The Politics of Historical Economics:

Wilhelm Roscher on Democracy, Socialism and Caesarism

Wilhelm Friedrich Georg Roscher (1817-94) has not been treated particularly kindly by posterity. He is perhaps best remembered as one of the many targets of Karl Marx’s unsparing sarcasm in *Capital*, a work in which Marx condemned “Herr Thucydides Roscher” as a leading exemplar of the uncritical, bourgeois political economy of the German professorial establishment.1 Roscher’s other claim to fame is that he invented, or at least popularised, the term “Enlightened absolutism.” Yet although this label once occupied a prominent place in scholarly accounts of eighteenth-century monarchical culture, recent work has dismissed its usefulness as a historical category.2 Roscher’s larger significance is usually held to lie in his call for the application of the “historical method” to political economy, as set out in the famous Preface to his 1843 *Grundriss zu Vorlesungen über die Staatswirthschaft*. On that view, his work marks an important methodological turning-point in the history of economic thought, signalling a break with the supposedly abstract, unhistorical and cosmopolitan perspectives of Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* and inaugurating the historicist outlook of the “German Historical School of Economics.”3 Nevertheless, even this

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3 Bruno Hildebrand drew an influential contrast between Smith’s “abstract” rationalism (which Hildebrand associated with the Enlightenment, and with Rousseau and Kant), and his own conception of a historically-grounded economics that would be sensitive to cultural and national contexts; see Bruno Hildebrand, *Die Nationalökonomie der Gegenwart und der Zukunft* (Franfurt am Main, 1848), 27-29. For a modern variant of the argument, see Walter J. Fischel, “Der Historismus in der Wirtschaftswissenschaft. Dargestellt an der Entwicklung von Adam Müller bis Bruno Hildebrand,” *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und*
way of construing Roscher’s intellectual significance has come to seem unpersuasive. Recent commentators have questioned the innovativeness of the much-vaunted “historical method,” while some have even been inclined to abandon the label of the “Historical School of Economics” altogether, noting that Roscher’s ideas were continuous with the main thrust of German economics since the 1790s.4

Why, then, should intellectual historians be interested in Roscher’s work today? This article attempts to answer this question by reconstructing his evolving perspective on the rise of democracy in nineteenth-century Europe. In particular, the article explores Roscher’s concern that Europe’s economically-advanced societies, characterised by an unstable combination of democratic sovereignty, deep socio-economic inequality, and a centralised state apparatus, would soon find themselves at the mercy of what he originally called “military tyranny” and later redescribed as “Caesarism.” The latter term became central to political thought after 1848 as theorists grappled with the possibility that Europe’s large military states, combining pseudo-democratic politics with centralised authoritarian


leadership, might default into imperial regimes analogous to those of ancient Rome or, more recently, the first Napoleonic Empire. Caesarism loomed especially large in Germany throughout the period of the Kaiserreich, where the subject intersected with questions about democratic representation, imperialism and Weltpolitik, and the possibility of forging a stable constitutionalist alternative to British parliamentarism and French republicanism. This article shows that Roscher’s own contributions to the debates of the 1880s and 1890s formed parts of a sustained, comparative and historical investigation into the future of democracy that stretched back to the 1840s. It underlines the ways in which he brought the resources of classical Greek and Roman thought to bear on his analysis of modern politics, and sketches his comparative assessment of democracy’s prospects in Britain, France and the United States. At the same time, my argument has a number of wider implications for understanding how German liberals confronted popular sovereignty, burgeoning social inequality and modern state power throughout the entire period between Vormärz and the Kaiserreich. Most importantly, Roscher’s example helps to deepen our understanding of the extent to which German perceptions of the “social question,” and connected debates about liberal imperialism, related to wider European anxieties about mass politics and the threat of

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Caesarist rule. The article thus sets Roscher’s thought outside the relatively narrow parameters adopted in specialist histories of economic thought, and argues that his methodological pronouncements about political economy were subordinate to a more ambitious effort to forge a science of politics capable of meeting the distinctive challenges posed by democracy. This points the way towards my central conclusion, which is that conventional depictions of Roscher as a German “historical economist” ultimately fail to capture his significance as a political thinker.

I

In order to see the centrality of politics to Roscher’s intellectual enterprise, it is necessary to begin by considering the famous passages in which he formulated his approach to Staatswirthschaft. The standard reference-points in the scholarship are the Foreword and Introduction to his 1843 Grundriß zu Vorlesungen über die Staatswirthschaft, the text-book accompanying his lectures at the University of Göttingen, where he had been trained and took up his first academic appointment. It was in these sections of the Grundriß that Roscher made his famous call for a reorientation of Staatswirthschaft on the basis of the “historical method,” citing the earlier innovations in the historical study of jurisprudence made by

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9 The term Staatswirthschaft was not a precise equivalent to Nationalökonomie, and cannot be directly equated with the English term “political economy.” Roscher’s usage of Staatswirthschaft corresponded with that of his Göttingen predecessor, Georg Sartorius. Nevertheless, I will occasionally translate Staatswirthschaft as political economy in preference to “state economy.” On these terminological distinctions, see Tribe, Governing Economy, 149-82.
Friedrich Carl von Savigny and Karl Friedrich Eichhorn.\textsuperscript{10} The basic point that he sought to impress on his readers – most of whom would have been students enrolled on his lecture course – was that the laws of economics were not timeless axioms, but were rooted in the real life of specific peoples at specific stages of their development. For that reason, Staatswirthschaft had to form an alliance with legal, political and cultural history (Rechts-, Staats- und Kulturgeschichte).\textsuperscript{11} He had already made similar points in his 1842 review of List’s National System, in which he claimed that competence in political economy required thorough knowledge of the history of “peoples and states.”\textsuperscript{12} Yet despite his insistence on the significance of the “historical method,” recent commentators like Tribe and Pearson have discerned little that was truly novel in this emphasis on the historicity of economic relationships.\textsuperscript{13}

While this emphasis on the “historical method” has absorbed most attention from historians of economic thought, it is crucial to underline several other aspects of Roscher’s conception of Staatswirthschaft. The most prominent of these was his insistence that Staatswirthschaft was a “political science” (politische Wissenschaft) that pertained to the judgement (beurtheilen) and rule (beherrschen) of human beings. Political economy was far more than a simple “chrematistics,” or art of acquisition; as the terms “judgement” and “rule” imply, it was crucially connected to government.\textsuperscript{14} In making these claims, Roscher was, of course,

\textsuperscript{10} Wilhelm Roscher, Grundriß zu Vorlesungen über die Staatswirthschaft. Nach geschichtlicher Methode (Göttingen, 1843), v.
\textsuperscript{11} Roscher, Grundriß, iv.
\textsuperscript{13} Tribe, “Historical Economics”; Pearson, “Was there really a German Historical School of Economics?”
\textsuperscript{14} Roscher, Grundriß, iv. A similar perspective is adopted in Wilhelm Roscher, Leben, Werk und Zeitalter des Thukydides. Mit einer Einleitung zur Aesthetik der historischen Kunst überhaupt (Göttingen, 1842), vii.
echoing the famous theory of household management \((oikonomia)\) set out in book 1 of Aristotle’s \textit{Politics}, where Aristotle had claimed that “household management attends more to men than to the acquisition of inanimate things, and to human excellence more than to the excellence of property which we call wealth, and to the excellence of freemen more than to the excellence of slaves.”\textsuperscript{15} Traces of this Aristotelian conception of \textit{Staatswirthschaft} appeared in many of Roscher’s other writings of the 1840s and beyond. In the 1842 review of List he used almost the same words, stressing that \textit{Staatswirthschaft} was an “ethical science” concerned with human views and needs, and with the judgement \((beurtheilen)\) and rule \((beherrschen)\) of human beings. He went on to emphasise that \textit{Staatswirthschaft} had both a political and economic component, and insisted on the need to keep both elements simultaneously in view. While the ancients had overvalued the political component, the task facing the moderns was to redress a dangerous underestimation of the “political” – a tendency he associated above all with Jean-Baptiste Say, David Ricardo and the American political economist, Thomas Cooper.\textsuperscript{16} Similarly, in his 1849 lecture “On the Relationship of \textit{Nationalökonomie} to Classical Antiquity” he praised Socrates, Aristotle and Xenophon for recognising \textit{Nationalökonomie} as an “ethical science.”\textsuperscript{17}

Roscher also insisted that \textit{Staatswirthschaft}, properly understood, had a crucial role to play in maintaining the stability of modern states. This was not so much because of its concrete prescriptions, but because it promoted, more generally, a kind of political education \((Bildung\textsuperscript{15}\text{Aristotle, The Politics and the Constitution of Athens, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge, 1996), 28 (12509b - bk. 1, ch. 13).}\textsuperscript{16}\text{Roscher, Review of List, 1178-80. Cooper was a significant target, since he had explicitly argued that politics “are not essentially a part of Political Economy.” See Thomas Cooper, Lectures on the Elements of Political Economy (Columbia, SC., 1826), 15-16.}\textsuperscript{17}\text{Wihelm Roscher, “Ueber das Verhältniss der Nationalökonomie zum klassischen Alterthume,” Berichte über die Verhandlungen der königlich-sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaft zu Leipzig. Philologisch-historische Classe, 1 (1849), 115-34 (here at 120).}
des politischen Sinnes).  He further underlined the practical significance of Nationalökonomie in his 1849 lecture on political economy and classical antiquity, delivered in the wake of the 1848-49 revolutions across continental Europe. Here he stressed the “significance of this science for our present and future,” and noted that “the existence of our entire culture depends on the correct understanding [Ergründung] and general spread of political-economic truth.” According to Roscher, one of the causes of Britain’s political stability in the late 1840s was the teaching of Nationalökonomie in schools and colleges. This meant that Britain was likely to remain exempt from the revolutionary instabilities afflicting France and other continental European states.

It is important to stress that Roscher’s political orientation did not entail a radical break with the classical political economy of Adam Smith. It is true that he sought to reverse what he took to be the impoverishment of political economy in the early nineteenth century, and he explicitly accused Say, Ricardo and Cooper of reducing political economy to the study of “material relationships” and of losing sight of mankind’s social and spiritual needs (Bedürfnisse). Yet these accusations did not apply to Smith himself. This point is amply demonstrated in the review of List, in which Roscher, while endorsing List’s work as the best practical defence of the Zollverein as the basis of Germany’s future unification, rejected List’s own caricature of Smith as a cosmopolitical economist who paid insufficient attention to questions of politics, nationality or history. Rather, he argued, Smith had incisively discussed the different “developmental stages” (Entwicklungsstufen) in the history of wage-

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18 Roscher, Grundriß, 2.
21 Roscher, Review of List, 1179.
labour, analysed the various types of colony, and had recognised the political significance of the division of labour.\textsuperscript{23} In the later \textit{System der Volkswirtschaft} (1854), Roscher also cited Smith’s praise of the Navigation Acts and his famous claim that defence was of “much more importance than opulence” as evidence of the Scotsman’s attentiveness to questions of nationality and national power.\textsuperscript{24} Seen from that perspective, Roscher’s formulation of the scope of \textit{Staatswirthschaft} in the 1840s and 1850s had little in common with List’s or Hildebrand’s far more critical denigrations of Smithian political economy. Rather, Roscher is best viewed as seeking to revive a more integrated view of politics and economics which he associated primarily with Aristotle – and, to some extent, with Smith himself – against the truncated, materialistic orientation of Ricardo, Say and Cooper.

II

A further point about the primacy of politics in Roscher’s thought can be made by situating his writings against the traditions of historical scholarship and \textit{Staatswissenschaften} at the University of Göttingen. As he wrote in the opening pages of his book on Thucydides, in combining history (\textit{Geschichte}) with the state sciences (\textit{Staatswissenschaften}), he was continuing the distinctive approach to these subjects as it had been pioneered by August Ludwig Schlözer (1735-1809), Georg Sartorius (1765-1828), and Friedrich Christoph

\textsuperscript{23} Roscher, \textit{Review of List}, 1196-7. For Roscher’s consideration of the moral and political dangers associated with an elaborate division of labour, which drew upon the work of Adam Ferguson as well as Smith, see Wilhelm Roscher, \textit{System der Volkswirthschaft. Ein Hand- und Lesebuch für Geschäftsmänner und Studierend}, 5 vols. (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1854-94), vol. 1, 84-88.

Dahlmann (1785-1860). Although these authors had divergent interests, all three had taught *Geschichte, Politik* and the *Staatswissenschaften* at Göttingen prior to Roscher, and all three shared a common view of the interdependence of history and politics. Schlözer insisted on the close relationship between history, statistics and politics or the “science of government” (*Regierungswissenschaft*), and laid emphasis on the ability of the historian to integrate, on the basis of comparison (*Vergleichung*), the various historical societies into a single stadial scheme. Roscher hinted, in a letter of 1842 to Leopold Ranke, that he was building upon Schlözer’s comparative approach, and cited Schlözer’s description of statistics as “stillstehende Geschichte” in his *System der Volkswirtschaft*. Sartorius was even more explicit that history and politics were “inseparable,” claiming that politics – which he sharply demarcated from natural law – depended upon exact information about recent history: “The role of politics is to order and impart the teachings of history on the constitution and

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government of states.” It is also worth noting that Roscher’s 1856 work on colonies was framed, in part, as a revision of the typology of colonies set out in yet another influential Göttingen text: Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren’s *Handbuch der Geschichte des europäischen Staatensystems und seiner Colonien*, first published in 1809. Roscher clearly associated himself with this broad, Göttingen tradition when he referred to Schlözer and Dahlmann as precursors of his own effort to ground the state sciences and politics on the foundations of “universal history.”

These continuities are perhaps most visible in the definitions of politics (*Politik*) that ran through many of Roscher’s works between the 1840s and 1890s. In his publication on Thucydides, for instance, he defined *Politik* as “the theory of the developmental laws of states,” rather than a set of practical rules guiding the statesman. Echoing Schlözer, he went on to argue that *Staatswirthschaft* and *Statistik* were especially important and elaborate branches of politics. He repeated this definition almost verbatim in the 1843 *Grundriß*. These formulations suggest that Roscher conceived of *Staatswirthschaft* and *Statistik*, along with *Polizeiwissenschaft*, *Diplomatik*, and *Völkerrecht*, as specialist sciences which were subordinate to the master-science of *Politik*. In the 1847 *Umrisse zur Naturlehre der drei Staatsformen*, Roscher only slightly modified this terminology. Here he wrote that his work did not deal with “politics in the ordinary sense of the word, but rather the natural theory and

31 Roscher, *Thukydidides*, viii.
He reiterated the claim that *Politik*, or *Staatswissenschaft* in general, was concerned with the “developmental laws” of states in the first volume of his *System der Volkswirtschaft* (1854). Finally, he claimed in the *Politik* of 1892 to have been engaged in the study of politics in the Aristotelian sense of that word, as a form of historical *Naturlehre* applied to the state, since the very beginning of his academic career.

This emphasis on the historical character of *Politik* underpinned a form of stadial history which also had roots in Enlightenment Göttingen. As we have seen, Schlözer had suggested that comparison (*Vergleichung*) between different societies, across time and space, made it possible to identify the basic stages through which all societies naturally proceeded. Roscher adopted a similar perspective in distinguishing the various “developmental” or “cultural” stages (*Entwickelungsstufen*; *Kulturstufen*) through which different peoples progressed. As he noted in the Foreword to his book on Thucydides, the key task of the political thinker was to identify the “developmental laws” (*Entwicklungsgesetzen*) of states on the basis of comparison between the distinctive histories of individual peoples. A firm grasp of these laws was an essential part of “universal history” or the “history of mankind.” He also argued that the theory of historical stages made it possible to make comparisons between different peoples in different times and places, although he cautioned against the indiscriminate use of historical analogies. Admittedly, Roscher was circumspect in identifying the precise stages which marked the progress of civil society, and he never attempted a detailed exposition in the manner of the eighteenth-century historians of civil

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36 Roscher, *Politik*, iii.
38 Roscher, *Thukydides*, xi-xii.
society. And although he sometimes implied that the laws of stadial development were universal, he also hinted that only some nations or peoples—what he called *Kulturvölker*—experienced the complete cycle of cultural development.

Most crucially of all for my argument, Roscher’s conception of “developmental stages” rested heavily upon the history of the ancient world. In his work on Thucydides, he claimed that the history of classical antiquity constituted a complete record of the stadial development of ancient societies, and could be approached impartially. The history of the Athenian and Roman republics thus furnished Roscher with crucial evidence about the development of political society as it passed from primitive forms of kingly and aristocratic government (characteristic of a “medieval” stage), through various monarchical and constitutional regimes, and finally ended in military tyranny or Caesarism (which he associated with the “higher cultures”). More urgently, Roscher maintained that the history of the ancient republics constituted a parallel, or “analogy,” with that of modern Europe. This made the history of antiquity a critical resource in his appraisal of the prospects facing modern Europe’s constitutional states, as well as an “inestimable guide” to their political and economic development.

For example, Roscher suggested that the history of the Athenian constitution in the fifth century, characterised by the rise of individual legal equality and an increasingly omnipotent state, paralleled similar developments in post-revolutionary Europe. He underlined the analogies between antiquity and modernity even more explicitly in his *Umrisse zu Naturlehre der drei Staatsformen*, which ended with a long, comparative

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39 On Roscher’s concern with historical impartiality, see Neville Morley, “Thucydides, history and historicism,” 115-39.
analysis of the ancient world’s collapse in military despotism and the rise of Napoleon.42 Perhaps most importantly, he claimed that the violent struggles over property and citizenship that occurred in the later Roman republic were analogous to the growing conflicts that were emerging between plutocrats and proletariat in the context of the modern “social question.”43 The history of the ancient republics thus had a pressing relevance for the future of politics in Europe’s “higher cultures.”

While one source of this concern may have been late eighteenth-century discussions about the rise and decline of states, Roscher’s thinking must also be situated alongside contemporary debates in German politics and historiography. Most obviously, his position forms a clear contrast with that of Marx, who scorned the idea of any resemblance between the worlds of antiquity and modernity, and would later reject the term “Caesarism” as a kind of schoolboy historical anachronism.44 Yet Roscher’s invocation of a parallel between modern and ancient history was far from unconventional in the 1840s and 1850s. Classical analogies, whether Greek or Roman, were employed by German political thinkers until well into the second half of the century as a means of analysing modern European politics and the character of the wider European state system.45 Moreover, Roscher’s specific concern about the parallel between ancient and modern class struggle foreshadowed later concerns in German “Historical Economics.” Gustav Schmoller, who is conventionally identified as the most significant figure in this context, also underlined the significance of the ancient world’s

42 Roscher, Umrisse, 458-9.
43 Roscher first rehearsed this parallel in detail in his “Betrachtungen über Socialismus und Communismus,” (1845), erster Abschnitt, 436-47.
45 For contemporary examples of the parallel between the modern European and ancient Greek system of states, see Georg Gottfried Gervinus, Einleitung in die Geschichte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts (Leipzig, 1853), 13-14, Constantin Frantz, Untersuchungen über das europäische Gleichgewicht (Berlin, 1859), 3-4.
social conflicts for understanding the modern “social question” in a number of writings around the time of the formation of the Verein für Sozialpolitik in 1873. Using the same terminology as Roscher, Schmoller warned in 1872 “that all higher cultures, like the Greeks, the Romans, and other peoples, have perished through similar antagonisms [Gegensätzen], through social class struggles and revolutions, and through their inability to reconcile the higher and lower classes.” Schmoller amplified the point in his 1874 Die sociale Frage und der preußische Staat, reminding his readers of the Roman republic’s transition to “Caesarism” or the “dictatorship of the Emperors” and again noting that “all higher cultures have perished through such starkly divided social oppositions.” Hildebrand, it is true, took a different position in his 1869 Die sociale Frage der Vertheilung des Grundeigenthums im klassischen Alterthum, in which he concluded that modern forms of credit and mobile property meant that nineteenth-century states were unlikely to experience the conflicts that had accompanied the agrarian history of antiquity. Yet while this reveals a lack of consensus on the details, Roscher’s anxieties about the parallel between ancient and modern political developments certainly pointed to a larger preoccupation in mid-nineteenth-century German scholarship.

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46 For an excellent discussion of Schmoller on this issue, see Grimmer-Solem, The Rise of Historical Economics, 110-11.
As his insistence on the recurrence of ancient forms of tyranny and Caesarism suggests, Roscher’s stadial perspective upon mankind’s successive “developmental stages” was not a neutral, or merely “scientific,” inquiry into the character of historical progress. Rather, his thinking about the history of cultures (Kulturgeschichte), with its marked anxieties about the rise, decline and fall of the ancient republics, was an integral component of a more urgent assessment of the prospects facing the modern states of nineteenth-century Europe. This theme first emerged in some of Roscher’s pieces from the 1840s, beginning with the short, but quite illuminating, “On the Formation of State Power in its Contest with Small Juridical Persons” (1843), and continuing in the more famous Umrisse zur Naturlehre der drei Staatsformen (1847-48). These two pieces provide evidence of Roscher’s commitment to the moderate constitutionalism associated with Dahlmann, and the latter text should probably be regarded as an attempt to revise the political typology worked out in Dahlmann’s 1835 Politik.50 Along with his “Observations on Socialism and Communism” (1845) – to be considered separately in the next section – these texts also supply us with insights into the intellectual origins of his later inquiry into the connections between democracy and Caesarism.

A particularly revealing source for understanding Roscher’s thinking about the character of the modern European state is his “On the Formation of State Power.” Here he described the expanding competencies of the modern state as it absorbed the formerly independent powers of towns, provinces, churches, guilds, corporations and other “juridical” associations. The article thus offered a kind of brief, theoretical history of the modern state and its rise as the sole source of legal and political authority. The heyday of this process was in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when formerly independent or “exclusive” associations were absorbed into, and made legally dependent upon, a centralised or absolute state. Here we can detect the origins of his long-running interest in the history of monarchical absolutism. Roscher described this process in terms of a larger shift from what he called the “patrimonial state” (Patrimonialstaat) to the “society state” (Gesellschaftsstaat), which accompanied a transition from “private-legal” conceptions of political rule to “social” ideas in which the state was conceived as a higher, general interest. The pre-eminent exemplar of these “social ideas” (gesellschaftlichen Ideen) was Frederick II of Prussia, with his famous self-description as the “first servant of the state.” The wider implication was that monarchical absolutism was the distant predecessor of the modern democratic state, since absolutism was the source of modern “ideas of equality” (Gleichheitsideen), the eradication of aristocratic ranks, and the progress of centralisation and regularity

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He suggested that Karl Ludwig von Haller’s political theory of restoration was an attempt to revive the central ideas of the *Patrimonialstaat*.

Crucially, Roscher did not think that the shift from the *Patrimonialstaat* to the *Gesellschaftstaat* was an unqualified change for the better. He criticised the modern state’s tendency to “devour the whole of life,” and offered China as an example of the “complete omnipotence of state power.” These comments reflect his long-running anxieties about the absence of restraints on the power of Europe’s post-revolutionary states, a concern which resurfaced in his later writings on Caesarism. Instead, Roscher argued that political flourishing consisted in achieving a balance between the centralising state and the “small juridical persons.” In support of this preference, he cited Montesquieu’s dictum that intermediary powers were essential in preventing monarchy from sliding into either democracy or despotism, and singled out England as the European country in which such a balance had been achieved. This reference to both Montesquieu and to England were fairly clear indications of Roscher’s political preferences in 1843, and looked back to the Göttingen tradition of Anglophile liberalism that is commonly associated with Dahlmann (who himself played a role in the German publication of Jean-Louis Delolme’s *Constitution of England* in 1819).

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Roscher’s more famous 1847 Umrisse zur Naturlehre der drei Staatsformen developed this analysis. In its opening pages, he sought to refute the various alternatives to Aristotle’s tripartite classification of state forms that had appeared since the publication of Montesquieu’s L’Esprit des Lois in 1748, beginning with Montesquieu himself, and continuing with Kant, Fichte, Schleiermacher and K. L. von Haller. His most interesting criticisms, however, were levelled at Rousseau, whom he accused of abandoning any fundamental differentiation between forms of state. According to Roscher, Rousseau’s insistence on the distinction between sovereignty and government had enabled him to claim that all true constitutions, regardless of their form of government, rested upon an “unalienable, indivisible, and unlimited popular sovereignty.”60 Thus for Rousseau, there were only “democratic constitutions.”61 Here Roscher was echoing some of the anxieties about Rousseau’s Social Contract expressed by earlier German thinkers, such as Heeren, who believed that Rousseau had opened the door to the politically-dangerous and incoherent idea of a democratically-grounded monarchy.62 Further echoing Dahlmann, Roscher’s alternative was a commitment to the classical, Polybian idea of the mixed constitution, which he thought found expression in the “constitutional regimes of our own times” (constitutionellen Verfassungen unserer Tage).63

60 Roscher, Umrisse, 79.
61 Roscher, Umrisse, 79-80.
63 Roscher, Umrisse, 85. For Dahlmann’s preference for a mixture of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, see Dahlmann, Politik, 18.
Roscher’s aim in the remaining sections of the *Umrisse* was to describe the entire cycle of state-forms, beginning with “free patriarchal kingship” (*patriarchalisch-volksfreie Königthum*), passing through the intermediate stages of “knightly-priestly aristocracy” (*ritterlich-priesterliche Aristokratie*), absolute monarchy, and democracy, and ending with the establishment of military tyranny (*Militärtyrannie*). His most significant comments on the character of the modern state, however, all appeared in the first section on monarchy. Here Roscher engaged more substantially with Montesquieu’s account of monarchy, endorsing the French writer’s emphasis on “intermediary powers” but simultaneously criticising his identification of “honour” as the principle of monarchical government. He also echoed Montesquieu, along with many other eighteenth-century thinkers, in holding monarchical government to be most compatible with the territorial scale of modern states. At the same time, he elaborated upon some aspects of the story he had laid out in “On the Formation of State Power,” significantly expanding his account of the transition from “Enlightened” absolutisms of the eighteenth century to nineteenth-century democracy. According to Roscher, “Enlightened absolutism” was a third form of absolute monarchy in which almost all previous restraints upon the ruler’s power had been eradicated, hence unleashing a kind of “state-machine” (in using this term, he may have been echoing earlier German critics of the machine-state, such as Johann Gottfried Herder or Wilhelm Humboldt). There was a strong implication that Europe’s post-revolutionary states were descendants of these earlier “state-machines.”

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64 Roscher, *Umrisse*, 87-88.
65 Roscher, *Umrisse*, 327-8, 331.
67 Roscher, *Umrisse*, 452.
This point, however, did not lead to a sustained examination of the nineteenth-century state, but to a more general discussion of the collapse of democracy and its replacement with military tyranny. Roscher claimed that military tyranny was a product of the intense social antagonisms between “money-oligarchy” (Geldoligarchie) and proletariat that characterised degenerate, or “extreme,” democracies. Military power became the de facto authority within the state as the demagogic and aristocratic leaders of declining republics sought for tranquillity at any price. If one instance of this was Napoleon Bonaparte, an equally weighty historical example was the Roman republic. Roscher traced the rise of ancient Roman pauperism, the struggle between Marius and Sulla, and the rise of Julius Caesar as underpinned by the “rule of a mob of soldiers” (Herrschaft des Soldatenpöbels). It is essential to recognise that Roscher saw this process as playing out in the Europe of the 1840s. Noting that the foundations of the French state had been transformed under the reign of Louis Philippe, he claimed in 1847 that the July Monarchy was already embarked on the transformation from a “monarchical democracy” to an “unlimited military monarchy.”

Before the 1848 revolutions, then, Roscher had already begun to identify the democratic foundations of modern states as dangerously unstable.

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68 Roscher, Umrisse, 88, 458.
69 Roscher, Umrisse, 458.
70 Roscher, Umrisse, 459-70.
71 Roscher, Umrisse, 455.
Roscher explored the social dimensions of the problem more fully in his “Remarks on Socialism and Communism” (1845). In this piece he took Lorenz von Stein’s famous *Socialismus und Communismus in heutigen Frankreich* (1842) and Michel Chevalier’s *Cours d’économie politique* (1842-44) as starting points for reflecting more broadly upon the relevance of socialism and communism for nineteenth-century politics. In this context, he developed his own analysis of the tensions unleashed by the combination of plutocracy with democracy among modern states. This sensitivity to the consequences of fusing socio-economic inequality with a system of democratic legitimation made his discussion a contribution to the wider European debate about the “social question,” which had arisen as a central topic in French, and then German, thought in the 1830s. Yet although he recognised the suffering, injustice and instability caused by inequality in modern commercial societies, and although he had some sympathy for Chevalier’s “half-way” socialism, he was unable to endorse projects that would undermine the foundations of civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) – namely, private property and the family.

Roscher set his analysis of socialism and communism in the context of a broader analysis of the instabilities and divisions that plagued economically-advanced societies. He depicted socialism and communism as almost inevitable ideological by-products of an extended

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74 Roscher, “Betrachtungen,” 418.

75 Roscher, “Betrachtungen,” 419.
division of labour and the inequalities to which it gave rise. He also lamented the increasingly polarized opposition between rich and poor, and the corresponding erosion of the middle classes, which he, like many other liberals in Vormärz Germany, saw as a crucial foundation of political stability.\(^{76}\) He also pointed to the increasing subdivision of landed property, the redundancy of individual workers in an age of machines, the concentration of public debts in the hands of fewer creditors, and the increasing frequency of financial crises and wars as symptoms of the instabilities unleashed by modern capitalism.\(^{77}\) All this led him to a memorable description of the modern state as a centralised, plutocratically-structured entity which nevertheless maintained some superficially democratic features:

The disappearance of the middle class, the split between a few extremely rich people and an innumerable proletariat, is the principal route by which free and once-flourishing nations have hastened towards the grave. This type of money-aristocracy (Geldaristokratie) shares all the severity of a genuine aristocracy without any of its milder features. Since money-aristocracy is usually the offspring of a degenerated democracy – the more that sovereignty is extended to the rabble (Pöbel), the more it can be purchased by the rich – its form cannot radically deviate from the principle of equality. The starving workers are told that there is no legal obstacle preventing them from joining the ranks of the capitalists, and from participating in their pleasures. The uniformity and centralisation of the state, which are anathema to a true aristocracy, are taken to the highest level: investments (Kapitalien) count more than human beings, the joint-stock company (Actiengesellschaft) replaces the old associations.

\(^{76}\) On the positive valuation of the Mittelstand by nineteenth-century German liberals, see James J. Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1978), 25-8.  

\(^{77}\) Roscher, “Betrachtungen,” 422-32.
The entirety of life depends on the state, in order that its lords, the men of big money, can wholly dominate it.  

Roscher concluded that such societies would experience the same sequence that had played out in the Roman republic, as it passed through a phase of conflict between democracy and plutocracy before finally reaching military despotism. From this perspective, he was offering a pessimistic evaluation about the prospects for maintaining democracy under conditions of a social war between “money-oligarchy and proletariat” (Geldoligarchie und Proletariat). 

Despite this prognosis, Roscher insisted that socialism and communism had no solution to the “state-illness” (Staatskrankheit) that now plagued nineteenth-century states. Rather, he suggested that any attempt to establish a community of goods, or to centrally regulate production and consumption in line with the proposals set out in Louis Blanc’s Organisation du travail (1839), would ultimately lead to the creation of novel form of despotism or “Caesaropapism.” His dismissal of socialist and communist ideas as a viable antidote to modernity’s problems is further revealed in his engagement with Lorenz von Stein’s Socialismus und Communismus des heutigen Frankreichs, which took up much of the second part of the article. Stein’s book, one of the earliest German discussions of the “socialism” of Charles Fourier and Henri de Saint-Simon, was among the most important contemporary analyses of the social question and the political prospects for modern industrial societies. Stein claimed that the next major European revolution, unlike the French Revolution, would

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be a “social revolution,” driven by the modern proletariat, which for Stein constituted a
distinctive new propertyless class.\textsuperscript{82} Aside from Roscher’s initial complaint that Stein’s work
was rendered less impressive by its reliance on Hegelian language, he went on to reject
Stein’s argument that the proletariat had no parallel in any earlier period, claiming that even a
cursory glance at Greek and Italian history suggested otherwise.\textsuperscript{83} More generally, Roscher
took the opportunity provided by Stein’s work to reiterate the dangers posed by communist
ideas to a “liberal” civil society.\textsuperscript{84} Every concession to communism, he argued, was a
betrayal of “true freedom and true order” (\textit{der wahren Freiheit und wahren Ordnung}). This
led him to underline the compatibility between communism and despotism:

Where communism is fully developed, its supporters will be satisfied with the state-

form which can offer them the most. For the present at least this can only be an

arbitrary despotism (\textit{rücksichtsloser Despotismus}). If they can be made to support
every revolution (\textit{Umwälzung}) easily, then they can certainly be made to support a
despotic one. Remember that Emperor Nero was the idol of the Roman rabble
(\textit{Pöbel}). And on the other hand, once communism places all the goods of life under

threat, then the propertied classes will also be compelled to cling onto anything which
can guarantee them against it, and it’s quite possible that the very power they turn to
for support will smash their own political freedom. Stein has very clearly indicated
the sheer dreadfulness (\textit{Entsetzlichkeit}) of this general internal conflict, to which a
general dissemination of communist ideas must inevitably lead, and which in France,

\textsuperscript{82} Lorenz von Stein, \textit{Der Socialismus und Communismus des heutigen Frankreichs: Ein
Beitrag zur Zeitgeschichte} (Leipzig), iii.
\textsuperscript{83} Roscher, “Betrachtungen,” 544.
\textsuperscript{84} Roscher, “Betrachtungen,” 547, 549.
in particular, is not tempered by a belief in either the state or in religion. A *bellum omnium contra omnes*, precisely in the Hobbesian sense! (ganz nach Hobbes Art!)\textsuperscript{85}

Roscher went on to argue that the expanding competencies of modern states in terms of welfare provision, education, poor relief and security meant that they were much closer to the ideals of “community” (*Gemeinschaft*) than could possibly have been imagined a century earlier.\textsuperscript{86} While he recognised the utility of such institutions, he hinted at his earlier thesis that the modern state had become dangerously omnipotent and threatened to stifle progress. His other concluding remarks concerned the dangers of overpopulation, which Roscher consistently ranked among the gravest problems facing modern states. As a remedy to this problem, he proposed a programme of emigration and colonisation modelled on England’s colonial empire, and cited the work of Edward Gibbon Wakefield.\textsuperscript{87} This idea received much fuller elaboration in Roscher’s 1856 *Kolonien, Kolonialpolitik und Auswanderung*, in which he called for the emigration of the “propertyless” as a means of mitigating the explosive political (and moral) consequences of overpopulation, with its ensuing enviousness, competitiveness and social strife.\textsuperscript{88} It is worth noting that even in this work, Roscher was partly motivated by his perception of the instabilities that accompanied the combination of “untenable popular rule” (*unhaltbar gewordenen Volksherrschaft*) with a money-oligarchy

\textsuperscript{85} Roscher, “Betrachtungen,” 549. This famous Hobbesian trope, it is worth noting, reappeared in Roscher’s later depiction of Caesarism.


(Geldoligarchie) in European states.\textsuperscript{89} Seen from this perspective, Roscher was proposing colonial emigration as a means of solving the “social question” and neutralising its most destructive political effects.

Several of these ideas resurfaced in a text on property which first appeared in 1852, and which was subsequently reworked for the first volume of the \textit{System der Staatswirthschaft}.\textsuperscript{90} Yet this piece contains some additional material that takes us further into Roscher’s understanding of property, civil society and the threat of socialism. Interestingly, Roscher rejected Hobbes’s claim that private property was created by the state, as well as Proudhon’s suggestion that property should be regulated by needs, and instead expressed his preference for Locke’s account of the origins of property.\textsuperscript{91} But he also extended his analysis of the economic and political origins of communism. After repeating his earlier point that communism took root in polarized societies with an advanced division of labour, he went on to link communism to the rising power of the masses (\textit{Pöbel}) and the democratic principle of equality:

\begin{quote}
Communism is the not inconsistent exaggeration of the democratic principle of equality. Men who regularly hear themselves described as the sovereign people, and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{89} Roscher, \textit{Kolonien}, 97.


their will as the highest law of the state, are likely to experience even more keenly the gap between their own misery and the abundance of others.\textsuperscript{92}

Roscher’s argument was that political democratisation went hand-in-hand with the state’s increasing responsibility for the subsistence needs of the poor. The dangers of this trajectory were revealed by the history of ancient republics, which provided a clear illustration of the tendency of egalitarian democracy to promote the expansion of state power and, ultimately, the rise of despotism.\textsuperscript{93} This dynamic remained at the heart of Roscher’s analysis into the 1890s.

V

We are now in a position to better understand the relationship between democracy and Caesarism that was one of the major themes that Roscher explored in his later writings of the 1880s and early 1890s. In this period he published two dedicated studies of democracy and Caesarism, along with a separate piece on absolute monarchy, that were subsequently incorporated into his \textit{Politik} (1892). As he mentioned in the Preface to the \textit{Politik}, all of these works were continuous with his earlier aim of adapting Aristotle’s typology of state-forms to an understanding of modern politics.\textsuperscript{94} At the same time, the \textit{Politik} can also be situated within the longer tradition of German writings on “politics” stretching back to the eighteenth-century formulations of Achenwall and Schlözer, and advancing, in particular, in

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[92]{Roscher, “Grundzüge,” 116.}
\footnotetext[93]{Roscher, “Grundzüge,” 116-7, n.}
\footnotetext[94]{Roscher, \textit{Politik}, iii.}
\end{footnotes}
Dahlmann’s 1835 *Politik* (which Roscher explicitly cited as a model).\(^95\) Nevertheless, these later writings can also be interpreted as continuing Roscher’s earlier inquiry into the tensions between centralised state power, democratic legitimacy, and socio-economic inequality in nineteenth-century states. They should also be seen as vital contributions to the late-nineteenth-century German (and European) debate about democracy and Caesarism.

In order to grasp Roscher’s own contribution to that debate, it is necessary to briefly rehearse the German debate about Caesarism as it developed in the four decades after Louis Bonaparte’s 1851 *coup d’état*. The 1850s witnessed an explosion of German writing on the nature of Caesarism (or Bonapartism), as a wide range of thinkers, such as Constantin Frantz, Bruno Bauer, Karl Marx, Julius Fröbel, A. L. Rochau and Lorenz von Stein (among others), examined Napoleon III’s imperial regime and sought to assess its relevance for European politics. While they differed on many issues of terminology and substance, these thinkers generally agreed in defining Caesarism as a political regime that abolished individual and constitutional liberties while maintaining a veneer of democratic legitimacy and catering for the material needs of the masses.\(^96\) Nevertheless, divergent interpretations and emphases appeared among liberal, socialist and conservative contributors to the debate in the 1860s and 1870s, as the issue became intertwined with wider questions about the structure of the German *Reich*, the introduction of universal suffrage, the place of the *Kaiser* within the constitution, and the stability of the wider European state system. Some thinkers, such as the Swiss political theorist Johann Kaspar Bluntschli, depicted Caesarism as a kind of benevolent autocracy which satisfied the material needs of the “fourth estate” but which also stifled

\(^95\) Roscher, *Politik*, iv.
\(^96\) For discussion, see the works listed in n.5 above.
individual self-development.\textsuperscript{97} Others, such as Heinrich von Treitschke, claimed that the German states, with their distinctive traditions of self-government, federalism and kingship, would remain exempt from the mixture of revolutionary democracy and neo-Roman imperialism which characterised France.\textsuperscript{98} By contrast, some critics of the emerging German Reich in the late 1860s identified the combination of universal suffrage with Prussia’s military dominance in the North German Confederation as a potential new source of Caesarism.\textsuperscript{99}

It is impossible to understand Roscher’s own contribution to this debate without first reconstructing the larger analysis of democracy upon which it rested. In his Umrisse zur Naturlehre der Demokratie (1890), which reappeared in expanded form in the fourth Book of the Politik, he offered a wide-ranging account of democracy in its ancient and modern guises, and subsequently explored the divergent forms of democratic politics in Britain, France, and the United States. This material provides the essential framework for making sense of Roscher’s assessment of the social and political origins of Caesarism, and also reveals that the relationship between democracy and Caesarism was more nuanced than is recognised in

\textsuperscript{97} Johann Kaspar Bluntschli, “Cäsar und Cäsarismus,” in Bluntschli, Staatswörterbuch in drei Bänden, 3 vols. (Zürich, 1869), 1:391-2.

\textsuperscript{98} Treitschke argued that the permanent military domination of “Cäsarismus” was incompatible with the character of the German people in Heinrich von Treitschke, “Bundesstaat und Einheitsstaat,” [1863], in Treitschke, Historische und politische Aufsätze, 3 vols. (6\textsuperscript{th} ed., Leipzig, 1903), II.83; see also Heinrich von Treitschke, “Frankreichs Staatsleben und der Bonapartismus” [1865-71], in Treitschke, Historische und politische Aufsätze, 3 vols. (6\textsuperscript{th} ed., Leipzig, 1903), III.48-53.

\textsuperscript{99} Constantin Frantz, Die Naturlehre des Staates als Grundlage aller Staatswissenschaft (Leipzig and Heidelberg, 1870), 172-6. Social democrats, such as Wilhelm Liebknecht, claimed that Bismarck was copying Napoleonic Caesarism in using universal suffrage as a tool of reaction: see Wilhelm Liebknecht, “On the political position of social democracy, particularly with regard to the Reichstag” [1869], in Liebknecht, Wilhelm Liebknecht and German Social Democracy: A Documentary History, ed. William A. Pelz, trans. Erich Hahn, (Westport, CT., 1994), 151-175.
Peter Baehr’s brief account of Roscher. On the one hand, Roscher criticised those who facilely equated democracy with freedom, or expected its inevitable triumph in nineteenth-century Europe. One of his targets on both these counts was the British Whig writer and politician, Henry Brougham, who – according to Roscher – had failed to appreciate the possibility that an unpropertied majority, under conditions of universal suffrage, could threaten property rights and lend their support to Caesarist leaders. But on the other hand, Roscher distinguished himself from extreme critics of democracy like Henry Maine. This suggests that, for him, Caesarism was not an inevitable consequence of democratisation, and that certain modern forms of democratic government might have the capacity to forestall the usual shift from democracy to military tyranny.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Roscher identified representative government as the key to avoiding the transition to Caesarism that had taken place in the ancient world and, more recently, in the aftermath of the French Revolution. He made a strong distinction between “autocratic” and “representative” forms of popular government (Volksherrschaft), and claimed that the latter was superior for large, modern democracies. Citing Mommsen’s Roman History, he explained that Rome’s failure lay precisely in its inability to transform the constitution of a city-state into a properly representative system, as appropriate for a large empire. Roscher also admired federal institutions as an additional means of rendering democracy stable in the modern world. Referring to both Montesquieu’s description of a “federal republic” and to The Federalist, he explained that federal republics survived longer than unitary states.

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100 Baehr, Caesar and the Fading of the Roman World, 226-32.  
101 Roscher, Politik, 6.  
102 Roscher was critical of Henry Sumner Maine, Popular Government: Four Essays (London, 1885); see Roscher, Politik, 454, n.  
103 Roscher, Politik, 311, 347-53.  
104 Roscher, Politik, 311.  
105 Roscher, Politik, 454.
Both these points underpinned Roscher’s comparative evaluation of the American and French experience of democracy since the end of the eighteenth century. While the United States had created a stable, federal republic, the French had failed to construct a genuinely representative form of democratic politics. Indeed, Roscher argued that French politics since 1789 was better described as “revolutionary” rather than “democratic,” because its essential feature was the rule of well-organized minority groups.106

Despite this emphasis on the effectiveness of representation and federation in conferring political stability, Roscher remained anxious that the democratic principle of equality (Gleichheitsprincip) might prepare the way for the domination of the masses and, ultimately, Caesarism. Echoing Aristotle and Montesquieu, he argued that a key threat to all democracies was a tendency to enforce an extreme conception of equality which refused to recognise differences of talent, merit or virtue. He claimed that it was “under the mask of general equality” that the most oppressive forms of domination (e.g. the poor over the rich, or the majority over the minority) came to be realised.107 The basic process he diagnosed, which was based on the history of Athens and Rome, was of a shift from mixed forms of constitutional government that combined democratic freedoms with aristocratic prudence, to a more “extreme” or “unlimited” form of democracy based on purely numerical representation and the domination of the masses.108 One key term here was Kopfzahlstaat – literally the “head-count state” – a term used by other contemporary thinkers in identifying the dangers implicit in universal suffrage.109 It is worth observing that Roscher’s thinking

106 Roscher, Politik, 454-55.
107 Roscher, Politik, 320.
108 Roscher, Politik, 418, 448.
109 Roscher, Politik, 333. For a near-contemporary worry about the transformation of the European Rechtsstaat into a Kopfzahlstaat see Jacob Burckhardt, Historische Fragmente, aus dem Nachlass gesammelt von Emil Dürr (Stuttgart, 1942), 46; for an English translation see
here owed more than one might expect to earlier French discussions of the nexus between egalitarian democracy and despotic power, beginning with Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* (1748) and continuing in Tocqueville’s attack on the Caesarism of Napoleon I and III. Both these thinkers had argued that the drive towards extreme equality, or the levelling of intermediary powers, paved the way for the emergence of a despotic state. Roscher fleshed out these themes in his discussion of democracy in the *Politik*, claiming (*à la* Montesquieu) that “developed” democracies fostered an extreme form of equality that left no room for intermediary powers, ranks or provincial bodies, and maintaining (*à la* Tocqueville) that the drive to equality under the ancien régime monarchies had prepared the way for modern revolutionary democracy. Roscher’s depiction of the emergence of Caesarism from a combination of a democratic drive to equality and political centralization thus broadly resembled these more famous contributions to the understanding of modern despotism.

This more nuanced perspective is reinforced by Roscher’s evaluation of the diverging prospects for democracy and Caesarism in Britain and the United States. Although he recognised that England remained a limited democracy in practice, he also noted that the power of the Commons was theoretically almost absolute, making England an “scarcely


limited democracy” (sehr wenig beschränkte Demokratie).

Roscher thought that the expansion of the franchise in 1867 constituted a genuine revolution in English politics, unimaginable to the likes of Montesquieu or Blackstone. Propertyless workers now made up the majority of the electorate, while the various powers of the state were now concentrated in the House of Commons. Roscher hinted that the widened franchise, the centralisation of state power, and the confusion of executive and legislative functions meant that England was moving towards “extreme democracy” and possibly to Caesarism. This view, it is worth noting, aligned Roscher with larger shifts in the German discourse on Caesarism between the 1880s and 1920s. While German thinkers between 1848 and about 1871 had typically seen Caesarism as a French phenomenon, later writers including Bruno Bauer, Max Weber, and Ferdinand Tönnies were more inclined to discern Caesarist tendencies emerging from the mix of plebiscitary or demagogic party politics and Parlamentarismus in the English state.

In contrast to this negative evaluation of England, Roscher argued that although America paid lip-service to popular sovereignty, its federal structure ensured that no single power could really be deemed sovereign. Questioning the more pessimistic judgement about America’s future as a democracy set out in the second volume of Tocqueville’s Democracy in America,

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112 Roscher, Politik, 332-3, 337, n.
113 Roscher, Politik, 440.
115 Roscher, Politik, 440.
he claimed that the country had returned to a healthier condition in the two decades since the end of the Civil War. In developing this point, he was responding to a letter of T. B. Macaulay to Henry Randall, written in 1857 but reprinted in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1860. In his letter, Macaulay had voiced his belief that “purely democratic” institutions must inevitably destroy liberty, civilization or both, and argued that that the distinctive geographical features and economic conditions of the United States by no means immunized the country against the rise of demagogic leaders: “Either some Caesar or Napoleon will seize the reins of government with a strong hand; or your Republic will be as fearfully plundered and laid waste by barbarians in the twentieth century as the Roman Empire was in the fifth…” Roscher’s response to all this doom-mongering was one of measured optimism, grounded partly in his confidence about the stability of federal republics and partly on wider claims about the economic capacity and geography of the United States. Although, in a remarkable passage, he explained that a combination of immigration, population growth, and territorial conquest in Latin America might promote Caesarism in the very distant future, and although he hinted that Andrew Jackson had flirted with Caesarism, the larger upshot of his remarks was that the United States’ almost unlimited capacity for industrial and commercial development, along with its enormous territory, would provide a safety-valve against the social dislocations that were fuelling Caesarist politics in Europe. He also argued that the

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119 Roscher, *Politik*, 441, 453.
strength of the presidency vis-à-vis the legislature was a strength of the American system, especially when compared to the weak presidency of the French Third Republic.\textsuperscript{120}

This account of democracy forms the essential background to Roscher’s discussion of Caesarism, which he defined as a post-democratic regime-type that still maintained some democratic elements. He thus resisted the indiscriminate usage of the term “Caesarism” to describe any form of arbitrary, one-man rule, and instead endorsed Emile Littré’s definition of the term as “princes elevated to government by democracy, but invested with absolute power” (princes portés au gouvernement par la démocratie, mais revêtus d’un pouvoir absolu).\textsuperscript{121} He also characterised Caesarism as a distinctive mixture of “extreme monarchical” and “extreme democratic” components; this Janus-faced character was one of its most distinctive features and strengths.\textsuperscript{122} Roscher also indicated the proximity between democracy and Caesarism in further comments on political representation. As he underlined, Caesarist leaders drew their legitimacy from their claim to “represent” the people or nation. His main example of this tendency was Napoleon I, who had presented himself as an alternative to more conventional representative assemblies or legislative bodies. Thus Caesarism was a regime in which popular sovereignty was formally sanctioned, yet was in practice alienated to a single individual.\textsuperscript{123} Finally, Caesarism maintained the “equality principle” (Gleichheitsprinzip) that Roscher had already identified as the core of democracy. Citing Treitschke’s 1861 essay “Die Freiheit,” Roscher insisted that equality could be as


\textsuperscript{121} Roscher, \textit{Politik}, 13, n.

\textsuperscript{122} Roscher, \textit{Politik}, 591, n.

\textsuperscript{123} Roscher, \textit{Politik}, 591-2.
compatible with political slavery as with freedom.\textsuperscript{124} The commitment to abstract equality among eighteenth-century French thinkers like Helvétius made them intellectual forerunners of Caesarism.\textsuperscript{125}

One further significant feature of Roscher’s analysis was its sensitivity to what we might call the social dimensions of Caesarism. Like Bluntschli (and many others), he described agrarian reform, grain distribution, poor relief (\textit{Armenpflege}) and the emancipation of slaves as strategies by which Caesarist leaders maintained their authority.\textsuperscript{126} It was this that made popular leaders like the Gracchi or Saturninus the true precursors of Caesarism in republican Rome. Moreover, Roscher continued to insist that a major driver of Caesarism was the rise of deep social antagonisms within democratic states. He positioned his earlier concern about plutocrats and proletariat within the larger, Aristotelian-Polybian-inspired account of the transmutations of constitutions:

Democracy finally degenerates: the middle-class, upon which it depends, melts (\textit{schmiltz}) from above and below to become ever narrower; the people (\textit{das Volk}) splits itself in an opposition between very rich capitalists and completely propertyless workers. I term the resulting situation (\textit{Zustand}) plutocracy with the reverse-side of proletariat. Finally, the entire cycle comes to an end with the establishment of a new monarchy, the military tyranny, which we term Caesarism, after its greatest representative.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{125} Roscher, \textit{Politik}, 592.
\textsuperscript{126} Roscher, \textit{Politik}, 595.
\textsuperscript{127} Roscher, “Umriss zur Naturlehre des Cäsarismus,” \textit{Abhandlungen der Königlich Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften}, 10 (Leipzig, 1888), 642.
Roscher made no attempt to connect his discussion of Caesarism to an analysis of German politics in the late nineteenth century. This may have been a manifestation of his commitment to the impartial, scientific style of German “Historical Economics,” and it is possible that he was implicitly identifying threats to the stability of the German Kaiserrreich. The period was witnessing increasing concern about German Caesarism among political thinkers and publicists, ranging from Ludwig Quidde’s notorious attack on Wilhelm II in his 1894 Caligula, to Max Weber’s anxieties, in his 1895 Inaugural, about the political infantilisation of Germany’s political class that he thought was a legacy of Bismarck’s Caesarism. Nevertheless, Roscher himself explicitly mentioned only Britain and France as the two countries most vulnerable to modern Caesarism. As we have already seen, Roscher identified Britain as a kind of extreme democracy that had a real potential for Caesarism. Interestingly, he also discerned intellectual currents in British political discourse that favoured the replacement of parliamentary government with a new kind of executive-centred republicanism; his main example of this was the English Comtean, Frederick Harrison, with his admiration for powerful statesmen like Cromwell. At the same time, he continued to underline France’s deeply ingrained tendencies towards Caesarism, claiming that even if legitimate monarchy was restored in the 1890s, it would still retain many Caesarist features. He also identified statesmen (Thiers) and theorists (Comte) as sharing a basic inclination for

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Caesarism. Slightly disappointingly, Roscher never clarified the relevance of these dynamics for understanding Germany’s own prospects.

VI

This article has suggested that historians might be better equipped to understand the coherence of Roscher’s thought by laying less emphasis on his place within the history of political economy (conceived as a series of methodological or doctrinal innovations), and by paying more attention to the full range of his concerns from the 1840s onwards. Like any other political or economic thinker, Roscher deserves to be understood on his own terms, and this entails that we should, at least initially, try to move beyond the criticisms of Marx (or Max Weber), who of course had their own intellectual agendas. One outcome of this approach has been to problematize the conventional assumption that Roscher’s work represented a fundamental schism with the intellectual worlds of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. As the evidence of his writings from the 1840s clearly attests, he did not share List’s or Hildebrand’s denigration of Smith as a “cosmopolitical” or unhistorical thinker, and was deeply sympathetic to the projected reconciliation of history, economics and politics among his predecessors in Enlightenment Göttingen. A similar point could be made about Roscher’s engagement with eighteenth-century giants like Montesquieu and Rousseau, who provided essential reference-points in his evaluation of the prospects for democratic sovereignty, constitutional government and modern despotism. The standard ways of

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130 Roscher, Politik, 714.
understanding Roscher’s relationship with eighteenth-century discourses of politics, which have been deeply shaped by old interpretative paradigms about the impact of nationalism and historicism on nineteenth-century intellectual history, thus require readjustment.

More fundamentally, the effort to understand Roscher on his own terms has revealed a remarkable consistency in his central political concerns over his exceptionally long academic career. As I have argued throughout, his political writings are best understood as parts of a coherent inquiry into the prospects of the modern European state as it confronted the challenges of mass democracy, social inequality, and intellectual conflict. One important conclusion is that Roscher’s examination of democracy and Caesarism, published between 1888 and 1892, was simply the latest rendering of his much earlier concern, stretching back to the early 1840s, that the structure of the post-revolutionary European state housed a capacity to reignite the military tyrannies and despotisms that succeeded the ancient republics of Greece and Rome. The body of this article has detailed the ways in which class conflict, overpopulation, socialism, communism, mass politics, social polarization, colonization, plutocracy and egalitarian democracy fed into this overarching assessment. Most importantly of all, Roscher proclaimed the incompatibility between modern democracy, with its commitment to the principles of equality and popular sovereignty, and the sharp inequalities that characterised Europe’s economically-advanced states. It was this disjunction between the political and the social (or economic) that rendered the modern state vulnerable to Caesarism. All this helps further explain the importance that Roscher attached to Staatswirthschaft as a political science, and why he insisted on its potential as a tool for maintaining political stability.
One final conclusion concerns Roscher’s place on the shifting map of nineteenth-century European liberalism(s). As I have noted, his commitment to maintaining a flourishing middle-class, along with his early enthusiasm for the *constitutionelle Verfassung* and the English model of constitutional monarchy, are markers of his sympathy for the Hanoverian tradition of German liberalism that found its most famous expression in the writings of Dahlmann. Roscher’s later scepticism about the capacity of the English state to avoid the trajectory leading from an extreme, unitary democracy to Caesarism, and his faith in the United State’s distinctive mixture of representative government, federal institutions and economic dynamism, can be aligned with a more critical verdict on the British polity that characterised much German thought from around the middle of the 1870s. From this perspective, Roscher’s changing evaluation of Britain, combined with his consistently critical judgement on France, corresponded with some of the larger patterns in German liberalism in the second half of the nineteenth century. Yet one important additional argument of this article has been that Roscher shared a great deal of what is often regarded as a distinctively French perspective on the dangers of a levelling, egalitarian democracy, and frequently echoed Tocqueville’s more famous thesis that the legacies of monarchical absolutism held the key to understanding modern democratic republics. Roscher’s political thought may,

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therefore, be understood as articulating larger nineteenth-century anxieties about the dangers that an extreme commitment to democratic equality posed to constitutional stability in post-revolutionary Europe. This confirms that a purely German perspective on Roscher’s thought is far too narrow, and gives us yet another reason to be sceptical towards overarching categories like the “German Historical School of Economics.”