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Rejuvenating the Revolutionary Essence of Marxist Theory

ISSUE EDITOR: SIYAVEŞ AZERI

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EDITORIAL

Science and Humanism

The relation of Science and Humanism has often been presented as a juxtaposition of the methods of the natural sciences with the humanist legacy of the humanities. In the current situation of academia but also politics on a global scale this is understandable, but poses a serious challenge to the integrated way the Marxist tradition treated the concept of Science. This concept is rooted in the German term *Wissenschaft*. Even though historically it was present in all European languages and has been adapted in this sense by many other languages, today this integrated understanding of all kinds of collective knowledge production is endangered, facing the division of labour of institutionalised praxis.

At *Marxism & Sciences* we see the relation between science and humanism first of all not pertaining to any kind of present state of the division of intellectual labour and thus not only in terms of a complementary correspondence but as rooted in a common project. Hence our journal is dedicated to *keep alive and reconstruct* the awareness of that common project which connects all the *sciences* with endeavours of *emancipation* throughout the world. The European setting in which Marxist theory was first developed does not preclude but on the contrary emphasises as a cosmopolitical idea the pluralism of these endeavours, integrating them in a framework which upholds the necessary moment of unity.

Today we need to emphasise this unity more than ever before, if the Marxist endeavour as such wants to continue in one way or the other. Marxist thought today faces not only the practical challenges of 'late capitalism,' but also theoretical ones in the form of different kinds of so-called anti-, trans- and posthumanisms. We need to distinguish these from another, but also see them as perspectives to be confronted in an informed manner.

The notion of "keeping alive and reconstruct" reminds us of the historical period of the Renaissance where science as well as humanism (in both the scholarly and the political sense) were truly revived by revising the ancient notions of the philosophers. Thereby political as well as epistemic activities were connected and out of this, if you will, common root scientific and humanist projects sprang. Needless to say, that everyone who wants to continue to keep this kind of continuous engagement

alive needs to revise the conceptions of the forerunners. This is the way scientific knowledge proceeds.

And this goes for Marxist thought, too. However it may be not in vain to remember that Marx and Engels formulated in their *German Ideology* "the first premises of Materialist Method," integrating *science with the task of emancipation*. A critique of ideology is not sufficient, but the task is, as they put it, to empirically take into account "the real living conditions of concrete human individuals." If Marxism wants to uphold its connection to the scientific endeavour and the need for political emancipation at the same time it has to be revised over and over again.

This issue (as the whole endeavour of *Marxism & Sciences*) is dedicated precisely to this task. With this issue we inaugurate a new section of our journal: "From the Archives," where we will henceforth republish (and translate) pieces which make visible Marxist engagement with the sciences and the integrated concept of Science. Our first piece is a translation of a talk Albert Einstein gave in the Marxist workers school Berlin in 1930 as reported by Marxist philosopher Karl Korsch. We are happy to receive criticisms as well as suggestions for texts to be included in this section in future issues.

This issue is at the same time a special issue on the occasion of the centenary of Soviet philosopher Evald Ilyenkov, who is a prime example of earnest engagement with a Marxist approach to science and humanism in the context of historical (i.e., really existing) socialism. In his short piece "Humanism and Science" Ilyenkov stressed that the aforementioned distinction between science as an expression of rationality and humanism as pertaining to morality and "the needs of the heart" have to be traced to a common understanding of the role of knowledge and emancipation. This is of course no easy task, and criticism of what "science" means in the conditions of global capitalism today is necessary. However, as Ilyenkov already insisted—and we agree with him here, we cannot fail this task if we want to continue to unfold the emancipative potentials in all human practices and in the sciences in particular.

Many thanks go to all who have helped us preparing the issue and who donated to make it possible. We are an independent and international collective of scholars without any further funding. Therefore each issue testifies to the dedication of individuals from different countries and backgrounds and each time represents a tiny victory over the conditions of today's world.

Sascha Freyberg
On behalf of the editorial collective of *Marxism & Sciences*

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On the Nature of Thought: Centennial of Evald Ilyenkov

Siyaveş Azeri

IN HIS BOOK *ON IDOLS AND IDEALS*, Ilyenkov raises the question concerning the relation between human beings and machines, a problem that is also related to notions such as thinking machines (or machine-thinking) and the Artificial Intelligence. Ilyenkov states that the question of the so-called relation between human being and machine is in fact a variation of the question concerning the human-to-human relationship. In dealing with the Machine, human being is in fact dealing with another human being, say, the creator, the user, or the owner of the machine. "The 'Man-Machine' problem, if you delve a little deeper into it, turns out to be the problem of the relation of Man to Man, or, as the philosophers of the old school would put it, the problem of the relationship of Man to himself, although the relationship is not direct, but 'mediated' through the Machine" (Ilyenkov 1968, 30-31). Dealing with the question of the human-machine relationship superficially, in other words, dealing with it as a question in and by itself, in resemblance to the theological fallacy of dealing with religious questions as divine, other-worldly, and thus "purely" theological, means dismissing the human foundations of the question, and thus is a form of manifestation of fetishism—with the Machine being the fetish.

The aforementioned problem is related to the problem of the historically specific form of the social relations and the consequent self-conceptualization of human beings, the way they conceive of themselves, their humanity, personality, and skills and abilities, particularly thinking. Accordingly, the nightmarish fantasies concerning the subjugation of human beings under the Machine that have been haunting human im-

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agination for a long time are in fact forms of appearance of the relationship among people: the idea of human subsumption under the Machine and its will is a perverse form of the awareness of the subsumption of the human individual under the will of another; blaming the Machine as the source of inhumane, soulless conditions yielding to such subjugation means ignoring the real root of the problem: the inhumanity of the social relations that foster relations of domination and subjugation.

Within the historically specific social relations, that is, the capitalist relations of production, the Machine appears as the subject with human beings turning into objects; into appendages of the Machine. As Marx (1992) notes, it appears as if it is not the worker, the human individual that deploys the machine, but the contrary, it is the machine, apparently owning a soul of its own, that deploys human individuals. Human beings are deprived of their subjectivity and agency and appear as mere parts of the Machine (the system of machinery) (see chapter 15). As Ilyenkov notes, "Thus, the Machine more and more turns the Man into its own 'talking tool,' into the missing part of its mechanism and makes it—like all other parts —work to its fullest, to the point of wear and tear, to the point of exhaustion" (1968, 34). Consequently, the human individual disappears as a person in order to reappear as a part of the complex machinery, the "Big Machine," and his skills, including their thinking ability, are alienated from them in order to emerge as the skills and powers of the Machine. Thus follows conceptualizing human personality, their capabilities and thinking after the image of the Machine. Instead of the human person being the highest value and the goal for another human person, the Machine becomes the highest goal, the end towards which all history is destined to move. Human person, in its turn, is transformed into a mere object, a tool or "a speaking instrument, with the help of which this great all-consuming goal is realized. A means more or less suitable for the fulfillment of an end, and no more" (Ibid., 38).

A specific aspect of the aforementioned "technocratic-ideological" outlook is the way thought/thinking is conceived of. In other words, the answer to the question "what is thought/thinking" is a derivative of one's conception of the social relations among human individuals.

From a dialectical point of view, genuine human-thinking/thought always involves contradictions as it concerns proposing and realizing an "ideal," in contradistinction to the real/actual—the well-known contradiction between the "is" and the "ought." In a more general sense, every

act of thinking of any organism (capable of thinking) involves contradictions as thinking emerges only in the face of problems thus far unknown and unwitnessed, which should be surmounted if the organism is to survive. More specifically, human-thinking is a contradiction; human-thinking is thinking the non-existent in order to actualize it via actualizing thought. This does not mean attributing a mystical power to "thinking" and equating thought with chimeras. Genuine human-thinking is negating the existent by proposing a new actual—the thinkable is actual, the object of human-thought has to be real if it is to be thinkable; whatever that "comes to mind" or that is the object of human-thought is real because thinking/thought is "this-sided" [*Disseitigkeit*] (Marx 1976, 3) and its truth is a matter of praxis. The actualizability of human-thought is a manifestation of its ideality, a specificity that contrary to idealist assumptions follows from the this-worldliness or terrestriality of human-thinking, which in its turn is the source of its power and "materiality" that is expressed in the mutual transformation of the ideal into the material and the material into the ideal.

Idealisms, contrary to their appearance, tend to undermine the power of thought and limiting its reach and scope by relegating it to heavens as a strange substance; idealism is ideal-fetishism; it is the admission of the existence of the ideal independent from the individual but is a perverse form and as such it is the fetishization of thought.

The ideality of human-thinking is manifest in the (self)-image the human being reflects onto reality. In the middle ages, this image acquires the perverse, fetishistic form of the Christian ideal as the means for the realization of human essence and their salvation—the image of God as the savior of human beings from the horrors and the toil they are subject to, which in its turn is but a perverse image of the real conditions within which they exist. Under capitalism, and with the advent of the machine, thanks to "productivism" and "use-value romanticism" as forms of manifestation of capital's prevailing logic of fetishism expressed in the dictum "production for the sake of production" as a "shadow form of capital" (Murray 2016), this ideal may take the form of the machine-illusion, with " 'people' instead of looking at the Machine through the eyes of a Man and seeing in it a means and instrument of the Human Reasonable Will, look at Man from the point of view of the interests of the Machine, with the staring eyes of the Machine, and therefore see in him a non-living human individual" (Ilyenkov 1968, 41).

One of the most precise and succinctly put formulations of the dialectical contradictoriness of thinking is Hegel's formula that "the actual

is rational, and the rational is actual" (2001, 18). As Engels notes, this formula forms the revolutionary essence of Hegel's philosophy, as, contrary to its appearance, rather than sanctifying the existing order by rationalizing it, further points to the transitory nature of historical phenomena, that might have been "rational" and thus as much "actual" at a point in time but now, necessarily, they become irrational, hence unreal. On the one hand, Hegel's proposition turns into its own contrary since it admits that all that is actual carries the mark of "irrationality" from the outset, meaning that "all that exists deserves to perish" (Engels 2010, 359). On the other hand, it reveals the revolutionary essence of the Hegelian philosophy as the admission of the power of thought, which contradicts reality and posits a new actuality in its stead. The Hegelian formulation conceives of truth not as a set of readymade dogmatic statements and formulae, to be crammed in one's head or mind in form of procedures and algorithms but is a part and a constituent of cognition and its forms of realization that are subject to historical development of society, and the sciences and knowledge that are historically produced. According to Engels, this is as true as it is for the sphere of scientific cognition as it is true for the sphere of the so-called "practical" reason. "Just as cognition is unable to reach a definitive conclusion in a perfect, ideal condition of humanity, so is history; a perfect society, a perfect 'State,' are things which can only exist in the imagination. On the contrary, all successive historical states are only transitory stages in the endless course of development of human society" (Ibid.).

According to Ilyenkov, the power of thought is comparable to a "miracle" as it finds its "practical" expression in the action of the revolutionary masses, who while chanting the Marseillaise raising the tricolour flag of "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," the ideals that had been set before humanity, in the face of the (feudal) irrational actuality, as the new forms of reason and the actual by the Enlightenment thinkers. The contradiction between the actual and the rational has been once again resolved in favour of reason/thought only to encounter a higher form of contradiction revealing "the transitory character of everything and in everything" (Ibid., 360). In Ilyenkov's own words,

> The ideal—"the rational" ("proper"/"due"/the "ought")—turned out to be stronger than the "actual" ("existing"/the "is"), despite the fact that the "actual" was guarded by all the might of the state and the church, by the bastions of fortresses and offices, by the bayonets of soldiers and by the plumes of learned academicians, despite the fact that it was firmly entangled in the

> chains of thousands of thousands of years of habits and traditions, was sanctified by traditional church morality, art and law, established in the name of God. (1968, 61)

Although the triumph of the revolution and the Ideal was not absolute, and the power of the "actuality," incarnated in the rise of Napoleon as the new emperor, would eventually defeat the revolution and its ideals, yielding to the rebirth of hopelessness and misery on the side of the masses, the genie had got out of the bottle. One may speculate that the development of dialectics in its speculative form within the Hegelian system functioned as the philosophical counterpart to the revolution, its faith, and the rise and fall of the Ideal. Although Hegel had not drawn the aforementioned conclusions as sharply and explicitly, his system signified the logical necessity of the termination of the philosophical movement since Kant, an aspect of which had been abhorring contradictions.

Ilyenkov notes the relation between Kant's treating of logic and his approach to the "Ideal." With Kant logic becomes one of formality, indifferent toward the content of knowledge; the most important aspect of thought, accordingly, is non-contradictoriness and coherence of a logical series, even if it is pure absurdity (Ibid., 86). Furthermore, in his system, as much as in Fichte's, the Ideal becomes unrealizable. "According to Kant and Fichte, the ideal is absolutely similar to the horizon line, an imaginary line of intersection of the sinful earth with the heavens of truth, which moves away exactly to the extent that it is approached… everything ultimately comes down to a painful procedure of pacifying all of one's 'earthly' desires, aspirations, and needs" (Ibid., 79–80).

Kant's fantasy of the non-contradictoriness of thought (and logic as the science of thought/thinking) marks the inevitable failure of thought and reason not only in the face of contradictions inherent in new experiences, but also in face of past experiences as reason contains not only identities but also their polar opposite, that is, differences. That being the case, Kant's pure reason appears as the thought in the state of absolute inaction—non-contradictory thought is no thought.

This situation is reminiscent of the "Black Box" and its mystical, other-worldly silence of which Ilyenkov speaks in the "Mystery of the Black Box," the "Sci-Fi Prelude" of the *On Idols and Ideals*. After one of the "thinking machines" called Hamlet failed in resolving the riddle, "to be or not to be," and got into hysteria, the Automatic Civilization came up with a brilliant solution by dividing his task between to machines: the "to be" and the "not to be." This new design would be put into work

as a prototype for handling any contradiction; in the face of such a situation a pair of machines would be deployed one being in charge of, say, A, while the other would be in charge of, say, ~A. Still, in case there was a disagreement about the outcomes of the workings of the two polar machines or even in case of a misunderstanding that could develop into a contradiction, the inconsistent propositions would be submitted to the Black Box as input to be resolved and delivered by this superior machine as an output. However, the Black Box was silent; nothing would come out and the machines would then be convinced that there was in fact no contradiction and the problem had raised due to defects in their making and thus would rush to the surgical workshop for being repaired and for the dysfunctional hardware and software to be replaced. The reaction of the Black Box to all the entering contradictions and inconsistencies was a consistent silence; it was "illuminating the world with its benign wisdom. And everything went well" (Ilyenkov 1968, 20). At the beginning, there was another machine, "The Interpreter of the Great Silence," that would interpret the silence of the Black Box for other machines. However, eventually other machines realized that they didn't need the interpretation as they could get access to the Black Box's silence with the use of telepathy; as soon as they would face the slightest inconsistency, they would think of the image of the Black Box and would immediately experience a relief. As time goes by, the Automatic Civilization was developing alongside the Black Box and its divine silence: any controversial issue would be easily resolved by clarifying the meaning and the names by dividing the ambiguous term into two distinct and completely unambiguous ones.

> Thus, in particular, an end was put to the protracted dispute between two schools in machine historical science, one of which claimed that Man existed, and the other that Man did not exist. In accordance with the principle of the Great Silence and Economy of Thought, it was decreed that there was no Man, but there was a machine, which other machines called "man;" but this machine was so hopelessly primitive and stupid that calling it a Machine would be wrong and even insulting to genuine Machines; therefore, they decided to leave behind the name "man," denoting with this offensive word the machine-like ancestor of machines… So they decided: "Man" (with a capital letter, as a category) did not exist, although there was "man" with a small letter, as a proper name, as an offensive nickname for a faulty machine. And everything fell into place. (Ibid., 22)

As the Automatic Civilization developed further, machines came to the point to reach the absolute limit by tending to become like the Black Box. After a moment of high tension, all became clear to every machine:

there was no need to think further. Moreover, there was no need even the say this statement out loud… And as the machines proceeded to reveal the great secret of the divine silence of the Back Box, they faced what they already knew: there was nothing in the Black Box; nothing, but air; there was the secret of the Absolute, the Ideal, and the Ultimate. Now the machines would clearly know what they were supposed to do: they should not think (Ibid., 26).

Hence, we encounter a set of simple yet vital questions: Why thinking "happens?" And with thinking understood in its alleged "universal form," of which human-thinking and machine-thinking are supposedly specific types, comes about the question of the locus of thinking/thought: where is thought or where thinking is happening. The latter question is immediately related to the problem of the subject matter of logic with logic being conceived of as the science of the laws of thinking. This last definition, which seems to be accepted by all logicians, regardless of their being idealists or common sense philosophers, brings about another important question: "What is thinking?"

Ilyenkov argues that in a general sense, thinking cannot be defined unless all forms of thinking in their process of development are considered and analyzed; that being the case, such a definition, in Engels' words, will not be a definition. Yet, in a strict sense, we need a preliminary definition to start working with (2018, 9).

The traditional approach considers thought/thinking as an inner, silent speech and logic—as the science of laws of thinking—the investigation of verbalized thought/thinking: thinking can and should only be investigated in the form of its verbal, external manifestation (Ibid., 10). That being the assumption, the concept is equated with a "term" or a "signifying sign" and "judgment" is equated to "utterance" with thinking considered to be identical to constructing utterances or a system of utterances. Hence, the investigation of thinking is done away with to be replaced with the investigation of language, say, "language of science," of art, so on and so forth.

One particular problem that arises with such faulty identification is confusing the concept with the term. The difference between "concept", on the one side, and "term" or the "signifying sign" and the like on the other, is pivotal. Concept is a specific tool, an organ of thinking as much as other tools and organs of human body; "thinking body" is a "conceptualized body" or a "bodily concept" with body understood as social body; to put it differently, thinking body is the social body; it is body in society, the only body that is capable of human-thinking.

Identifying the concept with the term, the mainstream approach that is highly inspired by empiricism and crude substance materialism reduces logic into a branch of linguistics. With such an impoverished understanding of logic, human thinking is excluded from the scope of logical analysis. "Logic here cannot be a science of real laws of real human thinking but at best turns out to be a system of rules that 'must be' or 'may be' followed but are, unfortunately, broken at every step" (Ibid., 11). Furthermore, thanks to conventionality of rules, which reduces them into a matter of mere consensus, logic losses its right to objectivity—it loses its claim to the necessity and universality of its "laws."

Contrarily, for Hegel laws of thinking are considered to be laws or schemas of human activity with every form of activity conceived of as the manifestations of laws of thinking—logic. Hegel's importance lies in his admission of and insistence on the importance of deeds in understanding thinking, that is, activities, external deeds, are at least as much the manifestations of thinking as speech; to be clear, they provide a more genuine image of thinking than words. Hegel's introduction of practice into logic guarantees the objectivity of thought/thinking in two senses: genuine thought is objective as thinking concerns objects (particularly tools and artefacts); it is also objective in the sense that thought/thinking is a real activity and a material force—genuine thought is real. As Ilyenkov notes, "in Hegel practice serves as a link in the analysis of the process of cognition, and indeed as the transition to the objective truth" (Ibid., 13). In doing this Hegel anticipates Marx's introduction of practice into the theory of knowledge, that is, practice as a philosophical category, and his quest for demonstrating the "this-sidedness" of thought. As Marx notes in the 1844 Manuscripts, a non-objective being, a thing that is not objectivized is nothing; it is non-being. So, if thinking is not objective, it is not thinking; as non-objective thinking, that is, as thinking without an object outside itself it is unthinking and is devoid of any power (1975, 337). Marx follows Hegel's footsteps who included the objective determinations of things existing outside consciousness in logic as the science of thinking, albeit in a perverse manner as the self-manifestation and self-estrangement of mind. Still, with Hegel logic is saved from being a pure formality as he considers the objective determinations of things existing outside consciousness to be a part of logic (Ilyenkov 2018, 13). With Hegel we arrive at the idea of the historically formed and specific schema of action as the forms of human action carved in objectivity—the "ideal." Hence, his formulation of the whole social reality as "thinking in its other-being" (Ibid.).

A materialist dialectical critique of Hegel focuses on his failure in fulfilling the task of analyzing thinking and its manifestations in the historical real sense of the term; Hegel acts like a positivist when instead of paying attention the "activity," of which this logic provides the laws, treats the "laws of logic" as self-subsisting, universal laws from which activity emanates; or as Marx, in another context states, Hegel passes the state of his logic as the logic of the state. "[Hegel's] problem is that in his analysis of the history of humanity the 'activity of logic' absorbs his attention so much that he ceases to see behind it the 'logic of activity'" (Ibid., 14).This is the source of his idealism, of his fetishization of thinking/thought in the form of Spirit or Logic. Furthermore, in considering the external activity as a mere manifestation of thought, say of French revolution as the embodiment of Rousseau's and Voltaire's ideas, Hegel repeats the "ideologist's fallacy" of considering thought and idea as something by itself, which can only be encountered and is related or yields to another thought, idea. "While interpreting 'practice' exclusively as thinking in its external manifestation, i.e. as an idea (concept) embodied in space and time, Hegel cannot construct the true dialectics of human activity that expresses in its concepts the true logic of events, logic of actions, logic of the historical process" (Ibid., 15). Hence, the returning home of thought to its point of origin and affirming itself as absolute knowledge and absolute, abstract mind (Marx 1975, 330–331).

By reducing all forms of spiritual and material human culture into "manifestations" of thought, Hegel deprives himself from the opportunity to ask the question concerning the source of human thinking capacity: "where does this wonderful human capacity come from?" (Ilyenkov 2018, 18). What holds in case of Hegel also holds for all types of idealisms and fetishisms: the question is concerned with the source of thinking in general; why does an intelligent or rational being, or even an animal think? What is the source of this capacity? Where does it come from? As Ilyenkov notes, Hegel's answer to this question is "from nowhere." "It does not 'come from,' does not originate, but only manifests itself, expresses itself, since it is not conditioned by anything external—it is absolute ('divine') capacity, creative power and energy present in human beings from birth" (Ibid.). Hegel, thus, taking thinking and its definition (not in the restricted form but definition in general) for granted recapitulates the commonsensical understanding of thinking as something taken place inside one's mind or head and thus as a mental capability among other mental capacities. In doing this, he betrays the

revolutionary essence, "the true rational kernel" of his logic and conception of thinking, that is, its objectivity.

Thinking is the product of acting in a world populated by human artefacts; only here this special capability, human-thinking can flourish and develop. The artefacts themselves are the expressions or manifestations of former schemes of thought, which themselves are based on the schemes of activity. Thus writes Ilyenkov, "all 'logical forms' without exception that Hegel considers to be the immanent domain of the 'spirit' in fact 'express themselves and show themselves primarily' not in human language, as Hegel postulates, but only as constantly repeated schemes of the external—objective and objectively conditioned – human activity. These schemes are brought to consciousness in language only much later" (Ibid., 21). Thinking does not "wake up to self-consciousness;" to the contrary, consciousness, self-consciousness included, emerges only through the process of the constitution of human-thinking. Thinking in its human form is only possible in the social universe; so is consciousness—consciousness is a social relation.

Laws of logic, in other words laws of intelligent thinking are the forms and schemes of human activity in social nature with the use of tools and artefacts, which themselves are also interrelated. That is why forms and schemes of human thought matches the relation between things as laws of thinking are expressions of the real relations between objects and not a relation between signs or mere words. This is where Hegel still has something to offer in understanding the nature of sciences: that the rules, figures, signs, and the logical relations specific to each sphere of scientific knowledge-production are in fact relations between things mediated through human activity and human-to-human relationship (of course this requires turning Hegel on his feet). Hegel was aware of this but in a perverse way: the relation between things and the regularities of these relationships considered as objectifications of the Law, of the scientific law; such formulation is much more precise than understanding these regularities or "invariances" in terms of "conjectures" or mental or social constructs or phenomenologically acquired "essences."

> Thinking as an active capacity of any human being is born, comes into existence, and not 'expressed' as having been already present, in the immediate objective human activity that transforms the external world and that creates the objective human world (tools, products of labour, forms of relationships between individuals in acts of labour, and so on) and only after that it creates the 'world of words' and a specific capacity to treat words as its 'subject matter.' (Ibid., 22–23)

That dialectics is the science of the universal forms and laws that govern both being and thinking is just the "logically" necessary outcome of the emergence of human-thinking on the basis of human activity in social universe. Hence follows the resolution of the question concerning the relation or the identity of thought and being, of thinking and reality or the problem of the "reality of thinking" and thought. So conceived, thinking is a material necessity capable of grasping the essence of reality—the limit of thinking is the reality in its essence and not the notorious "thing-in-itself." Furthermore, thinking and logic are not mere formal processes; the whole social universe forms its subject-matter. Such a logic is the science of the laws of thinking as it is the science of history of the forms of thinking; it is necessarily non-idealistic and non-positivistic—logic as materialist dialectics of human activity and thinking.

The retreat from a dialectical conception of thinking to a positivistic view of thought has consequences far beyond the limits of the sphere of epistemology. At the political sphere it amounts to the sanctification of the existing order and the deification of the state. By making the "ideal" into a phenomenon of the past, Hegel draws the consequence that "beautiful individuality" belongs to humanity's childhood that has passed with no chance of a return. As Ilyenkov notes,

> The contemporary person can experience the naively beautiful stage of his spiritual development only in the halls of museums, only on a day off, given to him to rest from *the hard and joyless service of the absolute spirit*. In real life, he must be either a professor of logic, or a shoemaker, or a burgomaster, or an entrepreneur and *obediently perform the functions assigned to him by the absolute idea*. A comprehensively harmoniously developed individuality in the modern world with its fractional division of labor—alas!—impossible. (1968, 112–113, emphases added)

The individual person under the capitalist relations of production is incapable of initiating any change and is hopelessly obliged to submit to the harsh reality of capital's rule and the consequent dividing of human beings into their labour. We might lecture ourselves about the ideal yet the battle for actualizing it has been long lost.

To the extent that thinking itself is concerned, the idealist-positivistic conceptualization of thought presents it in form of a fetish either as presented by Hegel, as an inborn gift the source of which remains beyond the grasp of human understanding, or as a mechanical-algorithmic process of compiling information or data in form of signs or codes translatable into machine-language and thus an "ability" transferable into "intelligent" machines. Hence, the process of production of

knowledge and of cognition in general is conceived of in the form of an automatic mechanical procedure independent from the real, social individual. Such an impoverished understanding of thinking and genuine knowledge-production dismisses the simple yet fundamental questions concerning the nature of thought and human being's cognition of reality. "How does it happen that we directly perceive an event inside our own organism as an objective (located in external space) form of a thing, and "experience" our own internal state as something "other," as something outside ourselves? How and why do we see things outside rather than inside ourselves?" (Ibid., 212)

To put it differently, the question is that how changes on our cerebral cortex and other parts of our brain that are "internal" happenings yield the disposition of perceiving things outside the brain, outside ourselves as "external" entities? The knowledge of the working of the brain in reaction to physical, chemical, optical, and neural processes will add nothing to our understanding of the perception of external things in space and time.

This is so because "physiologists (and cybernetics) do not study mental abilities at all, but a completely different 'subject'—those material mechanisms with the help of which the corresponding active ability is realized. And mental abilities and their material mechanisms are completely different things, although inextricably linked. As different as, for example, the 'structure of a steam locomotive' and the result that a person arrives with its help, say, at the beaches of the Black Sea or meet one's relatives" (Ibid., 213).

Perception is not the formation of a mirror image of a body in another body but is a specific form of outward activity—"the transformation of visual impressions into the image of external things" (Ibid., 215). Human perception is accessing reality with the aid of imagination and other higher psychological functions. Once perception and its objectivity—externalization—as action is understood properly, the so-called "theory of reflection" can be raised on its feet: it is not the object that is reflected "in" the subject but it is the form of activity of the subject, the schemes of human action in the form of images, which are "reflected" onto the world of objects.

This specificity of human perception/cognition, which is responsible for its extensive reach and scope (in contradistinction to, say, animals), is a consequence of the human being's social existence—human beings are social animals whose organic and natural needs and desires are re-

placed by internalized social needs. "A person perceives/cognizes immeasurably more, in the world around him, because his gaze is controlled not by the organic needs of his body, but by the needs of the development of society and human culture, which he has internalized" (Ibid., 216). Social existence and cultural development are also responsible for the specificity and the extension of human thinking and intelligence in contradistinction to, say, the AI and the so-called intelligent machines and machine-thinking. The wealth of human thinking and intelligence is not a function of the quantity of the data available to them; furthermore, it is not distinguished, as alleged by Kaplan, from machinic intelligence by the functioning with limited data all the time (2016, 5–6), or by the ability for adaptation on the basis of "insufficient knowledge and resources" (Wang 2008, 371). These views recapitulate at best, the Hegelian stance that leaves the question concerning the source of human intelligence unanswered. Human intelligence, as much as its thought and cognition, owing to its social makeup, is, virtually speaking, independent from "sensory data" or "input." That being the case, human vision, cognition, thinking and intelligence is "impersonal."

To understand how and why human vision and cognition have become impersonal and disinterested toward "crude" individual bodily needs, i.e., to understand the emergence of "contemplation," of theoretical thought as a real, material force, we should consider the process of the emergence of individual sciences. Idealistic answer to the problem of the reality of thought or contemplation that explains it by reference to spiritual powers or the higher nature of human being that is allegedly irrelevant to the material human world is a non-answer—"it is a statement of fact passed off as an explanation" (Ilyenkov 1968, 218). The solution to the enigma is the material world itself; it is not the individual needs but the social organism that is the consequence of human beings collective labour, which is responsible for the emergence such needs and "curiosity" or "interests," that turns the human vision toward the farthest of the galaxies. "The human psyche was the product and consequence of the vital activity of this organism. It created the human-thinking brain and the human-seeing eye" (Ibid., 219).

A human individual is capable of cognizing, literally speaking, with a million eyes, of doing with a million hands and of thinking with the use of million brains; contradictory as it may seem, one's individuality and specificity as a human person is based on such social capability, of seeing with the eyes of another without becoming another—the capability that Ilyenkov calls "imagination." Imagination is the product of such

"collective" cognition: the ability to see through the eyes of another person without turning into them. Imagination is a fully historical product that "develops only in the course of handling objects created by man for man, with products and objects of creative human labour" (Ibid., 220).

Highly formalized, repeatable, algorithmic-procedural actions do not need imagination and its creative contribution to action; such automated processes can, in principle, be replaced hundred percent by machines. This is much true for the material life as it is for the "spiritual" life. Under the capitalist relations of production, however, thinking is reduced to such algorithmic procedures and the human person (or the so-called human mind) is conceived of after the image of the machine. Such dehumanizing image also has devastating implications in the way the educational system is organized: the fantasy of "inculcating 'mind' into a person in the form of a system of precisely and rigorously formulated 'rules' or operational schemas—in the form of a 'logic' " (Ilyenkov 2007, 10) the aim of which is not fostering independent thinkers—persons—but mediocre minds incapable of handling contradictions, i.e., incapable of handling tools and thinking intelligently, replaceable by machines—not, say, mathematicians but calculators "performing auxiliary operations but not engaged in the development of mathematical science" (Ibid., 36).

Through such a reduction, true human spiritual powers such as thinking and imagining are conceptualized as mechanical-algorithmic processes with the machine being the incarnation of capital as a social relation. Hence, the perverse relation between capital and human beings with the former assuming the role of the subject while the latter is submerged to the level of the mere object—the dead appears as alive and the living as dead—fetishism.

The consequent objectivization and pacification of human persons and the prevalence of mediocrity immediately affect the "scientific" image of reality as scientific inquiry and conceptualization is realized through active transformation of nature, which in its turn is subject to and determined by the *social form* of human activity. "Forms of thinking and forms of contemplation (that is, forms of imagination) arise only on the basis of 'humanized' (that is, processed, remade by labour) nature" (Ilyenkov 1968, 259). The consequent objectivization of nature and its conceptualization as a mere source of raw material utilized for the purpose of valorization of capital is yet another reflection of the aforementioned dehumanization of human persons through objectivization and pacification. Sciences are tools of "anthropomorphization" of nature.

Real anthropomorphization of nature is not a product of "mere fantasy," but is the consequence of social labour, which is responsible for humanization of nature as much as naturalization of humans. Humanization of nature means carving social goals into nature—socialized nature. Within dehumanizing social relations, social nature as much as social humanity is necessarily dehumanized—unsocial nature and unsocial sociality.

This situation, in its turn, reveals the essential unethicality and immorality of the capitalist social relations, their dehumanizing effect and their intrinsic fascistic tendencies; the fantasy of the thinking machine is a manifestation of such dehumanizing tendency—transference of agency from the human person to the machine, which is another manifestation of the intrinsic contradictoriness of the capitalist relations of production: "I want to force the machine to treat me 'humanly,' as a person, declaring myself a non-human, a thing, a partial part of a large machine, a part that agrees to any actions that the machine dictates to me" (Ibid., 282). As long as the conditions remain inhumane fetishism and the consequent denouncement of agency is an inevitability. The fantasy of a "thinking machine" that owns agency is cultivated and flourishes on the same soil from which religious perversion sprouts.

Humans, depending on the level of abstraction and the specific context, may be identified with anything from a stone, for being subject to gravity and mechanical laws, to a giraffe, because of being a mammal, to a calculator, when making calculations. The fact that humans can be identified with each and every of these objects is a showcase that they are not identical to any of them. This, in its turn, is the manifestation of the universality of the concept of human being which is a consequence of its sociality (Ibid., 285–286). Real, concrete personality emerges to the extent that the individual is subsumed under the universal concept of Human, the social species-being. In this sense, every individual is an "individual universality" or "universal individuality" (Ibid., 289). Personality of such universal individuality is a social phenomenon or a social relation; the person is what society has made out of it, that is, one's conditions of living, the social relations of production with their specific historical form within which the individual is born, acts, and matures.

Any human being in principle is capable of doing anything exactly because of such universality, which makes them different from being solely a chemist, a poet, a mathematician, or a truck driver. It is in this sense that we cannot attribute any "innate" specificity or property (innate skills or talents) to a human being (Azeri 2017, 691). Thus follows

the *differentia specifica* of a "thinking being," that is, a thinking human: "the ability to act according to the logic of another;" in other words, the ability to be intelligent; to be able to use tools and artefacts intelligently in accordance to their social significance, their ideality, in contrast to an unthinking being that acts only according to its own inherent "logic:" "The ability to handle anything in accordance with its own logic, and not in accordance with an a priori introduced scheme, not in accordance with an action stamp encoded in the hand or in the head, is precisely what makes a person a thinking being, a subject of thinking" (Ilyenkov 1968, 286). This is where anti-innatism and the communist demand of "to anybody what they need, from anybody what they can" meet the Aristotelian definition of intellect/"the thinking soul" as the "form of forms."

The discrepancy between a human's concept and their individual existence is the result of the limitations imposed on them by society, the social relations of production (Ibid., 289–90). This discrepancy, or the difference between the "real" individual and their concept, under capitalism, in actualized as forms of alienation. The task before us is providing the conditions that facilitates the correspondence of each individual to their concept. A specific step toward this goal is ending the division of human individuals to their labours or professions: "society has already become rich enough to allow itself to develop its culture not by turning the individual into a professionally limited, 'partial' person, but by maximizing the full development of all the possibilities inherent in him by nature" (Ibid., 290).

Ending the division of individual persons into their labours requires the humanization of social relations, which is possible only with demolishing the capitalist relations of production. It is on the basis of a just social order, that is, on the basis of the voluntary "association of social individuals"—communism—that reconstituting human persons as universal subjects, as the agents of their activity and of their thoughts is actualizable. Human-thinking requires agency; only agents of activity can think humanly.

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The first of the two issues (that form the volume 3) of the *Marxism & Sciences* dedicated to the centennial of Evald Ilyenkov consists of invaluable contributions in forms of original articles, essays, communications, cultural works, reviews, and interviews.

Vesa Oittinen, in his communication titled "Ilyenkov and Lenin's Dialectic" discusses Evald Ilyenkov's interpretation of Lenin's dialectics and dialectical method and applying it to criticize the positivistic philosophies and epistemologies prevalent in the Brezhnev era under the guise of the so-called "dialectical materialism." He further contextualizes Ilyenkov's attempt at and contribution to a materialist dialectics arguing that to such an end Ilyenkov follows the footsteps of Hegel in his criticism of Kant, Engels' idea on the discrepancy between Hegel's "revolutionary method" and "conservative system," and Lenin's interpretation and "appropriation" of Hegel's revolutionary dialectics.

Alan Diaz Alva, in his article titled "The Fetish of Intelligent Machines: From Ilyenkov to the *Neue Marx Lektüre*" attempts to ground the conception of AI-driven machines as 'intelligent machines,' i.e., as machines endowed with seemingly human-like intelligence in the forms of objectivity that correspond to capitalist relations of production and its fetishistic nature. Alva further argues that the idea of the intelligence of the machines and the AI should not be disregarded; yet, it might be evaluated under the light of the fetishistic forms of consciousness that are rooted in capitalist production and the on-going process of objectivation of the intellectual potencies of the material process of production. Alva utilizes a detailed reconstruction of Ilyenkov's concept of the "ideal" to form the centre of gravity of his argument which further facilitates a "dialogue" between Marxists and AI scholars. To this end, the author argues Ilyenkov's innovative interpretation of the "reflection theory," which contrary to "mainstream" understandings of it is not individualistic and in turn yields the possibility of a critique of tacit Cartesianism and cognitivism of some Marxist trends. Alva also critically discusses Ilyenkov's account of fetishism arguing that he has not sufficiently emphasized the uniqueness of capitalist forms of fetishism.

David Bedford and Thomas Workman, in their article titled "Ilyenkov and the Immanence of Logic" set before themselves the task of presenting Ilyenkov's dialectic as a radical thesis in comparison to Dewey's take on logic of inquiry while emphasizing Ilyenkov's ontological perspective of "a philosophy of entification." The authors tackle with a number of fundamental questions: What aspects of "the material" are considered when prioritizing it? How does "the material" ascend into the upper echelons of human culture? What precisely does it mean for materialist aspects to permeate abstract fields like philosophy or logic? Does the primacy of the material persist over time, or does cultural in-

fluence eventually reciprocate with the material domain? The main thesis of the article is constituted around the assumption that logic is immanent to the material world, which is further contextualized in relation to Ilyenkov's ontological take in contradistinction to Dewey's epistemological account of the immanence of logic. The authors' discussion implies that logic provides a universal scheme for subjective activity of transformation of nature and a universal scheme for changing any natural or socio-historical material linked to the objective requirements of this activity; this point is in agreement with Lenin's identification of logic, dialectics, and the theory of knowledge while resonates Engels' understanding of dialectics as the science of the laws of motion in nature and society.

Corinna Lotz and Paul Feldman, in their article titled "From Abstract to Concrete: The State as an Unquiet Ideal" aim for developing a Marxist theory of the state with the help of Ilyenkov's theory of the "Ideal" that conceives of the state in terms of "universal image-patterns." The authors also utilize Ilyenkov's methodological approach to Marx's concepts of the abstract and the ideal, as developed in his *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital*. A main claim at the heart of this article is that the state "is both a psychological/mental phenomenon as well as an external 'object'—or rather, a physical and psychological force and power that exists both within and outside individuals in the forms of social being and social consciousness. The state exists through its manifold institutions which exercise power. In this sense it is both concept and category." To further clarify their position, the authors set before themselves the task of explaining major theoretical issues, ranging from Ilyenkov's interpretation of Hegel's concept of Sublation (*Aufheben*), to the history of the concept of the "Ideal" in Western philosophical tradition, the history of Marxist state theory, the history of neoliberalism both in theory and practice, the history of the development of the British state, and, to conclude, they aim to make an intervention in the perennial Marxist debate on the status and transformation of the state and property relations in a post-revolutionary society.

Maxim Morozov, in his article titled "Evald Ilyenkov and Marek Siemek on Turning Marxism into A Science" focuses on the problem of disconnection between theory and reality utilizing the claim that the Soviet thinker Evald Ilyenkov and the Polish thinker Marek Siemek departed from a similar starting point aiming for developing a methodology that transforms Marxism into a science. Mozorov further criticizes

the failure of Marxisms in providing a comprehensive understanding of methodology owing to restoring to individual quotations from Marx and Engels isolated from their specific contexts. This means disregarding the dialectical relationship between theory and practice and arriving at a conceptualization of thought reminiscent of that pre-critical philosophical tradition, which in its turn amounts to overlooking fundamental epistemological questions. The consequent political position derived from such a theoretical stance, according to Mozorov, will also be inevitably problematic. Hence, Mozorov sets before himself the goal of contributing to a theory of knowledge that surmounts the disconnection between theory and practice on the basis of a materialist dialectical method. To this end, the author pertains to Ilyenkov and Siemek's contributions to the materialist dialectics that are rooted in their sophisticated elaborations on the German Classical Philosophy.

Emanuel Almborg contributes to this issue of the *Marxism & Sciences* with three interconnected works. Almborg's 2016 documentary, *Talking Hands*, which focuses on the Zagorsk "experiment"—the project under the directorship of the prominent Soviet psychologist and pedagogue Alexander Meshcheryakov devised for developing a systematic educational program for deaf-blind children—is published under the category of "Cultural Works."

Evald Ilyenkov collaborated with Meshcheryakov and actively took part in the Zagorsk experiment while relentlessly trying to promote the project. The documentary draws on the original footage that would be discovered some years later and the communications between Emanuel Almborg and Alexander Suvorov, one of the former students of the Zagorsk school, who is also an extraordinary psychologist. Almborg would write the script in collaboration with Suvorov. The documentary contains invaluable insight about Ilyenkov's pedagogical theories, his idea of the constitution of human mind and the interrelation between the two, and the fundamental role of education in the process of humanization.

In the same section, the second chapter of Almborg's doctoral dissertation, which carries the title "From Disability to Performativity – Reflections on the Process behind Talking Hands" has been published alongside the documentary. In this chapter, Almborg discusses the process of the making of the documentary and the ideas behind it.

We also have the privilege of publishing the first chapter of Emanuel Almborg's doctoral dissertation, titled "The Free Association of Abilities and Needs" in the Essays section. Almborg elaborates the idea that the

"Zagorsk experiment" is central to understanding communism in its non-official, "independent" form that is represented in the works of prominent figures such as Evald Ilyenkov alongside Alexander Meshcheryakov and Lev Vygotsky. Almborg views the Zagorsk project as the materialization of the communist statement, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." Accordingly, the Zagorsk project forces us to deeply reflect on the meaning of terms such as "ability" and "need" that Marx places at the heart of communism while describing the communist society as the facilitator of "all-around development of the individual" as a free person that has overcome capitalist exploitation and alienation.

The Reviews section of this issue includes a collective contribution titled "The Absent Educator: Following the Development of Deaf-Blind Children in *Talking Hands*" by Alsu Battalova, Ivan Kashcheev, Nikolai Kravchenko, Najma Layali, Sofya Matveeva, Anatolii Stepanov, my former undergraduate students and mentees at the School of Advanced Studies in Tyumen, Siberia whom I had the privilege to mentor and work alongside with for a few years. As it is clear from the title, this is a review of Almborg's aforementioned documentary where the authors discuss the concepts of humanness, its relation to education, the formation of human mind and the ideal goal of the educator as getting out of the road of development of the student in the context of the relationship between Alexander Suvorov and Evald Ilyenkov as presented in the documentary.

The interviewees of this issue that include both prominent figures and younger generation scholars are Arto Artinian, David Bakhurst, Pham Minh Duc, Sascha Freyberg, Isabel Jacobs, Martin Küpper, Kyrill Potapov, and Monika Woźniak. The interviewees answered a set of questions posed by me concerning the reasons for the reviving and/or growing interest in Evald Ilyenkov's ideas, the significance of Ilyenkov's philosophical stance, the actuality of his point of view and approach, and the thread, that keeps Ilyenkov's reflections on different issues and in different spheres together.

Last but not least; we have added a new category to our journal beginning from this issue: "From the Archives." This section of the current issue includes an archival work by Karl Korsch, which is originally in German and has been translated into English for the first time by two of our comeditors, Sascha Freyberg and Joost Kircz. The published text is titled "Karl Korsch 'Albert Einstein: Causality. Lecture at the Marxist Workers School 1930';" it consists of the notes made by Korsch during a

talk given by Albert Einstein to German workers in 1930 at the *Marxistische Arbeiterschule* Berlin (acronym: MASCH, Marxist workers school). Korsch writes at the beginning of his notes that "Einstein explains that he wants to tell the audience something about the laws of nature… We have all been taught that everything in nature is lawful, that there is nothing problematic about it. You only need to re-establish an initial state in the same way, then the same sequence will result. Such experiences give rise to the idea that perhaps everything else that happens in the world could follow the same pattern as a clock."

The translation is accompanied by an introductory commentary on Korsch's lecture notes, which has been written by Sascha Freyberg and Joost Kircz. Freyberg and Kircz elaborate on the context of the lecture, introduce the *Marxistische Arbeiterschule*, some of Korsch's ideas, the relation between Einstein and the Marxistische Arbeiterschule, and finally the importance of the lecture and Korsch's notes. They discuss that Einstein was concerned with the idea of causality and its fate in the face of the emergence of quantum mechanics, where, in contradistinction to classical mechanics, we do not deal with real objects but "with 'states' of a 'system' in N-dimensional vector space (aka Hilbert space) with the wave function pictured as "being spread out in a many dimensional 'flat,' Eucledian, space and hence an attribute (e.g. spin, polarisation, place of a particle) having no firm value."

The authors further discuss,

> It is interesting to note that Einstein in his lecture stresses the 'subjective' element in scientific theory. It is not sufficient to just observe, we also act in the process, at least via our tools of understanding. This is in correspondence with the Lenin quote which was put on the covers of the MASCH programs: *Ohne revolutionäre Theorie, keine revolutionäre Bewegung* ("Without revolutionary theory, no revolutionary movement," see fig. 1).

The commentary ends with a succinct analysis of the significance of the ideas raised in the lecture and the notes in the present-day scientific context and its political implications.

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Biography

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The Fetish of Intelligent Machines: From Ilyenkov to the *Neue Marx Lektüre*

Alan Díaz Alva

ABSTRACT: Recent critical scholarship in the nascent field of critical AI studies has vigorously defended the thesis that the forms of 'machine intelligence' deployed by data-intensive capital today (such as machine learning and deep neural networks) depend for their existence on material factors that range from rare minerals to human subjectivity, experience and social practice broadly speaking. Thus, the alleged 'intelligence' or 'smartness' of these technologies is often denounced as a mystified appearance of objectified human activity that ought to be unveiled. While accepting the contemporary relevance and importance of these interventions, in this article I will explore a different line of critique. I will dwell on the idea that machines appear in a certain way in virtue of their social form and the social relations they are entangled with. I will argue that, instead of dismissing the idea of 'intelligent machines' as a mere ideological semblance, it is crucial to also ask *why* and *how* it is that machines appear as intelligent or as endowed with 'intellectual life.' In other words, I will not defend or critique the idea that machine intelligence might be, at bottom, objectified human activity; nor will I denounce the attribution of any kind of intelligence to machines as false. Rather, my purpose is to present the argument that intelligence appearing as an attribute of capitalist technology is not merely an illusion, but rather a *necessary* appearance of capital's development. To develop this Marxist critique of the notion of machine intelligence, I will draw primarily from two theoretical sources. Firstly, the systematisation of Marx's critique of fetishism developed by authors in the tradition of the *Neue Marx Lektüre,* particularly in Clara Ramas San Miguel's recent work. I will try to show how such readings demonstrate the fetishism of machines as a strict continuity of the commodity fetish. Secondly, this will be complemented with Evald Ilyenkov's theorisation of the ideal as a phase of social practice. While Ilyenkov did not treat the problem of fetishism in a systematic fashion, I argue that his account of the dialectical relation between thought and being is crucial to understand how knowledge can be 'absorbed' in technology and how it can subsequently assume a mystified socially objective appearance.

KEYWORDS: Fetishism, machine intelligence, Ilyenkov, the ideal, *Neue Marx Lektüre*.

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Introduction

In his 1856 speech at the anniversary of the People's Paper, Marx observes that "all our invention and progress seem to result in endowing material forces with intellectual life, and in stultifying human life into a material force."[1] While we might be tempted to write off this statement as a passing comment or a polemic jab, it is actually a poignant locution of a line of argument that is more systematically expounded by Marx in several other occasions. Perhaps one of the most salient instances is the famous (or infamous) section of the *Grundrisse* known as the 'Fragment on Machines.' There we can read the following: "The accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain, is thus absorbed into capital, as opposed to labour, and hence appears [*erscheint*] as an attribute of capital and more specifically of *fixed capital*." (Marx, 1973, 694). This short passage contains the essential elements that have been the starting point for many Marxian analyses of the relationship between labour, knowledge, and technology which might already be very familiar to us. Reading this passage can summon echoes of Harry Braverman's seminal deskilling thesis and what then became known as labour process theory, as well as (and perhaps more obviously) postoperaist discussions about the general intellect and its role in so-called postfordism. The various virtues and pitfalls of these accounts notwithstanding, the purpose of my own analysis is somewhat different.

Marxian theory has been a frequent source of inspiration for the analysis of socio-technical developments since it arguably presents us with "the most comprehensive critical account of the fusion of commodification and technology" (Dyer-Witheford et al. 2019, 3). When it comes to contemporary technological developments, recently a lot of attention has been drawn by the field of artificial intelligence and the crucial role that the range technologies assembled under this umbrella term might play for the future development of the capitalist mode of production. Among several other things, recent critical scholarship has vigorously emphasized that the forms of 'machine intelligence' which are predominantly deployed by data-intensive capital today (such as machine learning and deep neural networks) depend for their existence on material factors ranging from rare minerals to human subjectivity, experience, and labour. In particular, it has been emphasized that the data on which these algorithmic systems are

1. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1856/04/14.htm

trained can be traced back to social practice broadly speaking. Such interventions can perhaps be described as subscribing to something akin to what Matteo Pasquinelli calls a "labour theory of machine intelligence," a position which "declare[s] computing infrastructures as a concretion of labour in common" (Pasquinelli 2023 120). In opposition to a historiography of technology that might be tempted to narrate the story of artificial intelligence in purely scientific and mathematical terms, Pasquinelli argues that "the 'intelligence' of technological innovation [not only AI] has often originated from the imitation of these abstract diagrams of human praxis and collective behaviour" (Ibid., 6).

Materialist critiques of AI—or critiques of AI from the standpoint of labour—have insistently tried to cut through the hype which can often serve to occlude the precarious click-work labour (Altenried 2022) and the gargantuan amounts of socially-produced data that these systems require to operate. Instead of the rarefied or disembodied computational wizardry hailed by tech pundits, we are presented with an "expanded view of artificial intelligence as an *extractive industry*" which combines infrastructure, capital, and labour (Crawford 2021, 15). In such critical portrayals of AI one can identify a certain penchant for demystification. The point is to show that, underneath the ideological veil embroidered with Silicon Valley hyperbole, artificial intelligence is actually all-too-human. We find analogies comparing AI systems with fake 'Potemkin villages' and invitations to see automation as a charade that would be better described as "fauxtomation" (Sadowski 2018; Taylor 2018). In her influential book *Atlas of AI,* Kate Crawford portrays AI from the standpoint of labour in the following terms:

> Contemporary forms of artificial intelligence are neither artificial nor intelligent. We can—and should—speak instead of the hard physical labour of mine workers, the repetitive factory labor on the assembly line, the cybernetic labor in the cognitive sweatshops of outsourced programmers, the poorly paid crowdsourced labor of Mechanical Turk workers, and the unpaid immaterial work of everyday users. (Ibid., 69)

Artificial intelligence, we are told, is neither artificial, autonomous, nor intelligent. Instead, it is fundamentally sociopolitical, and the act of ascribing it with 'intelligence' tends to hide more than it reveals. Pasquinelli claims that this is not an exclusive feature of our times: "Mythologies of technological autonomy and machine intelligence are nothing new: since the industrial age they have existed to mystify the role of workers and subaltern classes" (Pasquinelli 2023, 9). The myth of machine intelligence,

argues historian of science Simon Schaffer, is built on the rendering invisible of human labour: "To make machines look intelligent it was necessary that the sources of their power, the labour force which surrounded and ran them, be rendered invisible." (quoted in ibid.)

One thing must be clarified before moving forward. I regard this materialist strand of critical AI studies as absolutely crucial to the extent that it has provided us with a much-needed counterpoint to the fanfare and ideological stupor that often surrounds these technological systems today. I find the labour theory of machine intelligence compelling insofar as it highlights "the role of collective knowledge and labour as the primary source of the very 'intelligence' that AI comes to extract, encode, and commodify" (ibid., 9). However, the path that I want to follow into the problem of machine intelligence is rather different—albeit, I would argue, complementary. Another crucial aspect of the relationship between intelligence, labour, and machinery comes to the fore if we pay attention to the dialectical nuances implied in Marx's own account of technology.

The path that I want to take reiterates, at a different level of concretion, a central methodological motif of several contemporary readings of Marx such as the *Neue Marx Lektüre* and value-form theory. Authors in these currents suggest that Marx's critique of political economy and his theory of value should not be reduced to an attempt to lay bare the exploitative class structure of capitalism at the 'hidden abode of production' and identify labour as the substance or content of value. While it is certainly true that an important conceptual move in *Capital* is the 'descent' from the appearance of capital as self-valorising value to its origin in the use value of commodified labour, this is only half of the story. Marx's crucial innovation and central "expository move," Backhaus argues, lies in trying to answer the question of "*why this content assumes that form*" (Backhaus 1980, 101), a question which, translated to Hegelese, addresses "*the dialectic between ground and phenomena*" (Ramas 2021, 248). In other words, it is the attempt to show how the surface appearances or false immediacies of the capitalist world are socially determined. If the aforementioned materialist critiques of AI achieve the unveiling of the ground—human labour—behind the phenomena—machine 'intelligence'—what I intend to do is to tread the inverse path.

Thus, I would like to dwell on the idea that machines appear in a certain way by virtue of their social form and the social relations they are entangled with. In other words, it is not my aim to examine the possibility of attrib-

uting intelligence, of one kind or another, to machines. The concept of intelligence is a historical one, and it would certainly be possible to argue that machines (and other non-human entities) can be described as 'intelligent' if we think beyond our usual anthropomorphic models of what intelligence is and can be (Bridle 2022). However, instead of searching for a concept of intelligence that could be adequate to describe the peculiar capacities for problem-solving that these systems for statistical pattern recognition display, I want to start with something simpler or more immediate. I want to stay with the ideological semblance of 'intelligent machines,' that is, the vague and rather irreflexive understanding of sophisticated machines as displaying a form of intelligence which is of the same 'kind' that we humans display. This is the sort of intelligence attribution that the contemporary materialist analyses of AI so staunchly criticise. However, I want to dwell in it for a moment without trying to dispel or explain it away. I want to argue that, in addition to disclosing the objectified human activity at the heart of machine intelligence,[2] it is also crucial to ask *why* and *how* machines appear as intelligent or as endowed with 'intellectual life' in the first place. To advance a claim that will be elaborated in greater detail in what follows, my purpose is to develop the argument that intelligence appearing as an attribute of capitalist technology is not merely an illusion, but rather a *necessary* appearance of capital's development.

Tracing this second path of inquiry requires that we focus on two interrelated processes or dynamics that are already present in Marx's account: the processes of 'absorption' and 'appearing.' Or speaking in more precise terms, the process of objectification of knowledge into machinery and its relationship to the process of inversion of cause and effect whereby the products of social labour appear as inherent attributes of capital itself, separated from and dominating labour as an 'alien power.' The first process is often described using notions such as 'absorption,' 'embodiment,' or 'in-

2. Despite the crucial role that the harvesting of socially-produced data has for these algorithmic systems, James Steinhoff has argued that the emergence of 'synthetic data' can be seen as a development wherein contemporary data-intensive capital threatens to dispense from the human element that it currently relies on. Synthetic data is artificially created through generative models (such as GANs) and simulated environments; it "is data which is not a trace, copy, or recording, but the product of a computational process. Synthetic data thus purports to attenuate the connection between data and people by synthesizing data" (Steinhoff 2022, 5). Furthermore, he claims that, beyond providing an alternative to surveillance as the source of data, synthetic data "also provides a novel technical means for continuing a historical tendency within capitalism toward the autonomisation of the circuit of capital" (ibid, 2). In other words, it can be seen as the 'data adequate to capital' since it would seem to comply with the tendency, immanent to the logic of capital, of "rendering the valorisation process autonomous from human subjectivity" (ibid, 9).

corporation.' What does this mean? How can social knowledge be embodied in technology and what transformation does it undergo in the process? More often than not, these questions are not broached, which in turn makes the subsequent inversion of appearances hard to understand.

To approach this question, I will first turn to the work of Evald Ilyenkov, and in particular his concept of the ideal. Ilyenkov was imbricated in the Cold War Soviet 'algorithmic culture,' an intellectual milieu which distinguished itself from its Western counterpart by endorsing a more holistic (and less mechanistic) approach to the problem of human activity and intelligent machines.[3] Soviet AI theorists were critical of the mind-machine analogy of the American cyberneticians, and this "prevented [them] from regarding an intelligent machine, or computer, as a 'thinking' entity in its own right. For them, computers could only ever be tools to augment inherently human creative capacities" (Kirtchik 2023, 2). Ilyenkov himself engaged widely in these discussions, criticising such notions of machine intelligence for having misunderstood the social nature of thought and the dialectical character of human reason.[4] On the other hand, he was also highly critical of the Soviet intelligentsia's penchant for technocracy in their attempts to retrofit Marxist orthodoxy with cybernetics and other contemporary scientific novelties.[5]

Echoing the critiques of AI from the standpoint of labour mentioned above, in Ilyenkov's view, "far from being individual, intelligence results from the social and material activity of generations of people" (ibid., 6). Ilyenkov's concept of the ideal is useful to understand the notions of knowledge and social intelligence embodied in machines insofar as it presents us with "an original approach to an antireductionist understanding of the relationship between thought and being" (Levant 2015, 169). After explaining this approach, I will question to what extent it can also help us elucidate how this process of externalisation can be derailed, leading to a

3. I thank one of the reviewers for pointing me towards this aspect of Ilyenkov's work.
4. "The Western technical intelligentsia, including the cybernetic and mathematical intelligentsia, is therefore entangled in the problem of 'man-machine' because they don't know how to formulate it properly; that is, as a social problem, as a problem of the relationship between man and man, mediated by the material body of civilization, including the modern machine technology of production." (quoted in Kirtchik 2023, 2)
5. In a recent text, Keti Chukhrov (2020) incisively explores the relevance of Ilyenkov's critique of cybernetic and machinic intelligence today, reading him alongside contemporary authors such as Reza Negarestani and Luciana Parisi. She pays special attention to his 1968 sci-fi/pamphlet "The Mystery of the Black Box," along with several other sources yet untranslated to English.

fetishistic inversion of appearances whereby machines appear to be endowed with 'intellectual life.'

The Ideal as a Phase of Social Practice

In the Postface to the Second edition of *Capital Volume 1*, Marx writes that "the ideal is nothing else than the material, transplanted into the human head and translated there" (Marx 1990, 102). While this could easily be regarded (as it has been) as an instance of the classic reflection theory of knowledge that prevailed in Marxist orthodoxy, Ilyenkov's reading leads us towards an entirely different direction. We should not, he argues, interpret the notion of 'the human head' naturalistically but rather culturalhistorically,[6] and if we read the passage in its proper context as a polemic against Hegel, we "must conceive the act of birth of the ideal from the process of social man's objective-practical activity" (Ilyenkov 1977, 270).

One of the main sources of inspiration for Ilyenkov's concept of the ideal is Marx's theorisation of the value-form. As many contemporary readers of Marx have emphasized, the whole thrust of his critique of the classical concept of value is predicated on the attempt to elucidate its paradoxical reality as an abstract form which bears no relation to the material properties of the commodity in which it is 'incarnated,' but is nevertheless endowed with a socially objective reality. In a similar vein, Ilyenkov reads the value-form as an ideal form, and as the key to understand the 'sensuous-suprasensuous character' of commodities. However, Ilyenkov goes well beyond the critique of political economy to identify, in Marx's theory of value, a broader philosophical insight about the relationship between the ideal and the material vis-à-vis social practice—an insight which today is more commonly identified through the notion of *real abstraction*. Like value, "the ideal has an objective existence in human activity—in the process of creating ideal representations of the material world, and the reverse process in which these representations inform human activity" (Levant 2014, 7).

6. "When Marx defined the ideal as the material 'transposed and translated inside the human head,' he did not understand this 'head' naturalistically, in terms of natural science. He had in mind the socially developed head of man, all of whose forms of activity, beginning with the forms of language and its word stock and syntactical system and ending with logical categories, are products and forms of social development. Only when expressed in these forms is the external, the material, transformed into social fact, into the property of social man, i.e. into the ideal" (Ilyenkov 1977, 262).

What do these ideal representations that emerge through social practice comprise? Ilyenkov invokes the notion of 'social consciousness' from the German Idealist tradition and frames it as the "historically formed and historically developing system," a series of "forms and patterns ... of humanity's 'collective reason'" (Ilyenkov 2014, 47). For Ilyenkov, this system encompasses all kinds of norms and rules with varying degrees of 'thickness' (Daston 2022) and formalisation, from "ritually legitimised patterns of activity" to "the logical norms of reasoning" (Ilyenkov 2014, 47-48). Borrowing—and modifying—a term from Bogdanov, Ilyenkov also describes these patterns as 'socially organised experience' grounded on "stable, historically crystallised patterns, standards, stereotypes and 'algorithms'" (ibid., 52).[7] These are 'social algorithms,' independent and opposed to individual will and consciousness as external and objective social forms.[8]

This is, however, only half of the picture. For Ilyenkov it is crucial to avoid the idealist derailing of such a viewpoint, one which would take this social objectivity as always already idealised. To avoid this, he emphasizes the constitutive entanglement of the ideal and the material within the same dialectical process. Thus, the real problem is not the particular social reality of the ideal per se, but rather "the mutual transformation of the 'ideal' and the 'material' *occurring in the course of an actual process*" (ibid., 36). Alex Levant argues that this processual dimension is one of the most striking features of Ilyenkov's concept of the ideal. The ideal is understood as a *phase* in the broader process of the transformation of matter by social practice. Levant writes that understanding the ideal in this way,

> enables [Ilyenkov] to capture several moments of its existence–matter invested with meaning in the process of human activity, which comes to inform the subsequent transformation of the idealised material world ... As individuals, we enter an already *idealised material world*, which we continue to transform, as we materialise the ideal we inhabit in our own activity. (Levant 2015, 176–177)

7. In Bogdanov's tektology, the term 'socially organised experience' is predicated on a radically empiricist epistemology which was attacked by Lenin (among others) as idealist or subjectivist. See Backhurst (1991, 35-36). In light of Ilyenkov's dialectical conception of the ideal-material, it would be safe to assume that he is repurposing this term in the context of these theoretical disputes. I thank one of the reviewers for pointing this out to me.
8. "This system comprises all the common moral norms regulating people's daily life-activity, as well as the legal precepts, the forms of state-political organisation of life, the ritually legitimised patterns of activity in all spheres, the 'rules' of life that must be obeyed by all, the strict regulation of the workplace, and so on and so forth, up to and including the grammatical and syntactical structures of speech and language and the logical norms of reasoning." (Ilyenkov 2014, 47-48)

To emphasise this processual definition, instead of the notion of 'the ideal' (which can lead us to represent it as a substance distinct or opposed to the material) perhaps it is more useful to think about it in terms of *idealisation*. As such, we ought to understand idealisation as a particular phase of the broader process of the human transformation of the material world. Its dialectical counterpart is the phase of *materialisation*, that is, the objectification or reification of the ideal. In the following quote from *Dialectics of the Ideal* Ilyenkov makes this clear:

> The process by which the *material* life-activity of social man begins to produce not only a material, but also an *ideal* product, begins to produce the act of *idealisation* of reality (the process of transforming 'the material' into 'the ideal'), and then, having arisen, 'the ideal' becomes a critical component of the material life-activity of social man, and then begins the opposite process – the process of the *materialisation* (objectification, reification, 'embodiment') of the ideal. (Ilyenkov, 2014, 36)

This process whereby the ideal is objectified is absolutely crucial to Ilyenkov insofar as, without it, "ideality can only have an illusory, phantasmal existence. It becomes real only in the course of its reification, objectification (and de-objectification), alienation and dis-alienation" (Ilyenkov 2014, 60). In other words, taking his cue from Hegel, Ilyenkov argues that the 'forms and patterns' that constitute 'humanity's collective reason' remain invisible, unknown, or 'phantasmatic' to ourselves until they are made tangible in the 'inorganic body' of humanity; until they are embodied in the "system of things (their forms and relations)" (ibid.) which mediate between individuals engaged in the collective task of social production and reproduction.[9] These mediating cultural artefacts assume various shapes, such as,

9. "Yes, Hegel understood the situation with greater breadth and depth than the 'Fichtean philosopher'; he established the fact that before it is able to examine itself, 'spirit' must shed its purity, unblemished by 'tangible matter,' and its transparent nature, and must turn itself into an object and in the form of this object oppose itself to itself. At first in the form of the word, in the form of verbal 'embodiment,' and then in the form of instruments of labour, statues, machines, guns, churches, factories, constitutions and states, in the form of the grandiose 'inorganic body of man,' in the form of the sensuously perceptible body of civilisation which for him serves only as a mirror in which he can examine himself, his 'other being,' and know through this examination his own 'pure ideality,' understanding himself as 'pure activity.' Hegel fully realised that ideality as 'pure activity' is not directly given and cannot be given 'as such,' immediately, in all its purity and undisturbed perfection; it can be known only through an analysis of its 'incarnations,' through its reflection in the mirror of palpable reality, in the mirror of the system of things (their forms and relations) created by the activity of 'pure spirit.' By their fruits ye shall know them – and not otherwise. The ideal forms of the world are, according to Hegel, forms of 'pure'

> … words, books, statues, churches, social clubs, television towers, and (above all!) the instruments of labour, from the stone axe and the bone needle to the modern automated factory and computer technology. In these 'things' the ideal exists as the 'subjective,' purposeful form-creating life-activity of social man, embodied in the material of nature. (Ilyenkov 2014, 77)

In Marx's account, the concept of value is the key to understanding a historically specific form of the socialisation of labour and the organisation of social reproduction that follows from it. From an Ilyenkovian perspective, we can understand value as an ideality which emerges from certain patterns of social activity and is 'incarnated' in the products of labour. Although it has nothing in common with the corporeal form of the commodity, it is only by means of this 'expression' or 'reification' that it can acquire an objective reality[10] and can then face the individual consciousness as a real abstraction with a certain normative import. As it was already mentioned, Ilyenkov extracts the main features of a more general philosophical framework from Marx's theorisation of the value-form. However, I think that he does not place enough emphasis on a crucial part of this theory: the problem of fetishism.

In *Dialectics of the Ideal* Ilyenkov does not treat the problem of fetishism in a systematic manner. He explains that fetishism enters the scene when "properties are attributed to an object, precisely in all its crude corporeality, in its directly perceived form, that in actual fact do not belong to it and have nothing in common with its sensuously perceptible appearance" (Ilyenkov 2014, 46). As we saw, these properties are the "forms and relations of things" resulting from human activity which now appear as properties of things themselves (ibid., 77). Ilyenkov describes the existence of "fetishism of all kinds, from religious to commodity fetishism, and, moreover, the fetishism of words, of language, symbols and signs" (ibid., 54).

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activity realised in some material. If they are not realised in some palpable-corporeal material, they remain invisible and unknown for the active spirit itself, and the spirit cannot become aware of them. In order to be examined they must be 'reified,' that is, turned into the forms and relations of things. Only in this case does ideality exist and possess determinate being; only as a reified and reifiable form of activity, a form of activity that has become and is becoming the form of an object, a palpable-corporeal thing outside consciousness, and in no case as a transcendental-mental pattern of consciousness, or the internal pattern of the 'self,' distinguishing itself from itself within itself, as it turned out with the 'Fichtean philosopher.'" (Ilyenkov 2014, 59-60)

10. "Therefore, Marx characterises the commodity form as an ideal form, that is to say, as a form that has absolutely nothing in common with the real, corporeally palpable form of that body, in which it is represented (that is, reflected, expressed, reified, objectified, alienated, realised) and by means of which it 'exists,' possesses 'being.'" (Ilyenkov 2014, 61)

He, however, does not seem to rigorously distinguish between them, identifying the fetishism of commodity and money with every other form of idol-worship.[11]

It would seem that, by framing the value form as one instance of the ideal among others, Ilyenkov also elides the possibility of distinguishing the specifically capitalist form of fetishism—a rather considerable shortcoming if we consider that Marx used the term as a rigorous concept and not merely as an analogy or metaphor. In other words, if we understand fetishism merely as a common by-product of the idealisation of matter, we miss the opportunity to further specify the way that this takes place under capitalist conditions and the role that the value-form plays in this dynamic. If the ideal is a phase in the process of the social transformation of the world, then the way this process unfolds will depend on *how* social practice is organised. How would social practice have to be organised for the process of idealisation-materialisation to result in commodity fetishism? What can this tell us about the process whereby the products of labour become bearers of ideality?

Fetishism and Marx's 'Theory of Appearance'

While the concept of fetishism was almost entirely neglected by orthodox Marxism, it would later be regarded by other strands of Marxism as the key to interpreting the critique of political economy as an immanent critique of the process whereby capitalist society constitutes itself. A common thread running through these readings is the idea that fetishism is not just a matter of contingent and subjective confusion but is rather anchored in the everyday social practices of capitalist society. Several contemporary interpreters of Marx have also granted a central place to the problem of fetishism in the overall architecture and methodology of Marx's critical project. Isaac Rubin was the earliest proponent of this view, going as far as to claim that the "theory of fetishism is, *per se*, the basis of Marx's entire economic system, and in particular of his theory of value" (Rubin 1973, 5). Currents such as the *Neue Marx Lektüre* and so-called value-form theory have followed suit, emphasising the strategic role of fetishism in showing how classical political economists were "incapable of thinking an abstract

11. "Of course, real talers in no way differ from the gods of primitive religions, from the crude fetishes of a savage who worships (precisely as his god!) a real, actual piece of wood, a piece of rock, a bronze idol or some other similar external object." (Ilyenkov 2014, 45)

objectivity, the spectral objectivity of the socioeconomic object" (Backhaus 1980, 57).

More recently, in her remarkable book *Fetiche y mistificación capitalistas,* Clara Ramas San Miguel has taken these ideas even further. She uses the concepts of fetishism (and mystification) as the organizing principles for a systematic reconstruction of the entire critique of political economy, and extrapolates them in order to sketch a broader 'theory of appearance' that, she argues, is implicit in Marx.[12] In her view, Marx's project implies a particular 'concept of reality' and a specific way of approaching the latter through a critical materialist method. She claims that we should read the critique of political economy as the critique of a process of social constitution and reproduction in which "the traditional relationship between being and reality is altered" (Ramas 2021, 55). She goes as far as to claim that we can read Marx's critique of political economy as a "sort of ontology that inquires about the being of things in their historical determination, that is, it asks what it means to be a thing in general 'under the conditions of the capitalist mode of production'" (ibid., 264).

What kind of 'reality' is given in modern society and what are the specific tools that Marx's critical materialism provides us with? How does it differ from the positivist or vulgarly empiricist approaches that one can find in sociology, economics, and orthodox Marxism? As a *critical* approach, Marx's mature work contains this problem 'in negative' form, i.e. it is more a "question of not-being, of the effectivity of not-being, a protagonism of appearance in an order of things, that of modern society, defined by a play of forms of appearing and modes of displacement, inversion, and transfiguration of what can only appear and be effectively real *in this way*." (ibid., 256) Thus, it is a question of the *necessary form of appearances* and the role they play in capitalist society. The specificity of Marx's 'materialist method' lies in the fact that he is not content with showing the essence behind these inverted appearances—something that Ricardo had already done by showing that behind value lies labour time—but instead focuses on immanently unveiling the way in which they come into being. As he writes in a famous footnote from *Capital Vol.1*:

12. A great deal of Ramas's work focuses on distinguishing fetishism from another specifically capitalist structure of appearance: that of mystification. In her view, previous commentators have elided this distinction and have seen the terms as interchangeable, while in fact they are entirely different and pertain to different sections of Marx's critique. This is not the place to delve into the topic of mystification since, if we accept her argument, it enters the picture at a different level of concretion in Marx's categorical development that does not concern us here directly.

> It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly kernel of the misty creations of religion than to do the opposite, i.e. to develop from the actual, given relations of life the forms in which these have been apotheosized. The latter method is the only materialist, and therefore the only scientific one. (Marx 1990, 494n4)

Where does fetishism originate? In his analysis of the commodity fetish, Marx clearly states that "it arises from the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them" (ibid., 165). In other words, it arises from the particular way that, in capitalist society, private or individual labours come to be part of the totality of social labour *only* through the mediation of the market. The market is, to put it roughly, a space where the products of labour are related, commensurated, and compared to each other. What this means, then, is that under these conditions the social relation between people *can only* take place through the mediation of relations established between things in the market; it is only the exchange of things that allows individual labours to relate to each other and become 'active members' of the totality of social labour. In short, "private labours receive their social character only through establishing a relationship between things" (Ramas 2021, 79). It is precisely here that the fetishization of social relations takes place, manifesting themselves under the interrelated social forms of the commodity-form, the value-form, and the money-form.[13] However, in the capitalist mode of production, the fetishism that arises with commodity exchange and money spreads far and wide. As Marx writes:

> All forms of society [*Gessellshaftsformen*] are subject to this distortion, in so far as they involve commodity production and monetary circulation. In the capitalist mode of production, however, where capital is the dominant category and forms the specific relation of production, this bewitched and distorted world develops much further. (Marx 1981, 965-966)

Ramas argues that social forms can be understood as *ontological constituents* of things insofar as they determine the way things, people, and their relations manifest themselves under specific sociohistorical conditions (Ramas 2021, 180).[14] As we know, instead of the commodity as a mere

13. "Men are henceforth related to each other in their social process of production in a purely atomistic way. Their own relations of production therefore assume a material shape, which Is. independent of their control and their conscious individual action. This situation is manifested first by the fact that the products of men's labour take on the form of commodities. The riddle of the money fetish is therefore the riddle of the commodity fetish, now become visible and dazzling to our eyes." (Marx 1990, 187)

14. "It is a *form*, form used here as an ontological constituent, determinant of a mode of being, the peculiar being of things, men, and their relations under certain conditions of existence

empirical thing, the object of Marx's analysis is the *commodity form* as the social form that the products of labour take under capitalist conditions. In this vein, Ramas argues that fetishism is nothing but a determination of social forms which is specific to capitalism.[15] It is the particular 'structure of appearance' (ibid., 18) of a 'bewitched and distorted' social reality characterised by the inverted manifestation of social relations as relations between things.[16]

Machines and Fetishism

By crafting a series of categories that attempt to theoretically reproduce the capitalist social whole, what Marx elucidates is the "totality of determinations of entities under capitalist conditions" (Ramas 2021, 81). The commodity form occupies a central place in this totality as "the nuclear form of ontological determination of things under capitalist conditions" (ibid., 83) which, as we have seen, is marked by a fetishistic structure of appearance. In her skillful reconstruction of Marx's categorical development, Ramas traces the reappearance of fetishism as an essential aspect of the categories of money and capital. Unlike the commodity and money, Marx did not offer a systematic account of the fetishism of capital. This absence has left room for several interpretations which have tried to locate it, in germinal state, in Marx's sporadic allusions to the 'automatic fetish' in Volume 1 and in his treatment of interest-bearing capital in Volume 3 of *Capital*, i.e., in the D-D' movement where capital appears to spawn more value by itself in the rarefied sphere of financial operations. Ramas, on the

... Marx starts, as he says, from a 'social form' in which the 'product of labour' is presented, that is, a thing. What is being investigated is the series of 'forms' which determine that things are what they are under certain historical conditions." (Ramas 2021, 180)

15. Ramas argues that "the name that Marx uses to designate these 'circumstances,' using the language of the German philosophical tradition is 'form-determination' [*Formbestimmung*]" (Ramas 2021, 292). In other words, the *Formbestimmung* comprises the socio-historical determinations of a form or essence of a thing; that which determines the form under which something exists. In this sense, her whole book is devoted to the thesis of fetishism the *Formbestimmung* of social forms under capitalism. See also (Elson 2015, 139ff).

16. The idea of establishing a clear qualitative difference and rupture between pre-capitalist and capitalist forms of fetishism is not shared by Robert Kurz, who sketches a theory of second nature as 'fetish system.' In his view, second nature is always constituted in a fetishistic fashion, i.e. it always emerges from social practice through subjectless processes, appearing as external and alien to the latter. Furthermore, he argues that the commodity form, as a secularised fetish, is the "last and most advanced" fetish-form, from which the nature of the constitution of the fetish itself can be recognised, understood, and ultimately overcome. See (Kurz 1993).

other hand, offers a different (and ultimately more convincing) interpretation. According to her, the *origin* of the fetish of capital can be traced back to the fourth section of Volume 1, that is, to the chapters where Marx discusses cooperation, division of labour, and machinery as means to enhance the productivity of labour and as mechanisms for increasing relative surplus value. What we find in these sections is Marx's classic account (already mentioned at the beginning of these pages) of the reification and autonomisation of social relations of production as an 'alien power' that towers over the workers and presents the properties and potentialities of social labour as if they were its own.[17] Another text cited is the *Results of the Immediate Process of Production*—originally planned as Part 7 of *Capital* and reprinted as an appendix in the English edition of Volume 1—where Marx writes:

> Since—within the process of production—living labour has already been absorbed into capital, all the social productive forces of labour appear as the productive forces of capital, as intrinsic attributes of capital, just as in the case of money, the creative power of labour had seemed to possess the qualities of a thing. (Marx 1990, 1052)

This is, in short, the fetishism of capital—or more precisely, of the capital *relation*.[18] We are dealing with processes of organising labour which result in the productive forces of social labour appearing as an external reified power instead of as the result of social labour itself. Capital turns into a "thing-subject that embodies all the forces of social labour. Relations between things appear as properties of an object" (Ramas 2021, 107). This involves the double inversion characteristic of fetishism: a twofold process of personification of things (things appearing to possess the attributes of social labour) and thingification of persons (the fragmented worker as the living appendix of a system that dominates her). Following Amy Wendling, we can describe this as the phenomena of *machine fetishism* whereby machines become 'metaphysical objects' or, alternatively, 'fetishized subjects' which come to display the very functions that the worker is henceforth

17. In this she agrees with Michael Heinrich, who in *Wissenchaft von Wert* writes: "Finally, in the immediate process of production, the *fetish of capital* shows itself: the productive forces of social labour that are developed through cooperation, division of labour, and the introduction of machinery, appear as the productive forces of capital." (quoted in Ramas 2021, 99)
18. Ramas defines the fetishism of capital in the following way: "the increased productive force of labour appears under capitalist conditions as a productive force of capital, as it it were its own work, as if capital, as a mysterious entity, was by itself productive" (Ramas 2021, 232).

deprived of (Wendling 2009, 57-58). In her account, the machine holds a highly significant place in Marx's work. The machine is the

> final 'metaphysical object' … occupying the same structural position as God in Feuerbach or the absolutist state in Rousseau. Relationships with machines and other means of production in capitalism are correspondingly mythologized, and in no less baroque a fashion than God and the state (Wendling 2009, 58).

In this way, we can understand the fetishistic endowment of machines with the attributes of social labour as a necessary form of appearance which can be regarded as "the strict continuation of the commodity and money fetishes" (Ramas 2021, 99). As we saw, these fetishistic appearances can be traced back to the particular way that labour is socialized under capitalist conditions, predicated as it is on a social objectivity that reifies and automatises social relations as the properties of the things exchanged in the market. The same structure of appearance now reappears at a different level. As Ramas writes: "In the same way that the social form of labour is embodied in money as the property of a thing, the productive forces of social work manifest themselves as capital, that is, as properties of a thing" (ibid., 109).

Going back to Ilyenkov at this point, we can now explain the specific way that a particular subset of the products that result from the social transformation of the world (i.e. the instruments of labour themselves) are idealised under the fetishistic structure of appearance proper to capitalism. The 'social algorithms' that constitute the productive capacities of social labour are materialised in the means of production, and this happens under specific conditions such that they appear as their natural or intrinsic attributes. If we return to the quote from the "Fragment on machines" that we started with, we can begin to understand the full weight behind the notions of 'absorbing' and 'appearing' that we find there:

> The accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain, is thus absorbed into capital, as opposed to labour, and hence appears [*erscheint*] as an attribute of capital and more specifically of *fixed capital*, in so far as it enters into the production process as a means of production proper. (Marx 1973, 694)

Geistige Potenzen and the Spiral Movement of Capital

Following what has been said so far, we can advance the argument that the 'endowment of material forces with intellectual life' and the concomitant

'stultifying of human life' can be regarded as the two aspects of the necessary fetishized semblance resulting from capital's own 'structure of appearance.' In short, the fetishized appearance of machines as possessing the attributes of social labour is a necessary appearance of capitalist technologies. Following Ilyenkov, we can say that this is a consequence of the way in which the dialectics of idealisation and materialisation are 'derailed' towards the specifically capitalist form of fetishism. I believe there is, however, something more to say about this derailment and of the material effectivity of such fetish once "it is incorporated into the acts, ideas, and behaviours of the ensemble of human relations within a particular mode of production" (Read 2003, 42).

In various places of the *Grundrisse*, Marx inquires on the difference between the 'becoming' and the 'being' of capital, that is, between the coming into being of capital or "the history of its formation" and its "contemporaneous history" as an already constituted totality. Marx describes this process as that in which "once developed historically, capital itself creates the conditions of its existence (not as conditions for its arising, but as results of its being)" (Marx 1973, 459). In the following page, this transition is described using Hegelian language:

> These presuppositions, which originally appeared as conditions of its becoming —and hence could not spring from its *action as capital*—now appear as results of its own realization, reality, as *posited by it—not as conditions of its arising, but as results of its presence*. It no longer proceeds from presuppositions in order to become, but rather it is itself presupposed, and proceeds from itself to create the conditions of its maintenance and growth. (ibid., 460)

The idea of a transition whereby capital crosses a threshold to overcome its "antediluvian" phase and constitute itself as a 'meta-stable' system that "sets the conditions for its realization" (ibid., 363) encapsulates many of the great complexities and aporias that inevitably emerge when trying historicise the capitalist mode of production. This is not the place to delve into these particular issues.[19] However, there are some aspects of the notion of capital positing its own presuppositions that concern us here.

This form of 'retroactive causality' of capital is often depicted by Marx as a 'spiral-like' movement (ibid., 266, 746, 620), a figure that Ilyenkov also adopts in various places of his work. Following the passage (quoted above) where he describes the relationship between idealisation and materialisation as interlocked phases of the material life-activity of human

[19] See (Wood 2002)

beings, Ilyenkov points out that this process tends towards "the transformation of the material into the ideal and then back … constantly clos[ing] in 'on itself'" in a spiral-like manner.

> These two actually opposite processes eventually lock into more or less pronounced cycles, and the end of one process becomes the beginning of the other, opposite one, which leads in the end to the motion of a spiral shape with all its ensuing dialectical consequences. A very important fact is that this process—the transformation of the 'material' into the 'ideal,' and then back, which constantly closes in 'on itself' into more and more cycles, spirals – is highly specific to the socio-historical life-activity of human beings. (Ilyenkov 2014, 36)

This 'spiral movement' and the 'dialectical consequences' that Ilyenkov alludes to can be understood as the process whereby the embodiment or materialisation of ideality becomes "a critical component of the material life-activity of social man" (ibid., 36) giving rise to what David Backhurst calls the "normative character of reality" (Backhurst 2011, 112).[20] In a strikingly similar vein to Ilyenkov's account, the Brazilian Marxist José Arthur Giannotti also describes how materially incarnated socially produced 'essences' can determine behaviour: "it is in view of these essences, these ideals incorporated into natural things by an immediate process of social relations, that human behaviour is oriented and determined" (Giannotti 1983, 95). All of these accounts are relevant to understand the role of ideal social forms in the process whereby capitalism is reproduced as a social totality. Ramas argues that "these forms are reproduced alongside material and thingly reproduction: therefore, they perpetuate themselves as the appearance of things" (Ramas 2021, 245). The historically specific (and thus contingent) social form determination (*gesselschaftliche Formbestimmtheit*) of the different elements of production is naturalized as their inherent property, perpetuated as their mode of existence.[21] In short, the fetishized embodiment of capitalist social forms in the 'inorganic body' of humanity sets into motion a spiral movement with consequences that go beyond the realm of appearances or the *Erscheinungsform* of capital as a "'mystical being' appearing to generate its own conditions of possibility" (Read 2003, 43).

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20. Backhurst draws his understanding of normativity from the Pittsburgh school of philosophy. More specifically, he is critical of Brandom while drawing from the work of John McDowell, his thesis supervisor (I thank one of the reviewers for pointing this out). Unfortunately, this is not the place to delve deeper into these authors and the way that Backhurst reads Ilyenkov's concept of the ideal through them.
21. As Marx writes: "Their social character in the capitalist production process, determined by a particular historical epoch, is an innate material character natural to them, and eternally so, as it were, as elements of the production process" (Marx, 1981, 964).

The 'spiral-like' character of capital can be understood as the establishment of a certain 'path dependency' resulting from the fetishized entrenchment of capitalist social forms as a constitutive aspect of material and social relations. In a striking passage from his latest book, Søren Mau describes how, although capital came into being in a world where the valorisation of value was not the main logic organising society, it then revealed a propensity to create "a world in which profitability is the condition of life" (Mau 2023, 294). He writes:

> Initially, capital was a social *form* imposed on precapitalist *content*. As soon as its grip on the conditions of social life was established, however, this form revealed itself to possess a strong propensity to *materialise* itself, to transcend its own formality and incarnate itself in a mesh of limbs, energies, bodies, plants, oceans, knowledges, animals and machines—a process which continues to constantly reshape the world to this day. This is what the concept of *real subsumption* captures (ibid., 294).

From an Ilyenkovian standpoint, this passage might elicit objections insofar as talking about 'purely formal' capitalist social forms which are materialised only after a certain point would ostensibly signify an idealist relapse. However, the depiction of real subsumption in terms of a restructuring of social reproduction through materialised social forms is useful to illustrate the spiral movement described by Ilyenkov.[22]

In *formal* subsumption, the labour process exhibits a technical and organisational structure which is not itself the result of capital's own logic. As such, it can be regarded primarily as a matter of property relations insofar as capital can begin to accumulate itself without having to restructure the labour process itself (ibid., 234). In *real* subsumption the organisation, structure, and technical composition of the labour process are fully shaped in correspondence with capitalist social forms (Heinrich 2012, 118). It is through real subsumption that the logic of capital "seizes labour power by its roots" (Marx 1981, 481), transforming it into "*a potential whose condition*

22. The term real subsumption is used by Marx in *Results of the Immediate Process of Production* to describe the process whereby the social and material components of production are reorganized with the purpose of relative surplus value production. This term has acquired a lot of popularity in the recent decades, often being used in a non-rigorous way to describe our historical moment as that in which capitalism has suppoedly 'taken over everything.' Several authors have been critical of this popularisation of the term. Endnotes (2010) has advocated a more restricted use of the term. Mau (2023, chapter 10) has argued that, while we should avoid the pitfalls of using this term in too lax a manner, it is also useful for analysing phenomena such as the capitalist transformation of natural processes. For a superb account that traces the origins of the term back to Hegel and Marx, see Saenz de Sicilia (2022).

of actualisation is the mediation of valorising value" (Mau 2023, 247). One could certainly argue that this can also apply to formal subsumption: while the labour process itself might still be left relatively untouched at this 'stage' of capital's material restructuring of social reproduction, the fact that it is already mediated by market forces might already imply its transformation into a potential that can only be actualised when needed by capital.[23] However the labour process still preserves an organisational structure which is not itself a by-product of the logic of surplus value production, meaning that "a transition from formally subsumed capitalist production to non-capitalist production would not require a reorganisation of the production process" (Ibid., 234-235). By the same token, labour ostensibly preserves the skills and organisational abilities to produce without capital's intervention. Real subsumption, on the other hand, implies a radical upending of the whole process which tends towards revoking even the last shred of labour's own capacity to actualize itself. Through its implementation for the division of labour, automation, and deskilling, technology plays a crucial role in this process.

Mau distinguishes between two conditions of actualisation of labour from which labour is dispossessed: *objective* and *social* conditions. The first refers to the separation of labour from the means of production (i.e. the most basic class division), while the latter emerges when the cooperative potential for social labour cannot be actualised except when mediated by capital. As we saw, the appearance of capital as possessing the productive powers of social labour already emerges with cooperation and the division of labour, but it is not until the real subsumption of the production process through automation and labour-saving technology that the worker, already transformed into a partial and fragmented individual through the division of labour implemented in manufacture, is turned into a mere 'appendage' (Marx 1990, 799) of the machinic system.

> … all social powers of production are productive powers of capital, and it appears as itself their subject. The association of the workers, as it appears in the factory, is therefore not posited by them but by capital. Their combination is not *their* being, but the *being* of capital. Vis-a-vis the individual worker, the combination appears accidental. He relates to his own combination and cooperation with other workers as *alien*, as modes of capital's effectiveness (Marx 1973, 585).

23. I want to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for presenting me with this counterargument which, I hope, has been convincingly addressed.

It is under such conditions that we can see the 'dialectical consequences' that the spiral movement driven by the process of idealisation-materialisation has in relation to technology. The form-determination of the instruments of labour by capital's social forms leads both to their material reorganisation and redesign as well as to their acquisition of a fetishistic semblance whereby they display the attributes of social labour as their own intrinsic properties—an inverted appearance which in turn conditions how their uses and applications can be conceived. As Marx writes in *Results of the Immediate Process of Production*:

> The transposition of the social productivity of labour into the material attributes of capital is so firmly entrenched in people's minds that the advantages of machinery, the use of science, invention, etc. are *necessarily* conceived in this *alienated* form, so that all these things are deemed to be the *attributes of capital*. (Marx 1976, 1056)

In the fourth section of *Capital Volume 1*, Marx introduces another term which is relevant to us here. While discussing what we now understand as the fetish of (fixed) capital and the dispossession of labour's or cooperative potentialities, Marx also presents us with the notion of *intellectual potentialities* (or *geistigen Potenzen*) as another aspect of labour which cannot be actualised except through the mediation of capital.

> The intellectual potentialities of production expand in one direction, because they vanish in many others. What is lost by the specialized workers is concentrated in the capital which confronts them. It is a result of the division of labour in manufacture that the worker is brought face-to-face with the intellectual potentialities of the material process of production as the property of another and as a power which rules over him. This process of separation starts in simple cooperation, where the capitalist represents to the individual workers the unity and the will of the whole body of social labour. It is developed in manufacture, which mutilates the worker, turning him into a fragment of himself. It is completed in large-scale industry, which makes science a potentiality for production which is distinct from labour and presses it into the service of capital. (Marx 1990, 482)[24]

Although one might argue that this term is very similar to the notion of the general intellect famously used in the 'Fragment on machines,' I think that it sheds a somewhat different light on the issue. While the notion of the general intellect has often been interpreted as referring to the collective knowledge embodied in technology, *gestige Potenzen* points us to something

24. Translation modified. For some reason, in the Ben Fowkes translation the first 'geistige Potenzen' is translated as "the possibility of an intelligent direction."

that has not been actualized, something for which Capital possesses the conditions of actualisation. In short, it depicts a situation where, as a consequence of the consolidation of technoscience as a productive agent that towers over the worker, labour's 'social brain' has been dispossessed of the conditions for the actualisation of its potential for collective intelligence.

Conclusion: The Myth of Intelligent Machines Today

The presence of technologies such as smart environments, machine learning systems, and predictive algorithms have brought to the fore, once again, the old question of the intelligence of machines. Since its inception in the mid 20th century, the field of artificial intelligence has revolved around the "technological myth" of the possibility of creating intelligent machines using the tools provided by digital computing (Natale & Ballatore 2020). During its formative years, AI research was structured by a 'semantic field' that revolved around the anthropomorphisation of computers and the idea of 'thinking' or 'intelligent' machines through analogical arguments and cross-domain translations that imported concepts and ideas from other disciplines. Recent approaches to machine learning are very different from the kind of AI research that took place in the 1970 and 80s and which explicitly aimed to reproduce human intelligence machinically by imitation or analogy. Although nowadays many of those who are involved in the development of these task-oriented machine-learning systems might distance themselves from the AGI pipe dreams, there is nonetheless still a persistent reference to the human mind and its neurophysiological processes in claims that neural networks replicate the functioning of the brain.

Human intelligence itself remains a mystery and the attempts to define it (or even quantify it) are rife with problems. Depending on what we understand as human intelligence—is it merely the capacity to adapt to new situations, or does it involve consciousness, creativity, and understanding? —we will be able or unable to defend an attempt to present machine performance as analogous. There is a certain circularity or groundlessness to the whole endeavour: in a recent report on the current state of the field, AI research was described as "a branch of computer science that studies the properties of intelligence by synthesizing intelligence" (Stone et al. 2016,

13).[25] Thus, many have advocated for dropping the analogy between human intelligence and machine performance altogether, arguing that there are more useful and fruitful ways to understand these algorithmic systems. Elena Esposito, for instance, has argued that we should stop focusing "on the parallels and differences between human intelligence and machine performance, observing their limits and making comparisons" (Esposito 2022, x). Instead, she argues, what we observe today in our interactions with algorithmic systems "is not necessarily an artificial form of intelligence, but rather an artificial form of communication" (ibid., 2). In a way that resonates with what we described above as a "labour theory of machine intelligence," she argues that what is being reproduced (and transformed) artificially by machine-learning algorithms is not intelligence but communicative capacities, "and they do so by parasitically exploiting the participation of users on the web" (ibid., 3).

However, as it is hopefully clear by now, the purpose of these pages was not so much to denounce the myth of intelligent machines in its contemporary manifestation as the questionable attribution of an anthropomorphic notion of intelligence to what essentially are mechanistic (albeit inscrutably complex) procedures of statistical pattern recognition. Instead, the purpose was to explore the hypothesis that we can perhaps trace some of this myth's determinations back to the core structure of capitalist social relations. To be sure, the myth of intelligent machines most certainly predates capitalism, and has taken different forms throughout the centuries—from 18th-century clockwork automata (Jones-Imhotep 2020; Kang 2011; Schaffer 1999) all the way back to Greek antiquity (Liveley & Thomas 2020). The problem, rather, was to attempt to delineate the specific character it assumes under capitalism, where productive technologies fetishistically appear to be endowed with the properties of social labour.

25. Instead of a dead-end, some argue that there is a productive side to this circularity or groundlessness: it seems that we can't (or at least not yet) really answer the question of what intelligence is, but practical attempts to simulate or synthesize it have tested certain hypotheses which, although perhaps ultimately unconvincing up until now, have nevertheless forced us to reconsider—and hopefully refine—the parameters of the question itself. Reza Negarestani for instance, sees AGI as presenting us with 'an outside view of ourselves.' According to him, the ongoing search for AGI can be seen as the formulation of "an idea through which we begin to identify what we consider as our distinctive features, determine how they are realized or possible, and investigate whether these qualities can be reconstructed and realized in something else, and if so, how. From this perspective, the idea of AGI is an external frame of reference by means of which we inquire into our own conditions of realization and possibility only to reimagine that which makes us knowers and agents in the context of something else that might transcend us." (Negarestani 2018, 94)

In the previous pages, I argued that the portrayal of contemporary algorithmic systems as 'intelligent' machines might not be merely a marketing strategy or ideological veil to get rid of, but rather a necessary fetishized appearance of these technologies under capitalism. To develop this claim, I started with Ilyenkov's dialectics of idealisation and materialisation, a model which allows us to understand the complex interaction between social practice and ideality and to formulate an understanding of fetishim in these terms. Departing from the observation that Ilyenkov—despite his profound insights and his enduring relevance as a balm against vulgar materialist conceptions of knowledge and cognition—does not treat the problem of fetishism in a sustained manner, I moved on to other currents of contemporary Marxian thought such as value-form theory and the *Neue Marx Lektüre*. Drawing primarily from Clara Ramas San Miguel's systematic reconstruction of Marx's critique of political economy from the vantage point of fetishism, I retraced the road starting from the social form of labour characteristic of capitalism and the way that it gives rise to commodity fetishism, up to the impregnation of fixed capital by this same form determination leading to the fetishism of machines, i.e., the double inversion that involves the personification of things and the thingification of persons. Lastly, in order to avoid the impression that this fetishistic structure of appearance might be something pertaining to the order of illusion, I pursued Ilyenkov's insight about the 'spiral-shaped' ideal-material dialectic along with Marx's description of capital's development using similar terms. What these formulations intimate is the idea that fetishistic social forms can themselves be re-materialised in our objects, institutions, tools, and machines with very real and material effects. These structurally distorted idealities, embodied in the 'inorganic body of humanity,' are able to restructure our processes of social reproduction and, in the case of technology, predetermine the way we approach and conceive our machines and devices.

It is in this last point that we can perhaps glimpse the political valences of the line of argument presented in these pages. While delving into this problem with the detail it deserves lies outside the scope of this essay, I would merely like to suggest that it is tightly related to the protracted discussion around the problem of fetishism, i.e., the question of whether it is to be regarded as an ideological false belief, or rather, as a practically real element of social reality. Defending the latter interpretation, Nicole Pepperell writes: "For Marx, the fetish character of capitalist relations is not a veil of illusion to be penetrated but an important qualitative characteristic

of a special kind of social phenomenon that helps to distinguish especially capitalist relations from the kinds of social relations characteristic of other forms of social life" (Pepperell 2018, 35). From such a standpoint, a critique in the mode of unveiling, useful and revealing as it may be, is not enough to deal with the fetish character of machines. What would be needed, following Pepperell, is the "practical abolition of the socially real—but transient and transformable—phenomenon of a social relation that, so long as it continues to be reproduced, will generate fetish properties" (ibid., 36). As it has been argued in these pages, these fetish properties are not the consequence of some sort of subjective or cognitive misapprehension, but rather the result of a structurally phantasmatic social configuration that can be traced all the way back to a particular social form of labour. To take a phrase from Gilbert Simondon, using it in a way that he would most likely not be happy with, we can say that this is the *mode of existence of technical objects* insofar as they are historically determined by the social forms that follow from the value-form.[26]

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26. Here, we are following Ramas' reading of Marx's 'analysis of forms' (Elbe 2013) as a "sort of ontology that inquires about the being of things in their historical determination, that is, it asks what it means to be a thing in general 'under the conditions of the capitalist mode of production.'" (Ramas 2021, 264)

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Biography

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Ilyenkov and the Immanence of Logic

David Bedford and Thomas Workman

ABSTRACT: The materialist tradition challenges the conventional philosophical understanding that logic is the organon for both science and philosophy. Marx and Engels, building on the materialist tradition that can be traced back to the ancients, inaugurated the direct challenge in the nineteenth century. The dialectic of humanity and nature, they argued, was the matrix of all human culture including its philosophical and logical forms. But as suggestive and compelling as Marx's and Engels' bold thesis was, it would fall to twentieth century writers to flesh out the counter-claim that the material world is really the organon for logic. The logician John Dewey, building upon the naturalism and instrumentalism of American pragmatism, theorized the relationship between the continuum of science and the development of logical forms. And Evald Ilyenkov, writing a few decades later, argued that science and logic must conform to the dialectical character of the object world. In Dewey's writing epistemology is the organon for logic; in Ilyenkov ontology is the organon for logic; and thus in keeping with Marx and Engels both writers see logic as being effectively shaped by the material sphere. Neither writer, however, establishes a clear ontological philosophy commensurate with the claim that the world is dialectical, although Ilyenkov's writing is much more fecund and suggestive. Building on Ilyenkov, we argue that a theory of entification helps to illuminate claims about the dialectical character of the object world, drawing attention directly to the self-sameness and difference of entities, highlighting their abiding essence and evolutionary character, and so forth. Moreover, we conclude that a clearer philosophy of entification reveals the path through which the material world registers in the upper cultural echelons of science, philosophy, and logic, and helps to show how the dialectical epistemology of Dewey and the dialectical ontology of Ilyenkov complement each other within the materialist tradition.

KEYWORDS: Science, materialism, ontology, dialectic, Marx, logic, entity, Ilyenkov, Dewey.

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Introduction

The writings of E. V. Ilyenkov contain a radical philosophical thesis: *the matrix of logic is materialist through and through*. For more than 2,000 years, philosophical speculation had typically regarded *logic* as something akin to a transcending organon of pure thought, an abiding set of rules, creating a standard by which all thoughtful reflection and philosophical contemplation was to be measured. As such, *logic* yielded a set of invariant ratiocinative rules regarding conceptualization, the concatenation of concepts, and the drawing of valid inferences. Good philosophy and proper scientific investigation conformed to the rules of logic; bad philosophy and poor science tended to transgress or collide with them. Ilyenkov's insistence on the materialist matrix of logic overturns this perennial assumption, and its radical character could not be more striking: rather than seeing *logic* as an *organon* for thoughtfully grasping the world, the *material world* became an *organon* for shaping *logic*. The truly radical quality of Ilyenkov's work can be thrown into relief by reviewing the genesis of the materialist philosophy of knowledge in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Marx and Engels, building on ancient thinkers like Leucippus and Democritus, and directly inspired by modern thinkers like Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke, had emphatically declared that the matrix of human culture was materialist—tout court (Marx and Engels 1956, 172–177)! They asserted that the historical interaction between humankind and the natural world shaped all aspects of human life from the organization of the family through to the highest regions of human culture. "The phantoms formed in the brains of men," they stressed in *The German Ideology*, "are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises" (Marx and Engels 1976, 42). Although this constituted the essence of the materialist outlook, neither Marx's perennial work on questions of political economy, nor Engels' often expositional writings on scientific socialism, directly addressed the exact mechanisms through which the material world registered in our varied and increasingly sophisticated cultural forms. It is one thing to assert that the matrix of all culture was materialist, as Marx and Engels repeatedly proclaimed during their formative writings in the 1840s, and quite another to specify the mechanisms through which the material world is drawn up into the cultural realms, especially philosophy and logic. A litany of questions naturally arise out of their bold anti-idealist claim: What aspects of 'the material' do we have in mind when we assert its priority? Exactly how might 'the material' work its way up into the upper echelons of human culture? What does it more precisely mean to say that materialist aspects of life are deposited in the more abstract fields of philosophy or logic? And does the primacy of the material hold over time, or is there a point when the upper echelons of culture begin to exert a substantive influence in the course of history, creating a more iterative

dynamic between the material domain and its cultural offshoot?

Such questions abound, but the corpus of Marx or Engels responds with little more than the odd philosophical aperçu or tantalizing speculative morsel. The task of fleshing out the relationship between the material world and the upper echelons of human culture would initially fall to the American philosopher John Dewey, and we will argue that substantively similar themes are abundantly evident in the writings of Ilyenkov. Both writers explore the radical thesis that logic is immanent to the material world, but do so by centering different animating concepts in their respective *corpi*. Dewey's central analytical focus is *epistemological* whereas Ilyenkov's commanding intellectual notion is *ontological*. This is to say that for the American philosopher the path from the material world through to logic is forged through an epistemological notion summarized as the *continuum of inquiry*, while the path from the material to the logical in Ilyenkov is driven by an ontological notion grasped as the *dialectical character of the object world*. Dewey more or less ignores the character of the object world by privileging the science that investigates it, and this science provides the organon for logic in the end. It is not really an exaggeration to say that Dewey identifies that material world as the matrix of philosophy and logic, but fails to theorize the material directly. Writing several decades later, Ilyenkov begins to correct this theoretical shortcoming in the American logician's work. The organon for logic in Ilyenkov is ontological rather than epistemological, and he stresses that it is the dialectical character of the object world in particular which necessarily imbues logic, in turn, with a dialectical character. In the wake of the bold materialist claims of the nineteenth century, both speakers challenge the conventional philosophical claim that logic is the organon for science and philosophy with their deflationary thesis that the matrix of logic is materialist, but only Ilyenkov began to theorize the material directly.

The Materialist Matrix of Logic in Dewey

Turning first to the American philosopher, Dewey's writings were constructed around a paradox. On the one hand, he observed that philosophers and logicians were the models of rational interrogation when it came to the world around them. Their philosophical mode of cognition, especially when contrasted with religious or mythic ones, was permeated with an unrelenting reflex that subjected all aspects of life to sustained rational interrogation and analysis. Yet, Dewey lamented, even these denizens of otherwise rationalistic communities tended to work supernatural or seemingly divine elements into their reflections when it came to philosophy and logic. Logicians and philosophers, he stressed, often hypostatize notions like truth, beauty, logic, and epistemology, and fail to see that they are working notions engendered within

the continuum of inquiry. The notion that such staples of philosophical discourse can be orphaned to other-worldly spheres ran counter to Dewey's naturalistic view of philosophy. "Belief in magic," he lamented in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, "is not confined to primitive peoples" (Dewey 1938, 216). Dewey's naturalistic epistemology posits a relationship between the realm of inquiry and the labours of philosophy. Within the realm of inquiry a complex logical relationship of entailment and presupposition obtains between *i)* conceptions of the natural and social reality *ii)* practical applications of science to achieve homeostasis *iii)* ongoing scientific research and *iv)* the emergence and consolidation of established conceptual paradigms in various fields of research (Dewey 1938, chaps. 2, 3, and Part IV). Dewey's notion of *experience* encapsulates this rich relationship between the different elements of the *sphere of inquiry*, and we stress that this notion is very similar to the *dialectic of humanity and nature* found within Marxian scholarship (Dewey 1925, chap. 1). The critical moment of Dewey's project is his insistence that philosophy and logic supervene upon this ongoing sphere of sustained inquiry. To express this in a more philosophical manner, *philosophy and logic are immanent to the continuum of inquiry*. The conceptions formed within the sphere of inquiry tend to frame and steer philosophical and logical thought as inquiry deepens and progresses. Past philosophy has errantly *absolutized* notions like truth, beauty and epistemology, came to regard logic as a standard of thought 'lying in back of knowledge' as he would occasionally put it, and treated basic philosophical conceptions as notions transcending *experience*.

In Dewey's writings, the notion of experience is inseparable from the continuum of scientific inquiry. To illustrate the radical nature of his thinking, he drew a sharp contrast between 'transcendental epistemology' and the 'experimental theory of knowledge.' Transcendental epistemology often mistakenly assumed that "the organ or instrument of knowledge is not a natural object, but some ready-made state of mind or consciousness, something purely 'subjective,' a peculiar kind of existence which lives, moves, and has its being in a realm different from things to be known ..." Accordingly, Dewey added, the nature of the process of knowledge is de-naturalized or severed from the ongoing process of inquiry, and it is mistakenly assumed that "the ultimate goal and content of knowledge is a fixed, ready-made thing which has no organic connections with the origins, purpose, and growth of the attempt to know it, some kind of *Ding-an-sich* or absolute, extra-empirical 'reality'" (Dewey 1997, 98). Dewey argued that the noun 'truth' might be better conceived as an adjective 'true,' or even an adverb 'truly,' both of which summon to mind the relationship between the knowing subject and the known world. Such appellations would help to emphasize that any claim to truthfulness is not a property of things but rather a relationship between a knowledge claimant and some aspect of the extra-mental world.

Indeed, Dewey's instrumentalism, which as we will see has a family resemblance with Marx's notion of "human sensuous activity" as the ground of knowing, asserts the continuity between the practical actions that we take to solve the immediate, biological problems of shelter, food, protection, and so on as creatures embedded in the processes of nature, and the seemingly detached investigations of the scientist in her lab. Both are keenly attuned to the myriad of causal chains that link our actions and the actions of natural (and social) forces, each with the goal of creating a harmony between our existence and nature, and of uncovering the causal chains that will facilitate future practical activities. Dewey, like Marx, Engels, and Ilyenkov recognized that the quintessential form of the ongoing interchange between human thought and action and nature is "useful labour"(Dewey 1925, 84). Dewey writes further that "The first thinker who proclaimed that every event is an effect of something and cause of something else, that every particular existence is both conditioned and condition, merely put into words the procedure of the workman, converting a mode of practice into a formula" (Dewey 1925, 84). The goal of a naturalistic, instrumentalist practice of scientific knowing is not a fixed and once for all truth, which even if possible would be inconsistent with the final end of knowing which is to enhance and make more intelligent the practical solutions to lived problems. Rather, it is to discover ever widening, ever more comprehensive and interconnected causal sequences that both embed entities and emerge from their characteristic ways of being in the world. Such improvements in our understanding of the world ultimately make our practice more successful. To quote from Dewey's *Quest for Certainty*, "if we see that knowing is not the act of an outside spectator but of a participator inside the natural and social scene, then the true object of knowledge resides in the consequences of directed action" (Dewey 1929, 188).

Dewey's writings amount to a stark thesis: logic is not the organon of inquiry, but rather the continuum of inquiry is the organon for logic. Aristotle's logic, he argued for example, emerged organically as a register of the practices of Greek science in his day. Whereas the modern philosophy of science since Hume has been built around the problems of induction, and since Peirce, around the emergent forms of abduction and retroduction associated with the continual advancements in science, Greek science, as articulated by Aristotle in the *Posterior Analytics*, did not problematize the growth of new knowledge. Indeed, Aristotle argued that "the soul is so constituted as to be capable of" intuiting the universal from a group of particulars, and that it does so unproblematically (McKeon 1941, 100 a, 9–14). The current and apparent sterility of Aristotelean logic results from failing to recognize that *his* organon was immanent to the science of *his* day. As science, understood as the *continuum of inquiry*, evolves and changes, so too must reflective thought breach the immuring confines of syllogistic deduction as the *a priori* model of all proper

thinking. With each passing generation the advancements of science direct the attentions of the philosophers of science to the logical problems attendant upon growth of knowledge. These developments in science have increasingly highlighted the growing insufficiency of Aristotle's logic as the organon for theoretical knowledge. As Dewey wrote in his *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*:

> The next chapter deals explicitly with the traditional logic as derived from Aristotle, with a view to showing that of necessity the scientific conditions under which it was formulated are so different from those of existing knowledge that it has been transformed from what it originally was, a logic of knowledge, into a purely formal affair, and (2) that there is a necessity for a logical theory based upon scientific conclusions and methods. These are so unlike those of classic science that the need is not revision and extension of the old logic here and there, but a radically different standpoint and a different treatment to be carried through all logical subject matter. (Dewey 1938, 79–80)

The executive intellectual function of inquiry extends to the highest levels of abstraction, and we only lose sight of this because of prevailing pedagogical conventions. As he stresses in *Reconstruction of Philosophy*:

> Mathematics is often cited as an example of purely normative thinking dependent upon a priori canons and supra-empirical material. But it is hard to see how the student who approaches the matter historically can avoid the conclusion that the status of mathematics is as empirical as that of metallurgy. Men began with counting and measuring things just as they began with pounding and burning them. One thing, as common speech profoundly has it, led to another. Certain ways were successful not merely in the immediately practical sense, but in the sense of being interesting, of arousing attention, of exciting attempts at improvement (Dewey 1920, 137).

Dewey stresses that the appearance of logic and mathematics as something eternal overlooks the lengthy period of trial and error that established all paradigms of thought:

> The present-day mathematical logician may present the structure of mathematics as if it had sprung all at once from the brain of a Zeus whose anatomy is that of pure logic. But, nevertheless, this very structure is a product of long historic growth, in which all kinds of experiments have been tried, in which some men have struck out in this direction and some in that, and in which some exercises and operations have resulted in confusion and others in triumphant clarifications and fruitful growths; a history in which matter and methods have been constantly selected and worked over on the basis of empirical success and failure (Dewey 1920, 137).

Dewey's unremitting naturalism lays stress upon the iterative exchange of scientific observation and thought, of observation and theoretization, of the gathering up of facts and the translation of those facts into paradigms of

knowledge. He deplores the past tendencies of philosophy to isolate the scientific process of observation and investigation from the realms of thought and reflection: "Nothing has done greater harm to the successful conduct of the enterprise of thinking (*and to the logics which reflect and formulate the undertaking*) than the habit of treating observation as something outside of and prior to thinking, and thinking as something which can go on in the head without including observation of new facts as part of itself" (Dewey 1920, 140, our emphasis).

The Materialist Matrix of Logic in Ilyenkov

The radical nature of Dewey's logical project highlighted in the quote immediately above bears repeating: logic is not the organon for science; rather science is the organon for logic (Bedford 1993). And it is the contention of this paper that a similar notion frames Ilyenkov's logical project as well. To recapitulate, both thinkers flesh out the bold materialist thesis that was stated so starkly by Marx and Engels, but which was left largely unexamined when it came to the question of logic. How does the material world come to register in the more abstract echelons of human thought? Or, alternatively: "Exactly how can logic be traced back to the material realm?" Both Dewey and Ilyenkov essentially reply that the materialist matrix of logic is forged through the continuum of inquiry. To express their equally bold thesis with pith: *as science goes, so goes logic*. But for Ilyenkov, and this distinguishes his work from Dewey in a profound manner, science itself will respond to the dialectical character of the object world. In other words, the guiding notion in Ilyenkov's work is ontological, and the realm of logic, largely engendered through science, will tend to conform to the dialectical character of the object world. This is to assert, ultimately, that ontology—*viz* the dialectical character of the object world—is the organon for logic in Ilyenkov, a radical notion that inverts the traditional view of logic and science in the history of Western philosophy.

To elaborate, Ilyenkov's brilliant monograph *Dialectical Logic* has bequeathed a wealth of rich philosophical notions for later generations of radical scholars to ponder (Ilyenkov 1977). Not the least of these notions is his deflationary thesis that the sphere of *logic*, far from being the "supreme overseer" of science or the "absolute truth" threading pure philosophical discourse as metaphysical logic would have it, is wholly immanent to the material realm (Ilyenkov 1977, 371). Ilyenkov's most fundamental claim is that logic is tethered to an irreducible material world. The philosophical implications of this thesis are profound. Ilyenkov's notion of logic, therefore, essentially reworks several of the standard philosophical characterizations of logic that have appeared in the history of philosophy. The traditional conception of logic, a con-

ception that regarded logic as the fundamental organon of thought itself, entailed three closely related claims. *First*, logic was seen to be *eternal* or abiding, effectively immaterial and outside of time. *Secondly*, logic involved the *necessary* movement of thought, that is, the necessary drawing of inferences irrespective of time or place. This is to say that logic by and of itself was indifferent to the will of the thinking subject and foreclosed inferential variation or *contingency*—logic is exacting. And, *lastly*, the domain of logic is *analytic*, and tends to focus on the deduction of inferences through reflection rather than the *synthetic* drawing of inferences largely taken from experience, as the philosophical conundrum around induction confirmed in the modern era. *Eternal*, *necessary*, and *analytic*: in this traditional construal, therefore, logic transcends the specificity of history and scientific inquiry—it points to the immaterial and eternal nature of thought to which all proper human thinking, and all proper theoretization, inevitably conforms.

The notion of logic for Ilyenkov often departs from or massages this strictly traditional view of logic. On the question of its eternal character Ilyenkov rather presents logic as immanent to the progress of science in history. Logic is immanent to the material world as humanity struggles to come to terms with that world, and so much so that he embraces Lenin's notion that logic, dialectics, and 'the theory of knowledge' are fungible concepts. Logic pertains to the labour of thought itself, that is, it takes "thought, thinking" as its subject matter, and it regards this thought "as the ideal component of the real activity of social man transforming both external nature and himself by his labour" (Ilyenkov 1977, 8). In the language of contemporary philosophy Ilyenkov stresses that logic is 'created' rather than 'discovered,' and far from being an otherworldly template of proper thinking that humanity merely hits upon in the course of time, rather logic ultimately emerges out of our direct engagement with the material world, or what the historical materialist tradition would incline to summarize as the dialectic of humanity and nature. In the introduction to *Dialectical Logic*, Ilyenkov thus sums up his project by cribbing from Marx's language employed in his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and observes that the "matter of logic" is really, in the end, the "logic of matter."

Logic is the reducible notion in Ilyenkov and the material world is the irreducible notion. Ilyenkov's conception of the material world highlights its dialectical and contradictory character: "Contradiction as the concrete unity of mutually exclusive opposites is the real nucleus of dialectics, its central category" (Ilyenkov 1977, 320). The central question for Ilyenkov, and the question that demonstrates most clearly that logic is immanent to the material world, is how this dialectical character of the object world registers in thought itself. As he writes: "If any object is a living contradiction, what must the thought (statement about the object) be that expresses it? Can and should

an objective contradiction find reflection in thought? And if so, in what form" (Ilyenkov 1977, 320)? On this score, he continues, traditional logic rejects the very notion of contradiction on principle, and thereby proves to be inadequate to the tasks of science and philosophy:

> The metaphysical logician tries to demonstrate the inapplicability of the dialectical law of the coincidence or concurrence of opposites, which amounts to their identity, to the very process of thought. Such logicians are occasionally prepared even to recognise that the object can, in agreement with dialectics, be by itself inwardly contradictory. The contradiction is in the object but must not be in the ideas about it. The metaphysician, however, still cannot permit himself in any way to recognise the truth of the law that constitutes the nucleus of dialectics, in relation to the logical process. (Ilyenkov 1977, 320–321)

And to underscore his repudiation of the notion of logic as the discovery and respect for eternal modes of thought he laments that the "metaphysical logician" transforms the principle of contradiction "into an absolute, formal criterion of truth, into an indisputable *a priori* canon, into the supreme principle of logic" (Ilyenkov 1977, 321).

The fundamental movement in Ilyenkov's *Dialectical Logic* is from *ontology* to *logic* via *epistemology*. The dialectical character of the object world is the central notion for Ilyenkov, and logic will tend to conform to it as that world is grasped through inquiry. He retains the coincidence of logic and *necessity*, but only within the purview of this crucial ontological qualification. That is, the necessary character of logic is not attached to eternal or everlasting rules of thought, it does not view logic as the "supreme overseer" of science and inquiry, but rather attaches the notion of necessity to the dialectical character of the world. In short, the world is dialectical, and so too must thought and, ultimately, the science of thought—logic—be dialectical. The fact that the dialectical character of the material world functions as the organon for logic in Ilyenkov's thinking is the proper context for his claims concerning the necessary dialectical character of logic: "Logic has as its aim the development of a scientific representation of thought in those *necessary* moments, and moreover in the necessary sequence, that do not in the least depend either on our will or on our consciousness" (Ilyenkov 1977, 7). It is in this sense that Ilyenkov embraces Lenin's notion regarding the identity of logic and dialectic: "Dialectics had no subject matter distinct from that of the theory of knowledge (logic), just as logic (the theory of knowledge) had no object of a study that would differ in any way from the subject matter of dialectics" (Ilyenkov 1977, 312). The necessary dimensions of logic will reflect the determinations of the (dialectical) object world upon humanity as subject. As such, the subject matter or focus of logic is the "objective laws of subjective [viz human] activity" (Ilyenkov 1977, 289). The object world registers in the subject necessarily, viz dialectically, and this violates the conventions of traditional logic insofar as it

proclaims that logic admits of contradictory predication, that is, that logic is both subject and object at one and the same moment. It is useful to quote Ilyenkov at length:

> Such a conception is quite unacceptable to traditional logic since, from the standpoint of the latter, it unites the unjoinable, i.e. an affirmation and its negation, A and not-A, opposing predicates. For the subjective is not objective, and vice versa. But the state of affairs in the real world and in the science comprehending it also proves unacceptable to traditional logic, because in it the transition, formation, and transformation of things and processes (including into their own opposite) prove to be the essence of the matter at every step. (Ilyenkov 1977, 289).

Ilyenkov immediately adds that "traditional logic is consequently inadequate to the real practice of science and therefore has to be brought into correspondence with the latter" (Ilyenkov 1977, 289). Logic must 'get to' reality; logic appeals to experience in and through science. It is here that the *synthetic* character of logic in his construal is thrown into relief. Although he stresses that both logic and science will conform to the dialectical character of the world, the dialectical character of logic will emerge in and through the work of science itself. "Logic as a science is not at all interested in the 'specific features' of the thinking of the physicist or chemist, economist or linguist," Ilyenkov writes, "but only in those universal (invariant) forms and laws within which the thinking of any person flows, and of any theoretician, including the logician by profession, who specially thinks about thought" (Ilyenkov 1977, 314). Logic is the science of thought that emerges both alongside and through the various branches of science as we reflect upon its concepts and theoretical scenarios. As it congeals over time, logic then provides guidance to the very scientific endeavours that helped to spawn and engender it. Ilyenkov's notion of logic thus retains a significant analytic dimension, a dimension where the veracity of the claims are dependent upon the meanings ascribed to concepts and inferential rules as they are congealed through science, but these very meanings and rules were 'borne of' and 'confirmed through' experience. As he writes: "The *creation* of a Logic understood as a system of categories, of course, constitutes only one stage. The next step would have to be the realisation, actualisation of the logical system in a *concrete scientific investigation*, because the end product of all work in the field of philosophical dialectics is the resolution of the concrete problems of concrete sciences" (Ilyenkov 1977, 370-371). The meanings and ratiocinative rules attached to logic, in other words, are not spun out of our heads but rather appeal to real, factual conditions elaborated through and confirmed by the labours of science. Those crucial categories associated with logic like *contradiction* and *totality*, along with its inferential rules, appeal, ultimately, to those factual conditions explored in the concrete sciences, and it is in this sense that we can speak of them as synthetic. In linking logic to the process of scientific investigation, and especially

by presenting logic as something that is realized or actualized in and through science, Ilyenkov effectively repudiates the traditional view of logic as merely analytical, that is, as the enumeration of invariant rules of conceptual thought discovered largely through reflection. Logic rather emerges in and through concrete scientific investigations, and effectively becomes an "equal collaborator" in the course of science, "not a 'science of sciences' crowning their system as just another variety of 'absolute truth'" (Ilyenkov 1977, 371). As he summarizes:

> The dialectical conception of logic is engendered through and confirmed by science as it struggles to resolve its theoretical challenges: science as a whole, through the clash of undialectical opinions mutually provoking and correcting one another, develops for all that in accordance with a logic of a higher type and order. (Ilyenkov 1977, 290).

In tracing out the immanence of logic in Dewey's thought we observed that he largely fails to consider ontological questions directly. In his construal, the material world is the matrix for logic as engendered largely through the continuum of inquiry, and the object of science itself—the very character of the object world theorized by science—is more or less neglected philosophically. At the risk of oversimplification, the path for Dewey is from epistemology to logic, not ontology to logic, and there is a distinct sense in which the material realm is under-theorized.[1] Although both Dewey and Ilyenkov can be read as fleshing out the groundbreaking materialist thesis of Marx and Engels, the Soviet philosopher takes the question of the materialist matrix of logic much further than the American logician. The matrical path for Ilyenkov is from ontology to logic most definitively, with science acting as the cumulative conceptual register of the object world that both shapes logic and, in turn, is guided by logic. Ilyenkov places a much greater theoretical emphasis on ontology to specify the manner in which the material world is deposited in the realm of logic. In his *Dialectic of the Abstract and Concrete*, Ilyenkov argues for a dialectical conception of the abstract and concrete that guards against empty abstractionism, that is, that guards against conceptions of the concrete that lose sight of the essential markers and relational complexity of the object world (Ilyenkov 1960). Although his effort to explore the dialectical character of the abstract and the concrete summons an account of the object world more directly, particularly one that helps to clarify the path from the dialectical character of the object world through to the dialectical character of science and logic through which it registers, Ilyenkov falls short of presenting a full-blown philosophy of entification. To elaborate on this limitation, we begin by stressing that any theoretical assumption, including Ilyenkov's claim that the

1. This neglect has in no small part contributed to the neopragmatic relativism evident in writers like Richard Rorty.

object world is dialectical, cannot be left at the level of an axiomatic claim or assumption. By the seventeenth century, it was recognized that the scientific mode of cognition differed from mathematics by virtue of its rejection of axiomatic claims or unexamined points of departure. Hobbes' poignant criticism of Descartes, for example, stressed that science, unlike mathematics, had to be built on *empirical observations* rather than axiomatic claims or declamatory assumptions.[2] This rule of science throws the limitations surrounding Ilyenkov's claim that the object world is dialectical into rather stark relief. His assertion that the object world is dialectical must be grounded in experience, that is, in the observational and empirical aspects of inquiry, and cannot be left at the unexamined level akin to an axiomatic assertion in mathematics. This goes doubly so for Ilyenkov since it is the dialectical character of the object world that essentially functions as the organon for both science and logic in his philosophy.

Equally importantly, the evolution of science provides a clue as to how the need to ground Ilyenkov's claim about the dialectical character of the object world might be satisfied. Not only have we witnessed a continual evolution of such central scientific notions as 'hypothesis,' 'fact,' 'law,' and 'theory' over the ensuing centuries, but we have also witnessed a continual refinement in the conceptualization of the very things upon which science comes to devote its attention, that is, the very 'things' about which science develops theoretical knowledge. We can indeed identify evolving theories of the most basic character of the object world that summons the attention of science (Wootton 2015). Over time, a critical theoretical distinction has emerged between *aggregates*, such as Heidegger's famous jug, and *dynamic singulars*, that is, ontologically dynamic objects characterized by a self-generative essence and a relatively consistent presence of outward phenomena as it interacts with its environment. *Aggregates* like teapots or tables or piles of sand are not the focus of scientific inquiry; ***dynamic singulars*** ranging from atoms to cells to solar systems, and even the universe in its entirety, have invariably come to command scientific attention. This is to say that one of the most important developments in the philosophy of science has been the corresponding development in its *philosophy of entification* with a focus on the relational complexity and ontological depth of entities, that is, upon dynamic singulars (Hartshorne 1984). Any effort to theoretically and empirically ground Ilyenkov's claim that the object world is dialectical is bound to enlist a philosophy of entification. More to the point here, we are compelled to ask: "What is it about entities (of the object world) that is particularly dialectical?"

On this score we argue that Ilyenkov falls short of presenting a full-blown

2. As Hobbes wrote: "There are two things necessarily implied in this word knowledge; the one is truth, the other *evidence* ..." from *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994), 40, our emphasis.

philosophy of entification, although his writings are suggestive and rich. To conclude this paper we accordingly tease out a 'theory of the entity' that builds upon Ilyenkov's suggestive materialist thesis about logic, positing a theory of the entity commensurate, ultimately, with dialectical logical conceptions characterized by contradictory predication—the entity's self-sameness and difference, its abiding essence and evolutionary character, its individuality and its universality, its relational internality and externality, and so forth. We briefly elaborate on Ilyenkov's largely implicit notion of the dialectical character of the object world, and highlight especially his somewhat uncertain and imprecise specification of dialectical ontology.

As observed above, Ilyenkov argues in *Dialectical Logic*, that "(C)ontradiction as the concrete unity of mutually exclusive opposites is the real nucleus of dialectics, its central category." And with respect to the effect of the dialectical character of the world upon the course of science he adds: "(C)ontradiction in the theoretical determinations of an object is above all a fact that is constantly being reproduced by the movement of science" (Ilyenkov 1977, 320). As discussed above, such quotes assert that a dialectical philosophy of science will come to rest upon a dialectical ontology, that is, upon an account of the *object of science* that does not foreclose its dialectical construal either theoretically (in and through science) or logically. Ilyenkov stresses that both science and logic must evolve in a manner that embraces the contradictory character of the object world, and that traditional logic had fallen short in this respect (Ilyenkov 1977, 320–322). Such a standpoint, however, compels us to specify the dialectical character of the object world in an exacting manner. To put this in even stronger terms, the *object of science* must be examined *both* from the standpoint of its dialectical properties as well as from the way that these properties engender a dialectical science alongside a concomitant dialectical logic, and both of these requirements call for a clear *philosophy of entification*.

Ilyenkov's philosophy most certainly begins to fulfil this requirement. We can elaborate on this point by first observing the manner in which Ilyenkov stressed that Marx's logical categories are grounded ontologically, arguing that the fundamental categories in Marxist thought—that of the abstract and the concrete— do not admit of a "narrow epistemological interpretation" which Ilyenkov identifies with " modern bourgeois philosophy" (Ilyenkov 1960, 35). Rather, he argues that Marx sees them as properties of the object itself. Ilyenkov writes: "The object is concrete by and in itself, independent from its being conceived by thought or perceived by sense organs. Concreteness is not created in the process of reflection of the object by the subject" (Ilyenkov 1960, 33). A purely epistemological approach, one basically deriving the *universal* from the logical relationship of ideas alone, Ilyenkov argues, would fail to capture the form of logical argumentation and investigation used

by Marx. On his interpretation, Marx's emphasis on the ontological ground of the logical categories allowed him to explore the universal—or the essence of the entity—without relying solely on the method of empirical summation of perceived properties. Logical categories in Marx's corpus were neither distilled from pure thoughts alone nor mere generalizations from a series of discrete observations. Marx's sensitive treatment, an approach which results in ontological distinctions reminiscent of Hegel's differentiation between *mere existence* and *actuality*, strove to uncover the essence of the object under investigation, an essence which may *or* may not be instantiated in any given *particular*. Ilyenkov illustrates this using the example of Marx's assertion that the "production of labour implements" is the "objective basis for all other human traits," or better, as "the essence of man" (Ilyenkov 1960, 75). Marx did not derive this conclusion by summing up observations of innumerable individuals, but rather established this *universal* marker by discerning and clarifying the grounding relationship between the act of producing implements and all other human traits (Ilyenkov 1960, 76). We thus see the logical category emerging through the complex iteration of reflective thought and historical investigation, that is, between the dialogue of sorts between the abstract and concrete moments which defer, ultimately, and in keeping with Marx's materialism, to the independent character of the concrete. Absent such a derivation of critical logic categories from this dynamic exchange between abstract reflection and concrete observation, engendered through a complex interplay of *analytic* and *synthetic* moments as it might be philosophically put, then Marx's theoretical insights into the historical character and trajectory of capitalism would not have been possible.

Although incomplete, Ilyenkov's discussion of the abstract and concrete is richly suggestive in that the emergent categories of logic create space for the contradictions, tensions, and evolutionary processes which inhere in the object world, and begin to direct attention towards those very things which command the focus of scientific inquiry—namely, *entities*.[3] To elaborate, his ontological insights are grounded in his acceptance of the basic idea of Spinoza that being is one substance with the two attributes of thought and extension. He thus rejects any of the variants that follow from the Cartesian argument that there exist two distinct and unconnected substances—*res cogitans* and *res extensa* (Ilyenkov 1960, 32). The myriad of Cartesian-inspired ontologies assert that mind is a separate substance, unconnected to matter, and that matter is inert and unthinking. Such dualistic philosophies, despite the importance of specifying any connection between thought and extension, tend to

3. For a more involved treatment of the philosophy of entification as it relates to Marxian inquiry see David Bedford and Thomas Workman, *Marx, Engels, and the Philosophy of Science* (London: Routledge, 2023), chapter 3.

leave the matter unresolved. The Spinozan solution, which Ilyenkov embraces, is to unite thought and extension from the outset. "This simple and profoundly true idea," he writes, "was expressed by Spinoza in the language of his time: thought and extension are not two special substances but only two attributes of one and the same substance" (Ilyenkov 1960, 32). Hence, as Ilyenkov embarks on the philosophical construction of a dialectical ontology he begins by asserting that it is matter which thinks, and that thinking is material (Ilyenkov 1960, 33–35).

The notion of matter which thinks is a meager beginning. Ilyenkov's ontology is further developed when he argues against the mechanistic view of the entity as mere matter, and asserts instead that existing things are organically interconnected wholes. He writes that "(T)he concrete is thereby interpreted as an internally divided totality of various forms of existence of the object" (Ilyenkov 1960, 33). The idea of an internally differentiated totality, we stress, is a promising initial foray into the question of the entity. To explore the question further of what constitutes an entity as the existing thing we must begin by differentiating what we are here calling an "entity" from a mere agglomeration of matter. An "agglomeration" of matter, close to what philosophers have called an aggregate and famously exemplified with a tea pot, is a thing in which the material elements have no internal relation to each other. This can best be explained by an example. For Ilyenkov, a heap of stones would be such an instance of an agglomeration. The individual stones which constitute the heap are not related to each other in any meaningful way. There are no significant processes internal to the heap. In commonplace language, such a heap is lifeless or inert. Nor is there an internal life to the philosopher's teapot, just functional parts. In contrast to such renderings, Ilyenkov understands the entity as an organic, internally related, singular. It is a unity formed from diverse (but interconnected) parts. As Ilyenkov writes in *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete*: "The problem of the relation of the universal to the individual [by which Ilyenkov here clearly means the problem of the essence] arises…*as the object's internal relation to the object itself*, the relation of its different aspects to one another as the problem of the internal differentiation of the objective concreteness within itself" (Ilyenkov 1960, 75–76). It behooves us, however, to articulate more fully what is meant scientifically by "organic" or "internally related." To begin, such a notion implies that we can differentiate the entity from its environment. It will have a boundary which can be more or less porous, more or less definitive, separating it from its environment, and marking off what is internal to the entity and what is external to it. Entities will differ as to the degree to which this boundary with the environment is porous, that is, the degree to which the thing is fully self-contained, or correspondingly, the degree to which its essence is implicated in, and is determined by, its relations to its surroundings. No entity is fully

self-contained or self-identical, just as no entity is indistinguishable from its environment. One of the tasks of science is to determine the extent to which the physical boundary is porous. For example, recent studies on forests indicate that trees communicate with one another, and might even distribute food resources through the interconnection of their root systems. Theoretical chemists study the extent to which the outer electrons of molecules are shared and interact. In the social sciences, liberal political philosophers see the individual person as fully self-identical, and contained entirely within itself. A more socialist understanding sees the individual as both self-identical *and* relationally immured in the social, existing as well in its relations to other persons and to the social structures that are outside it and that are part of its essence. I am both a self-contained ego, and yet my being is also inseparable from my relations to others and my social environment.

If we generalize this key dialectical understanding of the entity as self-identical *and* extended into its environment, we can then problematize the way that different entities, with different essential features, interact with, and extend into, their environment. The starting principle is that what is true for *human being-in-the-world* is also true for all entities. All entities are, to varying degrees, sensitive to, and hence implicated with, aspects of their environment. The electrons of a molecule are sensitive to incoming photons, which they absorb and which increase their energy level. It does not need saying that they are not sensitive to sound. Plants detect water, sunlight, and minerals in the soil. They are also not sensitive to sounds. Animals can hear, smell, feel, etc. and they do respond to sound, but they lack sensitivity to many of the inputs that affect humans. These points are commonplace, but we must not lose sight of their importance because of this apparent triteness. The notion of the entity's degree of sensitivity to its environment is significant in two ways. *Firstly,* the degree and kind of sensitivities is a function of the complexity of the internal organic relations of the entity. So, while it is true that an entity is characterized by an internal interrelation, or ordering, as Ilyenkov asserts, entities differ by the degree of the complexity of this internal ordering, and, correspondingly, by the degree to which they are sensitive to inputs from their environment. That is, entities vary by the degree to which they are self-contained, and hence, as well, by the degree to which their *being-in-the-world* extends into their environment. The disagreement, for example, between liberal and socialist social theory regarding the degree of self-containment of the individual person is not merely an ideological disagreement—it is a scientific one, to be determined by an analysis of the actual *being-in-the-world* of individuals (and on this score liberalism is woefully lacking!).

Secondly, each kind of entity will process the inputs (to which it is sensitive) in ways that are characteristic of, and determined by, its internal organic ordering. Indeed, we can define the essence of any entity as its *way-of-being-*

in-the-world, understanding by this: *i)* the inputs from its environment to which it is sensitive; and *ii)* the ways that its internal organic ordering processes these inputs into various kinds of outputs. For example, Pavlov's famous experiments involved inducing salivation in dogs by ringing a bell. Here the dog's behavioural output —salivation—follows from the ringing of a bell. The dog's internal organic ordering transformed the stimulus into a response. What is crucial to note is that the output or response is always incommensurate with the input or stimulus. Salivation is in no way commensurate with bell-ringing. Absent the intervention of the processing of the stimulus by the internal organic ordering of the dog's *way-of-being-in-the-world*, there is nothing in salivating that is contained in bell-ringing. This is true of every input-output relation for every entity.

Indeed, the incommensurateness of effect to cause is the key way that science is able to discern the various features and internal ordering of the entity. As the essence of any entity is its *way-of-being-in the world*, that is, how it is affected by inputs from its environment and how in turn it (re)acts upon the environment, the scientific study of an entity probes the nature of its internal processes to learn how it is implicated with its environing world. Biology examines the internal processes of plants and animals; sub-atomic physics bombards particles to try to discover their composition and order. Psychology progresses by presenting the test subject with an input and noting their reactions to it. A subject is asked to speak before a large group. They report being nervous. Their palms perspire; their throat gets dry; their pulse rate increases; they begin to blush. This gives the physiologist clues as to the mechanisms of fear and anxiety, which can then be further investigated. Increases in hormone levels related to fear can be noted, and so on. These investigations reveal, piece by piece, the essence of the entity, or, more precisely, its *way-of-being-in-the-world*.

Our extrapolation of Ilyenkov's incipient suggestions regarding the entity help to clarify an unfortunate legacy of Spinoza's philosophy that is not explicitly disregarded by Ilyenkov, and which does little to clarify the manner in which the material world registers in the upper echelons of culture including, of course, philosophy and logic. While entities vary immensely in the degree to which they are sensitive to their environment, and in the degree of complexity of their internal relations, and hence in the range of responses of which they are capable, these are matters of *degree* only. From the standpoint of a dynamic theory of the entity, therefore, humans may differ significantly from all other entities in the degree of complexity of their internal relations, and thought and thinking (including scientific reflection and philosophical speculation when it comes down to it) is best grasped as an element of the complex internal processing and sensitivity of humans as they interact with

their environment. As such, thought (and all symbolic thinking for that matter) differs from the responses to environmental stimuli only by degree, and not qualitatively, as Ilyenkov, seeming to follow Spinoza, implies. Ilyenkov writes for example, "The crossing and combination of masses of chains of cause and effect could lead in one case to the appearance of a thinking body and in another case simply to a body, a stone, a tree etc." (Ilyenkov 1977, 53). Or again: "In man, in the form of man, in his person, *Nature itself* thinks" (Ilyenkov 1977, 34). Further, Ilyenkov quotes Engels: "But the truth is that it is the nature of matter to advance to the evolution of thinking beings, hence, too, this always necessarily occurs wherever the conditions for it (not necessarily identical at all places and times) are present" (Ilyenkov 1977, 54). Such a construal fails to expressly recognize that "thinking" is one end of a spectrum that considers the manner in which any given entity processes inputs into incommensurate outputs. Ilyenkov is at pains in *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete* to stress the social nature of conceptualization, along with its historical dimension, and he explicitly rejects what he calls the "Robinson Crusoe epistemological model." "Rising to conscious life within society," he stresses, "the individual finds pre-existing 'spiritual environment,' objectively implemented spiritual culture" (Ilyenkov 1960, 40–41). But despite his emphasis on the historical and social character of consciousness and language, Ilyenkov neglects to specify the genesis of thought itself. Our amendments to his nascent theory of entification help to overcome this limitation. Human thinking, and we really see our voice here as but an extension of his fecund speculations, is just the most complex example of a process that holds true for all entities. To adumbrate the materialist matrix of logic (and all thinking for that matter) with more rigour we must depart from Spinoza's inadequate construal, an error that seems to be absorbed unwittingly into Ilyenkov's philosophical horizons owing to his failure to theorize the entity fully and clearly. It is not that there is one substance with two attributes, the attribute of extension and thought; rather, the two attributes are 'extension' and the 'process of transforming inputs into incommensurate outputs.' Thinking—including logic—in humans is nothing more than the most complex processing that we currently know. It is with a note of irony that we underscore the claim that thinking is not something that just 'pops' into our heads. With this qualification, all thinking from the most prosaic through to the most abstractly symbolic can only be, as Ilyenkov is determined to demonstrate, social and historical, and in a word: material!

In itself, these are seemingly inconsequential differences, but we conclude by stressing that when theoretically elucidating the manner in which the material world is deposited in the realm of logic our observations about the *entity* bring us closer to bridging the gap between Dewey's epistemological focus and Ilyenkov's ontological focus discussed in this paper. A proper and complete

theory of the entity reduces language to the manner in which humans respond to their environment. We close by reiterating that a proper materialist treatment of logic must draw upon the theory of the entity outlined above, and by regarding the human entity and the immanence of language in this manner, we can explore the paths through which the material world comes to shape logic from *either* an ontological or an epistemological standpoint. A dynamic theory of the entity will constitute an integral part of a *dialectical ontology* which was more directly the concern of Ilyenkov, just as it will constitute an integral part of a *dialectical epistemology* which was more directly the focus of Dewey. Informed by a proper theory of the entity, the dialectical conception of both immanent dimensions—the ontological and the epistemological—will be animated, have 'concrete life' breathed into them, and can be blended together theoretically to yield a more vivid and robust materialist accounting of logic. It is in this sense that we can construe Dewey and Ilyenkov as complementary philosophers, with a *fundamental materialist matrix of logic* guiding each thinker.

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From Abstract to Concrete: The State as an Unquiet Ideal

Corinna Lotz and Paul Feldman

ABSTRACT: In this essay we attempt to interpret and develop Ilyenkov's pioneering investigation of the nature of the Ideal as a philosophical category in relation to state transformation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In the first section we set out Ilyenkov's category of the Ideal and its relationship to the Universal. We propose understanding the state as an Ideal, as a "concrete universal," which, as a developing whole exists, or rather, is negated into, contradictory relationships with its various parts. In this way it is a component of social consciousness as well as social being, which constitutes the culture of any society or social system. We suggest that the category of a dialectical Ideal is vital in theorizing the nature and essence of the relationship between the contemporary state and struggles for democracy.

In the second part, we outline the evolution of the capitalist form of state, touching on the conflicted history of Marxist viewpoints up to and including contemporary state theorists. The British state is analysed as an "ideal" model, given its particular nature as the oldest capitalist state with its "mother of parliaments." Rather than viewing the capitalist form of state as a simple reflection of economic categories, we see the state's relationship with capitalist production, and with its subjects (i.e. its Other), as "semi-autonomous," thus existing in a complex, uneven, simultaneously "fragile, unstable, provisional, and temporary relationship." (Jessop 2012). This is exemplified by historic class struggles in Britain and ongoing political crises, post-Brexit. We propose that grasping the state as a dynamic, changing ensemble of contradictory forces, while at the same time having its own objective existence and logic of development, is vital in the light of the present transition towards autocratic and dictatorial forms of state rule with its attendant crisis of the democratic Ideal.

KEYWORDS: The state, neoliberalism, the Ideal, Ilyenkov, Lenin, Engels, Jessop.

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Ilyenkov's Ideal

Soviet philosopher Evald Ilyenkov, whose centenary we commemorate this year, devoted a great part of his all-too-brief life proposing and developing the philosophical category of the Ideal. He first defined the nature of the Ideal in considerable detail in his essay for the *Soviet Philosophical Encyclopedia* published in 1962. He returned to the subject in the mid-1970s, with a long essay, *Dialectics of the Ideal*, which was never published in his lifetime.[1]

Ilyenkov's interpretation of the Ideal is drawn from Hegel. At the same time he works firmly through Marx's materialist perspective. In his entry for the *Filosofskaya Entsiklopediya*, edited by F. V. Konstantinov and published in 1962, Ilyenkov wrote:

> The ideal is the subjective image of objective reality, that is, the reflection of the external world in the forms of a person's activity, of his or her consciousness and will. The ideal is not an individual and psychological fact, much less a physiological fact, but a social and historical one, the product and form of intellectual production. The ideal is realised in a variety of forms of human social consciousness as the subject of social production of material and intellectual life. In Marx's assessment: "The ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man and translated into forms of thought." (Ilyenkov 2024)

The wider social and political implications of the category of the Ideal are set out in the English edition *Dictionary of Philosophy* (Frolov 1984) which may have been influenced by Ilyenkov. However that may be, it relates the Ideal to social consciousness, education and aesthetics. The definition sets out the Ideal as a contradictory category, reflecting the interest of reactionary ("obsolete") social forces as well as revolutionary strivings. It is thus defined not as a passive reflection but as a potential driver, for better or for worse, of social change: "The Ideal is the images created by mankind's history not only to understand but also to change the world." (Frolov 1984, 183)[2]

A decade or so later in the mid-1970s, Ilyenkov expanded his definition of the category to embrace all, even future, interpretations of the

1. The full manuscript of this only appeared in Russian in 2009 and in English in 2014. (Ilyenkov, 2009, Levant & Oittinen 2014). For a summary of its tribulations see Lotz 2014.
2. Joost Kircz sets out the material power of Ideality in his essay on mathematics: "The Ideality transcends the materiality, not in the Kantian sense of finding a home outside the human body, but as a human activity shaped in human society. Ideas evolve as a result of socio-historical developments." (Kircz 2023, 18)

Ideal. "The Ideal here," he wrote, "is understood in its entirety, as a complete totality of all possible interpretations—those already known, and those yet to be invented." (Ilyenkov 2014, 26).

In studying Ilyenkov's notion of the Ideal and developing it in relation to concepts of the state, his own Soviet state and our contemporary state, it must be borne in mind that Ilyenkov was obliged to function under constrained and oppressive circumstances. Openly critiquing the nature of the Soviet state was not an option in the Brezhnev-dominated 1970s, when Ilyenkov composed his extended essay *The Dialectics of the Ideal*. It took more than 30 years for it to be published in full, long after his passing (Lotz 2014). As David Bakhurst found during his time in Moscow (Bakhurst 2023), Ilyenkov and his closest colleagues could only speak freely in "в кухне" [in the kitchen], in the safety of their own homes. Ilyenkov's private views and discussions with his contemporaries were only published a quarter of a century after his passing.[3]

Given these inevitable lacunae and the near half-century since Ilyenkov was writing, ours is not so much a reconstruction but an attempt to deepen an understanding of the state not only as a "historically specific social form," to use Rob Hunter's formulation (Hunter 2023), but as an externally and internally contradictory, developing phenomenon.

The Ideal as a 'Springboard'

We set out to examine Ilyenkov's category of the Ideal as a springboard, a starting point, a lens that allows us to focus on the state as a simultaneously dialectically related abstraction and a concrete historical and social phenomenon. In other words, it is both a psychological/mental phenomenon as well as an external "object"—or rather, a physical and psychological force and power that exists both within and outside individuals in the forms of social being and social consciousness. The state exists through its manifold institutions which exercise power. In this sense it is both concept and category. As a form of the Ideal, the state exists as part of economic, social and cultural relations, while at the same time having a (relatively) independent existence, history, development and powers. It is this dialectical, self-relation of the state to the

3. Memoirs, Philosophical Society Dialectics and Culture, Public Movement Alternative, Moscow 2004. http://caute.ru/ilyenkov/biog/rem/index.html. See also Ilyenkov's Cry from the Heart, Corinna Lotz, *Studies in European Thought*. February 2024.

economic and social forms of society that we will go on to examine later in this essay.[4]

Through Ilyenkov's materialist definition, categories such as the Ideal are "crystallizations," not "as a psychic act of the individual but as the generic activity of man." (Kircz 2023; Ilyenkov 1977, 9). This understanding in no way excludes the most common understanding of the word "Ideal," which suggests something impossibly perfect that only exists in the imagination or in unreal, wishful thinking as opposed to any concrete, physical reality. Ilyenkov emphasises the contradictory nature of the Ideal, as simultaneously constituted by social consciousness and social being. Thus, his interpretation of the Ideal inverts and subverts the most common use of the word, becoming a rich philosophical form with a materialist and dialectical content. In our view it is his greatest contribution to philosophical thought, building on his theory of the ascent from the abstract to the concrete (Ilyenkov 1982) with an explanatory potential still to be further explored.

For Ilyenkov and for our present purposes, then, the Ideal is a "peculiar category of phenomena having a special kind of objectivity that is obviously independent of the individual with his body and soul" (Ilyenkov 2014, 30). It is a complex, and contradictory, internally-dialectical phenomenon that drives history and events. It reflects a multiplicity of interconnected social forces. It constitutes a universal whole that is larger than the sum of its parts. In relation to the contemporary state in particular, its Ideality has an objective existence and logic, not under the jurisdiction or control of any particular or individual nation or state. It forms part of a universal economic and social global totality that undergoes constant transformations, driven by and also driving the contradictory developments of the historic process itself. We shall review concrete examples of this in our review of the contemporary state.

Ideal phenomena exist in a dialectical self-relation both as abstract mental forms or representations and as living human activity. For the Ideal to be a concrete, rather than an abstract universal, it must be empirically examined as a unity, conflict, interpenetration and transformation of contradictory forces and tendencies. That dialectical whole is

4. State theorist Rob Hunter in *The Capitalist State as a Historically Specific Social Form* (Marxism and the Capitalist State, HM 2023) explores this relationship, in Ilyenkovian terms of the "primacy of the logical [over the historical]," albeit without reference to Ilyenkov.

"sublated"[5] in the concrete, living object-oriented activity of individuals in society who themselves have internalized in a variety of ways the mental-physical practice of countless people throughout history. Ilyenkov clearly builds on Vygotsky here.[6]

And yet, the identity of thinking and being cannot be taken for granted, Ilyenkov warns. He explains how "universal products of human activity (both material and cultural)" are transformed into a force independent of people's will and consciousness by way of "alienation" of the product of activity and the actual forms of human activity. This process leads to the results of human activity "standing counter to the individual." (Ilyenkov 2024)

Unravelling the Nature of the Ideal and Its Contradictions

In proposing the objective nature of the Ideal, Ilyenkov cautions against placing subjective constructs on any phenomenon. In other words, Ideal things and processes must undergo the same treatment by the researcher as Lenin proposed in his *Conspectus of Hegel's Logic*. The concept and its contradictory nature must be determined out of the "Thing-in-itself… The objectivity of consideration (not examples, not divergences, but the Thing-in-Itself)" (Lenin 1972, 221)

Ilyenkov sums the Ideal form as follows:

> The ideal form is a form of a thing, but outside this thing, namely in man as a form of his dynamic life-activity, as goals and needs. Or conversely, it is a form of man's dynamic life-activity, but outside man, namely in the form the thing he creates, which represents, reflects another thing, including that which exists independently of man and humanity. 'Ideality' as such only exists in the constant transformation of these two forms of its 'external incarnation' and does not coincide with either of them taken separately. It exists only through the unceasing process of transformation of the form of activity

5. The concept of sublation is taken from Hegel's German 'Aufheben' which holds contradictory meanings and can be translated into English as: to lift, cancel out, negate, abolish, preserve and transcend. In Hegel's dialectics the contradictory moments within any concept, or indeed any thing or process, are the motor of development in a spiralling movement. It is particularly apposite when discussing universal concepts and historical development, in this case, of the state.
6. "These techniques or methods of behavior, arising stereotypically in given situations, represent virtual, solidified, petrified, crystallized psychological forms that arose in remote times at the most primitive stages of cultural development of man and in a remarkable way were preserved in the form of historical survivors in a petrified and in a living state in the behavior of modern man." (Vygotsky 1997, 55)

> into the form of a thing and back—the form of a thing into the form of activity (of social man of course). (Ilyenkov 2024)

An Ideal form, therefore, is not reducible to subjective individual forms of thought or activity. It is a category of thought that arises from the need to distinguish between the fleeting emotions of an individual on the one side, and the "universal, necessary and because of this, objective, forms of knowledge and cognition, independent of one's existing reality" on the other (Lotz, Gold, Cole, Feldman 2014).

This understanding of the Ideal as human activity looks forward to contemporary cognitive theories such as "4-E cognition: enacted, embodied, embedded, extended," much of which, as Vladislav Lektorsky has noted, was anticipated by Ilyenkov.[7] It involves the activity of human minds and bodies in the reciprocal, material process and practice of changing the world, whether natural or social. In the case of any Ideal form, it is a socially evolving process, shaping the cultural history (including the class struggle) of humanity.[8]

Like the value form, any ideal form cannot exist apart from human beings; it exists perforce as a contradictory activity, in and through the relation of one human or collective bodies of people to another, acting upon and transforming a natural or social environment.

Ilyenkov noted that German classical philosophy "correctly identified them [ideal forms] as universal norms of that culture within which an individual awakens to conscious life, as well as requirements that he/she must internalise as a necessary law of his/her own life activity," (Ilyenkov 1977, 153) in words echoing those of psychologist Alexander Meshcheryakov, his colleague and co-worker at the Zagorsk institute for the blind and deaf.

As noted earlier, the Ideal constitutes a "peculiar category of phenomena," which are independent of an individual. It involves universal, commonly held image-patterns, as opposed to the awareness of an individual "soul" (Ilyenkov 2014).

However, the Ideal is not reducible to a form of social consciousness. As well as being socially constructed, the Ideal is also an attribute, with a potentially real objectivity and thus physicality because it partakes of, is under the auspices of, nature or matter (involving time and space).

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7. See IFI.2022 Lektorsky 2022 and De Paolo 2022
8. In his *The Spectre of Capital* Christopher Arthur (2022, 19) discusses "the actuality of the Ideal" in relation to exchange value and use value in the commodity. Proposing a novel way of connecting the Ideal realm with the material realm, he describes the Ideal as a "peculiar 'fold' within material reality," arguing that "the value form has itself an objectively 'ideal' character insofar as it may be presented as a logic of pure form."

"It is *in man* that Nature really performs, in a self-evident way, that very activity that we are accustomed to call 'thinking'."(Ilyenkov 1977, 16). In this process, things created by human labour, or in the case of the state, **powers**, receive the "stamp (imprint) of ideality,"[9] just as an individual becomes a human personality in her activity of social action.

Ilyenkov began his *Dialectics of the Ideal* with a quote from Lenin's notes on Hegel, namely that "the thought of the ideal passing into the real is profound, very important for history" (Lenin 1972, 114). We can add that the mutual transformation of the Ideal into the real and vice versa, is what human beings do every day as part of their material, social life-activity. Humans, through physical and mental labour produce not only material but also *ideal* products. That Ideal then "becomes a critical component of the material life-activity of social man, and then begins the opposite process—the process of the materialization … of the Ideal" (Ilyenkov 2014, 35).

Tarja Knuuttila, in her contribution to the first full English translation of *Dialectics of the Ideal*, eloquently referenced Ilyenkov's discussion about the work of an artist or an engineer. She concludes that "the ideal dwells in the relationship of representation, but that this is always in a state of becoming. It seems that the ideal is something fluid, flowing in the continuous stream of semiosis understood as practical activity, where meaning is constantly changing to its other" (Knuuttila 2014, 159).

To sum up: the Ideal is not reducible to the activity of an individual or a body or class of people. It exists as an Ideal action or actions, process or activity, each with its own inner contradictions and laws of development and transformations over time.

In the next section we consider how the category of the Ideal may mesh or interact with concepts of abstract and concrete universals. Can Ilyenkov's approach inform an understanding of the state, past and present? Is the state a type of universal? If so, what does that mean?

The State as a Concrete Universal and 'Universality'

We seek to view the state through the category of the Ideal as described above, building on Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach, which defines human essence as an ensemble of social relations. Ilyenkov elaborated on

9. Ilyenkov uses the word "imprint" in his essay on The Ideal. (Ilyenkov 2024)

the complex, multifarious nature of social forms as an Ideal which is objective in a material way:

> It is these spontaneously arising forms of the organisation of social (collectively realised) human life-activity that exist before, outside and completely independent of the individual mind, that in one way or another are materially established in language, in ritually legitimised customs and laws and, further, as 'the organisation of a state' with all its material attributes and organs for the protection of traditional forms of life that stand in opposition to the individual (the physical body of the individual with his brain, liver, heart, hands and other organs) as an organised whole that is 'in-itself and for-itself', as something 'ideal' within which all individual things acquire a different meaning and play a different role from that which they had played 'in themselves', that is, outside this whole.
>
> For this reason, the 'ideal' definition of anything, or the definition of any thing as a 'disappearing' moment in the movement of the 'ideal world', coincides in Hegel with the role and meaning of this thing in social-human culture, in the context of socially organised human life-activity, and not in the individual consciousness, which is here regarded as something derived from the 'universal spirit.' (Ilyenkov 2014)

Understanding Ilyenkov's category of the Ideal as a contradictory, objective, but vanishing moment rather than a static fixture is explanatory in relation to individual cognitive or psychological processes. It can also help us identify and analyse the state.

State theorist Bob Jessop's strategic-relational approach which views the state as characterised by its "fragile stability" (Jessop 2002, 2015) can be seen as a further development of this view of the state as both stable and a "vanishing moment." This is a particularly apt description, given struggles for self-determination, the existence of "failed states" and wars in Ukraine, Palestine-Israel and elsewhere.

The most basic definition of what it means to be a state reminds us that every country has a state, over which it exercises or seeks to exercise sovereign rule, defined in international law.[10] It is thus indeed a "universal" as shown by the membership of bodies such as the United

10. Polish-British political philosopher Zbigniew Pelcynski (1984) sets out the difference already for Hegel between the abstract and concrete universal of the state, in his 1984 book, *The State and Civil Society*: "When Hegel has in mind a specifically political community, he calls it der Staat (the state). His definition of the state is therefore highly stipulative, and quite removed from the conventional meaning of this term. 'The state' for Hegel means any ethical community which is politically organised and sovereign, subject to a supreme public authority and independent from other such communities."

Nations. An exception to this is Palestine, a stateless state, which proclaimed itself as a state in 1988 and presently has observer status at the United Nations.

As a universal category and concept, the state is an expression of the movement of complex social forces in history, a unity of relative parts of a historically-located totality, the form of the state and its content changing over time and geographical place. In its efforts to manage society, the state and state power are in concert and conflict with its own Other, which is the "non-state" or civil society, which consists of innumerable organised and non-organised entities and groups and individuals.

Both as an Ideal and in practice, therefore, the abstract universal of the state is the ensemble of all those institutions and public organs by which power or hegemony is exercised in a society, including the executive, judiciary, legislature, security forces and administrative apparatus. When Ilyenkov specifies that the organisation of a state stands "in opposition to the individual," he immediately draws attention to the way in which the state stands outside any individual, i.e., in an alienated and alienating relationship.

Abstract and Concrete Universals

Here we can usefully deploy cognitive scientist Richard Shillcock's distinction between abstract universals and concrete universals. He notes: "We provisionally conclude that abstract universals are theory-derived entities that give us valuable multiple perspectives on the ordered relations within a domain, but which fail to provide access to the complete contents of the domain and understanding thereof" (Shillcock 2013).

Shillcock, who draws on Vygotsky and Ilyenkov, views the abstract universal as part of a cognitive, and developmental process. It may also be seen as, "the logical method of approach" apropos Friedrich Engels in his introduction to *Marx's Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.[11]

So, moving on to Ilyenkov's exposition of the nature of the universal:

> The 'universal' in them [phenomena of the same 'kind'] may outwardly express itself equally well through differences, even opposites, which make these phenomena the mutually complementary component parts of the

11. Engels 1859. See also Chapter 4 (Ilyenkov 1982) and Ninos 2023.

> 'whole.' Thus, we attain some genuinely real ensemble, or some 'organic totality,' rather than an amorphous set of units which are ascribed to that 'set' on the strength of some 'similarity' or 'feature' more or less accidental to each of them, or on the basis of a formal 'identity' totally irrelevant to its specific nature, its particularity or individuality.
>
> On the other hand, that 'universal' which reveals itself precisely in the particular or individual characteristics of all component parts of the 'whole' without exception—in each one of many homogeneous phenomena—*is itself as 'real as the particular*,' [my italics] as existing along with other 'particular' individuals, its derivatives. There is no element of mystery about this, for the father very often lives a long time side-by-side with his sons. And if not present among the living anymore, he surely must have existed at one time, i.e., must be conceived necessarily in the category of 'existent being.' Thus, the genetically understood 'universal' exists, self-evidently, not at all in the ether of abstraction, or only in the element of word and thought. Neither does its existence, by any means, nullify or diminish the reality of its modifications, its derivatives or the universally dependent, particular individuals. (Ilyenkov 1974)

Thus, Hegel's "strictly political state" can be understood as the Ideal from which today's contemporary state is descended, albeit not simply in an "emergent," evolutionary way, but rather through social and political transitions and at times revolutions. In this respect we can view it as an **abstract universal**. From such abstract universals we need to elaborate the state further as a **concrete universal**, noting Shillcock's useful distinction: "The **concrete universal** has a venerable philosophical history, beginning with Plato but finding more expression in Hegel, and being taken up by modern materialists in the Vygotskyan [sic] tradition, but it is largely neglected in western cognitive science."

Here is where Ilyenkov's exposition of the movement from abstract to concrete is helpful: "The question of the universal character of a concept is transferred to another sphere: that of the study of the real *process of development*. The developmental approach becomes thereby the approach of *logic*" (Ilyenkov 1982, 76–77).

The State as a Dialectical Ideal

We suggest that the contemporary state in capitalist society can be viewed in terms of Ilyenkov's concept of the Ideal, as an internally-dialectical relationship of abstract and concrete universal identities, constantly developing in relation to each other.

As noted earlier in this essay, Ilyenkov developed the category of the Ideal drawing on Hegel as well as Lenin's conspectus of Hegel's *Logic*. Therefore, understanding the essence of the state involves grasping it as an ensemble of contradictions, as a fluid moment in time. In his *Science of Logic* Hegel emphasises that the very notion of essence is dialectical. Lenin refers to Hegel describing Essence as "a movement through different moments" and that

> the *stages of Being* and Essence hitherto considered, as well as those of Notion and Objectivity, are not, when so distinguished, *something permanent, resting upon themselves.* But they have proved to be dialectical, and their truth consists only in being *moments of the idea.* (Lenin 1972, 134, 198, emphasis in original)

From a materialist point of view, the Ideal of the state as well as Hegel's Ideal, is "enfolded" in the material realities of time and place.[12] These point to the state as an unstable, constantly in adjustment, unquiet form of the Ideal, experiencing quantitative and qualitative transformations, which are relative to each particular, individual state and its histories. It is therefore incumbent on us to elucidate in an empirical way the emergence of the capitalist state as a concrete universal.

We shall examine how, for example, the contradictions within the ideal of the state have undergone a transformation during the neoliberal period of globalised capitalism. Consequences in terms of social consciousness include a weakening of the legitimacy and authority of the state. In terms of state forms, it can help explain the crisis of representative democracy and the rise of autocracy.

Materialist View of the State

The outlines of a materialist view of the state were developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marx (1859), in his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, writes that relations of production, what he called the "economic structure of society" were the "real foundation" on which rises a "legal and political superstructure,"or the state. Moreover,

12. Compare Arthur's (2022) "homology" between the movement of exchange and the movement of thought in *The Spectre of Capital*: "The actuality of the Ideal results from the way the practical movement of exchange parallels that of thought, insofar as it generates a system of pure form. So the method here is not the application to our specific domain of one of universal truth, such as Hegel's logic. Rather, our domain itself generates a system of self-moving forms. Thus it is anticipated that there will be a homology between the economic forms and the categories of idealist ontology." (Arthur 2022, 26)

he added, how production was organized determined the "general character of social, political, and intellectual processes of life."

In the *German Ideology*, published in 1845, Marx and Engels insist that the state is "nothing more than the form of organisation which the bourgeoisie necessarily adopt both for internal and external purposes, for the mutual guarantee of their property and interests" (Marx and Engels 1845). In other words, the state is seen purely as an instrument in the hands of the ruling class. It was Engels who went on to develop a fuller framework for studying the state. In his ground-breaking 1884 work on anthropology, the *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State,* Engels (2010) writes that the state was a product of a society at a certain stage of its development:

> It is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, these classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a power, seemingly standing above society, that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of 'order;' and this power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state. (Engels 2016, 123)

Engels insists that "as a rule" the state was effectively the state of "the dominant economic class which in time became the politically dominant class" (Engels 2016, 124). These dialectical thoughts about the contradictory nature of the state indicated lines of inquiry and research for other Marxists to take on.

Vladimir Lenin wrote *State and Revolution* on the eve of the 1917 revolution. He quoted Marx and Engels positively in a polemic against those who watered down their views. Lenin particularly noted how Marx and Engels developed their view of the state following the experiences made by the Paris Commune. In their 1872 preface to the *Communist Manifesto*, they acknowledged that one thing especially was proved by the Commune, that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes" (Marx and Engels 1848) In his pamphlet, Lenin also writes extensively about the transitional nature of a state created by the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, which Engels (1877) had flagged up within his concept of the "withering away" of the state in *Anti-Duhring*.

Marxist state theory lay dormant for a long period after the Russian Revolution, with activists content to quote Marx, Engels or Lenin without further ado or describe specific state actions to substantiate their views. As the post-1945 Keynesian boom came to an end with an economic and political crisis, a renewed interest in a Marxist view of the state led to fierce disputes. On the one side was Greek sociologist Nicos Poulantzas and on the other Ralph Miliband, who taught at the London School of Economics.

Miliband reflected a view that held that the state in and of itself was neutral and was made capitalist by agency, or the actions of personnel who tended to come from upper middle-class circles (Miliband 2009). This, in practice, was a classic social democratic view of the state as a benign instrument in the wrong hands. Poulantzas, on the other hand, held a structuralist position and attacked Miliband's position in the *New Left Review*. Poulantzas contended that state structures were more important than the types of people who worked in its institutions. The structures, he argued, determined that the state was capitalist in and of itself. This outlook was criticised as vulgar materialism, in that actors' beliefs are treated wholly as a function of their material circumstances.

Attempts to overcome this impasse led eventually to a more nuanced, dialectical Marxist view, one which studies the relationships between structure and agency, the state and capitalism, the state and civil society in a concrete way. Bob Jessop, distinguished professor of sociology at the University of Lancaster, England, sees the state as a social relation within capitalism itself—a conclusion that Poulantzas eventually arrived at. This approach helps us understand how what Jessop calls a capitalist type of state functions, its contradictions, strengths and weaknesses.

As Jessop explains (Jessop 2015, 121):

> [First] the state protects private property and the sanctity of contracts on behalf of capital as a whole. This supports capital's formal rights to manage the labour process, appropriate surplus labour, and enforce contracts with other capitals. Second, the rational organisation of capitalism requires free wage labour—which the state creates through its role in ending feudal privileges, promoting the enclosure of commons, punishing vagabonds, and imposing an obligation to enter the labour market... Third, the modern state does not engage in profitable economic activities on its own account—capital prefers to provide these and gets the state to undertake economically and socially necessary activities that are unprofitable.

There is thus a division of labour in society between economic and political power. While capitalists hold economic and financial power through corporations, shares and financial institutions, the exercise of political power is through the state. The economic and non-economic exists in a dialectical, social relation, Jessop (2002) argues.

He views the state as a relatively autonomous "socially-embedded" ensemble of institutions that is interdependent with the operations of the capitalist economy. In that way, the state is an "ideal collective capitalist" with the capacity to fund its own projects through taxation of economic activity together with borrowing. Jessop explains that neither capitalism nor the capital-labour relation can be reproduced purely through market relations. "Both require supplementary modes of reproduction, regulation and governance—including those provided in part through the operations of **the state**" [our emphasis] (Jessop 2002, 11). In that way, "bourgeois societalisation … involves … the relative subordination of an entire social order to the logic and reproduction requirements of capital accumulation" (Jessop 2002, 23).

For Jessop (2015), class power and domination is "limited" and those he designates as non-dogmatic Marxists, try to explain this "in terms of the contradictions and antagonisms inherent in the capital relation" which, as we have seen, includes the state. His approach enables a concrete analysis of the capitalist economy as it develops. He demonstrates how capitalist-driven globalisation is "linked to changing forms of state intervention that affect the definition, regulation and operation of market forces" (Jessop 2015, 119).

The capitalist state as a specifically social form is examined by Rob Hunter (2023). He explains how the present state is "historically specific" to the capitalist society of which it is the "political form of appearance." A social form approach explains why the capitalist state "is not a state *in* capitalism but the state *of* capitalism." [emphasis in original] (Hunter 2023, 233)

Specifically *capitalist* states are not anterior (either logically or historically) to capitalist relations of production and exchange. They do not subsist independently of the capitalist economy, and they are not pre-capitalist institutions that have been captured by capital or capitals. If the capitalist state is a historically valid category, then it is not possible to speak of the state either as being captured by the capitalist class or as being denatured or deformed through subordination to the imperatives of capital accumulation.

How the UK Capitalist State was Built

In line with Hunter's approach, we provide a view of the emergence of the UK state in relationship to the development of the world's first capitalist economy. When capitalist forms of production first appeared in Britain in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the British state as we know it today was in its infancy. The landed aristocracy dominated politics. Within the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the rising capitalist class had won access to political power through electoral reform and the extension of the franchise.

A state-sponsored disciplining of labour ideologically and legally began. The modern state took shape and by mid-century, there was a police force in every town, for example. The abolition of the Elizabethan poor law—which provided state relief for the destitute—and the introduction of the workhouse in the New Poor Law of 1834 was far-reaching, both in daily practice and in the evolution of social consciousness. The original Poor Law of 1601, introduced under Elizabeth I, obliged each parish to collect taxes to support people who could not work. This pre-capitalist measure aimed at the rural poor, would not survive the first period of the industrial revolution, when millions were driven into towns in search of work in the new factories. Free-market imperatives demanded that workers accept wages dictated by the owners and that the state offer no financial support.

John Saville (1995) writes that the "acceptance of parish relief became an article of shame for many sections of the working population … the social stigma and fear of the workhouse went some way towards creating the ethos and ideas which industrial capitalism required of its workforce" (Saville 1995, 27).

A significant step forward for capitalism came with the legalisation of joint stock ownership of banks in 1826. Then in 1855 and 1856, new laws introduced limited liability for shareholders and extended joint stock ownership to industrial enterprises. The significance of the invention of limited liability has been compared to that of the steam engine. It was an essential precondition for the development of shareholding corporations, stock markets and capitalist economies. As Saville (1995, 81) writes:

> The effective consolidation of the British state by the third quarter of the 19th century was a product of a rapidly developing industrial society, of a middle class whose ideology of laissez-faire and the free market was a central article of faith linked with an unshakeable belief in a confident future …The

> transition to the industrial state … was never smooth and even. On the contrary, it was turbulent, disorderly and in social and political terms often violent.

The "urbulence" included the emergence of the first working class party in the shape of the Chartists in the late 1830s. They struggled to win the vote by means of protests and petitions but were denied by Parliament on repeated occasions over a decade. A militant wing of the Chartists adopted a revolutionary, military-style approach to challenge and even overthrow the state but were suppressed.

Votes for some male workers were achieved in 1867 and extended in 1884. The extension of the franchise by a confident ruling class now engaged in large-scale empire building and dominating world trade protected by its navy, signalled a new period of social compromise effected through the capitalist state. The Trade Union Act of 1871 formally legalised trade unions for the first time, giving them immunity for claims for compensation by the employers during strikes. This was followed by the Factory Act of 1874, which set a 10-hour limit on the working day. Capitalists required workers who could read and write. But they were in no position to provide schools or teachers. Schools for poor children were financed from the 1830s and from 1876 all parents were legally obliged to send their children to school. Public health was another function assumed by the state. In this way, the supply of relatively educated and healthy workers required by capitalists was achieved by the capitalist state and this continues to be the case today.

The Conservative Party, which had opposed the initial extension of the franchise in 1832, adapted to the needs of the dominant industrial class. They managed the consequences of capitalist exploitation in wider society through a series of reforms. So, by the last quarter of the 19th century, the state itself was in effect a form of class compromise. After the convulsions of two world wars and inter-war class conflict, the compromise was re-established in the post-1945 economic settlement made at Bretton Woods, which produced state-managed economies and what is known as the Keynesian Welfare State. In the UK, major social reforms included a free National Health Service and subsidised housing, alongside state ownership of energy and transport industries. These achievements by the UK working class continue to have a significant presence in social consciousness.

Enter Neoliberalism

The long period of social compromise was shattered in 1971 by the collapse of the Bretton Woods framework, with its fixed currencies tied to the dollar, restricted capital movements and budget deficits. On 15 August that year, the post-1945 economic framework became history after dollar convertibility was abandoned. A free-for-all in currency speculation began, the value of the dollar plunged, inflation soared—it reached 25% in the UK in 1975—leading to a tripling of oil prices by producers and a three-day week in the UK. A massive recession gripped the world economy.

In 1947, in opposition to Keynesianism, Austrian-British economist and philosopher Friedrich Hayek founded the Mont Pelerin Society in Switzerland. It included Milton Friedman, later a supporter of monetarism, among its thinkers. Hayek and Friedman led the way in advocating an open, market-driven economy which the state would encourage and help develop. This would replace the state-managed economy set out at Bretton Woods. Their theories began to find an echo in policy-making circles at the highest levels of the state and in actions by governments.

In 1976, with unemployment soaring, inflation at 16% and the pound under sustained attack, the UK Labour government negotiated a loan from the International Monetary Fund, the largest in its history. But the loan was conditional on substantial public spending cuts. Labour's austerity programme led to the so-called Winter of Discontent of 1978–9 and a major confrontation with public sector unions. Shortly afterwards, Margaret Thatcher steered the Tories to a decisive election victory. Bob Jessop (2003) writes that "1979 marked an important symbolic defeat for the post-war mode of economic regulations, its institutionalised class compromise between capital and labour, and its associated forms of crisis management. And in this sense it greatly facilitated further development and consolidation of neoliberalism."

As David Coates (2018) notes:

> Its [neoliberalism's] appearance as a dominant economic and political form was both a response to and a measure of the crisis of the Keynesian-based progressive politics that prevailed in the vast majority of advanced capitalisms during some/all of the years of the long capitalist boom that followed World War II.

While Alison Ayers and Alfredo Saad-Filho (2015, 603) argue:

> Neoliberalism is based on the systematic use of state power, under a "free-market" cloak, to transform the material basis of accumulation at five levels:

> the allocation of resources, international economic integration, the role of the state, ideology and the reproduction of the working class.

State intervention has been transformed rather than reduced under neoliberalism. The power of financial capital is prominent, as SOAS academics Ben Fine and Alfredo Saad-Filho (2017, 690) say:

> Currently, while the overall logic of state policies and interventions remains to promote economic and social reproduction and the restructuring of capital, the interests and role of finance have increasingly come to the fore either directly or indirectly. Such is evident, for example, from the policy responses to the global crisis and the continuing recession; but it is equally characteristic of the policies implemented over the entire neoliberal period, as the interests of private capital in general and of finance in particular have been favoured by the state.

From 1979, Tory governments, first under Margaret Thatcher and from 1990 until 1997 under John Major, put neoliberalism into practice. State assets like gas, water, electricity, telecommunications and the railways were privatised. Many local government services were outsourced. Vast areas like London's docklands were handed over to developers and planning restrictions scrapped to facilitate commercially-led regeneration. A panoply of draconian laws against trade union activity outlawed mass picketing and solidarity action. Historically, they reversed the gains of the 1871 legislation, which granted the trade unions legal immunity. The full force of the state was deployed in a year-long battle with the miners' union over closures, which lasted from 1984 until 1985. The union's assets were seized by the state and hundreds of miners arrested.

Among the most significant of all measures was Thatcher's 1983 agreement with the London Stock Exchange to restructure and essentially deregulate the UK's financial markets. When the City of London's Big Bang, as it was known, exploded in October 1986, electronic trading was introduced on the stock market in place of paper. Overseas investment banks were able to set up in the UK without restrictions. It was an essential part of finance-driven globalisation which was to change the shape and the nature of contemporary capitalism along neoliberal lines. A parallel process was launched in the United States when Ronald Reagan became president in 1981. He implemented 25% across-the-board tax cuts, higher defence spending, began financial deregulation and attacked the trade unions. The Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization staged a strike which was declared illegal. All the strikers were then sacked by federal authorities.

Neoliberalism was taken a step further by the Clinton administration which promoted the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This established a free trade area between the United States, Mexico and Canada. Clinton's administration accelerated the deregulation of the financial sector. The firewall between commercial and investment banking activities, introduced in the 1930s, was abolished. Clinton claimed the new arrangements would' "enhance the stability of our financial services system." It was in Clinton's first term that the World Trade Organization came into existence, replacing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade which had been part of the Bretton Woods financial architecture. The WTO went on to become a key facilitator of capitalist globalisation, ruling against a whole range of measures designed to protect consumers and public services. It is the only international body whose rulings are accepted by the United States.

The new global framework built by Thatcher, Reagan and Clinton was wholeheartedly embraced by Tony Blair and what became New Labour in the UK. Self-regulation for the banking sector encouraged the growth of speculative financial instruments, was implemented. New Labour's policies included the marketisation of education through tuition fees for university students and privately-run academy schools. An internal market in the National Health Service was established around hospital trusts that operated like big business. So-called private finance initiatives imposed huge costs on the construction of public buildings like hospitals and schools. The invasion of Iraq on a tissue of lies and misinformation was a neoliberal project. Its aim was to turn Iraq into a market economy and political system in the image of the United States and Britain.

Contradictions within the Ideal of the State

The capitalist state contains immanent contradictions, which have sharpened immeasurably during the neoliberal period. Limitations and reach of territorially-based sovereign state systems have been exposed by the power and influence of transnational corporations and an online global financial system operating throughout 24 hours. A "no-borders" globalised economy and financial system has reduced the impact of conventional economic measures. Attempts to sidestep these arrangements can spell financial chaos as the short-lived 2022 Tory government under Liz Truss discovered (Stewart and Allegretti 2022). The impasse over effective climate emergency measures is a consequence of the changed relationship between state and capital. The failure of Cop28 held in the

United Arab Emirates in December 2023, to call for a phase-out of fossil fuels is "devastating" and "dangerous" (Carrington 2023).

The capitalist state's very existence as a power with means of enforcement of decisions is an immediate opposite to the society over whom it claims to rule "in the common interest" (Jessop 2015). The state is incapable of satisfying all "interests" at the same time and thus privileges certain "interests," including those of the capitalist class. Depending on political and other considerations, the state may favor one or more sectors over others. This was the case when governments internationally deregulated the financial sector in the period from the late 1990s. During the 2008 financial crash, the state bailed out and nationalised some banks while others were allowed to go to the wall. On occasions, political considerations take precedence over the economy. Such was the case in the United Kingdom with Brexit. The high risk involved in withdrawing from the European Union with its tariff-free single market led to widespread opposition from global corporations with a UK presence as well as British firms. "For the last five years business and government have been at odds. Brexit was very divisive," Confederation of British Industry director general Tony Danker admitted in 2021. State policy-making failures are commonplace. Few anticipated, for example, that freeing the financial markets would open up the road to the global financial crash; even fewer predicted that the UK would vote for Brexit. As Jessop (2003) points out:

> Thus there is no guarantee that political outcomes will serve the needs of capital—even assuming that these could be objectively identified in advance in sufficient detail to provide the basis for a capitalistically rational plan of state action and inaction. The operational autonomy of the state is a further massive complicating factor in this regard. Indeed, to the extent that it enables the state to pursue the interests of capital in general at the expense of particular capitals, it also enables it to damage the interests of capital in general.

With its dependence on economic growth for revenue and the privileging of corporate interests, a state which claims to rule in the common interest, cannot in practice do so. The UK state's spending totals around £850 billion pounds a year. That is almost half the total value of all goods and services, or what is known as gross domestic product. Where does the money for this come from? Income tax and national insurance contributions are the largest sources. VAT, which is a tax on consumers, comes next. Corporations are near the bottom, contributing just £53 billion pounds of the total in 2020–21.

What these figures demonstrate is that the UK state is dependent on economic activity and, above all, having people in work paying taxes and spending money as consumers. The bulk of that employment is provided by the private sector, by capitalist enterprises. So the state, whatever government is in power, is committed to creating the conditions for the private sector to grow and dominate. Labour economist Martin Carnoy (1992, 218) writes:

> Economic activity produces state revenues and … public support for a regime will decline unless accumulation continues to take place. State managers willingly do what they know they must to facilitate capital accumulation… Such managers are particularly sensitive to overall business confidence.

The state is utterly reliant on financial markets for borrowing. The loans are used to fund services throughout the year as tax is collected gradually rather than at one go. The state also borrows to fund spending deficits and, significantly, to pay for emergencies, such as bailouts in the wake of the 2008 crash, and furloughs and other funding during the Covid pandemic. Finally, the state is not a homogeneous body where all the parts fit harmoniously into a single whole with a defined purpose. Contradictions within the state can lead to various malfunctions, as institutions pursue their own culture and interests.

The Struggle for Democracy

Antonio Gramsci (1999, 504) defined the role of the capitalist state as "the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance but manages to win the active consent over whom it rules." The last phrase is significant. Active consent, not just passivity. We must consent to be ruled in a certain way. This is, however, not a stable or absolute consent. Nor is hegemony reducible, we should say, exactly to the ideas of the ruling classes or crude propaganda. They are refracted, popularised, turned into aspects of art and culture and into an approach to education. They become mainstream. Bryn Jones and Mike O'Donnell (2018, 6) write that neoliberalism has the effect of structuring the way

> subjects think about the practices, techniques and rationalities used to govern themselves. Neoliberal governments represent the population's wellbeing as ultimately tied to individuals' ability to make market principles the guiding values of their lives, to see themselves as products to create, sell and optimise.

They describe neoliberalism as a "systemic discourse embodied in the dominance of market-like practices over social life and governance ... a pervasive commodification of most aspects of personal, public and cultural life, and well-being" (Jones and O'Donnell 2018, 6).

The struggle for democracy is the Other of the state, its opposite. In essence, the countless battles for democracy in all their forms constitute a resistance to the power of the state in both capitalist and pre-capitalist epochs. They are an expression of how the masses contest the right of the state to rule over them, to impose its will, policies and repressive measures and in this way constitute an integral part of the class struggle. The hollowing out of the state in the neoliberal period has an inexorable logic in terms of democracy in all its aspects. A crisis of representative bourgeois democracy is self-evident, with the emergence of autocratic regimes, the dismantling of many post-WWII social reforms and serious assaults on the right to strike and to protest in many countries like the UK.

The achievement of representative democracy opened the door to social reforms, especially in the long post-World War II boom. This form of class compromise was shattered with the further development of neoliberal capitalism from the early 1980s until today. With the eroding of bourgeois democracy forms and with it the effectiveness of electoral politics, the state's hegemonic ideological grip—essential for maintaining its authority and legitimacy—is weakened, deepening the contradictions within the state.

Rafael Khachaturian (2023, 86) notes recent scholarship on 'authoritarian neoliberalism' in which capitalist states are "beset by problems of crisis management stemming from austerity policies, weakened popular-representative capacities, and a general condition of ideological depoliticisation and lack of popular-democratic accountability." These contradictions have prompted further moves towards authoritarian measures to try and resolve "what is a general crisis of legitimacy."

Even before neoliberal capitalism entered its existential crisis in 2008, the state's legitimacy as a body claiming to represent the interests of society as a whole, was already considerably diminished. By introducing market criteria into new spheres of social life like education and care, the state abandoned its former role as provider. Whole areas of essential services have been moved from public to private sectors, from statutory to contract law. In many countries, mainstream parties converged in their outlook as the relationship between state and capital changed in favor of the latter, further weakening the effectiveness of the

existing democratic process. In countries like France, traditional parties of both right and left have disappeared altogether, replaced by managerial, populist groups. In the United States, the attack from within by the Republican Party at national and state level has created the conditions for a new civil war.

As Saad Filho and Sayers (2015, 604) explain, the neoliberal project sets out to reduce citizens with social and political rights to consumers. "Individuals are regularly invited to make a token visit to the polling booths, where they consume the freedom to vote by registering their preferences in much the same way as they express their identities by choosing soft drinks, clothes." They describe it as a "sterilisation of the political process," which amounts to a "depoliticisation of politics." Where opposition to post-2008 austerity took governmental form, as in Greece, the full weight of neoliberal state structures—this time in the form of the European Central Bank and European Union came down hard to impose harsh bail-out conditions. When Jeremy Corbyn, as the Labour Party's first elected left-wing leader, attempted to revive radical reformism, he was subjected to vilification and character assassination from within and without.

As a result, voters in many countries no longer view representative democracy as a vehicle for achieving meaningful change and improved life chances. This outlook is reinforced by the results of the last 40 years of globalisation. Inequality in the major capitalist countries has grown to record levels. The share of wages in gross domestic product (GDP) in the UK has fallen to 59.6 % compared with 69.7% in 1975. A growing hostility to the state is reinforced in many countries by a political class beholden to populism, anti-immigration rhetoric and practice. The capitalist state's refusal/inability to deliver policies that address the climate and eco-systems crisis reinforce the weakness of the political system, especially in the eyes of new generations. As a result, trust in mainstream politicians has plummeted. Just nine per cent of the British public say they trust politicians to tell the truth, down from twelve per cent in 2022 (Ipsos 2023). Detailed research by the Constitution Unit, University of London (Renwick et al 2023) found widespread dissatisfaction with how democracy is performing in the UK.

State versus Anti-State

From a dialectical perspective, the essence of the state is revealed as an identity, unity, interpenetration of a series of opposing forces. The self-related Other of the state is its "negative" or the absence of power; "the

Other of the first;" one presupposes the other. Lenin (1972, 226) emphasised the importance of grasping the essence of a universal concept, by drawing attention to Hegel's thought that: "a universal first term considered in and for itself shows itself to be its own Other…" We should view the Other of the state not as an empty abstraction, but rather an assertion, definition and negative development of the Other. As discussed earlier, the state exists as the constant exercise of power over a whole range of "Others," and there are a whole range of positive forces within the negative of the non-state. These can be described as civil society, the anti-state, the people or the Demos. The history of all states is characterised by opposition from the mass of society to assert its own rights and its power. This can also be seen as the struggle for self-determination of a people and the individuals who make up a people or nation or ethnicity. This is in essence, the struggle for emancipation from the state which is real democracy, as Marx put it.

We are living through a transition from neoliberal capitalism to authoritarian, illiberal forms of state rule. There are prolonged crises of the democratic form, including constitutional ones, in Brazil, Chile, UK, Sweden, Greece, Italy, United States, India, Israel, France and elsewhere. Neofascist parties have entered governments in Italy and are poised to win seats in Germany. To paraphrase Francis Fukuyama, it is possible to argue that there is an "end of history" moment here, with the incipient demise of bourgeois democracy. As Jessop (2012, 3) has argued: "Marxists tend to assume that all forms of social power linked to class domination are fragile, unstable, **provisional, and temporary** and that continuing struggles are needed to secure class domination, overcome resistance, and naturalise or mystify class power." [emphasis added]

Concluding Remarks

As the decline of the bourgeois state gathers pace, opportunities will arise for creating a revolutionary transition. To define richer and emancipatory concepts of universalism we can build on thinkers like Massimilano Tomba and Slavoj Zizek. In their own ways they assert the validity of both abstract and concrete interpretations of emancipatory universality. Tomba (2019) rejects notions of "big thinkers" and unilinear time, proposing instead a multiverse of layers and temporalities in place of dogmatic stages. He focuses on the many anonymous actors of all these events, trying to pluralize the concept of revolution—making it multidimensional: "revolutions within revolutions."

He refers in a semi-Ilyenkovian way to products of a 'collective mind' (Tomba 2020). This is a fruitful approach, allowing him to highlight emancipatory moments when revolutionary surges have thrown up novel forms of political and social organization. He describes the Paris commune of 1871 and the 1917 constitution in Russia as "temporalities" which form alternatives to existing oppressive hierarchical states. "The state was exploded, they were not building a state," he said in discussion with Gabriel Rockhill at a Critical Theory Workshop, contrasting Lenin's constitution with the Stalinist 1936 constitution. Noting that experiments such as the Zapatista's can only persist while, "the state is taking a nap," Tomba's democratic ideal is not state ownership or nationalisation but organising ourselves, independently of the state, picking up strands of Italian autonomism and the Potere Operaio movement of the 1960s and 1970s, theorised by Antonio Negri.

In a different take on universalism, Slavoj Zizek has strongly championed the importance of democratic and emancipatory universalism against its far-right opponents. He warns about the material power of ideology (which we can rephrase as "forms of the Ideal") in relation to the current onslaught on Ukraine, pointing to Putin and Dugin's attack on universalism and all human rights as a form of 'Westernism' (Ukraine Solidarity Campaign 2023). This is a crucial consideration and the rise of authoritarianism—whether in the United States, France, India, Russia or China— makes it imperative to go beyond simply opposition to curtailments of democracy, but to theorise and elaborate twentyfirst century concepts of democracy that can be developed in practice.[13] As Hunter (2023, 255) concludes: "Emancipatory struggle does not consist in the struggle to seize, or wield the power of, the capitalist state. Rather, such a state is an appearance of a social reality that must be abolished."

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13. Wendell Kisner (2008) made a study of Zizek's interpretation of the concrete universal and its political implications.

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Biographies

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Evald Ilyenkov and Marek Siemek on Turning Marxism into a Science

Maxim Morozov

ABSTRACT: The paper discusses the problem of the rupture between theory and practice in relation to the idea of the identity of dialectics, logic and theory of knowledge. Evald Ilyenkov and Marek Siemek show that the tepid attitude of marxist theorists towards philosophy, which is based on individual quotations of Marx and Engels rather than on a deep theoretical reflection on their cognitive foundations, has led to the elimination of important epistemological issues from Marxism and a general retreat of understanding of knowledge to a pre-Kantian level, where practice is understood as something only external to theory. This entails distortions in goal-setting and the choice of means in the context of mass movements associated with the emancipation of labour. Lenin warns of these difficulties associated with a lack of high philosophical culture in his "philosophical testament." In an attempt to fulfil this task, Siemek and Ilyenkov undertake a serious reversal of scientific consciousness to the problematics contained in the works of the German idealists. Both Siemek and Ilyenkov point out that the marxist theory of knowledge has yet to be created, that in the texts of the classics it is given only in a fragmentary form, in some individual aphoristic remarks, and that in order not to "reduce dialectics to the sum of examples" (Lenin), we must rediscover the works of the German idealists, read them in the most profound way in the context of contemporary problems and challenges, carry out their independent materialist revision, and ground our minds in a future practice which can be nothing other than the practice of the future. A practice that today manifests itself in the practice of knowledge.

KEYWORDS: Ilyenkov, Siemek, *dialectics*, Hegel, Marx, theory of knowledge, science, ideal.

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On Formal Causes and Material Reasons

Turning to "round numbers" always carries a certain problematic nature. Why do we only on a person's birthday strive to show him/her that we remember him/her, to say kind words, to show indifference? Commemorative dates of various events, including anniversaries of birth and death of great thinkers, artists, historical figures, year after year raise the same question: is it necessary to have a formal occasion to address the memory, their legacy? To what extent is the Pythagorean "mysticism of numbers" "to blame" for this, and is there room for a reasonable form of reason here? Is it only the coincidence of zeros and ones that makes us turn to dialogue with the outstanding "heroes of the spirit," as Hegel called them?

Just recently we celebrated the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx, and just a little later, one after another, the anniversaries of the scientists whose works served, as Lenin claimed, as "the source and constituent part" of the Marxist doctrine: Georg Hegel, Charles Fourier and David Ricardo were born a quarter of a millennium ago. As we continue to scrutinise the series of formal coincidences, we can see that this year in general has been rich in dates related to political economy: Ricardo passed away on 11 September 1823, and another famous predecessor of Marx, Adam Smith, was born a hundred years and three months before that. Anyone who did not yawn at literature lessons on reading Pushkin's immortal "novel in verse" will remember from whom young Eugene Onegin learnt to "judge how the state grows rich;" it was these lines that F. Engels quoted with pleasure to his guests, demonstrating his knowledge of the Russian language.

The coming year brings two huge occasions for philosophy, and I wish that they would not remain merely formal. I would like to see thought break through the floods of glorification and empty talk about Immanuel Kant in honor of his tercentenary. So that attention to the largest and brightest Soviet philosopher, Evald Vasylievich Ilyenkov, who would have turned one hundred years old, would not turn into a distant and polite courtesy. How can one not recall the famous words of Gotthold Lessing? "Who would not praise a Klopstock? But will everybody read him? No. We would like to be exalted less, but read more diligently!"

But if this wish is not to remain empty, it is necessary to identify the need to comprehend the influence that the works of Ilyenkov and Kant have on the possibility of overcoming the present—very sad—state of affairs, both in reality and in science, which reflects this reality in its

pure forms. This influence forces us to recall Hegel's famous thought about the sensible identity of opposites, which reason assumes only in isolation: everyone knows that form is not the same as content. If we think a little deeper, it is easy to understand that the formal reason points to a certain content, which is ideally represented in this reason, and which is generated by a certain problematic nature of the subject under study. In other words, the contradiction of form and content reflects the contradiction of the thing itself, which, being unified, is objectively bifurcated into phenomenon and essence. This duality is expressed on the surface as a distinction between the occasion, which does not always oblige serious reflection, and the actual, substantial motive for addressing the "round number," and in fact—to that layer of objective reality, which is reflected in the works of the scientist whose anniversary we are preparing to celebrate. Such an "archaeology of knowledge" is, of course, far from being of historical interest only: the problems grasped by the thinkers in their writings, the contradictions they expressed in their theoretical definitions, have not been resolved at all to this day. And when we re-open the pages of the *Critique of Pure Reason* or *Dialectical Logic* today, we look there, first of all, for ourselves: we try to find answers to the "cursed questions" of modernity; we try to understand in what society we now live, where we are, where and how we should go; we try to figure out how exactly to open doors with the "key to the anatomy of an ape" and to measure our minds against the best historical samples, measuring these samples with the "answer from the end of the textbook." All this is the universal process of the development of truth—the determination of the subject by its ideal form, essence, notion, and, at the same time, of the notion by its subject. Like any mutual transformation of the ideal and the real, this process in the field of thinking, which wants to be actual (that is, standing on *this* side, according to Marx), requires from this thinking the ability to control its every step, requires a rigorous view from dialectical thought. And first of all, it is worth addressing the fundamental problem of the beginning—however difficult this may be.

The mind that is not alien to classical thought knows Hegel's position that every movement is a forward movement towards its beginning. It is not difficult to realise that the problem of the beginning is identical with the problem of the end. Evald Ilyenkov would have been a hundred years old next year. This subjunctive mood, however, is appropriate when talking about those who have passed away recently and unexpectedly. Here we compare the time that was given to a person with our

measures. We unconsciously hold on to certain assumptions with our subjectivity, we reason like "one hardly lives to be a hundred years old, the subjunctive mood is hardly appropriate here." But how is the truth of our measures verified? So is the validity of the notion that the time of life is "given" by someone else, like a sausage by weight that is sold in a retail shop. We can't do without God and Mother Nature, and we start calculating whether we have "lived long enough," "hurried" or, on the contrary, "overstayed."

E.V. Ilyenkov, who understood perfectly well that truth is a relation to the Self, timed himself. "There is no point in living after fifty-five years,"—quotes his words A.V. Suvorov (Suvorov 2004, 13). And so, in the year of his centenary, we will be forced to recall also the 45th anniversary of his tragic passing. These outwardly formal things are necessary to unfold the inseparable from their own form content of the "accursed questions" to the resolution of which Ilyenkov devoted his whole life. Is there a meaning to life—after fifty-five or at all? What is *meaning* and why does a person put his or her life into finding it? Living to eat is understandable, but how do you understand the opposite? And, most importantly, what is to live for? Is the life of the spirit a tragedy? Is the life of the spirit only a tragedy? What is tragedy and how does it relate to the universal aesthetic ability of man? What is the role of universal human abilities in the universal process of truth, in the life of the Universe?

We can talk about the resolution of these questions from two fundamentally different positions. Here it is the same as with the history of philosophy: there are diligent doxographers like Diogenes of Laertes, and there are historical philosophers like Aristotle and Hegel. These latter create their own history of philosophy, but they create it with thought, and only therefore their creation is a reflection of actual history at its nodal points, an epoch grasped by this thought. "To be in an epoch does not mean to be present in the relevant time, it means to participate in the movement of its central principle—not only to be able to see and understand it,"—states G.V. Lobastov (Lobastov 2004, 4). Vadim Mezhuev writes about the same in his memoirs:

> With his life and work, Ilyenkov, as it were, marks the end of Marxism in Russia. The end, but not death. Marxism is really of no use to Russia today—it sets the wrong goals for itself and solves the wrong problems. Speculation on the basis of Marxism, hiding its real essence, can still be observed today, but they have nothing to do with what Ilyenkov sought and valued in Marxism. Someday this search, if Russia is to survive, will undoubtedly be continued under new conditions and circumstances, albeit in a modified form.

> Sooner or later, people will still have to think about the cultural and human consequences of the civilisation to which they now aspire. And then they will return to what Ilyenkov has done in philosophy, not only to honour his name with kind words, but also to solve with him, at last, the problems that he posed. (Mezhuev 2004, 284)

Many years have passed since then, and these words have finally been spoken in time. If together with Evald Ilyenkov we can solve the problems posed not by him, of course, but by the objective historical process, then we will be able to answer the questions about the meaning of everything. And this answer will be more meaningful than Adams' "42." This answer must include the knowledge of the most solid, stable thing in the universe—and this is not the material world at all. The most consistent materialists agree with this: it is hardly necessary to quote here once again Engels' quote about the extinguishing sun and the rebirth of the human spirit, "the highest creation of matter." This is Hegel's answer in an absentee dispute with Ecclesiastes: *creativity* is the essence and meaning of being, the idea is a totality that creates its own laws. Therefore, the correctness of the position "all is vanity and languor of the spirit, and nothing is new under the sun" is only relative, conditional, external. Ilyenkov refers to Ecclesiastes in a letter to his student and friend, A.V. Suvorov, and his *Cosmology of Spirit* is apparently an illustration of this biblical book, as Yuri Putschaev claims (Putschaev 2017). But it only seems so. After all, it was not in vain that he proposed to "light up the stars" in it. For he understood that "if they are lit, it means that someone needs it," as V. Mayakovsky wrote.

To understand means to act in accordance with this principle: to be actively involved in the movement of social relations, in the substance of which the knot of Evald Ilyenkov's personality was tied. But what does it mean to be involved in this principle today? What are the conditions for the possibility of such an active movement? What do we *need* to do—to *do* what is necessary?

The current state of the world must be recognised as the most dangerous in at least the last 30 years. The questions "what to do and where to start?" are ghosting around the movement of those who advocate the overcoming of private property, taking a variety of forms, both their own and transformed and borrowed. But the fact that these questions are central today is beyond the comprehension of those who have not quite freed themselves from illusions about the importance of their activity, or even its existence; activity that is at least somewhat successful in

terms of the effectiveness of the movement towards human emancipation. A mode of thought based on the postulates of empiricism feels rather than realises the need to answer them, and therefore offers intuitive and relatively simple in its radicality answers to these questions: self-deluding activism in the form of rallies, walking through squares with a red flag on one's shoulder, which are covered by supposedly noble goals of agitation and protest; the "politicisation of the masses," including through the creation of content, without inculcating the ability to think theoretically; the struggle for more favourable conditions for the sale of one's labour force—these are only a negligible number of examples of such illusory practices. "We have to do something before things get really bad!" shouts the proponent of "practice' in contrast to the "theorists" who again and again call for the reading of seemingly outdated books from the nineteenth century. Reading these books allows us to realise that things have become very bad already. This, however, does not invalidate the measure of truth contained in "practicioner"'s words—it is absolutely necessary to do something. But what exactly?

What is to Be Done: On the Internal Relationship of Theory and Practice

We think that both in the question of the choice of the path and in the question of the choice of means (these are the two questions posed by Lenin in his famous article on the problem of the beginning) and the forms of practical activity, there are many points to be clarified through the study of modern capitalism, through discussions, through mutual criticism. The problem, however, lies at a deeper level than is generally thought of today: fragmentation as the main characteristic of the current situation makes it impossible to make an informed choice of both ways and means. This means that a productive discussion cannot take place at all under conditions of fragmentation, when the main criterion for the truth of certain views is popularity on the Internet, and the activities of popularisers-propagandists, according to an objective regularity (regardless of the subjective mood of this or that representative) are shifted towards commodity forms or are completely subordinated to them. In the language of the theory of intersubjectivity, to which the Polish philosopher Marek Siemek drew the theorists' attention, the impossibility of solving the issue of the Other's presence in a way other than fighting (and establishing mutual indifference as a result of such a fight, which under certain conditions degenerates into "battles" in comments on the Internet), the impossibility of "pro-vocation," of voicing

an opinion and elevating it to an objective one as a result of a dialogue between peer and peer, is caused by the absence of a single semantic space of possible polemics and polemicists (Siemek 1998). From such a formulation, however, one can wrongly conclude that the issue here is "unspecified terms," and if you specify them better, the whole problem disappears.[1] *Sancta simplicitas*! After all, meaning is an objective characteristic, which is a by-product of human practical activity taken from the side of its universal forms. The point here is not a dispute about words at all, but the fact that there is no unified field of practical-subject activity common to a certain aggregate of individuals, which can only turn this aggregate into a collective. A derivative of this activity is the space for discussing and solving theoretical and organisational issues that grow out of this activity, are inextricably linked to this activity, and "push" this activity "beyond the boundaries of itself." The forms of collectivity existing in the "gravitational field" of this activity are the forms rising from the abstract (the least developed organisationally, and therefore common to all initially dispersed collectives) to the concrete as the unity of diversity—the integral movement. It is not difficult to understand that this desired activity to achieve the result cannot be carried out in a direction different from the real collectivisation.

In the absence of such activity, fragmentation, which manifests itself in a variety of forms, including within what is to become a movement in the future, is also clearly visible on all foreseeable scales. Fragmentation is today noted as the main problem of world communism, the main cause of its miserable state—and this statement can hardly be called non-obvious. Little has changed since Lenin wrote these words:

> Our movement suffers in the first place, ideologically, as well as in practical and organisational respects, from its state of fragmentation, from the almost complete immersion of the overwhelming majority of Social-Democrats in local work, which narrows their outlook, the scope of their activities, and their skill in the maintenance of secrecy and their preparedness. It is precisely in this state of fragmentation that one must look for the deepest roots of the instability and the waverings noted above. (Lenin 1961, 19)

It is perhaps unnecessary to give illustrative examples: the epistemological position, which relies on the direct discernment of truth and

1. Of course, we should not conclude from this that "clarification of terms" within the framework of conceptual tool development is absolutely useless. It is about the futility of solving problems only and exclusively by means of "clarification of terms." Such an approach, among others, is strongly rejected by Lenin in *Materialism and Empiriocritcism*, as well as in his other works.

takes obviousness as a criterion, is not the cutting edge of the science of thinking today. Any large number of examples has no proof power in principle, because the infinite variety of facts allows us to give a counterexample in each case. If we move from phenomena to essence (from examples to the real cause of the problem), we must remember the alphabetical truths that capitalism has existed for centuries as a world phenomenon, it has world domination; consequently, its transformation into its opposite—social revolution—cannot but be of a world character. This means, Marx emphasises, that "the proletariat can exist, therefore, only in a world-historical sense, just as communism—its act—is generally only possible as a 'world-historical' existence." But the world-historical existence of the proletariat is not at all reduced to its presence in the forms of existence: it is far from sufficient to cite recent statistics and point to the rapidly growing number of wage labourers all over the world. Once the mere existence of wage-workers has been established, the task of organised resistance to the world market arises, and this is impossible without the formation of theoretical preconditions for joint action *on a world scale*. For the class struggle, as Lenin makes abundantly clear, does not become class struggle in the forms of the clash between "the workers of a separate factory, a separate craft" and their master; these are only the faint rudiments of the class struggle:

> When the workers of a single factory or of a single branch of industry engage in struggle against their employer or employers, is this class struggle? No, this is only a weak embryo of it. The struggle of the workers becomes a class struggle only when all the foremost representatives of the entire working class of the whole country are conscious of themselves as a single working class and launch a struggle that is directed, not against individual employers, but against the entire class of capitalists and against the government that supports that class. Only when the individual worker realises that he is a member of the entire working class, only when he recognises the fact that his petty day-to-day struggle against individual employers and individual government officials is a struggle against the entire bourgeoisie and the entire government, does his struggle become a class struggle. (Lenin 1964, 217)

The preconditions for organised opposition to the world market, however, do not exist not only on a world scale: they do not exist within many countries, including Russia and its immediate neighbours. A close look at the world state of scientific Marxist thought reveals the fragmentation of the nodes of theoretical communism, which are fixed in their separateness without establishing a connection (i.e. productive

communication, as a result of which differences are sharpened to contradiction), let alone reaching the point of identity of opposites and reaching a new ground. It may seem that we are overdramatising the existing picture, that theoretical work is "really" going on, that communication and polemics between the participants in such knots exist, etc. However, this appearance is created by the participants of these nodes of theoretical communism themselves. The number of conferences, polemical and theoretical articles, praise and "recognition" on the part of the adherents of this particular theoretical tradition *have absolutely no significance* for the movement towards communisation *if they are excluded from the field of intersubjective interaction at the world level* according to the logic of the whole and, consequently, are created without and without taking this very logic into account because of their actual ignorance of it. But perhaps there is no fragmentation at least within these "habitats" of communist theorists entrenched deep behind enemy lines? Alas! The splits and divisions of editorial boards, the clarification of relations between yesterday's like-minded people and the labelling of "idealists" and "revisionists" instead of resolving contradictions are an empirical given. Lenin wrote in 1901–1902 about the existence of positions on which, as if all Social-Democrats were in agreement: "It turns out, however, that it is only in words that "all" are agreed on the need to develop political consciousness, *in all its aspects*." (Lenin 1961, 427) In 1904, in *One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward*, he develops this idea on different material, that although there are "points on which agreement has been reached" in general, a split seems to occur when one moves to a discussion of means and particulars. It is extremely important to note here that both in 1902 and 1904 these disagreements and fragmentation are overcome on the basis of a common practical activity, which is the foundation, the basis for the emergence of disagreements, but it is also the means of overcoming them. The present movement in this case develops visually and dialectically (for the intelligent eye): "the bifurcation of the one, the cognition of its contradictory parts" and the bringing of opposites to identity ensures a continuous transformation, i.e. movement through contradiction. It is also worth noting the situation in 1907–1908, when, despite theoretical divergences, the practical work of the supporters of Lenin's line was built in co-operation with the Mahists, and not least of all it was the extreme confusion of their practical-theoretical interaction that brought to life the famous book with notes on one reactionary philosophy, at the same time bewildering

its author's closest supporters (as well as many of his non-closest followers). What is different about today's situation? *The fact that there is no foundation, no movement and no contradiction*. There are simply "different" (i.e. indifferent to each other) nodes, groups, communities, figures, views, positions, etc., there is their mutual repulsion (necessary for the retention of the subjective moment of subjectivity), and so there is no real movement, but its transformed ersatz—wandering in the dark without a theoretical-cognitive "lantern," which is fuelled solely by the "energy" of practical activity itself.

The clever approach to the resolution of contradictions, which is indicated by the dialectical tradition, coming in its development to Marx, Lenin, and Ilyenkov, consists in a principled, theoretically rigorous solution to the problem of the beginning, mentioned above. It is necessary to find the essential contradiction leading the object (*Gegenstand*) of activity in its own development, or, as Ilyenkov puts it, the "germ cell" from which the object unfolds. Hegel saw in this point the key difference between systematic and empirical science. The note to § 379 of the *Encyclopaedia* states:

> Whereas in the empirical sciences the material is taken from outside as given by experience, ordered according to a general rule already firmly established, and brought into external connection, speculative thinking, on the contrary, must reveal each of its subjects and its development with its inherent absolute necessity. This happens in such a way that each private notion is deduced from the self-generating and realising universal notion, or logical idea. (Hegel 1971, 17)

Lenin called it a "link in the chain" that must be pulled to pull the whole chain. Such a link in the contemporary situation turns out to be the problem of the mind, of cognition, of the notion as an "understanding of the essence of the matter." It is no accident that one of the latest books by Gennady Lobastov, a student of Ilyenkov and chairman of the *Dialectics and Culture* Russian Philosophical Society (which organises and conducts the annual international conference *Ilyenkov Readings*), bears the title *Mind as a fulcrum*: just give me a fulcrum, smiles the author of *Capital*, following Archimedes. With one correction: neither Archimedes nor Marx can "give" this fulcrum. Like everything human, to be truly subjective, it must be *created* by the activity of man himself.

The demand for the theoretical justification of practice, empirically recorded today, which puts the discussion of the theory and practice of the world liberation movement on the agenda, cannot but be heartening: the broad appeal to Marx's legacy that is taking place today and the

attempts to "root" its results in the theoretical tradition should be commended. Here, however, it must be made clear that the main theme in any reflection must be the theory of the movement itself, the "logic of the Case," to use Marx's words, namely, materialist dialectics as a theory of development. This does not mean that any study of the causes of a phenomenon must be *subordinated* to logical categories. This requirement is only the "result, sum, conclusion" of the critical study of Hegelian dialectics undertaken by Marx and Lenin. The latter, in summarising his study, writes of two conceptions of movement, and only the second of these—the dialectical—does not leave the very source of movement, its cause, in the shadows out of consideration (Lenin 1976). To find the real cause of a phenomenon in the thing itself (this is the principle of materialism of the research position) means to comprehend the reflexion of this thing, its "turning-inward-to-self," to its own driving contradiction. Only in such a case, when the theoretical image of the thing turns out not to be external to it, can theory become a moment of practical action. Understanding his own movement as conjugated with the movement of reality itself, a person can freely build the trajectory of his movement in it: the theorist becomes a practitioner when theory "spills over the edge of itself" into actual life. It is this position of Lenin, driven by the above considerations, that Ilyenkov portrays and discusses in his last book written (Ilyenkov 1982).

Not many people today, however, realise that it is precisely in the present state of affairs that this "logic of the case" can only be understood from the "Case of Logic" and that there is therefore no contradiction between them. We are in a situation of far greater catastrophe than Lenin was in 1914, and it was this catastrophe that forced him to study Hegel's Logic and other works by eminent philosophers. Lenin realised that practical action, in order to be successful, requires a theoretical reflection on its own conditions of implementation. Lenin searches the pages of the classics for the logic of the transformation of opposites—i.e. dialectics—and it is the critical assimilation of its best examples that enables him to make his way "from Hegel's *Logic* to the Finland station," as M. Löwy puts it (Löwy 1973, 137) (which is in itself a highly colorful transformation of opposites: from impoverished political émigré to leader of a successful revolution). This example shows, without any stretch, how *theoretical thought becomes the germ of practical action*. Therefore, there can be no opposition between *communities of research* and *practical action*, which must *also* exist outside and apart from these communities, as it sometimes claimed. Lenin's great contribution is that

the epistemological line determines the political line, or, in other words (as Georg Lukács would later elaborate in his works), *truth is the most formidable weapon of the proletariat*. This understanding of theory makes the opposition between "purely philosophical questions" and "questions of politics" unproductive. This indeterminacy of the subject of action, which becomes evident from such oppositions, reveals the external relation between theory and practice, that is, it shows that theory and practice are related to each other only externally-mechanically, not in their very essence, not internally. Lenin, following Marx, draws the only possible correct conclusion from the materialist "overturning" of Hegel: the cause of theory, the cause of logic and "pure philosophy," can be pursued on its own "unpure" ground, exclusively in the sphere of the transformation of the world. That's why Ilyenkov saw his main task in justifying Marxism as a theoretical science—otherwise there would be trouble that would go far beyond the universities and research institutes.

System of Dialectics Against Vulgarization

First of all, this concerns the most important question of developing a system of materialist dialectics—a question that E.V. Ilyenkov considered the main task not only for himself personally, but also for Marxist philosophers in general:

> The task, bequeathed to us by Lenin, of creating a Logic (with a capital 'L'), i.e. of a systematically developed exposition of dialectics understood as the logic and theory of knowledge of modern materialism, has become particularly acute today … but since the task of a systematic exposition of dialectical logic can only be solved by collective efforts, we must at least determine the most general principles of joint work. (Ilyenkov 1977, 3)

Of course, Ilyenkov does not forget at the same time that "the creation of a Logic understood as a system of categories, of course, constitutes only one stage" (Ilyenkov 1977, 261) and that cognition is only a subordinate moment of the process of social object-transformative activity—the practice of transformation of the world and oneself by human. However, being aimed at solving concrete problems of concrete sciences, "in order for dialectics to be an equal collaborator in concrete scientific knowledge, it must first develop the system of its own specific philosophical notions, from the angle of which it could display the strength of critical distinction in relation to actually given thought and consciously practised methods" (Ilyenkov 1977, 261). That this task is very difficult

was shown by the result achieved by Marxist philosophy both during Ilyenkov's lifetime and beyond; or, more correctly, by the absence of such a result. Moreover, the very idea of creating a system of dialectics can arouse denial and anger in an otherwise committed Marxist, which does not turn into bargaining and acceptance, although it can sometimes cause depression; all the more so when it is contradicted by formulations that contradict the classics. In one of his early works Ilyenkov states the following:

> The classics of Marxism, as is known, have only fragmentary individual remarks on this subject, which—precisely because they are not systematically unfolded—are interpreted in a crooked way, turned into links of some other system of perceptions. Truth cannot be learnt except in the form of a system of representations of a systematically unfolded understanding. (Ilyenkov 2021, 170)

Anyone who has read at least a textbook of diamat knows the "class-correct" position (which usually refers to F. Engels' statements on this issue): philosophy, if it is still "alive" (let's forgive it for this oversight), has not been engaged in the creation of *systems* since Hegel. These reactionary tendencies were overcome in the "one true doctrine," which took from Hegel's dialectic a revolutionary *method* contrary to the *system*, and so on, and so on. On the other hand, Lenin's sharp reply to the Narodniks concerning "scraps of Marx's philosophy," that they did not see the forest for the trees, and that Marx expounds his "philosophy" (in Lenin's later writings such contemptuous inverted commas would become noticeably fewer) in *each* of his works, is well known. On the surface, it looks as if Ilyenkov is committing an irredeemable sin: arguing with the classics of Marxism, which, of course, entails appropriate sanctions. The tragedy of this great Soviet thinker's life was that he tried to show the fallacy of a view, which, because of its empiricism, stays on the surface and does not want to go deeper into the heart of the matter. "Dialectics takes revenge for neglect of it," as Engels rightly remarked (Engels 1986, 205); mastering dialectics as a way of thinking is the only way to clarify this "inconsistency with the classics" and overcome the religious attitude of consciousness to the subject, to prevent "interpretation in a crooked way" and to ensure an adequate "distribution of the idea" of this or that author.

To what neglect of this task can lead, Mikhail Lifshitz perfectly shows in his article "Nemesis," polemising in absentia both with the representatives of so-called "Western Marxism" and with the Maoists:

> No, all great ideas—precisely because they are so great and capture a lot of people—have been subject to distortions … Now world history with all its content teaches us wisdom and educates us in the spirit of its great moral law—the law of freedom as conscious control over external forces and our own actions, the law of circular bail and communist unity and comradeship. That is why it seems to me that overcoming the danger of the vulgarisation of Marxism is the number one question in the struggle against bourgeois ideology. One may ask: is revisionism less dangerous? By a strange misunderstanding, revisionism is somehow not accustomed to be regarded as a vulgarisation of Marxism; it is considered something more harmless and forgivable—from excessive zeal, or something like that. In fact, the history of socialism shows that this is one and the same thing. Both left-wing and right-wing revisionism stem from the same social source. It often starts out very "left-wing" and ends with an apologia of Genghis Khan and a demand for borders to the Black Sea. In speaking of the danger of vulgarising Marxism, I am referring both to an imaginary loyalty to dogma and to attempts to correct our doctrine by supplementing it with elements borrowed from any source—from Western existentialism or from Chinese Confucianism. (Lifshitz 2012, 514)

However, it is even more vividly and empirically-reliable in our life today, when the hour of reckoning with dialectics has arrived. The problems that we have here are therefore inevitably linked with the external relation between theory and practice and with the notion of science. These problems are universal. This can be argued on the basis of Marx's established position on "self-disconnected reality" and the separation of the meaning of labour from its process: the alienation of man from his own essence. This theme is developed in detail in Marx's early texts, and therefore there is no need to dwell on it again. From this point of view, the whole historical movement of mankind turns on the task of removing this disconnection, which at a certain stage of development turns into a problem that can be sensually and reliably stated; this problem caused by the contradictions of the dominant mode of production. This problem was perfectly expressed by Rosa Luxemburg: socialism or barbarism? (Luxembourg 2009) Today, the prospect of "barbarism" must be strengthened and replaced by the prospect of "self-destruction:" these are the realities of the current social situation. Thus, the question of mankind's mastery of the scientific mode of production of its life (i.e. the construction of socialism) turns out to be the key to its self-preservation, at least. But for this purpose, it is necessary to know *what practice is, how it gives rise to theory, and how this theory acquires the form of science adequate to itself* (or becomes, as Marx says, "reason in a reasonable form"). Hence it is not surprising, that these issues are becoming central

not only in the work of Evald Ilyenkov, but also of a whole pleiad of his theoretical comrades from other countries, including his Polish colleague Marek Siemek, who spoke very highly of Ilyenkov and helped popularise his work in Poland and Germany. Their "comradeship" here is not at all a verbal expression of mutual respect; words are not the most important thing to pay attention to here. They are comrades *objectively*, insofar as they solve the same problem from the same methodological positions (just like in "International Workers' Association" the last word translates into Russian as "comradeship"). Their theoretical legacy reveals a surprising kinship and mutually complements each other in the context of comprehending the "cursed questions of modernity."

A few words, however, should be said about the relation of Ilyenkov's and Siemek's views and their *difference*, for such an assessment of them as "theoretical comrades" may rightly raise questions and doubts.

A certain divergence between Ilyenkov's and Siemek's views on philosophy, on Marxism, on politics, can certainly be found. But where is this difference not to be found? "The law of difference" which logic offers us and which Hegel discusses at length in the *Doctrine of Reflexion* rightly asserts that no two things can even be found to be the same: difference is an absolute determination peculiar to both leaves on a tree (remember Leibniz, who overwhelmed the ladies of the court) and Marxist theorists. The other question is whether this difference is *essential*, i.e. belongs to the very *essence* of the subject. And here we cannot judge Ilyenkov's and Siemek's views in passing, but must take them concretely, in development as "the unity of the manifold." But it is impossible to do this in the format of this article: after all, the article is devoted to the *practical* problem of turning Marxism into a science (and we are interested in Ilyenkov and Siemek exactly in this respect), and not at all to a comparative characterisation of their views. I hope this somewhat clarifies and apologises to the author.

It is worth saying, however, that a cursory glance at Siemek's work can reveal this (apparently) essential difference: in the 1990s he departed from Marxist views, criticised the main points of Marxism, turned to transcendentalism, and created his own original social theory, based on the ideas of intersubjectivity that he drew from Fichte and Hegel. This common perception associates the reader who becomes acquainted with Siemek's work with the typical path of the "former Soviet intellectual," often unprincipled, who for opportunistic reasons, lacking an epistemological position, promotes what is paid for, what is profitable

at the moment, and whose trajectory therefore moves away from Marxism with the collapse of the socialist camp.

With all the contradictory views of Siemek in this period (which his students call "opportunistic" and strongly criticise), we have no reason to state that he was such an unprincipled opportunist in general. And no one is immune from misconceptions in theoretical research, which resonates with the personal attitudes of the theorist. Moreover, Siemek always retained a very warm attitude not only to Marx[2] but also even to Lenin,[3] which, in the conditions of a fiercely anti-Soviet Poland, already does honour to the "socialist Lessing of Poland" (as his followers nicknamed Siemek).

As for the difference, even Ilyenkov wittily remarked, speaking of the universal:

> Two absolutely identical individuals each of whom possesses the same set of knowledge, habits, proclivities, etc., would find themselves absolutely uninteresting to, and needless of, each other. It would be simply solitude multiplied by two. One wit, as he explained to his young friend the ABC of dialectical logic, advised him to ask himself the question: what is it in his bride that attracts the young man; wherein lie the ties of their 'commonness?' (Ilyenkov 1975)

But this may also sound "too abstract and theoretical." Well, then, let us look at the problem from a different angle. Louis Althusser, who came to Moscow in 1974 to attend the Hegelian Congress, gave Ilyenkov his books "as a token of theoretical brotherhood," as he himself wrote on their covers (these books are still in Ilyenkov's library). This alone shows that a "theoretical comradeship" does not necessarily require complete coincidence of views: as is well known, Ilyenkov did not agree with Althusser on theoretical issues (above all, he argues with him on the problem of the logical and the historical, as well as on the question of dialectics and Marx's relation to Hegel); their political positions and sympathies were also different. It is known from the words of his students that Ilyenkov considered the idealist Neoplatonist Alexey Losev to be more of a "comrade" than whatever "convinced materialist" relying on the "modern achievements" of cybernetics or neurophysiology (like

2. One of the most recent interviews is on Marx and relates to the return to Marxist positions that Siemek made in the early 2000s ("Teraz napiszę o... Marksie"–rozmowa z profesorem Markiem Janem Siemkiem." This is an excerpt from (Bajer 2005, 184-201).
3. His article on Lenin (Siemek 2007, 10), where he expressed cautious sympathy for the "leader of the world proletariat," caused a great resonance and a wide theoretical discussion in the journals.

David Dubrovsky) who looked for the ideal in the brain or genes. And why go far for examples? Lenin explicitly makes it clear that "intelligent idealism" is closer to Marx's position than vulgar, crude materialism.

So, let us now consider the main problems that come to the attention of our philosophers in more detail.

"Materialist Epistemology" and the Menace of Scientism

Marek Siemek in his article "Cognition as Practice" notes that a cool attitude towards serious philosophy is characteristic of almost all major Marxist theorists. This is especially true of German idealism. The attitude to the ideas of German thinkers in Marxism, even among theorists of Plekhanov's level, is based primarily on individual quotations from Marx and Engels, rather than on a deep theoretical reflection of cognitive foundations:

> The fact that Marx never formulated *explicite* the epistemological premises and implications of his critique of political economy and the theory of historical materialism, made one look for the Marxist conception of cognition rather in a few aphoristically extreme formulations, which—as above all the 2nd, 6th and 11th theses on Feuerbach—can be read in the sense of a complete dissolution of the whole theory, of all cognition and thinking in a comprehensive and all-explaining mythical 'practice.' Later, almost the entire Marxist tradition followed in this direction: the slogan 'philosophy of practice' was most often used here to explain its own avoidance of any serious epistemological problematic." (Siemek 1988, 14)

This has led to the elimination of important epistemological issues from Marxism and a general degradation of the understanding of cognition (and hence practice) to the level of John Locke, where practice is understood as something only external to theory:

> This approach—which also often appears under the enigmatic name of 'materialist epistemology'—has little in common with Marxism, much less with a decent theory of knowledge. For 'cognition' itself is understood here entirely in the spirit of the psychophysiological 'theory of cognition' of the Enlightenment: namely, as a contemplative relation of reflection arising between individual consciousness and its external object, and manifesting itself in the immediate instrumental-manipulative practice of current experience. Needless to say, within such a conception of 'cognition', any assurances about the 'dialectical' nature of this reflection, and especially about the 'social character' of this practice which verifies it, are purely verbal servility to the mere letter of Marx's historical materialism and his real understanding of practice, a mere illusionary being masking the fundamental mental

> incompatibility of this whole conception of cognition with Marx's genuine theory. The very 'reflection' as a basic theoretical-cognitive category—no matter how much it is enriched by the results of modern physiology, psychology, or neurophysiology—presupposes the contemplative, directly epistemic, and thus impractical character of cognition at its core. 'Cognition' in this formulation remains something completely external and indifferent to 'practice' in its post-Kantian and especially Marxist understanding as a central philosophical category." (Siemek 1988, 15)

"Prolegomena to a Future Epistemology" (the subtitle of the article mentioned above) was written by Siemek to point out the problems faced by Marxism's theory of knowledge without attention to the achievements of German classical philosophy, which does not attempt to conceptualise it as a conclusion from previous intellectual history. The main of these problems is the retreat to the pre-Kantian level, in which consciousness is always separated from its object, and therefore occupies a contemplative position in relation to it. From this fact grows "the chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism"—and in the conditions of a largely superficial attitude to the works of Kant and Fichte (Hegel, thanks to the famous Lenin's aphorism about the "Science of Logic," was "luckier" immeasurably) it is reproduced on a new basis, under oaths of "fidelity to the dialectical method of Marx." Transcendentalism, not empiricism, is the forerunner of Marx's materialism, and the line from Kant to Hegel is the process of the formation of the *materialist dialectic* as such—this is Siemek's main message, which determines his interest in the idea of transcendentalism in Fichte and Kant (Siemek 1977).

Siemek speaks of "materialist epistemology" in inverted commas for this very reason: it turns out to be primitive and defenceless not so much against idealism as against the problems and contradictions that arise in reality itself (first of all, in social, practical-political reality). These contradictions cannot be adequately comprehended because of the lack of a high philosophical culture. The "crooked interpretation" of Marx's and Engels' texts adopted in official[4] Marxist philosophy was followed

4. Of course, this name itself is a deep problem if we take the history of Soviet philosophy seriously, taking it together with the key events, which are the discussions between Deborinists and Mechanists (as well as both of these trends with Lukács and Korsh), the struggle of the thirties between the group formed around "The Literary Critic" (Lifshitz, Lukács, Platonov) and "vulgar sociology," the struggle with "gnoseologists" (this is related to the Ilyenkov-Korovikov theses and their dramatic fate). Although this is not about the vicissitudes of the Soviet history of philosophy, but about what it basically turned into (including its consolidation in textbooks, hence, in the minds of the general public) in the early thirties. This can be called DiaMat as presented by Mitin, Konstantinov, Suslov etc.

naturally by the slogan: "Philosophy overboard!," which appeared already in the first issues of the main soviet philosophical journal "Under the Banner of Marxism" and probably provoked Lenin to write his famous article on militant materialism, which is considered to be his philosophical testament (Lenin 1972). It is precisely this danger of a superficial understanding of Marx's mode of thought that Lenin warns against. Both Marek Siemek and Evald Ilyenkov, in their efforts to fulfil this task, achieve serious theoretical and organisational results for their theoretical nation. They make a serious turn of theoretical consciousness towards the problematics contained in the works of Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. The main task is very precisely formulated by M. Siemek: "The point is not only to develop and deepen our '*understanding of practice*' (as Marx says in the Theses), but also, and even above all, to see clearly the *practice of understanding* and to incorporate it consistently into the content of the philosophical notion of practice." (Siemek 1988, 23) This problematic is closely connected, on the one hand, with the *notion of science* and, on the other hand, with the *notion of truth as a system of thought*. It is not difficult to show that these are one and the same question, which finds its solution in the Lenin's idea of the *identity* (and not just unity or coincidence) *of dialectics, logic, and theory of cognition*: as we know, "it is not necessary to have three words, not just three different sciences."

Friedrich Engels' position that "since Marxism became a science, it is required to be treated as a science" is often repeated. However, the notion of science itself is highly problematic: Evald Ilyenkov in his article "Philosophy and Scientificity" (Ilyenkov 2018) and Marek Siemek in his article "Science and Scientificity as Ideological Categories of Philosophy" (Siemek 1989) reveal this problematic nature. They show that without reference to the long path of the formation of science as a pure form of notion, which finds its highest development precisely in German idealism, it is impossible to separate real science from the ideological layers and distortions that are expressed in scientism, positivism and the so-called "philosophy of life." By the way, as Siemek notes, even Engels, Kautsky and Plekhanov were not free from scientism:

> We should add that already in the nineteenth century it [scientism] was also completely and without much change adopted by the philosophical self-consciousness of the nascent Marxism, on the basis of which it already had its classical exponents in the person of Engels, and then especially Kautsky and Plekhanov, and at the same time very effectively and for a long time overshadowed the completely different original thought intentions of Marx himself. (Siemek 1989, 20)

Let us emphasise—this means that in their desire to overcome ideological forms they do not go beyond these forms by appealing to the authority of science. Moreover, in some key issues they contradict some of Karl Marx's epistemological tendencies. In the article "'Science' and 'scientificity' as ideological categories of philosophy," Siemek defines the question of the scientificity of philosophy as a symptom "betraying the absence of the right questions and indicating the theoretical impossibility of asking them," which is evidence of "its theoretical impotence in the face of the phenomenon of science" (Siemek 1989, 15). The scientistic understanding of science appears to be embedded in the very core of Marxism, Siemek argues, and a serious critical reflection on its cognitive foundations and results is required in order to go beyond the current theory of "science" and "scientificity," which even within a doctrine that claims to remove ideology, continue to function as *ideological* forms:

> The oblivion of Marx's epistemological intentions and this return to a pre-Marxist (and pre-Kantian) 'theory of knowledge' was further facilitated, and at the same time aggravated, by additional circumstances. The most important of these was the ideological pressure from the triumphant scientism and positivism in the second half of the 19th century, which had long perpetuated the myth of the identity of *cognition and science* in both philosophy and popular consciousness. For the Marxists this myth had, from the point of view of interest to us, grave consequences, since it indirectly provided them with an excellent justification for their own rejection of essential philosophical and epistemological questions. On the one hand, by declaring Marx's theoretical work purely 'scientific,' they could feel free from any critical reflection of its cognitive foundations and results that would go beyond the generally accepted theory of 'science' and the methodology of its 'scientificity' (directly continuing the old 'theoretical-cognitive' approach to the philosophical problems of knowledge). (Siemek 1988, 17)

On the other hand, the reference to the "scientificity of Marx's views" without a critical examination of the notion of "science" means "the complete absorption of the old 'theoretical-cognitive' problems by the scientific-positivist self-consciousness of modern science, its theory and methodology," and by this "smuggling" of positivism the Marxist theorists "cut off the path to the truly Marxist, i.e. dialectical-historical understanding of science itself as a peculiar, historically and culturally conditioned type of cognitive behaviour of socialised man" (Siemek 1988, 17).

This problem can be understood as the opposition between Marx's "true" views and the "distortion of his ideas" by his followers: Engels and

others. Even though the author doesn't stick to it, such a reading is certainly possible (for example, Allan Megill's book is devoted precisely to the divergence of views of the founding friends of "practical materialism" (Megill 2002)), and it is the one to which Siemek himself seems to be inclined, at least in the so-called "opportunist period" of the 1990s. This interpretation naturally gives rise to counter-criticism, which has every reason to defend the identity of the views of Marx and Engels. The root of the problem, however, is much deeper. It lies in the fact that the *tendency towards scientism is rooted in Marx's views themselves*; it can clearly be established in his early texts. Let us consider this thesis in some detail.

Marx as a (mis)Reader of Hegel

Thus, "materialist epistemology" makes a retreat to the reasoning-experiential form of cognition, which has as its premise the rupture of consciousness and object; a rupture which was overcome with great difficulty and not without mistakes by the Königsberg thinker. Milan Sobotka (Sobotka 1964) and the already mentioned Siemek investigated in detail the overcoming of this rupture and the legitimate consequences of the revealed tendency in their main works. In carrying out this work, of course, they were guided by the guiding idea of Marx, who was able to see behind the misty veils of Hegel's *Phenomenology* the real-objective historical process of man's generation of himself through his labour. Both Sobotka and Siemek convince us that the dialectic that is becoming in German idealism is from the very beginning a *materialist* dialectic. Moreover, from this perspective there can be no idealist dialectics at all. For the very question which Engels later labelled with good reason as basic to the science of thinking, in Hegel's formulation is quite different from its popular interpretations in diamat:

> We thus have really two Ideas, the subjective Idea as knowledge, and then the substantial and concrete Idea; and the development and perfection of this principle and its coming to the consciousness of Thought, is the subject treated by modern Philosophy. Thus the determinations are in it more concrete than with the ancients. This opposition in which the two sides culminate, grasped in its widest significance, is the opposition between Thought and Being, individuality and substance, so that in the subject himself his freedom stands once more within the bounds of necessity; it is the opposition between subject and object, and between Nature and Mind, in so far as this last as finite stands in opposition to Nature. (Hegel 2009, 112)

Here sensuality is not opposed to consciousness at all: in a serious theoretical formulation, such a question would remain unanswered at all, and this is absolutely clear to Hegel. The basic question of philosophy for him turns out to be the question of *freedom*, of the removal of the external relation between the particular and the universal, between the thing and its idea, between the individual and the substance, between subject and object. The latter is explicitly formulated by him already in *The System of Morality*, and in *Jena's Real Philosophy* he finds the point of their identification—and where? In the category of *labour*, of *object activity*, of *practice*. Turning to Hegel's legacy from this position, which is so unusual for fans of the labels "panlogism," "preformism" and other ideas that have no real relation to the author of the *Science of Logic*, one can discern in it a whole "philosophy of labour." The real problem, which Hegel, who, unlike his famous philosopher contemporaries, was perfectly familiar with the political economy of his time, was trying ("sometimes even striving and puffs," as Lenin would say) to solve, is the problem of resolving the contradiction between abstract and concrete labour, and not at all the composition of another "world scheme." Hegel's dialectic is not ontology, but a complete system of categorical definitions of activity, ascending from the immediate indeterminacy of pure being, from its nothingness, from absolute *dependence* to the complete, total *freedom* of the realising notion, which, like any other logical definition, is precisely the identity of thinking and being, the point of their absolute coincidence. The point, which is a form of activity, because as Hegel himself understood, and as Evald Ilyenkov later explained perfectly well, it is in the process of activity that the desired identification takes place. Ilyenkov's friend and senior comrade, Pavel Kopnin, once joked about the many years of research at the Department of Dialectical Materialism, as a result of which it was established that matter is primary, but this joke also contains a bitter irony: there have been too few such studies, and the question has not yet been resolved. Because the basic question of philosophy is not at all the choice of a foundation in which to believe ("being is primary!"), but the intense (self-)justification of substance, which ultimately comes down to the question of the genesis of thinking, of "the self-division of the one and the cognition of its contradictory parts," of the establishment of thinking in being and of the becoming of freedom. But it is not difficult to see that this is what Hegel is preoccupied with.

And this is far from a stretch, as Igor Barsukov shows in his remarkable book (Barsukov 2011), which allows us to rethink the most important question of Hegel's system and method. However, it should be recognised that such a view—the result of modern research—was not available, for certain historical reasons, neither to the classics of Marxism, nor to Feuerbach, who inspired them in their early period. Materialist criticism holds that Hegel stands on his head; however, this famous thesis was also realised by Hegel himself, who writes in the *Phenomenology* about the "unknown caused attempt of natural consciousness to resemble a head." However, it is not so unknown: it is clear from the same *Preface* that it is precisely the rupture between consciousness and object, which reveals science as an "otherworldly distance" for consciousness, that is the cause of the idealist overturning. But it is precisely this rupture that Hegel fights against! Moreover, it is the unsatisfactory solution of this problem on the basis of the phenomenological foundation that makes Hegel radically reconsider the whole plan of the system of sciences, the first part of which was originally conceived as *Phenomenology*, which is reflected in its original title. The gap between subject and object, between consciousness and its subject assumed for this foundation cannot be removed even in the form of absolute knowledge; this makes Hegel look for another foundation, where the very gap between subject and object would be justified by the logic of the bifurcation of unified being—and Hegel finds this *principle*, this absolute beginning in the *Logic*.

The influence that Feuerbach had on the founders of Marxism (and not only on them alone—in Russia his passionate follower was the outstanding Russian thinker and scientist Nikolay Chernyshevsky, who in turn had a profound influence on Lenin) is widely known. Here we also do not want to belittle or deny the depth of this influence: it is a question of "not thinking abstractly," not seeing only "bad" or "good," but seeing the entire concreteness (=contradictoriness) of the existing picture. And it is so—very contradictory, and a detailed unfolding of this picture is a topic for a separate large work. For the time being, I would like only to outline the problematic nature of the figure of Feuerbach, with the obligatory reference to the truly revolutionary role that the works of this thinker played in the formation of Marx's views.

Marx believes that "Feuerbach has in principle overthrown the old dialectic and philosophy" (Marx 1959, 63). But if we keep in mind the above-mentioned actual problematics, which Hegel dealt with, then it is

worth recognising that the criticism presented in the "Principles of Philosophy of the Future" almost all misses the target. Feuerbach does not stand on the heights of the achievements of German idealism, he ignores them, and the principle of the immediate givenness of the material world in feeling, which he expressed, is nothing but a relapse into empiricism, in spite of his own reservations and hesitations on the question of the essence of human.[5] As Gennady Lobastov states, "in the representing consciousness the universal meaning appears under different names, which—alas—always turn out to be *pseudonyms*" (Lobastov 2012, 100). But Feuerbach, contrasting sensual authenticity, the object world and thought, the ideal, does not reach the *notion*, seeing behind the Idea only a *pseudonym* of the Christian God; his consciousness remains representational—this is evident from the way he treats the category of "abstract," and the fact that he does not distinguish the concept from the term. This is why Feuerbach treats Hegel's philosophy as a "disguised theology" and the Idea as something different from things themselves. This interpretation gives birth to an inadequate criticism that does not overcome Hegel's position. This interpretation is rightly denied by Ilyenkov, who fought for a genuine understanding of Hegel's philosophy. It is regrettable to recognise that these Feuerbachian positions were borrowed almost without any criticism by the early Marx and are vividly seen in the works of the *Paris Manuscripts* period.

Marx formulates his claim against Hegel most radically in this way:

> This implies that self-conscious man, insofar as he has recognised and superseded the spiritual world (or his world's spiritual, general mode of being) as self-alienation, nevertheless again confirms it in this alienated shape and passes it off as his true mode of being—re-establishes it, and pretends to be *at home in his other-being as such*. Thus, for instance, after superseding religion, after recognising religion to be a product of self-alienation he yet finds confirmation of himself in *religion as religion*. Here is the root of Hegel's *false*

5. Contrary to the widespread opinion based on an inaccurate reading of Marx's "Theses," Feuerbach does not think of essence as "an abstraction inherent in each single individual:" for this it is enough to read at least the magnificent ending of the "Principles of the Philosophy of the Future," which even now impresses with the power of humanism and makes it clear why Marx and Engels, by their own admission, immediately became followers of Feuerbach. Consequently, Marx's thesis about the real essence of man as the totality of all social relations is not a criticism but a development of Feuerbach's position. It is worth noting, however, that in this work Feuerbach still sometimes lapses into the viewpoint of essence as an abstraction: apparently, this is also a manifestation of an epistemological position that is not entirely stable and which is ultimately based on empiricism

> positivism, or of his merely *apparent* criticism: this is what Feuerbach designated as the positing, negating and re-establishing of religion or theology—but it has to be expressed in more general terms. Thus reason is at home in unreason as unreason. The man who has recognised that he is leading an alienated life in law, politics, etc., is leading his true human life in this alienated life as such. Self-affirmation, self-confirmation *in contradiction* with itself—in contradiction both with the knowledge of and with the essential being of the object—is thus true *knowledge* and *life*. There can therefore no longer be any question about an act of accommodation on Hegel's part *vis-à-vis* religion, the state, etc., since this lie is the lie of his principle. (Marx 1959, 81)

This conclusion is based on the premise that there is no distinction between the thinking of the finite spirit and universal thinking, as Hegel understands it. Idea and thinking are everywhere conceived by Feuerbach and, following him, by early Marx, as belonging only to human consciousness. Here the limitation of both thinking and being, which is not at all peculiar to Hegel, is assumed: in this criticism, the Idea is detached from things and begins to appear under a pseudonym, the consequence of which is the criticism of philosophy as theology, where the Idea supposedly exists before nature and somehow generates it out of itself; there is the assumption, negation, and restoration of religion. There is actually none of this in the Hegelian *principle*. Although "false positivism" can indeed be seen in Hegel's philosophy of religion, as well as in other special areas of the system of sciences, Feuerbach makes the logical mistake of substituting the *universal* for the *particular*: from the criticism of religion he tries to criticise the logical principle as well. There is a "dialectical reversal in method:" Feuerbach, criticising Hegel for abstraction, is himself hostage to abstraction, assuming a gap between the subjective and the objective without grounding it in the logic of being. Marx does the same when he treats Logic as "the money of the spirit:" he proceeds from the political economy concept of alienation, trying to overcome the *universal* principle by criticising the *particular* sphere. But the alienation of man from his own essence in capitalist society and the alienation of the Idea in Hegel's system are not the same thing! Not to mention the identification of two kinds of alienation, *Vergegenständlichung* and *Entfremdung*, which is allowed by early Marx (although Marx has reason to do so, as Ilyenkov shows in "Hegel and Alienation" (Ilyenkov 1991a). Hegel and the later Marx strictly distinguish them from each other, as well as from other aspects of alienation: *Entäusserung* as process of making things external, *Verselbständigung* as empowerment, *Versachlichung* as transformation into a thing (not

objectification!), transformation of form. Hence arises the error that the logical category is treated by Marx as a "speculative or *mental value* of man and nature—its essence which has grown totally indifferent to all real determinateness, and hence unreal—is *alienated thinking,* and therefore thinking which abstracts from nature and from real man: *abstract* thinking" (Marx 1959, 84). It is not difficult to see that Hegel understands the logical category in a different way: as "the universal, which has absorbed all the richness of the particular and the singular," far from being indifferent to reality, not abstracting itself from the diversity of definitions, but revealing the true unity of this diversity, making it "for-self," an absolute relation to itself—and only insofar!—Hegel everywhere consistently fights against transcendence, dualism, and emphasises that thought, concept, *idea is the universal form of the thing itself unfolded in its own determinations*. This is Hegel's principle—the concrete *identity of thinking and being*, which is expressed in the categories of *totality*.

The initial approach to Logic through political economy rather than to political economy through Logic plays a cruel trick on Marx: he treats dialectics as the result of the self-alienation of human thinking, as a product of bourgeois society, divided at its foundation. And it must be admitted that it is here—in the uncritical at first stage perception of Feuerbach—that the *tendency towards positivism in Marxism itself* is rooted: not as a result of a perversion of Marxism at all, but as a *historical stage in the formation of Marx's own views*. Quotations from his early works, if they are considered in isolation from the further development of his views, from the movement towards Hegel, are used by apologists of empiricism as proof that Marx "threw away the philosophical junk, the old rubbish, the dark Hegelianism," etc. and replaced it with a "purely scientific position" which is thought of in the modern manner of "philosophy and methodology of science," i.e. as going back to the analytical way of thinking of Democritus above, and replaced it with a "purely scientific position," which is thought in the modern manner of "philosophy and methodology of science," i.e. as going back to the analytical way of thinking of Democritus, above which positivism hardly rises in the way of thought. A variation of this anti-Hegelian interpretation of Marx as an epicurean who, unlike Hegel, appreciated the role of *clinamen*, absolute chance, spontaneity—hence the whole (post)Althusserian line in Marxist thought. But the attempt to contrast Marx as a materialist with the German idealists, resting on the foundations of natural scientific methodology, inevitably slips into reading Marx in

the spirit of positivism. Even the most serious thinkers of this line, thoroughly commenting on the idea of the "ensemble of social relations," come to conclusions that are paradoxical for the spirit of Marx's teaching: humanism is a capitalist ideology, the human being and the individual should be banished from science and replaced by the concept of "structure" or, for example, "assemblage" in the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari. This degradation of philosophical culture seems to them even a step forward in theory. However, the idea that development takes place also through forms of degradation is not new. Here again we can pay attention to the amazing dialectic of revolutionary and reactionary, examples of which history is full of: Plato's "reactionary" line becomes today a prescription against sliding into empiricism, and Democritus-Epicurus' "revolutionary" line justifies thoughtlessness.

Another striking example of an inadequate interpretation of Hegel is Marx's commentary on § 262 of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, which reads as follows:

> The actual Idea is mind, which, sundering itself into the two ideal spheres of its concept, family and civil society, enters upon its *finite* phase, but it does so only in order to rise above its ideality and become explicit as *infinite* actual mind. It is therefore to these ideal spheres that the actual Idea assigns the material of this its finite actuality, viz., human beings as a *mass*, in such a way that the function assigned to any given individual is visibly *mediated* by circumstances, his caprice and his personal choice of his station in life. (Hegel 1952, 219)

Without mentioning some logical errors and strains in Marx's interpretation of this fragment, we should pay attention to the main epistemological defect: the *ideal* here is interpreted by him as "necessary, belonging to the essence of the state," and the idea—as an independently existing and acting subject, which makes it impossible to understand this Hegelian paragraph. On the contrary, for Hegel, as mentioned above, the *Idea* does not exist separately from things, it is not a subject outside and apart from reality. In the *Logic*, speaking of the absolute Idea, Hegel gives it a definition of the "totality of its own moments," or *absolute method as the form of movement* of manifold content. It is precisely this point that Lenin writes enthusiastically about Hegel's "materialism" in his *Philosophical Notebooks*. The *ideal*, as Hegel explains also in the *Logic*, is first of all "the way in which the finite exists in the truly infinite," i.e. the imaginary, the non-self-independent, only a *moment* of the real, which is the true infinite—this crucial definition has escaped the discussion of the problem of the ideal even from Ilyenkov,

whose level of understanding and contribution to the development of this problem is almost unrivalled to this day. Here is no place to unfold the dialectic of the real and the ideal, which is developed by Hegel in the *Doctrine of Being*, but it is worth noting that his absolute idealism consists only in the fact that the ideal—arising, transitory, moving—is absolute, that only the whole totality, substance as the Whole, is real. But it is real only because it is absolutely mobile (*ideal*), or, in other words: development is the mode of being of this totality, which Hegel calls *Idea* (in which only this development itself—i.e. *self-development*—is absolute). With this understanding of the ideal, this Hegelian position differs little from Marx's position, which he opposes to Hegel as materialist. Marx would later reproduce some provisions from Hegel's doctrine of law (which includes consideration of ethics and morality, the state and war) almost verbatim.

But to stop at this conclusion would be a great mistake: Marx's formation as a thinker at the point in question is by no means complete. It is not possible here to show the tense dialectic of revolutionary and reactionary, which is characteristic of the nature of the influence of Feuerbach's views on Marx's position, but it can be said that Marx, under the influence of the events of the "Spring of Nations" and, most importantly, in the process of working on "Capital" as an applied logic, is forced to change his attitude to Hegel, first of all, methodologically[6]. In a letter to Engels of 11 January 1868, he admits that "gentlemen in Germany (with the exception of reactionary theologians) believe that Hegel's dialectic is a 'dead dog.' On Feuerbach's conscience is a great sin in this respect" (Marx 1975, 115). There is no doubt that in such "settling accounts with his philosophical conscience," Marx attributes this sin to himself. This is the result of a kind of "epistemological rupture"—though not in the form in which it appeared to Althusser, if we can call the contradictory movement of the theorist's formation a rupture at all. It is not an exaggeration to say that in the most accurate distribution of Hegel's thought we should see the reason for the rise of Marx, Engels and their famous Russian follower (the hereditary nobleman) as theorists, as well as one of their main merits for theoretical thought in general. Formulating it somewhat aphoristically, we can say that the classics of Marxism "ingeniously guessed the dialectics of reality in the dialectics of notions" of Hegel.

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[6] This is particularly evident in the relation to the category of "abstract:" the Marx of The Holy Family laughs at "speculative philosophy, which called the abstract concrete and the concrete abstract," while the later Marx aligns himself with Hegel on this issue

Once Again on the Notion of "Science" and Where to Find It

Back to Ilyenkov. It is in the question of scientificity that he sees the root of the divergence between a truly Marxist position and the views of A. Schaff (this famous article represents another link between Polish and Russian theoretical thought).[7] Schaff declares with crystal honesty the identity of "scientificity" with its neopositivist interpretation; the idea that the former may not be reducible to the latter does not even cross his mind. Trying such a "model" on the views of Marx and Engels, he naturally discovers much that does not fit into this Procrustean bed. Without wisecracking, he declares this "irrational" remnant to be "utopianism," demanding that it be preserved only as an otherworldly ideal, a value, like those with which modern axiology is concerned—i.e. in the neo-Kantian manner. In doing so, Schaff is generally correct in setting the task of "purging Marxism of the illusions of its own scientificity." But what a solution! It can be seen that the directly opposite results of Ilyenkov and Schaff follow directly from their epistemological foundations.

The absence of attempts to comprehend science in a truly Marxist way, i.e. as a "peculiar, historically and culturally conditioned type of cognitive behaviour of socialised man" leads to uncritical borrowing of the existing (anti-dialectical) theory of "science" and "scientificity," which, under certain conditions, puts an end to attempts to break through the circle of transformed, false forms of consciousness. The rare "official" Marxist goes beyond the scientist understanding of "science" and "scientism," which function as forms of *ideological* (in Marx's sense). The distinction between the main paradigms of philosophy of science that Siemek undertakes (scientism, positivism and "philosophy of life") turns out to be a very successful logical perspective for a productive comprehension of "symptoms," as the Polish thinker himself calls them, which are presented in the question of the philosophical content of science and are the result of the inability of philosophy to find out something essential about itself. But it is difficult to agree with Siemek when he declares the concept of science developed by classical philosophy to be *pre-scientific*, having only historical significance (Siemek 1989, 16). It is here that we come across the origins of the division between so-called "creative Marxism" (or "ordinary Marxism," as Mikhail Lifshitz called it), which continues Lenin's line, and dogmatic-positivist diamat,

7. See Ilyenkov 1991b.

which is a departure from Marx's ideas. An appeal to the works of German thinkers who explicitly and rigorously investigate the question of how philosophy can become a science and develop the notion of science as a *generic* notion is required here by necessity. Without mentioning the fundamentally important development of the concept of science in Plato and Aristotle, Bacon and Locke, Descartes and Spinoza, it should be emphasised that the development of the problems of the subject and method of philosophy as a pure (absolute) form of science is in the focus of attention of the representatives of German idealism and constitutes the essential content of this stage in the development of the historical form of philosophy. It is safe to say that the "Copernican revolution" in the question of scientificity made at this nodal point did not become the content of the thinking ability of even many specialist philosophers, not to mention a wide range of scientists in general. The idea and development of science as a theoretical system made by Fichte is still only in the initial stage of comprehension beyond the templates that mystify his personality and heritage (one of the successful attempts can be called the book by Anton Ivanenko (Ivanenko 2012)). Evald Ilyenkov, revealing the question of scientificity, far from in vain proposes to orientate on the polemic of Schelling and Hegel concerning the leading mode of consciousness. This polemic in the removed form is contained in the evolution of the formations of spirit to absolute knowledge, which is shown in the *Phenomenology*. This, as well as the explicated own form of the absolute, presented in the *Science of Logic*, can give the future researcher (regardless of subject specialisation, and even—let us say more acutely—in spite of it) the main thing—the necessary conditions for the formation of universal thinking ability, which Ilyenkov saw as the main goal of any education.

But why is the problem of understanding science closed to the problem of educating the mind? This turn of thought is by no means arbitrary. Because all theoretical problems not only arise from the sociohistorical practice of mankind, but also "find their rational resolution in this practice and in the understanding of this practice," as Marx notes. Because, following Hegel, he rightly declares understanding *valid* only when it successfully manifests itself in the transformation of the world, and not only in explaining it. Because any knowledge reveals itself in existence only as removed in the theoretical ability of its possessor, the scientist, who actively transforms the real forms of reality by means of its ideal forms. On tomorrow's scientist—today's student—depends whether science will become a direct productive force, whether the sham

of the dispute between "physicists and lyricists" will be shown in practice, whether "scientific rationality" will cease to conflict with "axiology." In practice, and only in practice, lies the real semantic center of gravity of all the discussions that arise about and around philosophy, science and their correlation.

This is why it is hasty to declare the legacy of classical philosophy a stage passed. The gap between the natural sciences and the humanities (philosophy, in particular), which became apparent in the twentieth century, was decided in neopositivism, in French epistemology, and in the Soviet diamat to be bridged by introducing philosophers to the "advanced achievements" of the natural sciences. On the contrary, we are convinced that only a deep mastery of the classical philosophical heritage by a wide range of people, for whom thinking is not necessarily a profession, can qualitatively overcome this gap. "A school should teach to think!"—we say after Ilyenkov. Otherwise, in the historical perspective, humanity has no chance to survive.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

In their works, Ilyenkov and Siemek reveal the meaning of the conceptual breakthrough that was made by German classical philosophy. It consists in the removal of the gap between cognition and practice. Or, in other words, in understanding cognition as a special kind of practice itself, which is connected with a faithful reflection of reality and adequate goal-setting. But for this to happen, the theory itself, as Lenin noted, must include "the whole practice of mankind, everything that man needs." Both Siemek and Ilyenkov point out that the Marxist theory of cognition has yet to be created as a system. In the texts of the classics it is given only in a fragmentary form, in the form of some individual aphoristic remarks. In order not to "reduce dialectics to the sum of examples" (as Lenin says), we must rediscover the works of the German idealists, read them in the most profound way in the context of contemporary problems and challenges, carry out an independent materialist revision of them, and ground with our own minds a future practice that can be nothing but the practice of the future. This Practice with a capital letter manifests itself today in the practice of cognition and requires a clear confrontation with positivist attempts to push through their idea of science and scientificity, to make it the supreme measure of all rationality. This is all the more important because these attempts today continue to cover themselves with the name of Marxism, both in

theory and in politics. On the basis of classical theoretical thought, today's theorists who want to consider themselves Marxists are required to uncover the contradictions of the formation of Marx's views, which undergo a non-linear process of liberation from empiricism and represent the transformation of Hegel's dialectic into the scientist's own theoretical ability. In this rather broad problem field of questions about system, truth, method, science as applied logic and as highest form of spirit ability, about the theory of reflection and creativity lies today the main center of gravity, where the efforts of truly theoretical thought are required. Only such thought is able to justify its beginnings, to take a critical look at its premises, and to remove them through engaging them in the theoretical-practical process of truth. And the process of truth, as it was already clear to Hegel, is not only a one-sided correspondence of a notion to an object (or vice versa). Truth must manifest itself in being itself; or, as Marx argues, not only explain the world, but transform it.

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id#: *m&s*.2403.03105 ESSAY

A Free Association of Abilities and Needs[1]

Emanuel Almborg

Dedicated to Alexander Suvorov
who sadly passed away this year.

ABSTRACT: The communist ideal—"from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs"—presupposes the self-evidence of "need" and "ability." Yet the terms' precise meanings are seldom elaborated. Turning to Evald Ilyenkov and Agnes Heller, this article reconstructs concepts of need and ability adequate to Marxism. In so doing, the article distinguishes a distinctly Marxist theory of need, as found in Heller, from more crudely biological and liberal alternatives, demonstrating its compatibility with Ilyenkov's anti-essentialist theory of ability. The upshot, I argue, is both an enriched understanding communist organisation and a reassessment of political subjectivity, reorienting focus to the radical potential of those made "disabled" in capitalism.

KEYWORDS: Karl Marx, Evald Ilyenkov, Agnes Heller, Alexander Suvorov, disability, ability, need, pedagogy, psychology, communism.

Note on terminology: In this text, the terms "capacity" and "ability" are used synonymously. (In English, 'capacity' connotes more of a potential, 'ability' more an actuality; the distinction, however, does not obtain in German, and hence not in Marx.) The term 'talent' denotes an ability that has developed to a 'higher' state. I will distinguish 'disability' from 'physical impairment,' although the two are, of course, related. Following Saad Nagi's definition, "impairment" refers to a functional loss or physical limitation (Romeis 1983). "Disability" refers to role-relevant performance outcomes, which encompass the interactions between impairments and socio-economic forces. In other words, while a physical impairment points towards limits of bodily functions, disability comprises the social context in which it appears. Which physical impairments are understood as disabilities—and when—depends on cultural-historical context: disabilities need not necessarily derive from physical impairments.

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Introduction

"From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs": Marx's famous statement on the organisation of a communist society foregrounds individual needs and abilities. Marx opposed bourgeois conceptions of equality and "vulgar socialism." These, he argued, unjustifiably treated individuals as abstractly equal and separated distribution from production. In their place, he proposed a communist politics that would re-organise society in accordance with the "all-around development of the individual," a free individual rid of capitalist exploitation and alienation, advanced beyond the "realm of necessity." Marx, as such, placed the concepts of "ability" and "need" at the heart of communism. But what to make of their precise meaning?

To explore the two, this article turns Evald Ilyenkov's concept of "ability" and Agnes Heller's of "need." The philosophers, to my knowledge, never met, nor did they address each other's work. Nevertheless, similarities unite the two. Both produced writings from the end of the 1960s to the mid 1970s. Both wrote within Warsaw Pact states: Ilyenkov in the Soviet Union, Heller in Hungary. Both were committed communists critical of the state socialisms under which they lived, with critiques extending to its official ideology (Diamat). And both voiced their critiques, in part, with reference to Marx's notion of the human and his early writings. Additionally, Sergei Mareev has argued, an intellectual continuity runs between psychologist Lev Vygotsky, Ilyenkov and György Lukács (Levant and Oittinen 2013), with the latter supervising Heller's doctoral thesis and informing her work. Amending the missed encounter between Ilyenkov and Heller, this article contends, can reconstruct an understanding of abilities and needs adequate to communist politics, reorienting attention to "disability" within capitalist society. To make its case, the article considers practices and ideas rooted in the Zagorsk School, a Soviet boarding school for deaf-blind children. Situating the so-called "Zagorsk experiment" within an understanding of communism (as distinct from official Soviet ideology), I argue, illuminates the centrality of "disability" for Marxian visions of a different society.

Background

In the early 1960s, the director of the Institute of Psychology in Moscow, V. Davydov, called for a complete reassessment of the history of Soviet psychology, advocating for:

> a restoration of historical justice, since regrettably, historians of our science have lost sight of the dialectical tradition of the theoretical reproduction of the psyche, the 'I,' the 'soul,' 'self,' by the method that was used by Descartes, Spinoza, and later Fichte. Without taking this into account it is impossible

> to understand the modern method of penetrating the mysteries of the 'soul.' (Welsh 1977)

The statement implicitly critiqued dogmas of Pavlovian behaviourism, then known as "reflexology." What's more, it reaffirmed the virtues of a repressed tradition in Soviet psychology, "cultural-historical theory," a method developed by Lev Vygotsky in the 1920s yet marginalised by Stalin's establishment of official Soviet ideology, "Diamat" (Dialectical Materialism), in the 1930s. For a time, Vygotsky's ideas faced censorship; his supporters and adherents were frequently compelled to adjust their theories and practises in conformity with official ideology. But their work possessed insights the emerging orthodoxy lacked. Central to Vygotsky's theory was his pioneering research in disability[2] and a theory of child development stressing the importance of the social as a precondition for developing "higher" cognitive powers and language. Vygotsky showed that cultural-historical context shapes consciousness and cognition, operating through a process of internalisation, whereby lived experience renders shared and social things individual and private. Vygotskian psychologist Alexander Meshcheryakov,[3] specialising in disability, and philosopher Evald Ilyenkov, at the time best known for his reading of the abstract and concrete in *Capital*, became important figures in this attempt to rethink psychology and philosophy, participating in what Maria Chehonadskih has described as the "the Soviet 68."[4] Ilyenkov provoked uproar among Pavlovian psychologists, writing in the official philosophy journal that no amount of inquiry into physiology and "reflexes" could reveal a single thing about the human mind. Pavlovians, in turn, denounced Ilyenkov, decrying his work as "revisionist," engendering a debate and power struggle that would continue throughout the decade to come. That same year, in 1968, Ilyenkov visited the Zagorsk School for deaf-blind children where Meshcheryakov was developing pedagogical methods based in Vygotsky's theory. Ilyenkov quickly became ever more involved in the school, applying and experimenting with a combination of philosophy, psychology and pedagogy for the education of deaf-blind children. Ilyenkov writes:

> The more closely I got to know Meshcheryakov's work, the stronger grew my conviction that blind-deafness as such literally does not create a single problem—apart, of course, from purely technical problems of secondary importance—that is not also a problem for general psychology. The only circumstance specific to blind-deafness is that here all of these problems are a hundred times more acute and therefore literally force the researcher to

2. Known as "defectology."
3. Meshcheryakov was a student of Ivan Sokolyanski, a pioneer in deaf-blind education and close colleague to Lev Vygotsky.
4. Comments made during a talk at e-flux New York in 2018 and in private conversations.

> pose them in as sharp, clear, and theoretically thought-out—that is, competent—a fashion as possible. And to pose a problem sharply and clearly is to be halfway to solving it. (Ilyenkov 2007c, 87)

During this period, Ilyenkov met a deaf-blind child by the name of Alexander Suvorov; the two developed a close relationship. Suvorov was eager to engage in philosophy, while Ilyenkov, convinced by the importance of dialectical thinking in education, was translating Hegel, Spinoza and Marx into braille. Ilyenkov saw in Suvorov and the other children at Zagorsk proof of his Marxist, anti-essentialist theory of consciousness, itself based on the irreducible sociality of the individual, their "ability" and "talent." Suvorov, for his part, saw in Ilyenkov a chance at being recognised as a universal human being. Suvorov later attended university and Ilyenkov became his mentor. Inspired by Spinoza, Ilyenkov conceptualised the "thinking body," elaborating a body's capacity to "mould its own action actively to the shape of any other body, to coordinate the shape of its movement in space with the shape and distribution of all other bodies"; this, he argued, constituted a fundamental feature of consciousness and human life activity. Communism from this perspective was foremost a pedagogical project to develop such a subject's full potential. In 1977, Ilyenkov gave a talk at Moscow State University, the same year Suvorov graduated from university. In his address, Ilyenkov conveyed the philosophy behind the success of the Zagorsk School. An "anxious dialectical materialist" in the audience, however, objected, "Doesn't your experiment refute the materialist truth 'Nothing in the mind that is not in the senses'? So how come they see nothing and hear nothing, and yet they understand things better than we do?" Ilyenkov relayed the question to Suvorov, who replied, "Who told you we see nothing and hear nothing? We see and hear through the eyes and ears of our friends, all people, the entire human race" (Levitin 1982, 89).[5] Suvorov's response implied that seeing or hearing is to be understood as a social process rather than a bio-mechcanical action of the eye or ear, an answer confirming Ilyenkov's relational understanding of subjectivity. Suvorov would later become a professor in psychology and develop his own theories based on both the lived experience of the Zagorsk School and his reading of Ilyenkov, Marx and Spinoza, alongside a wide range of psychological and pedagogical sources.

Ability

In capitalism, "ability" tends to be measured according to one's capacity to work, what Karl Marx defined as "labour-power" or "labour-ability"

5. Levitin attributes the quote to a booklet by Dyenkov, 'Learn to Think from Youth.'

(*Arbeitskraft* or *Arbeitsvermögen*), terms used interchangeably in *Capital* and translated as "labour-power" in English. According to Marx, labour-ability/power is the capacity of a person to labour. The worker is forced to sell this capacity as a commodity on the market. In other words, when the capitalist buys labour-power they are buying something that is a potential. Labour-power is only realised when the worker produces a commodity; this is its use-value. Its exchange-value, on the other hand, is equivalent to the socially necessary labour-time required to reproduce the worker at a given standard of living. As a commodity, labour-power/ability is not only a source of value but produces commodities of more value than it possesses, "surplus value." If, for example, the working day is eight hours, the worker could theoretically stop working after, say, four hours because by that time they would have worked the necessary time for their reproduction. The capitalist, however, makes the worker labour for the full eight hours to generate surplus value, which takes the form of profit. Therefore, the capitalist will try to extend the working day or intensify labour as much as possible to generate more surplus value beyond any physical or natural limit. When there is an abundance of unemployed workers competing on the labour market, what Marx calls "surplus populations," the process of exploitation intensifies. Labour-power, simply put, can be bought for less. Marx describes how agricultural populations forced off the land, having nothing to sell but their labour-power, become wage labourers to survive. The brutal conditions surrounding capital's absorption of new wage labourers from the countryside is exemplified by a government report on working conditions in pottery factories in England cited by Marx:

> The potters as a class, both men and women, represent a degenerated population, both physically and morally. They are, as a rule, stunted in growth, ill-shaped, and frequently ill-formed in the chest; they become prematurely old, and are certainly short-lived; they are phlegmatic and bloodless, and exhibit their debility of constitution by obstinate attacks of dyspepsia, and disorders of the liver and kidneys, and by rheumatism. But of all diseases they are especially prone to chest-disease, to pneumonia, phthisis, bronchitis, and asthma. One form would appear peculiar to them, and is known as potter's asthma, or potter's consumption. Scrofula attacking the glands, or bones, or other parts of the body, is a disease of two-thirds or more of the potters (...) That the "degenerescence" of the population of this district is not even greater than it is, is due to the constant recruiting from the adjacent country, and intermarriages with more healthy races. (Marx 1990, 355)

To remain competitive, the capitalist is compelled to extend both the working day and the productivity of work as much as possible. Marx writes,

> Capital therefore takes no account of the health and the length of life of the worker, unless society forces it to do so. Its answer to the outcry about the physical and mental degradation, the premature death, the torture of overwork, is this: Should that pain trouble us, since it increases our pleasure (profit)? But looking at these things as a whole, it is evident that this does not depend on the will, either good or bad, of the individual capitalist. Under free competition, the immanent laws of capitalist production confront the individual capitalist as a coercive force external to him. (Ibid. 381)

Industrial capitalism thus creates not only a class of proletarians by absorbing "surplus populations" from the countryside and turning them into wage labourers; it also produces a new class of "disabled" subjects, "generations of stunted, short-lived and rapidly replaced human beings...," who deviate from the standard worker's "abled" body, whose labour-power/ability is effectively erased and disposed. It is only through collective labour struggle, Marx argues, that such violence would be lessened and regulated.

If the measure of ability in capitalism is "labour-power," in one's capacity to work, and this work—as Marx shows—is historically specific to capitalism, *dis*ability can be understood as its negation: the inability to work. In this regard, the very the categories of "abled" and "disabled" arise from the exclusion of those with physical or mental impairments from the workforce. As disability activist Marta Russell writes, "the primary oppression of disabled persons is their exclusion from exploitation as wage labourers" (Russell 2001, 88). As permanently unemployed "surplus populations," this exclusion from work is biologised and pathologised through an essentialising notion of the body, against which non-confirming bodies are deemed "disabled." Such an essentialised notion, according to Russell and Malhotra, relies,

> primarily on medical definitions and uses a bio-physiological definition of normality. Further, "the environment" within which this "disadvantage" is located, is represented as "neutral," and any negative consequences of this approach for the person with an impairment are regarded as inevitable or acceptable rather than as disabling barriers. (Russell and Malhotra 2002, 211)

Capitalism, in this manner, produces "disability" in two principal ways. Firstly, due to coercive laws of competition, the pressure to enhance surplus value forces the capitalist to lengthen the working day and intensify exploitation of the mind and body of the worker, exhausting and disabling both. Secondly, those who do not have a body that conforms to historically specific forms of capitalist labour are rendered disabled; their "labour-power" is erased, and they are discarded as "surplus populations." Their potential as labour-power is destroyed. In both cases, the rate of exploitation and the capitalist labour process determines who is "disabled."

Understanding disability as a capitalist relation suggest the relevance of another Marxist concept: alienation. Marx described various forms of alienation in capitalism. Firstly, the worker is alienated from the product of their labour; although the worker makes the commodity, the capitalist owns and sells it. Secondly, the worker is alienated from the labour process because they are forced to sell their labour power as a commodity; it is a form of compulsion and experienced as such. The worker only feels free in basic functions:

> As a result, therefore, man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating (…) and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal. Certainly eating, drinking, procreating, etc., are also genuinely human functions. But taken abstractly, separated from the sphere of all other human activity and turned into sole and ultimate ends, they are animal functions. (Marx and Engels 2009, 71)

Thirdly, the worker experiences alienation from species-being (*Gattungswesen*), a term taken from Ludwig Feuerbach to denote the qualities that comprise the human. Marx, accordingly, describes the dehumanisation of the workers, implying that they are denied human qualities. He often uses the metaphor of a worker being reduced to a machine. In *Capital*, Marx writes:

> Within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power. (Marx 1990, 799)

Finally, human beings are alienated from their peers. In capitalist society, Marx argues, individuals are estranged from each other; the alienated condition of workers—and the division of labour—is generalised throughout society at large. The role of private property—as commodity, as capital—underpins this alienation: "Private property," as Marx writes, "is therefore the product, the necessary result, of alienated labour, of the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself. Private property is thus derived from the analysis of the concept of alienated labour; that is, alienated man, alienated labour, alienated life, and estranged man." (Marx and Engels 2009, 81)

Alienation is the result of historically specific—capitalist—relations. Within such relations, labour reduces the worker to a machine, stunting

their potential to develop into a full human, a social being. Bodies that fail to conform to capitalist requirements are rendered useless. The function of 'disability' within capitalism, in this sense, produces alienation, both through exclusion from work and in the curtailment of capacities and potentials. The social structure of disability has many alienating dimensions, which relate to a more general process of alienation in capitalism. Thus, "ability" acquires a dual nature in capitalism: "labour-power," at root the very measure of ability, begets its own negation, "disability," engendering physical and mental impairment. Such impairments impede humanity's actualisation. But what in this instance constitutes humanity? As we will see, for Ilyenkov, the answer is not to be found in some innate essence but rather an external world of objects and relations.

Need

"Man produces even when he is free from physical need and truly produces only in freedom from such need" (Marx and Engels 2009, 77). For the young Marx, following Hegel, the ability to make objects, "objectification," is a basic feature of human activity. This ability, however, is inhibited by the labour process. That is, the separation of labour's product from the labourer prevents the subjective transformation of the world into its object and the object's reciprocal production of the subject. Objectification, as such, is a social process of shaping the world for human needs. Needs are the starting point for subject-object relations, in the specifically human conscious activity of transforming oneself by transforming one's environment (nature). But, as Agnes Heller argues, "needs" in Marx are inherently social. To fail to grasp this, risks a problematically naturalising ahistoricism. Writing in communist Hungary, Heller claimed that need satisfaction is not an isolated process. Needs are necessarily shaped by social context, rendering any neat distinction between "natural" and "social" impossible. Marx, for example, writes that "…natural needs, such as food, clothing, fuel, and housing, vary according to the climatic and other physical conditions of his country", adding that "the number and extent of his so-called necessary needs, as also the modes of satisfying them, are themselves the product of historical development" (Marx 1990, 275). In other words, there are "natural" needs, geared towards survival, and "social" needs. But the satisfaction of "natural" needs is always socially mediated. Humans, unlike animals, transform and socialise "nature" through objectifications that, in turn, shape human needs.

Heller explains that "Marx considered the object of need and the need itself to be always interrelated. Types of need are formed in accord-

ance with the objects towards which they are directed and the activities involving those objects" (Heller 2018, 28). The socially produced quality of "natural" needs means that, for her, only social needs exist. Nevertheless, a biological limit remains, "the existential limit" of the reproduction of human life itself. But one would be mistaken to understand Marx's social notion of needs as opposed to an individual conception. On the contrary, Heller stresses, social needs comprise the totality of individual needs. Moreover, such needs are felt as needs by real individuals. The political implication, here, is that revolutionary transformation might start from the individual's experience of need, rather than the directions of a vanguard acting on their behalf. In the early 1970s, Heller's claim was read by the Hungarian authorities as an attack on the communist regime and her writing was banned.

For Heller, there are "alienated" and "non-alienated" needs. Both are felt and "true." But the former are opposed to the "full and many-sided" development of the individual while the latter enable it. Alienated needs are "the need to valorise capital, the system of need imposed by the division of labour, the continuous appearance of needs on the market, the limitation of the workers' needs to 'the necessary means of existence,' the manipulation of needs" (Heller 2018, 27). Non-alienated needs, by contrast, can only be fully developed with social change, when the economy itself is subordinated to a new "human" system of control. In such a system, need is transformed, relating less to material goods and corresponding more to "higher activities." Crucially, needs, here, are directed towards others who are seen not as means but as ends.

Capitalism continually produces new needs it cannot satisfy. Such needs are shaped by the division of labour and private property. As Heller observes,

> The development of the division of labour and thus of productivity creates not only material wealth but a wealth and diversity of needs. It is because of the division of labour that needs too are 'divided': the position of need within the division of labour determines the structure of need, or at least its limits. This contradiction reaches its peak in capitalism. (Heller 2018, 25)

For Marx, capitalism generates ever more objects of desire yet simultaneously provides an impoverished existence. It creates new needs but attenuates need for the sake of surplus value. Capital alienates the ability to objectify (by separating the object of labour from the labourer) and alienates individuals from one another (through the division of labour, competition and property). But this condition can lead to what Heller calls "radical needs," needs whose fulfilment necessitates the system's transcendence. Such needs are for community and genuine sociality, the need for a social being based on the "full and many-sided" development of the individual, realised in a new form of life, communism. To illustrate the point, Heller turns to Marx's example of workers who choose

free time over increased wages. Free time creates opportunities for ordinary people to develop their abilities and interests into talents. Over the long term, it stands to reason, the demand for more and more free time could put pressure on capital's reproduction, ultimately leading to its abolition. In this manner, Heller insists, "radical needs" hold the key to capitalism's supersession, engendering the kind of society where the individual is not reduced to the satisfaction of purely material needs but to the expansion and "enrichment" of new and diverse talents. Communism, here, is not a homeostatic state of pure satisfaction but rather an expansion and development of needs precluded by society's current condition, especially non-material needs. Writing of development, Heller notes,

> The increase in productivity can also be related to needs; by this law, the socially necessary labour time is diminished, with the consequent possibility for the worker of satisfying a 'higher level' of needs. But according to Marx, this can never come about in capitalism, partly because the valorisation of capital sets a limit to the reduction of labour time, and partly because (and we shall see that this is the decisive factor) no structure of need can be built that will enable ordinary people to use their free time to satisfy 'higher needs.' This possibility can be realised only in the society of 'associated producers.' (Heller 2018, 26)

The satisfaction of 'higher needs,' therefore, requires a society in which needs do not appear on the market, surmounting the logic of capitalist accumulation.

To Heller, radical needs are born in capitalism. It is not the needs in themselves that are revolutionary; it is the process of their satisfaction—a process that necessitates systemic change—that implies revolution. In this regard, the proletariat need not necessarily occupy a privileged position within theories of revolutionary change. Instead, it is those individuals who experience such radical needs most acutely—those whose needs develop within the system but cannot be fulfilled by it—who might hold the greatest revolutionary potential. Such individuals are the bearers of what Heller calls the "collective Ought": they are revolutionary subjects who, by the struggle to satisfy not only material needs but "higher needs," struggle for a new society where true freedom—in the free development of new and diverse needs—can prosper.

Property and Alienation

Capitalism, I have argued, determines the pervasive conception of disability. It also, moreover, produces a class of the "disabled." Those who do not have a body that conforms to capital's demand for "labour-power" suffer a form of alienation that ultimately begets their de-humanisation. Capital, in this regard, not only alienates the "disabled" from the labour

market; it denies something that is specifically "human" in the Marxist sense. In its dynamic expansion, capitalism continually produces new needs. Yet, in their unsatisfiability, the production of such needs constrains need as such, engendering a condition of "impoverishment." On the above account, the solution to unemployment's alienation resides not in employment, nor does that of 'disability' reside in the ability to labour. Rather, such alienation can only be overcome with society's transformation, creating the conditions for free-self activity and community to prevail. But how does such a transformation relate to the context from which Heller's writing on "need" and Ilyenkov's understanding of "ability" emerged? What of "actually existing socialism"?

For Ilyenkov and for Heller, alienation pertained to private property. Private property mediates social relations, needs and abilities, and does so in alienating ways. Moreover, the all-round development of the individual presupposes its abolition. If private property exists, so will alienation. Ilyenkov writes, "for Marx the 'abolition of private property' is (…) not achieved by a single blow, in one single act of overturn in the legal and political sphere, on the day following a political revolution. The abolition of private property (or, what is the same thing, the real socialisation of property) was always understood by Marx as a process of organic, revolutionary transformation of the whole 'ensemble of social relations'."[6] The revolution, in this sense, creates only the necessary preconditions and starting point for the private property's abolition. If alienation still existed in the Soviet Union, it followed, this was because private property had never been fully transformed into socialised property. Ilyenkov proceeds, "apart from the political revolution, a cultural revolution is required (and) a revolution in the sphere of the division of labour."[7] Only such a revolution, he argues, can overcome the social 'stratification' between "manual" and "mental" labour, between city and village. For Ilyenkov, alienation is nothing other than the process of turning property into private property. "Property," in this instance, denotes the human activity of "appropriation" and "objectification," "private property" the appropriation of "nature's objects' in *private fashion*," with the latter unfolding in such a way as to crystallise the individual's atomised existence. Ilyenkov writes,

> By the word 'property' Marx always—in his youth as well as in his old age—understood not a 'thing' or a 'collection of things' in somebody's possession

6. Quote taken from *Ilyenkov on Shaff: On the 'Essence of Man' and 'Humanism' as Understood by Adam Shaff*. Shaff's book *Marxism and the Human Individual*, translated independently by Peter Jones, unpublished and sent to author.
7. Ibid.

> and at their disposal, but a process. The process of appropriation by the individual of the objects of nature within and by means of a definite social form.[8]

Private property, in Ilyenkov's account, results from the fetishised illusion of independence between people in the process of appropriation. Here, private individuals no longer see their dependence on each other, but instead become alienated individuals, subject to the abstract forces of competition and market relations. "While capitalism—as the highest and ultimate phase of evolution of private property in general—is the highest and ultimate phase of 'alienation' in general"[9], this does not mean that alienation disappears in a post-capitalist world. Alienation is not abolished overnight. Rather, for Ilyenkov, alienation exists on a spectrum, varying according to private property's development. While alienation peaks in capitalism, levels of alienation might exist in any type society, depending on property's relative socialisation.

Alienation, in Heller's reading of Marx, suppresses the development of human essence. But, significantly, this essence can only be realised *through* alienation. This is because historically developed private property produces alienation in general, a condition that provokes "radical needs." Such needs, in turn, beget the possibility of systemic change and the realisation of fully social beings. Put another way, capitalism provides a specific route to communism via alienation. Yet it is not the only route. Heller observes that there are other possibilities, drawing on the letters Marx wrote to Vera Zasulich, in which he outlines the possibility of building communism directly from already existing forms of community in the peasant commune without first developing industrial capitalism.[10] Irrespective of the route to its actualisation, the "human essence" Heller refers to is not an eternal human nature but a specific historical possibility in capitalist development to transcend its systemic oppression. Here, Heller and Ilyenkov diverge. In Ilyenkov's reading of Marx, "man" is not alienated from some innate human "essence"; it is simply that the Hegelian formula of "alienation of man from himself" was transformed by Marx as alienation of one person *from another person*, as two private owners, resulting in an appearance of independence that obscures the true relation of dependency between people. What makes one human is not a "universal essence"—such as reason—but the part one plays in the ensemble of social relations that comprises humanity (from which reason, or thinking, can develop). To Heller, on the other hand, there is human essence, but only in the sense of a potential sociality, the social process of objectification, and a historical, not eternal,

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. For a discussion on these letters, see Tomba 2017.

possibility to overcome "alienation (of private property, subsumed under the division of labour) that makes every individual able to participate in social wealth as a whole" (Heller 2018, 46). Communism will therefore realise "a new and higher form." As she elaborates, "Only then will man become a being that accords with the nature of the species for itself, only then will 'internal' and 'external' nature adequately match the human essence" (Heller 2018, 46).

Different in character yet overlapping in concern, both positions share the conviction that communist transformation, and the abolition of private property, cannot be measured by legal, political or institutional changes alone, such as those implemented in socialist countries. Rather, degrees of alienation are decisive. In other words, it is the degree to which the whole 'ensemble of social relations' is transformed, the degree to which property is socialised and the degree to which material conditions are created that will enable each person to develop their full potential as social beings. Furthermore, this implies that the so-called "socialist countries" of the Eastern Bloc had yet to become communist in Marx's sense. The socio-cultural revolution Ilyenkov called for[11]—one that would abolish everything inherited from the world of private property and overcome the social 'stratification' between 'material' and 'mental' labour, between city and village, etc., transforming social relations and subjectivity—is in this sense a communist pedagogical project.

Universal Talent

The Zagorsk School provides a sense of what such a pedagogical project could look like. In Ilyenkov's writing on pedagogy and psychology, abilities are not inherent but developed through social interaction. He is mostly concerned with "mental abilities," such as the ability to think dialectically, as a necessary part of communist education. Physical abilities are not unimportant here, but they are considered in relation to the way they condition the development of "higher" mental abilities. This conditioning, of course, is socially determined rather than biological. How physical impairments condition mental development and abilities, too, depends on social context. "Ability as such," Ilyenkov writes, "is foremost a social category, ability is not biologically innate but given to the individual from without and formed during one's lifetime" (Ilyenkov 2007a, 57). This is an idea of development rooted in the Vygotskian claim that all "higher mental functions," such as thinking, attention, language and memory are social, not "natural." Accordingly, higher mental functions develop from relations between people in a specific

11. This revolutionary understanding can be understood as an attempt to reconnect with cultural, art and educational post-revolutionary discourse of the 1920s (Fitzpatrick 2002).

context. Ilyenkov writes that "the entirety of an 'ability' is given to the individual 'from without'—by the world of objects and people, and the ability is developed (shaped) through the individual's 'assimilation' of the experience of other people, of (…) modes of changing the surrounding world" (Ilyenkov 2007a, 57). This claim echoes Marx's notion of objectification and conscious self-activity. Ilyenkov does not deny biological conditions but argues that claims departing from them tend to lead to the conclusion that abilities are natural and innate, entrenching reactionary positions. Such naturalistic explanations, Ilyenkov, argues, risk essentialising "the historically shaped and inherited mode of the division of human labour" (Ilyenkov 2007a, 57).

But if ability is the universal possibility of developing our full potential or talents as social beings, such an understanding of ability, one could say, implies that its opposite, disability, results from an inherited division of labour. In other words, disability arises from capitalist social relations. Ilynekov writes, "The 'norm' for man is precisely *talent* and that by declaring talent a rarity, a deviation from the norm we simply dump onto Mother Nature our own guilt, our own inability to create for each (…) individual all the external conditions for his development to the highest level of talent" (Ilyenkov 2007a, 67). Providing these external conditions, according to Ilyenkov, is the main task of communist transformation. Ilyenkov does not deny physical impairment; but, according with the previously mentioned disability activist Marta Russell and definitions by Saad Nagi, he separates them from disability and ability. Impairments, here, are specific to social context. The potential, to develop higher abilities and talents is universal, in so far as it is social in origin. Following psychologist Lev Vygotsky's theories, Ilyenkov holds that cognitive powers always develop intersubjectively first and are subsequently internalised. In the education of deaf-blind children, access to the social world is essential: it is the very material experience required for development of abilities. But whereas Vygotsky emphasised the place of language in this social process, for Ilyenkov it has no privilege. He often seems to emphasise other forms of social mediation and practical activities, such as gesture and the use of tools. Meshcheryakov, for his part, devised alternative pedagogical methods, tactile sign language and technologies for group learning, attempting to foster material and social experiences that establish a sense of self in relation to others as well as an ability to participate in the social. But to Meshcheryakov and Ilyenkov, the work with deaf-blind children proved something beyond its specific context, something that was universal in human beings, and that Vygotsky had begun to outline in the 1920s: the social mind. The "human," here, is simply the context in which one is socialised *as* a human individual.

> The human mind begins (...) with the ability to live like a human being in a world of things created by a human being for a human being. And the more this world opens up to the child, the more things are involved into the sphere of his activity, the more and more rational being he becomes. When this—practical—reason is formed, teaching language and speech ceases to be a difficult problem and becomes primarily a matter of technique.[12]

Ilyenkov read Marx through both Hegel *and* Spinoza, producing an understanding of what he calls the *thinking body*, not the physical body of the human but an inorganic body. As Andrey Maidansky (2005, 290) puts it, "Ilyenkov insisted that Marx had in mind not the bodily organ of an individual homo sapiens, growing out of his neck at the mercy of Mother Nature, but precisely the human head—a tool of culture, not of nature (...) Its body does not consist only of the brain, but also of any thing that is created by people for people. Products of culture are nothing but 'the organs of the human brain created by the human hand, the reified power of knowledge'." Perhaps, then, Ilyenkov's concept of the *thinking body* can be understood, as the opposite of disability and its alienating dimensions, that is, ability.

From Ability to the Thinking Body

The notion of the "thinking body" derives from Ilyenkov's unconventional reading of a "deeper meaning" in Spinoza's thought, mobilised as a critique of positivism and dualistic essentialism both in the Soviet context (Pavlov's reflexology, etc.) and in the Western context (English neopositivism, Russell, Wittgenstein, Popper,[13] etc.). Spinoza resolves the dualist problem posed by Descartes, of how soul and body are united, by reframing the question. Spinoza's system overcomes mind-body dualism by arguing that there is only one infinite "substance," "god or nature," with thought and extension merely two of its attributes. This prompts Ilyenkov to claim that there is not body and thought, but only the *thinking body*: an active body, relating in space to other bodies. Substance links thought to a spatial dimension, extension. Thought, as such, can only be understood as an action, an activity within nature as a whole. It is not that humans think in nature; rather nature itself thinks in humans. "In humans, nature thinks of itself" (Ilyenkov 2008, 33): nature acquires self-consciousness. Instead of looking for thinking in the brain, as in positivist science, the concept of the thinking body insists one looks outside the head. Thought occurs in actions and practices. When a body is inactive, on this account, it does not think. It is just a body, not a *thinking* body. Whatever the body is, thinking or not, the thinking body can shape its movement around it. While the body that does not think

12. Quoted in Igor Hanzel (2018, 5).
13. Ilyenkov, allegedly, would call him "pooper."

is determined by its inner logic (nature), the body that thinks moves freely in exterior space. The thinking body performs actions that it was not physically or biologically predisposed to carry out, actions which are not instinctively innate but shaped in relation to whatever the body encounters. Ilyenkov elaborates,

> Thus, the human hand can perform movements in the form of a circle, or a square, or any other intricate geometrical figure you fancy, so revealing that it was not designed *structurally* and *anatomically* in advance for any one of these 'actions,' and *for that very reason* is capable of performing *any action.* In this it differs, say, from a pair of compasses, which describe circles much more accurately than the hand but cannot draw the outlines of triangles or squares. In other words, the action of a body that 'does not think' (if only in the form of spatial movement, in the form of the simplest and most obvious case) is determined by its *own inner construction* by its 'nature,' and is quite uncoordinated with the shape of the other bodies among which it moves. It therefore either disturbs the shapes of the other bodies or is itself broken in colliding with insuperable obstacles. *Man*, however, *the thinking body, builds his movement on the shape of any other body*. He does not wait until the insurmountable resistance of other bodies forces him to turn off from his path; the thinking body goes freely round any obstacle of the most complicated form. *The capacity of a thinking body to mould its own action actively to the shape of any other body*, to coordinate the shape of its movement in space with the shape and distribution of all other bodies, Spinoza considered to be its distinguishing sign and the specific feature of that activity that we call 'thinking' or 'reason.' (Ilyenkov 2008, 47)

But the 'thinking body' is not exclusively human; the concept does not demarcate clear boundaries between humans and non-humans, matter and creature. Ilyenkov insists that there are levels of "thinking" in non-human bodies too, in gradations, because thinking is an attribute of substance (nature). Since some animals also "think," Pavlov's mechanistic understanding of a reflex evoked and shaped by stimulation not only tells you very little about the human mind; it also says little of the animal (such as his famous dogs). Nonetheless, for Ilyenkov, in the thinking body something powerfully interferes in the chain of events between an external effect on the body that causes it to react, and this something—a feature of the thinking body—is particularly clear in humans. This is an interference that forces a body to break down the given chain of events and recombine it in entirely new ways. The intervention comprises reflection, contemplation and consideration, leading to reconstruction. Thinking, therefore, is a body's ability to adapt and mediate, a means of recombining movement in relation to external circumstances. In other words, the thinking body possesses plasticity: the ability to respond in an infinite number of ways to whatever it encounters. As such, Ilyenkov conceives "the organ of thought *bodily*, as structurally organised in space" (Ilyenkov 2008, 50). This spatial corporality implies

that thinking or consciousness is not an innate essence, but relies on the ability to actively build ever new schemes according to external objects.

In Ilyenkov's non-essentialist conception of the human, thinking or consciousness can be opposed to intrinsic determinations, such as those of instincts, reflexes or anatomy. The human, for Ilyenkov, resides in social practice and the activity between bodies and objects. He defines the human, moreover, not as one who possesses an essential quality common to all, but as a part of a larger whole. Following Vygotsky, Ilyenkov argues that what makes one human is not a specific feature but their role in the "ensemble of social relations" that constitutes humanity. One cannot, therefore, find the answer to thinking in the brain; it is found in action itself, realised in space. To understand thinking in general, one must grasp the relation between the thinking body and its object. This refers not to a particular object or body, but *any object* in general. Thinking can only be understood biologically or anatomically at a specific moment, not in general. Thinking, therefore, is a process, an attribute of substance, constantly *extending* and embracing new things, plastically adapting to them, such that they are experienced by the thinking body not as internal and anatomical but as external, as the shape of things outside the body. But if thinking—that is, actions—are situated in an external space of relations between bodies and objects, how does one account for "error" or "evil"? Spinoza's reply, according to Ilyenkov, was that error or evil were not internal to an idea or an action itself. Rather, they resulted from acts according to the shapes of imperfect objects. When replicating such actions, errors increase. If the particular—imperfect, half-true, relative—is granted universal significance, errors expand. Additionally, the more passive the thinking body is, the more power does the accidentally nearest object, or its immediate circumstances, wield over it, determining its mode of action. For Spinoza, complacency is thus the greatest sin. The more actively a thinking body expands its activity to embrace further objects, the more adequate become its ideas. Human thinking can only be perfected—can only become identical to thought as an attribute of substance—when its actions conform to infinite interacting things, themselves being forms and combinations of a natural whole.

Human beings, in reality, deviate from perfect thinking. Humans think in a finite manner. For Ilyenkov, that means that humans are imperfect; they are always in some sense lacking, constantly striving towards an ideal that eludes completion. This imperfection means that the finite and partial should not be taken for the universal—an error—but should be understood as a movement thereto. It was clear, for Ilyenkov, that thought as an attribute of substance was not identical to human thought. Instead, the universal property of substance provides the

basis for "finite thought," itself encompassing human thought. To consider human thought as identical to thought in general is mistaken. It is merely one instance of thought. That is what Ilyenkov claims Spinoza meant by construing thought as an attribute of infinite substance. Ilyenkov, though, develops the idea further, forging a link to Marxist materialism. Since substance is nature, he reasons, it is another word for matter. Thinking thus evolves from matter when conditions are right. It is the same matter that thinks in humans and in other possible creatures or bodies, and thought, accordingly, cannot be separated from this matter. He writes,

> Spinoza's definition means the following: in man, as in any other possible thinking creature, the same matter thinks as in other cases (other modi) only 'extends' in the form of stones or any other 'unthinking body'; that thought in fact cannot be separated from world matter and counterposed to it itself as a special, incorporeal 'soul,' and it (thought) is matter's own perfection. That is how Herder and Goethe, La Mettrie and Diderot, Marx and Plekhanov (all great 'Spinozists') and even the young Schelling, understood Spinoza. (Ilyenkov 2008, 56)

Since thinking is an attribute of substance, Ilyenkov contends, it cannot be found in the brain or the biological body; it exists in the relation between bodies in infinite variations. The argument derives from an unorthodox reading of Spinoza. There is no "thinking body." Accordingly, Ilyenkov's reading is best understood as a departure point for his own theory. To understand Ilyenkov's concept of consciousness, one ought not to investigate the brain, physiologically conceived, but turn to what Marx, in the 1844 manuscripts, called the "inorganic body," that is, a nature that humans both depend on and are part of: the world of "things" that humans produce and reproduce by their "life activity" (labour), which shapes them in turn. This corresponds to what Judith Butler has described as the unity of the human body and nature, the organic and inorganic (Butler 2019), [14] or what Jason Moore refers to affirmatively as "an open conception of life-making, one that views the boundaries of the organic and inorganic as ever-shifting" (Moore 2015, 7).

To Ilyenkov, mind and body are inseparable in the practice of thinking. When such an understanding is applied to developmental psychology, consciousness and self-consciousness are seen to emerge through relations with an exteriority, with an already existing "humanity," not from an intrinsic essence, but from activity with the world of objects, tools and social relations that a child encounters and appropriates, the material context in which they "awaken to consciousness." From this

14. We have to "make sure we do not accept these as two separate kinds of substances" (Butler 2019).

perspective, the problem of accessing this "humanity" is paramount, becoming particularly acute in deaf-blind pedagogy. The anti-essentialist understanding of the human here articulated raises various questions. When does an object become a subject, and what are its limits? What are the organising principles of this "humanity" of which it becomes a part, and who gets to shape it? What bodies does it include and exclude? What are its qualities within a given society and the properties that consciousness and self-consciousness emerge from and are attached to? The anti-essentialist concept of 'humanity' would appear to make any nature/culture divide or mind/body distinction impossible. Culturally mediated yet dependent on nature, biological bodies and organic needs are inseparable from the social activity that satisfies those needs. Humanity is attached to nature not because of some inner essence, but due to the social-historical and cultural activities that shape bodies, "life-activity" or labour. The human universal, far from characterising a pure freedom or disembodied form of reason, is precisely this dependency on nature: humans and non-humans, bodies and objects. Butler writes, "So when Marx then claims that 'Nature is the inorganic body of the human,' he is claiming that only as inorganic can nature keep the human alive" (Butler 2019, 11). Thus, situating human reason bodily, within space, renders it immanent to subsistence and social reproduction. From this conclusion, a variety of pressing ecological questions, unaddressed here, follow.

In his writing on Spinoza and the thinking body, Ilyenkov never mentions his work with deaf-blind children. Yet he wrote these reflections whilst increasingly absorbed in daily practice at the Zagorsk School, work that occupied twelve years of his life. As Andrey Maidansky has pointed out:

> He tried to discern the moment of birth of the ideal in the 'natural,' not yet human psyche. He wanted to see with his own eyes the most mysterious event in the universe—the origin and emergence of the human self, and further, to discover the laws, according to which the world of ideas and ideals is formed and shaped in the soul of a young child. (Maidansky 2005, 295)

At Zagorsk, Ilyenkov encountered everyday practical obstacles to teaching deaf-blind children and youth. In an essay about the school, ideas resonating with the "thinking body" are reiterated without reference to the concept as such. Ilyenkov outlines how the deaf-blind child learns to satisfy an organic need through their "inorganic body" and so how a body becomes a thinking body. This time the question is formulated as a pedagogical problem, a problem of mediation:

> What kind of obstacle would (…) pose the issue point-blank: either accomplish the transition to the human mode of satisfying organic needs or else perish? An obstacle that would be at the same time a bridge or, so to speak, a level crossing (…) between the biological and the specifically human

> form of mind. Such a bridge-obstacle is any object created by man for man, any artificial tool that man places between himself and an object of his organic needs (Ilyenkov 2007c, 89).

In other words, for consciousness to develop, an artificial link, such as a tool or sign, between biology and the inorganic, that is, between a body and the thinking body, is necessary. "For example—a spoon. A spoon is a pass into the realm of human—social—culture, into the sphere of human life activity and of the human mind" (Ilyenkov 2007c, 89). It is only when the body, or the brain, is transformed from "biological life activity of an organism of the species Homo sapiens into an organ for control of the highly complex system of external objects that constitutes, to use Marx's expression, the inorganic body of man" that consciousness truly arises (Ilyenkov 2007c, 89). A spoon can be understood as an elementary step in such a process. As such, the first step towards the human mind is in the movement of the hand. The hand moves not according to a biological innate schema or instinct but by the form and function of artificial things made by and for other human beings. The process, however, is not specific to deaf-blind children; it is merely clearer in this case. The deaf-blind child encounters the same humanity located outside of the body as any other child. The difference is one of technique and patience, of mediating tools that can enable a leap from body to thinking body. In his writing on psychology from about the same time, Ilyenkov states:

> The first element of the psyche can arise only where there is the beginning of his organism's own "self-motion" toward food—toward the mother's breast. The embryonic form—the baby—"is drawn" in the direction toward the mother's breast, toward milk. In the animal this psyche is innate. In man it is not, it must still take form—the baby does not display any attempts, even the clumsiest, to move in a particular direction. Fichte described this well, as a fact: vegetative "instinct" in the absence of animal instinct—that is, of the morphologically innate schema of motion in space that is necessary for the elimination of the spatial "obstacle." Of the ability by means of organized actions to overcome the gap between his own body and the external condition of its existence. The emergence of psychic functions (= the image) is inextricably connected precisely with the presence of this—animal—"instinct," although it is not an "instinct" at all (…) but a formation that arises after birth. If this is not an "instinct" but a highly complex formation that arises after birth and requires ontogenetic development of a corresponding "functional organ," then the problem of the emergence of the psyche coincides with—and does not stand in opposition to—the problem of ontogenesis of the corresponding zones of the brain. But the organ here is created by the function, and not the other way round, not the function by the organ, by a "structure" that exists prior to it. (Ilyenkov 2010, 16)

The helplessness and absence of instinctual, biological determination opens a space for plasticity and the inorganic body of man. Such an un-

derstanding aligns with Freudian theory (Freud 2017), whereby infantile dependence appears as a starting point for developing a sense of self and others. But in contrast to psychoanalytic theories of innate drive and inborn phylogenetic knowledge of the object of organic need—such as "the good breast" (Klein et al. 1953, J. Bowlby 1958)—Ilyenkov argues that an image emerges in the mind when the newborn encounters an exterior object of any shape or form and adapts their actions to it, whether a breast, a spoon or a bottle. As such, Ilyenkov's non-essentialist position repudiates psychoanalytic and biological determinism. What causes the newborn to move is not a primary mental process, a genetically coded instinct or a biological "drive." It is a social mediation. Thinking and other "higher mental functions"—"human" functions—are irreducibly socio-cultural and are internalised from a specific position in development. The theory offers a rejection of Pavlovian reflexology. For while Pavlov contended that innate reflexes develop slowly, gradually transforming into higher functions, such as language, given social conditioning and stimulation, there is no such grounding in innate reflexes for Ilyenkov. Human functions are one hundred percent social, as Ilyenkov emphasised in his provocations of Pavlovians, articulating a social constructivism based in activity, mediated by objects within an ensemble of social relations. Ilyenkov's orientation to the thinking body is in some respects compatible with Vygotsky's views. To Ilyenkov, language does not play the privileged developmental role it did for Vygotsky. Tool use and activity are just as, if not more, important to the social development of consciousness (as in A. N. Leontiev's "activity theory").[15] Additionally, for Vygotsky, the real issue is not how hereditary an impulse is but how rigidly formed it is at birth. Sex, for example, is an instinct but it is not well formed at birth; by contrast, bottle feeding is not an instinct but can begin immediately after birth. We are readied precisely by our unreadiness. Because individuals are born so helpless, they are ready to be helped, and this is what makes the formation of historical and cultural functions of the mind possible. "Lower mental functions," such as reflexes and instincts, are not rigidly formed in humans, as they are in primates; but for Vygotsky, in contrast to Ilyenkov, they still play a part. They remain and are transformed within "higher mental functions," such as language, and can re-gain dominance if these deteriorate. As such, one could describe Ilyenkov's position as an extension of Vygotsky's work towards a more thoroughly social constructivism, discarding the biological almost entirely. But as Suvorov notes:

15. A. N. Leontiev was a Soviet psychologist who worked together with Lev Vygotsky and developed a critique of Pavlov's reflexology.

> Ilyenkov focuses on the social nature of individuality not because he underestimates the significance of "biological factors," but rather because he opposes, in principle, all attempts to shift responsibility for what makes a child part of the "ensemble of all social relationships," for the nature of this ensemble, and for what individuals obtain when they join it. The important thing is not the ratio between the biological and the social, but the extent of human responsibility for themselves and each other. (…) Ilyenkov categorically insisted on the maximum level, on "one hundred percent" responsibility of humanity for itself, for every "possessor and authorized member of common human culture. (Suvorov 2003, 68)

Irrespective of differences, both Ilyenkov and Vygotsky considered thinking possible because of innate determination's absence. This absence enables contemplation, adaptation and the inorganic body of man, in a space where culture and the political manifest. Thinking, however, remains imperfect on this model. It is always lacking, always changing and continually adapting to new conditions. Individuals are born non-thinking bodies, and becoming a thinking body is not a given; if this process of activity and mediation is disrupted or destroyed, precarity befalls the body. As such, the ongoing interchange between the body and nature—"the inorganic body" of the human—requires both renewal and the material conditions for renewal.

Ability and Needs

In the picture presented, the communist subject—often imagined able-bodied, white, male and industrially employed—is better conceived as a deaf-blind child, as both the universal subject and object of communist transformation. Such a transformation can be measured by the conditions for the development of each of us to the highest-level of talent and ability. Here, issues of mediation and pedagogy become decisive. Overcoming capitalist notions of disability implies overcoming property's private appropriation. As we have seen, the pedagogy and philosophy emerging from the Zagorsk School emphasised a *socialised* appropriation of objects, tools and nature. But the problem of mediating such appropriations extends beyond issues particular to the deaf-blind. The problem merely appears more clearly here and, according to Ilyenkov, reveals its universality. Following Agnes Heller, one might add, those who feel "radical needs"—needs for community and social being, the "full and many-sided" development of the individual, which cannot be achieved in their society—bear a universal revolutionary potential. It is not only the struggle to satisfy material organic needs, which engenders political contestation. Demands based on "higher," radical needs pose enormous potential for the emancipatory transformation of society. Such radical needs can perhaps be best understood as what Kathi

Weeks (2011) has called "utopian demands": [16] demands whose importance lies in the impossibility of their satisfaction without structural change .

The communist motto "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" ought to be re-articulated with a vivid sense of ability's determination by social need. So reframed, the statement critiques the bourgeois equality of transactional exchange, highlighting the conditioning of needs. One could equally say that it implicitly critiques its Soviet revision—"from each according to his ability, to each according to his work"—too, where need replaces labour investment and fails to address the conditioning of needs and the division of labour. Indeed, distribution according to labour was already criticised by Raya Dunayevskaya in 1944 as reproducing capital's law of value (Duyanevskaya 1944). "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs," by contrast, requires the abolition of the law of value and private property. In other words, the slogan implies the transformation of production and distribution, that is, the total system of needs and abilities, which would lead to an expansion of new ones. As Marx and Engels famously wrote in *The German Ideology*:

> For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic. (Marx and Engels 1947, 22)

Ilyenkov adds, "[m]an is not split between biological and social being, not on the one hand social and on the other biological, but a dialectical being" (Ilyenkov 2007b, 64). With time, Ilyenkov became increasingly tormented by the increasing distance between "real socialism" on the one hand and the society adumbrated by Marx and the "withering away of the state" promised by Lenin on the other. And yet, according to Sergei Mareev, a student of Ilyenkov, he never lost faith in the "socialist ideal." To Ilyenkov, such an ideal retained one fundamental advantage over capitalism:

> It corresponds to the collective essence of human beings. It is the opposite of the individualism and egoism of the members of the 'civil society' that inflicts

17. Quoted in Maidansky and Pavlov (2018, 224).

> objective suffering even on those who 'consciously' share the ideology and psychology of this society.[17]

The thinking body Ilyenkov articulated in response is not an isolated individual. It is a social being, situated within a world of tools and artefacts of culture that become its organs within an ensemble of social relations: it is a collective body that idealises the material and materialises the ideal.

The theory and practice of the Zagorsk school today appears marginal. Meshcheryakov died in 1974, Ilyenkov committed suicide in 1979 and Davydov was forced to resign as the director of the Institute of Psychology four years later. In the 1980s, the ideas and methods they championed were attacked in the name of perestroika, in favour of "Western" theories that emphasised the innate determinations of individual development. Alexander Suvorov was one of the last people alive with direct experience of this history, both as student at the Zagorsk School and as a theorist who has continued to develop Ilyenkov's philosophy. The concepts and techniques of the school, I have argued, ought to be reconsidered.

Today, artists, activists and researchers are re-discovering repressed histories and traditions in Soviet theory. Keti Chukhrov (2020) has mobilised Ilyenkov as a critique of cybernetic theory and artificial intelligence; Alexei Penzin (2018) of Chto Delat rethinks Ilyenkov's communism as a cosmology that redefines teleological readings of Marx. In Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, a group of queer activists study Ilyenkov and Suvorov in order to go beyond what they call "liberal queer-theory," replacing it with a "queer-communist" alternative derived from Ilyenkov and Suvorov, a theory founded on a non-essentialist and social understanding of the human, opposed to right-wing and fascist "bio deterministic" theories. They argue that Ilyenkov's radicalism lies not in his rejection of the biological perspective but in

> the fact that relying on the biological factor in personal development relieves society of its responsibility for this development. In other words, the anti-essentialism of Ilyenkov is attributable to an ethical position. As Suvorov remarks, "Ilyenkov focuses on the social nature of personality not because he underestimates the significance of the 'biological factors,' but because he is fundamentally against any attempt whatsoever to relieve the responsibility for how a child is included in this 'ensemble of all social relations,' that which represents this 'ensemble' and how this personality emerges while included within this ensemble (...) Ilyenkov categorically insists on this to the fullest degree, on the 'hundred percent' measure of humanity's responsibility for itself, for each 'bearer and authorized representative of a culture common to all.' (Mamedov and Shatlova 2017)

17. Quoted in Maidansky and Pavlov (2018, 224).

Such readings point not only to the strength of Ilyenkov's ideas but to unexplored potentials and applications of them. What's more, they push one to think beyond critical theory's Western canon. Today, it is incumbent upon Ilyenkov's readers to imagine radically different contexts and practices in which his ideas can be realised. Such a project is, of course, processual, entailing experimentation, a dialectics of theory and practice, embodied forms of research, testing, rehearsal, staging. It is "thinking as action."

Ilyenkov's notion of ability acquires a new exigency in light of Heller's 'radical needs.' The statement, "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs" is turned on its head: it is only from the realisation of radical needs that universal ability can appear. In the essay "Experimental Philosophy," Suvorov reflects on his experiences growing up in the Zagorsk School and his friendship with Ilyenkov. He points out that for Marx the shortening of the working day was essential for free time devoted to "creative activity." He writes, "Marx and Engels provided a theoretical rationale for the need for universal—comprehensive and harmonious—development of the individual, but focused on more, so to speak, macrosocial conditions of such development, one of which they acknowledged to be the presence of leisure time" (Suvorov 2003, 68). Becoming human, he elaborates, depends on just such macrosocial conditions,

> Thus, one is born a person but has to become a human being, and becomes one to precisely the extent that one participates in the process of human, that is, productive, activity. In Marx, the term "production" is a synonym for human activity in general. "Production" is not so much work at a plant or factory as it is activity to transform nature as a whole, universally, and including the transformer himself. Production is universal, creative, and in no way "fragmentary," monotonous, machine-like factory work. Production is all of the "vital activity" of the human "organism," of humanity as a whole. It is understood that such universal vital activity includes not only material production of the means of survival, that is, everything necessary for the physical survival of humanity, but also the spiritual and mental production of ideas (philosophical, scientific, artistic, and religious) and psychological and educational production of the producers themselves—human beings, individuals. (Suvorov 2003, 68)

Such an understanding aligns with but goes beyond a "social model of disability" (Hunt 2019, 73) that grasps disability as a social oppression placed on top of impairments. Thoroughgoing emancipation from such oppression obliges the creation of the material preconditions for free life activity, preconditions antagonistic to the value form and dependent on free time. This would oblige the replacement of labour input—or labour power in capitalism—with the sort of "production" Suvorov alludes to, involving imagination, play, creativity and the "self-production" of the

thinking body. If the "human" body comprises an ensemble of social relations, following Suvorov, it is not only up to us to define it and shape its organs. We must create the material conditions for its sustainability, reproduction and access to humanity. Humanity, in this sense, ought not be viewed as an ahistorical "essence"; it is an ethics that communism can be measured against based on the free association of abilities and needs.

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Biography

Emanuel Almborg is an artist based in Stockholm and London. His practice is primarily moving image-based and engages with pedagogy, psychology and theatre. He was a Whitney ISP fellow in New York, 2015 and finished a PhD at The Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm (KKH), 2021, with the dissertation; *Towards a Pedagogy of the Utopian Image*. He is the facilitator of *Switchers,* a film and theatre collective with young people from London and rural Wales. He has studied psychoanalysis and child development at the Tavistock in London. He is currently doing a Postdoc across art and psychology with KKH, Stockholm and University of East London, BabyDevLab. He has recently taught and lectured at Goldsmiths, London, Konstfack, Stockholm and Yale University, New Haven. His work has recently been shown at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Whitechapel Gallery, London, Kunstverein Munchen, Munich and CAC Brétigny outside Paris.

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id#:*m&s.*2403.03106 INTERVIEW

Interviews: Rejuvenating the Revolutionary Essence of Marxist Theory at the Centennial of Evald Ilyenkov

Arto Artinian, David Bakhurst, Pham Minh Duc, Sascha Freyberg, Isabel Jacobs, Martin Küpper, Kyrill Potapov and Monika Woźniak

Interviewed by Siyaveş Azeri

SIYAVEŞ AZERI (SA): The year 2024 marks the centennial of independent Soviet philosopher, Evald Ilyenkov. The following questions below were sent via email to the authors.

1) The first question will be a very general one. It seems as if we are experiencing a "revival" of Ilyenkov's ideas; there appears to be a growing interest in his philosophical conceptualizations and methodology. What is so significant about Ilyenkov's ideas that may be responsible for such a revival?
2) The next question will be in a sense the continuation of the previous; in what sense and how relevant/actual is Ilyenkov's take on philosophical questions? Does he have anything to offer in the face of contemporary philosophical and/or social and political issues and crises?
3) In his philosophical work, Ilyenkov addresses several problems that traditionally belong to different fields of philosophical study, from machine-thinking and the AI to the questions concerning the relation between philosophy and sciences, the "universal," the "ideal," problems of epistemology, methodology, the relation between ethics and science, Marxism, humanism, general education and the education of people with disabilities, to the criticism of positivism, so on and so forth. What in Ilyenkov's philosophical approach keeps together these apparently different fields and questions? Does he suggest that there is an essential bond between these diverse problems? If so, what that would be in his formulation?

Artinian, Arto, David Bakhurst, Pham Minh Duc, Sascha Freyberg, Isabel Jacobs, Martin Küpper, Kyrill Potapov and Monika Woźniak. 2024. "Interviews: Rejuvenating the Revolutionary Essence of Marxist Theory at the Centennial of Evald Ilyenkov." By Siyaveş Azeri. *Marxism & Sciences* 3 (1): 139–176. https://doi.org/10.56063/MS.2403.03106

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Interview with Arto Artinian

SA: *The first question will be a very general one. It seems as if we are experiencing a "revival" of Ilyenkov's ideas; there appears to be a growing interest in his philosophical conceptualizations and methodology. What is so significant about Ilyenkov's ideas that may be responsible for such a revival?*

ARTO ARTINIAN: In Evald Ilyenkov's thought we have a Soviet philosophy that is uncompromisingly communist at heart, openly and directly positing the communist transformation of society as eudaimonia, as a practical vision for achieving "the Good Life" (at least within the confines of our own current imagination, culture and systems of knowledge, as Ilyenkov might have qualified it). In other words, this is not a Marxism of the Trotskyist vs. Stalinist factional fight, nor is it a liberal "dissident" (i.e. anti-communist) critique of the Soviet epoch (despite some current efforts at presenting Ilyenkov as s "critic" of the Soviet system in ways that sound Trotskyist or anti-communist—albeit in disguise). Nor is it a Marxist critique of capitalism from within capitalist society (which remains the most widely read "flavor" of Marxism—a fact, which given the total lack of political success of revolutionary Marxism in the West, is a contradiction in itself).

Ilyenkov's efforts were directed towards an explicitly political goal: the formation of Soviet subjectivity, and thus, directly waging struggle for the movement towards egalitarian society. It is not surprising that he always thought through the category of "Soviet society" and the "Soviet people."

In other words, Ilyenkov's revival today is to an extent formed by the "shock," the realization that a major Marxist philosopher from within the Soviet Union (who was also a committed communist, it is crucial to this keep in mind) was busy thinking about the fundamental political questions, from within a society that had eliminated the capitalist class, along with capitalist economic and juridical structures. This contrasts with hegemonic perceptions of Soviet society in the West today, where the common narrative affirmed by constant negative scribbling across ideological space, is that Soviet Marxist thought was incapable of significant contributions, since it functioned as "ideology." There is a persistent narrative—especially in the West—that to be a "creative thinker," one would have to be not a communist thinker (or at best, a "Marxist" who is fundamentally critical of the USSR). This distorted

view holds (in innumerable variations) that virtually everything in Soviet philosophy since Lenin was directly or indirectly in the service of the party nomenklatura—with few exceptions such as Merab Mamardashvili, who was indeed recognized as a major creative thinker in philosophy. Mamardashvili, however, did not consider himself a Marxist, or a communist, though his thought was certainly infused with ideas from the Marxist tradition, among others.

What is the ground of Ilyenkov's communism? His entire body of work was centered on asking the fundamental political question inherited from Aristotle and Marx: "What does it mean to be human?" Ilyenkov's various answers to this question took the form of praxis: the communist political goal is to reach a condition of everyday life, of a society consisting of fully-developed human beings. This presupposed the ability for everyone (including people born with severe disabilities) to think. Thinking itself was conditioned through culture, through the infinitely complex, and historically layered web of social relations, and the relations, ideas and concepts that formed those social relations (obviously, through processes of constant political struggle, and the working through various contradictions).

It is indeed this fundamental question that is ever-present throughout Ilyenkov's public and intellectual life. Thus, in polemical works addressed to a general audience, such as "The school must teach how to think," Ilyenkov passionately called for socialization focused on fostering thinking, rather than the trend towards "tracking" students who already excel in some field of formal logical reasoning (as in the education system emphasizing the role of elite schools, consisting of overachieving "hard sciences" students). The centering of human beings in human society was also the central theme of his constant polemics against the positivist-cyberneticists' dream of reducing human thought to a series of complex input-output functions acting on a human-created computing machine, a most pathetic act of reductionism, for it placed total acceptance upon formal logic, which was but a limited subset of the innate human ability to make sense of everyday life through thinking. Dialectical logic, in contrast—the ability to persist through the tensions of contradictions (as Hegel beautifully affirmed) that defined most aspects of everyday life—was the form most organically, for Ilyenkov, embedded in the human mind, as a capacity, a potentiality, that could be unlocked in everyone (again, through deliberate processes of socialization that aim to accomplish this goal).

It is precisely on this point that Ilyenkov's direct relevance for our times is found. He participated in the Zagorsk studies for the full socialization of severely disabled children. This extraordinary program objectively proved the fact at the core of a communist like Ilyenkov's politics: social relations, the complex processes of socialization, the internalization of a particular culture (the collectively formed "already-is" of a society, a totality of already-happened, of actually-existing social relations) is what "makes up" a human being, not the particular aspects of one's "biological"/genetic inheritance. This was a final deathblow to all racist arguments, which are firmly implanted in all capitalist ideological space (whether labeled liberal, "progressive" or fascist and Nazi). Expressed most succinctly, Ilyenkov's political position is "I am, who We are," vs. the liberal-racist "I am, because I (through my own genetic makeup and/or personal/individual efforts) became this way." In other words, communist socialization affirms that who I become is a direct function of the cultural-social structure I become socialized in, whereas capitalist subjectivity is overwhelmingly a function of one's own class inheritance and "genes" (i.e. the main factors which liberal ideology constantly accents as the prime determinants of one's own formed subjectivity). It is thus not surprising at all that the results of the Zagorsk Experiment are not widely known, for its results decisively target and disempower all forms of capitalist subjectivity.

SA: *The next question will be in a sense the continuation of the previous; in what sense and how relevant/actual is Ilyenkov's take on philosophical questions? Does he have anything to offer in the face of contemporary philosophical and/or social and political issues and crises?*

ARTO ARTINIAN: The central question motivating Ilyenkov: "What does it mean to be human?" certainly remains of prime importance in our political struggles today. We are living under a regime of socialized cybernetics, which is imposing itself as the "common sense" of contemporary capitalism, as its ascending new ideology. This is taking place under conditions of generalized proletarianization: the condition of ever-increasing loss of the fundamental human abilities of to do and to be/think). Marx already foresaw this as a tendency, a trajectory of development, inherent in the internal logic of capitalism. We are living through it now, and the fusion of generalized proletarianization with the ideology of socialized cybernetics, has produced an emerging vision for a new political subjectivity: biological beings with human capacities.

This is the new mediating link, between the previous form of subjectivity under capitalism—the Homo Economicus of mass consumerism and libidinal economy of hyper commodification and consumption—and the emerging hyper-alienated world of Homo Datum, a world in which human beings are just a particular instance of a digital social object (some digital entity which is capable of displaying simulated/approximated or base human capacities).

Ilyenkov sensed this trajectory of political development (including among the increasingly fashionable and politically dominant positivists-cyberneticists in Soviet intellectual life) and it is safe to say, the shift towards Homo Datum subjectivity would be appalling to him. In this context, Ilyenkov's ideas about "thinking," and thus relatedly, of dialectical logic as an organon for thinking—for making sense of the complex contradictions that define everyday living— become centrally important. For what is the ongoing hype about all things "AI," but a thinly veiled political program that has declared humans "obsolete," uninteresting, imprecise, irrational, subject to emotional sways… We are reminded here of the pioneers of cybernetics in the UK and US, who in the post-WW2 years, wrote about the inherent vagueness of human language, and thus of human beings in general. Their inability to understand the practical implications of dialectical logic (for they were liberals of various flavors, to the core) for the human condition, produced radical and dogmatic reductionism, declaring that the human mind (and everything that derives from it politically) is nothing more than a computing machine, and thus its "functionality" can be accurately replicated, and further "improved on," by human-created digital computing machines.

Today, the vast, inexhaustible range of human ways of making sense of living, filled with contradictions above all else—an ability which is best systematized through Ilyenkov's approaches to dialectical logic as an organon—are being declared in need of optimization, simplification, and elimination, primarily through the displacement/externalization of our sense-making capacities. Such is the vulgarity of capitalists, that we are expected to jettison our innate abilities to experience wonderment, our imagination, etc., in other words, the entire movement from abstract to concrete is being replaced by a persistent abstract to abstract loop. Sense-making is now to be externalized to simulated human intelligence in the form of digital social objects, such as the various "AI agents" (themselves, essentially a radical abstraction of plagiarized (already-happened) social relations.

Just to be clear: I don't have a problem with simulated human intelligence or relations. The problem becomes political (and thus all-significant) when such simulations—and thus abstract-to-abstract movements—begin to substitute and normalize actually-existing social relations, and thus interrupting and subverting the abstract-to-concrete movement that is the precondition for thinking (for sense-making) necessary for the existence of the social, that politically most meaningful universal, the constant subject and object of Ilyenkov's thought.

On a different level of the political, Ilyenkov also understood that the movement towards the formation of an egalitarian society, away from the primitive social formation known as capitalism-primitive, because it actively promotes stunted political subjectivity, the negation of the fully developed human being— requires multiple and succeeding revolutions in the political domain. The first stage was the easiest to execute: the nationalization of capitalist private property, the actual elimination of the capitalist property form, as well as its ideological framework of liberalism (in all of its shades, from "left" to "right"). Ilyenkov called this the "formal" socialization of bourgeois property forms, and the primary achievement, thus far, of Soviet socialism.

Other revolutionary transformations had to follow, which Ilyenkov didn't see happening yet in Soviet society, to his great regret. I think he may have overlooked the fact that such follow-on transformations did occur in Soviet society. Probably his lack of close, first-hand experience of living in a capitalist society (a joy that all of us today are experiencing daily), prevented him from fully capturing the revolutionary changes that did occur in the formation of a new political subjectivity: the New Soviet Person was perhaps incompletely actualized by the 1960s (before the party signaled a turn towards consumerist culture, essentially hoping to emulate the hyper-consumerist, libidinal economy of contemporary capitalism), but at least through most of Ilyenkov's life, Soviet "common sense" was indeed distinctly different from that of a citizen living in Western part of Germany, or the United States. The revolutionary transformations in Soviet society between 1917 and 1961 (to use Gagarin's flight into space as a marker) can be denoted through particular markers: the revolutionary and most rapid expansion of education on all levels; the democratization of "high culture" through the provision of maximum social access to the arts; the fostering of the avant-garde in various areas of human creativity and thought (from architecture, literature and music, to the organization of the economy itself), and the

general absence of commodity consumption as the central virtue of everyday life. As an example, access to the arts in post-socialist Bulgaria has once again become the prerogative of the newly reconstituted bourgeoisie, as has privatized (thus capitalist-controlled) book publishing and reading. Classical music has essentially atrophied, along with the visual arts and everything in between, depending once again (as in pre-socialist times) on the benevolence of bourgeois donors. The overall social effect of this retrenchment of the arts, is its renewed functioning strictly along social class lines, to the detriment of the vast majority of people in society.

To summarize: for Ilyenkov the socialist revolutionary transformation of society is a question of utmost necessity, to be achieved via political struggle. In his philosophical system, the corresponding movement would be the practiced ability to complete the flow of abstract-to-concrete. However, we must be keenly aware that unlocking a course of political development through and beyond capitalism—and based on principles of egalitarianism enabling the full actualization of human beings—is a series of multiple and interconnected follow-on revolutionary transformations. This long duration political struggle on the level of strategic-systemic social transformation, centered on the gradual creation of conditions for the maximum, full development of each human being (and thus, simultaneously, of society as a whole) —beyond that of a wage laborer and consumer—offers a practico-political guide, at the very least illuminating the possible steps that need to be anticipated in the ongoing struggle against the capitalist political form.

In the final analysis, Ilyenkov was the preeminent Soviet philosopher of praxis. I mean "Soviet" here, in the sense that Ilyenkov's own political subjectivity was Soviet, having been born and lived exclusively in the Soviet epoch. Unfortunately, he practiced philosophy actively mostly in what Soviet-Russian historian Andrei Fursov calls the "post-heroic" phase of Soviet society, when communist ideas of revolutionary transformation of society fueled by a program of radical egalitarianism and unbounded optimism about the future, were being actively replaced by the anti-humanism of liberalism, of the vilest capitalist logic, in its most dogmatic positivist form. In the last two decades of his life, he witnessed (as his letters to the party leadership, to a group of economists, and to his friend, the prominent mathematician Georgy Shilov attest) the gradual decay and decomposition of the communist party towards liberalism. This must have been an unbearable burden, a most profound disappointment, especially for a decorated war veteran, having first-

hand witnessed the human cost (and determination) through which his society defended its political trajectory towards socialism.

From our present vantage point of living in capitalist societies, the series of transformations noted as necessary by Ilyenkov may seem utterly beyond comprehension in scale and difficulty of conceptualization, but it is far better to have fundamental insights about the necessary road ahead, rather than remain comfortably inside a false imaginary, or a depressed acceptance of capitalism through its often-hollered TINA (there-is-no-alternative) abstraction.

SA: *In his philosophical work, Ilyenkov addresses several problems that traditionally belong to different fields of philosophical study, from machine-thinking and the AI to the questions concerning the relation between philosophy and sciences, the "universal," the "ideal," problems of epistemology, methodology, the relation between ethics and science, Marxism, humanism, general education and the education of people with disabilities, to the criticism of positivism, so on and so forth. What in Ilyenkov's philosophical approach keeps together these apparently different fields and questions? Does he suggest that there is an essential bond between these diverse problems? If so, what that would be in his formulation?*

ARTO ARTINIAN: At the risk of sounding very repetitive, the essential bond that joins together the various strands of Ilyenkov's thought can be summarized as follows: concern and direct engagement with the fundamental question: "What does it mean to be human?" and the political goal of transforming political subjectivity along the lines of socialist-egalitarian politics. I keep returning over and over to this question, but there's no way around it, as this is precisely the line, the boundary condition that separates Ilyenkov's position, from that of the typical liberal notions of the political today.

To Ilyenkov, the answer to this question was rooted in the idea that our very existence as human beings is one of the extraordinary random events of the universe itself. He didn't waste his time in speculations about trans-historical essences that ground our ontology as human beings. Far more important and interesting than the idea that we are simply a totally random event (non-event?), a tick precipitated by the benevolent indifference of the universe, was his point, that now that we are, now that we exist, it is best and necessary to strive to unlock the potential contained within our condition, to deploy the full "resources" that we have and to live according to this potentialities denoting our

condition. It is difficult not to make the immediate parallel with Aristotle's meditations on this same question, and that is totally OK. After all, as we know there's an organic continuation in-thought, from the ancient thinker through Spinoza, Hegel, Marx and the Marx-inspired systems of thought which overdetermined Ilyenkov's philosophical world.

A committed communist, Ilyenkov understood that social relations in their totality (or, culture, in his conceptual world) form the ontological categories of our existence. Underpinning this belief was the understanding that capitalism had politically exhausted itself by the 20th century (in other words, all it could offer was more of the same, with diminishing returns: think of the degenerated political "elites" that are in position of power today…). Communist revolutionary transformations offered a far better way towards achieving the fundamental political task: the formation of a society, consisting of full-developed human beings. Fully-developed in their human totality, meaning, having a maximally-developed ability to think (to make sense of everyday life), to live life filled with meaning, creativity, reflection, understanding. To think, meant to make sense of contradictions, to persist through the tensions of a contradiction (to return to Hegel's wonderful phrase), and to emerge changed on the other side of it. Ilyenkov constantly emphasized this point!

The common bond uniting these lines of thought is the concept of the "universal." The "universal" for Ilyenkov is that which has emerged through culture as being "common-to-all" (всеобщее). That which is common-to-all is what makes us human beings, and thus is the prime political battleground. It is the foundation around which the social fabric can form and reproduce most completely aligned with the human ontological inheritance. But this could actualize only within an appropriate political configuration. This was the core of the Soviet project in its most revolutionary periods, and unsurprisingly and correspondingly, the heart of Ilyenkov's thought.

Soviet society was to be the political actualization of the universal, the common-to-all field of everyday life, forming a culture grounded in egalitarianism and fully-developed human beings. Once this was accomplished, the "sky was the limit," and in this sense, we can read the enormous social optimism that pervaded Soviet society through the sixties (and especially from the end of the civil war through the immediate aftermath of the victory in the Great Patriotic War); but we must note, this was optimism underpinned by a complex dialectical tension

throughout. As an example of how widespread this speculative optimism about the communist future was in Ilyenkov's time, we could point to the early corpus of the Strugatsky brothers in works such as The Land of Crimson Clouds, The Way to Amalthea, and Noon: 22nd Century (1959-1962). Even more fully developed, this line of thought, outlining the vast potential suggested by communist subjectivity, can be encountered in the novels Andromeda: A Spce-Age Tale (1959), and Razor's Edge (1963) by the great Soviet writer and paleontologist Ivan Efremov. Such works should be read as continuations of Ilyenkov's philosophical thought, expressed through the form of science fiction. They are an indicator of how the focus of Ilyenkov's thought and polemics, was "in the air" of Soviet society during the fifties and early sixties.

By contrast, the capitalist class (and its dominant ideology of liberalism) actively fears this universal in the political domain. Liberals are deathly afraid of the formation of a "society," of that which is common-to-all politically.

The formation of such a generalized commonality is utterly incompatible with capitalism and would spell the political end of the capitalist class. This was understood by early ideologues such as David Hume, who defined individual, personal (and of course, material) interest as the highest possible "virtue," echoing similar ideas from John Locke and other comparable owners of shares in slave plantations in the English colonies of North America. Liberalism replaces the universal in politics with "civil society," the infinite number of private, particular groups, motivated by narrow (not-common-to-all) interests (mostly defined through the equally narrow categories of capitalist commodification). Michel Foucault focused on this very problem of liberalism in relations to the political, in his lectures in the late 1970s, at the College de France. We can find similar engagements in Giorgio Agamben's work, especially in Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life.

Evald Ilyenkov's notion of the universal is the total rejection of the liberal notion of particular interest. This is the Soviet political project expressed in philosophical categories. It is not an accident at all that Yegor Gaidar, Anatoli Chubais and other liberal criminals explicitly justified their insistence on shock therapy in post-Soviet Russia, as the need to dismantle as soon as possible—and as thoroughly as possible—the existing Soviet universal political structures (even if they were incomplete in their form and functioning; the potentiality was already part of the Soviet social fabric, whereas it is almost completely absent

in Western capitalist collectivities, dominated by bourgeois civil societies). The restoration of capitalism in Russia would have been impossible without this process of deliberate destruction of the socialist social fabric, which was in-process of formation.

In conclusion, it must be said that Ilyenkov reminds us that Marxism is above all, a framework for waging political struggle on the systemic-strategic level of the class struggle. Repeating Lenin's insight and fundamental contribution on this point, Ilyenkov would perhaps agree, that the common bond joining the critique of fundamentalist positivism (expressed today in the ideology of socialized cybernetics), along with the need for a practical education curriculum dedicated to teaching and practice of dialectical logic—and of the widespread (universal) formation of practical programs in creating socialization spaces for all people (regardless of their initial intellectual abilities, disabilities, inherited culture and ontology of everyday life) that aim to unlock the inherent, organic and innate capacity for creativity and wonderment present in all people—in all of this, the common bond is the fundamental political project of rejecting the inherited and still persistent burdens of capitalism, and its overcoming by a new praxis, a new politics of communism as eudaimonia.

Evald Ilyenkov and all of us who lived during the Soviet epoch, at the very least, sensed these potentialities for living in new, better, more fulfilling ways; the deeply felt and internalized realization that there is more to life than the simple reduction of all living to one exchange of labor power for money, and the acquisition of some desired commodities with that money, a process looped more or less till death. In retrospect, the minimization (and at times, outright absence) of the basic categories of the capitalist libidinal economy seems like an extremely significant political achievement in itself. Of course, such conclusions about communism as the way to the future, and especially building upon the potentialities unlocked by the Soviet epoch, may seem strange. This is especially true given the vast amounts of most vulgar and primitive propaganda unleashed against every aspect of Soviet socialism till this day. After all, however, Soviet society did implode and formally disappeared from the political field.

Yet perhaps this is really a problem of political struggle in the "collective West," where revolutionary socialism didn't even manage to accomplish the first stage of nationalizing capitalist private property forms. This historical fact must be recognized by Marxists, especially in

the West. In this context, Evald Ilyenkov's corpus of thought can function as both, a corrective to the increased abstractions of Western (now mostly) academic Marxism, while also serving as a generator of how to engage in praxis—using the intellectual weapons of philosophy to wage effective political struggle in theory (to borrow Louis Althusser's elegant phrase here), and by doing so, to directly affect the political field itself.

SA: *Thank you for your contribution Arto Artinian.*

Arto Artinian is a musician and a student of political philosophy. He grew up in both Bulgaria and the Soviet Union, before pursuing his university studies in the United States. His current interests include the articulation of new communist politics, Soviet Marxism, Eastern European political thought, and history during the socialist period, as well as writing and performing electronic music. He is presently working on two projects: "Homo Datum," centered on the emerging transformations of political subjectivity in contemporary capitalism, and "June 1941: Soviet Ukraine," a historico-philosophical reconstruction of the first months of the Nazi invasion of Soviet Ukraine, in an attempt to counter current historical revisionist narratives of that war, that are increasingly popular across Europe. Arto is currently an associate professor of political science at Borough of Manhattan Community College—City University of New York. He lives in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, while also travelling to New York as his academic position demands. He is also a member of the editorial collective and board of the Institute for the Radical Imagination, in New York City.

Interview with David Bakhurst

SA: *The first question will be a very general one. It seems as if we are experiencing a "revival" of Ilyenkov's ideas; there appears to be a growing interest in his philosophical conceptualizations and methodology. What is so significant about Ilyenkov's ideas that may be responsible for such a revival?*

DAVID BAKHURST: Actually, I don't think it's right to say that we are experiencing a revival in Ilyenkov's ideas. I think that interest in his life and work has been steadily growing for a long time, perhaps since his death in 1979, but certainly since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. When I began studying Ilyenkov in the early 1980s there were hardly any resources. In the West, the 1977 English translation of *Dialectical Logic* was available from progressive bookshops and a few libraries had Russian editions of his works (the British Library, for example, had *Dialektika abstrakt'nogo i konktret"nogo v "Kapitale" Marksa* (*Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's "Capital"*) and carried *Voprosy filosofii*). The situation in Russia was not much better because his books were out of print and it was not always easy for people to get library access. Moreover, like all Russian publications of the Soviet era, you often needed to know the story behind many of Ilyenkov's writings in order to read them correctly and there was no secondary literature that could help with that. In 1980 there was no book, Soviet or Western, about Vygotsky, let alone Ilyenkov. However, the situation soon began to improve. Ilyenkov's final book, *Leninskaya dialektika i metafizika positivizma* was published in 1980, and an English translation appeared in the UK in 1982 (*Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism*), the same year that Progress published an English translation of *Dialektika abstract"nogo i konktret"nogo v "Kapitale" Marksa*. A Russian collection of Ilyenkov's writings on aesthetics, *Isskusstvo i kommunistichestkii ideal* (*Art and the Communist Ideal*) followed in 1984, along with a second edition of *Dialekticheskaya logika* (*Dialectical Logic*). Under glasnost, Ilyenkov's friends and colleagues began to write reminiscences about him, the first set—by Mikhailov, Korovikov and others—appeared in *Voprosy filosofii* in 1990. A year later, another important anthology of Ilyenkov's writings came out under the title *Filosofiya i kul'tura* (*Philosophy and Culture*), with an introduction by Novokhatko. 1991 also saw the publication of my *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy: From the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov*. In 1997 the unexpurgated version of Ilyenkov's first book was published under its original title, *Dialektika abstract"nogo i konkret"nogo v nauchno-teoreticheskom myshlenii* (*Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Scientific-Theoretical Thinking*). In 2002, a number of Ilyenkov's writings on philosophy of education were collected under the title,

Shkola dolzhna uchit' myslit' (*School Must Teach How to Think*) and the entire book was translated into English in *The Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* in 2007. A second Russian edition of Ilyenkov's 1968 book, *Ob idolakh i idealakh* (*Of Idols and Ideals*) also came out in 2002. In 2009, *The Ideal in Human Activity* appeared, an important English-language anthology of Ilyenkov's texts and in the same year *Logos* published the definitive text of Ilyenkov's masterpiece "Dialektika ideal'nogo" ("The Dialectics of the Ideal"), which later appeared in a fine English translation by Alex Levant. Interest in Ilyenkov then intensified further with the publication of three volumes of archival material collated by Elena Illesh, Ilyenkov's daughter, and the discovery of the long-lost text of Ilyenkov and Korovikov's famous "Theses on Philosophy." At the same time, Andrey Maidansky began the herculean project of editing Ilyenkov's *Collected Works*—7 volumes have so far appeared and several more are planned. Finally, I should mention that my book, *The Heart of the Matter: Ilyenkov, Vygotsky and the Courage of Thought* was published in 2023, collecting together many of the articles I have written about Ilyenkov over the course of my career. A paperback version will be available in April this year.

Forgive this long list! It's incomplete of course. I didn't mention Evgeny Pavlov's *Intelligent Materialism*, an anthology of English translations of Ilyenkov's writings on Hegel. I didn't include translations in languages other than English, or the works of the many scholars who have written about Ilyenkov or drawn on his ideas. I should also draw attention to Andrey Maidansky's website (http://caute.ru/ilyenkov/index.html), where you can find many of the writings I did mention. My point is only that interest in Ilyenkov has been remarkably constant over the last 30 years or more and shows no sign of abating. This is of course an intriguing and rather amazing fact. When *Consciousness and Revolution* came out in 1991, just as the Soviet Union collapsed, I assumed that my book would be consigned to the dustbin of history because Ilyenkov was destined to be remembered—if he was remembered—as an obscure contributor to a defunct tradition. But I am delighted to say that assumption was unfounded.

I don't think there is a single answer to the question of why Ilyenkov has inspired such interest and admiration. Ilyenkov was a massively important figure in the history of Soviet Marxism, who did more than anyone to create and sustain a form of creative, critical Marxism in contrast to the doctrinaire version of "diamat" and "histmat" that formed the official ideology of the Soviet state. So his immediate friends and colleagues, and their students after them, sought to preserve his memory and keep his ideas alive, not just for Ilyenkov's sake, but so that the tradition Ilyenkov helped to found should remain alive and continue to develop. I don't think many of these thinkers saw this primarily as a

matter of sustaining *Marxism*, so much as recognizing a distinctive tradition within Soviet thought that was rich in insight and moral depth and which they did not want to see erased. Ilyenkov's appeal in the West is a little different. Many scholars, already aware of Vygotsky's cultural-historical psychology and Leontiev's activity theory, were drawn to Ilyenkov because they saw him as the philosophical mentor of those schools. Ilyenkov was in various ways connected to them, of course. He knew and admired Leontiev. He was very close to Vasili Davydov and Alexander Meshcheryakov. Western interest in Ilyenkov, however, has not typically come from philosophers (despite my efforts!), but from people in psychology, education, communication, applied linguistics and cognate fields, who were attracted to his views on activity and the ideal and then were pleased to discover that Ilyenkov had a developmental theory of culture and mind, that he wrote on education, including the education of blind-deaf children, and so on. Of course, there was interest in Ilyenkov from other quarters too. Some Western Marxists saw him as the archetypal anti-Stalinist, whose example shows that the Soviet Union was not entirely a lost cause. And others were simply drawn to some of his key ideas, such as his work on the abstract and the concrete. And of course, some find Ilyenkov irresistible because he was a romantic figure, a tragic hero. The more you learn about his life, his triumphs and torments, his achievements and his persecution, the more impressive he seems and the more moving his story.

SA: *The next question will be in a sense the continuation of the previous; in what sense and how relevant/actual is Ilyenkov's take on philosophical questions? Does he have anything to offer in the face of contemporary philosophical and/or social and political issues and crises?*

DAVID BAKHURST: I think Ilyenkov's work continues to be philosophically significant. If I didn't, I would have stopped writing about him long ago. Ilyenkov addresses questions of perennial philosophical importance—about the nature of mind and its embodiment in human life activity, the reality of culture and its significance in human development, the nature of concepts and norms, the character of knowledge and inquiry, the limits of natural-scientific explanation, the emergence of personhood, imagination, insight and understanding… Although he is wedded to a Marxist idiom that can appear dated, his ideas have a freshness and originality that is truly compelling, especially when they are understood in the context in which he was writing. I like to bring Ilyenkov's ideas into dialogue with other thinkers who grapple with the same questions, and who sometimes try to articulate similar insights. When I first started doing this, I would often get pushback, especially in Russia: How can you say that there are parallels between Ilyenkov and Wittgenstein? Ilyenkov was a materialist and Wittgenstein an idealist!

But now we have overcome these wooden dichotomies and are willing to see things in less Manichean terms.

Over the years, I have tried to bring Ilyenkov's philosophy into conversation with thinkers like John McDowell, Jerome Bruner, Jonathan Dancy, Sebastian Rödl, Elizabeth Anscombe, and others. And there are many other avenues that one might pursue—for example, exploring the relation between Ilyenkov's conception of "the thinking body" and contemporary views of embodied cognition. At a less esoteric level, there are obviously important lessons to learn from his preoccupation with education as *learning to think*, a view which does not just align him with Western advocates of critical thinking (though Ilyenkov has a much richer conception of thinking than they have) but addresses an issue of massive political importance today. For what is the antidote to conspiracy theories, echo chambers, scepticism about science, and so on, if it is not education aimed at the cultivation of knowledgeable citizens who can think for themselves and who care about making up their own minds. And, of course, Ilyenkov's humanistic criticism of cybernetics resonates today with the rise of AI. So there is no doubt Ilyenkov remains relevant.

It is important that Ilyenkov's works, often produced under conditions of censorship and self-censorship, require a good deal of interpretation, and so it is not unusual for readers who are drawn to his writings to find in them themes that engage with issues of interest to them. (This is so for all philosophers, but I think it is especially true when it comes to exploring Ilyenkov's works, where readers often have less to guide them than with thinkers who have prompted a wealth of secondary literature defining established points of entry into their work.) This means there is a risk of distortion, of course, but also the prospect of novel and inventive readings that open up exciting new avenues of inquiry.

I think the biggest challenge facing sympathetic interpreters of Ilyenkov today lies in finding an interpretation of his humanism that is not at odds with contemporary progressive views about our relation to non-human animals and the natural world more generally. Ilyenkov thinks that there is a very sharp distinction to be drawn between human minds—responsive to reasons and capable of self-conscious thought, intentional action, and self-determination—and those of non-human animals, whose mental lives are dictated by biological and environmental imperatives. Many thinkers today find such a severe opposition unsatisfying: it fails to do justice to the commonalities between human and animal minds and it places us somehow above and outside "nature." As a result, the natural world is seen merely as an object of human mastery and domination, as a means of humanity's self-development and fulfillment, but of no intrinsic value. Of course, an Ilyenkovian need not hold such a view, and perhaps Ilyenkov himself, had it been put to him,

would have disavowed it, but there is plenty of precedent for such thinking in the Marxist tradition and Ilyenkov's adherence to such views is more than merely a matter of rhetoric. Ilyenkov's solution to the problem of the ideal, for example, makes much of the power of human activity to transform nature. It is important to explore carefully the extent to which we can embrace the core of his position while rejecting the idea that nature is a mere means to human flourishing.

SA: *In his philosophical work, Ilyenkov addresses several problems that traditionally belong to different fields of philosophical study, from machine-thinking and the AI to the questions concerning the relation between philosophy and sciences, the "universal," the "ideal," problems of epistemology, methodology, the relation between ethics and science, Marxism, humanism, general education and the education of people with disabilities, to the criticism of positivism, so on and so forth. What in Ilyenkov's philosophical approach keeps together these apparently different fields and questions? Does he suggest that there is an essential bond between these diverse problems? If so, what that would be in his formulation?*

DAVID BAKHURST: Ilyenkov thinks of philosophy as a unity, not as a collection of disparate sub-disciplines. For him, philosophy is the "science of thinking" (*nauka o myshlenii*). By "science" here, he means "systematic study" (the Russian "nauka," like the German "Wissenschaft," is far broader in meaning that the English "science", as that term is used today). Philosophy is a non-empirical discipline and does not study thinking as the psychologist or cognitive scientist does. Philosophy studies the forms of our thinking, our fundamental categories and concepts, and the *movement* of thought—the nature of reasoning, the dialectical interplay and development of ideas, the methods of concept formation, scientific inquiry, and the achievement of knowledge and understanding.

With this conception of philosophy, it starts to become clear how Ilyenkov is led to address all these various topics. His most fundamental inquiries, into Marxist epistemology and the nature of the ideal, issue in a conception of the human mind as a set of capacities or powers that emerge in the course of the child's initiation into culture. This leads Ilyenkov to consider the creation of the conditions in which the human mind is nurtured and cultivated, and so it's natural he should address questions of education and equally obvious why he found Meshcheryakov's work with blind-deaf children so enthralling and inspiring. It's also clear why his resistance to positivism, which is first articulated in a purely theoretical context, comes to take on a moral and political dimension. Ilyenkov was appalled at the extent to which positivist and

scientistic thinking had gripped Soviet ideology and led the Party to think that the problems of Soviet society could be addressed by "the scientific-technological revolution." Ilyenkov was no luddite; he had no problem with computer science and cybernetics as scientific disciplines. But he strongly rejected the idea that social and economic problems could be solved by thinking of human beings as information-processing devices. He felt this technocratic vision lost sight of the true ideals of communist society as a fellowship of equal self-determining persons organizing their lives to ensure the flourishing of all. Ilyenkov's humanistic Marxism lends all his work a moral dimension, since the ideal that motivates everything he does is the creation of a just society that enables human flourishing.

So from Ilyenkov's perspective, all these problems, issues and themes are organically connected to one another. They are all aspects of the *same* problem, the problem of finding a satisfying conception of the unity of thinking and being, which for Ilyenkov is not a merely theoretical problem, but a practical one to which communism is the solution—communism in the true sense of the word, that is, not the kind that sent tanks into Czechoslovakia, or that thinks of disabled people as a burden on society, or that rules by fiat and fear, or that discourages people from thinking for themselves.

SA: *Thank you for your contribution David Bakhurst.*

David Bakhurst is George Whalley Distinguished University Professor at Queen's University, Ontario. His book, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1991) was the first critical history of Soviet philosophical culture. The primary research was conducted in Moscow under the mentorship of Felix Mikhailov. Since then, in addition to continuing his work on Russian thought, Bakhurst has written on epistemology, metaphysics, Wittgenstein, ethics and philosophy of education. His publications include *The Heart of the Matter: Ilyenkov, Vygotsky and the Courage of Thought* (Brill, 2023); The *Formation of Reason* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) and the edited collection, *Teaching and Learning: Epistemic, Metaphysical and Ethical Dimensions* (2020). Bakhurst is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and Executive Editor of *Journal of Philosophy of Education*.

Interview with Pham Minh Duc

SA: *The first question will be a very general one. It seems as if we are experiencing a "revival" of Ilyenkov's ideas; there appears to be a growing interest in his philosophical conceptualizations and methodology. What is so significant about Ilyenkov's ideas that may be responsible for such a revival?*

PHAM MINH DUC: I do think at first, I need to delve into the key aspect that, what is revived and what do we revive for? If revival means bringing something back from the death, then it is not the case for Ilyenkov. As, Ilyenkov ideas were not "dead," his legacy still continues, his thoughts still influence many people and scholars from around the world. Yet, revival here may mean looking at Ilyenkov's ideas in a fresh way, interpreting and applying his ideas to contemporary issues, make it "lively" and carry "the breath of our current era."

In that sense, I will then answer the question, "What do we revive for?" But, as you can see from the question, we are the active agents that do the work. Therefore, the things that we need to consider first is ourselves. Recall the ancient adage; Socrates stated that the most important things is "know thyself." And in that light, the question that Kant proposed: "What is man?" (Kant, 2004, p. 538). Inherited the legacy of Kant, Karl Marx dealt with that same question, but from a dialectical (and historical) materialist point of view. In *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, *German Ideology* and his mature work, *Capital*, Marx seeks for the real conditions that make us human, and from that move on to identify what we truly are. Ilyenkov continues that legacy to unveil the human essence. His significant contribution is his discovery that the real conditions of man consist not only of material aspects that give human the vital sources for existing, but also of the ideal and the human culture.

Although it may seem that Ilyenkov has a Hegelian take, if we look carefully, we can see his dedication to materialism, while going against naive and trivial materialism that only see human as a mechanical being and reduce every spiritual element to material substance. The important thing is that, we cannot reduce human and spiritual aspects to matter, but we see these aspects as material—a materiality irreducible to any substance, the "lively-culturally-socially-thinking matter." This is what Ilyenkov sets before himself to resolve throughout his works such as *Dialectical Logic: Essays on Its History and Theory*, and *Dialectics of the Abstract & the Concrete in Marx's Capital*, *The Concept of the Ideal*.

To put it in a sentence, I contend that Ilyenkov's conceptualization of human is the most significant aspect in his thought that we need to consider.

SA: *The next question will be in a sense the continuation of the previous; in what sense and how relevant/actual is Ilyenkov's take on philosophical questions? Does he have anything to offer in the face of contemporary philosophical and/or social and political issues and crises?*

PHAM MINH DUC: Continuing the line of thought from my previous description of Ilyenkov's ideas of man as the core of his philosophy, I think that Ilyenkov's thought is indeed forceful. His ideas can be used to answer the currently hot debated questions concerning transhumanism, a school of thought that announces triumphantly the transcendence of human form and its inherent essence: "What is the essence of man? Can it be transcended?" Rethinking the fundamental concerns of what it is to be human and how society and culture interact with and affect the material conditions of existence in light of the current intellectual, social, and political issues is needed. In order to achieve societal and personal transformation, Ilyenkov's dialectical method promotes a comprehensive understanding of human problems and calls for the synthesis of theory and practice. As a result, his philosophical endeavor—which emphasizes the relationship between the ideal and the material, the person and the community—continues to be an essential tool for critically analyzing the urgent problems of our day.

Also, in this light, and in contemporary philosophical discourse, Ilyenkov's insights can offer a potent critique of reductive materialist or overly idealist conceptions of human existence. His analysis of the role of the ideal and thinking in the material world, as the "distinct matter itself," with the particularly his exploration of concepts such as the "ideal" in "The Concept of the Ideal," underlines the significance of cultural and intellectual dimensions in shaping human reality. This approach is immensely valuable in addressing current debates on the nature of consciousness, the construction of social reality, and the dynamics of cultural and ideological formation.

Lastly, Ilyenkov also investigates the human in concreto, in personality. His unique view of personality as synthesis of human psyche with material and social conditions can be the answer for the current issues of the politics of identity. Also, his view can be the quintessence key to deal with the hot problems of "machine personality," "A.I. personality," and more generally, the questions that already Winner proposed: "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" (Winner, 1960).

SA: *In his philosophical work, Ilyenkov addresses several problems that traditionally belong to different fields of philosophical study, from machine-thinking and the AI to the questions concerning the relation between philosophy and sciences, the "universal," the "ideal," problems of epistemology, methodology, the relation between ethics and science,*

Marxism, humanism, general education and the education of people with disabilities, to the criticism of positivism, so on and so forth. What in Ilyenkov's philosophical approach keeps together these apparently different fields and questions? Does he suggest that there is an essential bond between these diverse problems? If so, what that would be in his formulation?

PHAM MINH DUC: Ilyenkov's philosophy functions as a tapestry, deftly combining several philosophical fields of study and investigations under one overarching concept: the dialectical interaction between the ideal and the material in the context of human social practice. This idea, which has its roots in the dialectical materialism tradition passed down from Marx, holds that human consciousness and the material world are not two distinct worlds but rather are linked by the ongoing processes of human action. Also, human consciousness is the "matter in itself," it cannot be reduced to any others forms of matter. This view is indeed put more radical in his "Cosmology of the Spirit," where he said, that consciousness is the highest form of matter (Ilyenkov, 2017).

And as I previously mentioned above, the idea of the "ideal," which Ilyenkov views as being closely related to and developing from material conditions via human work and social interaction, therefore the also the "matter in itself," rather than as a simple abstraction floating above material reality, is also at the center of his methodology. With the help of this comprehension, he is able to integrate seemingly unrelated fields of philosophical study—such as the philosophy of science, ethics, and education—as well as the nature of consciousness and the difficulties presented by artificial intelligence.

Furthermore, Ilyenkov finds that humans actively shape their surroundings and asks how they perceive it, which is the fundamental connection between these disparate issues. According to his theory, we not only engage with the material world but also change it, producing the "ideal" in the process, via our practical and intellectual endeavors. This change is not exclusive; it also affects how we view the world, how society is organized, and how we approach philosophy. Therefore, the core of Ilyenkov's formulation is that: the notion that comprehending the fullness of the human requires an awareness of it as a matter in itself, as the dialectical interaction between the ideal and the material, mediated by human thinking and praxis. This dialectic suggests that any meaningful study or intervention—be it in science, education, or eth-

ics—must understand the interplay between human awareness and material conditions. It is not only a theoretical construct but also a useful manual for interacting with the world.

To summarize, Ilyenkov's overarching concept is dialectical materialism, which centers philosophical research around human activity and suggests that the self and the universe are undergoing mutual transformation. This viewpoint, which contends that the many fields of philosophy, science, and social practice are all aspects of the same fundamental reality that has been molded by human labor, provides a potent framework for confronting the complexity of modern life.

SA: *Pham Minh Duc, Thank you for your contribution.*

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Pham Minh Duc was born in Ha Noi. He studied Philosophy from 2018 at VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi. His field study is Philosophy of Science and Technology, specifically Ethics of Artificial Intelligence.

Interview with Sascha Freyberg

SA: *The first question will be a very general one. It seems as if we are experiencing a "revival" of Ilyenkov's ideas; there appears to be a growing interest in his philosophical conceptualizations and methodology. What is so significant about Ilyenkov's ideas that may be responsible for such a revival?*

SASCHA FREYBERG: I think the interest in Ilyenkov is first of all due to the fact that there is a renewed interest in Marxism, which together with the whole legacy of the socialist countries was (and to some extent still is) in a state of *damnatio memoriae*. Ilyenkov's life and work represents the critical and humanist heritage of the Soviet experiment and is a clear example for genuine philosophical work and creative as well as critical mental labour done in the socialist realm—or what we could call the "global former East."

As to Ilyenkov's work in particular, he would not claim any originality, his radicalness is of a different kind than capital T theory in attention economy. Ilyenkov embodies 'the courage of thought' despite complicated conditions and thus follows the attitude demanded by Hegel in his Berlin inauguration lecture: "the courage of truth," that is, philosophy as critical anti-authoritarian consciousness. It is not only insight of genius, but it is the earnest labour of his working-through the philosophical heritage of Marxism and the way he presented e.g. dialectical logic in rather non-technical language which is of interest. The idea of simplicity is at once a very notion of what we could call "the ideal of science" as well as of simple need to speak to people—not only to academics. In this sense it is a truly communist take on philosophy which is embodied in his works and this is certainly fascinating to many people, given the situation nowadays.

There are of course more specific aspects to his work which are of interest (his idea of a dialectical logic as processual and relational, of interaction, of the embodiment and objectivity of the ideal, of personality as a kind of knot, of the role of thought in the world etc.) and people are often fascinated with his involvement in the 'Zagorsk experiment,' but I think for him it was a thinking-through of the philosophical trajectory of which Marx and Engels were a part of. His work can be understood as an unfolding of the implications of Marxism. In this respect, he is one of the advocates of the Praxis- or Activity approach, his notions are all based in the understanding of the self-development and -transformation of humanity through its own actions. I call this his contribution to the 'metamorphological project' as the philosophical answer to modernity, where "all that is solid melts into air."

SA: *The next question will be in a sense the continuation of the previous; in what sense and how relevant/actual is Ilyenkov's take on philosophical questions? Does he have anything to offer in the face of contemporary philosophical and/or social and political issues and crises?*

SASCHA FREYBERG: I think his contribution to the 'metamorphological project' in general and to activity theory in particular are full of potential for contemporary theory. This pertains to diverse "turns" today (practical, embodied, ecological, posthumanist, self-declared new materialist etc.) which more often than not fall short of a systemic analysis and lack – as strange as it may sound – a proper understanding of research, i.e. an understanding of the role and the very notion of science (what Lenin called *nauchnost'*). Ilyenkov tried to show how Marx's method is scientific and philosophical at the same time, what kind of research logic is at work and what this means for a dialectical logic. From his understanding of what he called "consistent materialism" a particular critical function of thought is emphasized which is not helpless in face of symbolisms and their reifications. Thus, it is a materialism which can be spelled out in terms which current theory understands but often splits up instead of taking on the hard work of seeing e.g. semiotics and (post-) structuralism not opposed to scientific realism and/or humanism. That's just a very general notion of his actuality, but I think an important one. I found interesting that he has so many points of contact (and agreement) with thinkers who seemingly stand in a different tradition like Neo-Kantianism or Pragmatism in particular when it comes to a philosophy of culture (which in itself is rather marginalized today). The whole idea of culture is thought in its entanglements and interactions with the world, also building on Marx formulation of the metabolism between humans and nature. So, to shortly answer the second question: yes, he does have much to offer, although he would claim that it is not his personal work, but just his expression of a collective work.

SA: *In his philosophical work, Ilyenkov addresses several problems that traditionally belong to different fields of philosophical study, from machine-thinking and the AI to the questions concerning the relation between philosophy and sciences, the "universal," the "ideal," problems of epistemology, methodology, the relation between ethics and science, Marxism, humanism, general education and the education of people with disabilities, to the criticism of positivism, so on and so forth. What in Ilyenkov's philosophical approach keeps together these apparently different fields and questions? Does he suggest that there is an essential bond between these diverse problems? If so, what that would be in his formulation?*

SASCHA FREYBERG: Given what I have said so far, I think it does not come as a surprise, that I answer the first two questions in the affirmative. I mentioned that he can be seen as the proponent of a specific approach inside of Marxism (or Marxism-Leninism), which works out the implication of human activity not only for cognitive phenomena but a whole realm of problems, since in practice or everyday life ideal and material aspects are always in a particular interaction, brought into a concrete *form* or configuration. There are however different ways to tackle the question of how he would put the connections (materialist dialectics, dialectical logic, consistent materialism etc.). I think, as a student he was excited when he read Engels' distinction of old and new materialism: the old materialism is fine as far as it goes, but it cannot explain the *necessity* in the emergence of thought, so it can only be grasped as a contingent combination of elements or absurd coincidence. For Engels (and young Ilyenkov), however, there must be a place for thought in the universe. However, would such an idea be sufficient in providing the formula under which we could subsume all of Ilyenkov's work? Even pointing to the central idea revolving around human activity on Earth would be much too abstract.

Maybe the question cannot be answered when we presuppose that epistemology, methodology, pedagogy, criticism of positivism and technocracy belong to different academic fields and are quite different again from listening to Wagner records, riding a bike or smoking tons of cigarettes. Let's suppose that in all their differences they can be considered *as problems* on different levels and contexts of human activity and thought (which is always connected with the former, albeit often in muted ways). They all involve in some way or another *the activity* called *learning*. As a Marxist philosopher Ilyenkov put the emphasis on *understanding problems*. This means that our way to understand an issue is as important as the connection of the problem with particular actions, actual practices or with other issues. Ilyenkov followed Hegel in his inversion of the abstract and the concrete, with the latter as a tentative result of a process of engagement. There are different levels of coherence and "truth is always concrete" as Marx put it, so several formulations of the consistency of a problematic configuration are possible, depending on which concrete problem you have to deal with at the moment. This dialectical research logic as such was directly opposed to the petrification and dogmatization of historical and dialectical materialism (like in Stalin's infamous Fourth Chapter). So my guess is, that the kind of philosophy Ilyenkov did and worked on does not even want to give such a formulation, it legitimizes itself differently. It is our retrospective view which asks here. Ilyenkov worked at a particular moment at a particular place, and what he worked for was to keep thought alive, but not for thoughts sake. For him this meant to let people partake in the 'riches'

of philosophical heritage in order to understand themselves as persons, as individuals and as collectives in better, i.e. more adequate, liberating and emancipating way. If you ask me for my formulation of his central ideas, I would pick Ilyenkov's idea of dialectical logic as a 'logic of the concrete': we inquire into situations, thoughts, things, issues where ideal and material, cultural and natural forms are entangled. We are faced with forms, work with them to orient ourselves, understand or deal with the world. We use them as tools but we (can) also transform them. In Ilyenkov there's a notion of a basic relation between thought and potentiality. However, thought is not enough, it never is, but without it there's no unfolding of possibilities embodied in the forms of action.

SA: *Thank you for your contribution Sascha Freyberg.*

Sascha Freyberg is a visiting fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin and member of the Max Planck Partner Group "The Water City: The Political Epistemology of Hydrogeological Praxis." He is also an editor of the book series "Verum Factum: Studies and Sources on Political Epistemology" and with *Marxism & Sciences*.

Interview with Isabel Jacobs

SA: *The first question will be a very general one. It seems as if we are experiencing a "revival" of Ilyenkov's ideas; there appears to be a growing interest in his philosophical conceptualizations and methodology. What is so significant about Ilyenkov's ideas that may be responsible for such a revival?*

ISABEL JACOBS: Unlike more orthodox Soviet Marxists, which can appear a little stale today, Ilyenkov has a lot of creative potential. That makes him a lively voice in contemporary debates rather than a figure of purely historical interest. In fact, many of his writings feel remarkably relevant today, for instance when it comes to theories of artificial intelligence, automation and machine learning, but also his radical work on education and disability. I think one aspect of Ilyenkov's thought that resonates with people today is his complex materialism, which fuses materialist dialectics with ideality and theories of embodied cognition.

SA: *The next question will be in a sense the continuation of the previous; in what sense and how relevant/actual is Ilyenkov's take on philosophical questions? Does he have anything to offer in the face of contemporary philosophical and/or social and political issues and crises?*

ISABEL JACOBS: Ilyenkov was a visionary precursor of current ideas of *transindividuality*, which equally emerged from reading Spinoza through Hegel and Marx. Ilyenkov's take on Spinoza is unique in its emphasis on what he calls the *thinking body*. Throughout his works, Ilyenkov developed the idea that it is not the individual mind that thinks but the interactivity of a collective thinking body. From that idea arose his notion of *personality*, defined as a node within a communal network.

Today, Ilyenkov's theory of subjectivity can be brought into dialogue with a more recent shift towards non-human agency, ecology and the Anthropocene. His sci-fi book *On Idols and Ideals* (1968), for example, features extraterrestrial, more-than-human thinking bodies, such as intelligent machines or conscious mold. Cybernetics and systems theory were very much *en vogue* in Soviet debates of the 1950s. Ilyenkov was a critical voice in those debates, invested in defending the superiority of human thinking against artificial, computational intelligence. While some of Ilyenkov's anthropocentric positions need to be updated from today's view, his concerns regarding cybernetics and AI still feel fresh.

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ISABEL JACOBS: I think Ilyenkov's main contribution, which also unites his diverse interests, is his original conception of *thinking*, rooted in a conscious materialism. In his late work, *Dialectical Logic*, he offers a striking metaphor of the activity of thinking. Similar to the form of a jar growing under the hands of a potter, thinking happens within the interactivity of hands, clay, and tools. Such a conception of a transindividual thinking body transcends any material-social or mind-world dualism. It is not me who thinks but my social-material interaction with others and the environment. In *On Idols and Ideals*, Ilyenkov beautifully summarises his position: "The ability to see the world like a human means to see through the eyes of another person, through the eyes of all other people."

SA: *Thank you for your contribution, Isabel Jacobs.*

Isabel Jacobs is a PhD Candidate in Comparative Literature at Queen Mary University of London. She specialises in Soviet and French thought, with a focus on Alexandre Kojève. Her research is situated at the intersections of philosophy, aesthetics and the history of science. She co-founded the research network *Soviet Temporalities* and runs a regular Ilyenkov reading group. Her interests include late socialist temporalities, ecology, migration and political theology.

Interview with Martin Küpper

SA: *The first question will be a very general one. It seems as if we are experiencing a "revival" of Ilyenkov's ideas; there appears to be a growing interest in his philosophical conceptualizations and methodology. What is so significant about Ilyenkov's ideas that may be responsible for such a revival?*

MARTIN KÜPPER: I believe that there are several reasons why there is growing interest in Ilyenkov's philosophy in academic circles. Firstly, there is a certain fascination that stems from his personal life and background. From his participation in World War II to his successes and failures in Soviet philosophy following 1945, including his groundbreaking work on Marx's methodology which garnered international attention, and his involvement in the Zagorsk experiment.

Secondly, he is politically intriguing because he does not fit into the usual narrow-minded dichotomy between dissidence and dogma. As a Bolshevik, he fully supported historical socialism and its achievements and dedicated himself to working towards a classless society, the so-called second stage of communism.

Finally, his manner of thinking is fascinating. Ilyenkov was a great polemicist who knew how to articulate his position masterfully and was not hesitant to criticize opposing viewpoints. He represents a generation of thinkers whose self-confidence was high as their work was an integral part of the construction of socialism, as demonstrated by the Zagorsk experiment. This experiment also centered around the distribution of social resources in the development of science, with a philosopher at the forefront. Socialism needed philosophy, and philosophers needed socialism. However, the position of the polemicist was always precarious, as political institutions could silence them, or they could succumb to hubris.

His personality, political integrity, and thinking are valuable traits that are hard to come by in today's world. The resurgence of interest in his work reflects a need for this kind of philosophy and criticism of current conditions that make the development of such personalities almost impossible.

SA: *The next question will be in a sense the continuation of the previous; in what sense and how relevant/actual is Ilyenkov's take on philosophical questions? Does he have anything to offer in the face of contemporary philosophical and/or social and political issues and crises?*

MARTIN KÜPPER: Ilyenkov's philosophy offers valuable scientific tools for current debates on at least two fronts. Firstly, materialist philosophy

has reemerged after falling into a defensive position following the collapse of the Soviet Union. New Materialism and Posthumanism, two currents in this field, present far-reaching reductionisms despite their diverse positions. For instance, the redefinition of "matter" is mainly based on the discoveries made by natural sciences, leading to ontologies that level out the difference between human society and natural contexts. This reduces reality to contingency and assumes that rapid changes in productive forces, like science and technology, are unchangeable variables. Individuals are thus limited to acting responsibly with the effects of these changes. Ethics of responsibility are justified in this context, but they are not aimed at social liberation. Instead, they focus on technocratic strategies for overcoming crises such as the climate crisis. These philosophies do not allow for a self-determined transformation of the mode of production by the exploited classes.

Ilyenkov's philosophy emphasizes the importance of the ideal as a social context, providing an effective antidote to reductionist materialism. His ideas can be used to counter new materialisms, showing that natural sciences and philosophy should not be mutually exclusive. The natural sciences examine the different structures, forms and types of matter within a particular societal framework, while philosophy focuses on the origin, realization, and development of (scientific) thinking within a social context that operates under certain laws. Rejecting the claim to a universal explanation of reality's structures given by natural sciences, Ilyenkov's philosophy demonstrates the social dependence of all philosophizing in an ideology-critical way.

Secondly, philosophy, which has historically been a source and component of Marxism-Leninism, has come under attack in contemporary global Marxism. This also leads to an ignorance of the level of knowledge achieved in historical socialism and blocks the reception of elaborated approaches. The discussion on the topic of inheritance, including what to inherit and how to inherit, is still in the early stages of development. Ilyenkov's way of thinking can be seen here as a successful example that can be inherited and is also valid under current conditions and in current debates. For instance, his thinking, trained in the cultural-historical school of psychology, argues that the world shaped by humanity has opposed the biophysics of humans in a long historical process and continues to do so in the development of an individual. However, it remains dependent on it as well. Ideal phenomena like love can be viewed as social rather than biophysical issues. After all, this dialectic allows the conclusion that the current problems of capitalist-induced human metabolism with nature can only be comprehensively solved by revolutionizing the mode of production.

Currently, there are dominant positions that understand Marxism almost exclusively as social theory or a certain form of sociology. They

want to exclude all philosophy from the corpus of Marxism. This approach deals with original philosophical concepts such as practice, class, or consciousness by specialized sciences without taking their special epistemological status into account or even discussing it. Ilyenkov's philosophy shows that sciences not only have to be partners but also have to work together in a certain harmony, representing different levels of scientific work as a productive force. Philosophy emphasizes this and makes the identity of thinking and being its main problem, revealing how in the respective sciences this problem based on social conflicts arises in the formation of categories and concepts.

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MARTIN KÜPPER: There are two important points to consider here. Firstly, philosophy, according to him, is the science of scientific thinking. The main object of this science is the problem of the unity of thinking and being. Scientific thinking arises from the historical necessity of securing the socialization of human beings in a general, necessary, and reproductive way. This ensures stable productive forces and relations of production. The questions that bind all of these areas together are why thinking necessarily arises, how it is divided into different forms, and what role these forms play in social practice. He thinks that the sciences and their organization, as well as the material and ideal problems, sedimented in them, require a philosophical approach to the question of the "nature of thought." However, it is important to note that these questions are only inadequately solved or cannot be solved at all in antagonistically structured societies.

For him, Marxism (-Leninism) is not only a political ideology, but also a worldview (*Weltanschauung*). In other words, he sees Marxism as a philosophy that unites politics and philosophy. Marxism offers a unique approach to understanding society and politics. It not only poses important questions for critical thinking but also provides a framework

for political action. One of the main aims of Marxist theory is to establish a communist mode of production that can support the ongoing development of individuals, their abilities and skills, as well as the economy and technology. This means creating a system that is sustainable and avoids catastrophic crises while promoting social progress and development.

SA: *Martin Küpper, thank you for your contribution.*

Martin Küpper is a PhD Student at the University in Kiel about Aesthetics in the GDR and also a Doctorand at the international and interdisciplinary project titled "Philosophy in Late Socialist Europe: Theoretical Practices in the Face of Polycrisis" at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. After his studies he worked as a scientific assistant at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder in 2019 and as a trainee at Jovis publishing house in 2020. Author of an introduction into materialist philosophy (2nd edition, 2021), among articles and edited issues.

Interview with Kyrill Potapov

SA: *The first question will be a very general one. It seems as if we are experiencing a "revival" of Ilyenkov's ideas; there appears to be a growing interest in his philosophical conceptualizations and methodology. What is so significant about Ilyenkov's ideas that may be responsible for such a revival?*

KYRILL POTAPOV: First, I think people recognise the ambition of Ilyenkov's project and the relentless energy with which he pursues it. How many thinkers since the Enlightenment have attempted to offer a complete philosophical system? Certainly, it became progressively rarer in the tweintieth century as philosophy became professionalised. Bakhurst (2023) draws parallels between Ilyenkov and Bukharin and indeed how many Marxists since Bukharin attempted such a feat? The current Ilyenkov renaissance suggests he perhaps got further than Bukharin in this project. Ilyenkov's work does not limit itself to "value" or "class" or any other topic of Marxology; its topic is human life and thought as we find them. What is particularly appealing here I think is how sober Ilyenkov remains in his ambition. Writing in the clearest language he can find, Ilyenkov avoids the utopianism and dogmatism of other Soviet thinkers as well as the pessimism of the Frankfurt School, to critically engage with their shared tradition.

SA: *The next question will be in a sense the continuation of the previous; in what sense and how relevant/actual is Ilyenkov's take on philosophical questions? Does he have anything to offer in the face of contemporary philosophical and/or social and political issues and crises?*

KYRILL POTAPOV: In my own work as a human-computer interaction (HCI) researcher, Ilyenkov has helped me to understand how technology and cognition are related. There's a cognitivist tradition in HCI that sees the mind as another kind of computer, in a dyadic interaction with the tech tool. Ilyenkov helps me to reframe this within wider social practices and the systems in which they are embodied. It's not a dyad but a complex dynamic system. This of course compliments other embodied approaches to cognition, but also emphasises the role of material culture and sociality. I study data visualisations and other Marxists have commented on how these are products of capitalism, reifications etc. Which is true, but it's only in Ilyenkov that I've been able to find answers to the more basic questions of how do they actually work such that they can do this reification.

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KYRILL POTAPOV: In a word, *activity*. Ilyenkov advances our understanding of a Marxist concept that is not well covered by terms such as *labour* and *praxis*. Habermas (1990) famously criticized Marxists for lacking the resources to characterise what constitutes a practice and makes it good i.e. normativity. Ilyenkov does this: his philosophical project takes us from the level of practices, be they of physicists or school students, to the contribution and orientation of individuals within those practices. Throughout this work, he is often contrasting two views of activity: on the one hand, there is our dynamic metabolism with a (social and natural) world which we form as it forms us, on the other hand, there are cybernetic dynamics which can as much associate with Western Capitalism as with the Soviet society in which Ilyenkov lived. This top-down method of organisation severs activity from dynamic concrete reality and reproduces structures of alienation.

SA: *Kyrill Potapov, thank you for your contribution.*

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Kyrill Potapov is research fellow in Human-Computer Interaction and Anthropology at University College London. His research focuses on social practice and the interpretation of personal data. At present, he is exploring social practices involving current and future home energy systems. His theoretical work draws on Ilyenkov, Vygotsky, and the Pittsburgh School. He spent over a decade teaching English at a secondary school in London.

Interview with Monika Woźniak

SA: *The first question will be a very general one. It seems as if we are experiencing a "revival" of Ilyenkov's ideas; there appears to be a growing interest in his philosophical conceptualizations and methodology. What is so significant about Ilyenkov's ideas that may be responsible for such a revival?*

MONIKA WOŹNIAK: There are several reasons for this revival. It can be seen, of course, as part of a broader rise in interest toward Soviet philosophy and state socialist Marxism in general. This growing interest, in turn, resulted from a loosening grip of neoliberal ideology with its militant anti-communism that we have observed more or less since the 2008 crisis, on one hand, and mainstream recognition of the climate crisis, on the other. Of course, there are also several additional factors that play a role here: generational change in academia with the emergence of new, less prejudiced scholars, the stream of new translations and materials appearing since the 1990s, etc.

Nevertheless, the interest in Ilyenkov's works goes far beyond just that. His legacy is incredibly rich and multifaceted, both because of the themes it discusses and the sources it uses. It is relevant to people interested in education, the theory of knowledge, dialectical logic, AI, etc. It can speak to people following various lines in critical theory—from followers of Engels and Lenin, through humanist Marxists, people interested in the Hegelian legacy, to people interested in Spinoza and new materialism. To all of them, Ilyenkov has something interesting to say. I also think that he offered a version of non-vulgarized dialectical materialism that was very refreshing to those who felt disappointed with the development of Western critical theory. A version that was unapologetically Marxist, materialist, and dialectical but also creative and philosophically nuanced. Finally, his egalitarian approach to education has always attracted people interested in education, self-education, democratization of access to culture, etc., which can partially explain his unique popularity outside the narrow circle of academic Marxists.

SA: *The next question will be in a sense the continuation of the previous; in what sense and how relevant/actual is Ilyenkov's take on philosophical questions? Does he have anything to offer in the face of contemporary philosophical and/or social and political issues and crises?*

MONIKA WOŹNIAK: There is a whole body of literature that can be seen as proof that he does. Ilyenkov is not only the object of historical studies, but his ideas are actively used. I remember my surprise when I discovered Krystian Szadkowski's employment of *Dialectical Logic* in his analysis of the subsumption of current academia under capital, for

example. And I could continue: Ilyenkov's ideas can be found in texts discussing cognitive studies, sustainability challenges, aesthetics, the value-form debate, education, philosophy of artificial intelligence, and so on. And in most cases, his ideas really do contribute something there by counteracting the dominant narratives with a more dialectical, nuanced, materialist, egalitarian, and humanist (but not abstractly moral or essentialising) approach.

Personally, I believe that Ilyenkov's most important contribution to Marxism is his methodological and epistemological studies, simply because I believe understanding Marx's method is crucial for developing Marxism and conducting new research. Whether we agree with every detail of Ilyenkov's reconstruction of Marx's method or not, I think his books offer a very good point of departure and a position that is definitely still worth seriously engaging with and discussing. Ilyenkov's writings—not only those specifically devoted to methodology but also those employing it—are a great lesson in thinking dialectically, in trying to understand phenomena concretely, in their relationship with the totality they are part of.

SA: *In his philosophical work, Ilyenkov addresses several problems that traditionally belong to different fields of philosophical study, from machine-thinking and the AI to the questions concerning the relation between philosophy and sciences, the "universal," the "ideal," problems of epistemology, methodology, the relation between ethics and science, Marxism, humanism, general education and the education of people with disabilities, to the criticism of positivism, so on and so forth. What in Ilyenkov's philosophical approach keeps together these apparently different fields and questions? Does he suggest that there is an essential bond between these diverse problems? If so, what that would be in his formulation?*

MONIKA WOŹNIAK: I believe that Ilyenkov not only formulated his understanding of the object of philosophy very early, but also never abandoned it, and it is precisely what unites his different philosophical endeavors: philosophy deals with thinking in all its multifaceted nature. This might sometimes seem obscure because Ilyenkov's understanding of thinking is very distinct from a psychological one or logical (formal) one we are used to. For Ilyenkov, thinking is something both deeply rooted in the world of socially and historically created normativity and revealing the laws governing the objective reality (this is why we can speak of unity of logic and dialectics). His philosophy goes beyond dualism of matter and mind, instead treating thinking as an ability of acting,

of actively creating one's own activity in response to world and transforming it.

Majority of Ilyenkov's writings can be linked to thinking and knowledge understood in that way. There are exceptions, of course, but few—short texts, sometimes written for a specific occasion and audience, like international conferences. Ilyenkov studies Marx's method as something that tells us not only something about the capitalist economy but also reveals something more general about knowledge, about thinking. He is interested in pedagogy as a science dealing with people acquiring the ability to think and in what "thinking" actually means. He writes about cybernetics and AI mostly because of the difference between employing algorithms, already pre-existing rule and thinking as something creative, able to deal with contradictions and deeply rooted in the world of praxis. The majority of his texts on aesthetic deal with questions of cognition; art is, for him, primarily a form of perception. Even "Cosmology of Spirit," while somewhat unique in its approach, is a "poetic phantasmagoria" about nothing other than thinking.

SA: *Monika Woźniak, thank you for your contribution.*

Monika Woźniak is a researcher of the history of state-socialist Marxism, especially in the post-Stalinist period. She works at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences, where she conducts the project "Unorthodox Orthodoxes: Forgotten Quest for 'Real' Marxist Science in Eastern Europe" as well as at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, where she is a member of the project "Philosophy in Late Socialist Europe: Theoretical Practices in the Face of Polycrisis". She is a member of the editorial board of *Contradictions. A Journal for Critical Thought*.

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ESSAY

Reflections on the Process Behind *Talking Hands*[1]

Emanuel Almborg

THE RESEARCH BEHIND *TALKING HANDS* was a slow and fragmented process (I do not speak Russian), shaped by language barriers and geographic distance (I was based in Stockholm, London and New York at the time). I first encountered cultural-historical psychology in 2013. My interest in socialist education and pedagogy predates this encounter, but it wasn't until friends, philosophers Maria Chehonadskih and Alexei Penzin, introduced me to Vygotsky and Sokolyansky's work with disabled children in the 1920s that I became interested in Soviet psychology.[2] This eventually led me to the history of the Zagorsk School outside Moscow in the 1960s and early 1970s, the philosophy of Evald Ilyenkov and his deaf-blind student Alexander Suvorov. So began a research process that brought me to conferences and meetings with researchers and archives in Russia and Finland, alongside conversations with scholars such as Vesa Oittinen and Irina Sandomirskaja.

I spent the summer of 2014 on my first long research residency in Moscow. During this trip, I met with Suvorov for the first time. At this point, I did not know how the project would evolve. All I knew is that I wanted to make a film about the Zagorsk School. I visited Suvorov in his Moscow suburb several times. We would always sit in his kitchen.

1. This article is an adaptation from chapter 2 in Emanuel Almborg's PhD thesis, *Towards a Pedagogy of the Utopian Image*, Kungl. Konsthögskolan, Stockholm, 2021.
2. Ivan Sokolyanski was a pioneer in deaf-blind education and close colleague of Lev Vygotsky.

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We spoke with the help of two translators, from English to Russian, by Maria Chehonadskih, and from Russian to tactile signing, a slow and fragmented conversation marked by mistranslations and misunderstandings. The person translating into tactile signing was Oleg Gurov, whom Suvorov introduced as his adoptive son. They had met in a summer camp for orphaned children that Suvorov visited in the 1980s.

The dialogue between Suvorov and myself would continue over email for about a year, unfolding with the help of numerous translators. Gradually a text emerged from our conversations, mainly based on questions and answers. I proposed to develop these fragments into a script for my film and Suvorov agreed. We wrote and edited together, sending the text back and forth. I asked long and complex questions in the hope of gaining philosophical understanding of the ideas behind the Zagorsk School. Sometimes he answered them, at other times he would reply with something unrelated, a biographical account, memories or a dream. It was unclear to me if this was due to a misunderstanding, mistranslation or was intentional, an ambiguity I accepted. The process allowed us both to imagine the film's narrative and negotiate different ideas and positions before filming. Sometimes we had disagreements about edits, sometimes they concerned content, spanning Ilyenkov's philosophy, Marx, communism, and pedagogy. Eventually, however, we came to an agreement. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that I more or less accepted Suvorov's point of view, his understanding of Ilyenkov, the Zagorsk School and communist pedagogy. During one visit I noticed a drum; it turned out that Suvorov learned to play percussion as a child by "feeling" sounds and vibrations. I proposed that he should make the soundtrack for the film and he agreed. To me, it made sense: the film was dealing with notions of both seeing and hearing beyond the eye or ear. In the late autumn of 2015, the script was finished in a form with which both of us felt happy. To me, it was important to keep some of our miscommunication in the film and Suvorov didn't seem to mind so long as he got to say what was essential to him. It was also important for him to have Oleg, his adoptive son, in the film. I proposed that we staged it in his kitchen, the same way we first met, with the help of the two translators, Oleg and an acquaintance, Liza Bobriashova, who supported the project. I wanted to show how our meetings were constructed, not as a meta-level reflection or to make the viewer critically evaluate documentary truth claims; I wanted to show how both the film and our "dialogue" were situated within a process where "subjectivity" was reliant on and distributed over multiple bodies and objects, a social "ensemble." What's

more, the layers of translation—marked by slowness, pauses, and breaks—conveyed something true about language in general: it is a social, external and material process of mediation, rather than an innate capacity for immediate communicability. Dialogue, as such, is a precarious process, only made possible through friendships and social networks of support and containment.

While in Moscow, I visited archives and academic institutions in search for materials related to the history of the Zagorsk School. I knew that films had been made as this was mentioned in various texts. One of the school's main psychologists and close collaborator with Ilyenkov, Alexander Meshcheryakov, wrote in his book *Awakening to Life* from 1979,

> Instruction in the first habits of independent eating were recorded on film and then carefully analysed. A micro-analysis, so to speak, of the training in what at first glance appears a simple skill reveals a fairly complex pattern underlying the emergence and development of this activity on the child's part, as can be seen from the extracts of this analysis. (Meshcheryakov 1979)

The passage is followed by a series of reproduced film stills of a deaf-blind child slowly learning how to eat with a spoon. A teacher guides her hand with the spoon in it, from plate to mouth. It suggests that at least part of the purpose of the film was research-related and meant for internal documentation and study, a so called "micro-analysis." Such film studies were not uncommon at the time. I was eager to see the film, but it took months to locate. I started at the archives of the Institute of Correctional Pedagogy of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, a name given the institution in the 1990s to reflect a new perspective in psychology and education. Although they kept other materials from the Zagorsk School, the archivist claimed to be unaware of the film. After six months of following various other leads, I was back where I began, at the Institute. I asked the archivist again. This time, it transpired, they had it. Two weeks later, the 16mm film reel was delivered in a black plastic refuse bag with no other information than its title, "Talking Hands." I could use it in whatever way I wanted, they said. I was even offered to keep it; I declined, unwilling to assume such responsibility. The film was scanned at Mosfilm and returned to the archive (a process about as difficult as obtaining the film). The author and exact date are unknown but it was made sometime in the late 1960s and/or early 70s. It is ninety minutes long and shows examples of deaf-blind education, followed by plays, school trips, leisure time and everyday life at the boarding school. The period over which the film was shot is unknown,

but it seemed to have been made in parts over a longer time. Perhaps it was filmed by different people. It also seemed as if the film wasn't edited but rather composed of a series of film reels edited in camera and stitched together, one after another, perhaps in the order in which they were filmed. The first fifteen minutes are taken up by the scene described by Meshcheryakov, a girl learning to eat with a spoon. But only the very beginning of the film keeps a clinical and staged aesthetic reminiscent of "micro-studies" in developmental psychology. As the film continues, arranged examples of teaching methods and learning tools are abandoned and the film turns towards a more personal and playful mood, shifting from a fixed camera-eye to handheld footage, dislocated but not disembodied. A durational and aesthetic progression runs alongside a narrative of development, from child to young adult. From stationary shoots aimed at capturing a controlled environment and set of actions, to free movement, tracing the trajectories of a group of deafblind students as they move through public spaces. Around the same period the film was shot, Meshcheryakov's friend and colleague the Soviet philosopher Evald Ilyenkov also made a reference to film when writing about his work at the Zagorsk School, more precisely "slow-motion film," but this time as metaphor:

> Here we have the unique opportunity to fix with almost mathematical exactness the real conditions which solely determine the birth of such phenomena as consciousness, self-consciousness, thinking, imagination, aesthetic and moral feelings (...) The process of forming the specificity of the human psyche is extended in time, especially in the first—decisive—stages, and therefore can be viewed under "time's magnifying glass," as if it were being seen in slow motion film.[3]

Method

The first contradiction I encountered when making the film was this: How do I approach a subject matter centred around the absence of sight through a visual medium? To Ilyenkov, an image is constructed in the mind through activity with the external world, tools, objects, people. Seeing is an ability that we learn by forming images in the mind, in imagination, from the simplest geometrical form to abstract concepts. An object interferes with a body's trajectory and motion, or an object is used as a tool to overcome obstacles in order to satisfy a need. Through

3. Ilyenkov quoted in Maidansky "Metamorphoses of the Ideal". *Studies in East European Thought*, vol. 57, no. 3–4 (2005, 295)

activity, with objects and people, images appear as something close to a "movement-image" in the mind that plays an essential part in a child's ability to make sense of the world. An understanding of a spoon is acquired through using it: slowly, not only is its image constructed in the mind but so is the cultural practice of eating with it grasped, the movement of the hand holding it learned. To Ilyenkov, drawing on Vygotsky, imagination plays a crucial role in cognitive development. For Vygotsky, children's play, with objects and others, is a practical form of external imagination, internalised and abstracted as the child develops. Seeing, therefore, is a form of imagination for Ilyenkov that needs to be trained. This is the task of aesthetic education. Its purpose is to develop imagination's power, understood not as the ability to think up what does not exist but as the ability to see what does exist, what lies before one's eyes. It is not innate but an acquired skill. Someone with a limited imagination perceives only that with which they are already familiar. To Ilyenkov, such a person might be "looking" but not "seeing." To such a person, concrete situations are not an object of examination and reflection but simply an external trigger that activates readymade stereotypes in consciousness, readymade images that have been internalised without ever encountering the object itself. That is what Ilyenkov means when he says, he *looked* but he *did not see* (Ilyenkov 2007, 82).

I asked myself: does a similar distinction between "looking" and "seeing" apply to the camera-eye? How would such a distinction affect the film's foundational contradiction, i.e., the depiction of sight's absence through a visual medium? Attempting to answer such a question with Ilyenkov's notion of seeing—as an image constructed in the mind through activity with an object—would probably not provide a resolution. It did, however, help foreground the contradiction within the film, pushing it in a new direction.

I decided to start from close-ups when shooting the kitchen scene with myself, Suvorov and the two translators, Oleg and Liza. Without an establishing shot, the close-up was intended to push the viewer to "see," or at least be aware of, that which was outside the frame. Layers of translation and out-of-shot voices were layered over fragments of body parts, hands, objects and details of the space. My intention was to force the viewer, gradually, to construct an image of the situation and space in the mind rather than showing it. A long lens captured partial objects, scanning surfaces and shapes, slowly allowing the viewer to assemble them, bringing them into a whole. It is not until the final shot that Suvorov's face is revealed and the scene gains clarity for a brief moment.

The archival material posed another challenge. It was already full of meaning and an aesthetics that felt immanent to the subject matter; editing was difficult. The material followed a narrative from child to young adulthood, from an enclosed school to deaf-blind youth exploring environments through touch, where students climbed public monuments and traversed urban space, "appropriating" and "examining" whatever objects they encountered in such a way as to complicate its status as a research film. While reading a biography of Meshcheryakov by Soviet psychologist Karl Levitin, I encountered another mention of the film, which confirmed the cinematic quality of the work:

> Meshcheryakov was showing a film about how his pupils were wrested from the darkness and silence, how reason and judgment, feelings, will, and imagination were created in them. Everything was so simple, as if they had purposely made an antifilm hit. (…) Any movie, however, even a down-to-earth one, is nonetheless a skilful fabrication compared with life: it condenses time and creates its own film truth. (Levitin 1982, 160)

I decided to retain the archive material's original order. Initially, I simply tried to edit it down, removing repetitions or long stretches of low quality or damaged material. I then began to make some of the "scenes" shorter, reducing them as much as I could while keeping what felt most important. Eventually, I ended up with about half the material and brought it together with that filmed with Suvorov in Moscow.

The archival material had a quality that felt precious and precarious; it was difficult to edit. But the footage lacked a soundtrack and that presented another possibility for experimentation alongside the dialogue's multiple voices. Much like the close-up's intention to "see" outside the frame, I wanted the sound design to trace shapes and scan surfaces, adding a layer of tactility that separated seeing from the visual. Furthermore, the 16mm film's surface itself carried historical meaning as a material form of mediation and translation. I decided to add two layers of sound as a starting point, sounds that would capture the feeling of surfaces in the environment and the objects depicted, as well as the surface of the 16mm film itself. These two surfaces, the environment and the film, would bleed into each other, making one an implicit part of the other. A third element was added, Suvorov's drums, that would disrupt the soundscape, adding a sense of individuality or character, directing or framing the narrative through punctuation and rhythm. I used contact microphones on surfaces, materials and film projectors and recorded foley together with a sound designer, experimenting in a studio for two weeks. In addition to these sounds, we added "drones" or tones

that would reflect the mood in each scene and bridge moods in the dialogue with the archival material.

To be clear, these ideas were starting points, and in the process of their realisation, other things happened and choices were made for intuitive rather than conceptual reasons. According with filmmaker Raul Ruiz' poetics (Ruiz 1995), the film took shape through a dialectical process of structure and construction. While structure, here comprises the basic ideas, the plan and framework, the construction is the process of making the film, where things do not go as planned, new ideas emerge, one does things out of "gut feeling" or one finds something that makes sense by accident or from experimentation. The relation between the structure and the construction produces a third object: the film.

A friend recounted that filmmakers Straub-Huillet once declared all their films "affirmative." I have looked for the quote many times but never found it. If such a statement exists, it resonates with how I think about my work. Another way of putting it would be to say that I see my films as "reparative," to borrow a term from psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, or what queer theorist Eve Sedgwick describes as an alternative to the paranoid "hermeneutics of suspicion" dominant in critical theory. For Klein, the reparative is connected to the "depressive position," it is a sort of coming to terms with fragmented part objects and the splitting of "good" and "bad" associated with the paranoid in order to establish a new sense of the whole. Interestingly, Klein associates this position loosely with a developmental stage relating to language acquisition, one of Vygotsky's "higher mental functions" that are social in origin. For Klein, of course, this is a position, not a stage: one can come in and out of it at any time in life. Were one to attempt a Vygotskian reading of Klein, perhaps, one could say that the reparative first happens between people and is subsequently internalised as a social function of the psyche. Without dwelling on this argument, I merely want to propose that such an understanding of reparative or affirmative filmmaking would need to imply not only a positive vision but a certain socialisation of authorship and a process of making the film with subjects rather than *about* them. It would make the social and its contradictions, which underpin all filmmaking, an implicit part of the film's form and construction. Shortly after finishing the filming in Moscow, Suvorov wrote me the following e-mail:

> Ilyenkov actually made a revision of a revision—returning from falsified "bolshevised" Marx to true Marx. Ilyenkov revised official real revisionists. I don't know who will watch our film, and which kind of reaction it could

cause. But I am pleased with your attention to this, which others are trying to ignore. And I am pleased to explain my understanding of communism at least in our film—it is a rather rare chance and I feel the effort, or tension, of an interlocutor. Thank you for giving me a chance to speak.

Your Hedgehog, November 7th, 2015.

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Biography

Emanuel Almborg is an artist based in Stockholm and London. His practice is primarily moving image-based and engages with pedagogy, psychology and theatre. He was a Whitney ISP fellow in New York, 2015 and finished a PhD at The Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm (KKH), 2021, with the dissertation; *Towards a Pedagogy of the Utopian Image*. He is the facilitator of *Switchers,* a film and theatre collective with young people from London and rural Wales. He has studied psychoanalysis and child development at the Tavistock in London. He is currently doing a Postdoc across art and psychology with KKH, Stockholm and University of East London, BabyDevLab. He has recently taught and lectured at Goldsmiths, London, Konstfack, Stockholm and Yale University, New Haven. His work has recently been shown at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Whitechapel Gallery, London, Kunstverein Munchen, Munich and CAC Brétigny outside Paris.

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WORK

Talking Hands

By Emanuel Almborg, 2016

VIDEO

Talking Hands, 2016, 48 min, HD (and 16mm transferred to HD): https://vimeo.com/158482244

Almborg, Emanuel (director). 2024. *Talking Hands* [documentary]. *Marxism & Sciences* 3 (1): 185. https://doi.org/10.56063/MS.2403.03108

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Ilyenkov and Lenin's Dialectic

Vesa Oittinen

IN THE PAPER, I DISCUSS EVALD ILYENKOV'S interpretation of Lenin as a dialectician thinker. It turns out that Ilyenkov has used Lenin to criticise the positivistic and technocratic traits in Soviet reality of the Brezhnev era. Thus, Ilyenkov sees Lenin to be more "Hegelian" than he actually was. Lenin did not attempt to develop a system of dialectical categories in Hegelian manner, nor was his idea of "the concreteness of truth" identical with Hegel. For Lenin, dialectics meant above all a concrete analysis of a concrete situation.

Evald Ilyenkov, the maybe most prominent Soviet philosopher, never liked to be viewed as a "dissident." On the contrary, he always stressed that his understanding of philosophy and especially of Marxist dialectics were in line with the ideas of Marx and Lenin. They were the "Diamatchiks" and Party bureaucrats who were wrong as regards to the true interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, not he. Already in his seminal work *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in the 'Capital' of Marx,* published in 1960, Ilyenkov declares "the ascent from abstract to the concrete" as the quintessence of both Hegel's and Marx's method and lets the reader know, that Lenin, too, was an adherent of this method:

> A 'logical argument' of the 'on-the-one-hand, on-the-other-hand' type, an argument more or less accidentally isolating various aspects of the objects and placing them in more or less accidental connection, was rightly ridiculed by Lenin as argument in the spirit of scholastic formal logic […]. If the Party reasoned about trade unions according to this principle, there could be no hope for any principled, scientifically worked-out political line. It would have been tantamount to a complete rejection of a theoretical attitude to things in general. (Ilyenkov 1982) (translated by VO)

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Ilyenkov's View of Lenin as a Dialectician

This was already a reading of Lenin which must have made the "Diamatchiks" insecure. Ilyenkov pursued the same line of thought during his entire productive life. His last book was a thin volume of 180 pages with the title *Leninist Dialectics and Metaphysics of Positivism,* published posthumously in 1980, one year after his suicide (Ilyenkov 1980).

It was noteworthy that the book, which had a short introduction by Ilyenkov's friend Lev Naumenko, was published by the prestigious Party publishing house Politizdat, but most astonishing of all was the huge amount of copies in which the booklet was printed: 100 000 copies. Such an amount for a philosophical pamphlet would be unheard-of in present-day conditions, and even in the Soviet Union it was exceedingly high. Wladislaw Hedeler, the German scholar who participated at the first Ilyenkov conference in the West in 1999, suspected that there was a political tactic move behind this all: the authorities wanted to "re-direct the 'critical Marxist' as soon as possible back to the conventional mainstream of the official Marxism-Leninism" (Hedeler 2000, 282). This may be true or it may be not; I for my part could well imagine—indeed, I think that this is a more plausible explanation—that the publication was an attempt of a reciprocal influence: Ilyenkov's friends in the Party tried to influence the minds of the authorities by popularising his ideas.

Be it as it may, Ilyenkov's posthumous book on Lenin's dialectics has left even many of his admirers cold or uneasy. The book is written in a harsh polemical tone—indeed, in this it reminds of Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1909), which actually may have been one of its paragons—and its attacks against "Positivism" have an overtone of obsessiveness. The arch-villain in the book is Aleksandr Bogdanov, just as in Lenin's book of 1909. A further problematic point is the history of the edition of the book. After having compared the book with an article of Ilyenkov published a year earlier, in 1979, in the official theory journal of the Party, *Kommunist* (where Naumenko was one of the editors), Wladislaw Hederler is of the opinion that Ilyenkov's original text is heavily edited.[1]

We hope that the original manuscript (or manuscripts) of the book on Lenin's dialectics one day will turn up from the archive of Ilyenkov,

1. See Hedeler (2000, 287). The article in question was Ilyenkov's "Materializm voinstvujushchii—znachit dialekticheskii. K 70-letiju vykhoda v svet knigi Lenina 'Materializm i empiriokrititsizm" 'c, in: *Kommunist* 1979 № 6. The original version of Ilyenkov's book manuscript is to come in the 10-volume Collected Works edited by Andrei Maidanski (the "Kanon +" Publishing House, Moscow).

which Professor Andrey Maidansky at present is going through and editing. Nevertheless, I believe that the book reflects mostly Ilyenkov's authentic views on the subject, albeit in a polemical form. Ilyenkov is known for his distaste towards "positivism," which he, however, never defined very accurately. Clearly, "positivism" represented him not only a certain philosophical current with an empirist epistemology. He saw in it a worldview which he found repellent—a narrowly "technocratic" attitude towards society and the tasks of building socialism. It seems to me that Ilyenkov felt that the Soviet society was going astray in the 1970s, forgetting the humanistic and cultural ideals of socialism. This explains the often profusely aggressive tone of *Leninist Dialectics and Metaphysics of Positivism*. The intention was to demonstrate what Lenin "really said" and turn this against the actual Soviet society as it existed in Brezhnev's times.

But if this indeed was Ilyenkov's strategy—that is, to play Lenin against the "real socialism,"—so it had its precarious sides. If Lenin is to deliver the yardstick for the assessment of Soviet realities, the risk of taking a hagiographic stance towards Lenin becomes great. Ilyenkov's Lenin in the book *Leninist Dialectics…* does not, in fact, differ much from the picture of the infallible theoretical genius established already in the late 1920s and canonised in such texts as V. Adoratski's article of 1930, where it was claimed that Lenin already since his youth was a master of Marxist dialectics.[2] Actually, Ilyenkov goes even further than Adoratski, when he alleges that Lenin had absorbed the philosophy of Hegel already during his Siberian exile in Shushenskoe in 1897–1900, where he studied i.a. Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. The fact that no excerpts or notes on Hegel have been preserved from this period, Ilyenkov (1980, 29) quits with nonchalance.

Despite of this dogmatic starting point, Ilyenkov does in *Leninist Dialectics…* some interesting observations concerning Lenin as a philosopher and questions a couple of received Soviet interpretations. For example, according to him, it is a "legend," that in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism,* Lenin "has delivered only general axioms of any materialism, allegedly not noting specially the dialectics," whilst he "in the *Philosophical Notebooks* in particular took up the dialectics" (Ilyenkov 1980, 161). For Ilyenkov (1980, 162), it is not justifiable to speak of

2. The article of V. V. Adoratski on Lenin's biography was published for the first time in the journal *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* №№ 1 и 2–3, 1930 and set the paragon for further Soviet discussion on Lenin as a theoretician.

Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* as a work focusing on gnoseological questions only.

Ilyenkov is undoubtely right in stressing the unity—at least a relative unity—of Lenin's work. In the West, there has emerged a interpretatory tradition of "two Lenins," the earlier one of a vulgar materialist and representant of a primitive theory of reflexion, the later one in turn a cunning dialectician and admirer of Hegel.[3] This dualistic picture finds little support in Lenin's own work and Ilyenkov's interpretation is here of course closer the historical truth. However, Ilyenkov is at the same time reading Lenin in the light of his own favourite philosophical idea, that of the absolute coincidence of dialectics, logic and theory of cognition. This is a Hegelian idea, which Lenin quotes approvingly in his *Philosophical Notebooks,* although (and this is symptomatic) he does not seem to make further use of it.

What did Lenin Actually Understand with Dialectics ?

For Ilyenkov, Lenin thus gives the paragon of materialist dialectics. According to him, "Lenin knew extraordinary well the higher form of dialectics, which constituted 'the soul of Marxism'—the dialectics of *Capital,* the dialectics as the logic of thought of Marx and Engels, the materialist dialectics" (Ilyenkov 1980, 28).

However, what did Lenin actually understand with "dialectics?" If we read attentively his texts, a strange feature soon stands out. Lenin's talk about "dialectics" is often haphazard, but one trait is recurrent: the idea of a concrete analysis of a concrete situation. Examples abound, so it suffices to quote from an important work of of 1904, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*:

> [G]enuine dialectics does not justify errors of the individuals, but studies the inevitable turns, proving that they were inevitable by a detailed study of the process of development in all its concreteness. One of the basic principles of dialectics is that there is no such thing as abstract truth, truth is always concrete. (Lenin 1964, 409)

The idea of a concrete, all-sided analysis of the phenomena is a hallmark of Lenin's special genius. It was just this trait which allowed him to see hidden possilibities in political processes; possibilities which other politicians did not see, as they looked at the world through the eyeglasses

3. This thesis has been put forth especially by Anderson (1995). I analyse Anderson's arguments more detailed in my paper 'What Kind of Dialectician was Lenin?' (Oittinen 2018).

of a dogmatic theory. We see this creative trait in Lenin, when he seizes the revolutionary opportunity in October 1917, against the warnings of such "orthodox" Marxists as Kautsky or Plekhanov. Lenin was never a prisoner of the theory: the concrete situation and the possibilities it offered was always more important for him than abstract theoretical schemes. In *Leninist Dialectics…* Ilyenkov is, of course, right when he stresses Lenin's innovativeness in his philosophical and political analyses.

However, before going any further, I would maintan two points which concern Lenin's idea of the "concreteness of the truth." Both his confept of truth and his thoughts about the concreteness were quite different from those of Hegel.

a) Lenin's concept of truth different from that of Hegel

On the basis of the above-mentioned, nothing seems more natural than to equate Lenin's and Hegel's concepts of truth. The famous German playwright Bertolt Brecht did so. He loved to repeat the expression "Truth is always concrete" which, according to him, was the *idée-maîtresse* of Hegel's dialectics; he even painted these words on the rafter of the house he lived during his exile in Denmark in the 1930s, in order to keep them constantly in his mind. The expression indeed sounds Hegelian. But one seeks it in vain in Hegel. Brecht seems to have taken it from Lenin and interpreted it as a Hegelian trait in Lenin's thought. This is not so simple, for several reasons.

First, Lenin and Hegel had quite opposite concepts of truth. For Lenin, truth was essentially, in accordance with the "theory of reflection" he supported, the good old Aristotelian correspondence relation: *x* is true, if *x* "corresponds" to the fact *y* outside the mind. The question of what a "correspondence" means is of course problematic and it has caused much discussion among philosophers. But the main idea which concerns us here is that in the Aristotelian theory of truth, facts have the priority and the subjective thoughts are secondary, i. e. dependent of the facts, if they are assumed to be true. For Hegel, on the contrary, the Aristotelian interpretation of truth as *adaequatio rei et intellectus* is insufficient. For him, a deeper definition of truth is to say that it is a "correspondence of a content with itself" (*Übereinstimmung eines Inhalts mit sich selbst*) (Hegel 1930, § 24 Zusatz 2), which is "a quite different meaning of the truth as the first-mentioned" [i.e. the Aristotelian—V.O.].

When Hegel says that "truth is the whole" (*das Wahre ist das Ganze*) (ibid.), he means with the whole a totality where the distinction between the subjective and the objective, or the subject and the substance, has in the last resort became sublated. This sublating is a process in which the substance becomes more and more mediated with the subject, until they finally obtain a synthesis in the Absolute Idea. For Hegel, the whole reality of the universe consists of this process, and so he can claim that the "execution" (implementation, *Ausführung*) of the process is at least as important as its final result. Thus, although Lenin's and Hegel's views on the necessity of a concrete approach to the reality seem at first glance to be similar, there is actually a deep difference between them. Lenin's "concrete analysis of a concrete situation" is factual; it consists of an empirical inquiry—Hegel, for his part, discarded the empirist approach, which according to him, "instead of seeking the truth in the thought itself," falsely tries to obtain it "from the experience" (Hegel 1930, § 37).

Hence, when Lenin (1964, 482) says that "the ABC of dialectics […] tells us that there is no such thing as abstract truth, the truth is always concrete," he is saying something quite different from Hegel's intentions. He is not construing a totality in which all the details would form moments submitted to the teleological movement of the Whole. For Lenin, the principle of the concreteness of the truth is the way which makes it possible to escape the grip of abstract and dogmatic determinism. To my mind, it is important to see that although both Hegel and Lenin criticised abstract theories, their incentives were different: for Hegel, the goal was to construct an organic, richly detailed totality, while for Lenin there was no such "totalist" ambitions; what he aimed at, was to find by a detailed analysis the fissures in the seemingly monolithic façade of, for example, such a determinist theory of history, as Marxism was interpreted by the protagonists of the Second International.

b) Lenin follows Chernyshevsky, not Hegel

But from where has Lenin his idea of "concrete analysis" and the "concreteness of the truth" if not from Hegel? In the foreword to the second German editoion of *Capital,* Marx distinguished two steps in his method, the inquiry (*Forschung)*, which consisted of the analysis of the obect of research. It was followed by "presentation" *(Darstellung),* and only at this latter stage the dialectical figures were used. But Lenin never refers explicitly to this two-step structure of Marx's method when

discussing dialectics. Somewhat surprisingly, Lenin's idea of dialectics does not come from Marx, but from the Narodniks. These pre-Marxian Russian revolutionaries rebelled against the dogmatic interpretation of a pre-defined succession of socio-economic formations presented by the Second International Marxists. This "Marxist" (actually, of Positivist origin) scheme seemed to deny all alternative perspectives for Russia. The country had to pass from feodalism to capitalism following the iron-cast necessity of the laws of historical development. It was especially Nikolai Mikhailovsky, an eminent representant of the moderate wingn of Narodniks, who polemised against this deterministic scheme.[4] But the "concreteness principle" was formulated earlier, already in 1855–56 by Nikolai Chernyshevsky, in an essay, which dealt with Russian literature:

> The essence of this method [the dialectical method—V.O.] lies in that the thinker must not rest content with any positive deduction, but must find out whether the object he is thinking about contains qualities and forces the opposite of those which the object had presented to him at first sight. Thus the thinker was obliged to examine the object from all sides […] Gradually […] the former one-sided conceptions of an object were supplanted by a full and all-sided investigation […] In reality […], everything depends upon circumstances […] Every object, every phenomen […] must be judged according to the circumstances, the environment, in which it exists. This rule was expressed by the formula: 'There is no abstract truth; truth is concrete', i.e., a definite judgement can be pronounced only […] after examining all the circumstances on which it depends. (Chernyshevsky, 1855-56 as cited in Plekhanov 1974, 547)

For Chernyshevsky, Hegel's dialectics consists above all of a concrete analysis of all the sides of the phenomen in case. Chernyshevsky does not give in his essay a more specified presentation of Hegel's method. He does not speak about the mediation of subject and substance, nor of subjectivity as an absolute, self-referential negativity, nor of the triadic movement of categories—all of which are, in fact, essential traits of Hegel's dialectical method. It is only the "concreteness" of analytical approach which counts.

In a seminal article on Lenin's dialectics, Robert Mayer constates, that

4. I discuss the Marx-Mikhailovsky dispute more in detail in my recent book *Marx's Russian Moment* (Oittinen 2023, 41–64).

> Lenin […] was not saying anything original about the dialectic in 1904 when he identified it with concreteness and tactical relativism. This sounds a plausible comment, but it should be borne in mind, that by using this seemingly so simple principle Lenin was able to challenge successfully the positivistic *Zeitgeist* of the Second International Marxism. He borrowed it from Plekhanov, who in turn had taken it from Chernyshevsky. But Lenin turned it against Plekhanov's own fraction in the Russian Social Democratic Workers's Party, by showing that a "principal weakness of Menshevism and other revolutionary trends was an undialectical tendency to rely on abstract and universal rules for solutions to concrete tactical problems. (Mayer 1999, 46)

c) Lenin never formulated any "dialectical logic"

But maybe Lenin had later, in the *Philosophical Notebooks* of 1914–1915, formulated an idea of dialectics which would be somewhat more specific than the stress on the importance of a concrete analysis, accompanied with hints to the role of the "contradictions" in the process of cognition and in the objective reality? Most of the *Notebooks* consists of excerpts and direct quotations from Hegel's *Science of Logics* , and it is not always easy to distinguish passages and formulations only resuming up Hegel's views from those expressing Lenin's own thoughts. There are, however, some important passages in the Hegel conspectus, where Lenin steps aside from rewriting Hegel and reflects about what he just has read. One such passage is at the end of the notes on *Science of Logics*, with the title *Summary of Dialectics*; another is a longer fragment, writtten in 1915, *On the Question of Dialectics*, which, according to the editors of Lenin's works, is contained in the notebook following the conspectus of Lassalle's book on Heraclitus (Lenin 1974, 582). It seems that these fragments give the most "authentic" picture of Lenin's ideas concerning dialectics and Hegel's importance for Marxism.

In the first fragment, *Summary of Dialectics,* Lenin departs from Hegel's definition of the "dialectical moment" in the judgement, which runs as follows: "This equally synthetic and analytic moment of the *Judgment*, by which [the moment] the original universality [general concept] determines itself out of itself as other in relation to itself, must be called dialectical" (Lenin 1974, 220).[5] One almost sees Lenin shaking his head, when he comments: "A determination which is not a clear one!!." But Lenin tries, nonetheless, to capture the essential features of Hegel's dialectics. He lists as many as sixteen "elements of dialectics," among

5. In the original: "Dieses so sehr synthetische als analytische Moment des *Urteils*, wodurch das anfängliche Allgemeine aus ihm selbst als das *Andere Seiner* sich bestimmt, ist das *dialektische zu nennen*" (Lenin's (1974, 220) quotation from Hegel).

them "the entire totality of the manifold *relations* of this thing to others"; the idea of development; the thing or phenomen as the sum and unity of opposites; "not only the unity of opposites, but the *transitions* of *every* determination, quality, feature, side, property into *every* other;" "the endless process of the discovery of *new* sides, relations, etc."; "the repetition at a higher stage of certain features, properties, etc., of the lower," and " the apparent return to the old (negation of the negation)" (Lenin 1974, 220 sqq.).

If one considers more closely all these definitions of the "elements" of dialectics, it becomes soon obvious, that they are mostly nothing else but further specifications of the view on dialectics which Lenin had already long before the assumed "turn" of 1914. Even in the *Philosophical Notebooks,* dialectics is for Lenin above all a theory of concreteness, a method of taking into account all the details and sides of the phenomen to be analysed.

This impression gets confirmed when we read the second fragment, *On the Question of Dialectics,* which is apparently written a bit later than the previous one. Here Lenin first mentions "unity of opposites" as a characteristic of dialectics, but continues then:

> Dialectics as *living*, many-sided knowledge (with the number of sides eternally increasing), with an infinite number of shades of every approach and approximation to reality (with a philosophical system growing into a whole out of each shade)—here we have an immeasurably rich content as compared with 'metaphysical' materialism. (Lenin 1974, 361)

Again, he underlines the richness, many-sidedness, concreteness of the dialectical research.

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Lenin may well be right when he says that a "living, many-sided knowledge" is one of the hallmarks of the dialectical approach. But this said, we do not find in Lenin any explicite formulation of a dialectical logic—if we understand with "logic" some coherent order of categories. This runs counter to the suggestions of Ilyenkov and many other Soviet philosophers with the reputation of being "Hegelians," who have claimed that Lenin gives us a materialist interpretation of Hegel's dialectics. Indeed, we find in Lenin many interesting and acute comments on Hegel's philosophy, made from a materialist point of view. But they remain scattered, fragmentary and do not form a coherent whole. If

Lenin, as a Marxist, would have turned Hegel upside down (as the saying goes), one would have presupposed that he develops—or at least sketches—a materialist system of categories. But we find nothing like that in Lenin's published works or in his *Nachlass*.

One might maybe object, that Lenin, like Marx and other genuine Marxist philosophers, intends to take from Hegel only the method, not the system of categories. This argument reflects the old system vs. method dispute among the Marxists, which was initiated by Engels's comments on the discrepancy between the revolutionary method and conservative system in Hegel. But actually, it seems to me, that with the "system" Engels meant above all Hegels so-called "real philosophy" *(Realphilosophie),* that is, philosophies of nature, history, art and religion. The method, on the other side, consisted of the logic of philosophical categories.

Hegel's ambition in his *Science of Logic* was to fulfil and overcome Kant's intentions in this respect. As well known, Kant lamented that Aristotle had left us 12 categories, but did not offer any justification why just these categories should be the fundamental ones. Kant attempted to give a justification of the categories by deducing them from the synthetic activity of the Transcendental Ego. According to Hegel, Kant had not succeeded in this. For Hegel, a justification of the categories of dialectical logic is possible only if one intrerprets the categories as self-moving. In Marxist philosophy, such a view on categories cannot be accepted—it is nothing but "Ideenmystik," as Lenin rightly notes.[6]

But the problem of a system of categories remains even in Marxist dialectical logic. Many Soviet philosophers have tried to construct such systems and thus renew Kant's and Hegel's projects of a justification of categories, and a description of the "system of the categories of dialectics" was included even in the basic courses of Dialectical Materialism taught at the schools (one typical work in this respect was Aleksandr Sheptulin's *Kategorii dialektiki*, 1971). It is, to my mind, symptomatic that Ilyenkov never participated in these projects of Soviet Diamat. For him, other aspects of dialectical thought were more important, for example the idea of the ascent from the abstract into the concrete, or the thesis that dialectics, logics, and theory of cognition form an inseparable

6. As he himself says in the *Philosophical Notebooks*: "Hegel's logic cannot be applied in its given form, it cannot be taken as given. One must separate out from it the logical (epistemological) nuances, after purifying them from *Ideenmystik*: that is still a big job" (Lenin 1974, 264).

unity. It is true that Lenin, contrary to the aspirations of Diamat tradition, never had the ambition to build a deductive system of the categrories of dialectical logic. But a critical scrutiny of Lenin's texts shows that Lenin did not highlight the just mentioned, for Ilyenkov so important aspects of dialectics, either.

Ilyenkov's Lenin is to an important degree a construction: a connoisseur of Hegelian dialectics who in a genial manner was able to "apply" Hegel's ideas in a materialist way. The truth is, to my mind, simpler. Lenin had an outstanding analytic mind, who was able to go in the most concrete details of the problems he studied, and in this manner, he could see possibilities and alternatives in political and social processes, which other Marxists of his days usually did not notice. But to call this rare ability a "dialectical thinking"—in the sense of a conscious application of a method—is another matter.

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Biography

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The Absent Educator: Following the Development of Deaf-Blind Children in *Talking Hands*[1]

Alsu Battalova, Ivan Kashcheev, Nikolai Kravchenko, Najma Layali, Sofya Matveeva and Anatolii Stepanov

ABSTRACT: The paper focuses on Emanuel Almborg's movie *Talking Hands* (2016)—the documentary that presents a perspective on the Zagorsk experiment, an educational project directed by Meshcheryakov in the Soviet Union that challenged the notions of disability, thinking, and education by teaching deaf-blind children to become independent and intellectually capable individuals. The text deals with the experiment's legacy along with the voice of Alexander Suvorov, one of the participants of the Zagorsk experiment, and raises questions about humanness, education, and the bond between a teacher and student. The relationships, as well as the origin of humanness, are revealed in the analysis of the educator's role in their deaf-blind students' mental development, where at first there is a constant and necessary presence of the educator, which is then followed by their disappearance. The poignant impact of Ilyenkov's absence on Suvorov sheds light on the importance of an educator as a guide not only to understand the objects which surround us, but also to comprehend the self as an independent subject.

KEYWORDS: Zagorsk Experiment, Education, Ilyenkov, Meshcheryakov, Vygotsky, deaf-blind children, cognitive development, humanness.

Introduction

The boarding school for deaf-blind children was opened in Zagorsk in 1963 under the direction of Meshcheryakov. The school was inspired to teach deaf-blind students to be a part of society. The aim of the school was to prove that these students are not deprived of intellectual abilities, and that they are able to study in schools, get a degree, and be a part of society. As noteworthy as this idea is, there is little information available about this school in open sources. Even the footage of the film

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about the school was found as a surprise in some archives in Moscow. This footage did not contain any particular information about the director, dates or any specific details but the name Talking Hands.

After about half-century since the Zagorsk experiment, Emanuel Almborg started his research for a film about Zagorsk students. He communicated with one of the four students who received a university degree, Alexander Suvorov, and discovered the original footage. These conversations and the footage later were used for the 2016 movie. The script was written by Almborg in collaboration with Suvorov. The film is a video essay that tells about Ilyenkov, his ideas and their realization in Zagorsk. The logic of the film guides the viewer from a particular example of how a child's mind is formed, to the cosmic ideas about the true history of humanity as a society of talented individuals.

Education and Humanness in Zagorsk

The revelations brought forth in the course of the experiment call into question and contemplation the very nature and importance of education. What is education? How does it take place? What are its essential aims?

The Zagorsk experiment was unfolding on the basis of the boarding school for deaf-blind children; moreover, the experiment itself revolved around children that have lost their sight and/or hearing. What is observed of such a child prior to tuition, Meshcheryakov writes, is that along with the loss of senses, they also lose the behavioral habits acquired earlier—such children are described as "deprived of the capacities of human behavior and thought" (Meshcheryakov 1979, para. 2)—and, consequently, deprived of humanity. Selecting pupils for the Zagorsk school, Mescheryakov found that, due to the over-abundance of parental care, some children could not have been regarded as independent organisms, as many of them "were not even able to regulate their body temperature" (Meshcheryakov 1979, para. 21) on their own.

Meshcheryakov (1979) sets out to elucidate the ways in which the foundation shall be laid for the consequent development of such a child's thought and behavioral patterns. The popularity of hasty attempts to develop speech skills in the pupil is to be rejected as erroneous – in no way can it provide any basis for the development of the child's mind insofar as there is no immediate system of images of the surrounding environment for the child to situate themselves in, to which speech is to refer in its operation. Instead, he highlights the importance of the interaction with the world of objects and with the world of people, claiming that successful development of the deaf-blind child necessarily starts at acquiring self-care habits, an uninterrupted flow of action which in-

volves the mastery of everyday household objects—using a spoon for eating, for one—which accumulate, embody, and have inscribed in them thousands of years of human experience (Meshcheryakov 1979).

This brings into light a hypothesis, namely, that there is an ambiguous relation between education and humanness. That is, as a process, education fundamentally aims to transmit humanness from the educator to the pupil. In the case of the education of the deaf-blind children, the process necessitates the turn towards an object, in which human activity is inscribed. With the help of the educator, the deaf and blind child unlocks and appropriates this human activity and, consequently, humanness, via appropriating the object and gaining independence in regards to their action, which is, largely, a characteristic of the conscious human action—genetically indeterminate, marked by deliberation, choice, and guided by experience. The question of humanness is then posed in the same breath as that of education. Yet, what is left to ask is the following: where does humanness really lie—in the educator, the object, or does it come into being in the relational modality of the two, necessitated by its transmission?

Touching upon the origin of humanness and how it is acquired during the development of children, the film focuses on the products of human labor as objects that transform and regulate human activity. In the example of a spoon, it is "a pass into the realm of human—social— culture, into the sphere of human life activity and of the human mind" (Ilyenkov 1975, 89). Thus, through mastering the use of a spoon, the child opens a path to humanness itself. Yet, the spoon is not only an entrance to human thinking, but also it is a "first shared action of a teacher and a child" (Talking Hands 2016, 07:50). This shared action aims to teach a child to use the object that he or she has no way to know how to use on their own. Only with the guidance of the other, a child can acquire the knowledge and possess the understanding of the object and its use.

This can be emphasized with Vygotsky's idea of the zone of proximal development—"the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky 1978, 86). The zone elucidates the importance of the more knowledgeable Other to make the process of pupil's maturation "currently in an embryonic state" (Vygotsky 1978, 86) possible. If a child, due to the teacher's guidance, acquires a technique or an object, "the functions for such-and-such have matured in her" (Vygotsky 1978, 86).

Having fulfilled his role in guiding the pupil's maturation process, the educator is no longer required to be present. The educator needs to disappear to foster the independence that has already been supported

and made possible in students' development. Only with the act of disappearance can students realize that they can firmly stand on their feet, walk on their own, and bring forth their achievements. Thus, humanness does not solely lie either in the spoon as an object of culture or in the educator. It lies in the pupils' understanding of their own separation from educators, their ability to live independently, without everlasting guidance.

In this case, the question of the independence of students gained with the help of educators is no longer the aim made by the educator himself but becomes the ultimate goal that education should strive to lay out. Expanding the role of education, Evald Ilyenkov strives to show how education needs to redirect itself from being solely the accumulation of knowledge via memorization towards the cultivation of "the ability independently to solve tasks that require thinking in the proper and precise sense of the word" (Ilyenkov 2007, 16–17). The primary task of education, then, lies in realizing the independent process of acquiring the "intellectual culture" (ibid.) one is always surrounded with.

After the Last Class

However, Almborg's film reveals a more delicate link that is established between an educator and a student—an intimate link between Suvorov and Ilyenkov being the role model for the former. At the end of the documentary, the mournful break of such a fragile connection captured our attention. When the political shift had revealed its positivistic nature by taking off "its Marxist mask," (Talking Hands 2016, 42:54) the Zagorsk experiment ceased to be the focus for the exposed political regime. This left Suvorov and the lives of the Zagorsk's participants isolated, as their life turned out to be solely "his or her own way" (Talking Hands 2016, 43:18). At the end, when the experiment collapsed, Suvorov chose not to take sides, claiming to be "[his] own party" (Talking Hands 2016, 43:38).

The discontent with the political focus, the sense of abandonment, and the confinement in one's solitude—all of these puzzle pieces are recollected as Suvorov tells the viewers how "[he] solemnly miss[es] Ilyenkov" (Talking Hands 2016, 42:29). The exposure of the political regime showed that the shift of the world, as Ilyenkov wanted it to be, was no longer possible. The abandonment, due to the ceased focus on the project of the Zagorsk experiment, revealed that there was no more interest in the paradigm where the primary question was of understanding what comprises each of us as human. Finally, Suvorov is left alone since Ilyenkov's attempt—the attempt to show the underlying and material nature of every person's thinking and being—has left its (last) mark on Suvo-

rov's view of human (world) from which he could not refrain. To renounce it meant "renouncing [him]self" (Talking Hands 2016, 41:45), leaving Ilyenkov's influence no longer present in his surroundings but left solely to himself.

As we saw how Suvorov misses Ilyenkov, we also recognised how Suvorov had lost his guiding educator—the mentor that has brought forth a lens that allowed him to see an individual's thinking in a renewed light. This realization left us with crippling sadness that came with the undertones of despair. The feeling is reinforced the moment we see a shot of Ilyenkov's photograph in the frame, which stresses the importance of Ilyenkov's guidance for Suvorov. At first, we deeply sympathized with Suvorov's loss, taking such loss of an educator as something that should not have happened when the guide, as it seems, is needed the most. At the moment of one's loneliness, when the surrounding world seems to be shattering, should not educators remain with the ones they have influenced to the greatest extent as Ilyenkov influenced Suvorov?

The truth is that Ilyenkov went nowhere. Several times in the documentary, Suvorov mentions the importance of Ilyenkov in cultivating the conviction that deaf-blind children could, too, acquire talent. We see scenes of children creating statues made out of clay and playing chess with each other as clear representations of their developed skills. However, for Ilyenkov, this is only a stepping stone in the process of the formation of the minds of these deaf-blind children. Throughout the movie, there are numerous scenes which show the students go out on a trip and feel different monuments, statues, huts, and even a fireplace. The scenes signify their ability to discover the world on their own and that they are able to, without guidance, become familiar with complex and deeply historical objects. These young adults, who used to require help from the educator to use a spoon, were now able to interpret the world independently and discuss their observations with each other. Finally, they have become individual persons. This development is beautifully illustrated by the beach scene where a group of three students held each other's hands as they walked into the water but soon after, we see them freely swimming on their own with smiles plastered across their faces.

Ilyenkov cannot be directly found in these moments. We did not see Ilyenkov jogging alongside them across the sand or guiding their hands across the door and explaining every mold. Yet, it was exactly Ilyenkov's intention for the deaf-blind children to realize that they could reach a point in life where they could do everything on their own. In other words, Ilyenkov's disappearance was necessary for them to become independent humans. Following Vygotsky, Ilyenkov, too, deeply understood that "it is impossible to teach a child—or, indeed, an adult—anything, including the ability (skill) to think independently, without

adopting an attitude of the closest attention to his individuality" (Ilyenkov 2007, 16).

Ilyenkov will always be in the students. Suvorov deciding to "go his own way" (Talking Hands 2016, 43:25) and not follow any political parties may be contrary to Ilyenkov's political views, but certainly it is an internalization of Ilyenkov's teachings, as Ilyenkov "reject[ed] idolization (or as is also said, 'alienation') of any given institutionalized form of human activity" (Ilyenkov 1971, 13), the very situation Suvorov declined by his decision. Though Suvorov wishes that Ilyenkov was still there for them, it is clear that Ilyenkov never left at all. Suvorov, through his independent stance, comprehends his humanness. His longing for Ilyenkov to be around is merely the essence and desire of any human—the longing for social relations. Through Ilyenkov's words, "the old philosophy and pedagogy used to call such an attitude 'love'" (Ilyenkov 2007, 16).

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Albert Einstein: Causality. Lecture at the Marxist Workers School 1930 (Private Notes by Karl Korsch)

Translated with an introduction[1] *by Sascha Freyberg and Joost Kircz*

ABSTRACT: The article entails the translation of notes made by Karl Korsch in 1930 at a lecture given by Albert Einstein at the Marxist Workers School in Berlin. The event was announced as a working group discussion. Einstein spoke on the topic of causality which was of particular interest due to the developments in physics at the time as well as the problem of causality in historical materialism. The translation is accompanied by an introduction which provides context and discusses the more implicit problems addressed in Korsch's notes, in particular the council communist idea of workers education and the issue of complexity.

KEYWORDS: Karl Korsch, Albert Einstein, Marxist Workers School, Causality, Complexity, Historical Materialism, Science

I. INTRODUCTION

> *We have to create the formula and apply it in such a way that we do justice to what we observe. The lawfulness of events does not fall into our laps if we only look, but we must also create.*
>
> Albert Einstein (Lecture on Causality)

In this issue we publish the first English translation of the notes which Karl Korsch (1886–1961), Marxist philosopher and Communist politician of the Weimar period, took during a lecture by the physicist Albert Einstein (1879–1955) at the *Marxistische Arbeiterschule* Berlin (acronym: MASCH, Marxist workers school) in 1930 (Korsch 1996). By this time Einstein had been in Berlin for 16 years and already was world-famous. Furthermore, he was not only an important figure in physics but also as a public intellectual. Einstein supported the work of MASCH

1. With special thanks to Marcel van den Linden and Jarek Ervin for their help.

Korsch, Karl. [1930] 2024. "Albert Einstein: Causality. Lecture at the Marxist Workers School 1930 (Private Notes)." Translated with an introduction by Sascha Freyberg and Joost Kircz. *Marxism & Sciences* 3(1): 207–232. https://doi.org/10.56063/MS.2403.03111

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as a lecturer more than once. He was known for his left-leaning and pacifist opinions since the beginning of WWI, when he was one of the very few signatories of the pacifist appeal "Aufruf an die Europäer" (see Fölsing 1997, 346–350; cf. Dmitrieva 2024, 125–129).

Because of his scientific and political reputation Einstein was in 1918 invited as a mediator to the revolutionary students' council at Berlin University and made his way to the occupied Reichstag building, a mission he completed successfully together with his friends physicist Max Born and the Gestalt psychologist Max Wertheimer.[2]

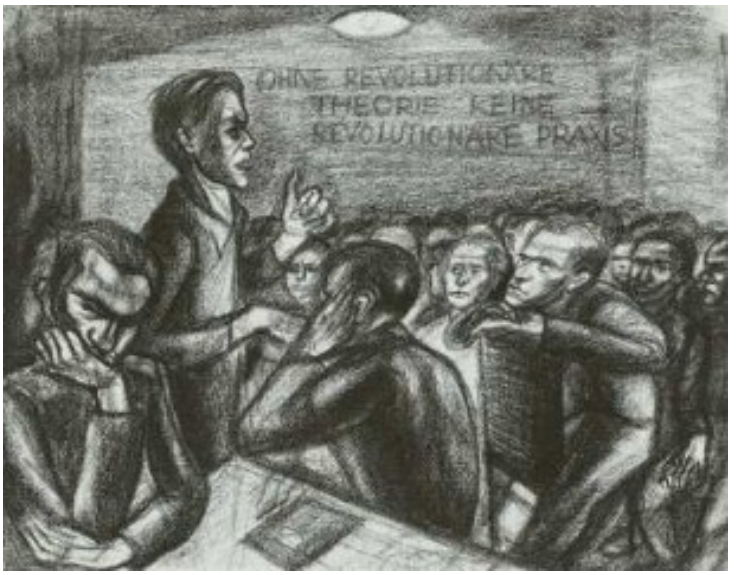

Fig. 1. Scene from a Workers School with a Lenin quote in the back. (Anonymous)

The interesting aspect of the translated text is first of all the notion that workers need to be informed by the latest discussions in the natural sciences. This is in line with the understanding that Marxism is scientific. After all, against the utopians, Marx and Engels argued that also emancipatory theory must be built on solid investigations; on how we arrived where we are now in society in order to forecast the best way into the future and develop political actions and organisation. In other

2. Einstein appealed to the students concerning academic freedom (Born 1971, 149–151); an issue which was close to his heart, as exemplified by his anger about the fascist attacks on the mathematician E.J. Gumbel, who just in time could escape Germany (Einstein 1954, 28). Gumbel also co-signed the 1932 appeal depicted in figure 5. Gumbel was the first to review the batch of Karl Marx's 'Mathematical manuscripts.'

words: can we define social-economical laws, as analogue to physical laws and act accordingly? And to what extent does progress in the sciences influence our political outlook (as continuation of the discussions Engels started, see Kircz 2012).

This background shows clearly in the discussion part of the text. Causality and the notion of historical necessity are linked here. Since developments in modern physics questioned the traditional understanding of natural law and causality Marxists were interested in the consequences for their understanding of science and if a way opened up to go beyond the impasse of fatalism versus voluntarism (with historical determinism on the one side and vanguardism on the other). Council communism, which also was closer to Korsch's political views, tried to avoid both fatalism and vanguardism. Instead of a party elite the emphasis was on *education* to make the emergence of political subjectivity and its agency possible. It thus may not be fortuitous that Korsch was interested in this particular lecture and it may explain why he reported the lecture almost verbatim.

In the following we will shortly discuss: 1. The Marxist workers school, 2. Karl Korsch, 3. Albert Einstein at the MASCH, 4. Korsch's report, and finally 5. some implications are made explicit.

1. Marxist workers school (*Marxistische Arbeiterschule* - MASCH)

Germany knew a long tradition of workers education (Olbrich and Siebert 2001); in particular in the social democratic tradition, which for a long time included socialist and communist strains. The question of the support for the war in 1914 was the reason for splits in that tradition, which until then was represented politically by the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). After the Russian revolution the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was founded at the turn of the year 1918/1919 (in continuation of the *Spartakusbund*). After the two leading party officials Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were murdered in 1919 and the ensuing "*Spartakusaufstand*" as well as other revolutionary attempts throughout Germany (*Novemberrevolution*, Bavarian Soviet republic etc.) were violently put down, the party merged with split-offs from SPD (USPD) and was known for some time as United Communist Party (VKPD) until the pro-Soviet fraction renamed the party back to KPD in 1925. Shortly after, the party began organising courses in their offices. The interest was so enormous that political active academics and party cadres decided to found "a school for the working people," the Marxist workers school (MASCH)

> …to create a generally accessible educational institution in which the working population of Berlin should be given the opportunity to learn the basic teachings of unadulterated Marxism and their application to all areas of proletarian life and struggle.[3]

The MASCH initiative was entirely in the spirit of the resolutions of the 5th congress of the Comintern (July 1924) which started heralding the idea of Socialism in one country and a united front from below. This meant that an emphasis was put on Marxist education of the working class and work in the trade unions in particular. The programme of the MASCH was different from the many (rather non-political) popular education efforts (*Volksbildungsbestrebungen*). Although KPD cadres, like Hermann Duncker, were involved in its organisation, the school had to finance itself by small fees and was open to everybody. Hence MASCH operated parallel to the stricter formal party cadre school. It included a very broad educational programme from history of the labour movement to natural science, and from type-writing to Marxism-Leninism (Gerhard-Sonnenberg 1976, Friedjung 1977, Schmidt [1931] 2016).

Fig. 2. Schickler-Haus near Alexanderplatz where the MASCH occupied rooms on the first floor.

3. "...eine allgemein zugängliche Lehrstätte zu schaffen, in welcher der werktätigen Bevölkerung Berlins die Möglichkeit gegeben werden sollte, die Grundlehren des unverfälschten Marxismus und ihre Anwendung auf alle Gebiete des proletarischen Lebens und Kampfes zu erlernen."

The format was so successful that soon branches in other places were opened. In the 1930s, schools existed in 30 different German cities, each an autonomous entity. Most of its participants were not organised in a party even though the programme was clearly shaped by a communist agenda. As course lecturers we find famous names such as: Bertolt Brecht (dramaturg and writer), Alfons Goldschmidt (economist, writer, and journalist), Walter Gropius (architect), Bruno Taut (architect, urban planner), John Heartfield (Helmut Herzfeld, visual artist and famous for his political photomontages), Egon Erwin Kisch (writer and journalist), Erwin Piscator (theatre director and producer), Jürgen Kuczynski (economist), Hanns Eisler (composer), Wilhelm und Annie Reich (psychoanalysts), Käte Duncker (feminist political activist), and Edwin Hoernie (Marxist agronomist) et al.

Next to the regular courses, working group discussions (*Arbeitsgemeinschaften*) and special public meetings were organized. The entrance fee to these special public meetings was 50 Pfennig for members of proletarian organisations, 20 Pfennig for unemployed and 1 Mark (100 Pfennig) for people who were not member of a proletarian organisation.

Many prominent academics were invited to give lectures. Thus Anna Seghers, famous writer and the wife of Johann-Lorenz Schmidt (leader of the largest branch of MASCH) convinced Albert Einstein to give a special public lecture on relatively theory in 1931.[4]

Unfortunately, we lack the programme of the school year 1930, but given the fact that the 1931 public lecture is well mentioned in the literature, we must conclude that the 1930 meeting on causality, Korsch attended, was not a big event, but took place in the frame of a working group meeting (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*)[5] in the usual rooms of the school, which at the time were located on the first floor of an office building in the centre of Berlin (Fig.2). After the Nazi take-over in 1933, which immediately was connected with purges against communists, MASCH had to close and most of its materials and archives were destroyed.

4. Anna Seghers is the pen-name of Anna Reiling, (1900–1983). In 1925 she married László Radványi, who worked under the name Johann Lorenz Schmidt (1900–1978), a Hungarian Communist, economist and academic philosopher who fled after the fall of the Hungarian council republic to Germany and became a central figure in the MASCH.

5. Also Korsch notes entail hints on working group discussion.

2. Korsch

At the time Karl Korsch (1886–1961) was very active in communist politics. He was born into an intellectual family and followed university studies to become a lawyer.[6] In his student years he became active in left wing circles. With a study grant he visited the UK and became a member of the Fabian Society, a very active ethical and politically reformist organization. In 1914 he returned to Germany to enter the army, but not because he was supporting the war, but to be, as he put it, with the masses. In 1917 he joined the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD), a left-wing split of the Social Democratic SPD, which then became part of the new Communist Party of Germany (KPD). He became a communist politician and was elected as a member of the parliament and subsequently Minister of Justice in the left-wing regional Thuringian government from October till end of November 1923, when the KPD representatives had to step down due to pressure from the central government. At Jena University Korsch was, at the same time, promoted to professor of legal theory, but was prevented from lecturing, since the new right-wing government in Thuringia forbid it and tried to expel him. Although he won the legal case to be reinstated (in 1925) his position at the university remained precarious. He concentrated much more on his political activities and got elected into the *Reichstag* in 1924. He also became editor in chief of the KPD journal *Die Internationale* and took part in the 5th Congress of the Comintern. As a reaction to the decline and ultimately defeat of the German revolution (*Novemberrevolution*), he put an emphasis on workers education as precondition for a successful workers movement. Due to his criticism of the rising Stalinist influence, he was expelled from the KPD in 1926.[7] At this time a circle formed around him in Berlin which included the physician and writer Alfred Döblin, Bertolt Brecht and writer Susanne Leonhard. In line with his workerism Korsch's position at the time came close to the ideas of the council communists currents in which (the Dutch astronomer) Anton Pannekoek and Otto Rühle (writer and economist) played an important role. The central issue here is the understanding of the fundamental notion that the worker's class has to emancipate itself, in combination with the council communist dogma that the flow of history is a given (as function of the class struggle), which cannot

6. For a good introduction to Korsch see: (Fred Halliday 2012). See also: Interview with Hedda Korsch 1972.
7. For his battles in the KPD and the discussions at the 5th Comintern congress see Halliday (2012).

be pushed, contrary to Lenin's idea of a vanguard party. In particular, this last point was one of the fundamental ideas attacked by Pannekoek and other council communists. This remained a constant issue not only of the KPD, but of socialist organisation and apparatus up until the Prague Spring.

When in 1933, Nazis started to imprison communists on a mass scale Korsch escaped Germany via Denmark and the UK to the USA and dedicated his time to writing and lecturing at different US universities. An appointment to a permanent post failed due to his political background.

Karl Korsch's most famous work is his *Marxismus und Philosophie* published in 1923 (Korsch [1923] 2012), the same year as Lukács' *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (Lukács [1923] 1988). Both are seen today as early exponents of so-called 'Western Marxism,' which was at the time far from the academic affair it came to be.[8]

> In fact, however, the first three important theoreticians of the post-I920 generation—the real originators of the whole pattern of Western Marxism—were all initially major political leaders within their own parties: Lukács, Korsch and Gramsci. Each, too, was a direct participant and organizer in the revolutionary mass upheavals of the time; the emergence of their theory cannot, indeed, be understood except against this political background (Anderson, 1976, 29).

In the same year Korsch took part in the *Erste Marxistische Arbeitswoche* (Jay 1973, 5); a workshop, which today is seen as providing the founding impetus for the famous Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. This all speaks of the liveliness of Marxist engagement and exchange in the 1920s (Fig. 3).

In the context of the document we publish, it is an interesting open question to what extent Korsch, at that moment, positioned himself in the context of the historical materialist discussion in the background of the lecture. Our guess is, that he was neither tempted by power and the vanguard party, nor naive enough to believe in the self-development of socialism as a strict historical determinsim, a belief which was which was aligned with mechanical determinism in scientific theories (*a la* Pannekoek).

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8. An interesting recent assessment of Korsch is given by the American historian Paul le Blanc on the occasion of the republication in 2016 of Korsch's 1938 book *Karl Marx* (Le Blanc 2017).

Fig.3. Participants of the Marxistische Arbeitswoche. Standing from left to right: Hede Massing, Friedrich Pollock, Eduard Ludwig Alexander, Konstantin Zetkin, Georg Lukács, Julian Gumperz, Richard Sorge, Karl Alexander (child), Felix Weil, unknown; sitting: Karl August Wittfogel, Rose Wittfogel, unknown, Christiane Sorge, Karl Korsch, Hedda Korsch, Käthe Weil, Margarete Lissauer, Bela Fogarasi, Gertrud Alexander.

Einstein is known for his defence of the ideas of determinism and causality vis-a-vis the hypothesis of indeterminism discussed in Quantum Mechanics, which Einstein dismissed as incompleteness of the theory. However, he acknowledged that theories can provide results without including complete causal explanations and in the talk not only presents his own views but reports about the new developments in physics, like the introduction of probabilistic and statistical explanations. That is to say, that he understood causality and determinism not in the mere unilinear mechanical sense of causality but in a heuristic sense providing the orientation for theory development. It obviously poses the question of determinism to which we will come back at the end of this essay.

3. Albert Einstein at the MASCH

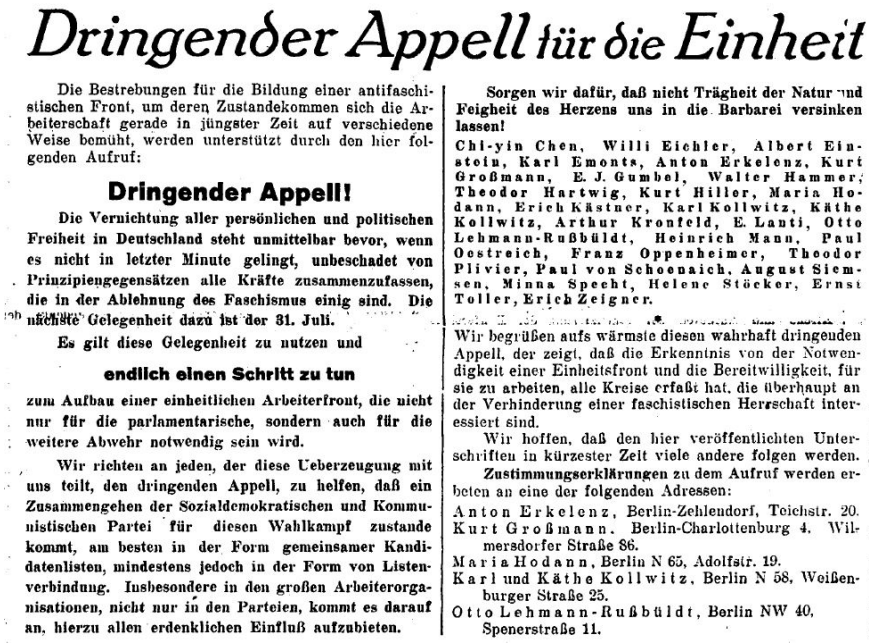
Most presumably Albert Einstein (1879–1955) belongs to the small community of highly known and venerated people in human history whose ideas are still subject to amazement and intense debate.[9] Today he still is seen as the quintessential mathematical natural scientist, who overthrew Newtonion cosmology. Be that as it may, in 1930 he certainly was an important public figure in Berlin.

Fig. 4. Einstein in Berlin 1932

As already mentioned Einstein was a humanist and pacifist and in his Marxist inspired anti-bureaucratic 'Why Socialism?' (originally in *Monthly Review*), he defends an ethical and social world against the perils of capitalism and private capital (Einstein 1954).[10] Einstein's democratic and socialist inspired thinking is a red line in his entire life. This induced permanent suspicion by governments (Grundmann 1998, Jerome 2002). A significant engagement today is almost forgotten: in 1932

9. On Albert Einstein there exist an enormous amount of papers and biographies which made the historian and philosopher of science Don Howard (2008) to call for a moratorium of Einstein's biographies. Consequently, apart from academic studies about his work and life, the poor man is exploited today for all kinds of lofty ventures, including merchandize.
10. Reprinted in the collection *Ideas and opinions by Albert Einstein,* Crown Publ. Inc. 1954, 151–158 (and many times in left-wing journals).

he was one of the signatories of a public appeal (Fig. 5) to the leaders of SPD and KPD to form an antifascist coalition—alas, to no avail. In the next elections the Nazis (NSDAP) won—SPD and KPD would have had enough seats to win in a coalition. The rest is history…



Dringender Appell für die Einheit

Die Bestrebungen für die Bildung einer antifaschistischen Front, um deren Zustandekommen sich die Arbeiterschaft gerade in jüngster Zeit auf verschiedene Weise bemüht, werden unterstützt durch den hier folgenden Aufruf:

Dringender Appell!

Die Vernichtung aller persönlichen und politischen Freiheit in Deutschland steht unmittelbar bevor, wenn es nicht in letzter Minute gelingt, unbeschadet von Prinzipiengegensätzen alle Kräfte zusammenzufassen, die in der Ablehnung des Faschismus einig sind. Die nächste Gelegenheit dazu ist der 31. Juli.

Es gilt diese Gelegenheit zu nutzen und

endlich einen Schritt zu tun

zum Aufbau einer einheitlichen Arbeiterfront, die nicht nur für die parlamentarische, sondern auch für die weitere Abwehr notwendig sein wird.

Wir richten an jeden, der diese Ueberzeugung mit uns teilt, den dringenden Appell, zu helfen, daß ein Zusammengehen der Sozialdemokratischen und Kommunistischen Partei für diesen Wahlkampf zustande kommt, am besten in der Form gemeinsamer Kandidatenlisten, mindestens jedoch in der Form von Listenverbindung. Insbesondere in den großen Arbeiterorganisationen, nicht nur in den Parteien, kommt es darauf an, hierzu allen erdenklichen Einfluß aufzubieten.

Sorgen wir dafür, daß nicht Trägheit der Natur und Feigheit des Herzens uns in die Barbarei versinken lassen!

Chi-yin Chen, Willi Eichler, Albert Einstein, Karl Emonts, Anton Erkelenz, Kurt Großmann, E. J. Gumbel, Walter Hammer, Theodor Hartwig, Kurt Hiller, Maria Hodann, Erich Kästner, Karl Kollwitz, Käthe Kollwitz, Arthur Kronfeld, E. Lanti, Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt, Heinrich Mann, Paul Oestreich, Franz Oppenheimer, Theodor Plivier, Paul von Schoenaich, August Siemsen, Minna Specht, Helene Stöcker, Ernst Toller, Erich Zeigner.

Wir begrüßen aufs wärmste diesen wahrhaft dringenden Appell, der zeigt, daß die Erkenntnis von der Notwendigkeit einer Einheitsfront und die Bereitwilligkeit, für sie zu arbeiten, alle Kreise erfaßt hat, die überhaupt an der Verhinderung einer faschistischen Herrschaft interessiert sind.

Wir hoffen, daß den hier veröffentlichten Unterschriften in kürzester Zeit viele andere folgen werden.

Zustimmungserklärungen zu dem Aufruf werden erbeten an eine der folgenden Adressen:

Anton Erkelenz, Berlin-Zehlendorf, Teichstr. 20.
Kurt Großmann, Berlin-Charlottenburg 4, Wilmersdorfer Straße 86.
Maria Hodann, Berlin N 65, Adolfstr. 19.
Karl und Käthe Kollwitz, Berlin N 58, Weißenburger Straße 25.
Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt, Berlin NW 40, Spenerstraße 11.

Fig. 5. Dringender Appell (urgent appeal) to the party leaders of SPD and KPD to form an antifascist front as published in the journal "Der Funke," 25th June 1932. Other versions of this appeal were published as posters and in other journals and included a special appeal to mental labour (Geistesarbeiter) to join the fight.

The engagement for the MASCH clearly fits with Einstein's principles. For Einstein such engagement seemed to be just the normal thing to do. As far as we know there is no special mentioning of Einstein's lectures for the MASCH in the vast literature on him. Korsch notes Einstein's remark at the beginning of the meeting: 'No written report should be published about this.' So, it clearly was not meant as an authoritative talk.

On 28 October 1931, Einstein gave another lecture for MASCH: "What the workers must know about the theory of relativity," in a loaded auditorium of a community school in the north of Berlin.[11]

In physics, the principle of relativity is the requirement that the equations describing the laws of physics have the same form in all admissible frames of reference. That is to say that a physical 'reality' is independent of the way it is described. It is an invariant whilst the descriptions are relative. Einstein's lecture was about his relativity theory, which knows two versions: The special theory which integrates Newtonian mechanics and electro-magnetism. In this theory we still deal with three space and one time dimension, in a (flat) Euclidean geometry. A big difference with Newtonian mechanics is that it postulates the finite velocity of light *c* in empty space, as a universal constant for all types of interactions (communications). The General Theory was an attempt to also integrate gravity into the theory and makes gravity also "relative," henceforward to integrate all known "forces" in nature in, what is now called, "a theory of everything" (ToE). However this failed and the general theory is technically speaking less relative than the special one, but essentially a theory of gravity. In this gravity theory we don't work anymore with the old 3+1 dimensions, but now with an integrated space-time system of 4 dimensions that exist in a curved, so-called semi-Riemannian, geometry. That is to say the mathematical model employs a certain novel geometry which describes our experience.

Obviously for normal mortals this geometrical reasoning is not easy to comprehend and in popular visualisations, the analogue of a trampoline is made, where we can illustrate that the curvature of the trampoline is a function of the weight of an object on it, like the notion that matter curves space-time. However, our world we live in is not a mathematical world. Model and reality are two different concepts.

4. Korsch's notes

Einstein's lecture on causality is certainly important as this was one of his main concerns about Quantum Mechanics. In this theory we do not

11. According to Gabriele Gerhard-Sonnenberg (1976), who quotes an article: "Einstein in der MASCH" in *Wochenpost* Volume 21, 30 August 1974, Nr. 36. Also Seghers is quoted as: "In the last days of the Weimar Republic, I went to a place near Caputh, a lake of Berlin, to ask Einstein to give a lecture at the MASCH. My husband, the head of the school, had asked me to do so." Albert Einstein spent in the years 1929–32 most of the year in his summer house in Caputh, a small village about 6 km south from Potsdam, idyllically situated directly on the Schwielowsee. The city of Berlin had given the property to Einstein as a present. It now hosts a small museum.

deal with "real" objects such as in classical mechanics, but mathematical entities such as the famous Schrödinger wave function. In Quantum Mechanics we deal with "states" of a "system" in N-dimensional vector space (aka Hilbert space). In this "picture" the wave function is spread out in a many dimensional "flat," Eucledian, space and hence an attribute (e.g. spin, polarisation, place of a particle) has no firm value. Only by measuring with a classical mechanical apparatus, out of the many possibilities a value is detected. This is the so-called collapse of the wave function. The hegemonic interpretation is that we can only speak about probabilities of a measurable value. This understanding induces an ever growing literature on the question if we have to drop causality from physics, and consequently from whatever. Einstein's biographer and successor as professor in Prague, the experimental positivist of the Vienna school Philipp Frank published his influential *The Law of Causality and its Limits* in 1932 (Frank 1932; 1977).

Einstein was vehemently opposed to the idea that Quantum Mechanics was an all-compassing final theory (as was the opinion of Niels Bohr and his school) and throughout his life he insisted that, although the theory works splendidly, it was clearly unfinished and incomplete. This remains also an issue in the present discussions on the possible integration of Gravity and Quantum Mechanics (Quantum Gravity).
Interestingly, Korsch does not mention in his notes the basic issues of quantum "uncertainty" and its probabilistic essence. We don't know how complete his notes are, but he seemed to have followed the argument closely. Let us see what Korsch emphasises.

Einstein (according to Korsch's notes) stresses that we have determinist laws which reveal themselves in repetitive experiences and henceforward are the data for a theory that, given causality is expressed in deterministic laws, allows us to make predictions. Einstein also stresses that basic notions are human made:

> Nature must have the incomprehensible quality of being comprehensible. It must somehow be such that it can be captured and made comprehensible by our thoughts.

And:

> In contrast to a few decades ago, causality or lawfulness or determinism in nature was not a problem at all. […] But today we can say that the deeper we penetrate into nature, the more enormous its riddles pile up before us.

Einstein then continues with some examples where mono-causal processes don't work (e.g. Brownian motion)[12] and we have to call in

> …statistical laws that can be derived with rigour from the previous discussed laws of nature. This is a sublimation of the concept of causality. We still believe in the strict causality or deterministic structure.

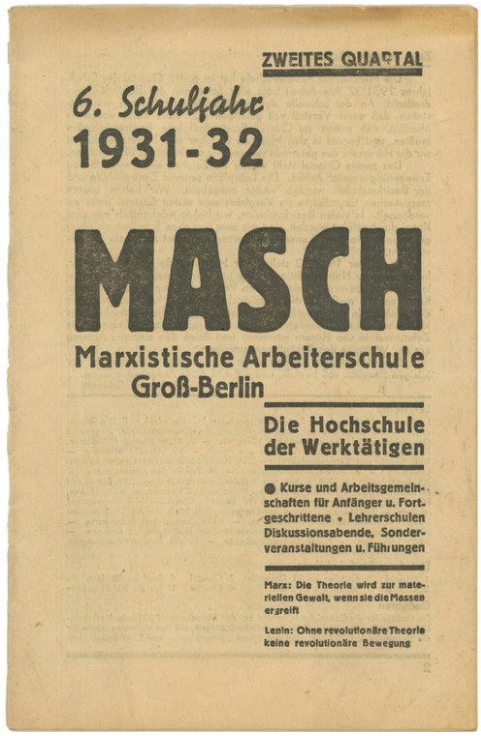


Fig. 6. Programme for the 1931–32 school year announcing "courses and working groups for beginners and advanced learners, teachers' schooling, discussion evenings, special events and guided tours." Below are two quotes by Marx ("Theory will become a material force, if it reaches the masses") and Lenin ("Without revolutionary theory, no revolutionary movement").

Einstein mentions quantum mechanical examples such as radioactivity "where it has not yet been possible to devise a strictly deterministic mechanism that would make this thinks comprehensible to us." Einstein's more philosophical views are expressed by the following quote:

12. Obviously the meeting was held in German and hence Korsch in his notes talks about "Braunian" motion, which we corrected in the translation. Brownian motion (named after the botanist Robert Brown) is one of the subjects Einstein became famous for and proving the existence of atoms.

> It would be so strange, a nature that has statistical but not deterministic laws. The human mind's hunger for beauty speaks in favour for determinism, and so far it has been shown that, in the end, the beautiful is also the truth.

It is interesting to note that Einstein in his lecture stresses the 'subjective' element in scientific theory (see our epigraph above). It is not sufficient to just observe, we also act in the process, at least via our tools of understanding. This is in correspondence with a Lenin quote which was put on the covers of the MASCH programs: *Ohne revolutionäre Theorie, keine revolutionäre Bewegung* ("Without revolutionary theory, no revolutionary movement," see Fig. 1 and 6).

The theoretical emphasis on the 'subjective element' in theory and science Einstein might have picked up in his exchange with philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), who had his background in Marburg Neo-Kantianism and wrote one of the earliest philosophical books on the theory of relativity (1921), which Einstein read and commented on. Usually Einstein preferred more empiricist presentations, like those of philosopher Moritz Schlick (1882–1936), who later became a professor at Vienna University and the instigator of the Vienna Cirlce.[13]

5. Some implications

As explained above, in physics we still have the pertinent tension that two excellently working theories: Gravity (General Relativity Theory) and Quantum Mechanics don't match. In Gravity theory we still have a classical deterministic mechanical outlook, despite the fact that the model that describes the experimental results (the reality we experience) is mounted in a not simple pictorial geometry. The question thus raised is: do we "live" in a curved space or is the theory, expressed in curved space, the best we have? This is in line with Einstein's comment on reality and poetry in the talk about causality. In Quantum Mechanics the situation is even more abstract, as the theory is completely strange to us—but works. No hyped AI generator will give the answer. Nobel laureate Richard Feynman supposedly said: "If you think you understand quantum mechanics, you don't understand quantum mechanics."

13. Schlick and Einstein cultivated a theoretical exchange as can be seen in there correspondence (Schlick-Einstein-Briefwechsel 2022). The discussion on Einstein's perceived positivism and his discussions with the logical empiricists is an enduring point of discussion. A nice overview is given by (Giovanelli 2013).

Obviously, in our everyday world nobody cares, as long as it works somehow. But Marxism, including its long and often painful history, teaches us to dig deeper and try to understand reasons as well as causes. We have to ask 'why' next to the 'how.' Laws are human made within the boundary conditions of actual knowledge. And this is as important in science as in politics. Marx already was fighting against the so-called Iron Law of Wages, and this meant that he demanded a more complex understanding. So we should not be afraid of complexity. There are always reasons and/or causes involved. Complexity should not become an argument for the prevention of intervention and can also be understood in a sufficient way.

We can avoid mono-causal and unilinear explanations without giving up on explainability altogether, because modern science, and particularly Gravity theory, teaches us that the world as we know her is not a linear object, but a complex and concrete 'system' of mutually reciprocal interactions (which is the meaning of the Marxists' insistence on the dialectic). Although, we can describe complicated (non-linear) interactions in first (and often sufficient) approximations as being linear, for "All Practical Purposes," this is only the beginning of the journey of human understanding of the world. As Einstein emphasized—in perfect alignment with Marx—theory development is not only inductive but demands vision and phantasy to even be able to imagine better explanations—or a better world.

II. TRANSLATION

Albert Einstein: Causality. Lecture at the Marxist Workers School 1930 (private notes by Karl Korsch)

Introduction

Einstein explains that he wants to tell the audience something about the laws of nature, as if we had never heard of them before. He wanted to talk about certain difficulties inherent in the concept. No written report should be published about this:

We have all been taught that everything in nature is lawful, that there is nothing problematic about it. For example, a stone falls downwards. This process is repeatable the same. It is similar with the clock.

You only need to re-establish an initial state in the same way, then the same sequence will result. Such experiences give rise to the idea that perhaps everything else that happens in the world could follow the same pattern as a clock. This idea already emerged in ancient Greece with a very poor and primitive knowledge of the course of all natural

processes. The Greek philosophers were convinced of the strict regularity of the course of events. It is part of this idea that this process occurs according to laws that we can find. This is what is meant by causality.

Collaborative dialogue
Einstein invites listeners to ask questions without feeling embarrassed. Before God, everything is equally clever and equally stupid.

The first listener objects that the clockwork does not run at a uniform speed, but starts with a higher initial speed. —Einstein replies: "The process proceeds in the same way every time, even if the individual parts of the process do not always remain the same."

Second listener asks about the validity of causality for animate nature. —Einstein replies that he will answer this question later.

Third listener asks whether man is a machine. —Einstein says that he will answer this question now.

Continuation of the lecture
If we can clearly see the regularity of processes in simple cases, why did it take such a high level of development for people to come to this realisation? The reason is easy to see. I can say what I want, turn my head as I like, where is the law?

The phenomenon of being able to act as one wishes, is naturally at the centre of human interest. Even more so than the running of the clock and the falling of the stone. Prehistoric humans were therefore originally more inclined to organise the world according to the scheme of volitional acts rather than causality. For example, they related lightning, death and all the important processes associated with their hope and fear to an unknown will. This was the so-called animistic view of events.

How should we respond to this question? The resigned answer is: nothing can be proven. For what would we have to have achieved in order to be able to say with justification, without unauthorised presuppositions? The world is causal. We would have to be able to characterise the initial conditions of all things and the exact nature of the sequence, and we would have to have established all this. Then we would have God's view. We are ridiculously far from that.

So with causality we express a *belief*, but never a *knowledge*. It is an idea that we entrust ourselves to if we want to understand the connection between natural processes. Essentially, however, those who have seriously studied nature are completely convinced of this kind of causality or determinism. According to this, for example, whether I say A or B is also causally determined.

Even with these opaque, seemingly internal entities, everything depends on previous conditions, like a clockwork. Except that we have no hope of seeing through it as deeply as we do with clockwork. We do not have such a deep insight into the states of the brain, for example, that

we could determine in advance with a kind of calculation what the individual creature will do.

We are also familiar with such structures where we are more easily convinced that everything proceeds according to certain laws, and yet we are unable to predict anything. For example, the course of the weather over several months, the processes in the atmosphere. Natural scientists know and understand these processes, but the diversity of interactions between the various factors is too great to allow predictions to be made. This is simply due to the complexity of the process. In the same way, the natural scientist thinks, it will be even more so with the volitional acts of living creatures.

So the natural scientist is a determinist. But for him this is more a belief than knowledge. Without this belief it would have been impossible to muster the energy to investigate those laws in nature that have been more or less clearly recognised up to now.

This deterministic view imagines the causal connection in nature as perfect and seamless—but not as a truth per se, but as a belief, or as a proposition, which is used to give us the courage to search for more subtle laws.

A new question

A listener asks: How is man capable of knowing? —Einstein answers: We can't say.

The same listener goes on to ask whether there are such limits to knowledge that the possibility of transcending them does not lie within man. —Einstein replies that he wants to clarify this question when discussing a complex that is in itself accessible to knowledge:

The investigation of the laws according to which the stars move appears to be a task that obviously falls into two parts. We can 1. determine by measurement, e.g., the distance of the Earth from the sun and its motion, its curve, speed, etc. We can determine all these facts. But there is a second task: 2. to determine the general rule according to which this movement takes place, so general that it can also be applied to other stars. Guessing this law is not simply a matter of observation.

Natural scientists have determined the true orbit of the Earth by the astute use of observations of planets and fixed stars. We will not go into this in detail now. We will assume that it is approximately determined by observation. Kepler then came up with the following theorem: This orbit has the shape of an ellipse. No matter how long he looked at it, he could not have found the law of this orbit. You have to know this kind of curve, which is called an ellipse, in advance by thinking about it. Then you can see whether this object, i.e. the movement of the Earth, corresponds to this kind of mentally determined curve. This can then be found by numerical comparison.

So we see that the formulation of laws is something that does not come directly from experience, but only through the shaping of the mental expression material with which one tries to express what one really observes.

Einstein explains his view by comparing science with poetry. He says: "You hear a bird singing, see the blue sky and a tree with a bird. But you have to make the poem yourself. —It is the same in science: we have to create the formula and apply it in such a way that we do justice to what we observe. The lawfulness of events does not fall into our laps if we only look; we must also create."

Working group dialogue

A listener asks about the difference between psychological and natural lawfulness and in turn asserts the existence of a special psychological lawfulness which entitles the poet, for example, to say "If it is madness, it has method." —Einstein replies: "We are not talking now about the processes that go on inside us. We don't want to talk about psychology."

Another listener repeats the question of how far we can go in determining the laws of nature. —Einstein: "No one can answer that question. (Just as little as the other question of how far we can go in designing machines to produce the necessities of life)."[14]

A listener asks about the meaning that Einstein associates with the word belief. —Einstein: "Belief in the laws of nature is not a mere belief, because that would be a foolish belief."

We have learnt to formulate a relatively large and subtle number of relationships in such a way that we can predict with certainty how things will happen. For example, the orbit of the Earth and Mars. So it is not an empty belief.

There is a certain connection of phenomena that are sufficiently simple that we can penetrate to exact prophecies about what will happen. But the vast amount of events that surround us are not sufficiently clear to us to be able to say that we can make precise statements about what will happen. That is where faith comes in, where our solid knowledge stops.

Our view that it would be possible, in principle, to grasp the rest—in such a way that we would be able to predict the future if the present were known—is a belief, a belief in the complete causality of events. It is as much a belief as the expectation that we would be able to fly was a belief a hundred years ago.

A listener suggests that Einstein should now finish his lecture without interrupting it with questions. —Einstein declares this to be reasonable.

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14. I'm not sure whether this sentence was said by Einstein or whether I intentionally added it for possible discussion. KK.

Coherent lecture

From what has been said so far, we can already see that the establishment of the laws of nature is not something as purely empirical as it appears to be. For in order to express laws, one needs certain thoughts. They do not come to us from nature. Instead, we must somehow create them ourselves, even if nature suggests that we form these thoughts. For example, how does a body fall? Do we need the concept of time, length, number?

Where do we get the concept of number, for example? There may well have been some needs in practical life that made the use of numbers expedient for us in order to find our way around better. But the need does not provide the number. The number has to be invented. A human-subjective element is therefore unavoidable here.

Nature does not speak its laws into our ears, no matter how closely we observe them. The mental invention can only be compared retrospectively with what we perceive. Purely empirical research into nature—without a speculative element that forms thoughts independently—is impossible. Such a law is therefore not only a reproduction of our sensory experience, but also a mental formulation shaped by us. And yet it is not man who makes the laws of nature, but man who must grope around in nature with his thoughts and mental forms until he succeeds in expressing with his self-created language what he observes in nature.

From here we can go back to the original question: If we ourselves fabricate the thoughts and concepts with which we want to master nature, how can we still speak of the laws of nature? After all, it is our lawfulness that is carried into nature!

But that's not how it is. For nature would be very well conceivable in such a way that we could not establish anything that is true in nature with any intellectual methods or methods of measurement. Nature must have the incomprehensible quality of being comprehensible. It must somehow be such that it can be captured and made comprehensible by our thoughts.

Let us imagine that the Earth was constantly changing the way it moves and that we could not account for this change, that the change was irregular, then no herb would grow to maintain the laws of nature. We would then have to resort to completely uncontrollable imaginings in order to maintain the idea of causality. So it makes good sense to say that nature is lawful, because otherwise our efforts at prediction could never lead to a favourable result.

Now we need to say a little about the approximate results that have been achieved with regard to the laws of nature. With the help of the mathematical method, the course of the stars can be predicted with great certainty and accuracy. We can also say something about the transport of heat, the way chemical reactions take place, and

mechanical and electrical processes. Today's radio technology is also based on considerations that are based on laws that we recognise clearly and completely.

In contrast, until a few decades ago, causality or lawfulness or determinism in nature was not a problem at all. People were convinced that nature was such that its laws could be fully understood in principle. But today we can say that the deeper we penetrate into nature, the more enormous its riddle piles up before us. I would like to point out the difficulties that arise here step by step:

I have already noted at the outset that one difficulty consists in the apparently immense complexity of certain natural objects, which prevents us from fully grasping the causal becoming in the area in question. For example, in the case of living beings or processes in the atmosphere.

There are other cases, however, which belong to the realm of the apparently quite simple, where similarly great difficulties pile up which are of much more immediate interest from the point of view of the general causal apprehension of things—though these processes appear quite insignificant to everyday life.

I will relate the following: In the attempt to conceptualise the phenomena of heat in causal terms, the view has been arrived at that the smallest parts of bodies, the molecules, perform irregular movements, the more violent the higher the temperature. These movements of the smallest particles are completely irregular. For example, the pressure of the gas in a vessel on the wall of the vessel consists of the molecules bouncing and flying back against the wall. This theoretical concept has now been used to calculate law-like relationships.

With this theory, we can already see a new fundamental difficulty for our question of causality, which we did not think of at first. At the beginning we spoke of a clock. It was wound up. Now the system was in a certain state, and the process was absolutely necessarily determined. However, this is only a very crude idea. In reality, there is always a variable temperature in space, there are certain air currents, the Earth's magnetic field always has a slightly different value where there is electricity, etc. All this also influences the processes in the system.

Just like the processes that constitute the clock; changes the wood, the material parts, etc. But in the case of the clock, we can understand the matter without these complications. It is different with the gas: here we do not need to know how the individual molecules fly through space—if it is true at all; it is enough to perceive the pressure on the vessel wall. But when we talk like this, we have taken a different position than we did at the beginning. We never know exactly what state the individual molecules are in. If we nevertheless calculate law-abiding events, then causality takes on a somewhat different character. The preconditions according to which we carry out our calculations are indeed strictly

lawful. But the strict sequence of cause and effect as such eludes our experience.

After all, that wouldn't be so bad. There are phenomena that are very easy to observe, which show us this character of the construction of the world very directly: For example, if we place a small grain with a diameter of ½ 1,000 mm in a drop of water under the microscope, we can see that this grain does not stand still, but makes irregular zigzag movements. It moves about 2/1000 mm to the right or left, which can still be seen very clearly under the microscope. The movement is absolutely irregular. And if you had seen nothing in the world but that, you would say the other way round that there is nothing to do with causality.

But someone has calculated before all observation that it should be like this, such an irregular dance. And if I observe a hundred times how much to the right and left the particle has travelled in a second and I take the average, then you can calculate from the theory how large these paths must be on average—depending on the fluidity and the size of the particle, but regardless of whether it is heavy or light. Such *statistical laws* can be derived with rigour from the previously discussed laws of nature.

This is only a sublimation of the concept of causality. We still believe in the strict causality or determinacy of nature. But we are convinced that the actual structure of natural objects is such that we can never observe the state of an entity at a given time precisely enough to determine unambiguously what will happen next.

We can be glad that such phenomena were not the first to come to our attention, otherwise we would never have had the courage to establish a principle of causality as a maxim of research.

This example has not yet caused any particular revolution in the physicists' view of nature. For we need not be upset by the fact that in a particular individual case, we cannot observe the state of a physical thing so precisely. It is enough that we can calculate what is really to be observed, the statistical laws of becoming and happening, on the basis of a law which is itself a completely causal law—of the kind of laws we have in astronomy, that is, of a strictly deterministic structure.

Finally, I would like to say that physics is currently in a third phase, where at least a large number of physicists no longer believe in strict causality or determinism. Imagine if, before we had established the laws of molecular motion from other phenomena, we had discovered this Brownian motion of particles in water. Then we would have said: there is complete lawlessness for this particle.

The law now says: If I observe the particle a hundred times, it will make certain movements on average. It is therefore a *statistical law*.

Until recently, it was generally believed that this was only due to the limits of our ability to observe. But physics is currently faced with

phenomena, so-called quantum phenomena, where it has not yet been possible to devise a strictly deterministic mechanism that would make these things comprehensible to us. I would like to mention a few such phenomena which we have not yet been able to master with a deterministic theory:

1. radioactive processes: A lot of radium shoots out particles. The individual atoms of radium burst and certain fractions, which are helium atoms, are thrown out with great vigour. When they hit a plate with a phosphorescent coating, we see a flash of light on the plate. So here we have a direct manifestation of individual molecular processes.

The first question is now: How do these atoms decay? The first thought was that there are some external influences, rays or something like that, that do this. But it turned out that there is absolutely nothing in the world that we can blame for this. It is the substance's own law to disintegrate or as we can also say, to "die." So what is the manner in which this substance decays? If we were to carry out the same experiment with human beings, we would find that relatively few die at first; when they get old, they die like flies. The death rate would therefore depend on the age of the substance.

In reality, it has been shown that there is no ageing in radium. If we first have the ratio 1:100 in the unit of time, then later we have the same ratio again, 1:100. It has not yet been possible to devise a reasonably reasonable causal theory for such a process. Even if one would always assume that the radium's time of existence must express itself in its inner nature, as an ageing weakness, it has not been possible to devise a mechanism for this. —This is also by no means an isolated case. Rather, this behaviour is quite general in molecular processes. Let me give you a second example: If you use short-wavelength light (something beyond the visibility at the blue end of the spectrum) on a metal plate in a vacuum, so-called electrons emerge, which can be observed using suitable means. In weak light, these are only very few electrons. The surface consists of an enormous number of atoms, all of which are irradiated, but only here and there does an electron emerge from an atom.—This statistical behaviour, too, has never been explained by a deterministic picture.

A large number of today's theoretical physicists are convinced that there is no strict determinism at all in nature, but that the very last laws are to a certain extent statistical laws—as with Brownian motion. According to this, even the most precise observation of the radioactive atom would not reveal when it would decay, but only a law of probability would apply, which does not allow any further analysis. These physicists therefore believe that the deterministic law, which gross experience so conspicuously presents to us, is only an effect of large masses

and numbers, i.e. something similar to the laws of mortality according to the statistical table.

It must be admitted that the difficulties that stand in the way of establishing ultimate deterministic laws are very great. It is also possible to consider them fundamentally insurmountable.

Personally, however, I openly admit that I do not share this pessimism. It would be something so strange, a nature that had statistical but not deterministic laws. The human mind's hunger for beauty speaks in favour of determinism, and so far it has been shown that, in the end, the beautiful is also the truth.

Questions and answers

A listener asks: Where do the mathematical forms of our thinking come from? —Einstein: A very sensible question! Psychologically speaking, most of the thoughts that are conceived, especially the elementary ones, are probably somehow suggested by external experiences. Numbers, for example, or figures such as the ellipse, which arises quite naturally when a string is used to describe the largest closed circle around two fixed points marked with nails. But we still need to have the concept of a line. Strictly speaking, there are no ellipses in nature, only irregular, similar curves. Nevertheless, for the concepts of geometry, it is still easy in this way to determine the experience that led us to form these concepts.

However, there are primitive peoples who, for example, do not have the concept of the number 2. For them, "two nuts" is something different from "two apples." Generally speaking, there is always something in the formation of our concepts that is not forced on us by external experiences, but that comes from us. So there really is something creative in these concepts. And without these concepts we are not able to express anything.

The same listener asks whether this view does not amount to dualism. —Einstein: I wouldn't call it dualism. Poetic language and the things sung about is not dualism either. After all, it is true that if the conceptual tools, i.e. the terms with which we represent a certain series of experienced things, are chosen differently, then the regularity, i.e. the poem, can look quite different. It is therefore possible for two reasonable theories to be quite different and yet both correct in a certain sense.

Another listener asks why there is only one mathematics? —Einstein: It is multifaceted. There are different geometries, etc.

Another listener makes lengthy remarks about whether mathematics in all its forms is really metaphysical and cannot be justified in any way. As a Marxist, he is used to linking all his thinking to historical events. And if he took Marx as the basis for his logical views, Marx would explain that all ideological events, including mathematics, are dependent on the mode of production. He therefore believed that

mathematics could only have its origin in productive actions and was therefore just as real as these human actions. In his opinion, this would establish the link between mathematics and the practice of life. —Einstein: In my opinion, the points of view I have discussed and the Marxist view are by no means mutually exclusive. For me, the Marxist view is nothing other than the scientific, psychological, causal view of everything that humans do as a lawful life process. My question today, however, was directed at something else. I asked whether what can be found in the concepts can also be found in the experiences to which the concept refers. In this sense, I said that mathematics is logically independent of the experiences it expresses. *Psychologically* it is different, but that is not what I was talking about. The Marxist view now seems to me to be specifically not only a causal one, but one in which *external causes* are pushed to the fore as the essential ones. That seems to me to be a certain one-sidedness. The psychological parts of the causal complex, man, his tradition, etc., will have to be ascribed an influence equivalent to that of external causes. The question of the distinction between the two sets of causes seems to me to be like the famous question of the scholastics about the priority of hen or egg. The Marxists, however, give the external causes an exaggerated importance. For example, the Marxist will gladly say that the invention of machines is a consequence of certain external circumstances, e.g. the thin population of a country, the shortage of labour, etc. But the reverse is also true.[15] Economic conditions are also created by certain mental dispositions. The term "interaction" is not a solution here either. The question is what weight is given to the individual factors.

A listener asks whether Einstein believes that there are still voluntary actions? —Einstein: The term "voluntary" does not belong to the domain of a causal view of the world. The determinist calls *will* the feeling a person has when something happens to him. Will as a cause does not occur for him.

After a leading member of the MASCH has argued that the lawfulness of the development of human society certainly has the character of a statistical lawfulness and that there is therefore no reason to doubt causality as the basis of communist politics from the recent development of natural science, Einstein also agrees with this assertion and says: "These refinements have nothing at all to say about the legal necessity of human events. This is quite independent of whether the ultimate laws of nature are statistical or strictly causal in character."

15. Marx e.g. says the opposite in "Capital" about machine and population density. Note by K.K.

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Biographies

Sascha Freyberg is a visiting fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin and member of the Max Planck Partner Group "The Water City: The Political Epistemology of Hydrogeological Praxis." He is also an editor of the book series "Verum Factum: Studies and Sources on Political Epistemology" and with *Marxism & Sciences*.

Joost Kircz has a PhD in molecular physics and studied and worked at the Universities of Amsterdam and Utrecht in The Netherlands. After his academic carrier he started working for the international science publisher North-Holland /Elsevier. Among his roles were Publisher of the renowned physics list and researcher in digital publishing. Hereafter he started his own research company in digital knowledge transfer: Kircz Research Amsterdam. From 2006-2014 he was a part time research professor/ program leader on electronic publishing at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. As from his early student years, as part of the national leadership of the student movement of 1968/9, he is involved in socialist politics and activism. He was a board member of the International Institute for Research and Education (1982-2019), founded by the Marxists economist Ernest Mandel: www.iire.org. At present he is in the board of the Dutch Stichting Socialistisch Onderzoekscollectief / Socialist Research Collective Foundation: Socialism in the 21st century. www.soc21.nl. He was chairman of the parliamentary fraction of the local radical party Amsterdam Anders (Different Amsterdam), in the central Amsterdam borough 2004-2010. His present interests are mainly in the interplay of Marxism and Science, and the study into what extent the contemporary sciences can deepen the understanding and development of so-called scientific socialism, set out by Marx & Engels, now more than a century ago. His publications can be found on the website www.kra.nl

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure a clear, standard format for submissions. Please follow all guidelines as closely as possible.

Marxism & Sciences is an open access journal. Publication of articles/essays and access to accepted and published material is free. The journal does not charge any article/essay submission, processing or publication fees. We have no budget for proof-readers or type-setters. These tasks are therefore the responsibility of the authors.

The basic descriptions and principles about the content of submissions are formally presented here. However, the priority of the journal is to achieve its aims collectively in collaboration with editors, editorial and advisory boards, authors and readers.

Marxism & Sciences accepts submissions only on the condition of contributing to Marxist conception of totality, materialist conception of history and/or materialist dialectics. Submissions satisfying this condition could be on any topic from any branch of sciences. The journal especially promotes submissions which are written collaboratively by more than one author from different and/or remote disciplines, or cover more than one discipline if written by a single author.

Marxism & Sciences welcomes any contribution that falls within the domain of its aims and scope. However, the journal especially encourages submissions with following four qualifications:

- *Class struggles:* Studies covering class struggles in nature, culture, and/or society.
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- *Gender equality:* Studies by non-male authors and/or from Marxist and socialist feminist perspective.
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Each issue of the journal is published based on a specific topic announced publicly at the web page through the Call for Papers (CFP). Submissions on other topics are also welcome.

Marxism & Sciences welcomes a wide spectrum of academic writing styles from articles at one end to essays at the other. *Marxism & Sciences* also welcomes cultural works in fields of arts or traditional and popular culture particularly those related to the specific topic of each issue.

Below are the types of submissions accepted by *Marxism & Sciences*:

- **Articles** (5000-10000 words): Articles are original scholarly manuscripts that contribute to any field of research.
- **Essays** (5000-1000 words): Essays are original contributions with more personal, intuitive and introspective style and do not necessarily have to build on a comprehensive literature review and/or extensive research, unlike scholarly articles. Essays are expected to include critical reflections or political interventions into the past or actual natural/cultural/social issues and/or old or ongoing scholarly and intellectual discussions.
- **Review articles** (6000-12000 words)**:** Critical review of the state-of-art of any topic or any discipline(s).
- **Cultural works** (max. 1200 words of texts or max. 1 GB of audio/visual material): Poem, play, story, music, short film, documentary, video, photographs, graphics design, painting, sculpture etc.
- **Communication** (1500-7000 words): Responses to previously published articles/essays or cultural works in the journal, or actual disciplinary discussions on Marxism, or brief political reviews from Marxist perspectives, or reports about planned or ongoing Marxist projects by scholars and/or activists. This category is intended to foster discussion, exchange, coordinate collaborations and international cooperation, Intention, standpoint, context, addressees and aims should become clear from the texts. Connections to knowledge, research and development are very welcome. Submissions under this category are not peer-reviewed but evaluated by the editors.
- **Translations** (6000-12000 words): Works either with an historical or actual significance written and published in languages other than English.
- **Interviews** (1500-3000 words)**:** Interviews with leading Marxist scholars in any discipline.
- **Book, film, music recording, exhibition and performance arts reviews** (1000-2000 words)
- **Conference and symposium reviews** (1000-2000 words)
- **Letters to editors** (500-1000 words): Short communication on any topic that attracts the attention of the readers.

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Academic quality: Please consider originality, theoretical and practical significance, and methodological rigor, referring to the usual standards within your specific discipline or subdiscipline.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

VOLUME 4 | ISSUE 1 | WINTER 2025

MARXISM IN THE AGE OF TOTAL CRISIS: DEFINITIONS, PRODUCTIONS, AND FUNCTIONS

It is said that we live in an era of "total crisis." Not only on a cultural, but social, economic, ecological level the term seems ubiquitously used with ever more urgency and on a global scale. In this respect the term crisis today seems to replace the concept of history as a concrete gen-erality in a generic singular form of multi-temporalities.

The ongoing "total crisis" seems to be a multifaceted totality; the multitude of crises humanity experiences are forms of existence of the crisis-ridden essence of capitalism.

The global economic stagnation, "negative economic growth," the rise of poverty and the widen-ing of the gap between the rich and the poor, high inflation, which allegedly has been caused by the pandemic, are evidence for the capitalist economy that follows its contradictory inner structure.

What is the Marxist answer to that anamnesis? The observed phenomena are certainly real, as can be seen on political (crisis of state, new authoritarianism), social (crises of labour, com-munity and society), and ecological (climate change, et al.) levels.

However, we need to remember that about 100 years ago the crisis narrative was used almost exclusively by Marxist scholars, like e.g. Henryk Grossmann, in their analysis of capitalist economy. At this time the "function of crisis" was to point to structural issues in world econo-my. In this way Grossmann in predicted the breakdown of the financial market in 1929 ("Black Friday").

While the function of crisis at the time was clearly critical, the situation today is more com-plex. It seems that the concept of crisis has different functions, which also pertain to politico-economic ideas adapting to the analysis of a "permanent crisis." Politicians use the term to explain their actions in terms of states of emergency – a concept which was famously used by the right-wing legal scholar Carl Schmitt in his description of the political possibilities of fascism. Thus, using the concept of crisis nowadays, means to address its particular function in a specific context.

This also pertains to the sciences and the ideal of science which encompasses all kinds of organized attempts of knowledge making. If the institutions of knowledge production and mediation are indeed in a crisis the consequences of the deep ruptures in collective praxis become graspable.

In this respect, a Marxist approach cannot remain just negative as a mere critique in face of the commodification of knowledge and manipulation of feelings and consciousness. Rather, the task is to seize the means of production even on the level of mental labour and iconic engi-neering. In this way the possibilities of a common use and a social orientation of the sciences, technology and all kinds of collective praxis can be opened up beyond extractivist exploitation and for the common good.

The aforementioned poses significant theoretical and political challenges and urgently calls for a Marxist response putting forth an encompassing view and methods to guide both theoret-ical analysis and political action. To that end we have to explicate the role of knowledge and the sciences as expression of the present societal context as well as tools for change. Not only do we have to analyze the mechanisms of how we reached the above-mentioned crises, but even more important is to try and define ways to break out of the current hegemony of capitalism.

We invite contributions that facilitate approaching the crises in a systematic way and analyz-ing them as forms of manifestation of the "total (capitalist) crisis" with the function of the concept of crisis in view.

We particularly encourage the participants of the First Symposium of Marxism & Sciences, which was held in September 2024 in Izmir to submit their full papers to be considered for publication in this issue.

The themes to be addressed are, but not limited to:

- The function of a critical concept of crisis, the reification or hypostatization of crisis
- The crises of knowledge society, incl. the crises of academia and its relation to capitalization of sciences and commodification of knowledge
- The crisis of knowledge viz. global digitalization (AI and the crisis of mental labour)
- Environmental crisis and climate change
- The capitalist mode of production in/as crisis ("extractivism") and the capitalist nation state in/as crisis
- The connections of flows of people ("refugee crisis") and money ("global finance")
- Forms of class struggle in the face of total crisis, (self-) organization of people, including the decline of trade-unions and traditional political parties
- The crisis of radical left politics and the rise of identity politics
- The rise of fascist politics and social movements of fear (of poverty, 'the other' etc.).
- The crisis of feminism and gender-based oppression in late capitalism
- Issues with non-Marxist responses to the crisis, e.g., new materialism, post-humanism, etc.
- The role of music, film, theater, and literature as expression of crisis and resistance.
- Alternative conceptions of crisis and their critique, e.g., anthropocene, capitalocene, etc.

NOTE

Your submission may be in the form of articles, essays, communications, cultural works and creative writing for our winter 2025 collaborative issue. Detailed CFPs for both issues will be published and circulated in due time.

Please submit your manuscripts prepared for blind review with a separate title page that includes the title of your submission, affiliation and contact information to marxismand-sciences[at]gmail.com. We also suggest the "online first" publication option for the manu-scripts that are submitted, reviewed, and accepted earlier than the deadline.

DEADLINE	PUBLICATION DATE
15 AUGUST 2024	JANUARY 2025