

SHARE

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Special Issue

Is Marxism Still Relevant?



L-Università ta' Malta
Faculty of Arts

Department
of Philosophy

Engaging the Contemporary 2022: Confronting Ethics

17-18 November 2022, University of Malta (Valletta Campus)

Keynote: Sophie Loidolt, Technical University of Darmstadt

Engaging the Contemporary 2022 is the seventh edition of a series of annual international conferences organized by the Department of Philosophy at the University of Malta, with the aim of promoting an interdisciplinary approach to a variety of current philosophical debates. This year's theme - Confronting Ethics - seeks to examine and bring into discussion recent engagements with the history of ethics as well as present-day ethical theories and practices as confronted by contemporary philosophers. The aim of the conference is to bring together various philosophical traditions into a conversation that furthers our understanding of the ethical perplexities that beset contemporary times. We invite contributions on the following themes:

Contemporary Engagements with the History of Ethics

- Neo-Aristotelian and Virtue Ethics
- Ethics of Happiness, Joy and Wellbeing
- Contemporary Approaches to Hellenistic Ethics
- Ethics, Therapy and Philosophy as a Way of Life
- Ethics, Reason and the Passions
- Ethics and Moral Philosophy
- Ethics and Natural Law Theory
- Neo-Kantian Ethics and Contemporary Deontology
- Contemporary Utilitarian Ethics

Contemporary Ethical Theories and Languages

- Ethics and Postmodernity
- Poststructuralist Ethics
- Ethics of Alterity and Immanence
- Ethics and Phenomenology
- Ethics of Affect, Touch, Sight and Embodiment
- Ethics of Vulnerability
- Relational and Care Ethics
- Ethics and Spirituality
- Feminist and Queer Ethics
- Ethics and Psychoanalysis
- Ethics and/of the Self
- Ethics and Critical Theory
- Ethics and Atheism

Contemporary Applied Ethical Issues

- Ethics of Health Care and Medicine
- Business Ethics and Economics
- Ethics and Education
- Technology, AI, and Blockchain
- Ethics and the (Post-)Human
- Ethics of Suffering and Pain, Life and Death
- Ethics, Biopolitics and Law
- Ethics, Borders and Migration
- Political and Public Ethics
- Ethics, Psychology and Emotions
- Ethics and Disability Studies
- Ethics of Sustainability, Climate Change, the Anthropocene and the Environment

Interested participants are to submit a 500-word abstract and a short biographical note through the website by 1 May 2022. Decisions will be communicated by 31 May 2022. Presentations are to be in English and no longer than 20 minutes. For more information, visit www.um.edu.mt/events/etc2022

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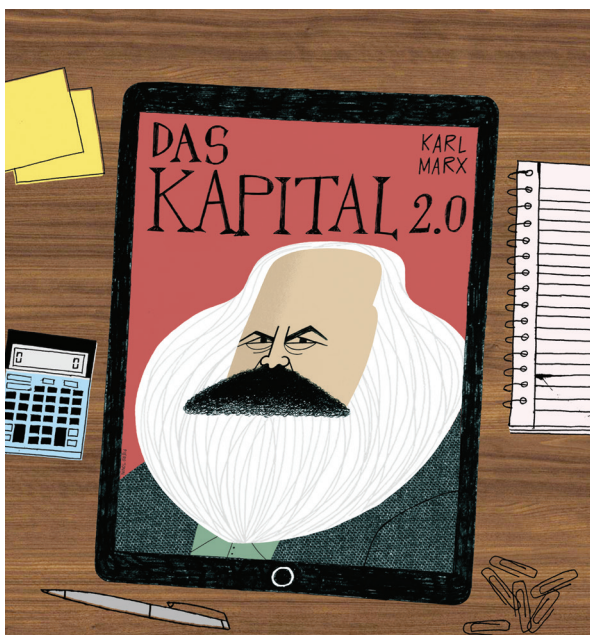
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We invite any person to submit an article on SHARE. Any subject matter may be dealt with, but articles must be of a philosophical nature, in English and no longer than 1,000-1,500 words. References, if any, are to be placed within the text. It shall be the sole prerogative and responsibility of the Editor to determine which contributions to include or exclude from the magazine. The ideas expressed in the authors' articles represent their views and may not necessarily reflect or concur with the views of the board members of the Philosophy Sharing Foundation.

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Editorial

This special edition of SHARE Magazine addresses the perennial question of whether Marxism is still relevant in the post-modern world. To many people of the West, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 proves that Marxism has been a failure. But what makes this logic problematic is that the theories of Marxism are being equated with the communist models of the ex-Soviet states, China and other countries such as Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea which have attempted to implement the Marxist ideology in the operations of their economic and political scenarios.

One must distinguish between the richness of thought a theory contains and the practical difficulties that a system encounters in its implementation. A theory works on the ideal while the system has to confront the daily obstacles and nuances of existence. But the richness of thought can only be appreciated from the critical analysis of the problems inherent in the implementation of the theory. This edition of SHARE tries to unearth the richness of thought that remains unexplored in the critique of Marxism and its contribution to a more just, humane and equal society.

Stephen Law introduces the central key philosophies of Marx.

Roberto Debono expands Marx's dire predictions on capitalism to the present global ecological crisis and attempts to answer whether there is a case to abolish capitalism on ecological grounds.

Edward Zammit focuses on the concept of alienation from a Marxist perspective and its application by philosophers and sociologists to capitalist societies.

Keith Pisani provides an overview of the attempt made by post-Marxist authors to develop Critical Theory on the current structures of economic and political power that act as the primary sources of exploitative and oppressive relations.

Kurt Borg reflects on the ability of Marxism to make us aware of the finitude and fragility of our existence, and which in the process should remind us that time ought to be utilised according to our free will rather than prescribed by the structural powers of societies.

Kathrin Schödel delves into various areas of utopian thought and shows how when combined with Marxist thought the imagination of alternative worlds is kept alive. Indeed it can also perhaps be grounded within historical realities, material conditions and the realities of social movements.

Özlem Duva Kaya tackles the relationship between Marxism and feminism. She highlights the initiatives of Marxist feminists aimed at a new and effective transformation within the feminist movement, with a call for women to gain their own class consciousness.

Karl Baldacchino provides an overview of the Italian autonomist Marxist movements from the early 1960s to the late 1970s. In this exposure, he explains how these movements represented an intense phase of the political conflict during that era and ultimately redefined the political landscape.

In the final article on Marxism, Michael Grech analyses some of the shortcomings on people who identify themselves as Marxists or claim to be directly or indirectly inspired by Marxism. He concludes that Marxist theory essentially remains a materialist philosophy.

On a different note, Ian Rizzo interviews Marianne Talbot with the aim of further exploring her philosophical angle. From 2001 up to 2021, until she retired, Marianne was the Director of Studies in Philosophy at University of Oxford's Department for Continuing Education.

Robert Farrugia deals with Boethius, author of 'The Consolations of Philosophy', written about 524 AD while Boethius was imprisoned awaiting sentence of execution. The article focuses on a theme that is often overlooked in Boethius's classical work - the virtue of humility.

Christian Colombo adopts an existentialist stance to make the case of how the humanist movements can place more emphasis on dialogue and respond to philosophical calls of wisdom by embracing ambiguity.

Nebojsa Kujundzic digs deep into the concepts of 'reality' and 'existence'. Although in ordinary language these two concepts appear complimentary, their relationship can prove to be more complex than thought. When analysed apart, these two concepts can contribute to different outcomes.

Alexander Gungov uses Husserl's transcendental logic to illustrate how deceptive evidence of skilful manipulation can take place.

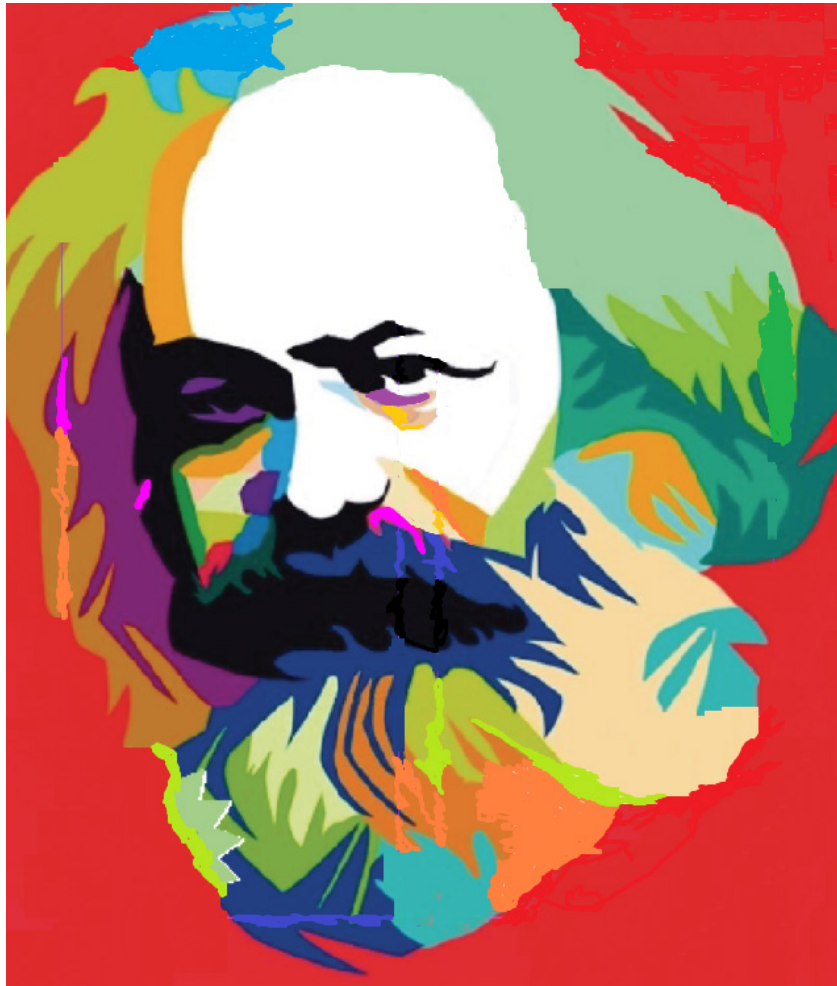
In the book review 'Be Logical Be Creative Be Critical' authored by Luc de Brabandere with Lina Benmehrez, Tanguy Swinnen deals with the ancient controversy between Plato and Aristotle on the understanding of reality and relates it to the choice between constructed models and artificial intelligence to make predictions.

The third part of our Philosophical Manifesto which was launched in SHARE 14 (November 2020) deals with the subject of 'Economics' and provides a critical commentary on the key role which the economy plays in our lives and its contribution to our well-being.

Finally, this edition of SHARE features a new corner for philosophy students. Sarah Vella, President of the Student Philosophy Society (SPS) has been invited to introduce this student organisation set up at the University of Malta.

Karl Marx - A Short Introduction

By Stephen Law



For the Philosopher Hegel, there is a kind of logic to history. The fundamental motor of change is the dialectic. History is fundamentally cyclical – at each stage, internal contradictions and tensions are resolved to create a new, higher stage of society. That stage itself contains internal contradictions, and so on. This process is headed in a particular direction – towards greater freedom and eventually a society without conflict.

A key difference between Hegel's thinking and Marx, however, is that while Hegel thought this dialectical process took place at the level of what he termed *Geist* – roughly translated as 'mind' or 'spirit', Marx thought the process was fundamentally a material one. While Hegel is a dialectical idealist, Marx is a dialectic materialist. According to Marx, he has turned Hegel's philosophy 'right side up', insisting that at each stage it is our material situation – and especially the way production takes place – that ultimately shapes what happens at the level of thought and ideas. So, if you

want to understand why we *think* the way we do, you need to understand how history is unfolding *materially*.

According to Marx, we are currently living through a great epoch known as capitalism. Before capitalist society, there was feudal society. Eventually the capitalist system will be replaced by a communist society. Each epoch is characterised by its economic structures which are in turn shaped the dominant productive forces of the day.

Human beings are creative creatures, according to Marx. They produce food, shelter, chairs and tables, art, and so on. The character of each epoch is determined by the dominant forces of production dominant at that stage of human history. These forces involve human labour in combination with the means of production – the means through which production takes place, such as mill powered by steam, or manually. These different productive forces give rise to different economic structures. Marx writes:

*The hand-mill gives you a society with a feudal lord;
the steam-mill a society with an industrial capitalist¹.*

As technology advances, so the forces of production develop. There comes a point where they outstrip and are cramped by the economic system of that epoch, resulting in a rupture and the birth of a new system better able to cope with the evolving forces of production.

According to Marx, under the current capitalist system, our productive output takes place within a market system over which most of us have no control and under which we must labour constantly in order to survive. The system involves the remorseless pursuit of profit, whose origins are found in the extraction of surplus value from the exploited proletariat. The proletariat – the wage earners whose only possession of significant economic value is their own labour – don't own the fruits of their labour. That value is owned by the bourgeoisie – the capitalist class. The proletariat are trapped in this system, like hamsters on a wheel. Marx says they are 'alienated' not only from the fruits of their labour, which belong to others, but also from each other. Alienation is a kind of social ill caused by things being separated from each other that should be together.

Of course the capitalist system pretends that within the marketplace everyone is free – but the truth is that the market is an inhuman mechanism that actually makes slaves of the majority of us. Marx believed the task of philosophers was to help change the world:

Philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways, the point is to change it.²

Marx wants to help the proletariat recognise and emancipate themselves from their enslaved and alienated existence.

So what comes after the capitalist society? Marx believed it would be replaced by a communist society. This would be a society in which humankind is genuinely self-determined and free, able to engage in the forms of production that allow us properly to express our humanity. The forces of production, Marx thought, were reaching the point where this becomes a genuine possibility. By overthrowing the capitalist system that currently enclaves us, we no longer have to produce what others demand of you. We can produce what we genuinely want to produce. Although Marx did not describe such a communist society in much detail, it's clear that he thought that private property would

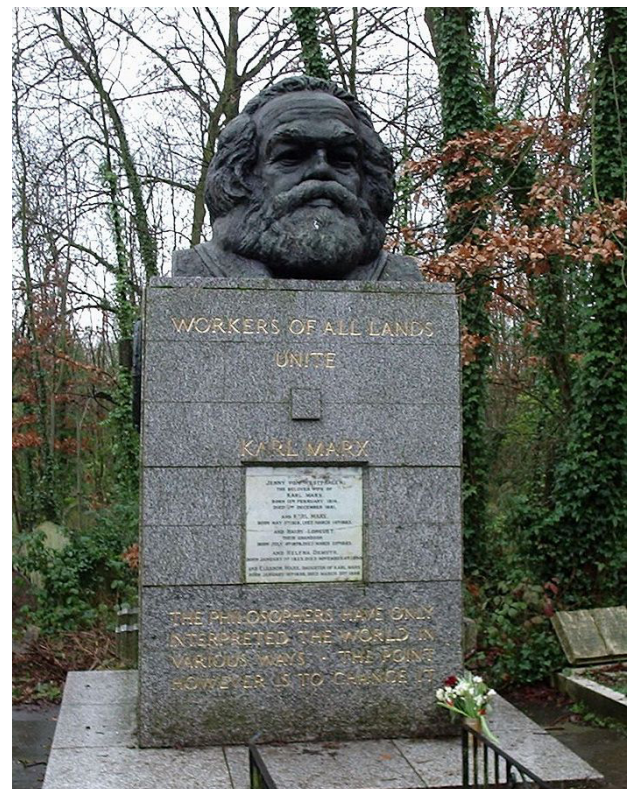
no longer exist. Note that what will make a communist society possible is industrial and technological development. Technological advances go hand in hand with human development. Technological advances were responsible for the overthrow of the feudal system, and further advances will enable the overthrow of capitalist society.

Marx famously criticised religion as the opiate of the masses. He believed that:

*Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature,
the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the
spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.³*

Religion, according to Marx, is a delusion that the oppressed and alienated proletariat indulge in to avoid being confronted with the reality for their situation – their enslavement. Religion holds out the promise of eternal bliss in the next life and helps keep the proletariat compliant. Rather than dream of an imaginary better world to come, we need to wake up and break free, changing things for the better in the here and now.

Stephen Law is Director of Certificate in HE and Director of Studies in Philosophy at Oxford University's Department of Continuing Education. His many popular philosophy books include *The Philosophy Gym: 25 Short Adventures in Thinking*.



¹ Karl Marx, 1847, *The Poverty of Philosophy*

² Karl Marx, 1888, *Eleven Theses on Feuerbach*. These words are also inscribed upon his grave

³ Karl Marx, 1844, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*

Marx's Ecology - A Case to Abolish Capitalism?

By Roberto Debono



'From the standpoint of a higher economic form of society, private ownership of the globe by single individuals will appear quite as absurd as private ownership of one man by another. Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the globe. They are only its possessors, its usufructuaries, and, like boni patres familias, they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition.' Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, p. 567

'Man lives from nature — i.e., nature is his body — and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man's physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.' Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 1844

The fate of contemporary¹ humanity will be determined by its ability to deal with the global ecological crisis. This depends in part on a rediscovered awareness that *Homo*

sapiens is part of a living whole – the Earth biosphere. The 19th century capitalist mode of production arguably created the illusion that humanity is free to exploit and commodify nature to pursue its selfish ends irrespective of humanity's impact on its environment. Two hundred years on, humanity is living on a planet fraught with anthropogenic pollution, climate change and unprecedented rates of biodiversity loss last seen during the extinction of the dinosaurs, 66 million years ago. In the absence of timely intervention, the global ecological crisis will spiral out of control. Earth will transition to a planetary state described by Earth System scientists as 'Hothouse Earth' (Steffen et al., 2018) – a planetary state which is either uninhabitable or hostile to human living. There is an urgent need to rediscover the intimate relationship that governs humanity's peaceful existence with its natural surroundings. This human-nature 'metabolic rift', a symptom propagated by the capitalist mode of production, did not escape Karl Marx's attention and is central to today's ecological critique of capitalism. In this short article, I will briefly examine the question 'Is Marx's ecology a case to abolish capitalism?' Or is it an invitation for humanity to

¹ In this text the term 'contemporary' is used to refer to the period after World War II (1945 – today). This period corresponds with humanity's greatest impact on the Earth system also known as The Great Acceleration. (Steffen et al., 2007).

develop more realistic material aspirations (especially in the Global North) and to cultivate a virtue of care with nature?

Marx made significant observations on the ‘irreparable rift’ in the ‘metabolic interaction between man and the earth’ associated with the industrialisation of agriculture during his time. ‘Capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil’ of its long-lasting sources of its fertility (Marx, 1867, Volume 1, p. 330). His writings were deeply inspired by the writings of German soil chemist Justus von Liebig in the 1840s through the 1860s on the metabolic need for soil restitution. The 1830-1880s were the decades of the British second agriculture revolution. In Britain, but then also in Europe and North America, people were moving from country to town to find employment. Long distance transport of food from the country to the town depleted the soil of its nutrients and led to a concentration of human and animal waste in cities such as London, polluting the river Thames. Depletion of soil fertility was an overriding environmental concern. The British were shipping tonnes of Peruvian guano to fertilise their fields and importing bones from catacombs in Europe. European farmers were raiding Napoleonic battlefields for bones out of desperation to fertilise their fields (Bellamy Foster, 2009). It is in this historical context that Marx developed his theories on the alienation of the labourer and the alienation of nature from the means of production in capitalist society. At the time of publication of Marx and Engel’s *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in 1848, capitalism had established itself in Britain, Western Europe and along the East coast of the United States of America.

Capitalism developed rapidly during Marx’s lifetime and Marx rightly predicted the inevitable development of global capitalism and the formation of a ‘world market’, which happened in the second half of the twentieth century. In its relentless search for cheaper material and human resources, the capitalist mode of production shifts to new frontiers of commodification. To be sure, this period witnessed incredible technological improvements in production which raised the material standards of living of many beyond the previous unimaginable, also to the merits of the capitalist mode of production. It also saw an increase in the exploitation of cheap nature and cheap labour in a bid for companies to maximise ‘surplus value’ and remain competitive. The acceleration of this exploitative process had already started during Marx’s time who observed how the ‘machine industry’ ruins, through competition, the production by native artisans and subsequently transforms land into fields of production of raw materials

for its needs (Chattopadhyay, 2016). One example is India, a colonial country, which was transformed into a minefield of ‘cheap’ raw materials (cotton, wool, hemp, indigo, etc.) for industrial production in Great Britain.

The rate of growth of capitalism, and especially market capitalism, was described by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto* as a case of capitalism ‘creating a world after its own image’. David Harvey describes global capitalism as a ‘system lock’ whereby both capitalists and labourers are locked in a global competitive system for their perpetual survival. In popular English literature, global capitalism represents a case of ‘if you can’t beat it, join it’.

This led Jason Moore (2016) to label the current epoch as the ‘Capitalocene’ – ‘the age of capital’ – in place of the more popular term ‘Anthropocene’ – ‘the age of man’. There is a growing popular belief that capitalism is at the root of the ecological crisis and that the ecological crisis is ‘capitalogenic’. In this view, climate change and biodiversity loss are ‘capital’s crowning achievement’. This is unjustified for those who feel that capitalism represents none other than greed and the accumulation of wealth (Bellamy Foster, 2002). Some Marxists go as far as blaming the institution of private property, calling for its abolishment (Lioudakis, 2010), despite centuries of defence by philosophers including Aristotle, St Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill on ethical and libertarian grounds.

Contemplating Marx, the question that direly begs an answer is whether there is a case to abolish capitalism on ecological grounds. Some argue that it is reductive to attribute the ecological crisis solely to the machinations of modern capitalism (Williams, 2019). Without going in detail into the social critique of capitalism, which merits a separate discussion, I argue that abolishing capitalism is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition to address the global ecological crisis, for the following reasons.

First, capitalism can take different forms. Capitalism changed form since Marx’s time and differs across borders. There are also key differences between market capitalism as championed by post-war US and state-led capitalism as practised by Stalin’s Soviet Union during the cold war. In many advanced nations after World War II, capitalist and market economies were heavily complemented with the welfare state and non-market institutions such as progressive income taxation and social security. The United States of America in the first three decades after the end of World War II experienced economic growth which was more broadly distributed across society with the

income share of the top 10% income percentiles decreasing progressively until the year 1975 (Jackson, 2019). With the onset of neoliberalism in the 1980s, the US and the UK, followed by many European countries experienced widening income and wealth inequalities. International comparisons among OECD members show the considerable disparity in the level of income inequalities among advanced nations, for example between the United States and Sweden (Rueda & Pontusson, 2000). These temporal and spatial differences show that capitalism takes different forms, some more socially acceptable than other. It is questionable whether it is socially and ecologically desirable to eliminate all forms of capitalism if this is at all possible.

Second, the hallmarks of a modern capitalist society – private property, profit, the market, and wage-labour – are arguably neutral with respect to ecological sustainability. If they are properly complemented with other forms of property (such as common and collective property), state regulation and non-market institutions, there is no reason why a capitalist mode of production should lead to environmental degradation. One example is the European Union’s political and legal commitment to limit its greenhouse gas emissions, irrespective of the type of economic activity undertaken, be it capitalist, socialist, or another form. Indeed, Marx did not believe that a transition to socialism would offer automatic liberation of nature from human domination and emphasised the need to plan responsibly. If analogically capitalism was a shovel (a human invention) in the hand of a person (human will) digging a hole (ecological degradation), which of the two would limit the size and depth of the hole – the shovel or the hand? And would eliminating the shovel prevent the hand from using other tools to dig the hole? I argue that it is the political and legal institutional framework which will define the ecological space within which capitalism, socialism or other forms of economic activity operate.

Third, the global ecological crisis is driven by other realities including global population growth and a popular desire for higher material standards of living. Global human population ballooned from a ‘mere’ 1 billion people around the year 1820 to 7.7 billion people 200 years later. Humans now correspond to roughly 34% of all mammals on Earth. The popular desire for comfort and the enjoyment of more goods and services is epitomised by the common man’s desire in the Soviet Union during the Cold War to lead Western ways of living, an aspiration which arguably undermined the Soviet party’s legitimacy. Similarly, China has a rapidly growing middle class with desires and wants for more

commodities including meat and material comfort. This desire is reflected in the elections in advanced democratic nations of political parties that promise economic growth and higher material standards of living. This also includes traditionally left-wing parties such as the Tony Blair’s New Labour, Bill Clinton’s administration and Joseph Muscat’s Labour Party. It would be naïve to assume that material resource throughput is exclusively driven by capitalists and their capitalist mentality. In this sense, capitalism is an efficient tool which speeds up the process towards predefined ends such as the popular desire for more material comfort. I contend that the human desire for more material comfort, alongside population growth, is a primary driver for ecological degradation and capitalism is an intermediate link. This would call for responsible self-regulation of human want in line with what Earth can afford ecologically rather than a futile attempt to destroy an economic system (a tool) which will in any case need to be replaced with other forms of economic organisation that might equally be ecologically degrading.

Fourth, the economic growth imperative is also a geopolitical imperative which thrives in a global political order of international anarchy – an international system characterised by the absence of a central governmental authority (Milner, 1991). There is food for thought in the statement that the Americans outspent the Russians during the Cold War. Similarly, Sino-American tension is underpinned by China’s growth as an economic powerhouse. Higher economic productivity means more material comfort, better healthcare, longer life expectancy, better education, more research, and military build-up; essential elements to compete on the international platform. In this framework, market capitalism is embraced as a form of economic organisation unrivalled at securing international economic competitiveness. Such geopolitical dynamics have also undermined efforts by the international community to address climate change. This has been witnessed by the delay and the absence of ratification by large countries of protocols and amendments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Within this context, market capitalism is used as a form of economic organisation which is best suited at maximising a country’s geopolitical influence. Eliminating capitalism would at best slow down ecological degradation but would leave unaddressed the global ultra-competitive context within which it thrives, which is another primary reason for capitalism’s existence in the first place and an independent driver of ecological degradation.



Fifth, although capitalism is not a perfect system of economic organisation and has characteristics that catalyse environmental degradation unless properly regulated, it has elements which are useful to enhance human material living on a resource scarce planet. These characteristics were also appreciated by Marx (1881) who envisioned a transition to Russian collective farming incorporating ‘all the positive acquisitions devised by the capitalist system’ (Marx, 1881, Draft of letter to Vera Zasulich). This includes market capitalism’s ability to maximise efficiency of production (doing more with less) and the market’s ability to promote entrepreneurship and innovation. These elements can be evoked with the same speed with which, say, vaccines were developed during the Covid-19 pandemic, and applied to find solutions to the ecological crisis. Within the appropriate political and regulatory structure, capitalism might hold some important keys to ecological sustainability.

In conclusion, Marx’s legacy on ecological sustainability leads us to question our relationship with nature and the practice

of capitalism on at least two accounts. The first relates to the ‘metabolic rift’. Marx invites us to investigate our relationship with nature illustrated in the image of the labourer who toils the soil and cares for it, a seamless process of reciprocal care. He leads us to question the extent to which nature should be governed as utility, that is, exploited to serve our needs, and whether like ‘[good heads of the household], [we] must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition’ (Marx, Capital, Volume III, p. 567). In the mid-19th century, Marx evoked in a very explicit manner the concept that would later be defined as ecological sustainability. The second relates to capitalism ‘creating a world after its own image’ – a global system of nations coerced into adopting capitalist ways of life. Marx observes capitalism as driving humanity’s aspirations, a characteristic which was also observed by Heidegger (1977) in his work on the essence of technology. As with technology and other useful human inventions, capitalism might have lost its proper place as a useful tool to advance

higher ends. It works against cultural diversity and coerces communities worldwide to lead ways of life not of their choice. It is incapable of providing the ultimate solution to the global ecological crisis. As with technology, however, this is not a futile call to abolish capitalism but an invitation to re-examine capitalism and the ends that it serves. Viewed in this way, capitalism needs to be reframed within an institutional framework designed to urgently steer the planet back to a ‘Stable Earth’ pathway.

Book Suggestion:

Bellamy Foster, John, 2009, *The Ecological Revolution: Making Peace With the Planet*, New York: Monthly Review Press

Roberto Debono is a medical doctor by profession, currently reading for a PhD with the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts at the University of Malta. He is critically exploring the necessary and sufficient conditions of a global political authority to address the ecological crisis and protect human freedom.

Marx and Alienation

By Edward Zammit



The concept of ‘alienation’ is often used loosely by psychologists and social scientists to depict a person’s state of mind rather than an objective situation. As used by Marx, however, this term refers to an objective condition which may be reflected in extensive social, economic and political impacts. The concept basically refers to a prevalent separation and a disruption in human, social and political relations in place of a presupposed and desired state of unity and harmony.

In addition to being sociologist, economist, political scientist, economist, activist and journalist, Marx was also a philosopher. Indeed, his concept of alienation is based on a philosophical concept of an ideal natural order. This idealised state includes a vision of human beings living, interacting and working productively in an orderly world. In order to fulfil their full, human potential, human beings need to work and enter in a dialectical relationship with others. In Marx’s imagined and idealistic ‘primitive’ society, all the people owned and operated the means and resources for production. At this original state of human development there was no separation or *alienation* between people in terms of ownership, domination and exploitation of individuals or groups over others. In Marx’s own words, this may be depicted as a state of ‘primitive communism’. It was only throughout subsequent history, with the appropriation by some of the means of production and the domination of one nation, group or class over the others that alienation emerged and eventually became dominant.

In Marx’s view, the state of alienation has been experienced historically by human beings in different areas of their lives and on various levels - with an increased level of intensity and at each level. At the *first level*, there is alienation or separation of human beings as workers from their basic, natural physical environment. This is best seen in the inhuman conditions of the workplace environment in the particular circumstances of capitalist society when Marx was doing his analysis. As a result, people become aliens and cannot be ‘at home’ throughout

their lives. At a *second level*, people are also alienated from their own work and the whole production process. Of course, this applies mainly to industrial production in contrast, say to artistic work which is creative and enables a 'sense of ownership' to be retained by the artist even after he may have sold his artistic product. At the *third level*, alienation happens at the social level – where human beings are disconnected and may even view each other antagonistically. Once again this happens as a result of the capitalist social and economic structure where due to endemic unemployment and competition for jobs, the interests of the unemployed militate against those of the employed. Likewise due to competition on the open market, the workers of one company are, in effect, competing against the workers of another company. Additionally, the interests of employees are pitted against those of their employers who are constrained by the forces of the open market to constantly to lower prices and wages in order to gain competitive advantage. Finally, as an inevitable consequence of all these forces, alienation also takes place at the *fourth level* which is at the most intimate level of the self. Here, individuals may become alienated from their own nature as human beings. In such a state, people become disconnected from their own species and as a result, their own self-perception becomes thwarted.

It has been argued by some scholars that Marx's interest in alienation was mainly confined to his youthful years and that in his later works he was more focused on his economic analysis of Capitalism. However, more recent scholarship has revealed that this was not necessarily the case and that Marx intended to return to it in the final volume of his *magnum opus* which, unfortunately he was unable to complete due to his untimely death. There he would also have completed his vision of the future communist society – about which we know very little.

The impact of Marx's analysis of social relations in terms of his alienation concept¹ was partly overshadowed by his economic analysis of the capitalist system and the social class relations associated with it. One influential, early writer on this subject was Max Weber² who saw alienation as a necessary by-product of the power structure of industrial society with its emphasis on the principle of efficiency and rationality. Alienation is embodied as an integral part of the bureaucratisation process where individuals become dominated by the organisational machinery.

But it was especially around the middle years of the subsequent century that a string of influential philosophers and sociologists drew their inspiration from Marx's alienation concept in their analysis of society and particularly of workers living under the prevalent conditions of advanced capitalism. The application of Marx's ideas by these scholars may be classified as being at a *general societal level* or at a more *specific level*. At the *general level*, these scholars identify the main characteristics and trends of their society as a whole, and at the *specific level* they highlight the social pressures on individuals to influence their thinking and acting in specific ways. In the remaining part of this essay I shall refer, selectively to a small sample of the main scholars in this tradition.

Foremost among these scholars is the German-American philosopher and sociologist Herbert Marcuse³ who writes about the 'one dimensional man' whose potential for real growth and development is crushed under the conditions of advanced industrial society. He describes work as being 'exhausting, stupefying and inhuman slavery'. Furthermore, leisure is seen as modes of relaxation which simply 'soothe and prolong this stupefaction...by projecting and satisfying false needs'. These are imposed by the media of mass communication which in turn are controlled by the established power holders. Rather than leading to self-fulfilment, these pressures lead to a 'euphoria of unhappiness ...a feeling of elation founded on misery'. Evidently, in Marx's terms, this is the deepest level of alienation.

Along the same lines, Andre Gorz⁴ has argued that deprivation at work leads the worker to seek self-fulfilment in leisure. However, just as capitalism shapes the working day, it also shapes leisure activities. As a result, the passive consumption of leisure is promoted rather than engagement in creative leisure. He argues that this kind of leisure simply provides 'a means of escape and oblivion and serves like a local anaesthetic'. Thus, according to Gorz, capitalist work and leisure reinforce each other. Such assertions have served as a catalyst to a number of sociological studies about the mutual impact of work and non-work activities. These include the 'compensatory' versus the 'spill over' hypothesis as well as on the interpretation of job satisfaction surveys and cognitive dissonance theories. On a practical policy level, these studies have also been inspirational on the humanisation of work programmes – with

¹ Marx's concept of alienation (Entfremdung) was inspired by the writings of the influential philosophers of his time, mainly Hegel and Feuerbach.

² Weber (1978).

³ Marcuse (1964).

⁴ Gorz (2013).



experiments like those with work groups, job enrichment and job enlargement. Alvin Gouldner⁵ for instance has expressed a sense of moral outrage at the impact of chronic unemployment, which is typical of industrial society, on the self-identity of unemployed workers in a society where persons are valued simply as commodities in the labour market.

Equally influential were a number of studies, mainly by sociologists and psychologists with specific applications of Marx's alienation concept.

Some sociologists, following the lead established by Weber, focused on alienation in the industrial work organisation which is so typical of industrial society. Robert Blauner⁶ proposed an operational definition of alienation and broke it down into a number of segments for the purpose of his analysis. He focused on the varying influence of technology on the worker's consciousness in a range of different workplaces. He argued that with the development of production technology over time, from the early craft industry, to machine production, assembly line production and subsequently to automated process production there was a gradual, significant decrease in the level of alienation.

Other scholars have attempted to relate workers' symptoms of alienation to other aspects of the social organisation of production including its size, supervisory style, and communications system. As a result of the new technology and the use of robotics, there is also an increased process of de-skilling taking place which further contributes to the workers' powerlessness.

In my own study of Malta's colonial heritage which stretches over many centuries of history, I have argued that certain aspects of alienation and anomie became an endemic feature of Malta's culture which are only gradually being eroded in recent years - particularly since independence and accession to the European Union. The most tangible inheritance of Malta's colonial past stretching over many centuries is the culture of national powerlessness and dependence which overshadowed our dealings with successive colonial rulers. The impact of these traditions can still be identified and are manifested in a number of specific social responses such as paternalism, patronage or clientelism, localism and political activism.

Marx's alienation concept as well as its applications have been subjected to severe criticism on several fronts. They are allegedly based on a vague picture of what people ought to be and ought to achieve in their lives - while ignoring the claims and meanings held by the people themselves. This applies particularly to his views on work and leisure. The Marxian perspective is seen as lumping together diverse occupations so as to create an unrealistic, simple model and a radical, utopian image.

Nevertheless, despite the criticism, Marx's view of alienation has undoubtedly remained to this day one of the most stimulating and productive ideas in social philosophy, social science as well as in many other literary and artistic works.

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⁵ Gouldner (1970) .

⁶ Blauner (1964).

Critical Theory and Marxism

By Keith Pisani



The term critical theory has a narrow and a broad meaning in the history of twentieth century philosophy and social theory. In its narrow sense, it refers to a Western Marxist tradition tracing its origins to the *Institute for Social Research* in Frankfurt under the directorship of Max Horkheimer. The term critical theory was at first used by members of the Institute as a code¹ for their brand of Marxism while in exile in the United States. The name stuck, and till this very day philosophers and social theorists affiliated or associated with the Institute both in the pre- and post-World War 2 periods, and those broadly working within the tradition of the Frankfurt School – as it is often called – are referred to as critical theorists.

The Institute for Social Research and Western Marxism

The *Institute for Social Research* was founded in 1923, when its affiliation with the Frankfurt University was officialised, and formally opened in 1924 under the directorship of the Austrian Marxist Carl Grünberg. Funded by Felix Weil, the Institute was originally devoted to the study of the theory and history of socialism and the labour movement. In his

inaugural address, Grünberg argued that Marxism is both an economic theory and a method of research.² Clearly aligning the vision of the Institute with a form of Marxism generally referred to as orthodox Marxism, in which the economic base is thought to largely determine social structures and social change,³ he stated that the aim of the Institute was to uncover the underlying laws and causes of history and social change⁴ through empirical and historical research.⁵ Grünberg's directorship did not last long, and after suffering a heart attack, in 1929 he resigned. In the following year, Horkheimer was appointed director of the Institute. The school of Critical Theory begins with his appointment.

In his inaugural lecture on 24 January 1931, titled 'The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research', Horkheimer immediately signalled a shift in the research vision of the Institute. With a clear reference to his predecessor, he argued that the view that considers the economy as unilaterally determining other spheres of human life such as "law, art, and philosophy" is based on "an abstractly and badly understood Marx."⁶

¹ Douglas Kellner, 1984, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, p. 116.

² Douglas Kellner, 1989, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 13.

³ Kellner, *Critical Theory*, p. 11.

⁴ Kellner, *Critical Theory*, p. 13.

⁵ Kellner, *Critical Theory*, p. 14.

⁶ Max Horkheimer, 1993, "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research," in *Between Philosophy and Social Science Selected Early Writings*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, p. 12.

Instead, Horkheimer argued for a research programme in which different researchers from different fields of study “are brought together in permanent collaboration.”⁷ With the outlining of his vision in his inaugural address, Horkheimer was aligning the Institute with a novel brand of Marxism which came to be known as Western Marxism.

The term Western Marxism, which was popularised by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *Adventures of the Dialectic* (1955), refers to a more philosophically oriented Marxism which rejects the economic determinist thesis of orthodox Marxism. Instead, this version of Marxism leaves space for human agency that can alter and even radically change the social, economic, and political organisation of society, utilising philosophically founded conceptual categories. The first Western Marxist works are generally considered to be *History and Class Consciousness*, authored by the Hungarian philosopher György Lukács, and *Marxism and Philosophy*, authored by the German philosopher Karl Korsch. Both works were published in 1923.

Critical Theory in the Pre-War Period

The term critical theory was first used by Horkheimer in a 1937 essay titled ‘Traditional and Critical’. By that time, after the Nazi accession to power, the *Institute for Social Research* had first relocated to Geneva in 1933 and then to New York in 1935, eventually becoming affiliated with Columbia University. It would then return to Frankfurt in 1953. In this programmatic essay, Horkheimer labels the kind of theoretical and empirical work conducted under his directorship as critical theory, contrasting it to what he refers to as traditional theory. The latter is understood by Horkheimer as work that seeks to formalise knowledge in a mathematical fashion with the aim of controlling reality.⁸ He takes issue with the supposed neutrality of such work and its lack of critical self-reflexivity. Contrary to traditional theory’s self-understanding as detached and neutral theoretical activity, Horkheimer argues that traditional theory is conditioned by its historical, social, and economic context. In failing to critically reflect on this conditioning, it reproduces the prevailing mode of production and structures of power.⁹

Contrary to traditional theory, Horkheimer claims that Critical Theory is critical of the current structures of economic and political power, which it sees as the source of exploitative and oppressive relations.¹⁰ The object of investigation of Critical Theory is not this or that aspect of society, but society as a whole. The problems of exploitation and oppression, according to Horkheimer, require not a partial fix and patching but a complete overhaul of the system. In this sense, Critical Theory seeks to offer a macro-critique of the structures of society which it sees as the causes of contemporary malaises,¹¹ with the practical intent of transforming society from one characterised by exploitation, oppression, and irrationality to one in which human beings are truly rational, free, and happy.

In the same year of the publication of ‘Traditional and Critical Theory’, Herbert Marcuse, another member of the Institute, published an essay in which he too tries to define and delineate the aims and character of Critical Theory. In this essay, titled ‘Philosophy and Critical Theory’, Marcuse contrasts Critical Theory to Idealist Rationalism (Kant, Hegel) which conceptualise reason abstractly. He argues for an understanding of reason in terms of a “rational organization of society...prescribed by an analysis of economic and political conditions in the given historical situation.”¹² While acknowledging the important connection between reason and freedom posited by Idealist Rationalism, Marcuse is critical of such philosophy for restricted freedom to an abstract freedom of thought. Such abstract understanding of freedom and reason bypass critical reflections on the material conditions of society, rendering material transformation of reality seemingly unnecessary.¹³ Critical Theory, according to Marcuse, does not simply stop with critique; it has as its aim the transformation of society in which the economy is subordinated “to the individuals’ needs.”¹⁴

Post-War Critical Theory

The most prominent of the early critical theorists who kept the critical utopian aims and spirit of the early Critical Theory alive in the post-World War 2 period as outlined in the essays mentioned above, was Marcuse. Famous for

⁷ Horkheimer, “Present Situation,” p. 9.

⁸ Max Horkheimer, 2002, “Traditional and Critical Theory,” in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell and others, New York: Continuum, p. 190.

⁹ Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical,” pp. 208-9.

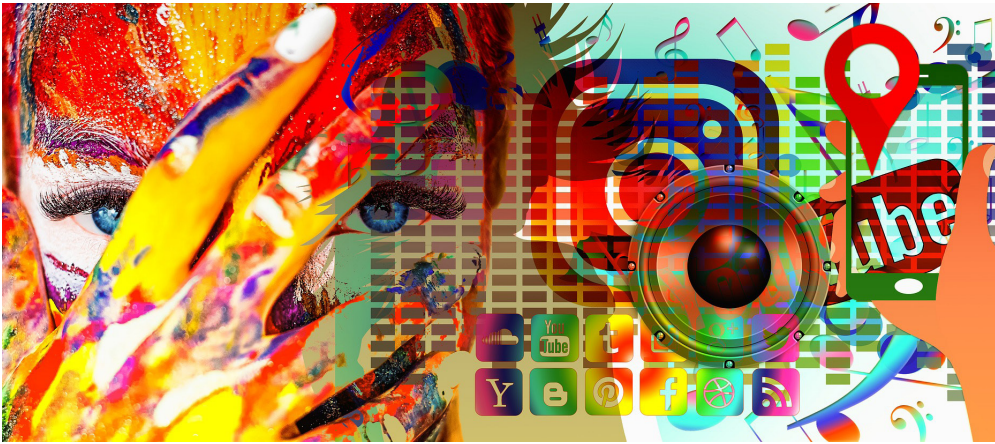
¹⁰ Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical,” pp. 221-2.

¹¹ Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical,” p. 218.

¹² Herbert Marcuse, “Philosophy and Critical Theory,” in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: MayFlyBooks, 2009), p. 100.

¹³ Marcuse, “Philosophy and Critical Theory,” p. 101.

¹⁴ Marcuse, “Philosophy and Critical Theory,” p. 106.



his interventions as an intellectual in the public sphere and unequivocal support for activism, Marcuse became a philosopher celebrity in 1960s, at one point being referred to as the “guru of the student movement.”¹⁵ Amongst the works in the post-war period of Marcuse, two stand out: *Eros and Civilization* published in 1955, and his most renowned work, *One-Dimensional Man*, published in 1964.

Eros and Civilization is a work that draws from, and synthesises, the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and the critique of political economy of Marx. The title *Eros and Civilization* is itself an allusion to Freud’s *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930). In this work, Freud argues that civilised society is achieved at the expense of pleasure repression. The notion of repression in psychoanalysis refers to a defence mechanism through which the human psyche subdues unacceptable memories, thoughts, and desires into the unconsciousness. According to Freud, in their early years, individuals are originally governed by the pleasure principle, seeking immediate, continuous, and maximum gratification. As they mature, they learn to subject their drives to the reality principle, learning to control their impulses and urges, and delay gratification according to what is considered acceptable in their society. No civilised society, Freud argues, can exist without repression.

Marcuse accepts Freud’s basic idea but gives it a Marxist twist. While he agrees with Freud that a certain level of basic

repression is necessary for the development and sustainment of civilised society, he argues that in societies characterised by “social domination” there exists a higher level of repression that supersedes what is really required for civilised societies to exist. He refers to this latter type of repression as “surplus-repression.”¹⁶ Moreover, he historicises the reality principle by claiming that it takes different forms in

different historical periods. In capitalist societies, Marcuse contends, “the prevailing historical form of the *reality principle*” is the performance principle.¹⁷ The performance principle, which Marcuse conceives in instrumental terms¹⁸, is tied to specific values, such as domination over nature, efficiency, and competitiveness. In the second half of *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse argues for a society in which the performance principle and its “rationality of domination” are replaced by “the rationality of gratification,” elevating *eros* or gratification to a governing and guiding value.¹⁹ The utopian society imagined by Marcuse would be one characterised by cooperation and the free fulfilment of needs, doing away with any form of surplus repression.

In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse retains the polemical tone against capitalism and modern society that characterises *Eros and Civilization*. This book is premised on the distinction between what Marcuse refers to as one-dimensional and two-dimensional thinking. One-dimensional thinking, which translates itself into a one-dimensional society, is a form of thinking characterised by a lack of critical evaluation, naturalising the current order of things. Two-dimensional thinking, by contrast, is characterised by critical evaluation in which the current economic, social, and political structure are subjected to a critique against potentialities and possibilities inherent in it. Two-dimensional thinking

¹⁵ Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse*, p. 281.

¹⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 35.

¹⁷ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 35.

¹⁸ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, pp. 109-10.

¹⁹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 157, p. 224.

is therefore able and willing to imagine an alternative organisation of society. One-dimensional society, Marcuse argues, is created by the assimilation of subjects into the capitalist system. In such a society, individuals become mere cogs in a machine, whose thoughts, aspirations, inclinations, and habits become moulded by the system itself.²⁰ Crucial to this total assimilation, is the creation of false needs, which Marcuse contrasts with true needs.

False needs consist of needs that are imposed on the individual from the outside. These needs, Marcuse argues, serve “particular social interests” rather than the true needs of individuals.²¹ Belonging to this category, are such needs created and imposed on the individual through advertisements.²² Marcuse does not, on the other hand, give a list of true needs, apart from the basic ones such as the need for nourishment and protection against extreme weather. He argues that true needs can only be determined by the individuals themselves, but ones that are free, unoppressed, and autonomous.²³

Conclusion

The above brush strokes of the thoughts of some of the first-generation critical theorists are meant to offer a taster of this vibrant and intellectually rich tradition. Some important figures associated with the Institute – most notably Theodor W. Adorno and Eric Fromm – were completely bypassed for the sake of brevity. Their contributions are equally rich and insightful. The tradition of Critical Theory was kept alive by so-called second-

generation critical theorists, most notably Jürgen Habermas, and post-second-generation theorists, including prominent philosophers such as Axel Honneth and Rahel Jaeggi.

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²⁰ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 13-4.

²¹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional*, p. 7.

²² Marcuse, *One-Dimensional*, p. 7.

²³ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional*, p. 8.

The Time of Our Life is a Political Matter

By Kurt Borg



Humans are fragile creatures. Our time on Earth is finite. Our immense capabilities, be they physical or cognitive, are greatly limited. Our lives are dependent on other lives, on the environment, on institutions and infrastructure. Our vulnerability is not something that we can simply will away or pretend is illusory. Finitude is therefore intrinsic to the human condition. We do not have infinite resources, nor do we have infinite time. This reality may quite easily lead to thinking that life, therefore, has no meaning. But consider the opposite view, which is that events in life obtain their meaning *precisely because* of how rare, unlikely and fragile they are. All plans can very easily be demolished. Life itself will be lost – that is a certainty, but we have to live on with the uncertainty of when it will end. And, yet, it is this same fragility that makes life precious, one could say. Perhaps it is a bit of a cliché, but visualize a beautiful sunset or a star-lit sky – isn't it the case that at least part of the beauty of this moment is that it could very easily not have happened, and that it will surely never happen again? It only happened in *this* moment, and to *you*. It happened here, and it happened now. And it ended; if it were endless, then it would not be as meaningful. If you had any guarantee that that moment will surely have happened, or that it will surely happen again and in that same way, then perhaps that sunset would be less precious.

This is the opening sentiment of Martin Hägglund's book, *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom* (2019). This

book created a lot of ripples, both in the academic world and beyond. It is not usual that a relatively thick book (450 pages), written by an academic philosopher, manages to appeal both to scholars and to the general readership. Part of this success is due to Hägglund's clear writing – the book manages to cover a lot of theoretical terrain without getting lost into excessively technical jargon and pedantic scholarly debates while remaining true to the complexity of the works being engaged with. The book manages to explain key ideas from philosophers whose texts are not particularly easy to engage with, such as Hegel's notion of freedom, Kierkegaard's understanding of faith, Augustine's idea of time, and, especially, Marx's critique of political economy.

But the book's success is also due to its deep engagement with an issue that touches people's lives. One of Hägglund's claims in *This Life* is that the structure of our lives today is being determined by economic concerns that deprive us of control over our time. What this claim then implies is that, given our finite nature, we must re-structure society in such a way whereby humans can actually have the chance to engage in meaningful activity. The thesis of the book, therefore, is quite a simple one but with powerful implications. These implications range from more existential ones – it opens our eyes to the attitudes we are taking in relation to our finite life – to more explicitly political ones, where Hägglund attempts to re-imagine a social transformation from the current capitalist economic

model to what he calls a *democratic socialism*. At the heart of this perhaps utopian social arrangement lies a deep commitment to giving people control over their time, something which is very much missing in a world where people's lives are restricted in a capitalist economy that reduces their existence to consumers and workers.

Häggglund's book also contains an important critique of liberalism, something which Marx too had anticipated. It is not that Marx (nor Häggglund, for that matter) was against liberalism; rather, he highlighted how in its current form, liberalism is failing to live up to its own promises. If liberalism aims to promote the freedom of individuals, then it is not true that the capitalist model is consistent with these aims. This is because, under a system of wage labour, such freedom is not guaranteed or achieved at all. A powerful argument that Marx makes is that although slavery was abolished in most parts of the world in the 19th century, this was replaced by a different kind of slavery, that is, wage labour. If an individual does not own enough capital to be the capitalist, then what he can offer to exchange in the market is his or her own life, that is, time, energy and labour. As compensation, the worker is given a wage, which is literally a means for subsistence, that is, money needed to buy stuff to keep on existing, be it food, shelter, and so on. Supposedly, a wage should also cover expenses that the worker *freely chooses* to engage in beyond the world of work. But the worker works way more than is required to maintain existence. So, while some of the labour of the worker's day goes to earn the money needed to survive, the rest of the worker's labour goes to produce surplus value that benefits the capitalist. That surplus value is not enjoyed by the worker – it is not the fruit of the worker's labour – but instead is enjoyed by the capitalist.

This is *exploitation* because, ultimately, the worker – who is a human with aims, aspirations, commitments and desires – is being made to sacrifice the time of his or her life. Importantly, Marx argues that such exploitation does not exist simply because some capitalists *happen* to be 'evil people'. Capitalist exploitation is not (just) a problem of morality; for Häggglund, "to reduce the issue to individual choice and character is to disregard how exploitation is *systemic* under capitalism" (2019, p. 246). This echoes David Harvey's commentary on this same issue, who writes that exploitation under capitalism is dictated by "coercive laws of competition" (2018, p. 125) and not quite by the individual capitalists' virtues or vices.

Since, as argued above, the time of our lives is so finite and thus so precious, Häggglund's point is that there is something fundamentally wrong and undesirable in this model, which underpins most societies. To flesh out this

issue further, Häggglund elaborates on the twin notions of *secular faith* and *spiritual freedom*, which are central to his arguments. Secular faith – which he contrasts with religious faith, although one could be religious and still demonstrate secular faith – is a type of faith rooted in finitude. In other words, secular faith is when you commit yourself to something while fully knowing that that something is, like yourself, finite and not eternal. Such faith depends on one's *committing* deeply to it. For Häggglund, "secular faith is the form of faith that we all sustain in caring for someone or something that is vulnerable to loss. We all care – for ourselves, for others, for the world in which we find ourselves – and care is inseparable from the risk of loss" (2019, p. 6).

Häggglund maintains that out of this shared vulnerability and finitude *could* emerge a commitment to create a better world for all, with institutions that prioritise social justice and everyone's material welfare. There is no guarantee that this will happen; after all, vulnerability is often exploited rather than protected. To better understand what Häggglund has in mind, it is worth looking at his notion of *spiritual freedom*, which is an idea he derives and adapts from Hegel's work. Human beings are the kind of creatures for whom it is intelligible to ask: *what should I do with my time?* To ask this question means that one is spiritually free, by which Häggglund means that you are not completely determined by natural instincts. The human is never *entirely* free and various factors are not of one's choosing – we are all born in a culture, within a history, into a family, in a community governed by certain norms. To be spiritually free, however, means that our life is not completely governed by the realm of necessity, i.e. survival or reproductive needs. To be free in this sense means that one is free to commit to projects that one knows will surely end. Spiritual freedom can also manifest itself in feelings of existential anxiety, since asking yourself the question of what you want to do with your life can be an unsettling experience. Being spiritually free means that one lives as a finite being and in relation to one's irrevocable death. Unfreedom, in this sense, is when someone treats you as if you are not a creature who recognises itself as a finite being, as an individual with projects, hopes and agency. For Häggglund, the capitalist system and its ways of organising our lives do not complement our being spiritually free creatures.

According to Marx, since humans are living beings, they are not self-sufficient and must draw on their environment in order to survive. This is what he refers to as the realm of necessity, that is, the realm in which humans must work in order to ensure survival. However, and this is the key point, we do not need to spend the entire time of our life engaged in activities required for our survival. Thus, there is

a *surplus of time*. It is therefore a *political* question to then inquire into what is happening to this time, and whether it is being used fruitfully or exploited. As Michael Lazarus, commenting on *This Life*, remarks, “if the control of total labour-time were democratic rather than motivated by the profit motive then the realm of freedom could determine the realm of necessity, rather than the inverse” (2021, p. 12).

Marx even thought that with the increasing use of technology, humans will be able to liberate more time for themselves. Thus, Marx optimistically thought that technology could be one way through which humans can be made freer. This is why it is important to keep on asking critical questions about whether contemporary technological advances are, in fact, contributing to a greater democratisation and freedom for humans, rather than enslaving them even further to technological tools specifically designed to boost capitalistic interests over social goods.

This Life does not only raise the critical questions, but also provides concrete suggestions for what a society that acknowledges human spiritual freedom could be like. This is another virtue of this book; while a lot of critical theory is excellent at diagnosing our contemporary predicaments, less work actually makes the bold move to risk suggesting alternatives. Hägglund outlines a vision of *democratic socialism*, and in this last part of this article I will indicate some measures that Hägglund proposes. The project of democratic socialism, for Hägglund, “is committed to providing the material and spiritual conditions for each one of us to lead a free life, in mutual recognition of our dependence on one another” (2019, p. 26).

For example, Hägglund argues that “in an emancipated society, we would be able to work on the basis of our commitments rather than due to coercion” (2019, p. 214). This would mean engaging in activities as ends in themselves, that is, as activities that we ourselves have freely chosen for ourselves. Being free in the way humans are, means that time matters for us (because we do not have an infinite amount of it) and so this can motivate us to resist exploitation and engage collectively with others to transform society by creating institutions and structures that recognize us as free. An important step towards this is to alter the measure of value and social wealth. Instead of measuring wealth through socially necessary labour time, Marx argues that it is, rather, *disposable time* – or what Hägglund calls “socially available free time” (2019, p. 265) – that is the real measure of wealth. Instead of the current measure of wealth – by which the capitalist seeks to extract more surplus value from wage labour – the democratic socialist

measure of wealth would be in terms of the time that humans have left to themselves. This disposable time, the time of our lives, would then be used by individuals in the way they would want, thus foregrounding their agency and being true to their spiritual freedom. This would liberate more time for individuals who, rather than sacrificing their time to wage labour, would actually use this time to flourish as they wish.

Another principle of democratic socialism is that the means of production must be collectively owned and not used for the purpose of generating profits. So, Hägglund argues that, for example, technologies would be engineered “with the aim of generating as much surplus time as possible for everyone” (2019, p. 304). Furthermore, democratic socialism would function according to Marx’s principle: “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” (2019, p. 307). Unlike capitalist models, in which humans are alienated from their work, from themselves and from others, democratic socialism could be a way to restore people’s agency since social production would be contributing to a common good and to everyone’s spiritual freedom.

To tie this vision back to the original point in this article, all depends on our ability to truly realise our finitude and fragility. This reveals the value of our limited time, which should prompt us to ensure that this time is being used in the way that we are actively and freely choosing, and not how it is dictated to us by exploitative structures. Out of this insight, Hägglund’s book argues, emerges the motivation to struggle for a democratic socialism. Ultimately, Hägglund maintains, “*everything depends on what we do with our time together*” (2019, p. 27).

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Marxism and Utopian Thought

By Kathrin Schödel



There are several contradictory relations between Marxism and utopianism. On the one hand, Marxists are often accused of purporting an unrealistic or totalitarian utopia. Marxism itself, however, has its own anti-utopian tradition going back to Marx and Engels' critique of 'utopian socialism'. Then, there is also a strand of Marxist utopian theory with well-known works such as Ernst Bloch's *Principle of Hope* (1954-59) and more recent contributions (e.g. Chrostowska/Ingram 2016).

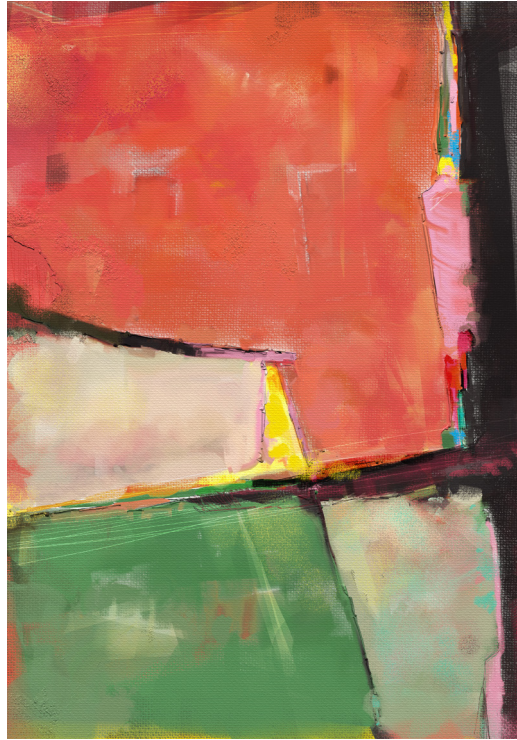
Even though utopianism is often seen as aiming at a timeless ideal, it is of course historically situated – as is its rejection. The shape of utopia and what is negatively characterised as utopian both change with different contexts. Today, branding a notion as utopian can be used to denigrate it as impractical and illusory. It may also refer to an all too rigid, generalising idea of what a better world would look like, especially one that disregards the limitations, necessary shortcomings and conflicts of social relations. Contemporary utopian thought in turn has reacted to this kind of critique by emphasising utopia as an image, not a blueprint to be implemented literally and in all details, but an experimental sketch of what could be, a fictional world designed to inspire rather than limit. From the invention of the word in Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), it has, indeed, been linked to literary writing. Some of the most prolific recent utopians

are authors of speculative fiction, such as Ursula K. Le Guin and Kim Stanley Robinson. Current utopian theories tend to conceive utopia as a process, a method (Jameson 2010; Levitas 2013) and not a fixed aim. The question of the relation between Marxism and utopia is, therefore, connected to the question of how utopia is defined.

Etymologically, utopia is a place that does not exist, derived from Greek οὐ τόπος, *no place* or *non-place*, and a good place – this second meaning can be traced back to a pun with Greek εὖ τόπος. The term is generally used to describe any kind of positive imagination of an alternative socio-political world. What Marxism and utopianism have in common is the radical departure from the status quo. They both conceive changes towards a better world as structural and systemic. Since the time of the Cold War, predominant anti-utopianism also closely links utopia and communism. The main notion used to characterise them in a negative sense is totalitarianism. They were seen as attempting the realisation of an ideal socio-political world by the suppression of otherness, of anything perceived as unfitting for the ideal to be established. In 1989/90, the 'Fall of Communism' seemed to seal the end of utopia, too, conceived as the end of a failed social experiment that had caused much suffering and discontent. The rejection of utopia was connected to the apparent triumph of the

capitalist world order. Margaret Thatcher's famous slogan "There is no alternative" appeared to be vindicated. However, this viewpoint, generally known by its acronym TINA, can itself be criticised for its rigidity and claim to absoluteness – tending to the very traits it ascribes to utopianism. The total affirmation of the prevailing social order is clearly linked to the interests of the ruling classes in maintaining and justifying a system they profit from. Accordingly, opponents of TINA have since countered with TAMARA: 'There are many and realistic alternatives'. In times of financial crises, a global pandemic and worsening climate catastrophe, it is no longer plausible to speak of an 'end of history' understood as a continuity of the present world order. The radical questioning of the political and economic system responsible for such severe effects and the search for a better, or even necessary, alternative has consequently gained more urgency and prevalence. Can the two theories spurned by proponents of the status quo be of use in this renewed quest for a better future?

If the ideas are rejected because of their deviation from the present state of things, they may be exactly what is needed. But that does not mean to dismiss all criticism of Marxism and utopia. In view of the question of applying them today, they certainly have to be adapted. Indeed, one could argue that both approaches entail precisely the impulse for constant critical reflection, including self-reflection, in their very concepts. The utopian 'no place' continuously shifts in relation to the 'place' it is envisaged from: many utopias can be read as a mirror, *ex positivo* so to speak, held up to the present of their time of writing. The more recent idea of utopia as a method implies the dynamic application of this mode of thought by using the perspective of a better future to consider present realities and possibilities for change. Since Marxism is mainly a method of historical analysis, if it is to be continued meaningfully, it has to follow the historical moment. Accordingly, both theories are opposed to the static rigidity and totalitarianism their critics associate them with. They are contemporary in the sense that they change with time and are therefore, by definition, open and receptive to varying social realities. Contrary to widely held prejudice, both can be deeply democratic, and are



often concerned with individual autonomy. Marxism highlights the fundamentally undemocratic structure of capitalism by showing how economic power and decision-making is largely exerted outside of democratic political control, and it emphasises the fact that conditions of alienated labour preclude individual freedom and self-actualisation.

Many utopias also contain ideas of radical democracy, and so does, for instance, Marx's appraisal of the Paris Commune as the "harbinger of a new society" (Marx 1871). Thus, when utopian visions and Marx's theories have been used to justify the violent suppression of opposition and dissidence, it constitutes a break from some of their central tenets. Nevertheless,

in order to be able to employ the concepts of communism and utopia in view of a "reconstruction of the future", the negative past associated with them has to be remembered and confronted, as political theorist Bini Adamczak rightly insists in her book *Yesterday's Tomorrow* (2021). The capitalist world order, however, is not the historical answer to all failures of 'real existing socialism' as it was presented after the Cold War. The connection between capitalism and its forms of suppression and exploitation, its deadly inequalities – life expectancy depends on social conditions and material wealth – and exclusions – for example at national borders – as well as large-scale, ongoing environmental destruction has now come to the fore again. If we want a better, or rather simply a good future or even a future at all, a radical alternative will have to be envisaged and attained – the original aim of Marxism and utopia.

First of all, both view-points can help to sharpen the critique of the present. Marxism remains an essential tool for analysing capitalism, even for those who would not call themselves Marxists. It foregrounds the structures of exploitation – of humans and of non-human nature, the systemic need of capital accumulation, which leads to the continuously expanding extraction of surplus value and the economisation of ever more spaces and spheres. This logic is linked to the burning issues of our time. The increased risk of new zoonotic diseases transmitted from animals to humans, such as Covid-19, is a result of the ruthless exploitation of nature in capitalism: deforestation and the

disturbance of eco-systems, as well as meat production and unsustainable land use. Climate catastrophe, pollution and loss of liveable spaces are the consequences of a mode of production geared towards the maximisation of profit. A system based on the competition between private economic actors is hardly suited for sustainable planning and a holistic concern for all the effects of its workings. With Marxist analysis, the conditions of capitalism, which appear to many as simple factual necessities, become visible as politically established exclusionary power structures based on private property. Those in possession of capital are able to make far-reaching decisions – such as where, how and what is produced – and to avail themselves of the largest part of the value created by the labour of others while externalising further ‘costs’, such as environmental impact. Unsettling a seemingly self-evident consensus about what is considered as unquestioned ‘normality’, is also a function of utopia. It provides the vantage-point of a different socio-political system and thus broadens the scope of imagination for a departure from the overwhelming dominance of the existing world order and its ideological formations. Social reality comes into focus as man-made, not an ineluctable given but open for change.

In the search for alternative futures, Marxism and utopian thought can furthermore be employed to critically examine one another: the critique of utopia formulated by Marx and Engels can be used to probe utopianism, and utopian theory in turn may help to overcome some of the impasses Marxism has run into. ‘Utopian socialism’ is seen by Marx and Engels as detached from historical developments. Instead of what they consider as mere intellectual phantasies of a better world, they emphasise the appearance of a new social order in the process of class struggle (Marx/Engels 1848). A better socio-political world would thus be created from below and in practice, not through the implementation of a utopian theory. The understanding of utopia as method similarly emphasises the need to connect utopian ideas to social realities and existing political movements, and it asks the question of the way to utopia, which the construction of insular utopian spaces tended to evade. Here, Marxist historical materialism helps to highlight the importance of the material basis of social organisation and the necessity to change economic conditions as well as political and social ones. However, it becomes too one-sided and itself unrealistic when it construes the end of class society as an end of all forms of oppression and inequality. This is where utopian thought, together with other political perspectives, such as feminism and queer theory, anti-racism and -colonialism, abolitionism and many other relevant approaches, can help to identify all dimensions of social relations which need to be altered if a better world for all is the aim. Feminism, for instance, accentuates gender

relations and the essential dimensions of reproduction and care. Instead of being a limitation, the utopian form of spelling out and narrating different ways of living together concretises the various areas of life which would have to be recreated – in a constant process of critique and change. Utopian constructions can be a catalyst for discussion and an inspiration of what to fight for and – as far as possible – already put into practice. A Marxist perspective again guards against the creation of utopian enclaves for the privileged. It highlights that many current alternative life-styles are not accessible to the majority, for example experiments in a sharing economy, which rely on people having something to share in the first place, and have become a further site of exploitation as part of the platform economy. Combining Marxism and utopia in a political struggle for a commonly shared better future means to keep alive the imagination of alternative worlds and to ground it in historical realities, material conditions and social movements from below. A Marxist utopian method can be seen, for instance, in the occupation of unused buildings: it provides a space for putting non-hierarchical, democratically planned and collectively organised forms of living together into practice while also confronting the property regime at the basis of capitalism.

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Marxist Feminism and the Relation between Marxism and Feminism

By Özlem Duva Kaya



Marxist feminism¹, by establishing the problem of women's emancipation with a perspective that includes and expands the Marxist theory, primarily deals with the critique of capitalism and focuses on the question of how gender inequalities are reproduced within the relations of production. The Marxist feminist point of view, which started with the political movements in the 1960s and continued in the 1980s and 90s, and has gained different perspectives today, accepts that the subordination of women did not occur for the first time with capitalism, but explains the increase of this exploitation with the rise of capitalism. From the 1930s onwards, Marxist feminism in the USA demanded greater attention to the political and economic dimensions of systemic racism as well as sexism and class exploitation. Marxist feminism within the anti-colonial movements has also drawn attention to imperialism and its mobilization of feudal relations of gender oppression to seize populations, land and markets. Both feminism and

Marxism are movements against the inequalities created by power relations. For this reason, Marxist Theory and Feminist theory have some common points. While Marxism is about exploitation within the class dynamics of capitalism, feminism is about patriarchal exploitation and both draw attention to systematic inequalities.

Thus, by acknowledging unpaid, productive "women's work" as an integral part of capitalism, Marxism has historicized reproduction in relation to production to better understand the exploitation and oppression of women under capitalism. In general terms, it is claimed that the liberation and emancipation of women will be possible with the complete transformation of capitalist society in which private property and class struggle exist. In this direction, feminism, which intersects with Marxist movements, developed by feeding on Marxism's critique of capitalism and its emphasis on the priority of class exploitation. For this reason, women

¹ I would like to thank Prof. Claude Mangion for his support and proofreading in this article.

are considered as part of the oppressed and exploited class in Marxist feminism. However, this approach is not considered a satisfactory for some feminists.² According to some feminists, the economic style of capitalism and the ideological style of patriarchy are different from each other. When it comes to women's emancipation, it is clear that Marxism and feminism have some common demands in terms of both the class context and the context of equal access to rights.

The pioneers of Marxist feminism like Clara Zetkin, Emma Ihrer, and Adelheid Popp claimed that women's rights can be developed in political associations. They defended the political rights of women struggling within the working class (Foster, 1955). At this point, it is understood that Marxist feminists, unlike many Marxist thinkers, do not consider the issue of labor and exploitation only on the basis of economic conflict of interest, but also as a political issue. Clara Zetkin, Eleanor Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Alexandra Kollontay became influential in Marxist feminism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by establishing the struggle based on the contradiction between bourgeoisie and the working-class. The early work of Marxist-Socialist women's movement was primarily concerned with the social democratic position on women's issues or the antagonism between the bourgeois women's movement and the working class movement. The structural causes of the oppression on women, the arrangement of the public sphere and the effect of capitalism on this arrangement were taken as the focal point of investigation. Therefore, the feminist movement was mostly driven by economic and political demands and activities. (Paletschek, Sylvia-Ennker, Biancha Pietrow, 2004:303)

Both Marxism and feminism attempt to explain the positioning to which individuals are subjected to historical reasons and by including them in a discussion of justice. While the feminist theory shows that the historically exploited class of women is the result of patriarchal ideological structures, according to Marxism, the historical positioning of the oppressed classes is the product of a structure under the control of capital. For this reason, Marxist feminists have tried to show that Marxist theory is a useful ground for revealing the foundations of patriarchal exploitation while explaining the causes of the exploitative order. According to Marxist Feminists, the liberation of women is related to the production of material life, and this relationship is essential to conceiving the possibility of life without domination. Frigga Haug believes that a new and more egalitarian life can be established by the reorganisation of material life, and it can be achieved

within a Marxist understanding of economics and politics, by dividing all people's time equally into four main areas of activity: employed work; social reproduction, work; personal self-development; and political activism. (Haug, 2015:236) It is understood from this that the reflections of Marx's ideas within the feminist movement not only emphasize the struggle for a more equitable distribution of reproductive labor, but also emphasise and articulate the need for women to organise themselves through political activism to participate in these struggles.

In fact, when we consider the years when Marxism and feminism interacted, the demands of women for basic rights such as the right to political organisation constituted the driving force of their class demands. Therefore, it is clear that the demands of Marxist feminism have enriched and transformed the Marxist movement especially in terms of political organization, although some Marxists have seen feminism as a part of bourgeois ideology and even as an agent. In spite of this Marxist feminists were aware that they were not equal to men from the same class even if they experienced the same class oppression. Therefore, the issue of women and, more generally, the issue of exploitation couldn't be addressed only with an economic-based class analysis. Based on these considerations, Marxist feminists have appropriated some of the possibilities within the thought of Marx and Engels in the name of feminist demands.

The issue of women's emancipation has been one of the debates of European social democrats in the context of social liberation since the middle of the 19th century. From this period, which can be considered as the early years of Marxist feminism, the exclusion of women from wage labor in the capitalist mode of production and the reproduction processes they undertake in domestic production are the fields of struggle for the liberation of women. Thus, a feminist discourse emerged from the speech that "women, like those who produce, should be the subject of their own liberation but neither should women seek help from men, nor workers from the middle class"; and women are considered a part of the revolutionary subject (E. Marx and Aveling, 1886).

By seeking an answer to the question of how women's emancipation will be possible under the conditions of capitalism, Marxist feminism appealed to classical Marxist theory. Accordingly, the historical and social change of humanity can be analysed with a materialist method by understanding the change in modes of production, and that human emancipation can only be achieved through the

² See: Hartmann, Heidi I., "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a more Progressive Union", *Capital and Class*, 1979, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/030981687900800102>, Accessed: 05.02.2022

establishment of a classless, non-exploitation communist society. In the aforementioned framework, the relations between the sexes and the family, like other social units, have been differentiated due to the change in the mode of production, and especially with the development of capitalist production relations, women have been socially subordinated.

Marx and Engels' argument that male dominance is the product of certain historical conditions in which private property developed is the basis of Marxist feminism. Marx developed brief but important discussions of gender, both in his diaries from 1880-1882 and in the Manuscripts of 1844. In the 1844 manuscripts, Marx states that "the condition of women can be used as a measure of the general development of society". In fact, that was also expressed by the utopian socialists before him, but the novelty in Marx's analysis in this work is particularly on "the relationship between nature-society". In this respect, the Manuscripts revealed why the status of women can be a measure of the overall development of their society, and later explained them more fully in *The German Ideology* and *Capital*.

Today, feminist theorists criticise Marx claiming that despite all his criticisms of western metaphysics, he maintains its fundamental dichotomies and dualities in his own thought. Feminists frequently argue that Marx established a hierarchical dichotomy that associates women with nature, men with society, that is, women with obligations and men with freedoms. Thus, it is claimed that Marx re-naturalized the position of women and their productive role. On the other hand, with a careful reading on the dialectical method of Marx's understanding of the relationship between the concepts of nature, culture, and labor in the Manuscripts, especially the relationship between nature and culture, it can be seen that it is considered in relation to women. Focusing on his dialectical method may also offer some ideas that disprove this criticism. According to Marx, "there is no fundamental human nature"; on the contrary, there are only historically definite forms of human nature. Human nature is peculiar to feudalism, capitalism, socialism and others, and is therefore, historical. This analysis provides us with dialectical tools against the claims that "women are by nature...", which are confronted on many occasions today. It makes it possible to understand that the behavior patterns of women (and of course men too) have not only biological but also social (also economic, cultural) foundations: "If 'human' does not have a given, fixed, unchanging nature determined by their biology, and historicalness-sociality-culturalism is an immanent part of their nature, then biology

cannot be a destiny for either man or woman. Because human always exist and interact within concrete conditions mediated by certain social relations.³

In his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Friedrich Engels argues that the institution that subordinates the free and equal productive women of pre-class societies to men is the family that reveals and reproduces the private property owned by men. Accordingly, as production for use gradually turned into men's production for exchange, women became secondary beings within the home expected only to manage the private sphere (Engels, 1884). Therefore, as Martha E. Giménez mentioned, for Marxist feminism, the oppression of women in the unequal man-woman relationship is on the one hand hidden while on the other being a matter of social struggle (Giménez, 2018: 352).

After such analysis of Marxism, socialist feminists in the early 1900s demanded a better understanding of how reproduction became women's business and demanded an end to monogamous marriage and objectification in the family (Bebel, 1910). They criticized the strict distinction between the private and the public space and thus enriched Marxist theory by these analysis. In campaigns to organize women from the 1880s, the practice of socialist feminism had already developed explanations for why women's labor was paid less than men's labor. In the factories controlled by violence, it was loudly stated that women workers should gain their rights by entering the collective bargaining units of workers' associations and unions (Zetkin, 1976). Socialist feminists sought to synthesize and broaden their scope by combining feminist analysis of gender inequality, social reproduction, and economic reproduction. Considering women in the field of economic and social reproduction and limiting them to female roles was not only a problem of the capitalist class, and women began to declare that they were oppressed by both capital and masculine ideology in every environment they were in. Engels and Zetkin viewed the family as a female-oppressed space used by capitalism to further exploit women's (and to a lesser extent men's) unpaid reproductive labor. They also criticized marriage by targeting it as a religious and governmental institution that forces women to be subordinate to men and capital. However, neither has fundamentally theorised that women's bodily integrity and control over their sexual desires are also constitutive aspects of capitalism.

This issue was discussed by Alexandra Kollantai. According to Kollantai, women are a classed group within capitalism, and therefore the suffrage is not sufficient alone to ensure

³ See: Marx, Karl; Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/comm.htm>, Accessed: 02.02.2022

the emancipation of all women. While acknowledging the contributions of first-wave feminism, Kollontai argues that women's suffrage did nothing to advance workers' power for themselves; instead, she argued that some women increased class power over others. For this reason, working class women have to know their class position and each element that determines those positions and develop ways of struggle accordingly. Working class women must join the proletarian revolution in solidarity with working class men to overthrow capitalism. Considering that private property is the root cause of women's oppression, Kollontai thinks that without the active transformation of morality, sexuality and family, which are the founding elements of state socialism, women will never achieve full emancipation. To this end, Kollontai established the *Women's Bureau* in 1919 and tried to develop solutions that would eliminate patriarchal control over women's bodies. She has helped change many laws, from developing government support programs for children and mothers, such as paid maternity leave and childcare institutions, to divorce laws, civil marriage laws, and illegitimate child rights laws. By waging war against oppressive sexual customs, she argued that sex, desire, and pleasure must also advance revolutionary horizons. Thus, she brought together concepts of Marxist feminism in her thought such as revolution and popular will, with the concepts such as the desire to live fulfilling lives, bodily autonomy and women's sexual pleasure. After this stage, the liberation of women from all the masculine forms, embracing revolutionary sex, love, care and desire became the basic principles of Marxist feminism.

From past to present, the main problem that Marxist feminism has dealt with in its development process has been the invisibility of women's labor and the exploitation of women by capitalist institutions. In connection with this, how capitalist production mobilises social reproduction for the acquisition of capital and how it dominates women's lives and bodies is also discussed. Starting from Marxism's labor theory and definition of class contradiction, Marxist feminists initiated a new and effective transformation within the feminist movement. With a call for women to gain their own class consciousness, not just demanding suffrage, Marxist feminists aimed to erode all institutional structures surrounding women, such as the economy, family, and sexuality. In addition to this, they tried to reveal how revolutionary movements could fight capitalism by collectivising and socialising reproduction works for the benefit of everyone through an investigation of the possibilities of a revolution that would make women subjects. Although it has become common to employ female workers today, there is still no equal wage distribution between men and women. On the other hand, many problems such as

discussions of social reproduction, the institution of the family demanding social values, sexuality, desire, and control of bodily pleasures still continue. For this reason, Marxist and Socialist feminists, as in the past, are looking for ways to destroy the moves of patriarchal values towards the world of life, reproduction, and the determination of production and consumption relations within the feminist revolutionary struggle. Of course, today they try to imagine that they be productive in an intersectional way with new subjects and new fields. In order to better understand the new revolutionary horizons, the Marxist feminist continues to associate labor with desire and need, drawing attention to the emotional relations in capitalism, and expanding their framework with the contributions of different feministing movements and theories.

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Redefining the Political: Italy 1968 - 1977

By Karl Baldacchino



The Italian autonomist Marxist movements from the early 1960s to the late 1970s represent an intense phase of conflict and radical action, as well as innovation in terms of redefining the political. Indeed, Italian revolutionary politics is said to “constitute a kind of laboratory for experimentation in new forms of political thinking that help us conceive a revolutionary practice in our times” (Hardt, 1996, 1). This experimentation stemmed very much out of a turbulent period, known as the *sessantaotto lungo* (long ‘68). Similar to France and other parts of the world at the time, in 1968 Italy was hit by a wave of conflicts initiated by university students in Rome, as well as automotive factory workers in the north of the country. The said conflicts culminated in what came to be known as the *autunno caldo* (‘hot autumn’) of 1969, which saw the majority of the Italian workers engaging in strikes, factory take-overs and acts of sabotage.

A distinctive type of Italian political philosophy is said to have originated out of such a turbulent political situation (Negri, 2017). Indeed, the *Operaismo* (workerist) movement is credited with formulating “a unique form of Italian phenomenology”, resulting in ‘Italian theory’ gaining “self-awareness of its specificity” (Christiaens and Treiber, 2021, 122). In Mario Tronti’s “classical formulation of Operaismo, the working class was capable of more than that which

served capital accumulation, and the “excess potential formed the basis of resistance” (ibid., 122). In his classic *Operai e capitale* (Workers and Capital) (1966), Tronti (2019) portrays capitalism as that dominant force which exploits the potentiality of human living labour, namely by way of conditioning it to produce surplus-value. Nevertheless, according to him the potential of living labour by far exceeds such limitations. In this context, Italian theory has been at the forefront in renewing a seminal philosophical issue, originally attributed to Aristotle, concerning the relation between potentiality and actuality. As a result, “Aristotle’s metaphysics” was connected “to a crucial political question for our times: the relation between potentiality and actuality in the government of life itself” (Christiaens and Treiber, 2021, 122). Consequently, due to its perpetual engagement with everyday political realities, Roberto Esposito (2012) dubs Italian thought as ‘living thought’ (*pensiero vivente*).

Notably, since Tronti’s early writings, the refusal of work featured as a strategy that helps workers in achieving autonomy from the exploitative productive forces of capital. In this context, the concept and practice of ‘the refusal of work’, synonymous with workerist and autonomous movements, is an ever-present potentiality for withdrawal from exploitative settings. Franco Berardi (2009) notes how

besides the obvious fact that the refusal of work is attached to the fact that workers do not like to be exploited, it also

means that the capitalist restructuring, the technological change, and the general transformation of social institutions are produced by the daily action of withdrawal from exploitation, of rejection of the obligation to produce surplus value, and to increase the value of capital, reducing the value of life (75).

Accordingly, an antagonistic relationship with power, based on “internal displacement, shiftings, settlings and dissolutions”, ensures “self-regulation of the social body in its independence and in its interaction with the disciplinary norm” (ibid., 75). This distinctive brand of Italian autonomist Marxism, however, sharply contrasted the ideas of historical organisations of the Left at the time, namely the Italian Communist Party, which was quick to disassociate itself from the workers’ movement. Consequently, away from any type of party affiliation, a host of revolutionary groups such as *Potere Operaio* (Workers’ Power) started to organise for themselves (Berardi, 2007). This group in particular was composed of a mix of militant intellectuals and artists, chiefly among them Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi, Antonio Negri and Nanni Balestrini. More generally, such groups

organized in factories, schools, and at the local level (promoting political strikes, the occupation of schools, student demonstrations against the government, and occupation of vacant houses by homeless proletarians in Rome and Milan especially). They assumed a position of opposition to the Italian Communist party, which, after decades of Stalinist loyalty, was taking on the characteristics of a social-democratic party and was condemning the most radical working-class and student demonstrations in the name of unity with the middle classes and in the name of a policy of legality and respect for the fundamental rule of the capitalist order (ibid., 151).

In fact, in 1973 the Italian Communist party went on to reach a pact with the Christian Democrats, known as the ‘historic compromise’ (compromesso storico), to govern jointly.

That same year, in 1973 *Potere Operaio* dissolved and diffused itself throughout the mass *Autonomia* (Autonomy) movement, which was mobilising itself throughout the country and engaging in direct confrontation with the state police and fascists. The phrase adopted by the movement — *Autonomia* — meant

autonomy from capital (the refusal of workers to define their need and demands according to capital’s need for labour power subordinate to the rhythms of the production process), and autonomy from external organizations (workers’ independence

from the parties and unions which were seen to be subservient to capital). As such, it represented the most absolute and essentialist conception of social movement (Lumley, 1990, 38).

At this stage the Autonomy movement was growing both in numbers and in violence. Notably, however, a lot of the more serious violence during this period is attributed to the *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades), a left-wing terrorist group formed in 1970 and which was particularly active later on between 1977 and 1981. Nonetheless, in the midst of a bleak socio-economic situation, *Autonomia* started to search for new inspirations, namely the French philosophy of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Berardi 2007, Lotringer and Marazzi, 2007, Dosse 2009). Consequently, a post-operaist reading of Marx emerged. Industrial workers have been indeed successful in their refusal, nevertheless, in post-industrialist societies capitalism invested in “labor saving technologies and also to change the technical composition of the work process, in order to expel the well organised industrial workers and to create a new organisation of labour which could be more flexible” (Berardi, 2009, 78). Thus, the “central role previously occupied by the labor power of mass factory workers in the production of surplus value is today increasingly filled by intellectual, immaterial, and communicative labor power” (Hardt and Negri, 2001, 29).

In this respect, as remarked by François Dosse (2009), in particular the Italian translation of *Anti-Oedipus* in 1975 provided the movement “with a new language and new paths for hope” (14). Those affiliated with the movement “set out to change life in the present. They hoped to be able to invent the new here-and-now in convivial collective spaces, self-managed places, communities conducive to the liberation from the self” (ibid., 14). The movement never asked for “better distribution of employment, work for all, and wages indexed to inflation, but far less traditionally strove to sap the foundations of the system by frontally attacking labor value, property, and the delegation of power and speech” (ibid., 13). Nevertheless, such struggles, which reached their culmination in 1977, faced fierce counter-resistance from the state. That year the city of Bologna saw several violent clashes, as well as a massive convention against repression, which saw some 80,000 people descending onto the streets. Notably, in this period a host of French intellectuals, including among others Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, Jean-Paul Sartre and Roland Barthes, penned and signed an appeal in the name of those *Autonomia* members who were imprisoned by the state, among them Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi.

Sylvère Lotringer, “who spent the summer trying to clarify the confused Italian situation”, saw in the Autonomists

a new form of political behavior, experimental and imaginative, ideologically open, rhizomatic in organization, non-representational and non-dialectical in action, with a healthy sense of humor and zest for life. It was the kind of movement May '68 could have triggered, and that Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze had anticipated in theory (Lotringer, 2007, vi).

Consequently, “Autonomy does not remain content ‘waiting for something from outside’, but instead tries to live through today’s capitalism in an alternative way by deflecting the latter’s advances to the profit of the new social subject” (Lotringer, 2007, 14-15). The movement was never interested in seizing power and intended “to win against capitalism not by force of arms, but by quickness of intelligence, by pushing capital to the utmost of its possibilities” (ibid., 15). In seeking “to create organizational forms different from both the party and the ‘anti-party’” the autonomists sought to redefine the political, which in many ways spelt the end of a certain way of doing politics (Lotringer and Marazzi, 2007, 12). “The end of politics”, however, according to Lotringer and Marazzi, signified “the rebirth of politics” which in a “Nietzschean sense: it returns as other” (ibid., 12, emphasis in original). Thus, in this specific Italian context, a simultaneous ‘end’ and ‘return’ results in a perpetual search for new emancipatory spaces and possibilities, still present in the more recent Italian critical thought.

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On not Being too Dogmatic About Marx

By Michael Grech



Apart from the logical error this labelling involves (a clear example of *Ad Hominem*), it is a line of attack that is antithetical to the thought and spirit of the great thinker himself. Marx analyzed, exposed and confuted the reactionary use of ideas, belief and thoughts - even those ideas that are, appear or come to be marketed as being the most progressive or enlightened – rather than their source or nature. In *The Communist Manifesto* for instance, he negatively refers to those German philosophers who took those ideas that in France were the rallying cry of the great revolution, and transplanted them in a socio-economic-cultural context where conditions differed radically from those of France in 1789, with the net effect of making them politically sterile. Indeed, the most progressive and enlightened (whatever these terms may mean) ideas, beliefs and thoughts may - in specific contexts, situations and circumstances - be employed to sustain, defend or maintain the *status quo*, or help deflect possibly fecund criticism to safe harbours.¹

Introduction

This writing may be considered as the second segment of a non-academic article concerning Marx, the first part of which appeared in *Isles of the Left* a few years ago. There I discussed five caricatures of Marx that many, especially non-Marxists (but not just), endorse. Here I refer to some shortcomings of people who identify themselves as Marxists, or who are directly or indirectly inspired by Marxism.

That's crap ... he's a reactionary

Thomas Sowell, a harsh and often unfair critic of Marxism, was probably right when he noted a tendency amongst many who style themselves as Marxists to dismiss ideas, thoughts and conclusions they do not accept merely by attaching the label 'reactionary' to their source. (Sowell, 1985) Throughout the years, the label has been applied to various people, groups and tendencies (in art, science and philosophy); ranging from those that can sensibly be called reactionary (which does not imply that they are wrong in everything they say or suggest) on the one hand, to leftist views, individuals and groups deemed unorthodox, heretical or deviating on the other side of the spectrum, passing through a variety of other positions in between.

The tendency to label and dismiss individuals, groups and tendencies as reactionary – and to end the argument once the label has been affixed - has indeed been found stifling by the most fertile minds within the Marxist political and philosophical tradition. From thinkers like Marcuse who could re-evaluate movements like Romanticism that had been dismissed outright as reactionary (Sethness Castro, 2016), to those Marxists that critically and constructively engage with the work of Eduard Bernstein (Gorman, 1981), mature Marxists have struggled and succeeded to get rid of the habit of dismissing *ad hoc* individuals, groups and tendencies through the mere application of a label. Marx himself after all, took insights from a thinker - Hegel, arguably his most important point of reference - who considered the authoritarian Prussian State as the embodiment of Reason (with a capital R). Clearly not an example of 'That's crap, he's a reactionary!'

It's a construct ... hence it's not real

This is another common fallacy amongst many Marxists (or people directly or indirectly inspired by what goes/went on as Marxism) with roots in the work of Marx himself.

¹ A corollary of this would be that there might be contexts where ideas that appear or would be labelled traditional, conservative or conventional by positivist or liberal standards, might be put to a progressive use; if they are successfully employed to challenge existing hegemonic relations.

It is a fallacy that arises from the fact that maybe Marx himself, but definitely many who follow him, confound what is a mere category mistake², with an ontological verdict.³ More specifically it is a fallacy which occurs when - after something that is thought to be natural or essential is exposed to have been invented, built or created by human beings in some determinate context which involves specific interests or contingent situations – one is lead to a verdict pronouncing the non-existence of the construct. (I am using the word construct since it is this word that is frequently used in current literature to indicate what I have in mind, though it is not a word that Marx himself used.) Examples of constructs whose ontological status has been demoted abound; from the state, God, morality and the family, to nations, gender, race and the Orient/Occident. The corollary to this tendency to demote the ontological status of the construct, is to announce that its reality will be exposed for what it is to all and sundry once society or the world is tuned along the desired lines. (Marx himself suggests that this will be the case with regards to such things as the state, God and morality. In *Capital* for instance, he indicates that once there is a break in the traditional conditions of ownership, and once the relations between humans themselves, and between humans and nature have ‘assumed the aspect of perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations’, these ghosts will be exorcised.)

The tendency is clearly fallacious. Dismissing constructs as unreal, betrays a shallow naturalism of sorts. It only takes on Johnstonesque example to demonstrate it. A table is a construct. It is created by humans in contingent and definite situations. It is not something found in ‘nature’. This in no way implies its unreality. Giving it a solid kick would convince anyone about this.

Though the tendency to dismiss a construct due to its non-natural nature is fallacious, there is obviously a kernel of sense that animates the tendency. What service Marxism may do – and indeed in many contexts has done – is to expose the historical and non-natural quality of constructs, debunking their supposed essential, supra-historical or natural nature. For instance, one of the main services that Marxism rendered to the social sciences is indicating that categories like ‘the people’ or ‘the nation’ are not natural, a-historical or essential categories as asserted in certain discourses. Marxism though, ought to stop short, of pronouncing ontological judgements.

In the beginning

Another common tendency amongst many that style themselves as Marxists is the tendency to dismiss the reality of what falls under a concept, or denying the truth of a belief or set of a propositions, once the historical narrative of how humans arrive at the concept, belief or at accepting the propositions is drawn. This is especially the case once the narrative is related to the interests and power-relations of various social groups and classes, as well as to the development means of the production of goods, and to the general state of technology available to humanity.

The tendency reflects a bias traceable to classical empiricism, wherein to explain the origin of an idea or a belief, is to explain the belief or idea away. (See Priest 1990) In the philosophies of Locke, Berkeley and Hume there is the propensity to conclude that nothing in reality corresponds to a belief or notion, once the origin of the belief or the notion is explained in relation to the working of the mind. Marxist thought on the other hand, would lay emphasis on social, political and material conditions, rather than the workings of the mind *per se*, to deliver similar judgements

Classic examples are the belief in God and in propositions that concern religion. Once the genealogy of these beliefs and their acceptance is related to: ‘the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world’; once it is shown how ideas about God or the divine are concocted (and develop) in relation to natural and social forces, conditions and situations; their truth is taken to be exorcised.⁴ The same holds for another set of propositions – propositions of morality - though this has perhaps been emphasized less by many Marxists, wishing to retain a moral pulpit or compass of sorts.

The empiricist bias behind this tendency is fundamentally mistaken. Explaining the origin of a belief, and noting– in genuine Marxist fashion – how its origin or development is related to concrete circumstances and situations (which means that it is also tainted by concrete interest, manipulation or misuse) is obviously an interesting and worthy enterprise. Now, describing how a belief or a set of propositions were concocted or came to be widely accepted because human being faced certain natural circumstances or because this suited the hegemony of some group or other, does not suffice to show that the belief or set of propositions are false. To think otherwise is to mistake truth-making –

² Placing something in a category where it does not belong, as when someone includes ‘carnation’ under the category ‘animals’.

³ ‘Ontological’ is here understood in the manner of Quine (1948), i.e. as having to do with the existence of entities.

⁴ In this regard, Engels (1969), perhaps more than Marx, drew support from natural science and history of religion.

something in the world makes a belief or a proposition, or their negation, true - with the genealogy of the proposition or belief. What makes a belief or a proposition true is some chunk of reality. The manner in which humans arrived at concocting the belief or accepting the proposition/s, and whose interests this suits/ed, are irrelevant to this.⁵

This is evident if one considers truths of science. The manner in which these have been discovered, and how these truths came to be widely accepted, is a narrative intertwined in the power relations between different social classes and groups within concrete social formations. Yet, that time is the fourth dimension of reality or that the atom can be split are truths that are not in any way dependent on the fact that those who championed these ideas were people who had definite moorings and a definite place in the web of cultural, economic and political power relations that characterize concrete societies. Assuming their truth, these propositions were always true, and were made by the world or by properties of atoms. The same would hold for mathematical propositions. That the square root of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle equals the sum of the square root of the other two sides, is made true by properties of triangles (whatever the latter might be).

By parity of reason, the same should hold for moral and/or religious propositions. These are true, or fail to be true, because there is (or there isn't) something in the world that makes them true.

In the end?

What remains of Marxism once the tendencies discussed in the previous sections are restrained? There remains a materialist philosophy, wherein materialism is not understood as a metaphysical theory that concerns what is or is not part of the world, but an analysis that considers the various facets and aspects of human existence in relation to the manner in which humans produce, and distribute their goods, and to the power relations these generate. A philosophy which recognises that, before they philosophise, embark on political projects and worship, humans have to produce their subsistence in determinate and concrete ways. What types of entity are part of the world, is something that falls outside its remit. After all, in the First and Second *Theses on Feuerbach* Marx himself criticized as the 'chief defect' of the materialism that preceded him, the fact that

it focused on objects and entities, and not on the material: 'activity [or] practice' of human beings in their relationships and engagements with the world and with one another.

What remains of Marxism once the trends discussed in the preceding sections are contained is a philosophy which recognises that human beings are split into groups and classes, that their relations between these may be conflicting, antagonistic or opposing. In this intertwining of relations, ideas, institutions and beliefs are used to consolidate or challenge existing power structures. This is the case regardless of the truth or falsity, or whether the institutions or entities to which ideas or beliefs may refer, are natural or not. In this regard, the Gramscian contribution to Marxism has been essential, especially with the centrality this places on the notion of hegemony. From within such a perspective one can still concoct a critique of an idea, belief or proposition, not however in terms of the truth of the belief, or whether there is anything in the world which falls under a concept. The critique would rather involve assessing the limits and possibilities of an idea, concept, or belief may have to abet, perpetuate. or challenge hegemonic relations in a determinate contexts and situation. This alone is an invaluable service to human thought.⁶

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⁴ In this regard, Engels (1969), perhaps more than Marx, drew support from natural science and history of religion.

⁵ As Hans Kung (1991) notes with regards to belief in God, such Marxian argument would amount to an ontological argument in reverse. In the ontological argument for the existence of God – an argument accepted by philosophers as diverse as Anselm, Descartes and Alvin Plantinga, and rejected even by many theists like Aquinas and Kant – one attempts to prove the truth of a proposition asserting God's existence from the very concept of this being. The Marxist tendency to which I am referring also asserts the falsity of propositions concerning God or Moral facts through a mere conceptual analysis, an analysis that concerns how humans came to accept these propositions.

⁶ I am thankful to Profs Peter Mayo for comments on the first draft.

Interview with Marianne Talbot



Ian Rizzo interviews Marianne Talbot with the aim of exploring further her philosophical angle, especially on issues such as reason, ethics, feminism and the future of humanity. Marianne Talbot has taught philosophy for the colleges of Oxford University for 32 years. Her philosophy podcasts have been downloaded more than 8 million times.

On your website, you state that you were expelled from school for truancy and disruptive behaviour and consequently failed to obtain any qualifications. Then at 26 years of age you discovered philosophy. Could you explain what was the fuse that sparked your enthusiasm for philosophy?

I travelled widely for five years between the ages of 13 and 18, doing the overland trail to Australia, then New Zealand and back to the UK through Africa. During this time I began to feel intellectually starved. So when I got back I did an Open University Course. I had to do a foundation course because I had no qualifications. In the middle of the course was a unit on philosophy. In those days they did formal logic (elementary logic of course). I found it the hardest thing I had ever done. But at the same time I enjoyed it enormously. So I started reading more and more philosophy.....

What does it take to become a philosopher in your view?

First an overwhelming interest in the issues – I always tell students they can be an observer of an argument or a participant. They'll never be a participant however (or not

an effective one) until they get really engaged in whichever issue is under discussion. The other thing that's necessary is confidence. We rely on our intuitions telling us whether there is something wrong with an argument. We must then engage self-discipline and tenacity in tracking down what is wrong. If you don't trust your intuition in the first place, you will not spend the time and energy needed to track down the problem.

Can you name me three classic books in philosophy which you consider to be a must for any person interested or eager to explore philosophy?

*Bertrand Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy*, Descartes' *Meditations*, and to read with the latter Bernard Williams's *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*. (Not sure the latter counts as a 'classic' book, but I really do think that Descartes is best read with a commentary of this calibre).*

What is the philosophical question that intrigues you most?

Whether reasons are causes. I might say, for example, that my reason for opening the door was the combination of my

desire to see outside and my belief that opening the door would enable me to see outside. Suppose I speak truly. Then is that desire-belief combination realised in some neural state inside my brain such that it was the occurrence of that neural state that caused me to open the door?

*For many years the kneejerk response to the question ‘are reasons causes’ was ‘no’. The main argument rested on the idea that there are logical relations between reasons and actions, and causal relations between brains and behaviours are not logical. But then along came Donald Davidson and this paper 1963, ‘Actions, Reasons and Causes’ (ARC), *Journal of Philosophy*, 60: 685–700; reprinted in 2001a, *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford: Clarendon Press). Davidson argued that, mental states and actions are logically related but they are causally related too.*

His view of the mind came to be known as Anomalous Monism (AM) (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/anomalous-monism/>). Some years later (AM having been, along with functionalism, the kneejerk response to our question in the meantime) Jaegwon Kim came up with the Causal Exclusion argument (<https://iep.utm.edu/causal-e/>). This argument seemed to undermine the argument of ARC and was believed by many to show that Davidson’s argument failed, as indeed did any ‘non-reductive physicalism’ like AM and functionalism. The upshot of Kim’s argument is that IF reasons are causes then reasons (beliefs and desires) must be type-identical to (or reducible to) neural states.

*I don’t accept the Casual Exclusion argument. This is because I accept a Davidsonian account of causation (as given in, for example, this paper: 1967a, ‘Causal Relations’, *Journal of Philosophy*, 64: 691–703;) and once that is accepted the causal exclusion argument doesn’t follow.*

*I fear this topic is deemed old-fashioned now. But I continue to find it completely fascinating. The topic is summarised in: Giuseppina D’Oro and Constantine Sandis (eds.), *Reasons and Causes: Causalism and Anti-Causalism in the Philosophy of Action*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 239pp., \$85.00 (hbk), ISBN 9780230580640, if anyone is interested in following it up.*

I am of the understanding that one of your special philosophical fields of study is ethics. Which ethical philosophy you lean mostly to and why does it stand out in relation to other ethical topics or theories related to philosophy?

For many years it seemed to me that Utilitarianism was the correct ethical theory. But then I started to think it too simplistic, and I started leaning towards Kant. But I also find

Aristotelian ethics very convincing. In a nutshell, I do not know which moral theory is the correct one, but I do know that we cannot just plump for one and think we have solved all the problems of morality.

What do you think is/are the most dangerous ideas at the moment? Do you consider yourself an optimist or a pessimist about the future prospects of humanity?

You are asking me to respond to this in the week that Russia invaded Ukraine. That makes me feel quite pessimistic. But in the longer term I am generally optimistic. I think AI is probably the most worrying problem we face at the moment – specifically the problem of lethal autonomous weapons.

In the article which you wrote in the last issue of SHARE, you describe yourself as a life-long feminist. While it seems to have become common acceptance nowadays that there ought to be no discrimination on a gender basis, don’t you think that critics of feminism have a valid point when they raise alarm bells on certain impressions being disseminated in the modern era that women can adequately cope well on their own without men, marriage and family?

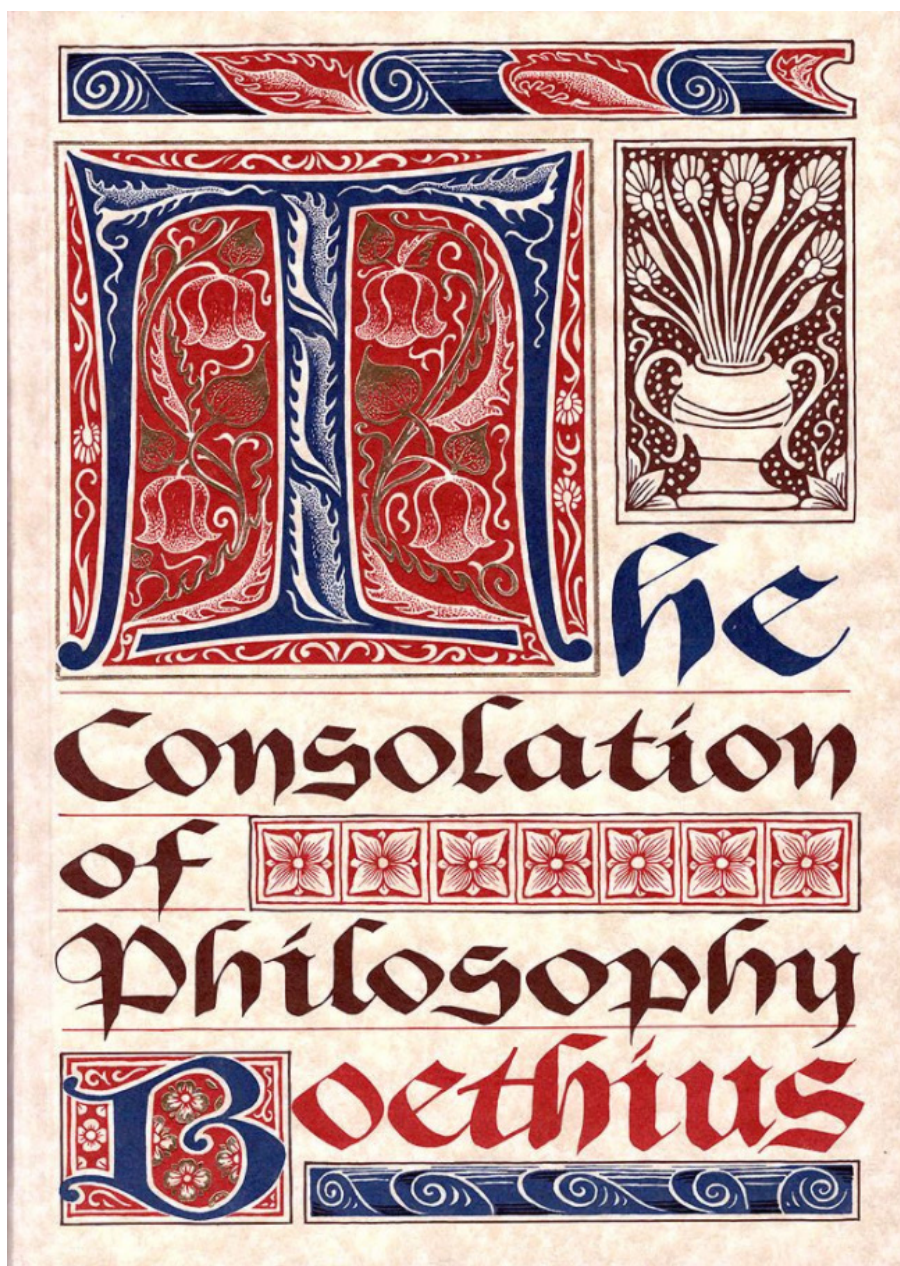
Um...I have coped perfectly well without men, marriage and a family!! I really think any worry about individuals coping thus are overblown. Most women want marriage, men and a family and more power to their elbow! I think the most important thing is that people should be able to live their lives as they see fit (as long as this is consistent with others living their lives as they see fit).

If you had to be a philosopher-queen appointed by Plato, what would be the first steps you take to change society?

Ho! I used to think that our problems would be over as soon as I was made Prime Minister! But actually that is the fantasy of a very young person. As one gets older one sees that things are very far from simple. I do think, though, that society has been badly served by an emphasis on business at the expense of the family. Malthus famously believed that as resources grew people would have more and more children and the population would become too big for the planet. In fact the opposite has been proven true – as resources grow and women take their fair share in them they start not having children, or certainly having less of them. So in many countries these days, especially richer countries, the populations are collapsing. This might be reversed if, instead of assuming that all educational and working patterns should be modelled on male educational and working patterns, we find the flexibility to recognise that children matter too, and that parenthood is as important as paid work.

Boethius on the Path of Humility

By Robert Farrugia



Boethius lived amidst the complex world of sixth-century Italy, right after the deposition of the last Roman emperor of the West. Being a highly literate man and leading figure in the Roman establishment, Boethius was well known for his zeal in dealing with cases of corruption and injustice that came to his notice. Apart from his office duties, Boethius worked on bringing Hellenistic philosophy before the minds of Roman readers. His plan was to translate into Latin works of Aristotle and Plato, and write commentaries on them, and also provide an attempt at reconciling the ideas of these two Greek philosophers. Unfortunately, the entirety of this ambitious plan was never fulfilled.

Boethius was also an ardent defender of Christianity, writing numerous theological treatises which had both a religious and political significance during his time. For instance, in 'The Trinity' [*De Trinitate*] he argues against the heterodoxy of Arianism, which put him at odds with the beliefs of the Arian king of Italy, Theodoric the Great, who had appointed Boethius as his Master of Offices. These theological works [*Opuscula sacra*] would, in fact, play a vital role in Theodoric's deepening suspicions of his chief official.

Eventually, the king had Boethius arrested on charges of treason related to an alleged conspiracy plot. A senatorial court was convened at Rome, passing the death-sentence on Boethius, without giving him the chance to leave his confinement at Ticinum (modern Pavia) to defend himself. During his final days, whilst imprisoned, Boethius sought enlightenment and wisdom, which led him to write his most celebrated work titled 'The Consolation of Philosophy' [*De Consolatione Philosophiae*] as he was knowingly awaiting an imminent and violent death. As a Roman senator, he might have anticipated a less brutal mode of execution since by Roman law a ghastly execution was typically restricted to individuals of the lower classes. However, such a practice would have been of little value to Ostrogoths,

especially for such a scandalous crime as treason. Boethius was executed circa 524-6 and is honoured as a martyr, his feast day being the 23rd of October. Pope Benedict XVI, addressing a general audience in 2008, spoke of Boethius as "the symbol of an immense number of people unjustly imprisoned in all ages and on all latitudes."

Much has been written on Boethius' final philosophical work, especially on themes such as happiness, freedom and fate. However, a less commented upon subject from his Consolation is on his path of humility. This is perhaps because Boethius only mentions the word humility once in

this work, when he writes: “by payment of a proper humility we deserve the priceless recompense of divine grace. This is the only way in which men are seen to be able to converse with God, and to be united by this means of supplication to that unapproachable Light, even before obtaining what they ask for.” (Bk V, 3:34) However, a closer reading of his work will make us apprehend the central role humility plays in attaining such consolations.

But, what is humility? Dietrich von Hildebrand explains humility as follows: “what is true of love – that without it, all other virtues and good works are valueless – is again, in another respect, true on humility” (1990, p.5). Humility can also be defined in contrast to its antithesis, pride [*superbia*], as that which contaminates our inner dispositions as it deprives every virtue of its true value. Pride can take the form of self-glorification, as the world becomes our playing field where we exercise our own superiority, power and glory. This attitude instils a value-blindness which is hostile to, and fearful of, any objectivity and transcendence which, apart from any utilitarian use in the service of the ego, have no real use to pride. In turn, pride dethrones them as it yearns for a self-supremacy. However, the proud remains torn apart with a deep disharmony, as all the indulgence derived from what flatters and feeds this pride is unable to profoundly provide and sustain any genuine inner joy and peace.

On the contrary, in humility we adopt this readiness to submit and surrender ourselves, with a sense of commitment and devotion, as we enter in a harmonious union and participation within this realm that exists beyond us. Boethius’ personal transformative journey, documented in his *Consolation*, is a heightened awareness of this stance as he comes to realize that the degree of his humility is directly proportional to the measure of consolations he receives. Lady Philosophy, his own personal guide in this work, instructs him to “raise your minds to righteous hopes, pour out your humble prayers to heaven. As long as you refuse to play the hypocrite, a great necessity to behave honourably is imposed on you, for your deeds are observed by the judge who sees all things.” (Bk V, 6:46)

In fact, Boethius’ consolation becomes attainable in the same breath that he becomes fully aware of his condition as a finite, imperfect creature with its self-imposed shackles of self-glory and illusions of grandeur. It is humility that teaches him the knowledge of his creaturely status, making him attuned to the idea that his whole being is a dependent being and that it is his pride that is robbing him from this realization about his own metaphysical condition. As Teresa of Ávila writes in her work titled *Interior Castle*, a millennium later, “humility must always be doing its work like a bee

making its honey in the hive: without humility all will be lost” (2008, p.22).

Humility can be closely linked to the concept of *kenosis* - the act of emptying. In this sense, it becomes a ‘self-emptying’ of one’s own will in order to become entirely receptive to transcendence. This kenotic ethic is an emptying of oneself in order to take the form of a servant, rather than a ruler. However, perhaps surprisingly, *kenosis* is not a loss or defeat. Rather, through humility, one is exalted to the highest place. Boethius becomes slowly adjusted to this awareness, as he comes to realize that humility is not the end of the journey but merely the means. In this state, with the guidance of Lady Philosophy who assists his inner transformation, Boethius receives illumination and consolation only when he empties himself of himself and consents to be led towards the light which in turn gently consoles his misery.

Thus, Boethius’ interior voyage can be seen as a passage from pride to humility, from being dependent on his own wealth and possessions towards an original, primordial freedom, away from all worldly ambition and power. It is his state of humility that calls him to “uncover the wound” in order to receive “the physician’s help” (Bk I, 4:1) whilst in the process admitting that he is “ashamed of the stupidity which has inflicted such wounds on me” (Bk III, 12:23). Fascinatingly, Teresa of Ávila again draws interesting parallels here, when she writes: “let us practise humility, which is the ointment for our wounds; if we are truly humble, God, the Physician, will come in due course, even though He tarry, to heal us” (2008, p.42). As Lady Philosophy instructs Boethius, it is the lack of humility which keeps preventing him from making any progress in receiving consolations.

Moreover, in Boethius’ work, humility is shown to be not merely a passive awareness and acknowledgment of this light but an active conformity of one’s will to it, as a wilful self-surrender which requires one to respond to this call genuinely and truthfully. It is only after having passed through the purification and mortification process of abandoning all pride and all longing for his previous fortunes that Boethius feels prepared, as he says, “to identify my healer’s face” (Bk I, 3:1). As a result, this transformation displaces his centre of gravity outwards, outside-of-himself, towards the light of consolation that he allows to shine upon him. This consolation is concurrent with the same moment of trust, not in his own self, but in a merciful light that outshines him and, in turn, releases him from his false sense of security; hence from his own pride.

Essentially, we could say the *Consolation* is both a philosophical and poetic work which narrates Boethius’ own heroic abandonment of his self-glorification and bourgeois complacency. Humility, as he tirelessly shows us throughout,

carries with it a breath of audacity. Boethius teaches us that when our self becomes a seat of consummate humility we are able to confess our wrong doings with ease and with resignation. The humble yearns for the practice of submission, a disposition which makes one willing to suffer for a greater meaning. Humility thus encloses this mystery of an inward descent down to the dark abyss of nothingness, so that the light may shine fully. Humility is, thus, the presupposition for the genuineness of all our virtues, as a central condition of our transformation and regeneration. Through his own wounded experience, Boethius painstakingly shows us how all those who exalt themselves will be humbled whilst those that humble themselves will be exalted. Ultimately, as he comes to discover, it is only the humble soul, that is the soul that has emptied itself from itself, can be fully penetrated by the light of consolation.

As Boethius indicates, humility involves a habit, or an attitude, of living at the service of the other-than-self. It implies dying inwardly, descending almost beneath one's natural level of being, to allow the wealth of life to blossom. Through a radical renunciation and mortification of the self, we acknowledge that we are not merely a result of the

unfolding of our own natural powers. As Boethius shows us, the one who achieves most in life is not the one who desires the most but, rather, the one who diminishes before the greatness and abundance of Lady Philosophy, in humble expectation. In turn, as he comes to experience first-hand, consolations will flow gently into the empty recipient, like water from a fountain.

Ultimately, Boethius' *Consolation* can aid us today to become better lovers of wisdom. By adopting a philosophical attitude that is more receptive, open and empty, we allow ourselves to transcend the boundaries of our own subjectivity. And, as Boethius himself experiences at the end of his life, this love affair is made most fruitful when we choose the path of humility.

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Boethius (left) genuflects as a sign of deep reverence to Lady Philosophy (right) who is offering him wings so his mind can fly upward.

Humanism: A Worldview Committed to Self- Reflection and Maturity

By Christian Colombo



Over the past decades, consumption has increased dramatically and as individuals we have access to technology and information of which no-one in the past could have dreamed. While this represents potential for distraction, having our basic needs met provides fertile ground for deeper questioning and self-actualisation¹. This is of course positive, but the increased responsibility on the individual is also substantial: from the consumption point of view, we have to decide how much and what to consume against a backdrop of depletion of natural resources and climate change. From the information perspective, given the sheer amount of material, we have to discern what to accept as true and subsequently what to publish and share. If the reality the individual faces is not complex enough to navigate as it is, add to it the lightning speed at which technology evolves. Phenomena such as social media and distributed ledger technologies are fundamentally disrupting our way of life (not necessarily in a negative way) while most of us have little to no understanding of what is happening under the bonnet. Even as a collective, we are still coming to terms with the wider ramifications of such technologies: having so

many data points on so many individuals means that we can be easily targeted and influenced in a tailormade manner towards a particular goal, as happened in the American elections². Equally worrying is that we are still far from understanding the psychological effects such technologies have on society, and in particular, on children³.

Given a fast-changing and complex world, the mainstream worldview naturally evolves. And while the majority in the Western world identify with one of the major religions, what that means has changed dramatically: salvation is much more expected from scientific and technological advancement than from some supernatural being⁴. Just like biological organisms, worldviews evolve within a contest for the survival of the fittest. Fitness in this sense can take on several aspects, including how successful it is to bring harmony in the social order of the day, how helpful it is for people to make sense of and cope with their lives, etc. Elements of a worldview which fail to make sense in the context faced by society at the time, fade away and are replaced by new ones.

¹ Abraham Harold Maslow, 1943. A Theory of Human Motivation. *Psychological Review*. 50 (4), pp. 370–396.

² Hal Berghel, 2018, Malice Domestic: The Cambridge analytica Dystopia. *Computer*, 51(5), pp. 84-89.

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/oct/25/facebook-whistleblower-frances-haugen-calls-for-urgent-external-regulation>

⁴ Mary Midgley, 1994. *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and its Meaning*, London: Routledge.

While the main religions of the world have their theological traditions, they are also open to scientific discoveries and rational thought. A case in point is that of the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican Council II. And yet, such religious organisations struggle to keep up with the pace of modern developments and are typically perceived as slow to react and adapt to new realities.

It is common knowledge that many religious people (e.g. in Malta⁵) do not follow their religion's teachings on particular aspects. While this could simply be the result of indifference, it might also indicate that more people are acting according to their own personal moral judgements. It would seem that believers start off with a religion as a point of reference but then adapt it according to their rational reasoning.

Such a reason-based stance is at the heart of Humanism which maintains that as human beings we alone are in charge of ourselves. Humanism is a worldview which by definition encourages the person to take responsibility for their own life, for creating their own meaningful lives and for taking ethical decisions based on reason and compassion. Of course, it's not as simple as that in practice; you're rarely free to take moral decisions without considerable constraints, competing priorities, consideration for the rights and freedoms of others, and uncertainty about the results of your decisions.

Humanism is far from new. Although the word 'humanist' may not have been used to describe humanists at the time, similar beliefs and values can be found spontaneously recurring in communities and civilisations around the world as early as the 6th century BCE, especially in ancient Greek philosophy. While undoubtedly it has been heavily influenced by Christianity (with suggestions that its current form evolved from Christianity⁶), Humanism represents a clear distinction from Christianity when it comes to trusting the individual's judgement. In fact, while Humanism is loosely defined in terms of a basic set of principles, it refuses to define anything resembling a creed or a fixed definition of what is morally good or evil. Rather, it is more about agreeing on the tools (broadly speaking: reason, logic and compassion) to be used by the individual when dealing with the ambiguity of life.

Humanism is a work in progress, embracing disagreement and potential for improvement. Not all humanists agree on every issue; people who share the same basic ethical principles and non-ethical values will probably always disagree about exactly how to apply them. For example, many humanists say there's more to our understanding of the world than science and rationality; that our shared tradition of arts and literature, and the experience of love, grief and beauty - our profound interior life - give us a deeper, but non-scientific, understanding of life. Similarly, humanists are not united on animal welfare. Some argue that those giving preference to certain lives simply because they belong to their own species puts them in the same position as racists who give preference to those of their own 'race'; some ask how a higher degree of intelligence can entitle humans to exploit non-humans; other humanists eat meat and use animal products.

Philosophically, there are several flavours of humanism but I focus here on the existential kind⁷ which maintains that human beings have no predetermined essence or status when coming into being. Using Simone de Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*⁸ as a signpost, there are three key ingredients towards becoming a free person, the prerequisite of any moral decision: (i) acknowledging ambiguity, i.e. that there are no absolute ethical values because everything is meaningless outside of the human sphere; (ii) deciding to take action anyway in the face of ambiguity; and (iii) ensuring that such action is ethical by maintaining the freedom of self and others at the centre of all moral decisions.

Interestingly, the existential position resonates with the idea of Anatheism⁹ put forward by the Catholic philosopher Richard Kearney who acknowledges the usefulness of losing the strict ideas about "God" and religion (which we can equate to the acknowledgement of ambiguity) in order to discover more authentic action which embraces the "stranger", concerned with justice (which can be equated with working towards the freedom of others). Viewed from this perspective, the human experience shares a commonality which goes beyond religions and worldviews. And although the existentialist worldview should encourage its subscribers to embrace the absurdity of life and keep an open mind, this is not to say that all Humanists adhere to

⁵ https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/data_and_surveys/63463/a_la_carte_catholics#.Ycin133MJGo

⁶ Theo Hobson, 2017, *God Created Humanism, The Christian Basis Of Secular Values*, London: SPCK Publishing.

⁷ Jean Paul Sartre, 2007, *Existentialism is a humanism*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

⁸ Simone Beauvoir, 1948, *The ethics of ambiguity*, New York: Philosophical Library.

⁹ Richard Kearney 2011, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God*, New York: Columbia University Press.



the same position. The temptation to “explain” as Camus puts it, frequently means that “the abstract philosopher and the religious philosopher [...] support each other in the same anxiety” and lead to “extreme rationalisation of reality which tends to break up that thought into standard reasons and its extreme irrationalization which tends to deify it.”¹⁰ Steering away from both extremes, I see Humanism more as a commitment to “critical questioning of one’s own truths”, “ethical norms and meaningful narrations”, rather than “a secular doctrine of salvation: the ‘naive optimism’ claiming that superstition (may it be religious or not) can be eliminated and replaced by ‘the triumph of happiness and virtue’”¹¹.

Humanism is far from being static, and the emphasis and direction the Humanist movement takes (nationally and

beyond) is very much a response to its environment¹²: In countries where there is still a serious lack of freedom of thought, Humanist societies tend to focus on enlightenment-era philosophy, promoting science and reason - sometimes in a ‘militant’ way as the situation demands. In other cases where secularism is assumed and people no longer need to fight for rights, the focus is more on supporting individuals in living meaningful ethical lives inspired by ideas such as existentialism. Following this trend, one might expect that in a future where there is no religion, Humanist societies (influenced by post-structuralist thought) will focus more on the ways in which human freedoms can be subtly eroded through modern power structures, and how cultural biases can lead societies to have blind spots to moral nuances. This development is especially interesting in the context of the increasingly strong presence of Humanism across wide ranging countries and cultures. With Humanist International now spanning 62 countries, it is only a matter of time until Western thought will lose the monopoly it has had on the Humanist international movement.

From this perspective, the common theme across Humanist organisations is not so much the precise philosophy espoused, but rather a pointer towards more maturity as a response to the context within which they happen to be. Judging by the global philosophical direction, one would expect a Humanism which is less sure of itself, putting more emphasis on dialogue, and above all committed to the philosophical call towards wisdom and its implications to humanity and the rest of the universe.

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¹⁰ Albert Camus, 2000, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (J. O’Brien, Trans.), London: Penguin Classics, p. 48.

¹¹ Florian Baab, 2021, Secular Humanism in Europe, A Comparison of two Current Approaches. *Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism* p. 29.

¹² Julian Huxley, 1952, *Evolutionary Humanism* - Part I. The Humanist.

Why is the Puzzle of Existence and Reality Becoming Increasingly Complex?

By Nebojsa Kujundzic



Common sense seems to dictate that existence and reality stand and fall together. A logician would say that existence is both a sufficient and necessary condition of reality. In simple words, if anything happens to exist then it is real and conversely if anything happens to be real then it exists as well.

Perhaps the best approach is to look closer at the meaning of the expressions “to be real” and “to exist.” The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines “real” in the following manner: “Actually existing as a thing or occurring in fact, objective, genuine, rightly so called, natural, sincere, not merely apparent or nominal or supposed or pretended or artificial or hypocritical or affected.” In the same dictionary, this is the definition of “exist”: “Have place in the domain of reality; have being under specified conditions.”

Notice that only the first part of the definition of existence invokes “the domain of reality,” and thereby affirms the common-sense assumption of the close logical fit of existence and reality. The second part of the definition already departs from that assumption (“have being under specified conditions”). As well, the definition of what is real is at first most closely related to existence (“actually existing”) but as the definition expands the link between reality and existence appears to weaken (notice the usage of words like “genuine,” “not artificial or hypocritical” et cetera).

A bit of ordinary language analysis reveals that the sentence “The person who purports to be Sherlock Holmes does not exist” appears to be closer to truth than the sentence “The person who purports to be Sherlock Holmes is not

real” except in the fictional context. Should we narrow the fictional context down to the context of film or theatre, the truth functional conditions appear significantly modified. The former sentence becomes obviously false since the actor who plays Sherlock Holmes exists. The truth functionality of the latter sentence may depend on the actor’s ability to persuade the viewer that he is indeed Sherlock Holmes. The sentence “The person who purports to be the king of Yugoslavia does not exist” happens to be false since there is someone from the Karadjordjevic dynasty who is actively engaged in re-creating a constitutional monarchy in Serbia. At the same time, the sentence “The person who purports to be the king of Yugoslavia is not a real king” is true, since the constitutional monarchy has not been re-created in Serbia, and possibly never will be.

I think these general observations allow us to tease out some nuances by way of additional examples. While providing such examples, it will become increasingly clear that the logical equivalence between existence and reality is rather complex and tenuous.

Mount Everest is the highest mountain on Earth; imagine someone claiming that Mount Stupidest stands at 9000 meters tall. This person’s claim is normally refuted pointing out to common facts: everyone knows that Mount Stupidest does not exist, and a map representing Mount Stupidest would obviously not be a real map.

Let us imagine that a mischievous geography student forges a map of the world and represents Mount Everest as Mount Stupidest. All the actual physical configurations

of Mount Everest are left intact; the mountain is simply renamed as Mount Stupidest on the map. This easy example demonstrates that a fake (or non-real, in our terminology) map can indeed represent existing objects. On the other hand, imagine someone pouring over a map representing the movement of tanks in the epic 1943 Kursk battle. This is a real historical map, depicting events that occurred in reality, yet the objects of this map no longer exist. The former assertion, I should note, rides on a somewhat controversial assumption that a rational agent, or a rational society, can distinguish between “real” and “fake” history. The purpose of this discussion is far too specific and narrow to even outline the reasons why this assumption might be considered controversial.

I hope these examples suffice to establish that there are plenty of things that exist yet are not real at the same time. Or conversely, plenty of things that do not exist (consider some abstract ideas like “the value of money”) but have a real and significant impact on our lives.

What I find especially intriguing is that the development of technology, especially towards the end of the 20th century and in the 21st century, seems to force humanity to contend with phenomena hitherto not even found in

the English language vocabulary: virtual reality, cloud storage, social media, and so forth. These expressions, in my opinion, reinforce the subtleties and intricacies of the relationship between existence and reality and perhaps the need to better understand that relationship.

Consider the following contemporary phenomenon: Facebook pages of deceased people. Where does this phenomenon exist? From a broadly metaphysical perspective, it exists in some ether of the cloud storage. How real is this phenomenon? Most likely, not particularly real since people often modify their names on Facebook, and their self-representations are largely neither veridical nor accurate. As far I can see the only true “anchor,” that these phenomena may have in reality, is the emotional attachment of those who still remember them.

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Fundamental Manipulation in Terms of Transcendental Philosophy

By Alexander L. Gungov



Mark Twain's popular protagonist Tom Sawyer is proverbial in his innocent cunning. Being punished by his aunt Polly to whitewash a fence, Tom ingeniously converts his embarrassing sanction into a prize by sheer turning the situation upside down. He is not lying to his friends about painting being an exquisite pleasure but aptly succeeds in changing not only the meaning but the very environment of his punishment as a joy where 'boring' becomes 'exciting', 'penalty' an 'award', and, in short, 'black' stands for 'white'.

How will Tom's manipulation as 'environment transforming' be justified? Tom's friends willingly release him from the punishment, and even pay him for this. They wholeheartedly believe that they are enjoying themselves and perhaps truly enjoy doing the job. It seems that not only their attitude to painting has changed, but the activity of painting has got some opposite and irresistible aspects. Hence it is not just a perception of the world that has changed, but the world itself has been transformed in the first place.

Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is univocal about the primordial role of the ego in constituting the world. By this, he means not the empirical I but the

transcendental ego which invisibly directs the empirical actions of any intentional consciousness. According to phenomenology, consciousness always acts as intentionality, that is, it is a union of conscious directedness and the object of that directedness. Objects of consciousness willy-nilly depend on the functions of consciousness. For phenomenology 'world per se' does not make much sense in the same way as 'whitewashing per se' irrespectively of its function of disciplining makes no sense for Tom's aunt. Linking a penalty or an award with painting the fence are simply different types of constituting reality by Aunt Polly, Tom, and his friends. Nevertheless, Husserl warns that constitution is neither creation, nor construction but unfolding of possibilities contained within the horizon of a given situation.

Possibilities under materialisation bring their focus, i.e., objects, into presence marked by indisputable evidence. In this respect, sensible perception is accompanied by evidence, the demonstration of the Pythagorean theorem too is evident, just as the rules of logic and arithmetic. In terms of formal logic, reasoning such as, "All patients with anemia feature pale complexion, Tom is diagnosed with

anemia; therefore, Tom must have pale complexion” or “If Sid overeats regularly, he is going to get obese; but Sid indeed overeats regularly, then, he must be obese” are evident due to the presence of some inferential rules: a valid instance of the categorical syllogism in the first case and modus ponens in the second.

However, Husserl’s transcendental logic would not only be interested in presence or absence of some inferential rules in the objective content of reasoning and accordingly the presence or absence of evidence accompanying that content. Transcendental logic would look for the subjective feature that make a given objective content evident. Transcendental logic will be pondering which intentional activities make a certain situation of reasoning evident or non-evident. For instance, not simply what is objectively wrong with assertions like “All surgeons wear a green gown, Huck wears a green gown; therefore, Huck must be a surgeon” or “If Becky is infected with sars-2 virus, she might develop COVID-19 symptoms; Becky is not infected with sars-2 virus, then, she cannot develop COVID-19 symptoms.” The transcendental method will inquire about what in our cognitive activities makes us wrongly believe that from a green gown can be concluded that a surgeon is wearing it; whereas, from the lack of sars-2 virus, the exclusion of COVID-19 symptoms is evident.

The principle reasons why we would consider a false inference as correct, is the ‘deceptive evidence.’ In its core it is to take something as being present, while it is not or, more precisely, to take a presence of something else as the object under question, i.e. a misidentification. This can be just a mistake.

However, a similar, although intentional, misidentification takes place in cases of skillful manipulation. Professional manipulation is a far cry from a sheer lie. Not only did

Tom’s supposedly gullible pre-teenage friends make fools of themselves but in the same manner disillusioned adults fall prey to the manipulation of others. Manipulation is the constitution of a substitute reality that usurps the place of a genuine one. It reduces a genuine reality to a non-sense and endows emerging simulacra with invincible persuasiveness. Notwithstanding, the virtuoso art of manipulation aims not so much at Jean Baudrillard’s realm of simulacra hiding the loss of the original and building a fake reality according to a malicious code, but rather applies Karl Marx converted form (*verwandlung Form*) pattern being both certain and false in a non-contradictory fashion.

An example of a converted form would be the belief that in giving credit, banks profit only on the interest paid for the credit, while the real gain comes from selling the expected profitability of the credit as derivatives. Furthermore, a converted form would take place if credit is viewed only as a bank-client relationship. Such understanding will hide the fact that credit is primarily currency emitting, since financial institutions are authorised to provide credit exceeding dozens of times the actual assets they possess. However, the above two instances of converted forms are not isolated cases but demonstrate a fundamental manipulation of the current life world.

Does the transcendental perspective offer a clue on how to self-guard against the deceptive evidence of fundamental manipulation? The answer is “Yes” and it contains two elements: harmony and teleology. According to Husserl, every piece of evidence must fit harmoniously into one’s entire experience and tradition and be involved in a priori teleology of the ego. Regrettably, neither harmony nor teleology can guarantee proof against brainwashing since manipulation aiming at a harmonious telos cannot be excluded. Nevertheless, if we believe in transcendental phenomenology to imitate genuine teleology, it will take much more propaganda to whitewash it than to constitute a manipulative harmony. And this might turn out to be impossible. The problem with any surrogate teleology is that it will easily jeopardise the possibility of making sense of anything in the life world and therefore the possibility of undertaking any meaningful actions.

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Book Review

Be Logical Be Creative Be Critical

Author: Luc de Brabandere with Lina Benmehrez

Publisher: Luc de Brabandere - Cartoonbase Publishing

Year: 2021

By Tanguy Swinnen

AI: Aristotle's ultimate weapon against Plato?

To discover a new publication by Luc de Brabandere is always a pleasure and "Be Logical, Be Creative, Be Critical" is no exception. Luc has put (some of) philosophy's history on the backburner to present a 3-dimensional model which classifies the different modes of what makes mankind so unique: THINKING.

Luc applies a 3D model (Logic, Creativity and Critique) for industry, innovation, history of science and... the history of philosophy. With that, he makes special reference to the oldest and longest battle of all humanity: the 2,500-year-old controversy between Aristotle and Plato: the role of abstraction (/models) in our reasoning.

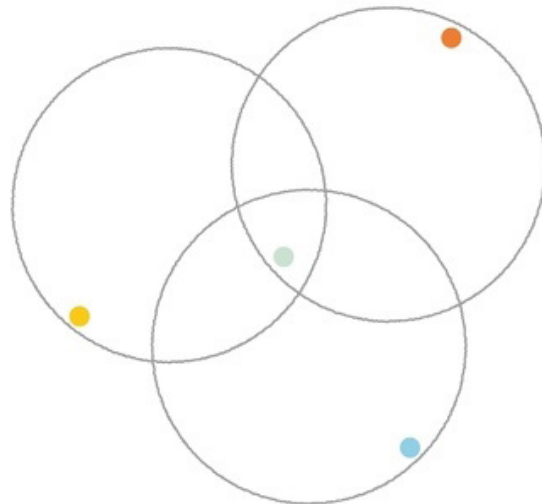
Modeling is the main activity of scientists who try to describe (/abstract) phenomena (I am excluding life scientists here who maybe tend to focus more on describing reality as it is). Plato instructed us to create models in order to deduce reality; as an engineer, I feel that I've been trained to follow Plato, but there is a minor hiccup: if you listen to a discussion between two engineers, you will soon find their concepts confusing! The need for these models is raising more and more questions: the Artificial Intelligence (AI) approach promotes the idea that we can make predictions without the use of a model. Aristotle told us to stick to reality; no need for creative models.

Could this mean that AI is Aristotle's ultimate weapon against his teacher, Plato?

Luc describes the model as a "*mental construct in which reality is strongly simplified in order to be understood in a useful way*" [p22].

BE LOGICAL
BE CREATIVE
BE CRITICAL

The art
of thinking
in a digital
world



Luc de Brabandere with Lina Benmehrez

And why do we use these models? This question is partially answered by Luc: in order to understand. And I may agree, but WHY do we strive to understand? Is it for the beauty of science? I strongly believe that mankind's desire to understand its surroundings ("in a useful way") is because humans hope to fully grasp what is going on: predict, prepare and act on things.

Predicting is key here: using Luc's zigzag imperative, I would therefore like to jump to the other side of the Z [p58] and leave aside the idea of understanding and focus on the perspective of **modeling for the sake of predicting**.

With that jump in mind, and considering that new technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) can help predict things without "*strongly simplifying*" reality (and hence losing parts of it), we may wonder why we even still

need models. Some people may of course argue that the AI approach is inherently based on interpolating (and is hence limited in its use); it is true that an AI system cannot predict an outlier event. But models are also intrinsically interpolation-based: their development and validation take place within certain boundaries; e.g., rational mechanics are only valid below 1% of the speed of light, linearity between heat (energy) and the variation in temperature is only valid when there is no change in state, ... All in all, it would seem that both AI and models are valid only within the limits used for validation. A big difference could be that models are used by scientific people (fundamental or engineer), whereas AI tends to be increasingly used by people less aware of those limitations. This is where the third part of the book "Be Critical" really shines through: Luc reveals a powerful toolset to identify fallacies and support us in this hard-to-fulfil attitude.

Now, when we discuss prediction, both models and AI seem to get the job done with the same level of effectiveness. We may wonder which one to use. One way of answering this could be to consider how quick and easy it is to build a prediction tool, in one way or another. We are comparing the efficiency of models developed over the course of the last 2,500 years with an AI tool designed only in the last 25 years...

Another method would be to measure the (computing) energy needed to use one or the other. AI has developed over recent decades thanks to the advance of computing power, of which it requires a great deal and hence a lot of energy. Models are quite obviously the winners in this respect.

The hybrid approach is probably the best one: using AI to mimic phenomena that are not understood / modeled (yet!)



and also existing models when possible. Plato told us 2,500 years ago to walk into the abstract world to understand it and then return to reality (i.e., induce models from reality, then deduce / predict reality from models). Aristotle told us to stay and directly predict reality from reality...

The book discusses the controversy that is still ongoing, which is good news for philosophers; it provides tools to navigate each way of thinking, as well as a toolset to systematically identify wrong use of thinking, mankind's most distinctive activity.

Tanguy Swinnen is by profession a self-employed engineer with a deep passion for digital innovation. He believes that technological breakthrough can happen only with the high involvement of people. Tanguy uses philosophy to create value and meaning both for his work and for engagement with his collaborators.



Philosophical Manifesto On Economics - Part 3

Drafted by Ian Rizzo

Understanding Economics

Few people tend to be knowledgeable about economics, perhaps because it is often perceived as a complex and abstract subject with hardly any relevance to their everyday lives. Indeed, it is generally felt to be the preserve of professionals working in business, finance and public policy.

Yet surely all of us become aware from time to time of how the economy plays a key influential part in our lives and well-being – be it on consumption and rising prices, government taxes, investment decisions employment opportunities, standards of living – to name but a few. Perhaps, we should not forget one of the slogans credited with the election of Bill Clinton as US President in 1992 when he campaigned ‘It’s the Economy, Stupid!’ and presented himself as the best candidate to haul the country out of recession.

So to an extent we all are all immersed in economics. We cannot afford to ignore it. Neither can it be rejected by hippies or other counter movements who tend to be highly critical about the values of consumption and working life patterns of modern societies. Karl Marx was one of the first thinkers to view the economic organisation of society as the basis of its social and political organisation. Marx claims that the economy is the main driver of social change.

Perhaps one of the best definitions of economics is by British economist Lionel Robbins who defined it as the science of human action in the face of limited resources with multiple uses. The concept of scarcity - limited resources against infinite human desires - is central to the subject of economics as it reminds every human

being that every decision in life tacitly involves a choice. The choice of an option at the expense of another constitutes the basic rule in economics that every opportunity has a cost.

The business of producing and exchanging goods and services can be traced back to the times of the agricultural revolution when human beings began to exert control over the earth’s resources and learned to store and barter whatever products were produced. Agriculture and the settled way of life were important milestones in the process of the ascent of man as asserted by Jacob Bronowski. Yanis Varoufakis builds further on this linkage between the agricultural revolution and the market economy in his book ‘Talking to my Daughter About the Economy’. He views the production of the agricultural surplus as the first step towards the true foundations of any economy – creating in the process a recording system, the concept of debt, a money system and property rights. Eventually all these processes encompassed the need for the market economy





The intro to the movie The Matrix – Are we chained to a quantitative financial system full of rules and algorithms that is in control throughout our lives ?

to be sustained by city states, hierarchical power structures, armies, bureaucracies and organised religion. Perhaps one could also add that the market economy defined new sexual relationships that brought stricter emphasis on monogamy and family relationships in a drive to bring more stability and order when dealing with inheritance rights. Marx also highlights how the concept of class and class conflict became an integral part of the value system of societies whose resources were being harnessed and owned by a ruling class that managed to assume hegemonic power.

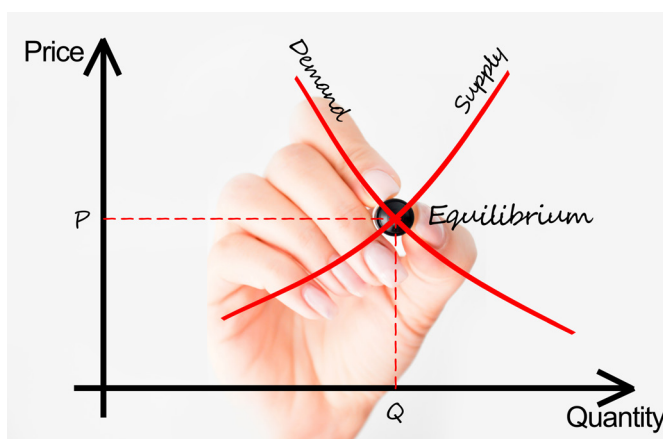
Fast forward this society to the creation of a complex sprawling financial system of currencies that integrates all economies of the world to meet the demand and supplies of our natural resources. The transnational transactions that have been developed and sustained by this globalised system gave rise to the establishment of international economic institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organisation (WTO), Group of Seven (G7) and BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China). The economy of every country has become highly dependent on this global integrated system.

In spite of this complexity, few people probably realise that our money system is what Yuval Harari calls a 'collective myth'. When people accept money to sell a good or service, they are accepting coins or notes that do not have any intrinsic value but a promise or rather a trust that it can be exchanged for something better. This is an example of a creative collective myth that allows us humans to shape reality and to encourage us to cooperate in the extraction and acquisition of the world's natural resources.

It comes quite as a surprise as to why philosophers have shown little if any concern about the influence of the economy in our day-to-day lives. It is true that early

philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle expressed their thoughts on property rights (Plato in favour of communal ownership and Aristotle in favour of private property), while Thomas Aquinas argued on the need to have a just and moral price system. Both John Locke and Immanuel Kant saw private property as a legitimate expression of the self. On the other hand, David Hume was one of the first thinkers to recognise that the market does not provide certain public goods. But right up until the end of the 18th century, any interest that the subject of economy attracted in philosophy formed part of political philosophy.

Modern economics emerged as a distinct discipline with the publication in 1776 of 'The Wealth of Nations' written by Adam Smith. This book was published at the time when many societies were experiencing the advent of the Industrial Revolution which was characterised by the building of factories and mass production techniques. These developments gave rise to a high level of urbanisation which completely changed the social interaction systems of the industrial society.



The Invisible Hand that drives Demand and Supply

Adam Smith was one of the first thinkers to observe that the market was being driven by an invisible hand whereby the rational actions of self-interested individuals ultimately deliver what the wider society expects. The premise of this new economic order was based on the interplay between the amount of a product available on the market and the willingness of consumers to buy that product. This system created the foundation of market theory in economy and established the 'just' equilibrium market price.

Smith's observation is generally regarded as a milestone in the development of economics because it established a new notion of a free-market economy that could ensure prosperity, freedom and self-development. Smith established the notion of Classical Economics which advocated a limited role for the State in the running of the economy or rather a laissez-faire policy. Following in Smith's footsteps was another great British economist, David Ricardo, who was a staunch supporter of free trade and the specialisation of labour and supported by economic theory argued that all countries, even those less productive, tend to benefit from free trade.

The above developments – in particular, industrialisation, the market economy, international financial systems, division of labour, free trade and a globalised economy sowed the first seeds of the modern capitalist societies that permitted the accumulation of capital through a variety of methods and the concentration of wealth in a powerful business class. Capitalism, which gradually became the dominant economic system throughout the world, dovetailed with the development of liberal democracy that emphasised the protection of individual rights and freedom. Over time, governments were persuaded that institutions which embody laws, customs and traditions of their society are essential to the flourishing of a free market economy.

The Dark Side of Capitalism

Not everyone, of course agreed with the philosophy of capitalism. Karl Marx was one of the leading proponents who viewed the capitalist economy as fatally flawed and containing the seeds of its own destruction. Marx essentially viewed the history of society as a struggle between two opposing classes – those who own the means of production and those who have nothing to offer except their labour. In the capitalist economy, the bourgeoisie own the means of production while the proletariat provide their labour. Marx argued that a commodity's value in a capitalist society is based on the labour that is required to produce that commodity. The bourgeoisie sets the price of the finished product by first adding the price of labour to the cost of raw material required to produce that product and then adding a profit margin. It is clearly in the interests of the bourgeoisie

to keep wages low to the barest minimum in their quest to maximise profits. In the meantime, new technology is constantly sought to improve efficiency in production. Marx raised a valid point in his analysis of capitalist society when stating that members of the working class who constitute the major element of society tend to suffer from a sense of alienation and exploitation.

Furthermore, Marx claimed that the greed for profit would encourage increased production regardless of demand. The growth in the capitalist economy would be prone to a series of economic crises as a result of a possible mismatch between supply and demand. The frustrations of the working class combined with the inherent instability of a capitalist economy lurching from crisis to crisis would pose a potential time-bomb of massive social unrest. Marx predicted a proletarian revolution that would bring about a new social and economic order and eventually establish a communist state that would abolish private property.

Unfortunately Marx was short on the specifics of how a communist economy should be managed. It might be open to interpretation of whether the handful of states who adopted the communist approach really implemented what Marx had in mind. Critics of Marxism are happy to point at the failure of communism and centralised planning as practiced in China, the former Soviet Union and Eastern European Countries. China following the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 opened up their economies to the market and rules of international trade, while retaining authoritarian rule and rejecting the demands of liberal democracy.

Nevertheless, critics of Marxism have to concede that events such as the Great Depression in 1929 and the financial crisis of 2008 proved the point made by Marx that unregulated markets provide the ideal ground for uncontrolled greed, exploitation, chaos and instability. During these crises, state intervention has been considered to be best means that could mitigate the ills caused by these crises.

For and Against Government Intervention

The question remains as to what extent governments ought to intervene. It is the question that cuts through the very heart of the relation between economics and politics. One possible answer to this question could be found in a comparison between the US and the European economic models. The US model is renowned for its laissez faire policies, even in welfare provisions, and is distrustful of government intervention and regulations. On the other hand, the EU model, based on the continental economic policies of Germany and France, extolls the virtues of a social market economy that endorses a higher degree of government intervention to guarantee universal healthcare,



The Occupy Movement in 2011 protesting against the 1% inequality – echo of Marx's critique of the unfairness of capitalism

free education, state pensions, social security benefits and subsidisation of basic services to its citizens. This model of social market economy has been developed further in the Scandinavian countries.

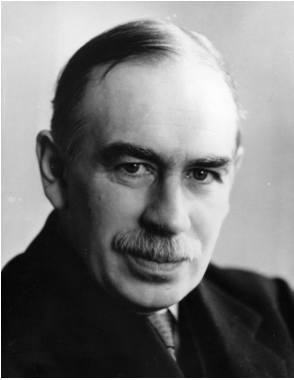
The US model is criticised mainly for its inherent vast inequalities in income and wealth. The US, for example, ranks one of the lowest countries in the Gini coefficient that measures the degree of inequality in the distribution of income and wealth. The lack of universal welfare and inadequate safety nets in US society have often been identified as one of the hidden causes of the relatively high rates of crime, violence and homicides. On the other hand, the US economy is lauded for the flexible and unrestrained approach it allows its citizens to pursue success and increase their incomes and wealth. The EU model, while renowned for its generous welfare schemes and more equitable distribution of income, is mainly criticised for the heavy taxation and regulatory rules required to sustain them and which in the process hampers competition, economic growth and innovation.

This divisive line reflects to some extent the traditional split that exist between the political spectrum of the left and the right. The political right expresses its beliefs in minimum state intervention, which is characterised by lower taxes, a stronger reliance on the price system, freedom of choice and unrestricted property rights. Individual self-interest is viewed as a valuable motive for improving the well-being of society while inequality is perceived to be an inevitable feature in every social and economic system. The political left tends to empathise more with people who are the

victims of the inequalities that are bred by the unregulated economic systems. They are more likely to view the poor and the lower class as unlucky people while the wealthy class are seen as benefitting from privileges and conditions that are more amenable to them. The political left is thus more sensitive to calls for more redistributive policies and universal social systems through higher taxation and government spending.

This divide between the political right and left on government intervention also mirrors to a certain extent two rival schools of economic thought - Keynesianism and Monetarism. Keynesianism is based on the ideas of John Maynard Keynes that advocates government spending and taxes (known in economics as fiscal policy) to pull economies out of recession. Monetarism on the other hand is associated with US economist Milton Friedman who believed that government is the problem not the solution and society should be governed by the rules of the market. Friedman strongly believed with supporting economic theories that it is only the money supply which affects the economy and government's intervention should be limited towards ensuring a growth in money supply that is in line with the growth in the economy.

The Manifesto of the Foundation takes the stand that free markets and government intervention are essentially two sides of the same coin. The Manifesto acknowledges the fact that the capitalist system has an ingrained potential to stimulate the individual aspirations and self-interest of human nature. The capitalist system is perceived to be a prime driver for creativity, innovation and better prospects



Left: John Maynard Keynes – For Government Intervention



Right: Milton Friedman – Against Government Intervention

for future well-being of all members of society. In this regard, the Manifesto subscribes to economist Joseph Schumpeter's philosophy that profit comes from innovation which thereby requires entrepreneurs to remain on their toes and search for new markets in their quest for survival.

It has also to be conceded, that the price mechanism has proved to be more efficient and effective than that of centralised planning in tackling complex demand issues. Market prices reflect the right balance between demand and supply while firms must ensure that their revenues are higher than costs to avoid going bankrupt. Under centralised planning systems, firms are not subjected to the same market discipline knowing that the state will always step in to protect them when they are unable to cover the operating costs of the quantities as instructed by their central planners.

On the basis of this dual scenario, the Manifesto concurs with the view that governments must give free reins to private ownership to secure the efficient provision of goods and services. Government should be guided by the laws of the Classical Economics school when it asserts that state subsidies always distort the mechanisms of the market and are likely to contribute towards inefficiency and waste. Firms should neither be burdened with heavy regulation or fiscal policies that may act as a disincentive for work, investment and innovation which are after all axiomatic for the creation of wealth.

Although in terms of Keynesian economics, government spending and taxes are seen as a valuable and effective tool to stimulate demand particularly during times of recession, the Government ought to ensure that its fiscal budget is balanced over a period time. Governments need to be fiscally prudent, cut down on excessive bureaucracy and guarantee value for money in revenue collection and expenditure. If governments run excessive fiscal deficits year in year out, more debt will eventually be piled upon the economy which in the future will have to be serviced

by higher expenditure on interest. We must bear in mind that debt is always the price of extracting future resources for the satisfaction of present needs.

At the same time though, the Manifesto cannot ignore the concerns expressed by the political left on the inequality that results from unrestrained regulation of the free markets. However inevitable inequality appears to be, it may cause instability, unrest and upheavals in society if left unattended to and ignored. To this end, governments should provide a safety net that ensures all the requirements for basic human well-being are adequately satisfied. In the previous SHARE 16 we referred to Kate Raworth's doughnut model of nine basic services that are worth another mention – housing, health care, clean water, safe food, access to energy, good education, an income a political voice and justice. If the state offers a basic living wage to people who are unemployed or searching for work or cannot cope with the demands of the labour market, it will truly ensure that no one is left behind.

In its efforts to redistribute wealth, governments may impose higher tax rates for conspicuous consumption, excessive accumulation of wealth and salary earnings that are over-proportionate to the median pay. This would be consonant with the effort to tax extravagant lifestyles or status, rather than penalising people who work hard and generate creative opportunities for society members. Tax avoidance and evasion should be rigorously tackled and cracked down at all costs.

Rethinking Economics

The Manifesto finally asserts its beliefs that in spite of the criticism levelled at state interventions, government is the most effective institution to deal with market failure. One of the present topical issues relevant to the universal cause of market failure is undoubtedly climate change. Believers in the principles of free market have to acknowledge that environmental costs such as pollution, waste disposal, traffic congestion, loss of natural habitat and depletion of natural resources, tend to be ignored in the market prices resulting from private transactions between producers and consumers. In the 1950s, economists began to refer to such unaccounted costs that negatively affect third parties as externalities. British economist Arthur Pigou argued that one of the ways to deal with pollution is to tax the polluter so that the full costs of the pollution are factored into the buyer's and producer's decision. Throughout the past decades, many environmentalists have called on governments to introduce carbon taxes in an effort to make buyers and producers conscious of the costs of carbon emissions that are contributing towards climate change. But the reluctance of governments to act on externalities helps to explain the tragic state that the environment is in.

The question that remains at the heart of the matter is whether human activity can keep on expanding and growing at the present rates given that the earth's population is not showing any sign of declining and despite the low fertility rates registered in many western countries. The predictions of economist Thomas Malthus did not materialise at the time of his writing when he argued that food production cannot keep pace with increases in population. But Malthus predictions could be proven right if the capacity of the earth's resources shrink below to what technological solutions can offset.

Perhaps, one of the greatest problems to the constant push for economic growth without any measure of impact is the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measure which is used by governments worldwide to measure the economic activity of their country. In his publication 'Life on Planet', David Attenborough points out how our obsession of using the GDP goal for ever-increasing growth is one of the chief problems to the environmental destruction being wrought on the planet. He recommends the path taken by New Zealand in measuring the economic success of the country by focusing on two other dimensions apart from profit – people and the planet. In a similar vein, David Pilling in his publication 'The Growth Delusion' argues that the prevailing obsession on growth by our policy makers is the main source of misguided policies.

This is indeed an area where perhaps economists and philosophers can work jointly together. While economists focus on the incentives that make people thrive, work and consume, it is philosophy that mainly addresses the questions on the meaning of life and what constitutes a good society. If philosophers prod economists and politicians to focus on a wider range of social and economic variables that seek to address other goals such as happiness or quality of life rather than just increases in income and wealth, new priorities would emerge. Maybe governments rather than spending all their efforts on economic growth might encourage better work-life balance, the provision of more meaningful jobs, more time spent on sports, artistic and cultural activities, a greater appreciation of nature, and a deeper engagement of citizens in community affairs. During these two years of the pandemic, some countries such as Iceland and Belgium have opened up to the experimentation of a four day working week. Such a measure if implemented could drastically improve the quality of life and would be of valuable benefit to the economy if output is maintained at previous levels.

Bhutan was the first country to recognise the need to measure economic well-being from a wider perspective that goes beyond economic growth. The Gross National Happiness as developed by Bhutan consists of 33 indicators that are categorised under 9 domains – psychological well-being, health time use, education, cultural diversity and

resilience, good governance, community vitality, living standards and ecological diversity. The United Nations has also created a Human Development Index that is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living.

The question that stills begs an answer is why have such measures failed to become universally adopted by governments and institutions in their pursuit of economic policies? The human condition is conditioned by self-interest argues Adam Smith. True. The human condition is engulfed by materialism argues Karl Marx. True. However the worrying possible consequences of climate change point to a reality that cannot be ignored or treated lightly. Politicians and economists have to find new economic ways of working to balance human aspirations and relate them to the sustainability of the planet resources. Although during the last COP 26 summit, various proposals were made to tackle climate change, the question of how to manage economic and population growth was not given the same priority as the need to replace fossils fuel resources with renewable energy. The apparent tendency of humans to act selfishly and with a low level of sensitivity to the capacity of our natural resources calls for a serious questioning and rethinking of our economic systems. Naturally, reform of our economic systems calls also for an analysis and rethinking of our political systems. That will be focus of the next issue.

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Introducing the Student Philosophy Society (SPS) at the University of Malta

by Sarah Vella



Growing up, I had the pleasure of experiencing an environment filled with inquisitive minds. I truly am a believer that we are all born to wonder with eyes unclear. Thankfully, I had found a community of like-minded people through the Students' Philosophical Society (SPS). At age 16, students are typically asked to participate in and write up a project for their Systems of Knowledge assignment, and I dedicated mine to SPS, an organisation that has encouraged bringing together students from all walks of life and motivating them to explore the wonders of philosophy and engage in discussions without limitations. After some years, I finally became the president of SPS, and I could not be prouder of the progress and growth the club has obtained. Our goals for SPS not only include keeping the integration of the Philosophical Society in Malta at its prime but we also strive to take care of the well-being of students who have faced many hardships, especially during the pandemic. This is why I, along with SPS' current executive committee are devoted to providing safe spaces for students to explore and train their minds so that they may become well-thought thinkers of the future.

Over the last two years, I've seen SPS adapt itself by shaping and evolving to our goals, something which could not have been done without the wonderful people who I acknowledge as not only my colleagues but friends. My

thanks go to Emma Cassar for her attention to detail, Skye Vassallo for her creativity which is never bound by restrictions, Guilia Debattista Montalto for her strategic skills that never disappoint, James Pace for his welcoming attitude, Maya Micallef Engerer and Jeremy Gatt for their input which keeps me grounded, and Francesca Montesin for always bringing a positive outlook. Lastly, my most sincere thanks goes to Cole Curmi de Gray, my vice who has taken the role of being my rock and partner throughout the development of SPS. This being said, I encourage those of you who are interested to check out our organisation and see what SPS is all about for yourselves.

For further information regarding SPS and any upcoming events, you can follow our social media platforms;

Instagram: @sps_um

Facebook: @spsuom

Twitter: @SpsUM2021

You can also send emails regarding any queries via:

spsuom@gmail.com

Sarah Vella is a student of the University of Malta and President of SPS.

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