Social economy and the government of poverty

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> Assisting the poor is a means of government, a potent way of containing the most difficult section of the population and improving all other sections.[1]

We are accustomed to think of the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth as the moment of historic emergence of a new discourse, political economy, a discourse destined to teach us much about the nature of our society. One of the singularities of this discourse's fortunes has been the fact that, all through the nineteenth century and even down to the present day, it has remained positioned at the *centre* of our history, the privileged terrain for domination and resistance alike, the arena for all the conflicts of which our societies are bearers.

But what if we were to relinquish for a moment this certainty which has so regularly governed our historical vision of the economy? What if, instead of accepting this postulate of centrality as an incontestable pre-given of all analysis, we were to begin by posing the question of how this centrality is constructed, and what purposes it serves.

This, after all, is the essential contribution genealogical analysis has had to offer: the impulse to see every object represented to us as irreducible, every truth as irrefutable, as the end-product of a series of retraceable operations, and accordingly to search out the dynamics of the process which constituted them. *Power is brought into play as an analytical principle.* Returning to history no longer means retracing the vicissitudes of certain already given objects, but exploring lines of convergence and derivation through which certain specific configurations are shaped, under conditions where alternative historical possibilities confront one another.

A genealogy of political economy undertaken in this spirit must of necessity call into question the centrality attributed to its object, and this questioning leads to a number of important clues. There is, for instance, the obscurantism of the centralist thesis. The official history of economic thought has singled out its classical texts and themes in such a way as to disqualify a whole area of production labelled as 'vulgar economics', relegating it to the margins of that history, as representative of the

inevitably lethargic, tentative, botched qualities of its accompanying intellectual environment. To differentiate between 'noble' material, which matches the profile of *our* truth concerning political economy, and 'vulgar' material, whose divergent by-ways can be legitimately disregarded, was a convenient procedure for a historiography which already has its cast of characters – with the mode of production officiating as the structural element of society, the principal site of conflict and criterion for identifying historical protagonists – and for which nothing more is required than to set them in motion in order duly to arrive at an appropriate moral. But if what is required of history is not to revalidate that which is already known, but to offer us new clues about ourselves, then it no longer makes sense to let ourselves be put off by distaste for the 'vulgar'.

What is proposed here is an attempt to look again at this material which the history of economic thought has relegated to oblivion, and to gather the new clues which such a re-reading can offer us concerning political economy and its relation to the process of formation of modern society. And this attempt arises out of an initial *uncertainty*, an uncertainty which has come to be widely shared and which has forced us to rethink the fabric of our social being. We have rediscovered in turn the insane, the beggars, the paupers, the criminals, the women and children, the heretics, those real micropopulations which the historiography of the working-class movement claims to reduce to sociological categories; and through these rediscoveries new light has been thrown on both them and us. We are the heirs of their vagrancy, their insanitary slums, their illegalities, as of all the sociotechnical inventiveness that has been at once demanded and produced by the need for their socialization; for, as Karl Polanyi writes, 'social and not technological invention was the principal intellectual source of the industrial revolution'.[2] And this social inventiveness was an omnipresent force, applying itself to every hotbed of variant social existence, through the converging action of a zealous multiplicity of novel or renovated techniques.

But this does not mean replacing the cult of a central myth of origin with the new myth of a uniquely creative marginality. That would, in any case, be a misconceived way of posing the problem. Each element in this history can equally well be said to have been central – or marginal. What we are aiming at here is to outflank these massive declamatory categories which can be employed only for the reciting of epics, in order instead to seek to rediscover the materiality of the lines of formation and transformation of the social domain. This is a materiality which is composed not of macroscopic relations of domination and submission, but of a multiplicity of social islands dealt with at a local level, a plurality of diverse modes of behaviour needing to be combated, encouraged or

promoted; in this sense, labour itself figures as a technological apparatus productive of specific patterns of sociality, alongside such techniques as mutual benefit societies, schemes for compensating industrial accidents, hygiene and psychiatry. And, to the extent that political economy forms an integral component of this universe of invention, it requires to be examined in terms not of an opposition between truth and ideological mystification, but of the 'transformation of society' (Polanyi) which it made possible. It needs to be regarded not as an imperious instance which subordinates society to its demands, but as a set of special technologies which opened up new social spaces; and what is needed is to trace the vicissitudes to which these new techniques gave rise, the displacements they effected, the strategies they promoted and those which they made obsolete.

The 'vulgar' material to be re-read here is that which goes under the name of *Sozialpolitik* in Germany and *économie sociale* in France – as also in Italy. In this chapter, only the French aspect will be examined: a discursive field which is heterogeneous in respect of the positions occupied by its authors, the sources of their inspiration and the proposals they put forward; but homogeneous in its strategic location midway between public and private life, and in its preoccupations.

The discursive reference-point for social economy is the critical discourse which appears within classical political economy, with Malthus in Britain and Sismondi in France. We will not enter here into an extensive summary or a detailed analysis of this relationship, but only note the problematic issues which were taken up by social economy for use as instruments to make it autonomous of classical political economy. Social economy was a critical discourse in the sense that it took its start from that same discovery of society as something that exists positively, and not only as a result of laws, something that has its own rules and functioning, that discovery which with the Physiocrats became an essential doctrine of political economy; but here this discovery was turned round and used against political economy itself. This championing of the social against the economic drew its central arguments from the analysis of the question of *pauperism*.

Pauperism in this context denotes at once the critical element of the socioeconomic order which economics takes as its end, society's answering riposte to economics, and the line of economic penetration into the evasive substance of the social. The political significance of discourse on poverty, for Malthus and Sismondi, as for social economy (whose whole theoretical and practical identity it defines) throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, resides in this double meaning of poverty, as both the limit to economic discourse and the key to economic conquest of a

new continent. On the one hand, it allows the refinement of the instruments of political economy through analysis of crises and mechanisms of systemic breakdown and dysfunction (this analysis, however, makes little significant progress within economics before the end of the nineteenth century, nor indeed any decisive advance prior to Keynes' revival of social economy); on the other hand, it permits the instruments of 'economic' government to be mediated by a more varied and flexible set of tools, which provide access to a whole series of social situations which political economy alone was incapable of handling. Though it undoubtedly derives from the philanthropic spirit of the eighteenth century, social economy elaborates its problematic of poverty around some themes which connect in an extraordinarily modern way the techniques of a philanthropy which gradually breaks away from older charitable perspectives, with the problems of the new social order implanted by industrialism. The new philanthropy associated with social economy works through specific methods which effect a linkage between political economy and population otherwise than through the medium of labour.

This is not to say that the problem of poverty had been absent from the conceptual horizons of the first classical economists. Political economy, which was constructed as a discourse on the increase of wealth, never evaded the problem of poverty: 'In the highest stage of social prosperity, the great mass of the citizens will most probably possess few other resources than their daily labour, and consequently will always be near to indigence.' [3] One thinks of the considerations on poverty in Adam Smith's *Draft of the Wealth of Nations*, and on the 'subsistence wage' in Ricardo. But poverty here appears as the counterpart to abundance, in the sense that it serves as the backcloth against which the discourse on wealth is developed, and also as a reservoir continually tapped for its energies, motives and propulsive forces. Poverty is the counterpart to wealth in as much as it is the territory of unfulfilled needs, or of needs not yet invented; a territory that extends indefinitely, the symbol of a market without limits:

> The desire of food is limited in every man by the narrow capacity of the human stomach; but . . . what is over and above satisfying the limited desire is given for the amusement of those desires which cannot be satisfied, but seem to be altogether endless.[4]

As an element set in counterpoint with wealth, poverty in itself has no independent meaning: as theoretico-practical support for the prospect of increasing abundance, poverty's vocation is to make possible its realization. No wonder then that, caught between this 'economic' reading which treats it as a fact of nature impossible to control by direct

intervention ('What can the law do relative to subsistence? Nothing directly . . . The force of physical sanction being sufficient, the employment of the political sanction would be superfluous')[5] and a regime of administration which amounted to simple policing, the theme of poverty found no other utilization: classical political economy did not discover the utility of a *politics of poverty*. And its interventions in the legislation governing the poor in Britain (Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834) never looked beyond the aims of protecting the labour market, unburdening the taxpayer and generalizing wage labour as a means of subsistence. Poverty, for this discourse, is not an administrable datum. And when Ricardo pronounces against all poor laws,[6] he does not do so in order to replace them with a different perspective of management. Poverty must simply be eliminated; even if in reality, as we have seen, it is an integral part of the discourse on wealth.

This contradiction is made explicit by Malthus. His famous example of the Irish[7] serves to show how poverty is not the external limit of the economy, but rather its internal limit: contrary to the 'law of trade outlets' (*loi des débouchés*) which was being elaborated by Say, James Mill and Ricardo. Malthus's Irish peasant stands witness to the futility of producing goods with which to invade a new market if there has been no previous concern there to 'create the consumer', that other product which is of such particular and primary importance. The poor Irishman who lives on potatoes and dresses in rags appears as the extreme version of the consumer in need of management; stubbornly indifferent to the lures of well-being, indolent in regard to that fundamental activity for the economic system, the perpetual expansion of 'needs', he represents in caricature the threat lurking on the rosy horizons of production, personifying the mechanism of crises of underconsumption. If it is true that penury is the critical social point of anchorage for the economic system founded on wealth, not its ideological justification but the technical condition of possibility of its intervention, then the Irish peasant embodies at once the danger of 'subversion' (the refusal to make the passage from penury to comfort, which is not a moral but a technico-social transition) and the privileged subject of political economy in so far as he is the ideal model for the expansion of needs.

Having made his entrance as a fully fledged participant on the stage of the economy, the 'pauper' is destined also to become a new scientific object. But for this to be possible, economic science will have to be redefined, and this will be the constant preoccupation of Sismondi. In his polemic against Ricardian political economy, Sismondi's tones revert almost to those of the eighteenth century: political economy as the 'science of government', inasmuch as it assumes 'happiness' as its end. But

this revival of the late-eighteenth-century theme of the state of prosperity – which had, for example, been a key theme of the German Cameralistic 'science of police' – now happens in a changed context, that defined by political economy; within it, happiness becomes the technical means for resolving a new problem, that of reconciling the social groups which the economic project brings together in the growth of wealth, but which are incapable by themselves of giving up their antagonisms. Given this new way of construing the social problem in terms of technical innovations of political economy, such as the productive role of property, the contract-form as an extension of market mechanisms for labour relations, the division of labour, etc., Sismondi's purpose is to make clear the problem's economic significance: it is the system of wealth itself which is endangered. He addresses himself to the economists, to make them appreciate how important the management of the social problem is for the future of their own project; he does not yet imagine that this problem could form the origin of another science, and in this sense his conception of political economy remains akin to Adam Smith's. But the problem he identifies is a new one: the eighteenth century had thought of 'happiness' as a global project, the end of society which political power had the task of realizing for it; whereas 'happiness' now appears as part of an articulated project which brings into relation distinct sectors of the population and takes control of their reciprocal connections. The problem of equilibrium, which remains central to Sismondi's strictly economic preoccupation[8] and leads to his development of a theory of the crisis of general overproduction that challenges the hypothesis of an automatic adjustment achieved through the workings of the market, is in its most general sense rooted in the problem of *social* equilibrium.

The new problem which surfaces with Malthus and Sismondi is that of the management of population; and though they see the problem as one for political economy, the response in fact comes from elsewhere: the problem will be taken up by a disparate band of administrators, economists, philanthropists, doctors and others, giving rise to a discourse which, compared with classical political economy and its successors, functions on a different and intermediate level, that of *savoir*.

The term *savoir* is used here to designate a type of discourse which has a crucial position in the discursive universe: a *savoir* acts as an 'exchanger' (*échangeur*) mediating between the analytico-programmatic levels of the 'sciences' and the exigencies of direct social intervention – whether this intervention is imaginary or real matters little in this context. Whereas a 'science' begins with the invention of an object of analysis, an epistemological operation based on abstraction from the real, as the starting point from which it develops its own 'project of reality', a *savoir*

relocates the object thus scientifically delineated within a field of relationships in which the instruments of the scientific project are forced into contact with all the rigidity, inertia and opacity which the real displays in its concrete functioning. And it is precisely in this sense that a *savoir* can more explicitly assume the viewpoint of power, if we interpret this last as an exercise in relating elements external to one another and a principle for deciphering such a network of connections. Reinserted within this 'field', the object of *savoir* is no longer pre-eminently a scientific object, but instead first and foremost an object upon which intervention is possible. It is in this play of reshaping and recomposing that science and *savoir* – not one against the other, but in mutual support – render discourse into at once an instrument capable of creating new objects and a source of new and complex configurations.

Such a *savoir* is what goes under the name of *social economy*. It was to make its own, and henceforth take for granted, the distinctive position relative to political economy which had been adopted by Malthus and Sismondi. As Buret put it, economy had been political because, for the Physiocrats and Smith, what was required was a science of administration; subsequently it had come to limit its object of analysis ever more narrowly, to the point of reducing it to production in the strictest sense and defining itself as the science of wealth: 'The theory of wealth neither can nor should constitute an independent science because the facts on which it rests are connected indissolubly to facts of a moral and political order, which determine its meaning and its value.'[9] Along with the Physiocratic 'table of wealth', wrote Buret, the '*tableau* of poverty' must become an object for economic analysis.

Political economy and social economy, however constantly articulated one on another, from now on have distinct existences. This distinctness arises from the recognition of a specific object of analysis of social economy: 'These relations between moral facts, or institutions, and industrial facts or the growth of labour, are what is most important in the study of social economy.' Its true object will thus be 'knowledge of all the means of order and harmony which found and maintain this public prosperity, for which wealth is one of the resources, but is ultimately only one of the elements'; the problem is then that of treating 'moral well-being, or order, and material well-being, or comfort, as inseparable'.[10]

What is involved here is, in Jacques Donzelot's phrase,[11] a 'systematic grafting of morality on to economics', the technico-discursive instrument that makes possible the conquest of pauperism and the invention of a *politics of poverty*. 'Morality' does not stand here for ideology, or for strategy; one should not be misled into thinking that the social economists are pedantic moralists, gripped by nostalgia for the past. 'Morality'

signifies a discursive mediation which allows a whole range of technologies to be brought to bear on the social as *behaviour*: 'The behaviours of a people are its morality; the task therefore is to give them nothing but good ones.' [12] The moral element is *order*, that order which liberal society discovers as a vital need: 'Between freedom and order, there is no opposition, the second is in fact a condition of the first.' [13] And order faces a series of adversities/adversaries, which the first half of the nineteenth century terms 'the poor'. Morality is the discourse which describes them, one which is still remote from the statistical–mathematical discourses which at the end of the nineteenth century make possible the disaggregation of the notion of 'the poor' and the creation of new agglomerations, in accordance with new criteria; morality is also the discourse which unites them, inserting itself in continuity with the older discourse of charitable assistance. But in the space opened up between these two moments, this grafting of morality on to economics will make possible the elaboration of a whole set of technical instruments of intervention.

'We must find a remedy for the scourge of pauperism, or else prepare for the convulsion of the world.' [14] If the '*tableau* of poverty' is recognized as defining an urgent political problem, what does 'pauperism' signify in this discourse? What does this category designate, and what are its purposes?

> This floating population of the great cities . . . which industry attracts and is unable to regularly employ . . . is an object of serious attention and disquiet for both thinkers and governments. And it is among its ranks that pauperism is recruited, that dangerous enemy of our civilisation.[15]

> Pauperism is the class of men injured by society who consequently rebel against it.[16]

> Pauperism is that kind of indigence which becomes by its extension and intensity a sort of scourge, a permanent nuisance to society.[17]

Pauperism is thus poverty intensified to the level of *social danger:* the spectre of the mob; a collective, essentially urban phenomenon. It is a composite (and thereby all the more dangerous) population which 'encircles' the social order from within, from its tenements, its industrial agglomerations. It is a magma in which are fused all the dangers which beset the social order, shifting along unpredictable, untraceable channels of transmission and aggregation. It is insubordinate, hidden from the scrutinizing gaze of any governing instance. The definition of pauperism, as we have seen, does not work essentially through economic categories; rather than a certain level of poverty, images of pauperism put the stress principally on feelings of fluidity and indefiniteness, on the impression, at

once massive and vague, conveyed by the city crowd, accounting for all its menacing character.

This enables us to understand the distinction which social economy draws between pauperism and poverty, and how discourse on the elimination of the former can go hand in hand with discourse on the conservation of the latter: 'When pauperism has been conquered, only the poor will remain, that is a certain sum of accidental poverty.'[18] Why does poverty itself, as the effect of social inequality, the existence in society of rich and poor, not become the object of attack for this discourse? Why is it not assumed under the same category as pauperism? Because the elimination of social inequality is not the purpose of discourse on pauperism. On this, all the social economists concur with the position of Sismondi: 'It is not in fact equality of conditions but happiness in all conditions which should be the legislator's aim.'[19] Inequality is never taken as being a target for attack, but as a 'natural', irrefutably given fact of industrial society:

> Poverty . . . derives from inequality of conditions . . . It is humanly impossible to destroy inequality. There will always therefore be rich and poor. But in a well-governed state, poverty must not degenerate into indigence . . . It is in the interests of the rich as much as of the poor that this should be so.[20]

Compared with poverty, then, pauperism appears immediately as 'unnatural' as well as antisocial, a deformity which insinuates itself into that natural order which the discourse of political economy, the discourse on wealth, purported to establish. As the natural ground for the development of wealth, the inexhaustible source of the extension of needs, the technical working principle of political economy's social project, poverty was nevertheless marginalized by it as a topic, being considered a fundamental yet un-analyzable, unadministrable given. Alien in the concreteness of its existence to the planned order of social nature, poverty only figured as a counterpoint, a candidate for negation. In these terms, the 'poor' could figure in the scenario only as virtuous exemplars of renunciation of pauperism and adhesion to the values of well-being. These model personages were evoked from time to time in the literature as the 'respectable' or 'independent' poor; the same thinking accompanied the British economists' objections to the Poor Laws as giving legal status to poverty, and their criticism of public assistance which recognizes rights to poverty or rights of poverty.

But alongside this discourse which ratifies the wealth–poverty relationship and excludes pauperism from the picture, social economy is involved in formulating a different scenario, where pauperism is perceived as anti-social in the sense of being a 'hyper-natural', rudely primitive mode of life. On the basis of an analysis of the instinctive

antisocial tendencies of the individual, society comes to be presented as inevitable restraint: freedom and equality, innate tendencies which can find expression in their pure state only in 'savage' society, and there encounter only natural limits and obstacles, are unavoidably frustrated and repressed in civilized society: 'Civilized man constantly restrains himself, every day and every hour, because he *may not*.' Furthermore, 'In civilized society, faculties unequal at the moment of birth tend to become constantly more so.' [21] Thus, if it is true that humanity is spontaneously social, this means that it tends instinctively towards an uncivilized society based on natural appetites; but instinct does not impel humanity towards civil society: not only does it fail to provide a natural basis for cohesion, but humanity is set against itself, and revealed as its own enemy 'in those social classes where poverty, ignorance and isolation have diminished the influence of associative ideas'.[22] The task of governing poverty will be not to suppress these innate tendencies, in so far as they provide the favourable terrain for social development – so far, that is, as they are useful and necessary to the project of wealth – but to channel them so that they 'aspire to find their satisfaction through the means permitted them by the social regime'.[23] Restraint and guidance, in apposite proportions, thus become the basis of administrative action to harness the alien force of pauperism, which political economy – and its discourse of natural order – could only exclude as extraneous. It is a discourse in two registers, each one reinforcing the other; and if it is the 'unnaturalness' of society, which is used to found the possibility of a government of pauperism, the innovative significance of this discourse cannot be missed, despite the old-fashioned language in which part of it is formulated. Moreover, if it is true that, when Cherbuliez analyzes what could enable people to be persuaded to accept a reduction of their freedom for the sake of civilization, his answer is 'the influence of religious ideas', it is also true that, in order to illustrate what he means by this influence, he cites the entry in Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique* on Brazil: 'Even if we were also to instil in them only enough Christianity so that they feel the need to go around dressed, this would be of great benefit to English manufacture.' [24]

But then, if it is not poverty which discourse on pauperism takes as its object of attack, if it is not towards the disappearance of the poor – the indispensable support of the existence of the rich – that this discourse is directed, what is its purpose? Its objective is the elimination not of inequality, but of *difference*. And here 'moral' language finds its exact meaning. By the term 'difference' I want to underline that the essential significance of the term 'pauperism' consists in indicating a series of *different forms of conduct*, namely those which are not amenable to the project of socialization which is being elaborated: 'Indigence is a set of physical and moral habits.' [25]

Pauperism is mobility: against the need for territorial sedentarization, for fixed concentrations of population, it personifies the residue of a more fluid, elusive sociality, impossible either to control or to utilize: vagabondage, order's itinerant nightmare, becomes the archetype of disorder and the antisocial: 'The vagabond, the original type of all the forces of evil, is found wherever illegal or criminal activities go on: he is their born artisan.' [26] Mobility also means *promiscuity*: indecipherable couplings, difficult to use as cohesive supports for the social fabric; spontaneous solidarities which elude 'legal' or 'contractual' definition, evading any attempt to orient them towards the goals of the social project. Concubinage, connivance, neighbourhood or trade solidarities: our authors seem unable to find sufficiently powerful images for the mass of threats and dangers constituted by the poor quarters, constantly liable to pour out and invade the entire city with their pollutions.

Pauperism is independence: the refusal of organic ties of subordination, as of all other restraints implemented through contractual exchange, illustrates the difficulty of using need as the structuring element of a new social cohesion, spanning and uniting all ranks of the population in a hierarchically constituted chain. The 'shameless' poor, who keep alive traditional types of alliance system and refuse to relinquish control of the organization of their survival, remain an impenetrable zone of the social fabric. The economic critique which reproaches public assistance for maintaining islands of dependence in a society organized around the 'free' disposal of one's self, is actually an attack on those existing social ties that are seen as obsolete, and obsolete precisely because of the specific way in which they mediate dependence: forming people into a bloc, resisting the 'free' circulation of individuals in the network of the labour market, neglecting the consideration which the satisfaction of needs is entitled to claim. Moreover, the fact that the poor on relief do as they wish with the money allowed them, and liberally dispose of what is theirs, is also only too well illustrated by the ample descriptions of licentiousness, drunkenness and improvidence which characterize this section of the population. Another characteristic feature is the play on the opposition between manufacture and piecework: the disregard for the criterion of earnings levels, the tenacity with which the poor defend their independence, is what marks them as falling under the category of pauperism; the discontinuity of their conduct leads the authors of investigations into the conditions of the working class in the first half of the nineteenth century to assert that, when they have free disposal of their own time, they devote only half of it to productive activity, while in general spending the other half in 'disgusting orgies'.[27]

Independent, masters of their own time, the poor are also the masters of their future: *pauperism is improvidence and frugality*:

> We can affirm, as a general proposition, that workers think little of tomorrow, especially in the cities; the more they earn, the more they spend . . . work, but enjoy: this seems to be the motto of most of them, with the exception of those in the country.[28]

The habit of living with the present as the only certainty and the refusal to be blackmailed by the future ill accords with the 'abstinence' which Cherbuliez characterized as the peculiar trait of civilized man. The whole discourse on savings – which during the same period political economy is identifying as the principle device of capital accumulation – with its promised mirage of economic independence attainable through accession to small property, encounters a technical obstacle here; and thus the introduction of the savings bank, beside creating easily disposable capital, will have the function of a technology of abstinence, diffusing among the popular masses that 'spirit of economy which is highly unfavourable to everyday disorder'.[29] It is also the frugality of the poor which poses a problem: the poor represent a refusal of the expansion of 'needs', an insensibility to their inexhaustible solicitations, to the never fully slackened mainspring of well-being. Malthus's celebrated Irish peasant, faced with the marvels of English manufacture, remained indifferent, incapable of 'recognizing' his need and hence of accepting a further reduction of his freedom in order to procure the wherewithal for something more than his potatoes and his rags.

Pauperism is ignorance and insubordination, and the fact that the two qualities are connected is beyond doubt for the social economists: 'Nature has made man, education makes the citizen; pay more teachers and there will be less need for policemen, and if there were more colleges there would be fewer prisons.'[30] The ignorance spoken of here certainly includes that technical backwardness which hinders the organization of labour (cf. the projects for schools of arts and crafts); but much more disturbing on the whole is that kind of ignorance which 'deserves to occupy the foremost place among the causes of indigence, since it leads to idleness, immorality, uncleanliness, improvidence, as well as to many diseases and infirmities', namely 'ignorance of duty and its usefulness'.[31] And it is exactly this ignorance of their duties, of the necessity of these duties, which makes for the insubordination of the impoverished masses, which thrusts them on to the streets, which inspires the arrogance of their demands: it is this ignorance which lies at the origin of their challenge to political power, which they consider responsible for their fate, and of their belief in political struggle as a possible instrument for transforming their situation.[32]

To say that pauperism *is* these modes of conduct may lead to a misunderstanding: it is not a question here of determining the concrete

'reality' of the existence of the poor, and still less of eulogizing the mode of social being they express. It is not their 'real' existence which is being analyzed here, because in this discursive context pauperism is a *pretext:* a political laboratory for an intellectual experiment designed to isolate certain social bacteria (themselves not necessarily unique to pauperism) and to make possible the invention of techniques adequate to deal with such bacterial action (although the techniques in question are not designed for this purpose alone). The homogeneous consistency of the category of pauperism, used without any concern to break it down into a distinct conception of the various micropopulations it brackets together, indicates its fictitious character: what is really designated by the term is, as we noted earlier, the ensemble of adversities/adversaries which confront the project of social order.

Neither is it intended here to counterpose the social world of 'the poor' to the social world of the industrial order, to oppose the positivity of the first to the negativity of the second, as if the poor constituted a political riposte to that order. Every social transformation is accompanied by inevitable frictions at a localized, capillary level: what I am interested in analyzing here is the precise site where these frictions occur, and what this site tells us about the transformation which is taking place. Not for the sake of nostalgia for what we have lost by the invention of government of the poor; rather out of curiosity about the effects that this 'historic' con rontation induced, the special inflections it gave to the social fabric. Not to regret the insanitary quarters in which the poor were housed, or the forms of alliance which were preserved in them, not to vindicate poverty against wealth; but to reach down to the underside of our own present, in whose origins discourse on poverty proves to have had at least as much importance as discourse on wealth, and to assemble as many clues as possible to the nature of the social order which the conjunction of these two discourses inspired.

The problem of indigence and assistance was perceived from the end of the *ancien régime* and throughout the Revolutionary period in the context of the economists' discovery of the intrinsic bond between labour and wealth.[33] In the light of this discovery, it seemed that the problem could be resolved at a stroke by removing all obstacles to the free access of labour to the market, thereby integrating the population of the indigent into the productive cycle: labour, the inexhaustible source of wealth, which in turn is the inexhaustible source of labour, represents the magic key to social organization. For the nineteenth century, such faith in the miracles of labour was no longer possible. Far from succeeding in absorbing all orms of poverty to the point of eliminating them, labour itself created new ones; and, as if this were not enough, it posed on another level a whole new order of problems: 'Labour is an element of

moralization; but it is also, or at least is liable to become, through abuse of the resources it procures, an element of disorder.'[34] Labour is inadequate as a general principle of order and incapable even of solving all those problems which its own order creates: the zones of unemployment, heavy concentrations of people and capital with the promiscuities they foster, the inequalities aggravated by its hierarchical organization, the intimate contacts it sets up between wealth and poverty, the irreducible role it assigns to the latter in the development of the former. What the invention of a politics of poverty signifies here is not the generalization of the order of labour, the recuperation of unproductive zones by the production cycle, but, on the contrary, the valorization of those zones as supports for a different mode of administering the social from the one that techniques linked to the category of 'labour' make possible. Thus one finds that the discourse on pauperism covers a diversity of social populations, those which work and those which remain outside the organization of production, the rebellious and the contented, those who apply for relief and those who maintain themselves through a traditional alliance system, and so on. The poor are the site where the problems we have noted can be clarified, their symptoms grouped together. As a field of analysis, it is basically extraneous to the world of the factory; the factory is not its destined goal or terminus. Poverty constitutes a development area for techniques designed to structure an organic social order which, whatever the concrete localization of the human subjects it deals with, is able to bring under its management those zones of social life which have hitherto remained formless. What is involved is the constituting of a different subject from the productive subject: a subject 'aware of its duties', a civil and political subject, one might say; it is not poverty as the stigma of *inequality* that is combated, but pauperism understood as a cluster of behaviours, a carrier of *difference*.

What are the weapons of this combat? There is a whole rich and coordinated arsenal, which we can only briefly survey here.

Statistics, first of all, serves as the technique of decipherment enabling the chaos of pauperism to be disentangled. The savings bank and the providential society, instruments of that education in abstinence and exploitation of the future to blackmail the present which we have already mentioned. The insurance system. The mutual aid societies, the worker's *livret* (pass-book), workshop regulations, the organization of bonuses, and particularly the construction of a 'labour aristocracy' as a means of mediation and persuasion enabling hierarchy to extend down to the lowest and most turbulent levels: the use of overseers, the inclusion of workers in the *Conseils des Prud' hommes* (arbitration councils), foremen. The paternalistic regime of quasi-familial relations between boss and

workers, extended to take a hand in the moral education of the worker and his family and the organization of free time on Sundays. An organization of social assistance, articulating public and private spheres, which made possible the rationalization of the range of existing benevolent activities and (most importantly) of their strategic advantages: assistance becomes in this context a sacrament of moralization, control and dissuasion, far exceeding the capabilities of the old logic of alms. The pivot of this new guise of benevolent activity is the 'visitor of the poor',[35] the true forerunner of social work, the instrument at once of the capillary distribution of 'household relief' and of that 'study of character' which was beginning to be considered indispensable for good social administration. A figure with a great future.

Another group of techniques place their emphasis on hygiene: rules for public hygiene in cities, 'police of dwellings', rules of hygiene in the workplace, hygiene in marriage and procreation (of Malthusian fame): hygiene for these authors is a grid for reading social relations, a system which serves at once to canalize them and to invent new paths of circulation that are more 'orderly' and more decipherable. There are, in addition, innovations of hygienist provenance such as workers' housing schemes (mining towns, for example) and agricultural colonies, which directly involve the displacement and reconstitution of groups, and therefore a whole system of social relations invented *ex novo*.

Yet another essential element is the reinforcement of the family, utilized simultaneously as a means of stabilizing individuals and breaking down the old systems of kinship, but also as a polymorphous social instrument whose different members can be played off in turn against each other.[36]

Education, through a whole constellation of specific functions, constitutes another important technological nexus: the need for free elementary schools and kindergartens, for internal discipline and for a staff trained in surveillance (and hence for training schools, like the Écoles Normales), the role of gymnastics and recreation, the shortening of holidays, etc. Also illuminating, in certain respects, is the discussion of the syllabus, in particular regarding the necessity of introducing elementary notions of political economy from the primary classes on: 'this would be the best possible corrective for the flights of imagination set off by the study of letters',[37] and, above all, 'the inestimable value of time, the miraculous scope of progressive saving, the absolute necessity for prudence in conjugal unions, are rudimentary truths of which the populace are profoundly ignorant'.[38] The teaching of political economy allows popular insubordination to be combated in a more effective way than with the instruments hitherto adopted, 'the penal code and the bayonet',[39] since its effect is to spread the fundamental notions of

participation in the social order and to develop the spirit of association as a vehicle of disciplinary and disciplined organization of the masses.

We see political economy reappearing here, this time as a technical instrument adopted by social economy in response to a precise problem: the ignorance of duties which was one, and not the least serious, of the dangers discerned in pauperism. This is an interesting convergence, one which enables us in the first place to recognize how the destined object of these educative techniques is not the child alone: if it is true that school is conceived as a counter to the street with its pleasures, its mobility, its promiscuity, it is also true that this discourse aims at reaching other sectors of the population, whose mode of conduct is assimilated to that of childhood:

> Institutions are impotent against poverty, but they can attenuate it; the means is not alms, humiliating for the recipient and repugnant to the man of feeling, but to prepare the populace from infancy to have good habits and to practise them in later life.[40]

Infantilization of the poor and valorization of childhood as a vehicle for socialization: the two operations go together as technical supports for an immense enterprise of permanent educability.

Political economy also permits a connection to be made with another discourse. Ignorant of their duties, the poor must certainly be educated, but they must also, above all, be implicated in the order into which they are to be integrated: 'Men in general respect most the institutions in which they participate';[41] 'An institution is not stable unless sanctioned by public opinion.'[42] Therefore, alongside the perspective of tutelage provided by infantilization, another is opened up here, that of the constitution of the politically responsible subject, capable of entry into the machinery of political representation. This indicates a completely different aspect of technical intervention, centred on the two key notions of *participation* and *association*. Participation in property (a technique for the enlargement of the middle classes) as an instrument for implication in the defence of order; participation at the intermediate levels of hierarchical power as an instrument for co-option in decisions; participation in political activity through associative forms as an instrument to defuse conflict in the political field; and in a more general sense, association as a vehicle for structured and structuring ties which allow the progress of subjects from a merely individual level to that of joint interests which reproduce on a reduced scale the relations of discipline and authority.

Poverty, politically defined, constitutes for the first half of the nineteenth century the surface of emergence of the social problem; but between this first appearance and the moment when it becomes a field of real and

systematic intervention (the 'social laws' at the end of the century) and when political economy is redefined in terms of the conjunction with the social question which Malthus and Sismondi had proposed, a whole series of transformations are operated. Pauperism is decomposed into new constellations, and it will no longer be around the wealth–poverty opposition that the conceptual instruments of social economy will assume concrete shape: employment and unemployment will become the new analytic couplet. To understand how this passage is effected and what gradually makes the earlier opposition inadequate remains a central problem in reconstructing the lines of transformation and constitution of the social, that special object of *savoir* and government. In the meantime, what interested me here was to try to see how the discourse of political economy was unable to function outside of the wealth–poverty coupling, and how social economy's conquest of political economy's foil, of the open terrain of poverty, became the productive conquest of a new object and of a whole technology destined to outlast the discourse which initiated it. If the theme of poverty accompanied, in antiphon, the celebration of the miracles of industrialism, then the governing of poverty permitted the realization of a new and different strategy: parallel with the utilization of need as support for a social project for the indefinite expansion of wealth, there is a strategy to disconnect need from this programme, in which it was liable to act as a principle of subversion, in order to utilize it instead as an instrument of social integration.

NOTES

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3. Jeremy Bentham, 'Principles of the Civil Code', in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. J. Bowring, Edinburgh, 1843, vol. 1, p. 314. Cf. also the considerations on poverty in the Draft of Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, and on 'subsistence wages' in Ricardo.
4. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, 2 vols, London, 1976, vol. 1, p. 181.
5. Bentham, 'Principles of the Civil Code', p. 303.
6. David Ricardo, 'The principles of political economy and taxation', in *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo*, ed. P. Sraffa, Cambridge, 1951–73, vol. 1, p. 108.
7. *Principle of Political Economy*, Book 1, chapter 1, section IV.
8. Cf. Henryk Grossman, *Simonde de Sismondi et ses théories économiques*, Varjaviae, 1924.

9. Antoine Buret, *De la misère des classes laborieuses en Angleterre et en France*, Paris, 1840, Introduction.
10. 'De l'enseignement de l'économie politique', *Revue mensuelle d'économie politique*, vol. 2, 1833.
11. Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, London, 1979.
12. Louis Villermé, *Tableau de l'état physique et moral des ouvriers*, Paris, 1840, vol. 2, p. 48.
13. Charles Dunoyer, *De l'industrie et de la morale dans leur rapports avec la liberté*, 1825, p. 47.
14. Buret, *De la misère des classes laborieuses*, p. 74.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
16. De La Farelle, *Du progrès social au profit des classes populaires non indigentes*, 1847, p. 7.
17. Antoine Cherbuliez, *Précis de la science économique et de ses principales applications*, Paris, 1826, vol. 2, p. 305.
18. Cherbuliez; *Étude sur les causes de la misère*, Paris, 1853, p. 121.
19. Jean Simonde de Sismondi, *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique*, Paris, 1819, vol. 1, p. 11.
20. Firmin Marbeau, *Du paupérisme*, p. 20
21. Cherbuliez, *Étude sur les causes de la misère*, pp. 13–14.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
25. Cherbuliez, *Précis de la science économique*, vol. 2, p. 305.
26. Honore Frégier, *Des classes dangéreuses de la population dans les grandes villes*, Paris, 1840, vol. 1, p. 50.
27. Villermé, *Tableau*, vol. 2, p. 66.
28. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 34.
29. François Dupin, *Progrès moreaux de la population parisienne depuis établissement de la Caisse d'Épargne*, Paris, 1842, p. 8.
30. Marbeau, *Politique des intérêts*, Paris, 1834, p. 136.
31. Marbeau, *Du paupérisme*, pp. 33–4.
32. Cf. Jérome Blanqui, *Des classes ouvrières en France pendant l'année 1848*, Paris, 1849.
33. Cf. Robert Castel, *L'ordre psychiatrique*, Paris, 1977, chapter 3.
34. Frégier, *Des classes dangéreuses*, p. 276.
35. Joseph de Gérando, *Le Visiteur du pauvre*, Paris, 1820. Translated into English as *The Visitor of the Poor; designed to aid in the formation of Provident Societies*, London, 1833.
36. Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, chapter 3.
37. Michel Chevalier, *De l'instruction secondaire*, Paris, 1843.
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39. *Ibid.*
40. Villermé, *Tableau*, vol. 2, p. 147.
41. Alexandre de Laborde, *De l'esprit d'association dans tout les intérêts de la communauté*, Paris, 1821, vol. 1, p. 16.
42. *Le Censeur européen*, vol. VII, p. 296.