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ARTICLE

Production Beyond Instrumentality: Marx's *Capital* and Ilyenkov's Methodological Explanation

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ABSTRACT: The work of Evald Ilyenkov, in addition to its importance for the deep understanding of Marxist developments in the former USSR, is distinguished by a variety of topics that the philosopher dealt with (indicatively I refer to German Idealism, the methodology of *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*, questions of education and psychology, but also more current issues such as cybernetics). In this article I will elaborate on the category of the ideal and how this category can be exploited in the Marxian analyses of the first volume of *Capital*; more specifically in the third and fourth sections, that is, in the production of absolute and relative surplus value. Starting from the interpretation that Habermas gives in these parts of Marx's *Capital*, that is to say a logic of instrumentality that attributes to Marx, I will follow Ilyenkov's analysis of the ideal, as carried out by Ilyenkov in the essay on the *Dialectics of the Ideal*. Even though Ilyenkov does not follow the analysis of the ideal in the production process, I will show in the third part that this category can be used in these Marxian analyses. The position of this article is that the category of the ideal also concerns production and hence Marx's analysis goes beyond instrumentality. Looking back at the analyses of the labor process (absolute surplus value) and cooperation (relative surplus value) one can find the position of the ideal as fundamental in the explanation of the materiality of production and the consciousness that results from this materiality. The aim is to show that the elaboration of the category of the ideal, as carried out by Ilyenkov in the essay on the *Dialectics of the Ideal*, can help to explain more comprehensively, parts of the Marxian analysis that even Ilyenkov have not paid attention to the same extent as the first chapters of the first volume of *Capital*. So, this paper concerns the possibility of processing categories of materiality (labor process and cooperation) with the mediation of a category, which is basically used to explain problems formally (that is, of circulation) as ideal, with the content given to it by Ilyenkov. In the article follows Ilyenkov's critique of positivism and its characteristics and closes with the analyses of the concrete and the abstract, which characterizes the category of the ideal.

KEYWORDS: Ideal, materialism, positivism, instrumentality, production process, labor process, cooperation.

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Introduction

In the first volume of *Capital*, in the famous chapter on the so-called “primitive accumulation” Marx mentions that the “expropriators are expropriated” and in fact this results from the very movement of capitalist production: “capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation” (Marx 1976, 929). If we accept this phrase as detached and literal and do not examine its premises, then the natural process refers to the mechanistic and instrumental analyses that have given birth to a series of misconceptions in the various Marxisms of the twentieth century. This provocative Marxian phrase is of great interest, in my opinion, if we examine it through a remark by Marx himself in an unpublished manuscript, which was intended as a reply for the Russian monthly *Otechestvennye Zapiski* and was probably written in November 1877, in which he refers to this very wording: “At the end of the chapter [on the so-called primitive accumulation], the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation is summarized as follows: ‘capitalist production produces by the necessity of a natural process its own negation’ [...] I provide some proof at this point, because this claim is nothing more than a brief recapitulation of the lengthy analyses previously set out in the chapters on capitalist production” (Marx and Engels 1962, 108). In this light, I believe that the Marxian analyses in the examination of the production process cannot but be upgraded to the importance they have in the contemporary Marxist theoretical-political debate.

In this article I will focus on two moments of the production process: the labor process and cooperation. But what has this problematic to do with the epistemological issues which E. Ilyenkov tackled? I claim that the most “influential Soviet Marxist philosopher in the post-Stalin period” (Levant 2014, 183), through the definition he gives to the category of the ideal and the elaborations he has made to construct the definition (otherwise the theoretically elaborated conditions for the category of the ideal), gives us a tool to reflect on materiality in the production process as analyzed by Marx in the first volume of the *Capital*.

At a deeper level, the question that I will attempt to answer is whether there is an instrumentality, in Marxian thought, in the way consciousness is found in the labor process. In this sense, I consider Ilyenkov's contribution to be important because it can be used as a counter awe to such approaches of Marxian texts on the production process. Therefore, I will analyze the concept of the ideal as it is found both in the work process

(chapter 7, in the English translation of the first volume) and in collaboration (chapter 13 of the first volume respectively).

In order to demonstrate my point, I will follow the following line of reasoning: First, I will present the way in which these Marxian texts are read through the perspective of J. Habermas in certain parts of the text *Knowledge and Human Difference*. This approach will be criticized through Ilyenkov's examination of the category of the ideal. So, the second step is Ilyenkov's analysis of what is the "ideal." The category of the ideal in Ilyenkov is based on human activity, following Marx's "activity materialism" (Azeri 2022, 88–89),¹ and as the place which, once constituted, we can then proceed to analyze the category of consciousness.² I thus move on to my reading of the production process in Marx's *Capital* and to the exploitation of the concept of the ideal in these Marxian passages. From there on, I will attempt to highlight two additional aspects of Ilyenkov's method, which are auxiliary to a better understanding of his work, that is, his anti-positivism and the dialectical construction of the concepts of the abstract and the concrete. Thus, I will construct a perspective for an elaboration of the Marxian text, that on the one hand names a timeless adversary (i.e., positivism)³ which despite the fact that it is not in the same form that Ilyenkov attacks, exists in other forms inside the corpus of Marxism, and on the other hand I will present evidence of Ilyenkov's dialectical thinking through the treatment of the abstract and the concrete.

Instrumentality in Marx's Production Process

In one of his most influential books in the twentieth century's Marxist thought, Jurgen Habermas (1972) proceeds to a strong criticism of Marx's thought.⁴ The basis of his problem is that "Marx reduces the process of

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1. The notion of the activity materialism is directly opposite to what Maidansky calls "somatic materialism." The last categorization of materialism presupposes a hypostatized content in Marxian materialism, which in my view stands on the contrary in Ilyenkov's analysis.
 2. Maidansky (2014, 137) points out that Ilyenkov does not pay attention in the difference of the "terms Ideale and Ideelle," which is an observation that first made by Lifshits in his work *On the Ideal and the Real*. In this paper, I will not concern myself with this observation because I focus only on the way Ilyenkov treats the notion of the ideal.
 3. As Bakhurst (1991, 122) argues that "[F]or Ilyenkov, Lenin's great contribution lay in his rejection of empiricism and positivism, a rejection that, Ilyenkov believed requires materialism."
 4. Of course, I am not the first who exposes Habermas' position on Marxian production process—for example for the critique of Marxism from Habermas' point of view see Flood

reflection to the level of instrumental action [...] Marx conceives of reflection according to the model of production” (Habermas 1972, 44). By state, Habermas claims that in Marx’s thought, consciousness does not go further beyond instrumentality. The Habermasian problematic presupposes a dualistic distinction between the natural sciences and the sciences of man, where the last ones have to be a “critique of ideology and distinct from the instrumentalist meaning of natural sciences” (Habermas 1972, 45). From this point of view, we can observe that even if there is a kind of distinction between these two kinds of sciences in Marx, he does not use the critique of ideology to discuss the instrumentality of natural sciences. Hence, because of this unfulfilled movement Marx ends at the point where he “equates social theory with the natural sciences” (Habermas 1972, 46). And Habermas comes to the conclusion that from Marx’s analysis:

Science in the rigorous sense lacks precisely this element of reflection that characterizes a critique investigating the natural-historical process of the self-generation of the social subject and also making the subject conscious of this process. To the extent that the science of man is an analysis of a constitutive process, it necessarily includes the self-reflection of science as epistemological critique. This is obliterated by the self-understanding of economics as a “human natural science.” As mentioned, this abbreviated methodological self-understanding is nevertheless a logical consequence of a frame of reference restricted to instrumental action. (Habermas 1972, 46)

This is exactly the point that I want to discuss in this paper and for this discussion I will use E. Ilyenkov’s help with his category of the ideal. Before I proceed to the analysis of the ideal I have to sum up Habermas’ position. Habermas is concerned with the problem of critique as a reflection of human thought. In the first place, what one can notice is that Habermas does not expose dialectically his position of consciousness and the reflection comes up instrumentally. Respectively, I would claim that the development of the theoretical subject produces the notion of reflection in the presuppositions of this subject. If this does not happen then the problem of *positive separation* between the fields of thought arises. I certainly do not

(1977) and for the relationship between Marxian thought and Habermas’ thought see McBride (2000). Here, I want to expose a view on what production process is in Marx and I chose this because keeps a critical character against Marx. Another view on what Marxian production process refers to can be found in Harvey (2010, 112) where the ideal in the production process is characterized as “a utopian moment.” Using Ilyenkov’s analysis on the category of the ideal it will be proved that this utopian view does not respond in Marx’s analysis and behind of the ideal is hiding the category of consciousness, which opens the path to get over a instrumentalized view of labor.

argue that Habermas ends up in positivistic thought (moreover, his whole program is based on anti-positivism) but what I claim is that if we cannot find the dialectics between the production process and consciousness then it would be very difficult to follow a Marxian (and so materialistic) epistemology. That is why I turn now to the notion of the ideal, as the medium between the materiality (production process) and consciousness.

What is the Ideal?

The real interest, at the first level of analysis of the category of the ideal for materialists is how they will work out the basic category of idealism—that is, the ideal.⁵ As Ilyenkov says: “This is precisely why the anti-materialist camp in philosophy is called idealism” (Ilyenkov 2012, 149). And this is exactly what the Soviet philosopher wants to challenge, as I will argue. Secondly, the dialectical problematic in the materialistic reception is put up for discussion: how can an idealistic (initially) method contribute to the materialistic treatment of a concept so opposed (apparently) to the category of matter? Finally, what scope does this treatment of the issue leave? I will deal with the last question in the next section with the example of the production process.

In general, the ideal refers to the non-material properties of things and the place they hold in the material world. Because it reveals the relationship between material world and non-material properties, I argue that is the medium term to explain non-instrumentality of Marx’s thought. Ideal is that part of human society which above and independently of the individual intellect has its own objectivity, such as “mathematical truths, logical categories, moral imperatives and ideas of justice” (Ilyenkov 2012, 153). The ideal, then, according to Ilyenkov, is positioned as a subsequent form from that of materiality as the kind of phenomena (the ideals) function as “these normative patterns as a special ‘reality’ that is clearly distinct from himself (and from his brain, of course), and is, itself, moreover, strictly organized” (Ilyenkov 2012, 153).⁶

5. Levant (2014, 126) argues that Ilyenkov’s analysis of the ideal “challenges both idealist and crude materialist forms of reductionism (what he called ‘neopositivism’).” This happens for both Soviet philosophers (with the paradigm of Dubrovsky 1971, 1988) and philosophers in the West.

6. This point in my opinion fits directly to a theory of the symbol. Although this is a crucial problematic cannot be discussed in this paper. A very informative aspect in symbolic mediation is pointed by Peter Jones (2000, 205–223).

Based on the above, we could say that this kind of approach gives the impression that it lends itself more to an idealistic conception of the problem than to a materialistic one, since by talking about the ideal we are discussing something objective with its own strict organization and its own set of rules. Ilyenkov dispels this impression, following the Marxist conception of the process of reflection of the material world in human thought, and from this conception he understands the ideal as:

[...] specific forms of reflection of the external world by the *human* head have always been investigated by the science of philosophy under the designation: ‘ideal’ forms of mental activity; it retained this term precisely for the sake of their delimitation from all others.⁷ (Ilyenkov 2012, 160)

We can now determine the main characteristics of the ideal according to Ilyenkov: it is objective, as it is a reflection of objective reality in human consciousness. Its form is characterized by relative autonomy in terms of the materiality of the external world, without this meaning that it is not realized by the “human head.” Briefly “[t]he ideal form of a thing is a form of social-human life-activity, which exists not in that life-activity, but, namely, as a form of the external thing, which represents, reflects another thing” (Ilyenkov 2012, 184). So, as we can see, Ilyenkov explains the objective nature and independence of the ideal but does so materialistically, when he establishes the ideal in the form of social-human life-activity.

The return to Marxian thought for further understanding of the ideal cannot be accidental. Thus, Ilyenkov, referring to the analyses of *Capital*, makes a tripartite movement:

i. Ilyenkov resorts to the value form as a model for solving the philosophical problem of the ideal.⁸ For Marx the value form does not belong to the realm of imagination but exists objectively—within the commodity—and manifests itself only through material activity and relations between people. Ilyenkov uses value in all its forms (for example money) in order to show the objectivity of ideality and thus concludes that “the ‘ideal’

7. Oittinen (2014, 109) argues that in the concept of the ideal “Spinoza’s influence is strongest.” Indeed, for Ilyenkov, Spinoza sets the ideal and the material world as iso-extensive sizes. For the influence of Spinoza to Ilyenkov also see Oittinen (2005).

8. In my opinion highlighting value form is crucial and not just “the concept of value” (Levant 2012, 129), because this opens the path to find out what is value. Levant subsequently writes for the notion of value-form but does not thematize it as the *main* problem (or the first necessary step) to analyze value itself. For the connection between Ilyenkov’s thought and the value form debate see Oittinen & Rauhala (2014).

described here is nothing more or less than the value-form of the products of labour in general (*‘die Wertform überhaupt’*)” (Ilyenkov 2012, 175).

ii. The value form in Marx also helps him to contrast with singularity and subjectivism since,

Ideality [...] has a purely social nature and origin, and yet, the ideal, in the form of knowledge, reflects objective reality, which exists independent from humanity. It is the form of a thing, but it is outside this thing, namely in the activity of man, as a form of this activity. (Ilyenkov 2012, 176)

iii. Wanting, finally, to show how Marx scientifically solves the problem of the ideal, Ilyenkov refers to the fetishism of the commodity according to which the commodity form as an ideal is completely separated from the physical form of the commodity. Such a process, apart from not presupposing the unit or the individual soul, is social and takes place behind the back of the individual's consciousness:

‘Ideal forms,’ like the value-form, the form of thought or syntactical form, have always arisen, taken shape and developed, turned into something wholly objective, completely independent of anyone’s consciousness, in the course of processes that occur not at all in the head, but always outside it—although not without its participation. (Ilyenkov 2012, 179)

The key concept, for the most complete understanding of the ideal, according to Ilyenkov, is that of representation.⁹ As we have seen, in addition to establishing the general and objective form that the ideal takes, we must distinguish some phases that constitute the process of its creation. This process, since it takes place within society and is the result of human relations, takes the form of material social activity. The result of this activity is the constitution of a primarily material thing, which, because it has arisen through a material social activity, also carries other kinds of characteristics, which represent them in its primary material form as a thing:

This relationship of representation (reflection, in the dialectical-materialist sense of the term) is a relationship in which one sensuously perceived thing, while remaining itself, performs the role or function of representing quite another thing (to be even more precise, it represents the universal nature of that other thing, that is, something ‘other’ which in sensuous, corporeal terms is

9. For Maidansky (2005, 296) “the term “ideal” denotes a relation between at least two different things, one of which adequately represents the essence of the other.” So, only through representation can be understood what the ideal is.

quite unlike it), and in this way acquires a new plane of existence.¹⁰ (Ilyenkov 2012, 174)

Finally, according to Ilyenkov, an additional element that helps us understand the breadth of the concept of the ideal is that of differentiating man from animals. What we can see with a first observation, is that non-rational animals, with their activity, on the one hand, have as their object only the phenomena (objects) of the external world. On the other hand, they head towards them directly, following their instincts alone:

The animal that has just been born [...] needs only to exercise the forms of behaviour encoded in it. Development consists only in the development of instincts, innate reactions to things and situations. The environment merely corrects this development.¹¹ (Ilyenkov 2012, 185–186)

On the contrary, human activity is not only directed towards external objects, but also towards activity itself as an end in itself, through will and consciousness. Due to the existence of an earlier level, which arose from the vital activity of man, i. e. culture as a system and result of this activity, man is able to shape this direction in his activity and thus to evolve society itself within from the assimilation of the modes of activity existing up to that period. That is, the newborn man forms his activity on the basis of the activity of previous cultures, the data of which he must assimilate in order to develop his will and consciousness. As Ilyenkov states:

This is the world of the forms of social-human life-activity that confronts the newborn child (specifically, the biological organism of the species *homo sapiens*) as the objectivity to which he is compelled to adapt all his 'behaviour,' all the functions of his organic body, as that object towards assimilation of which adults guide all his activity. The presence of this specifically human object—the world of things created by man for man, and, therefore, things whose forms are reified forms of human activity (labour), and certainly not the forms naturally inherent in them—is the condition for the existence of consciousness and will. (Ilyenkov 2012, 186)

Given this finding, we can now conceive of the ideal threefold. Initially, the ideal is a product of history, as the latter is what gives the flow of the form of the ideal from one generation to the next. Therefore, the ideal presupposes history. Secondly, the ideal is examined as a result of the relations

10. This creative function of the ideal is doubted by Lifshits who argues that the ideal has more a reproductive than creative function. For this debate see Mareev (2016).

11. For the discussion on how Vygotsky treats the problem of the animals and intertwines Ilyenkov's view see Levant (2012, 140–141).

of production of people through their work, which prompts Ilyenkov to insist on the concept of activity as a rational form of action. Finally, we should perceive the exploitation of the ideal as a condition, which is necessary for the birth, existence and development of the will and consciousness and not the other way around, as the latter are the mental forms of expression of the ideal or otherwise the necessary forms of expression and its implementation.

The Ideal Character of the Production Process

a. Consciousness as Derivative of the Ideal

Consciousness as a derivative of the ideal can be found in the chapter on the labor process of the first volume of *Capital*. In this chapter Marx explains what labor is as “a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature” (Marx 1976, 283). But in order to more fully explain the problem of labor, Marx refers back to the conditions from which labor itself arises. And it is at this point that the Marxian argument becomes interesting as not only is it not about a non-historical anthropology, but it turns to a theory of consciousness. Thus, Marx refers to a form of labor that has emerged from its simple instinctual form, which can refer to the copying of animal labor. The latter is based on animal instincts, which as work skills are anything but negligible. Marx in his analysis refers to “labor in a form in which it is exclusively human characteristic” (Ibid., 283–84). This means that any anthropological interpretation disappears in the sense that labor as a human activity is interpreted in the light of the content of the activity of the worker who sells his labor power “An immense interval of time separates the state of things in which a man brings his labor-power to market for sale as a commodity from the situation when human labor had not yet cast off its first instinctive form” (283). Labor is thus examined as a historical problem: primordial or archaic labor is a different thing than labor in the capitalist mode of production. What therefore separates the seller of labor power from its first instinctive form? On this Marx has a very strong position:

A spider conducts operations which resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax.

At the end of every labor process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. (Marx 1976, 284)

This is the point at which Ilyenkov's conception of the ideal can work as explanatory. The ideal is something to which the worker already belongs before it is introduced into the labor process. The worker objectively works consciously to carry out his activity. Ilyenkov's scheme here works: the consciousness of the worker when he works belongs to a wider field of the order of the ideal, which precedes the labor. Therefore, can the ideal and its characteristics work in the field of the labor process? If we take for granted the three basic elements of the ideal as exposed in the previous section then we can answer positively: first, to the problem of historicity, it seems that Marx's position confirms Ilyenkov's position, that the ideal is governed by historicity. Secondly, that the ideal is produced by the relations of production, so it is the result of the activity of people. Finally, these two elements of the ideal are conditions to produce consciousness, as the latter can be traced in the labor process.

b. Cooperation and the Ideal Character of Planning

In the first form of relative surplus value production, namely cooperation, Marx lays the groundwork in order to explain how the shortening of necessary labor time functions as a condition to produce further surplus value. So, in this specific chapter, of cooperation, there are elements to read sides of the chapter in two ways:

i. From the side of materiality, i.e., the collaboration of labor forces as an element that does not necessarily concern capitalist production, but also extends to other forms of production both in the past horizon and in the potential future. This happens because through the material cooperation of the workers, values are produced such as “a rivalry and a stimulation of the ‘animal spirits,’ which heightens the efficiency of each individual worker” (Marx 1976, 443).

ii. From the side of the capitalist form. The production of relative surplus value is the production process that concerns the “specifically capitalistic mode of production” (Marx 1976, 645) and therefore cooperation can be read as the first specific moment of the specific mode of production. The capitalist form, on the one hand, integrates materiality and utilizes the values produced by it, such as increased individual productivity, and on the

other hand, absorbs and directs them for its own reproductive activity exclusively: “the co-operation of wage laborers is entirely brought about by the capital that employs them” (ibid., 449).

What interests us here, i.e. the ideal in the case of cooperation, concerns the collapse of both materiality and capitalist form. And this is because, according to Marx, the relevance of the workers can ideally be constituted as a plan (thus speaking exclusively about materiality), however, this plan belongs, practically, to the power of the capitalist (in other words, social form):

The workers unification into one single productive body, and the establishment of a connection between their individual functions, lies outside their competence. These things are not their own act, but the act of the capital that brings them together and maintains them in that situation. Hence, the interconnection between their various labours appears to them ideally as a plan practically as the authority of the capitalist, as the power of an alien will that subjects their actions to its purpose. (Marx 1976, 449–450, translation modified)

Thus, the category of the ideal, as presented by the Marxian text, has the character of a condition for the practice of capital, which exploits it, precisely because it has the planning function to satisfy its movement. According to Ilyenkov's analysis, in this particular case we believe that both the first element of the ideal, i.e., the historicity, which self-evidently exists in the capitalist mode of production, and the second element, that it is produced by the relations in production, are easily explained, for the third, that is a condition for the production of consciousness is rather more difficult to show. And this is because we have left the abstract field of the labor process (materiality) which inevitably is included in a social form—the capitalist one. And indeed, through the practice of power it is demonstrated that a characteristic of capitalist consciousness is the inversion of materiality, within the productive process. The ideal can be exploited to show that capital reverses even this world (of the ideal and planning), when it incorporates it into its own movement. Hence, while a connection between ideality and materiality emerges, when the latter is subordinated to the capitalist form, then the consciousness of capital in production reverses it. So, the ideal can be used to further examine the capitalist form of consciousness.

Methodological problems or the anti-positivism of Ilyenkov

The antithesis with which Marxist philosophy proceeded in the twentieth century is well documented. On the one hand materialism and on the other idealism: on the one hand the production of the world from material movement and on the other the production of the world from the idea.¹² Ilyenkov's philosophical position in its principle is also inscribed in this antithesis. More specifically, much of Ilyenkov's research tries to answer the question of what thought, and idea is. Two positions appear there—a thesis and an antithesis. Regarding the thesis, the Soviet philosopher claims that “Thought arises within and during the process of material action as one of its features, one of its aspects, and only later is divided into a special activity” (Ilyenkov 2009, 304). This position, which captures a materialist answer to the question of thought, raises many objections. The objection that Ilyenkov deals with is in his book *Reflections on Lenin's Book: Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*: “thought is only ‘speech without sound’” (ibid.). And this position is the start for the “path to idealism” (ibid.). But why does positivism lead to idealism?¹³ To this question a three level answer can be given, which goes beyond simplistic/tautological answers like the one that claims positivism is a form of subjective idealism:

i. that positivism is unable to explain the forms of discontinuity found within historical-social development. In this way positivism undertakes to present the movement of society as a continuum which at any time and moment can be justified by the examination of individual factors. Within the modern context, where society as an object has been structured through many parts, the positivist approach states that there is no possibility to examine the object in its entirety. Therefore, it is the duty of every expert in every social field to explain progress or regression but focusing only on that field and nowhere else. It is a question to be discussed, however, that in this case any form of method, which can be discussed in the

12. Of course, this problematic has been thematized by both Marx and Engels. See Engels (1969) and Myuskovic (1974).

13. In this text Ilyenkov turns against Bogdanov, who was Lenin's theoretical opponent in the Bolsheviks and for whom he wrote *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. But and that is why I include this in my analysis, Ilyenkov's observations on positivism can be used against positivistic thoughts in Marxism as can be detected in the analytical Marxism (for the relation between positivism and analytical Marxism see Tarritt 2006).

context of an epistemology, is discredited.¹⁴ For Ilyenkov, there is no question of whether the object is made up of partialities and he does not question the authority of scientists in each field—however, there is no doubt about the way we can deal with discontinuities: the materialist dialectics. As the Soviet philosopher argues:

The scientist actually knows the methods and rules of scientific cognition better than any specialist in epistemology. The scientist need not learn these methods and rules from philosophy. From the materialistically explained theory of knowledge he can on the other hand learn something else: the dialectical conception of the logic of scientific thought, which, according to Lenin, is a synonym for dialectics [...] Revolution is revolution, regardless of whether it occurs in the socio-political ‘organisms’ of an enormous country or in the ‘organism’ of contemporary scientific development. The logic of revolutionary thinking and the logic of revolution are one and the same thing. And this logic is called materialist dialectics. (Ilyenkov 2009, 390–391)

Therefore, the first constitutive element of positivism is the impossibility of dealing with discontinuities in historical and social movement.

ii. The second level corresponds exactly to cutting off the shaping of consciousness from the mechanisms that can shape it. By considering the problem of the formation of consciousness in isolation from both the conditions of its birth and the mechanisms of its formation, the positivist view may come to assume that consciousness can develop on its own. According to positivism, just as worker consciousness can be developed spontaneously, so can scientific consciousness, without the contribution of a philosophical method. So, positivists argue that “there is the same ‘accidental’ (and fundamentally ‘incorrect’) statement [...] the working class is capable, ‘on its own,’ of elaborating ‘a truly proletarian world view,’ without the active assistance of ‘any of the intelligentsia there’” (Ilyenkov 2009, 388). In this sense we observe an emptying of mechanisms (whether scientific or social) that present a naive understanding of social movement.

iii. The culmination, however, of this disconnected perception of social movement and the splitting of the object into individual objects concerns the cult of technocracy. Here, the deification of technique is the point at which positivism cannot hide its idealistic origins. And this is because in the modern paradigm, technology has taken the place of god and the re-

14. The problematic of epistemology is multileveled in Ilyenkov’s work. For example, on epistemological problems that are discussed in the discipline of education see Azeri (2020). Respectively on the interdisciplinary studies in communication see Bakhurst (1995).

spective scientists of various fields the place of priests. This is also a modern form of mystification according to Ilyenkov, resulting in the new deity called technique. More specifically, Ilyenkov states that positivist's philosophy:

[...] secret of these illusions is the idolisation of technique—technique of every type—from the technique of rocket design to the technique of dentistry, bomb-dropping or sound-recording. And with such an approach, the engineering and technical intelligentsia begin to resemble—both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others—a special caste of holy servants of this new divinity.¹⁵ (Ilyenkov 2009, 337; translation modified)

Materialist Dialectics or the Logic of the Concrete and the Abstract

From the above three problems of positivist thinking, the obsession with the fragmentation of the object can be distinguished as a thread that runs through them, and more specifically that this fragmentation cannot be explained from a methodological point of view. Ilyenkov answers this problem through his analyses of the dialectic of the concrete and the abstract. Looking back at the Marxian analyses of *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*, the Soviet thinker tries to show the reasons why “Marx’s *Capital*, is indeed the highest type of school for theoretical thinking. A scientist specialising in any field of knowledge can use it as a source of most valuable ideas with regard to the theoretical method of research” (Ilyenkov 1982, 219). Therefore, Ilyenkov's book *Dialectics of the Concrete and the Abstract in Marx's Capital* constitutes a developed response to the positivist perspective. But how does this answer relate to the problem of the ideal, even though “the term ideal does not play a significant role in Ilyenkov's first book *Dialectics of the Concrete and the Abstract in Marx's Capital*” (Maidansky 2014, 128)? To answer this question, we have only to see what is concrete and what is abstract according to the Soviet thinker.

Starting from the attempts to define the concrete it becomes clear that the Soviet philosopher follows Marx's position on what is concrete: that is, as “unity of the diverse” (Marx 1973, 101). Ilyenkov tries to explain this

15. Bakhurst (1991, 143) notes that Ilyenkov sometimes calls scientific empiricism as positivism, thus implying that Ilyenkov can confuse the two categories. In my opinion this is not correct from the point of view that Ilyenkov argues for the production of positivism (and hence to idealism) from the category of scientific empiricism.

laconic formulation and give it a comprehensive content, which is also connected to the basic methodological relics of Marxian thought, such as the research method and the exposition method in the first volume of *Capital*. For this reason, it has the following characteristics:

Concrete and concreteness are first of all synonyms of the real links between phenomena, of concatenation and interaction of all aspects and moments of the object given to man in a notion. The concrete is thereby interpreted as an internally divided totality of various forms of existence of the object, a unique combination of which is characteristic of the given object only. Unity thus conceived is realised not through similarity of phenomena to each other but, on the contrary, through their difference and opposition. (Ilyenkov 1982, 20)

From this definition some elements emerge which I consider to be of major importance to lead to a complete understanding of the definition of the ideal and the possible ways of exploiting the concept of the ideal. Initially, a distinction is made between three elements:

i. The first concerns the real (the real links) and the phenomena, which are obviously connected to each other, but when we talk about the concrete, we are not looking for the connection of the phenomena, but the connection of real ties. So, beyond the phenomena there is a deeper and more essential level, as far as the concrete is concerned.

ii. Secondly, the concrete is interpreted as a whole, through its characteristics. This wholeness is exposed through the difference and opposition of the phenomena. This opposition makes the interpretation of the concrete as a whole.

iii. The third element that interests us here is that this interplay of moments of totality is founded on moments that are different and opposed to each other. In this light, however, an “integral whole unified in all its diverse manifestations, as an organic system of mutually conditioning phenomena” (Ilyenkov 1982, 20) is created. So, when talking about the concrete, the problem arises of an object that must have real links, which are not necessarily based on sensory observation.

The unity of the moments that make up the object, as in any genuine dialectical philosophy, cannot but be founded on the unity of differences or opposites. Here we could say that the concept of the ideal is preserved. And this is because for Ilyenkov the concrete:

[...] is treated first of all as an objective characteristic of a thing considered quite independently from any evolutions that may take place in the cognising subject. 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 either at the sensual stage of reflection or at the rational-logical one. (Ilyenkov 1982, 20)

Thus, the concrete has its own objective existence, beyond the backs of the actors, which makes it different from a simple sensory intake—so that the real, which characterizes the concrete, does not necessarily involve an exclusively sensory processing.¹⁶

The abstract, on its part and to the extent that it is opposed to the concrete, is treated for Marx as a term that characterizes “real phenomena and relations that exist outside consciousness, regardless of whether they are reflected in the latter or not” (Ilyenkov 1982, 20). This definition seems to share much in common with the analysis of the particular one we examined above. Then how are they opposites? The answer concerns the moments and the content of the moments, which constitutes them:

The abstract [...] assumes the meaning of the ‘simple,’ undeveloped, one-sided, fragmentary, ‘pure’ (i.e., uncomplicated by any deforming influences). It goes without saying that ‘the abstract’ in this sense can be an objective characteristic of real phenomena, and not only of phenomena of consciousness. (Ilyenkov 1982, 21)

In this case we are mainly interested in two things: the first concerns the undeveloped character of the abstract and the second its pure character. The first shows the extent to which the abstract falls short of the concrete—while the concrete constitutes a totality, the abstract functions as a condition of that totality. And this is because development as such indicates a process that ends up in something complete. We have seen that the concrete has this character—the abstract, on the other hand, shows that it is included in the process of formation of the concrete. Second, pure character is something that can function as the basis for a theoretical construct or problem statement.¹⁷ This characteristic of the abstract as a pure—free from all distorting influences—category concerns the labor process itself as presented by Marx in the first volume of *Capital*.

16. Bakhurst’s (1991, 139) definition on concreteness can develop these observations: “Concreteness may be seen as a function of the strength of the relations between components.”

17. Bakhurst (1991, 141) argues that abstract is constituted by three senses “1. A conception of some object is said to be abstract if it is partial or one sided. 2. An entity is an abstraction if it is considered in isolation from the whole of which it is an essential part. 3. An entity is an abstraction if it exists in relative autonomy from that whole (as a so-called real abstraction).” The last one (real abstraction) is useful for the analysis of the commodity exchange as Sohn-Rethel has shown through his analysis of *Manual and Intellectual Labour*.

Based on the definitions of the concrete and the abstract, there is no question that on the one hand there is an anti-positivist direction in a positive way as it presents the characteristics of the materialist dialectic. On the other hand, the joint determinations of the concrete and the abstract, I claim, lay the foundations for the concept of the ideal. In other words, by reconstructing the relationship between the concrete and the abstract we can say that the foundations are laid for the dialectic of the ideal.

Conclusion

In this article I examined the function of the ideal in the production process, based on the examples of the work process and cooperation. I started with J. Habermas' view on instrumental thought in Marxian analysis in the production process. For Habermas, because of the non-separation between the critique and the instrumentalism of the natural sciences Marx loses his critical point of view. A possible answer to this view can be found in the notion of ideal—that is why I analyzed this notion in the second part and in the third part I explained how the ideal can show how to go beyond Habermas' analysis. The ideal, examined through its characteristics, can be harmonized with the analyses of the first volume of *Capital*. While the Soviet philosopher uses the category of the ideal to explain forms of circulation such as the value form, in the last part of the article I attempt to use his analyses to examine further forms of the production process. I, then, showed two more aspects—anti-positivism and the dialectical analysis of abstract and concrete in Ilyenkov's thought.

I believe that in times in which the problem of labor is considered obsolete and nonexistent or as absolutely instrumental, bringing back problematic aspects of the nature of work, and perspectives of consciousness, objectively helps to better understand social conditions. Precisely because in our time technology seems to have transcended all traditional labor relations, Ilyenkov's analysis of the realm of the ideal can explain problematics of contemporary labor conditions. Therefore, in my analysis, I set again some fundamental problems that have the character of a foundation for the further processing of contemporary problems. In this sense, Ilyenkov's thought, even today, can prove to be useful both for the analysis of Marx's thought and for the analysis of contemporary working conditions.

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Biography

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