

THE UTOPIAN DIALECTIC OF CAPITALISM AND
COMMUNISM IN MARX

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»...if we did not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then all attempts to explode it would be quixotic.«¹

In the Afterword to *Capital*, Marx distinguishes the dialectic under its »mystified form« where it seems to justify the existing state of things and the dialectic under its »rational form«, essentially critical and revolutionary. But the very »dialectical method« which Marx affirms in this passage presents several aspects. The use of direct or modified Hegelian categories in his work assumes many forms and fulfils divergent functions. There are actually several dialectics. One consists of a logic of contradiction applied to capitalism and contained in *Capital*. The object of another dialectic however lies in establishing the possibility as well as the necessity of communism, the classless society of the future. Between the former »rational« dialectic — to borrow the expression — and the latter »utopian« or speculative dialectic, exist strong but hidden interactions. The distinction formulated by Engels and ratified by Marx, between utopian socialism and scientific socialism, constitutes a denial of this actual duality of the Marxian dialectic.

COMMUNISM AS A DENIED UTOPIA

When these categories first appeared in the early writings, *communism* and *proletariat* served the function of providing a speculative solution to a problem philosophically posed. The »positive supersession of all self-estrangement«² will be the work of one class »which has universal character«³ and which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating all other spheres of society. Marx's objective con-

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¹ K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 159.

² K. Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, in *Early Writings*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1977, p. 349.

³ K. Marx, Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Introduction, in *Ibid.*, p. 256.

sequently consisted in a search to overcome these original speculative determinations of proletariat and of communism to give them a real historical basis. What is incontestably, at the beginning, a utopia of social reconciliation and reunification formulated in a neo-Hegelian manner, ought to receive a positive and concrete determination firmly anchored in the movement of history in general and bourgeois society in particular. Providing the scientific proof of the possibility/necessity of communism and the historical mission of the proletariat, constitutes a major motive in the evolution of Marx's thought.

The Marxian vision of communism apparently underwent a profound transformation between the 1840s and 1860—1870 — it even appeared to have radically changed its nature. In 1844, Marx proclaimed that communism «is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man, the true resolution of the conflict between existence and being, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution to the riddle of history and knows itself to be the solution».⁴ But such an affirmation was then devoid of a theoretical basis. Things seemed quite different when thirty years later, communism was characterized in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* as a classless society, without a political state, without commodity production nor wage labour, overcoming capitalism through a period of political transition, then progressing from a lower stage to a higher stage, differentiated from the point of view of the economic basis (production, distribution) and of the ideological and juridical superstructure. The objective seemed accomplished indeed: communism is both possible and necessary, the materialist conception of history and the theory of the capitalist mode of production have demonstrated how it is part of the profound movement of history and why its coming is imminent. The credibility of communism is reinforced from its relation to the critical analysis of capitalism and of the situation of the proletariat developed in *Capital*.

However, the passage from capitalism to communism remains a speculative jump, a utopian leap, a forced deduction. The relation between the two societies remains contradictory and unresolved, not only historically, which Marx recognized, but *theoretically* as well, which he rejected. The refusal to admit the utopian character of communism, and the conviction that it represents on the contrary a »materialist« deduction from a »scientific« conception of history, constitutes a striking example of false consciousness among Marxists, and in Marx himself, which is surprising in a critical thinker of this stature.⁵ In a celebrated letter written as early as 1852, Marx asserted that his originality lay in »demonstrating« that classes are linked to definite historical phases of production, that class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat and that this latter itself

⁴ Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

⁵ Maximilien Rubel, who professes to be a Marxian anti-Marxist, ranges Marx among »the pioneers of rational utopia«. Cf. *Pages de Karl Marx pour une éthique socialiste*, Vol. 2, Paris, Payot, 1970. See, also, by the same author, *Marx critique du marxisme*, Paris, Payot, 1974.

»only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes and to a classless society*...«⁶ However, the »demonstration« of this last point is not to be found in the published or previously unpublished writings of the young or mature Marx. Each time such a thesis is formulated by Marx, it is founded on speculative arguments of a teleological type, transposed from Hegel, or on a utopian dialectic where mediations are merely postulated but not demonstrated.

COMMUNISM AS NEGATION OF THE NEGATION

The dialectical foundation of communism through an *Aufhebung* (supersession)⁷ recurs on several occasions in Marx's works. It presupposes the theme of *necessity* interpreted dialectically, and a teleologist or finalist orientation expressed by the thesis of the end of human pre-history — which is nothing but the ultimate end of history itself.⁸ The frequent recourse to the concept of »negation of the negation« and its speculative use, is an indication of the extent to which this problem remains unresolved in the Marxian project.

In *Manuscripts of 1844* appears the idea that »communism is the act of positing as the negation of the negation«,⁹ and »the positive supersession of all estrangement, and the return of man from religion, the family, the state, etc., to his *human* i.e., *social existence*«. ¹⁰ But this concept can be found again in later works where the arguments are more historical or economic rather than being specifically philosophical.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx distinguishes three stages in the development of human productivity: that of »relations of personal dependence«, then that of »personal independence founded on objective (*sachlicher*) dependence« and finally »free individuality based on the universal development of individuals and on their subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth...«¹¹ In the chapter on fetishism in *Capital*, the »community of free individuals« of which communist society is constituted, restores through superses-

⁶ Karl Marx to J. Weydemeyer, March 5, 1852 in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol 1, Moscow, 1976, p. 528.

⁷ The translation of this Hegelian concept must be rendered by the triad »suppress — conserve — elevate«. Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Science de la logique*, Vol. 1, Paris, Aubier-Montaigne, 1972, p. 38.

[The German term *Aufhebung* was translated by Marx himself as »suspension« (See, K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1977, p. 750), thereby endorsing Hegel's deliberate choice of the term to denote two opposite senses at the same time. (*Ibid.*, p. 32.) However another edition of Marx's early writings, translates the term as »supersession« (See, K. Marx, *Early Writings*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1977, p. 349), whose literal use stands in contrast to the French use of *sursumption*. In the present text, the terms have been used interchangeably in reference to context.]

⁸ G. Lapouge characterizes utopia as an attempt to escape from history, its horrors and its absence of finality. Cf. *Utopie et civilisation*, Paris, Flammarion, 1978.

⁹ Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

¹¹ K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1974, p. 75. (English version, *op. cit.*, p. 158.)

sion, those common characteristics of earlier forms which had been abolished by commodity society, regardless of whether they were based on exploitation or not. Although the existence of the division of labour and regulation of production by labour time — primitive communism, Robinson Crusoe on his island, European serfdom, the peasant community — all these social forms are based on *simple* and *transparent* relations. The commodity world with its »natural« and spontaneous mechanisms, remote from men's control and understanding with its mysticism and fetishism, is in its turn negated in communism; just as in pre-commodity forms, »the social relations of labour and regulation of production by labour time — primitive its products, are in this case perfectly simple and intelligible, and that with regard not only to production but also to distribution«.¹²

The most famous use of the negation of the negation to lay the foundation of the passage to communism is located at the end of *Capital Volume 1* in the chapter on »the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation«. Apart from an allusion to future collective ownership as a return to a form negated in private ownership, the main argument is as follows. The first major form of private ownership is that of the independent and individual worker, it is founded on small isolated production. The second form, capitalist private ownership, dissolves the first through expropriation of primitive accumulation. It has non-workers as its subject and the socialization of production as its basis. But capitalism in its turn, engenders its own negation »with the inexorability of a law of Nature«, i. e. the expropriation of the expropriators, that is to say, the »negation of the negation«: »This does not re-establish private property of the producer, but gives him individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era: i. e., on co-operation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production«.¹³

A similar thesis is found in *Wages, Price and Profit* (1865). The primitive accumulation of capital is none other than »original expropriation«, a decomposition of the unity between the worker and his instruments of labour. Once established, the separation reproduces and enlarges itself »until a new and fundamental revolution in the mode of production should again overcome it and restore the original union in a new historical form«.¹⁴ In the draft of his letter to Vera

¹² K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1974, p. 83.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 715. The triad is the following: private individual ownership of the worker (private social ownership of the capitalists) individual ownership of the workers founded on the common ownership of the means of production. This latter expresses the abolition of all opposition between the individual and the community. Engels interprets this apparently obscure formula in the following proposition: social ownership concerns means of production while the individual ownership relates to products of consumption (See, *Anti-Duhring*). This does not reflect what Marx considered here when speaking of the negation of the negation. In 1871, when writing about the Commune, he continued to maintain: »It aimed at the expropriation of the expropriators. It wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labour, into mere instruments of free and associated labour«. K. Marx, *The Civil War in France* in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, Moscow, 1977, p. 223.

¹⁴ K. Marx, *Wages, Price and Profit*, in *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

Zasulich (1881) on the contrary, Marx — borrowing a thesis of Morgan — asserts that the negation of the negation effects a return to collective appropriation of primitive communism, still alive in the »Russian rural commune«: the capitalist system finds itself in a crisis which will end in its elimination »and in the return of modern society to a superior form of the most archaic form — collective production and appropriation«.¹⁵ As the passage from *Capital* cited above indicates, there is in communism, a synthetic return to the collective and individual dimension of appropriation, the conflict of which finds a final solution.

Finally, a comparison of a passage from *Capital* and another from the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* reveals to us a negation of the negation that has not been sufficiently appreciated but is nevertheless essential, between simple commodity production, capitalism, and the lower stage of communism. The mode of appropriation of petty commodity production, where reigns the law of value, is founded on equivalence. Capitalism realizes an *Aufhebung* in this domain by a »dialectical inversion« in which the application, and not the violation, of the law of value to this particular commodity, labour power, leads to the appropriation of a non-equivalent by the capitalist: surplus value. The ownership right, an equal right characteristic of commodity production, is applied while the mode of appropriation finds itself reversed: »These rights remain in force both at the outset, when the product belongs to the producer, who, exchanging equivalent for equivalent, can enrich himself only by his own labour, and also in the period of capitalism, when social wealth becomes to an ever-increasing degree the property of those who are in a position to appropriate continually and ever afresh the unpaid labour of others«.¹⁶ Thus, capitalism is founded on an equivalence that is negated or superseded, and not simply abolished. For its part, communism in its lower stage effects a supersession and a return under a higher stage effects a supersession and a return under a higher stage to the genuine equivalence of simple commodity production. While the means of production have become common property, the products of personal consumption are distributed through a principle of strict equivalence. In this domain, »the same principle prevails as in the exchange of commodity equivalents: a given amount of labour in one form is exchanged for an equal amount of labour in another form«.¹⁷ The equality assessed in commodity production and superseded in capitalist wage labour is thus restored in some measure in a system which has neither commodities nor wage labour: communism.

We cannot but think of Marx's critique of Proudhon and the French socialists here. In considering that money and capital falsify a system of liberty and equality typical of commodity exchange, the latter do not understand that these are »inherent disturbances« of the

¹⁵ K. Marx, First Draft of the Reply to Vera Zasulich's letter in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, Moscow, 1976, p. 159.

¹⁶ K. Marx, *Capital*, *op. cit.*, p. 550.

¹⁷ K. Marx, Marginal Notes on the Programme of the German Workers' Party in *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

capitalist system where »in the realization of equality and freedom« these »prove to be inequality and unfreedom«. The »utopianism« of the French socialists stems from »their inability to grasp the necessary difference between the real and the ideal form of bourgeois society, which is the cause of their desire to undertake the superfluous business of realizing the ideal expression again, which is in fact only the inverted projection (*Lichtbild*) of this reality«. ¹⁸ But in restoring an authentic equivalence in communist distribution, does not Marx himself fall victim to this critique of utopianism to the extent where he re-establishes for his non-commodity society of the future, an »ideal form« of equality which is nothing but a projected image of bourgeois society? It is true that for him the dialectic here has not totally lost its effects. The equal right of the lower stage remains in effect, a prisoner of bourgeois limits, if we take into account the effective inequality of individuals. Only the higher stage can overcome all equal right, in a state beyond justice, where each will receive according to his needs. ¹⁹ The dialectic of overcoming is introduced here between the first and second stage of communism. However, even if this thesis remains implicit, it is clear that the higher stage, in as much as it is the »kingdom of liberty«, cannot be surpassed any further. There is thus a suppression of the dialectic under its »rational form«, if it is true that the latter« includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things (...) the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breakdown«. ²⁰ Hence, the end of human pre-history represents, due to the teleological character of the materialist conception of history, equally the end of the historical dialectic itself. ²¹

According to Marx, the positive traits attributed to different early social forms and negated in class societies, in commodity production or in the capitalist system, are therefore restored at a higher level by negation of the negation, in communism. This is the case for example with collective ownership and production of primitive community forms; of individual ownership or of the union between the worker and his means of production, the same with the principle of equivalence, characteristic of pre-capitalist commodity production; of the simplicity and transparency of economic relations, of the control of the social division of labour, that are characteristic of pre-commodity societies. Marxian communism as found in the mature texts, henceforth inserted into a conception of history and an extremely developed and complex theory of capitalism, however retains its major traits speculatively postulated in the early works. It abolishes all separation, all alienation, all mediation — these being themselves reduced just as in the Hegelian vision, itself transposed from the Christian con-

¹⁸ K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

¹⁹ K. Marx, *Marginal Notes* . . . , *op. cit.*, p. 19.

²⁰ K. Marx, *Capital*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

²¹ As a believer in the universality of the dialectic, Mao Zedong attempts to apply it to communism, in the belief that it too in its turn will be eventually overcome. But he does not question the earlier and later historical evolution towards communism, that is to say, the finalist thesis of Marx. Cf. Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1974.

ception, to painful but necessary moments in the process of the reunification of human society — the final new encounter of man with himself.

COMMUNISM: THE MODEL AND ITS CONTRADICTIONS

There is in Marx, a whole strategy of defence vis-à-vis a critique of utopianism. The essential argument consists in proclaiming as with the Commune that the working class »have no ready-made utopias to introduce *par décret du peuple*«, that they »have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which the old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant«. ²² Another line of defence lies in the definition of communism as a simple movement: »Communism is not for us a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality (will) have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things«. ²³ Such an argument, often found among several Marxisms occults two postulates: that there exists a real movement which will *abolish* capitalist society, and that communism through this negation, constitutes a classless society where the contradictions of all earlier social organizations are suppressed. The pretention of not formulating recipes for the future is, at best, blinding oneself. Since the problem does not lie in knowing the quantitative importance of Marx's writings devoted to communism in the ensemble of his work — these are effectively meagre. The question lies in the qualitatively essential place occupied, implicitly or explicitly, by the communist hypothesis in the marxian theoretical apparatus, in the orientation that it confers on its critique of the bourgeois world, in the absolutization and radicalization which it implies for its denunciation.

A utopia which is presented under the guise of an anti-utopia — is this not a super-utopia? ²⁴ The communism of the mature works, from the *Grundrisse* and *Capital to Gotha*, and the different texts published or written by Marx in the last twenty years of his life, does not constitute a pure »movement«, or something vaguely and hypothetically defined that goes beyond capitalism, but is a social system whose foundations are formulated with precision and in a manner that is sometimes rather peremptory. It is a classless society, devoid of either politics or a state, the latter having become superfluous. Production has lost its commodity character: products are not transformed into commodities anymore since exchange is no longer necessary. Value and money have disappeared and the system of wage labour has been abolished. The totality of production, founded on the common ownership of the means production, is consciously organized through a plan established by the associated producers by a direct confrontation of collectively defined needs to different neces-

²² K. Marx, *Civil War in France*, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

²³ K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, Moscow, 1976, p. 57.

²⁴ Leszek Kolakowski speaks of the »utopian anti-utopia of Marx«. See the article that appeared under this heading in *L'esprit révolutionnaire*, Brussels, Ed. Complexe, 1978.

sary labour times used, indirectly or directly, for the various kinds of production. In the lower stage, distribution is effected through a system of labour vouchers, allowing an equivalence (after deductions for social funds have been made) between expanded individual labour and that contained in the products consumed. Distribution in the higher stage is organized according to needs. All fetishism, all alienation have disappeared. We could multiply the elements, dispersed among different texts, of this model of communism, which forms a system that wants to be coherent to itself and in its articulation to the model of capitalism and to that of history. This communist society is not reducible to a movement, it is very much a »state of things«, an »ideal«, actually an utopia. Some of the features that characterize precisely the utopians can be readily found here: »pictures and plans of a new society«.²⁵ A complex social system elaborated by its fundamental traits is effectively defined by Marx as »the objective of social movement«.²⁶ But he never »demonstrated« that it is communism, as he prophesied and defined it, that would result from the movement of modern society, nor the thesis that »bourgeois relations of production« constitute »the last antagonistic form of the social process of production«.²⁷

It is moreover revealing that many of the characteristics or principles of Marxian communist society had already been earlier formulated by several utopian thinkers, such as those relating to the common ownership of the means of production, of a planned economy devoid of anarchy and crises, of the suppression of social and class antagonisms, etc. In this context Kolakowski observes that it is the synthesis which Marx made that is original, in addition to the roots which he sought to directly establish with the tendencies of capitalism and of history. But different socialist theoreticians had already talked about the suppression of money, of the system of wage labour, of the utilization of labour-vouchers, or elaborated formulas such as that of the passage from a government of men to an administration of things, or »from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs«.²⁸ Did not Marx himself emphasize a community of grand objectives between the utopians and the International (»only the means are different«)²⁹ and write in *The Manifesto*: »The practical measures proposed in them — such as the abolition of the distinction between town and country, of the family, of the carrying on of industries for the account of private individuals, and of the wage system, the proclamation of social harmony, the conversion of the functions of the State into a mere superintendent of production, all these proposals point solely to the disappearance of class antagonisms which were, at that time, only cropping up«.³⁰

²⁵ K. Marx and F. Engels, *On the Paris Commune*, Moscow, 1971, p. 166.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ K. Marx, Preface to a Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 504.

²⁸ See, notably, the developments consecrated to Saint Simon, Fourier and Owen by Engels in *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* in *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, *op. cit.*

²⁹ K. Marx and F. Engels, *On the Paris Commune*, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

³⁰ K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* in *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

The elaborate character of the communist ideal in Marx does not imply that the model be absolutely coherent and free from contradictions. First of all, apart from a certain continuity, Marx's theses evolved appreciably on this question, whence the divergences in different periods. Thus, for example, the *Grundrisse* envisages that the scientific work of direction and control of production will become dominant, a line of thought which is undoubtedly linked to the transformation of labour into the »first vital need« (*Gotha*). *Capital*, on the contrary, assumes a generalization of simple labour, facilitating the permutation of tasks — labour then remains mainly an inevitable constraint and only a radical reduction in global labour time, thanks to the development of the productive forces, will allow the blooming of the kingdom of liberty beyond this necessity, which can only be reduced and not abolished.³¹ But the hypothesis of a generalization of simple labour is at the same time indispensable for the »simplicity« and »transparency« assumed in the calculation of labour time which must preside over the totality of the process of social planning and that of individual distribution. (See, *Capital* and *Gotha*.)

When Marx talks' of the economic organization of communism, he uses different analogies as that of Robinson Crusoe, the orchestra and the co-operative. Three forms however predominate in the comparisons used: the factory, the community of the primitive or patriarchal type and the association of communes (this latter image which appeared after the Commune assumes an implicit reconciliation vis-à-vis Proudhon's theses). The communist economy realizes a sort of synthesis of characteristics from the fabric and from the community: the absence of independence and autonomy among different kinds of labour, the control of the allocation of the labour force to different tasks, the control of the division of labour; these types of organization thus know nothing of commodity production or exchange in their working. But there remains several incompatibilities between the different models used. Thus, the idea of a large social community, or a huge social factory, is very different from that of a federation or association of communes. The first is compatible — abstractly — with the idea of the abolition of all separation, of all mediation, notably, commodity exchange, but not the second. On the other hand, as underlined by Selucky,³² there is a fundamental contradiction in the model of communism contained in the texts of the 1870s: the process of organization and planning of production envisaged by Marx is *in fact*, a centralized process, whence the analogy with a social factory, the argument of simple technical direction as opposed to Bakunin, etc., — while the »political« system of the association of communes is actually decentralized and self-managed. This is in contradiction with the determination by the economic of all spheres of society, the correspondence between the base and superstructure reaffirmed in *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* in relation to communism itself. Whence the alternative for Marxists: either

³¹ Cf. A. Heller, *La théorie des besoins chez Marx*, Paris, UGE 10/18, 1979.

³² R. Selucky, *Marxism, Socialism, Freedom*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1979.

abandon political decentralization to re-establish a correspondence with economic organization but at the risk of a rupture with Marx's anti-statism (Kautsky, Lenin, Stalinist and post-Stalinist Marxisms), or abandon economic centralization at the risk of reintroducing and legitimizing the very commodity mediations that Marx considered to be absolutely incompatible with a communist organization (market socialism).

THE INTERACTION OF CONCEPTIONS OF CAPITALISM AND COMMUNISM

Marx's effort to lend a stronger coherence to the definition of communism goes hand in hand with the progressive elaboration of his theory of capitalism, in constant dialogue of a conflictual sort with the classical school of political economy on the one hand and the different socialist tendencies on the other. Thus, the idea of the abolition of the division of labour, central to the *German Ideology*, is abandoned in the mature works where we only read about the suppression of the »old division of labour«, of its unplanned and un-coordinated character and its replacement by a »conscious« and collectively controlled division of labour.³³ In *Gotha*, Marx clarifies that what disappears — and this occurs only in the higher stage of the classless society — is »the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour«, and consequently the opposition between manual and intellectual labour. The analyses developed by Marx in *Capital* of the relation between the division of labour in manufacture and the division of labour in society, the distinctions between division of labour »in general«, »in particular« and »in singular or in detail«, find an echo here.

In an analogous sense, the thesis on the dual function of the law of value in commodity society: the regulator of the distribution of labour between the branches according to social needs, and operator of the distribution of product between individual producers-exchangers, — allows Marx to clarify the dual role that labour time (directly apprehended by the collective plan and no longer expressed through alienated mediations like exchange-value and money) plays in communism: »Its apportionment in accordance with a definite social plan maintains the proper proportion between the different kinds of work to be done and this serves as the measure of the portion of

³³ Cf. P. Ludes, *Der Begriff der Klassenlosen Gesellschaft bei Marx*, Frankfurt, Campus Verlag, 1979.

the common labour borne by each individual, and his share in the part of the total product destined for individual consumption».³⁴

Marx's vision of communism was not the only component of his thought which was modified in relation to developments in his theory of capitalism — the same was true of his theses on the transition between capitalism and communism which came under the influence of historical events such as the revolutions of 1848, the Commune and the growing electoral influence of social-democratic parties. The modification of the role attributed to the state, following the experience of the Paris Commune in 1871, is well known.³⁵ Mention can equally be made of the duration of the transition, first considered as short and later as a long historical period, its social nature, pre-communist or still essentially capitalist, the place accorded to the class struggle in the course of the same period, the function and relative importance of the contradictory measures during the transition such as the statization of the means of production, the possible role of production co-operatives or pre-capitalist community forms, etc. All this cannot be developed here. Let us note that the importance accorded by Marx to the idea of »transition« is often evoked to emphasize the difference between him and the utopians. Suffice to add that this always concerns a transition to... communism, that is to say, to utopia. If the realism and the dialectic of the Marxian vision seem enhanced, its determinism and teleologism do not remain any less important.³⁶

Marx's communism constitutes a complex social system in which different dimensions of the society are linked together: the economics base and the superstructure, production and distribution; there is a connection between the non-existence of classes and that of the

³⁴ K. Marx, *Capital*, *op. cit.*, p. 83. Let us note that this last principle of distribution proportional to expended individual labour, of which Marx develops the modalities of practical application in *Gotha*, is advanced here in a hypothetical form that is thus less rigid and peremptory than in 1875: »We will assume, but merely for the sake of a parallel with the production of commodities, that the share of each individual producer in the means of subsistence is determined by his labour time«. (*Ibid.*) But why precisely has *this* parallel been used here? As a matter of fact this hypothesis has a decisive importance, since the lower stage of communism restores the equivalence (and hence, equality) posed in commodity production, then superseded under capitalism, even before the higher stage goes beyond the bourgeois limits of equality, raising consequently economic difficulties, (cf. R. Tartarin, *Gratuité, fin du salariat et calcul économique dans le communisme*, in Marie Lavigne, (Ed.), *Travail et monnaie en système socialiste*, Paris, Economica, 1981) as much as philosophical and moral ones (Cf. A. Heller, »Marx, Justice, Freedom: The Libertarian Prophet«, *Actes du Colloque Marx 1983*, B. Chavance (ed.), Ed. de l'EHESS, Paris 1985).

³⁵ Cf. E. Balibar, *Cinq études du matérialisme historique*, Paris, Maspéro, 1974.

³⁶ Marx concludes the last chapter on the expropriation of the expropriators as a negation of the negation in *Capital* by a quotation from the *Communist Manifesto* which affirms: »What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, are its own grave diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable«. (*Capital*, *op. cit.*, p. 715) Teleologism is visible, still under a dialectical form in the remarkable analysis of Volume 3 on societies-by-action where the latter are qualified as »necessary points of transition« towards the »associated mode of production«.

state, between the absence of value and that of wage labour, between the defetishization of the world and the direct calculation of labour time, etc. The systematic character of communism responds to the systematic character of capitalism. The young Marx already *knew* — these theses had often been formulated before him — that money, wage labour, the state, private ownership and capital ought to be abolished. But the task he set himself in his critique of political economy was to show the logical and historical *connection* of the ensemble of these relations and categories. *Capital* effectively contains a theory of the connection between value and money (in reply to Ricardo), between commodity and capital, between wage labour and exploitation, etc. The result of these studies by Marx constitutes a *system* of the capitalist economy. Herein lies its force in its ability to analyse the nature and contradictions of such a social organization. But this is also its weakness since it tends to absolutize the »logic« of the system, to unify it in an exaggerated way, to underestimate the counter-tendencies or the divergent logics it contains. This theoretical construction, whose richness is still present, is in some part overdetermined in its structure by the pledge or the prophecy of its global negation, by communist eschatology. Such a finalist polarization of his critique, leads Marx to an excessive radicalization in his condemnation of the system, linked to the postulate, that the overcoming of capitalism can only consist of a joint abolition of *all* that constitutes its essential basis as well as the relations between its various elements. At the same time, he was inclined to postpone into the dream of an authentic and radical »revolution«, of an emancipated society without internal conflicts, the solution of social problems more complex or historically less restricted than he thought. Such a deficiency is apparent despite the profound vision that underlined his views and the sharpness of his approach, in his critique of the state, of politics, of democracy, as also of alienation, commodity production and wage labour as such, etc.

THE TELEOLOGICAL DIALECTIC

In the Marxian argument, there is a fundamental difference between the historical constitution of bourgeois society, and that of the communist society to come. The various negations which produced the capitalist mode of production, analysed *a posteriori* in terms of a »rational dialectic« anchored in real history, serve as a point of support to the »negations of the negation« which will produce communism, speculatively projected *a priori* in the future with the help of a »utopian dialectic«. Such a methodological asymmetry is dissimulated by Marx's efforts to establish a continuous historical chain ending »necessarily« by communism. However, there still remains a »missing link«, a *leap* from necessity to freedom, of which neither the *possibility* nor the historical *necessity*, have been (nor could be) proved by Marx. This »weak link« is occulted by the finalist *polarization* of the critical analysis of capitalism and its implicit orientation towards the birth of classless society.

But if we discard the Marxian teleologism, its denied utopianism, nothing proves that the historical dialectic — supposing it exists or follows Hegelian roads — leads to a positive overcoming of social contradictions. A negative dialectic could even realise unforeseen and less fortunate supersessions. A conservative critique of Marx has already observed, with reason, that the same contradictory tendencies of capitalism illuminated in *Capital* could be interpreted very differently and lead to very different conclusions.³⁷ In this sense, even if one admits the existence of imminent laws of capitalist production that Marx invokes to predict the expropriation of the expropriators, these could in reality very well lead to a hyper-capitalism, or to an overcoming of bourgeois society that would not at all be emancipatory, or even to a negative dialectical return to the darkest dimensions of pre-modern systems. Not to speak of an end to history by a self-destruction of humanity. Our century inclines us, alas, to consider such possibilities, far from the optimistic nineteenth century vision of the tortuous march of humanity towards progress, even through long stages of alienated progress. Future progress — and not a perfect society — is surely possible. It is not however, governed by any historical necessity.³⁸

The interaction between science and utopia or more precisely, between a scientific approach and an utopian approach, is thus profound and complex, although denied, in the thought of Marx and its movement. The reciprocal influence of these two dimensions explains the frequency of theses which are none other than combinations of historical or logical analysis, empirical and theoretical, expressed in rational terms — with utopian wishes. Suffice to mention the importance and function of the two concepts of *revolution* and *proletariat*.³⁹ Such a criticism does not lead to a questioning of the ensemble of Marx's conceptions of capitalism or history. Many remain pertinent and profound. It is rather an appeal to a critical reading which would take Marx seriously — not necessarily in words — and would seek to resituate his analyses which retain a validity a hundred years after his death, in a different perspective, that of an open history.

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³⁷ K. Popper, *La société ouverte et ses ennemis*, Tome 2; *Hegel et Marx*, Paris, Seuil, 1979, p. 234.

³⁸ On the contradiction to be found in the «critical theory» of the Frankfurt School which retained a quasi-Marxian vision of a liberated society of the future, while abandoning the thesis of the necessity of an overcoming of bourgeois society anchored in its imminent tendencies, see, A. Wellmer, Reason, Utopia and the Dialectic of Enlightenment, *Praxis International*, Vol. 3, No. 2, July 1983.

³⁹ On the tensions inherent in the concept of the proletariat, cf. H. Nadel, *Marx et le salariat*, Paris, Le Sycomore, 1983.

MARKSOVA UTOPIJSKA DIJALETIKA KAPITALIZMA I KOMUNIZMA

Bernard CHAVANCE

Rezime

Odnos između Marksa i dijalektike ima dvojak karakter: u njegovoj misli može se naći logika protivrečnosti koja odgovara »racionalnoj dijalektici«, ali istovremeno i spekulativne teze teleološke orijentacije koje se odnose na »utopijsku dijalektiku«. Skrivena interakcija između ove dve dimenzije ovde se analizira kroz jednu napetost, između njegove teorije kapitalizma i njegove vizije komunizma. Stvarni utopijski karakter marksističkog komunizma je skriven, jer se tretira kao naučni metod suprotan utopijskim socijalizmima. Čest spekulativni i teleološki način na koji Marks upotrebljava »negaciju negacije« kako bi raspravljao o mogućnosti i potrebi komunizma, označava nagoveštaj ovog problema unutar njegove koncepcije istorije. Uprkos Marksovima denegacijama, u njegovom delu postoji model, ili bolje rečeno različiti modeli komunističkog društva i komunističke ekonomije, koji pružaju implicitnu normativnu orijentaciju njegovoj teoriji i njegovoj kritici kapitalizma, odnosno njegovom konceptu »predkomunističkog« »preistorijskog« čovečanstva. Razvoj vizije kapitalizma za vreme razrade Marksovog dela deluje uzajamno sa paralelnim razvojem vizije komunizma. Zbog toga postoji snažan — ali skriven i negiran — recipročan uticaj između naučnog i utopijskog pristupa unutar Marksove misli i njenog razvoja. Po autoru, budući da je svestan ovog problema, koji se skriva od većine istorijskih marksizama, bitan je za razumevanje postanka i strukture marksističkih dela, a takođe kao kritička procena onoga što ostaje vredno u Marksovoj misli sto godina posle njegove smrti.