

THEORY AND PRACTICE IN MARXISM

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The aim of this paper is to draw attention to the fact that the concrete development of marxist philosophy after Marx and Engels has been determined to a large extent by the question we shall try to answer here. This question can be worded as follows: "To the extent that Marxism is a 'scientific socialism', it comprises a scientific part. If we ignore, for practical purposes, dialectic materialism as a cosmology, then we can say that this scientific part is a theory of the laws of historical development governing the capitalist period. However, to the extent that Marxism is a political movement, it consists of a long succession of collective human actions. The problem that interests us here is the following: what are the relationships between these collective actions on the one hand and these scientific doctrines on the other?"

This question is, even more brutally, "If we believe, for empirical and theoretical reasons, that the history of capitalism is identical with the history of the class struggle, then why should we adopt the points of view and the aims of one class rather than those of another class? If we are convinced that the history of capitalism leads necessarily towards its self-destruction, then why should we wish to accelerate this evolution rather than slowing it down or remaining indifferent to it? Why, being historical materialists, should we rather be socialists than conservatives? Less deterministic, why should we decide to *act* in this direction if we accept that the evolution of the capitalist system does *not necessarily* lead to its self-destruction, but is only certain to fulfill, at *certain moments*, the essential conditions for a radical transformation that *can* be brought about by personal and collective actions?"

These problems do not seem to us to be purely theoretical: they arise in the everyday lives of many individuals on the one hand, and they have been extremely important in the history of the different "Internationals" on the other.

Kautsky and Plekhanov (and hence the traditional Diamat) give an answer A. The Austro-Marxists give an opposite answer B. Lukacs and Korsch reject these two answers and put forward an answer C. If we consult the writings of Hendrik de Man, with Ernst Mandel, the only great socialist theoretician Belgium has ever produced, we can observe that his *Au-delà du Marxisme* is inspired first and foremost by the problems with which we are concerned here (I consider him to be a defender of a psychoanalytical — adlerian version of Austro-Marxism). The philosophical developments that have taken place in Western Europe since the Second World War have been strongly influenced by our problem. These developments have led to a renaissance of the chairs of moral philosophy in the GDR (even though we are completely ignorant of the theoretical results of their activities) and to attempts to arrive at a synthesis of Marxism, phenomenology, existentialism and psychoanalysis. We shall now expatiate upon the answers A, B and C that we have just mentioned.

Answer A : Karl Kautsky and Georgy Plekhanov

Sources: K. Kautsky, *Ethik and materialistische Geschichtsauffassung* (1906); Die Materialistische Geschichtsauffassung (1927); G. Plekhanov, *Complete works*.

To these two authors, the history of mankind is the continuation of the history of life: Marx and Darwin are very close to each other and are complementary. We understand objectively that capitalism is self-destroying and we understand, equally objectively, that the conscious and finalised actions of individuals and human communities are the agents of this self-destruction. Now then, these individuals and communities would not turn against the capitalist order if they did not consider the destruction of capitalism to be a positive value. We consequently understand, on the basis of our knowledge of history, that ever more individuals and groups will tend to reject the capitalist "order — disorder" voluntarily and consciously, and to defend the socialist order. This means that "conscience" plays an extremely important part, even for these naturalistic determinist Marxists. This conscience is determined, however, (in keeping with

a unilateral vision of the determination of the superstructure by the substructure) by economic and sociological developments of which *we*, as neutral and theoretical historical analysts, understand the inevitable character.

A last question arises here: why should I, as a theoretician conscious of the fact that increasingly large masses will start to look upon socialism at the same time as *a value* and as *a future*, embrace this cause ?

The answer to that question is extremely simple. If my class situation obliges me, as a wage-earning intellectual, to throw in my lot with the proletariat, then I cannot but embrace the cause of the proletariat because of the determinism of history. If, on the other hand, that is not the case, then no argument can force me into embracing that cause. The anti-socialist marxist, however, will ultimately be wiped out by history. In other words: as paid employment becomes ever more universal and as the class-struggle intensifies, the probability that an historian discerns the prevailing trends of history objectively without adhering to them intellectually and morally, becomes increasingly smaller.

The transition from *is* to *ought* consequently does not take place with Kautsky and Plekhanov, but this happens very consciously. It is not — as Kolakovski claims — because of ignorance or philosophical superficiality that these authors take this stand, but because of the emphasis they put on coherence.

If we understand the part that Spinoza (to whom freedom was nothing but a clear understanding of necessity) and his monism played in the works of Plekhanov, then we can gain a deeper insight into the depth of this monistic and scientific, naturalistic and deterministic standpoint. Spinoza is to Plekhanov what Darwin is to Kautsky. One problem remains to be solved, however: how does the transmutation of the real historical circumstances and the (possible) comprehension of their development laws into *aims* and *values* take place in the conscience of the masses ? Neither Kautsky, nor Plekhanov provide us with a satisfactory answer to that question, which has remained unanswered up to now.

Some people have claimed that utilitarianism constitutes the answer to that question: as a member of the wage-earning classes (even though I might belong to the medium-grade or senior staff) I can infer that my selfish interest recommends me to work towards the elimination of this destructive social order, through an analysis of the psychologically and socially destructive mechanisms that

dominate capitalist societies. Even although one might affirm that this argument plays or might play an important part in some theoreticians' reasonings, this combination of marxism and utilitarianism is neither implied, nor excluded by the viewpoints of Kautsky and Plekhanov.

To my knowledge, the theory of the relationships between superstructure and foundation, posited by marxism, has never been sufficiently developed to allow us to answer the following question: "How can a particular social situation, both by its static and dynamical aspects, transform itself into aims and values of persons and communities?" Since this theory does not exist — to my knowledge — it is impossible for me, even if I adopt the perspectives of Plekhanov and Kautsky, to contend that the "axiological transformation" (let us call it that way) will take place, in general or in particular, in accordance with the utilitarian method (in one of its many versions) or in accordance with another method. The affinity between Darwin and Spinoza (who is himself so close to Hobbes) leads us to believe that utilitarianism is at least an important possibility to these authors. If that proves to be the case, then it is "enlightened" interest that leads to marxism. But enlightened interest is the interest enlightened by the specialist, the theoretician and the professional revolutionary (who has understood, more rapidly and better than anyone else, the conditions necessary for satisfying his needs). Hence it does not seem surprising to us that the leninist domination by the party over social life is in fact in keeping with the A solution to our problem (even though Kautsky and Plekhanov refused to follow Lenin). Lenin, as all the other young Russian marxists, had been trained by Plekhanov. This influence can easily be recognised in Lenin's theory of the "reflection"; his *Cahiers philosophiques*, which are more hegelian and date from 1915—1916, are too fragmentary and too complicated to have influenced the simplifiers of the Diamat as much as Plekhanov and Lenin's earlier writings (Materialism and Empiriocriticism) have done.

Every conception of the relationships between theory and practice, between *is* and *ought*, between *fact* and *value* is translated into relationships between specialists and non-specialists (and consequently partially determines a general social structure and a party role). We do not wish to pass judgement here on the marxist authenticity of the A answer. But this answer deserves to be clearly outlined here as one of the possible attitudes.

Answer B: marxist neokantianism and other dualisms

Herman Cohen, one of the leaders of the school of Marburg, is an ethical socialist without being a marxist: if Kant's principle that every man must be treated as an aim and not as a means, is valid, then the social organisation should be aimed at achieving complete equality and freedom, and hence, should strive to eliminate the exploitation of man by man and paid employment, which is linked to this exploitation. One consequently has to be a radical socialist for universal ethical reasons, and not only on grounds of the interests of the working class. Cohen, however, was a socialist but not a marxist, as we have already pointed out.

Karl Vorländer (*Kant und der Sozialismus*, 1900; *Kant und Marx*, 1911; *Kant, Fichte, Hegel und der Sozialismus*, 1920) recognizes that Hegel, and consequently Marx as well, consider knowledge and ethics as historically variable and evolutionary, whereas Kant only deals with ahistorical and universal categories and duties. Vorländer adds, however, that the invariable core of the Kantian ethics and epistemology is completed by an important fringe that is at the same time historical and conflictual (it is through conflicts that the ideas of pure reasons materialise). Marx and Hegel, on the other hand, are also in need of a system of non-temporal aims, in spite of their historicism. Socialism must be justified as an aim, which is something traditional marxism does not do. A symbiosis of Kantianism and marxism can preserve the marxist theory of history on the one hand, and justify socialism as an aim on the other.

Max Adler, the theoretician of the Austro-Marxists (*Kausalität und Teleologie im Streite über die Wissenschaft*, 1904; *Das Soziologische im Kants Erkenntniss-kritik*, 1924) thoroughly reinterprets Marx (by giving a critique of social reason). Just as Kant tries to deduce the synthetic a priori from the fact that the data of experience should be synthesized as data of the *transcendental subject*, the data of the historical conscience must be synthesized as data of the *collective social subject*, the prerequisite condition for the existence of a personal conscience. A Kantian reinterpretation of the *Grundrisse* and the *Critique of Political Economy* seems to Adler essential. An original way to pass from "is" statements to "value" can be deduced from this theory: it is only through the formation of the collective conscience (which is only possible thanks to the appearance of socialism) that the "social transcendental ego" can become an empirical reality and become embodied in the different

empirical "egos". A Kantian reinterpretation of the *Political Economy* constitutes the cornerstone of the passage of theory to practice.

This sophisticated justification, however, is not the most frequently used in Austrian marxist neokantianism. In *Marxismus und Ethik* (1905) Otto Bauer presents an interesting concrete situation: a hard-pressed worker has to decide, during a strike, whether to act as a "strike breaker" (and to enjoy appreciable financial advantages) or to throw in his lot with the striking workers (and to suffer the adverse financial consequences this entails). Bauer deduces from the kantian categorical imperative that solidarity is an absolute necessity and reproaches orthodox marxism for not setting clear guidelines for action in this case.

The addition to marxism of an independent ethic (kantian in this case) can give rise to two radically different political tendencies: 1) In the case of Adler himself, it led to an anti-authoritarian position close to that of Rosa Luxemburg: considering that the socialist imperative is in fact inserted in everyone's conscience and that historical experience provides us with the instruments necessary to actualise this imperative, the actions of the socialist marxist should be aimed at "sensitising" the concrete lives of both the working classes and the entire people. An authoritarian party is not required, but a revolution is indispensable (in view of the strong tension between the *is* and the *ought* on the one hand, and the laws of historical development on the other). 2) In the case of O. Bauer and certainly of C. Renner (two Austro-Marxists that are very close to Adler), the fact that socialism becomes an imperative based on aims the working class has in common with the bourgeoisie (kantian ethics was the ethics of the "enlightenment") leads to gradualism and reformism. It is perhaps no coincidence that Bernstein, the most distinguished reformist, does systematically refer to Kant. It is probably this environment that provided Hendrik de Man with the inspiration for his "ethical socialism".

Conrad Schmidt proposes a synthesis of marxism, kantianism and utilitarianism at the same time. He believes that the theory of historical development, if it is to lead to concrete action, lacks both a theory of the enlightened interest *and* a theory of the categorical imperative.

If we consider the answers A and B, then it becomes clear that A is a radical reduction of *ought* to *is* and B an equally radical separation of *is* and *ought*.

To the extent that the ethic prevailing at a certain moment is the expression of the social structure prevailing at that moment, every ethical socialism lays itself open to the following reproach: a radical rupture with that structure cannot be deduced from an ideological expression of that same structure.

If, on the other hand, this social structure itself is contradictory and conflictual, and if its ethic represents its future, then an ethical justification of marxist action can escape this reproach after all. If this ethic is only partially determined by the social structure and also partially determines that structure, through a kind of bilateral interaction, then the reactionary total dependence mentioned in the above objection no longer exists either. For every kind of ethic in general (and for kantian ethic in particular) we cannot contend that the dependence is either only partial or else the conflictual expression of the capitalist contradictions. Once more, we need a detailed theory — that has not yet been developed — of the relationships between superstructure and foundation if we are to decide on a particular attitude vis-à-vis the B answer.

Before expounding the C answer, we should like to emphasise that ethics other than the kantian ethic can be used to justify a socialist action, on the basis of the historical laws of historical materialism.

a) If an existentialist ethic were possible (cf. the unexecuted projects of Sartre, Jeanson and some works by the Beauvoir), one might try to deduce the socialist imperative, the “axiological transformation” from that particular ethic.

b) If a christian ethic can be deduced from the sacred writings of christianity, one might, as political rheology (Metz) and the theology of liberation try to do, attempt to come to a synthesis of the marxist theory of history with this christian political ethic.

c) One might also, on the basis of a humanistic ethic fighting against (as did young Marx himself) different types of alienation (i.e. forms of human life that are incompatible with human “nature” or “essence”), deduce socialist action from the amalgamation of marxist historical laws and a theory of alienation. This presupposes, however, a valid theory of alienation (cf. J. Israel, B. Olman, I. Meszaros) for which either a philosophical anthropology or a general theory of action (in which the “alienated” forms of action would be deviating forms) is required.

d) A general theory of justice, revived by J. Rawls (a modern version of kantianism) can also be used to complement marxist

historicism; J. Habermas' dialogical ethic can in coöperation or in conflict with J. Rawls, play the same role.

e) Finally, our contemporary ecologists sometimes deduce a radically socialist ethic from imperatives of environmental conservation.

All these attempts, trying to justify and to systematise our moral aversion to the exploitation of man by man and to the injustice of inequality, suffer from (or profit by — according to the stand one takes) a radical dualism: the “axiological transformation” is a confluence of two relatively independent forces and not a unitary evolution of a monistic system.

Answer C : Lukacs and Korsch: knowledge in action

In *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, Lukacs explicitly rejects both the Kautsky — Plekhanov answer, and the Adler — Vorländer — Bauer answer. According to Lukacs these answers are false because the problem is put in the wrong way. The idea (thrown out in our introduction) that a thinker who theoretically accepts historical materialism, sides against the proletariat is considered to be contradictory. We contend with Lukacs that the marxist attitude with regard to history as the development of a whole (encompassing economics, politics, judicial organisation, ideology, technology, religion) can only be taken up by a group that occupies a particular position itself in that history. The proletariat, the interests of which coincide with those of mankind as such (a contention that once again presupposes a theory of “human nature”, a philosophical anthropology), is capable (and solely capable) of grasping the entire evolution of mankind. In fact action and theory coincide in this case. Historical knowledge is but a self-reflection of the act of making history. Socialism is neither an aim, nor a value, but a moment of the class-struggle, in the conscience of the “universal” class. This theory calls for a threefold commentary:

a) Politically, once again, (cf. Adler) a reflection on the relationship between theory and practice of actions leads to a libertarian attitude; if marxist science is no more than an awareness of marxist action, then the self-reflection of the universal class suffices. No experts or leaders are necessary to arrange the course of this action. This means that we arrive once more at Rosa Luxemburg's position. It should not surprise us consequently that Lukacs had to retract the vast majority of his statements in Stalinist Russia.

b) Lukacs's position is anticipatory: the *present-day* proletariat, undeniably characterised by working-class corporatism (according to the marxist theories themselves) cannot be the total and transparent universal class. Even if one accepts the epistemological *privilege* that was adduced, one should take into account that it is not total; it is only partial and in gestation.

c) Historical materialism as a theoretical reflection is in fact not the self-conscience of marxist action.

Should we consequently reject this science (partially out off from the action) as a science (1)? Should we detach this type of science from a marxism that still remains to be created (2)? Or should one confine oneself to a humbler statement? Social sciences, just as natural sciences, can only be experimental. Well now, historical action is the only macro-experiment possible. Only a group of agents striving towards the elimination of exploitation and inequality stands a chance of discovering the laws governing the development of that exploitation and inequality. Only a group of agents for whom this elimination is of paramount importance is capable of taking into account the difficult and subtle history of this development. This group of agents, however, is only asymptotically identical with the proletariat. It is currently present in this proletariat, although sometimes separated from it. The identity of subject and object in history (history as self-knowledge of acting mankind) is utopian in spite of its being both a theoretical and a practical aim at the same time. It follows that the identity of fact and value, of necessity and freedom, of *is* and *ought* are only utopian as well. It is true that the totalizing group can only discover history as the development of a totality; but this totalisation remains — we repeat — to be worked out in the future.

Despite all these critical remarks, we believe that the development of Lukacs's position would contribute to solving the problem with which we are concerned here. In *Marxismus und Philosophie* Karl Korsch sets forth ideas that are analogous to those of Lukacs in *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*. He tends to bridge the gap between theory and practice, as does Lukacs, by reducing theory to practice. Knowing is acting and presupposes acting. Hence, the transition from theory to practice is nothing but the transition from one form of action to another. The details of this passage remain quite unspecified, both in Lukacs's and in Korsch's writings. We must, however, realise that the political struggles of the twenties and the thirties made it impossible for both Lukacs (who had to abandon

his position) and Korsch (who emigrated in isolation) to further develop their theses, which should be elaborated.

Dialectics as a tactic for action

In the previous pages we examined the — difficult — passage from theory to marxist practice. We have now reached the following conclusion: neither of the three answers seems to be entirely satisfactory, but all three seem to contain partial truths.

On the one hand, hegelian historicism is closer to concrete life than kantian a-temporalism. On the other, however, it leaves us at the mercy of an evolution that does not solely consist of progress and that, at certain moments (as Marx himself repeatedly stressed) contains moments of real indetermination. At that moment human action based on non-historical considerations must intervene. This means that we are looking for — but certainly have not yet found — a non-eclectic conciliation of Hegel and Marx for the passage from theory to practice in Marx.

The “cold” theory of Kautsky and Plekhanov, on the one hand, is necessary in order not to backslide into utopianism; Lukacs’s and Korsch’s activism is also indispensable to avoid inertia.

We have thus only formulated the problem without being able to solve it. However, the passage from theory to practice in Marxism is not only a matter of determining aims. It is equally important to study the choice of the means to bring about this passage.

Marxism is closely linked to the notion of dialectics. Dialectics has been used systematically in twentieth century political practice to cover a pragmatism devoid of principles. In this way the Soviet - German pact and the oppression of Czechoslovakia have been covered with the cloak of dialectics. Serious socialist logicians and theoreticians have repeatedly shown their mistrust with regard to this notion which they consider to be useless to the scientific innovation of marxism that is currently taking place. We would like to put forward a new hypothesis: we believe that the development of a theory of dialectics is necessary for concrete political action. Why? We can only briefly enumerate our reasons here :

- 1) Every human action succeeds or fails (and in general partly succeeds and partly fails). But, every success provokes (by the increase in visibility, in power and oneness it causes) antagonists. In the same way every failure (by the weakness that results from it, the error it manifests, and again the increased visibility) provokes

antagonism as well. On the other hand, every successful action also has positive spin-off effects (band-wagon effect), as well as every failure (through the decrease in danger emanating from the unsuccessful agent). The interaction between all these consequences should be studied and foreseen. The type of antagonist and coadjutor, dependent on the type and the degree of success or failure, should be studied systematically in a theory of human action.

2) Every action provokes, not only externally, but internally as well, antagonism within those who are responsible for it. The agent thus becomes his own enemy (in different ways, depending on the type of action concerned).

The issue at stake here is to foresee as much in advance as possible, for each personal or collective action, the antagonisms, both external and internal, that interact and that will necessarily be provoked by every successful or unsuccessful action. What we need to do while planning the action itself is to insert actions whose effects will offset these antagonistic effects (and to foresee also, to a certain extent, the reactions of the nth degree that will be provoked by these compensatory actions).

A dynamic theory of the intra- and interpersonal conflicts ensuing from every action seems to us to be the intellectual aim of what is traditionally called "dialectics".

This dynamic theory of conflicts has to a certain extent been prepared by Raymond Boudon's theory of adverse effects (*Effets Pervers et Ordre Social*, P.U.F., 1977), which proposes to study the theory of counterproductive effects of human social actions systematically. His theory, however, is profoundly anti-dialectical to the extent that a) it tries to discourage us from studying the development of sequences of actions and b) it suggests that the very strong non-linearity of complex collective actions makes it increasingly difficult to monitor these actions. A positive theory of dialectics, close to a dynamic theory of games, based on findings that are close to Boudon's, should give the concrete agents concrete methods to organise and to anticipate counterproductive effects. Jon Elster's work goes in this direction.

Such a "dialectical theory" does not yet exist; which means that it is utterly impossible to apply. The recent attempts made to specify the notion of dialectics (cfr. the articles in Diego Marconi's anthology) are only a hesitant step in this direction. This means that: a) we have to contest that a concrete policy can be an application of a "dialectical theory", b) we must also reject the assertion that

dialectics is useless and cannot be sufficiently specified.

On the contrary, it contains a program for the future in the theory of human action. Within marxism, O. Bogdanov, who is unfortunately enough only known as one of the empiriocritics attacked by Lenin, developed in 1913 and 1917 in his "*Allgemeine Organisationslehre. Tektologie*" (2 volumes) an anticipation of a general theory of action and organisation which seems to us to be an appropriate starting-point for developing a general theory of dialectical action; praxiology takes up this trend.

We cannot expatiate upon that here. But we would like to return to the "axiological transformation" for a few moments. If individual and collective human actions are dialectical, then the aims of the action should be adapted to the situation. Aims are not independent of means. Theory can also lead to practice in the following way: considering that the whole action is "dynamically conflictual" (dialectical), the agents should be capable of complying with this vision and this situation, and hence they should take into account while determining their aims that the results will inevitably be "contradictory" (in this sense that they will be conflictual and partially counterproductive) I would defend that only action in favor of a classless society would be able to take into account the dialectical character of action as such.

I have two reasons for this belief (1) if separate subgroups (individual firms and the state bureaucracy in so called 'democracies' and the conflicting parts of the "Nomenklatur" in so called 'real socialism') act independently but interact with only their proper interests in view, the problem of counterfinality and of counter-productiveness is much greater (by strong instability and non linearity) than if collectives of self governing individuals determine policy (without creating any separate class of professional 'leaders'); 2) moreover the inevitable counterproductiveness and counterfinality that *will* remain present in any self-governing socialism also will be closely recognized by all, aware of the fact that all 'deciders' share equally the collective responsibility. One may have the faint hope that this state of affairs will make defeats more bearable and changes of directions more swift and less costly.

Practical Conclusions

I. I would like to return to the question mentioned in my introduction "Why if I consider Marxist sociology and economics

to be partially or completely true, should I actively join the fight for the destruction of capitalism and of state socialism (that has only its name in common with socialism) ?”

This question can be addressed to myself in solitary deliberation or to an audience in collective discourse. Solitary deliberation and collective discourse have the rhetorical aspect in common: could Marxist sociology and historiography rhetorically *convince* given audiences to join the fight? The answer to this can only be found by empirical research into the reasons (rather the motives) that made given persons join the socialist movement. Here the answers are clear: a large variety of emotional causes *push* individuals towards their political commitment. Among these reasons pure interest may be found, or revolt against the brutal oppression of neighbours or family members, identification with oppressed persons (especially the revolt against the humiliation of loved ones or frustration of strong and basic needs) Social psychology has here its field of research. When do strikes and revolutions occur and when, in circumstances even more difficult or more promising, do they fail to occur? Among the motives leading given individuals to their commitment, also all types of ethical systems may be found. But often pure aggression against the individuals or/and the system that destroyed oneself or persons one identifies with is sufficient. My guess is that a revolutionary career of long standing and deep involvement is always the effect of such passionate protest.

However even if this is not the only problem (though it explains why revolutionary rhetoric has always to use emotional language, and often ethical appeals) I do not consider this problem a minor one. Our age has seen the rebirth of philosophical rhetoric (theory of informal persuasion) in the work of Naess, Perelman, Toulmin. The question asked in this discussion should also be studied *rhetorically* and the answer to this question should be used in practical political work.

Work as that of Barrington Moore on “Injustice” prepares the field but nearly everything remains to be done; socialism has a long history but the empirical study of convincing arguments (given certain audiences) in favor of socialist action is conspicuously absent in this long history.

II. If our first remark holds true and emotional causes are always decisive in the commitment in favor or against socialist political action, why not try to find a universal ethical system on the basis of which these appeals (necessary for cynically Machiavelistic

reasons) can be legitimately made? I consider an ethical system to be a system that claims universal validity, defends one unique hierarchy of values, and obliges (using internal or external sanctions) persons to realise these values in the preferred order. Ethics is based in reality, claims to be true, leads to obligations, condemnations, sanctions and guilt, and asserts its own universal validity. It may be that some ethical systems do not share all these characteristics (but most of them, indeed an immense majority present them). My answer is clear: a. all of us are infested with ethical convictions due to our education; b. however the political future of mankind is too important to depend on these pre-rational intuitions; c. because all past societies that have been based on ethical convictions have shown extreme fanaticism and rigidity, d. because philosophical discussion shows that no ethical system yet proposed has a clear intellectual advantage over any other; e. because most ethical systems are phrased in such general terms that both socialist and anti-socialist action can be justified on the basis of such theories; f. because the claims towards validity and obligation are not met by an objective study of the persons these claims want to guide. The properties of "having an objective base in fact" and of "universality" are de facto incompatible because the situations of persons and groups are basically socially and historically different. To be sure, works in the direction of "Ethics and Society" of Milton Fisk develop with great clarity a radically relativistic ethics where everything that is obligatory depends on our class positions. However such ethics answer our initial problem only in a tautological fashion. If I accept Marxist theory, then I consider myself as belonging to a certain class, and, given Fisk's thesis that obligations are relative to classes, I necessarily know thereby what my obligations are. No consensus towards such an ethics (or towards any other proposed one) is forthcoming. So, my passionate (sic) revolt against the existing order should be based not on ethical considerations but on reasons of fact.

III. Among these reasons of fact I may at least be able to show that *capitalist society is in principle unable to know itself*. I may even try to generalise this statement and claim that all societies characterised by strong inequalities in possessions or/and power are unable to know themselves. This claim, a repetition of Lukacs and Korsch in more naive terms is simple: all power holders develop an ideology leading to the legitimation of their power and, if in danger, hide their power successfully from the public eye (trivially, nobody in USA can really claim to know who really decides what in most

important matters, and nobody in the USSR can do it either, except those whose interest it is that this knowledge is not disseminated, and if, per impossibile, such knowledge could be obtained by non interested parties, no means would be available to explain the facts to the majority of the population).

Is this a non rhetorical reason for revolt ? After all, most people do not want to know (education and ideology, combined with the labour situation has seen to that). But objectively, in fast evolving dynamical societies is it not dangerous for the self-regulation of the system that most members of the system (even educated and influential ones) can not know the state of affairs ? I consider this a reason, albeit a weak reason to revolt.

IV. Moreover, we do not have at our disposal a means to evaluate life plans. I said already that all of us are "infested" with ethics, but we would like to have at our disposal a rational means (on which consensus can be reached) for the changing, testing and evaluating of such ethical rules. The situation here is the same as in all other scientific situations. We never start with a white sheet; but, going along we like to improve the initial text. However, I may again be able to show that in capitalism and state socialism nearly nobody has the ability to make the experiments in living that would allow an "experimental society" (I believe the expression belongs to Donald Campbell) to enable its members to find out what they really value, in every given case. So (and this is a modified form of the Neo-Kantian appeal) we are not in a situation in which we could claim to know what is right or wrong, what is good or bad, what is admirable or despicable. *Not* on the basis of a *specific* ethics, but in order to be able to construct an objective (not necessarily universal) plan of life, we should realise a self-governing socialism in our society, in which every living human being can and wishes to find out which life to lead (and to help, if asked, others to find out). To be clear, I am convinced that the Nietzschean criticism against traditional ethics (be they utilitarian or kantian, Aristotelian or Christian) is largely correct. All these ethical systems divide every group and every individual against themselves and create between the divided parts a *master-slave relation*. However I agree also that I do not experience the world in a neutral way. It is full of fascinating and dreadful things (even if it is not imprisoned by iron obligations nor endangered by inevitable sanctions) I (and every other human being) wish to find out what my momentary values are, in order to live according to them. Only in self-governing socialism can the experi-

ments be made and the individual and collective research be undertaken in order to find out. What we call moral convictions (in most, not in all cases) is simply oppression interiorised. I consider this a second, stronger, reason to revolt.

To summarise my two reasons: If I want to live in a society that I can know and if I wish to discover my "real" values, then I want capitalism and state socialism to be destroyed and a self governing socialism to be installed.

V. But — let us continue to be careful and not enthusiastic — there are so many things I wish and cannot have. Philosophical Marxists may claim that I live an alienated life in capitalism (and I, agree) but has there ever existed any society in which humans did not live alienated lives? Can a definition of a species be exact if the near totality of this species does not conform since its initial stages to this definition? This is the reason why I do not wish to make my revolt dependent on a theory of human nature. Even if such a theory would be simultaneously static (certain invariants characterise man since his beginnings) and dynamic (other characteristics are clearly in development), it should be a synthesis of the human sciences, respecting in their methods the very characteristics of the object (man) studied. Such a synthesis certainly does not exist, and most human sciences can be accused of employing methods copied from natural sciences and inadequate to the phenomenon to be understood. To be sure as much as I would like to know my society and to know my values, I would like to know what are the invariants and the variables of the species 'man'. But I don't have this knowledge. Certainly, man is characterized as *homo ludens*, *homo faber*, *homo loquens*, *homo sapiens* etc. and I see as evident that only a minute fringe of privileged humans are ever allowed to play, to know and to invent. Is this an argument in favor of allowing them all to be inventors, artists or scientists? Most of them (and this is perfectly true, but nobody knows if it can be changed) do not desire to create, to know or to invent. I pretend that they have been falsified by life; ("alienated"); the opposite side pretends that I am the dreamer who does not recognize facts when I see them. What can I answer? 1. I can claim that, when we take genetical psychology (Piaget comes to mind) seriously, then children, in favorable circumstances, are explorers, players, inventors and develop towards a maximalisation of these features. So I should create a self-governing socialist society in which adults could be what they tend to be as children and what is visibly destroyed by school and work. 2. I can also claim that there

always have been revolts against any arbitrary inequalities in historical societies. One could answer: so what? The eternal (!) situation is that there is an elite, an indifferent majority, and a minority of discontents (either failures or members of the elite that for some reason did not get power). I reply: the revolts are increasing in strength, frequency and depth. They reply: this is simply the consequence of human technological process and of the growth of human population. I reply: the more society progresses, the more revolts can be seen. They ask: prove! And even if you could prove that the intensity and frequency of revolts in all forms increase more than the number of men and the complexity of their relations, does this prove that your utopia can come true? I say yes. They laugh. This is a weak argument in favor of the possibility of what for my two first reasons I want to happen. (It has two parts: the reference to Piaget and child psychology and the reference to the theory of revolts). But Marxist theory of crises is there to reinforce these considerations.

VI. Finally, whatever one may think about the final results of the Frankfurter School, trying to combine Marxism with psychoanalysis, I think we can prove (applying a very cool cost/benefit analysis) that the balance of capitalism and state socialism is negative in terms of human self preservation. The number of persons who engage in symbolic or real self destructive or escapist behaviour steadily increases with their development. It can moreover be shown that the reasons for this self destruction or escapism is not to be found in technology or science but in features peculiar to these two societies as social organisations. If this is true, then — this is my final point — a reader might still say: so what? Why derive ought from is? This, without a systematic ethics, is no reason to eliminate capitalism. My answer is: if even this does not convince you that you should act, then obviously you have constructed your conception of being and acting in such a way that there never can be a factual argument in favor of any action whatever. To be sure: you can do this. But why? Observation shows the truth of the following statement' "for many propositions p, if a person believes p, this persons tends to perform the action A". So observation would advise the logician to investigate rules of inference from propositions towards actions. If this logician stands aloof and, with Hume and Poincaré answers with disdain "you never can derive values from fact, obligations from descriptions" then he obviously describes a thinking that is not the thinking that occurs in fact. Why does he wish to be such a revolutionary? Is he

more than the secretary of man, is he also his judge ?

To conclude: I formulated five very simple arguments in favor of self-governing socialism (without even defining it) and one argument in favor of the possibility of realising what according to me is desirable. They can only be sketched here. They would serve their purpose however if they could be seen as an attempt to break the stalemate, the pat-situation in the discussion between A, B and C. The arguments may be naive, but at least they can be factually refuted or confirmed, and there can be ways of making operationally precise the terms in them that are vague. I would like to know if socialists could be motivated to analyse a point of view that a. stresses the passionate and irrational (though not necessarily ethical) origin of the socialist commitment; b. considers as necessary the study of socialist rhetorics; c. defends on the logical plane socialism as a condition for the discovery of a theory about society and about values; d. defends on the factual plane socialism as possible on psychogenetical foundations and in consequence of a theory of strikes and revolutions (combined); e. asks for a cost-benefit analysis of the present societies in terms of a general social accounting (using measurements of quality of life); f. and considers only a self-governing socialism as an efficient response to the dialectical character of human action.

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NOTE

*The arguments sketched here and developed in various publications in Dutch (Proeven en Troeven van het Marxisme (ed. K. Raes), Leuven Tijdschrift voor Sociologie 1983, Psychologie en Maatschappij 1982) are due to a long lasting struggle about ethical or non ethical Marxism, between J. Walry and myself. Many of them are due to this interaction. Obviously only I am responsible for my presentation of the common cause.

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