusian principles of natural teleology, namely, “nature creates numerous contenders for each position, only one of which succeeds and occupies the position, while the others either perish completely or are preserved in a lower stage of existence” (AF 86).

Lange thus completely rejects the idea of social Darwinism, according to which there is a form of meritocracy in social competition. First, there are always countless individuals who have the talent to occupy a certain privileged position. Second, it is only the casual encounter with a set of favorable circumstances that enables one of these individuals to occupy a privileged position. And finally, it is precisely this privileged position that allows this person to be the only one who has the chance to develop his talents. Thus, if it appears that the persons in privileged positions earned their privileges because of their extraordinary talents, it is because we forget that they were not the only talented persons, but the only persons who had the chance to develop them, while a multitude of equally talented persons were wasted because of the mechanism of overproduction and dissipation inherent in natural teleology.

Consequently, the struggle for the privileged position should not be considered as a mechanism that promotes the development of talents and the progress of humanity by rewarding the most deserving. Quite the contrary. On the one hand, it is a mechanism that rewards those who happen to be favored by circumstances. On the other hand, it allows only a small minority of gifted individuals to develop, while most talents are wasted, just as countless living organisms are wasted in the Darwinian struggle for existence (see AF 51)⁵³.

⁵³ “In the formation of great fortunes, nature again employs the same method as in the struggle for privileged position in general: it sacrifices many similar forces to let one reach the goal” (AF 94). “Even in the intellectual sphere it seems to be the method of Nature that she flings a thousand equally gifted and aspiring spirits into wretchedness and despair in order to form a single genius, which owes its development to the favor of circumstances” (HM III 35).

Therefore, Lange claims that “the whole system of hierarchical organization” is “a terrible obstacle to human progress” (AF 50), contrary to what social Darwinists believe.

However, there is another reason why the struggle for the privileged position triggered by the hierarchical division of society does not lead to progress. To explain this problem, Lange refers to the psychophysiological research of Ernst Heinrich Weber and Gustav Theodor Fechner in the first half of the nineteenth century (AF 113 ff.)⁵⁴. Weber and Fechner showed that the organism does not perceive the *absolute* intensity of a sensation, but only the *difference* between two sensations, by some kind of comparison. For example, we do not perceive the brightness of a room, but only the increase or decrease in brightness. Moreover, Fechner found that the ability to perceive the variation in sensation decreases as the absolute stimulus increases. To stay with the example: it is very easy to perceive a change in brightness in a dark room, whereas it becomes increasingly difficult the more the room is lit.

If we apply this psychophysical phenomenon to the struggle for the privileged position, it follows that we enjoy our position only when we experience an improvement by comparing it with our previous and less privileged condition, or when we compare it with the condition of the underprivileged. Moreover, the higher our initial condition, the greater the improvement must be for us to perceive any change at all. For Lange, this leads to a further widening of the gap between social classes and a general decline in the overall satisfaction of the population. Indeed, the privileged need more and more goods to be pleased, so it becomes increasingly difficult to find means of

⁵⁴ In his experimental study of the sense of touch, Weber discovered that our ability to perceive the difference between two stimuli decreases as the absolute magnitude of the stimulus increases. For example, we are able to perceive the difference between two weights of 100 and 110 grams, but we are unable to perceive a difference of 10 grams when it regards two weights of 1.000 and 1.010 grams. Fechner further developed Weber's discovery in a more mathematical form, noting that the relationship between the perceived difference and the difference in stimuli follows a logarithmic ratio. The fact that the logarithmic curve becomes almost flat at higher values represents the fact that it becomes almost impossible to perceive a difference when the magnitude of the stimulus is particularly large. For example, it becomes almost impossible to perceive any difference. So, for example, in an extremely loud environment, we would fail to notice any new noise. On the topic see David J. Murray, *The Creation of Scientific Psychology* (Routledge, 2020).

satisfaction. This leads to the development of an ever-growing luxury industry. On the other hand, the lower classes perceive their living conditions as increasingly miserable in comparison to the ever-increasing opulence of the upper classes. Consequently, Lange asserts that “an exaggerated difference in the living conditions of individuals necessarily leads to a lower total sum of happiness than approximately equal conditions” (AF 126). Indeed, in an unequal society, many resources are wasted on the production of luxury goods, even though “luxuries by and large produce little happiness” (AF 131). If these resources were used to improve the general living conditions of citizens, it would lead to greater happiness for all. The result of this constant struggle for the privileged position is thus only apparent progress (if one confuses luxury with progress), because ultimately neither the poor nor the rich experience an improvement in their situation.

In *The Worker Question*, Lange also analyzes another modification of the struggle for existence that is typical of human society. In addition to the struggle for a privileged position, a large part of humanity is still involved in the struggle for existence “in the most immediate meaning of the word” (AF 264), namely as a struggle for the means of survival. This struggle involves the people of the lower classes and “takes the form of the struggle for wages” (AF 13). For in capitalist society, private ownership of land prohibits workers from resorting to self-subsistence in order to survive. Consequently, the only way for them to acquire the means to survive is to sell their labor to the capitalists in exchange for a wage. Thus, workers find themselves in a dependent condition that compromises the autonomy inherent in their human dignity (AF 12 ff.).

By claiming that the struggle for wages is a form of the struggle for existence, Lange subsumes Lassalle’s and Ricardo’s “law of wages” under the Malthusian-Darwinian mechanism of overproduction and destruction (see AF 161). According to Lassalle and Ricardo’s law, wages always tend toward the minimum necessary to sustain the life of the worker. For Lange, the fact that the overabundance of workers relative to demand lowers the price of labor (according to the law of supply and demand) is just another example of the

Malthusian dynamic between overpopulation and scarcity of the means of subsistence (in this case, wages).

In this way, Lange explicitly disagrees with Marx, who in the first book of *Capital* regarded the “ebb and tide of the demand for manpower” as detached from natural population dynamics and dependent only on the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production (AF 215)⁵⁵. However, Lange agrees with Marx’s analysis of the dynamics of wages and labor under capitalism, such as the role of the industrial reserve army, and he even declares Marx “the most knowledgeable and perspicacious national economist of our time” (AF 248). Nevertheless, Lange views the capitalist dynamics described by Marx as historical “modifications” of the never-ending struggle for existence (AF 217)⁵⁶. For Lange, Marx’s problem is that he got carried away with his good fight against the supporters of Malthusianism – who claimed that “the whole social question can be solved by the simple prescription of reducing the population” – and thus ended up rejecting not only this “false and wicked practical consequence” but also the correct theoretical core of Malthus’ theory (AF 237-238).

Marx rejects the Malthusian law of population because man, as a historical being, has only historical laws of population determined by the specific mode of production of the epoch, while a general natural law of population “exists only for plants and animals”⁵⁷. However, Lange points out that Marx himself conflated natural laws and historical development, insofar as he regarded the overcoming of capitalism as a sort of natural necessity. As he wrote in *Capital*, “capitalist

⁵⁵ “The law of capitalist production which really lies at the basis of the supposed ‘natural law of population’ can be reduced simply to this: the relation between capital, accumulation and the rate of wages is nothing other than the relation between the unpaid labor which has been transformed into capital and the additional paid labor necessary to set in motion this additional capital. It is therefore in no way a relation between two magnitudes which are mutually independent, i.e. between the magnitude of the capital and the numbers of the working population; it is rather, at bottom, only the relation between the unpaid and the paid labor of the same working population” (Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, vol. 1 [1867; London: Penguin UK, 1992], 771).

⁵⁶ For a more detailed account of Lange’s economic conceptions in comparison with the main theories of his epoch see Naúm Reichesberg, *Friedrich Albert Lange als Nationalökonom* (Bern: K.J. Wyss, 1892).

⁵⁷ Marx, *Capital*, 1:784. Quoted in AF 212.

production begets, *with the inexorability of a natural process*, its own negation”⁵⁸. From the standpoint of his philosophy of the ideal, Lange sees this approach as upside down: our starting point is the natural necessity of the struggle for existence, while our goal is its overcoming and the triumph of freedom thanks to the historical work of self-determining men. In contrast, Marx sees man’s starting point as historical, but his overcoming as a *quasi*-natural necessity.

Not surprisingly, Lange imputes the error committed by Marx to the “influence of Hegelian philosophy with its tendency to develop world history through progressive opposites that always resolve themselves on a higher level” (AF 247). This does not mean, however, that Lange regards Hegel’s philosophy of history as completely wrong. On the contrary, it was precisely the dialectical philosophy of history that was “the strength of Hegel’s speculation”, so much so that Lange considers it “almost an anthropological discovery” (AF 248-249). Indeed, even if “individual life” does not follow “development through opposition” in such a “precise and symmetrical” way as it is presented in Hegel’s “speculative construction” (AF 249), we should not overlook “the importance of so great a point of view for the apprehension and appreciation of the individual” (HM II 239). From this perspective, then, “the influence of Hegel on the writing of history, especially with reference to the treatment of the history of civilization, [...] mightily contributed to the advancement of science” (HM II 239).

Moreover, Lange adds that – alongside this “theoretical dialectic” – Hegel’s philosophy also includes a “practical, we might even say pragmatic dialectic” (AF 258). Indeed, Hegel’s dialectic can be seen as a scientific *idea* that serves to unify the scattered facts of history, but also as an *ideal* that forces us to consider the present not as a rational state, but as a stage to be overcome in a later and more rational future. In this way Hegel paved the way for “the most radical revolutionaries”, since “a system which represented the whole history of the world as a stream of constant development was bound to lead all too easily to

⁵⁸ Marx, 1:929. Quoted in AF 246. My emphasis.

the further step of subjecting the present form of things to the same principle of progress through opposites" (AF 259-260).

It is against this background that one can understand the passage in which Lange writes: "The ultimate aim of all social endeavors will always be to abolish the struggle for existence thanks to reason, which is its opposite (*one could also construct this according to the Hegelian method!*)" (AF 251-2 my emphasis). Lange's theory of historical development is indeed based on the opposition between the irrationality of natural teleology and the rationality of ideal teleology, whose dialectic – in Hegelian fashion – pushes forward the course of history. As I will show in the following.

3.2. *Community and ideal teleology*

In the previous paragraph, we saw how society and its development are governed by the law of natural teleology, which is based on the "two oppositely working forces" of "luxuriant propagation and painful destruction" (HM III 35). Moreover, we have seen that this natural teleology eventually produces the spiritual development of humanity (thanks to slavery), even if this development is achieved accidentally and affects only a small part of humanity at the expense of the majority of humanity. From this we can already anticipate what the characteristics of an ideal teleology are. First, instead of being grounded on propagation and destruction, it aims at ensuring that nothing goes to waste. This means that the life of all individuals must be preserved and that all individuals must achieve their full spiritual development. In this way, the progress of humanity will no longer be the fruit of chance, benefiting only a favored minority, but will become a self-given goal to be pursued and attained by all people. But let us follow Lange's reasoning.

Lange begins his book on *The Worker Question* by remarking that, faced with the struggle for existence,

man cannot console himself by setting off the sufferings and joys of existence against each other. He knows the horrors of destruction in advance, he

despises them and tries to escape them with all his might. He has formed an idea of how man should live and prosper. He knows the natural purpose of life and how easily one dies. Civilized man starts from the principle that the purpose of life belongs to himself and to all his fellow men. Life, once created, should be preserved (AF 4 my emphasis).

Thus, the two abilities that enable humans to rise above the necessity of nature are knowledge of how nature works and the creation of ideals as self-positing purposes. Indeed, while plants and animals are “subjected to these laws of nature without their will, there arises in man [...] the capacity to rise above the cruel and soulless mechanism of nature, to replace blind development by deliberate purposefulness, and to achieve, with infinite saving of pain and agony, a progress more rapid, more certain, and more comprehensive than that which the blindly flowing laws of nature produce through the struggle for existence” (AF 30).

The ideal goal of humanity, then, is to overcome natural teleology with a teleology that is more human because it is rational, compassionate, actually purposeful, and therefore more efficient. While natural teleology operates with enormous waste and constant destruction, the purpose of humanity is precisely to “reach the point where *no individual life is produced that cannot also live fully* [...] so that the struggle for existence is overcome [*aufgehoben*] as far as possible by the spiritual development of humanity” (AF 213-214, my emphasis).

For Lange, the overcoming of natural teleology is closely linked to the worker question, because, above all, the full development of *workers* is constantly wasted by a mechanism that allows only a small minority to live a truly human life. As long as workers are kept in a state of subjugation, humanity deprives itself of all the cultural progress that could be achieved if all people could develop their talents and realize their humanity. Moreover, the constant sight of the higher culture of the privileged classes arouses the workers’ aspiration to reach the stage of development denied to them. The worker “reflects on his higher destination; he sees in the privileged of his species what he himself could become if circumstances permitted” (AF 8). Therefore, the aspirations of the working class are the lever that can lead humanity to finally overturn natural teleology, to

“unhinge reality” (HM III 355). This is what Lange means when he writes: “The question whether this natural law is to remain for man the only path to perfection or whether with the growing strength of reason in man a new factor, and thus a turning point, enters into the struggle for existence is the core of the social question in all its forms” (AF 73).

If blind natural teleology leads to increasing differentiation among men, in which few prosper and many wither, conversely ideal human teleology is inseparable from greater equality among men, for equality is both a condition and a result of spiritual development. Indeed, the first step in promoting the purposeful progress of humanity is to narrow the socioeconomic gap so that the lower classes can be freed from the struggle for existence and allowed to pursue their ideal self-realization. Therefore, Lange writes that “a turning point in world history [*Weltwende*] regarding the struggle for existence is inconceivable [...] without a significant reduction of all inequalities” (AF 53).

In discussing Lange’s ethics, we have seen that for him sympathy flourishes thanks to the mutual encounter of people. In contrast, because of the “rapid increase of wealth”, in capitalist society the privileged “no longer have any care or sympathy for anything outside the circle of their pleasures”; therefore, “the more fortunate [...] begin to regard themselves as special beings” and “their servants” “as mere machines”, “as indispensable accessories”, for whose fate “they no longer have any feeling” (HM III 267-268). Consequently, the most important means of promoting sympathy between people is an egalitarian society. Indeed, for Lange, all those who share the same “standard of living [*Lebenshaltung*]”, who are “in roughly the same condition” tend to band together, to form a “natural coalition” (AF 148-149). In other words, they put aside their natural selfishness and become more interested in the common interest. Therefore, Lange claims that the standard of living is “a force of resistance against the burden of the struggle for existence”, “a moral means of opposing the life instinct” (AF 148).

Since “living together in sympathy gives rise to the idea of equality and progress in solidarity [*solidarischen Fortschritts*]” (AF 67), to set this virtuous circle

in motion, we should organize society in such a way to have the greatest closeness and cooperation among human beings. The best way to achieve this, according to Lange, is a society with a decentralized political structure and an economy based on worker self-management. Such an organization allows for both greater interaction among people – who must work together to achieve their common interests – and the development of personal autonomy, as individuals are no longer dependent on those above them (such as public officials and capitalists) but are personally involved in the pursuit of their self-posed purposes.

Consequently, Lange rejects the hierarchical society of the time, which culminated in absolute monarchy, and instead proposes “political decentralization with the most democratic organization possible of municipal, district, and county administration” (AF 383). In other words, he advocates a form of “federalism”, understood as “the principle of a subdivided system of government, assigning not only most of the administration but also legislation to smaller units, subject to certain inviolable general principles”⁵⁹. For Lange, federalism is advisable for both political and economic reasons. As to the former, federalism “promises a durable balance between general and special interests and aspirations”; as to the latter, it is also the only organization “enduringly compatible with economic freedom and full social rights for all”. In contrast, “centralization” always “leads to some form of monarchy, every monarchy to a hierarchy of officials, and every hierarchy finally to exploitation and oppression of the great majority”⁶⁰.

As for the economic mode of production, Lange supports the model of “cooperative farming of large plots of land” (AF 372) and “republican factories” (AF 370), i.e., “entrepreneurial cooperatives” (AF 354), in which workers are also the employers, thus enabling the “complete emancipation of workers from their degrading dependence on entrepreneurs” (AF 379). Indeed, Lange believes that

⁵⁹ Friedrich Albert Lange, *Die Arbeiterfrage. Ihre Bedeutung für Gegenwart und Zukunft*, 2nd ed. (Winterthur: Bleuler-Hausheer, 1870), 363.

⁶⁰ Lange, 363–64.

the true *Bildung* of the individual cannot be achieved through traditional scholarly education, but only through *Selbst-Bildung* (AF 370, 380). Since the development of the personality consists in the development of autonomy, in the higher moral and Kantian sense of the term, this can only be achieved through first-hand engagement in public life. As Lange writes:

The object and method of education [...] must have the clear aim of enabling the individual to look after his interests in the future, both independently and in cooperation with others. Moral uplift [...] must be directed above all to the restoration of the ethical bond between the workers and the narrower and wider circles of the community in which they live. But this can only be done by involving them, as equal members of these circles, in the management of their common affairs and by conducting these affairs [...] in a spirit that gives the workers reason to be convinced of the wholesomeness and fruitfulness of the bond by which they are linked to the community (AF 381-382).

Indeed, Lange was one of the first thinkers to become aware of the errors of *Bildungsliberalismus*, namely the “elitist implications of cultural humanism”⁶¹. As Willey explains, “cultural humanism encouraged many liberal burghers to assume that they were the exclusive agents of progress and universal rights”. As a result, they claimed that “citizenship required the possession of *Bildung und Besitz* – education and property – qualifications which allegedly fitted the middle class for its cultural and political mission”⁶². Conversely, following Rousseau⁶³, Lange was aware that schooling was often just another form of luxury and gatekeeping that, rather than developing the ethical bond between people, exacerbated the social divide.

Thus, in his book on Mill, Lange criticizes the British thinker for assigning education a prominent role in social progress. Conversely, Lange notes that “education, important as it is, is certainly often overestimated in some respects, especially as regards the value of mere school knowledge for the overall

⁶¹ Willey, *Back to Kant*, 23, 16.

⁶² Willey, 16.

⁶³ Needless to say, even though Lange agrees with Rousseau in condemning the vain display of culture of modern society, he does not agree with him in regarding the natural state as a state of original goodness (AF 126-127).

development of the personality" (MA 72). Indeed, for Lange, true *Bildung* is not possible without changing the political and economic organization of society to support the development of personal autonomy and fraternity through grassroots self-government⁶⁴.

Regarding the development of a cooperative mode of production, it is important to emphasize that Lange is not arguing for the abolition of property, but for a "higher form of property, namely, the common ownership of a community bound together by a spiritual bond" (AF 293). Rather than abolishing private property or property in general, humanity should develop more and more forms of common ownership, alongside private property. In particular, common ownership should take precedence in all areas necessary to provide people with everything they need to live a full life without the burden of struggle for existence (i.e., the production of food, essential goods, housing, transportation, etc.), while private property should be limited to that certain extra that rewards the special efforts of individuals. Indeed, one of the goals of overcoming blind natural teleology is to eliminate the unjust "social lottery" in order to "bring reward and effort into a just reciprocal relationship" (AF 111).

Even though Lange advocates an egalitarian society, he does so because he believes that only such a society can promote the full development of the *individual*. Thus, he emphasizes that "even the most ideal conception of the future organization of mankind will never be able to produce complete internal and external equality. But it is precisely in the training of special talents for special achievements, in the division of labor in the spiritual field, that lies the great advantage which reason grants to man" (AF 52). Lange's *quasi*-communist society does not aim to level individuals, but to give everyone equal opportunities to realize themselves and develop their special talents. For this reason, rather than abolishing all forms of private property, which may still have a valuable limited use in rewarding positive individual differences, we should aim to eliminate the

⁶⁴ In this paper we cannot go into the details of Lange's pedagogy, which was one of his main interests along with philosophy and politics. For a thorough analysis of this topic see the second chapter of Freimuth, *Friedrich Albert Lange - Denker Der Pluralität*, 31 ff.

real roots of inequality: inheritance rights and land rent (AF 281). It is these that lead to the accumulation of capital and to an increasing unfair competitive advantage that fuels inequality and inhibits the development of individuals. Therefore, any true supporter of individualism should also support the abolition of inheritance rights (AF 278-279, 284).

According to Lange, the elimination of capital concentration and the rise of common ownership will lead to an economic model with different priorities than today, namely: first the “production of everything that is necessary”; second “a reduction of working time”; and only “at the end, a moderately increasing luxury” (AF 107). Indeed, on the one hand, the disappearance of the privileged class and the creation of a more egalitarian society will eliminate the need for the constant production of ever new luxury goods, while, on the other hand, the general spiritual development of humanity will ensure that people will find their satisfaction in other types of goods, such as spiritual goods instead of luxury goods. For this reason, Lange believes that in societies with “moderate wealth disparities” and “average prosperity”

the public spirit receives the strongest impulse and education [*Bildung*] blossoms to its noblest heights, so that it may well be said that man can attain the highest and most satisfying pleasures only in a society which surrounds him with individuals of equal rights and equally capable of enjoyment. *Here luxury is transformed into the cult of beauty* [...]. What no quantitative increase of the resources can bring about for the fortunate possessor is achieved thanks to a favorable relationship between wealth [*Wohlstand*], education [*Bildung*] and milieu [*Umgebung*] (AF 107, emphasis mine).

The expression “cult of beauty” immediately brings us back to the topic of Schiller’s influence. We said that Lange distances himself from Schiller in that he does not believe that esthetic education is the fundamental instrument of change. Nevertheless, Lange’s political analysis also contains many key elements of Schiller’s political philosophy. First of all, Schiller too believed that the highest rational foundation of political institutions cannot lie in the selfish interest of individuals (as in the tradition of Hobbes and contractualism), but only in an ideal, moral, and esthetic connection between people. Accordingly, in the *Letters*

on the *Esthetic Education*, Schiller distinguished two kinds of political states. The first and more primitive one is the natural state (*Naturstaat*), or state of necessity (*Notstaat*), in which people only follow their self-interest. This state is also called “dynamic” because individuals oppose each other like forces that mutually limit their actions. In contrast, in the higher state of reason (*Vernunftstaat*), the esthetic state, or state of freedom, people fully realize themselves in a free association, so that they do not experience community life as a limitation of their self-expression⁶⁵.

Lange adopts Schiller’s view of the difference between institutions based on natural self-interest and ideal institutions based on the free community of men. Indeed, he mentions this explicitly in *The Worker Question*, where he writes:

The ideas of humanity that the eighteenth century brought to maturity laid down the goal that every man is called to freedom, education [*Bildung*] and the enjoyment of the fruits of his labor, and that no happiness of a minority can be considered morally justified so long as it is maintained by the misery and slavery of the majority. These ideas combined with the philosophical consideration of the legal and state system, which began to contrast [...] the historically developed state (the “state of necessity”, as Schiller says) with the state of reason and to show that the edifice of true political freedom can be firmly founded only on the basis of the equal rights of all citizens and the participation of all in the administration of public affairs (AF 338).

In summary, we can discern three Schillerean themes in Lange’s political view: 1) the analysis of the pernicious state of nature based on self-interest; 2) the vision of a new rational society based on the ethical and esthetic bond between people; 3) the role of *Bildung* in achieving this new society. However, as mentioned earlier, for Lange the latter is not merely esthetic *Bildung*, but rather a form of civic *Bildung*, that consists in the exercise of personal autonomy and cooperation with one’s fellow human beings. Still, this does not mean that these two forms of *Bildung* are mutually exclusive. On the contrary, Lange notes that:

⁶⁵ Actually, on the one hand Schiller distinguishes *Naturstaat* and *Vernunftstaat*, on the other hand he distinguishes dynamic state, ethical state (where human beings mutually limit their will according to the moral law), and esthetic state. However, the two characterizations partly overlap, so for the sake of brevity I chose not to address both. Schiller, *On the Esthetic Education of Man*, letters III and XXVII. See also Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 123 ff. and 161 ff.

One of the most important stimulations of the spirit, and in the long run probably the most indispensable, always consists in participation in public affairs, which is connected with the self-consciousness of the free citizen. *The most important elements of intellectual and esthetic culture are easily built upon this natural foundation of all higher education [Bildung]; without it, on the other hand, all educational endeavors degenerate into meaningless games and hothouse culture unfit for life (AF 369, my emphasis).*

This means that the goal of education is neither to divide the population into the educated and the uneducated, nor to prepare the population for its assigned subservient role in the social hierarchy. The goal of education – including esthetic education – must be the full realization of the individual as a human being and a citizen. But to achieve this kind of education, we must also change society to allow the exercise of personal autonomy.

By basing the higher form of political organization on a spiritually developed humanity, Lange obviously faces the same problem as Schiller, namely the vicious circle according to which, on the one hand, we need educated individuals to create an ideal political organization, but, on the other hand, only in an ideal political organization individuals can attain true education⁶⁶. Lange acknowledges that it was precisely to escape this vicious circle that Schiller resorted to the “sophism” of the educational function of beauty (EKS 58). Conversely, Lange does not pretend to break this vicious circle, for he is aware that education cannot do without politics and politics cannot do without education. We can only hope to make progress in both areas until the vicious circle becomes a virtuous circle in which the development of personal autonomy supports the participation of all in public affairs and the participation of all in public affairs supports the development of personal autonomy.

3.3 Social experiments and reformist teleology

⁶⁶ As Schiller writes: “But have we not simply gone round in a circle? [...] All improvement in the domain of politics should derive from the refinement of character – but how can character be refined under the influence of a barbaric state order?” (Schiller, *On the Esthetic Education of Man*, letter IX). On the topic see also Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 126 ff.

Let us recapitulate Lange's political ideals. First, the progress of humanity must be based on a teleology in which humanity consciously chooses its own purposes and achieves them without waste and suffering. Second, every human being matters, so we must guarantee all people a dignified life and the opportunity for spiritual development. Third, we must reverse the natural process of differentiation and strengthen brotherhood and equality among mankind. To this end, we must develop a decentralized, federalist political organization and a cooperative economy, and also abolish inheritance rights and land rent.

This might give the impression that Lange is basically a revolutionary who believes in a complete overthrow of society. However, we should not forget that these are Lange's political *ideals*, which relate to the first task of Schiller's esthetic redemption. In the ideal realm, we are free to create a worldview according to moral and esthetic demands without worrying about its relationship to the real world and its viability. These questions concern the second task, which calls us to return to the "life of reality". Here we are no longer concerned with political *ideals*, but with political *programs*.

Even if mankind should strive to realize the ideals, this does not mean that the ideals can be directly imposed on reality. This is neither possible nor advisable. Precisely because the ideal society that an individual imagines (regardless of how much it resonates with others) is different from the actual real society, any attempt to immediately put it into practice runs the risk of leading to violence and suffering and/or being rejected. Therefore, Lange writes that "the idealist who demands such a change merely because a new legal foundation, e.g. communism, is preferable according to his subjective judgment or on the basis of demonstrations that seem convincing to him, can certainly never demand that society follow him, and he will be crushed by society and *its natural right* as soon as he tries to impose his idea on it by force (*AF 277* my emphasis).

This social "natural right" is a reference to natural teleology, the mechanism of struggle for existence, which is the basic instrument of change in the world. In fact, the world exerts a kind of resistance against everything imposed from above,

from the heights of the ideal realm, instead of emerging from below, thanks to the mechanism of Darwinian evolution. In Langes' words:

At the same time, one should certainly not hope that the proper organization of the work will somehow emerge ready-made from the mind of an inventor. And even if such a philosopher's stone should be found in a fortunate hour, whether soon or after long struggles and futile attempts, it is far from certain that it would also be immediately recognized and generally applied. Rather, it is very probable that often enough the better will be hastily discarded, the worse will be tried and reshaped a hundred times, until finally *the relatively best will acquire durability, stability, and completeness, according to the same rules by which organisms are formed and gradually attain the form most appropriate to the conditions of life which govern their existence*. Thus, much as it must always be the ultimate aim of all social endeavors to abolish or reduce to its minimum the struggle for existence thanks to reason, which is its opposite (one could also construct this according to the Hegelian method!), *it is not to be hoped that this will happen without the cooperation of the struggle for existence* (AF 251-2 my emphasis).

This passage seems to imply that we should simply accept that history will always follow the law of blind natural teleology. However, this does not mean that Lange claims that we should come to terms with the destruction and suffering implied in the mechanism of the struggle for existence, because progress will eventually come out of it. As we have seen, this would go against everything Lange believes in. Rather, it means that conscious, purposeful, human teleology and the mechanism of natural teleology must be constructively brought together. For, although these two kinds of teleology are opposed from a logical point of view (or, in Hegelian terms, *because they are opposed*), they can work together at the historical level.

In a sense, we can say that we should use the mechanism of natural teleology to our advantage. In fact, the experimental method of trial and error, which is constantly used by mankind in the most diverse fields of life, is nothing but a deliberate and refined application of the mechanism of natural teleology, in which several attempts are made before finding the one that fits best. In discussing Darwinism in *The History of Materialism*, Lange writes:

If a man, in order to shoot a hare, were to discharge thousands of guns on a great moor in all possible directions; if, in order to get into a locked-up room, he were to buy ten thousand casual keys, and try them all; if, in order to have a house, he were to build a town, and leave all the other houses to wind and weather, assuredly no one would call such proceedings purposeful (*HM III* 33-34).

But even if man can *aim* at the hare, *choose* a key, or *design* a house, this does not mean that he does not need several attempts to hit the target, pick the right key, or discover the most durable construction method. Even though the *ideal* teleology of humanity achieves its goals perfectly, the *actual* teleology we use every day is more of a compromise between the ideal teleology and the natural teleology, as we need *multiple* conscious attempts to achieve our *intended* goals.

However, there remains a fundamental difference between this imperfect human teleology and natural teleology: knowledge. We know our goals in advance, and we can also use our scientific knowledge to effectively reduce the number of trials and make more educated attempts. Of course, since science always works with a certain degree of abstraction, it can never say with absolute certainty what we should do, especially in complicated areas such as society, politics, and human life in general. Therefore, “science should firmly reject the demand to guarantee a new social order”; nevertheless, “it is extremely probable that *with its help*, once the paths of weary tradition have been abandoned, happier forms than the present ones will be found” (*AF 17* my emphasis).

Science can indeed help us by analyzing which attempts produce the best results, so that we can clarify what has a chance of success and what does not. Therefore, Lange considers statistics – and especially the so-called ‘moral statistics’ popular at the time⁶⁷ – as a fundamental science for the progress of mankind, even calling it “the most revolutionary of all sciences” (*AF 16*).

⁶⁷ Lange lectured about moral statistic both at the beginning (1857) and the end of his career (1870) (Ellissen, *Friedrich Albert Lange*, 99, 196). Significantly, in his early lecture, he defines moral statistic as “the data-driven doctrine of the moral progress of mankind” (Ellissen, 249). On moral statistics see Theodore M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

Statistical analysis is the tool to control the results of our attempts, to check the results of our social experiments⁶⁸. As Lange writes:

When the sure signs of the world's change appear and the old world collapses, one can at least look to the future with increased courage; for *even if one cannot swear by any theory*, even if one must again make the best of the fragments of experience for each new construction, this experience has nevertheless traveled through history, it has been *illuminated by statistics*, and it has been equipped by all the richness of the sciences with an *excellent tool for solving new problems* (AF 17 my emphasis).

Unlike nature, man has the ability to learn from failed attempts, to learn from mistakes and transform them into knowledge that can be put into practice to create new and better attempts. Consequently, "the practical consequences of both utterly failed and successful experiments are at the same time factors in the great change that takes place partly in institutions and circumstances, partly in minds" (AF 350).

Nevertheless, the newborn social sciences are not yet sufficiently developed to guide us with a sure hand along the path of progress. At present, science is not even able to "determine with complete certainty how the most essential *existing* institutions affect the weal and woe of peoples", so "it remains utterly impossible for the present to invent new forms of state and society whose mode of operation could be determined in advance, as one would with a machine designed and calculated on paper" (AF 16 my emphasis). Therefore, Lange also emphasizes that what impedes progress is not always sheer *unwillingness* to make society better, but often a simple lack of *knowledge* about what is better for society and how to make it happen (AF 16).

But how can we improve our knowledge of the social, political, and economic realms? Once again, the answer lies in the experimental method of trial and error, based on the combination of natural teleology and ideal teleology. If

⁶⁸ For example, statistics can analyze what are the odds for individuals born into lower classes to improve their social conditions, thus showing that the hierarchic system is not meritocratic as one might think (as Lange does in the third chapter of *The Worker Question*). Statistics can also investigate the effects of reforms on health, life expectation, literacy, employment, etc.

we develop a wide range of political and economic experiments, we can see which ones lead to results that are close to our goals (ideal teleology) and which ones turn out to be dead ends (natural teleology).

For Lange, our institutions “resemble living beings that must die and from time to time sprout new life from their ruins” (AF 24). In other words, all existing institutions are at least relatively purposeful (in the Darwinian sense) insofar as they have been preserved over time. However, even if they have been preserved so far (because their organization happened to be suitable for the circumstances), it does not follow that they will be suitable for the circumstances in the future. It is more likely that they will eventually disintegrate and make way for new institutions that are better suited to the new circumstances. For Lange, there are examples of this process in the fall of ancient empires, but also in the current crisis of capitalism. As he writes in the *History of Materialism*:

We may show a hundred times that with the success of speculation and great capitalists the position of everybody else, step by step, improves; but so long as it is true that with every step of this improvement the difference in the position of individuals and in the means for further advancement also grows, so long will each step of this movement lead towards a turning-point where the wealth and power of individuals break down all the barriers of law and morals, where the state sinks to a mere unsubstantial form, and a degraded proletariat serves as a football to the passions of the few, until at last everything ends in a social earthquake which swallows up the artificial edifice of one-sided and selfish interests. The times that have preceded this collapse have so often occurred in history, and always with the same character, that we cannot any longer deceive ourselves as to their nature (HM III 256 emphasis in original).

From this perspective, a revolution is just the way natural teleology declares that an institution is no longer fit for purpose. Indeed, the test of time is always the ultimate test of purposiveness (whether we are talking about living beings or social institutions).

So, on the one hand, we want to avoid the suffering and violence of revolutions, that is, the suffering and violence inherent in natural teleology. On the other hand, we want to take advantage of natural teleology by learning which institutions can sustain themselves over time and which institutions are doomed

to decay. The only way to preserve the positive aspects of natural teleology (the test of time), while eliminating the negative aspects (the destruction and suffering) is to develop a wide range of small-scale social experiments. We did not learn how to design airplanes by building a few gigantic aircrafts full of people and letting them crash to the ground. Rather, we conducted countless small-scale experiments that allowed us to slowly develop knowledge of aeronautical engineering. By analogy, we should not allow a few huge political and economic institutions to develop and wait to see if they endure, with all the tragic consequences if they do not. If we create a multitude of controlled small social experiments, many of them will prove to be dead ends and few of them will be purposeful enough to endure; nevertheless, in both cases we will learn and the social sciences will progress. Of course, we can also learn from the falls of empires, but by developing small social experiments we can learn from our mistakes in a less destructive way.

This is another reason in favor of decentralization, which allows precisely the development of a variety of small-scale, controlled social experiments. Maybe the supporters of social Darwinism are correct in their assertion that the course of history has led to the development of large institutions, because the bigger and stronger crush the smaller and weaker in the struggle for existence. Yet the rise of great empires has led to even greater ruins when they fell. But this is what happens in an uncontrolled natural teleology. As people endowed with reason, we can imagine and work towards a different course of history, in which a variety of small-scale social experiments (associations, cooperatives, unions, grassroots initiatives, etc.) make it possible to test different economic and political systems, leading to an increase in knowledge, which is used to develop even more sophisticated social experiments, leading to even more knowledge, and so on and so forth⁶⁹. In this way, this continuous improvement process will lead to real progress for society and humanity.

⁶⁹ This conception is also echoed in Lange's pedagogical ideas, where he argues against state-controlled schools and in favor of freedom of education. The best scenario for Lange is having a plurality of schools organized by different associations (also religious associations), thus having a "pedagogical 'experimental field' [...] to promote the reform capacity of the school system"

To allow the development of these social experiments, nation-states must guarantee freedom of association. Lange therefore calls for “full freedom for actually communist experiments, in so far as they do not violate the rights of uninvolved persons” and for “all social experiments less remote from what actually exists, especially cooperative associations of every kind, whether they contain more or less communist elements in their organization” (AF 296). Moreover, the states must defend these embryonic experiments against the attacks of the representatives of the capitalist and centralized political system, who fight the struggle *for their existence*. Therefore, the bottom-up strategy of self-help cannot do without state-aid. Indeed, for Lange, the true alternative is between centralization and decentralization (MA 139), namely between federalist states that support and defend bottom-up initiatives, and states that seek to suppress them in order to exercise centralized government. Lange hopes that “if our states gave such communist societies a completely free hand – as the principles of justice demand – then it would at least be conceivable that the whole state would gradually dissolve into a multitude of such communities, and that then, eventually, in accordance with the victorious legal consciousness of this new society, the last vestiges of property rights would be abolished (AF 293). In other words, the goal of a communist system would not be achieved by a complete revolutionary upheaval of society, but by a continuous progress based on experimentation with small communist societies.

To sum up, we can say that there are three kinds of teleology in Lange’s thought: 1) a natural teleology, which reaches purposes unintentionally, thanks to the law of large numbers, i.e., through the two principles of overproduction and destruction; 2) an ideal teleology, based on the conscious setting of goals and the conscious choice of the most appropriate means; 3) what I propose to call a reformist teleology, which is the result of the interaction of the first two teleologies. This reformist teleology aims at conscious purposes (like the ideal

(Freimuth, *Friedrich Albert Lange - Denker Der Pluralität*, 78). If Lange is – like Freimuth rightly defines it – a “thinker of plurality” it is precisely because plurality (namely the variety of experiments) is the precondition of reforms and social improvements.

teleology), but achieves them through the experimental method of trial and error (which brings it closer to the natural teleology), resulting in a continuous progress of our knowledge and a constant refinement of our experiments.

Natural teleology is typical of a society based on personal interests and the struggle for existence. Ideal teleology presents the perfect image of an egalitarian society in which all individuals can cultivate their humanity in communion with their fellow human beings. Reformist teleology presents us with the project of a society in which individuals are free to associate in communities to experiment with new forms of economic production and self-government.

4. CONCLUSIONS

I hope to have shown that Lange's political views are linked to his philosophy once the latter is interpreted in light of Schiller's influence. Lange follows Schiller both in maintaining the separation between the ideal and the real world (which Kant traced but also undermined) and in explaining how the two can be reconnected thanks to the concept of esthetic redemption. Thus, it becomes clear why Lange claims that Schiller's concept of "esthetic redemption" is "in all likelihood more closely connected to the solution of the social question [...] than one would like to believe at first glance" (AF 142). The two tasks of ascending into the ideal realm and descending into the life of reality are key to understanding how people can have an impact in the real world and shape it according to their ideals. Consequently, they are also the key to solving the social question.

I hope that my investigation not only solves the puzzle of Lange's social Kantianism, but can also be used as an interpretive aid for reading Lange's works. I believe that three levels are interwoven in Lange's writings, so that one must always distinguish whether he is speaking of 1) the natural world, 2) the ideal realm, or 3) the historical development of humanity, which is the result of the interplay of the two.

Although I did not want to make my essay even longer by interrupting it with constant references to contemporary issues, I hope that my reconstruction of Lange's ideas proves that they are still relevant today.

Lange's writings are imbued with the premonition that a new ideal will soon emerge and call workers to revolt. Therefore, it is ironic that, although he had the opportunity to read Marx, he regarded him as a pure theoretician and did not foresee that Marx's ideas might develop into such an ideal. Nevertheless, the distinction between political ideals and political practices implicit in Lange's reception of Schiller's "two tasks" proved prescient. Indeed, we can consider the suffering caused by the failed communist large-scale experiment as an example of what happens when one tries to impose ideals on reality without sufficient knowledge of the social world.

Unfortunately, Lange's analysis of capitalism's increasingly unbearable social inequalities is still all too valid. However, since he did not claim to have magic recipes to change society, apart for the never-ending, unavoidable historical activity of humanity, I think he would have agreed with Slavoj Žižek's Beckett quote, "Try again, fail again, fail better"⁷⁰.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Joshua Dunigan, Elisabeth Theresia Widmer, and Alexander Sharifi Gesswein, who read this paper at various levels of elaboration and helped me improve it thanks to their comments and corrections.

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[Received: 30th November 2022. Editorial decision: 15th January 2023]