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## New Preface

ABOUT THREE DECADES have elapsed since these volumes, now combined in this new edition, were written and it is not out of place to ask whether the events that have occurred in the meantime have made my interpretation obsolete, irrelevant or plain wrong. To be sure, I was clever enough to avoid making predictions that could now be proved false. The question remains valid, however, what, if anything, can be still interesting in the intellectual or political history my volumes tried to depict.

Marxism was a philosophical or semi-philosophical doctrine and a political ideology which was used by the communist state as the main source of legitimacy and the obligatory faith. This ideology was indispensable, regardless of whether people believed in it. In the last period of communist rule it hardly existed as a living faith; the distance between it and reality was so great, and hopes for the joyful future of the communist paradise were fading so rapidly, that both the ruling class (i.e., the party apparatus) and the ruled were aware of its emptiness. But it remained officially binding, precisely because it was the main instrument of the legitimacy of the system of power. If the rulers really wanted to communicate with their subjects, they did not use the grotesque doctrine of “Marxism-Leninism”; they appealed, rather, to nationalist sentiments or, in the case of the Soviet Union, to imperial glory. Eventually the ideology fell apart, together with the empire; its collapse was one of the reasons that the communist system of power died out in Europe.

It may seem that after the demise of this multi-national machine, intellectually inept but efficient as an instrument of repression and exploitation, Marxism as a subject of study is buried for good, and that there is no point in digging it out from oblivion. But this is not a good argument. Our interest in the ideas of the past does not depend on their intellectual value, nor on their persuasive power in the present. We study various mythologies of long-dead religions, and the fact that there are no longer any believers does not make this study any less interesting. As a part of the history of religions, and of the history of culture, such study gives us insight into the spiritual activity of mankind, into our soul and its relations with other forms of human life. Inquiry into the history of ideas, whether religious, philosophical or political, is a search for our self-identity, for



the meaning of our mental and physical efforts. The history of utopias is no less fascinating than the history of metallurgy or of chemical engineering.

And as far as the history of Marxism is concerned, there are additional and more pertinent reasons that make it worthy of study. Philosophical doctrines that for a long time enjoyed considerable popularity (and what was called Marxist philosophical economics was not really economics in today's meaning of the word but a philosophical dream) never die out entirely. They change their vocabulary but they survive in the underground of culture; and though they are often poorly visible, they are still able to attract people or to terrify them. Marxism belongs to the intellectual tradition and the political history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; as such it is obviously interesting, together with its endlessly repeated, often grotesque, pretensions to being a scientific theory. However, this philosophy entailed some practical consequences which would bring indescribable misery and suffering to mankind: private property and the market were to be abolished and replaced by universal and all-embracing planning—an utterly impossible project. It was noticed towards the end of the nineteenth century, mainly by anarchists, that so conceived, the Marxist doctrine was a good blueprint for converting human society into a giant concentration camp; to be sure, this was not Marx's intention, but it was an inevitable effect of the glorious and final benevolent utopia he devised.

Theoretical dogmatic Marxism drags on its poor existence in the corridors of some academic institutions; while its carrying capacity is very poor, it is not unimaginable that it will gain in strength, supported by certain intellectually miserable but loud movements which have in fact lost contact with Marxism as a theoretical body, but look for issues that can, however vaguely, be presented as issues of capitalism or anticapitalism (these concepts are never defined, but they are employed in such a way that they seem to derive from Marxist tradition).

The communist ideology seems to be in a state of rigor mortis, and the regimes that still use it are so repulsive that its resurrection may seem to be impossible. But let us not rush into such a prophecy (or anti-prophecy). The social conditions that nourished and made use of this ideology can still revive; perhaps—who knows?—the virus is dormant, waiting for the next opportunity. Dreams about the perfect society belong to the enduring stock of our civilization.

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THESE three volumes were written in Polish in the years 1968–1976, when their publication in Poland could only be dreamed of. They were published by the Institut Littéraire in Paris in 1976–78 and then copied by underground publishers in Poland. The next Polish edition was published in London in 1988 by the publishing house Aneks. It was not until 2000 that the book was pub-

lished legally in Poland (by the publishing house Zysk), when censorship and the communist regime had disappeared. The English version, translated by P.S. Falla, was published by the Oxford University Press in 1978. Later on, German, Dutch, Italian, Serb and Spanish translations appeared. I am told that a Chinese version exists, but I have never seen it. In French translation only two volumes were published; why the third volume has never appeared, the publishers (Fayard) failed to explain, but I can guess the reason: the third volume would provoke such an outrage among French Leftists that the publishers were afraid to risk it.

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of religion abolished. But, unlike many Western social democrats, Lenin emphasized that while socialists might regard religion as a private matter *vis-à-vis* the state, it was not private so far as the party was concerned. In present conditions the party must tolerate believers in its midst (atheism did not figure expressly in its programme), but it was committed to carrying on anti-religious propaganda and educating its members to be militant atheists. The party could not be philosophically neutral: it was materialistic, therefore atheistic and anti-clerical, and this world-outlook could not be a matter of political indifference. However, anti-religious propaganda must be linked with the class struggle and not treated as an end in itself in the spirit of 'bourgeois free thought'.

Whatever his tactical concessions, Lenin was on political grounds an implacable opponent of religious belief. Hence the violence of his attack on the empiriocritics, whose philosophy coincided in part with that of the 'God-builders'. The latter were only trying to add rhetorical and sentimental trimmings to Marxism, but in Lenin's eyes they were engaged in a perilous compromise with religion. In his main philosophical work, in letters to Gorky, and on other occasions he argued that religion stripped of its cruder superstitions and using the language of social progress was even more dangerous than the besotted Orthodox Church which brutally proclaimed its union with Tsarist despotism. Religion in a humanist disguise was all the better able to conceal its class content and delude the unwary. Thus, while Lenin was prepared to compromise with believers on tactical grounds, his mind was firmly made up on the question of substance and he refused to admit any suggestion that the party's world-view could leave any room whatsoever for religious faith.

Lenin's position in these matters was in accordance with the Russian free-thinking tradition. The link between the Orthodox Church and the Tsarist bureaucracy was manifest. When the Soviet government came to power, most, though not all, churchmen were hostile to it. Owing to this and to the basic principles of Leninism, the fight against the Church soon took on wider dimensions than those indicated in the party's programmes. The government did not confine itself to expropriating Church estates and secularizing schools, measures which in any case were regarded as bourgeois reforms and not specifically socialist. The Church was in practice deprived of all public functions and prevented from teaching, publishing books and periodicals, and educating the clergy; monasteries and convents were for the most part dissolved. The treatment of religion as a private affair *vis-à-vis* the state could not apply in a one-party system in which party membership was, in the vast majority of cases, a precondition of state service. Persecution of the Church and the faithful varied in intensity according to political circumstances—it was much relaxed, for instance, during the war of 1941–5—but the principle that the socialist state must strive in every way to eradicate 'religious prejudices' has remained in

force and is wholly in accordance with Lenin's doctrine. The separation of Church and State is only workable when the state is ideologically neutral and does not, as such, profess any particular world-view. The Soviet state, regarding itself as the organ of the proletariat and atheism as an essential feature of the one and only proletarian ideology, can no more accept the principle of disestablishment than, say, the Vatican with its similarly built-in ideology. Lenin and the other Marxists always held that there was no difference in this respect between a proletarian and a bourgeois state, both of which were bound to support a philosophy that represented the interests of the ruling class. But for this very reason the separation of Church and State, which Lenin used as a battle-cry against the Tsardom, was contrary to his theory of the relations between ideology, classes, and the state and could not be maintained after the Bolsheviki seized power. On the other hand, the nature and scale of anti-religious measures was of course not prescribed by the doctrine and varied according to circumstances.

#### 9. Lenin's dialectical Notebooks

APART from occasional passages in articles and speeches, Lenin wrote nothing further on purely philosophical subjects. (His article of 1921 on 'The Significance of Militant Materialism' is in the nature of a propaganda directive; that of 1913 on 'The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism' is a popular exposition and has no claim to originality.) However, there appeared posthumously in the Soviet Union a volume entitled *Philosophical Notebooks* (*Works*, vol. 38) consisting of extracts made by Lenin from various works and manuals, chiefly in 1914–15, together with approving or exasperated comments and some philosophical observations of his own. In certain cases it is not clear whether the notes are summaries of what he has read or represent his own position. The book is of interest inasmuch as the principal notes are concerned with the dialectic and to some extent tone down the crude formulas of *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*. They show, in particular, the influence of Lenin's wartime reading of Hegel's *Logic* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. These convinced him that the Hegelian dialectic was of great importance in the development of Marxism: he even wrote that *Capital* could not be understood without a thorough study of Hegel's *Logic*, and added with irreproachable consistency: 'So, after half a century, no Marxist has yet understood Marx.' This *boutade* should not be taken literally, for it is hard to believe that Lenin did not think he himself had understood Marx until 1915, but it shows to what extent he was fascinated by Hegel's speculation.

As the *Notebooks* show, Lenin was most interested by the question of 'universality' and 'individuality' in Hegel's logic and by the dialectic considered as



a theory of the 'unity and conflict of opposites.' He sought to discover in Hegel's dialectic the themes which could be taken over and used by Marxism after the transposition to a materialist basis. As to the question of abstraction and the relation between direct perception and 'universal' knowledge, Lenin emphasized everything in Hegel that was opposed to Kant's doctrine (for example, that the 'thing in itself was completely indefinite and was therefore nothing) and pointed out the autonomous cognitive function of abstract thinking: according to Lenin logic, dialectic, and the theory of knowledge were all the same thing. Whereas *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* concentrated on combating the subjective interpretation of sensations and seemed content to regard them as the source of all knowledge of the world, the *Notebooks* raise the question of abstractions that are contained in perception itself and introduce unending 'contradictions' into the cognitive process. Laws, and hence 'universality', are already contained in the particular phenomenon, and similarly the individual perception contains 'universal' elements, i.e. acts of abstraction. Nature is thus both concrete and abstract; things are what they are only in terms of conceptual knowledge, which apprehends them in their general regularity. The concrete cannot be grasped in its full concreteness by a particular act of perception. On the contrary, it reproduces itself only through an infinite number of concepts and general laws, so that it is never exhausted by cognition. Even the simplest phenomenon reveals the complexity of the world and the interdependence of all its components; but because all phenomena are thus interconnected, human knowledge is necessarily incomplete and fragmentary. In order to apprehend the concrete in all its particularity we should have to have absolute and universal knowledge of all the connections between phenomena. Every 'reflection' of the world suffers from internal contradictions which, as knowledge progresses, disappear and are replaced by new contradictions. The reflection is not 'dead' or 'inert', but by its fragmentary nature and contradictions gives rise to the increase of knowledge, which continues indefinitely but never reaches absolute finality. Thus truth manifests itself only as the process of the resolution of contradictions.

Since there is always a certain tension or 'contradiction' between the particular and the abstract components of knowledge, it is always possible in the cognitive process to absolutize the latter at the expense of the former, i.e. to think in idealist terms. Along with Lenin's emphasis on the 'universal' aspects of the 'reflection' (which is contrary to the description of it in his main philosophical work), this idea is a second important departure from the rough-and-ready interpretation of idealism as a fraud invented by the clergy and the bourgeoisie. Idealism, it now appears, has 'gnoseological sources': it is not just a mental aberration, but the absolutization or one-sided development of a real aspect of

cognition. Lenin even remarks that wise idealism is closer to wise materialism than is foolish materialism.

The second important subject of the *Notebooks* is the 'conflict and unity of opposites'. The whole of the dialectic, Lenin claims, can be defined as the science of the unity of opposites. Among the sixteen 'elements of the dialectic' which he enumerates, the conflict of opposites appears in various forms as the main motif. Every single thing is the sum and unity of opposites, every property of things turns into its opposite; content 'conflicts' with form, features of lower stages of development are reproduced in higher ones by the 'negation of the negation', etc.

All these ideas are expressed in very brief and general terms and are therefore not suited to over-precise analysis. Lenin does not inquire how 'contradiction', a logical relationship, can be a property of objects themselves; nor does he explain how the introduction of abstractions into the content of perception fits into the theory of 'reflections'. It can be seen, however, that like Engels he regarded the dialectic as a universal method that could be expounded, irrespective of object, as a generalized 'logic of the world', and that he treated Hegel's logic as the raw material of a materialistic transformation. However, his remarks in general suggest an interpretation of Hegelianism that is less simplified than Engels's. The dialectic is not merely an assertion that 'everything changes', but an attempt to interpret human knowledge as a perpetual interplay between subject and object, in which the question of the 'absolute primacy' of either loses its sharpness.

The *Notebooks* were published mainly to serve the party in its critique of mechanistic materialism. While party philosophers used *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* to combat all doctrines suspected of idealism, they quoted the *Notebooks* to emphasize the difference between Marxism and mechanicism, especially in the campaign against Bukharin and his followers in the 1930s. There was of course no question of admitting that the two texts were in any way inconsistent with each other. Later, when the teaching of dialectical materialism in the Soviet Union departed from the schema laid down by Stalin, the *Notebooks* were used as the new basis and the sixteen 'elements' took the place of Stalin's 'four main features of the dialectic'. However, *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* is still revered as the philosophical foundation of Leninism, a status conferred on it by Stalin. It has had a deplorable effect in furnishing pretexts for the stifling of all independent philosophical thought and in establishing the party's dictatorship over science and culture in every sphere.

As Valentinov and others pointed out, the extreme obstinacy with which Lenin defended materialism was rooted not only in Marxism but in the tradition of the Russian materialists, especially Chernyshevsky, whose philosophy



was a popularization of Feuerbach. Comment on these lines was also heard in the Soviet Union in the 1950s, but was condemned as it suggested that Leninism was a specifically Russian philosophy and not the infallible, universally valid continuation of Marxism.

Apart from the question of the influence of Russian sources, it is clear that Lenin's philosophy was closely linked with his political programme and the idea of a revolutionary party, and that he himself was fully aware of this. A party of professionals in which all theoretical questions were strictly subordinated to the struggle for power could not safely countenance philosophic pluralism or be neutral in ideological questions. For the sake of its own success it must possess a clearly defined doctrine or body of inexpugnable dogma, binding upon its members. Party discipline and cohesion demanded that any risk of laxity, vagueness, or pluralism in theoretical matters should be eliminated. That the ruling ideology must be strictly materialist was ensured by Marxist tradition and by the need to combat religious thought in all its forms as an obstacle to revolution, as well as to avoid an ontologically neutral philosophy. Lenin castigated, in friend and foe alike, any tendency to compromise even verbally with religion, or to side-step ontological questions on the ground that they were wrongly formulated or insoluble. Marxism, he believed, was a ready-made answer to all the major questions of philosophy and admitted of no doubts. Any attempt to shelve philosophical questions was a threat to the party's ideological unity. Thus his coarse, uncompromising materialism was not only the effect of a particular tradition but was part and parcel of his technique for action. The party must have the sole right to decide all ideological questions, and from this point of view Lenin well understood the danger that idealism presented to his political programme. The idea of totalitarian power, embracing every aspect of cultural life, was gradually taking shape in his mind and was eventually put into practice; it was well served by his philosophy, which was not concerned with investigating and solving problems but with imposing a dogmatic intellectual system on the socialist movement. In this way the fury of his philosophical attacks and lack of interest in others' arguments had their roots in his political doctrine.

Even for Leninists, however, *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* was ambiguous on two important points. Firstly, as already mentioned, Lenin held, unlike Engels and Plekhanov, that 'objectivity', i.e. independence of the subject, was the only attribute of matter that materialists as such were bound to recognize. This statement was evidently designed to free Marxist philosophy from any dependence on changing scientific theories, especially in physics: as 'matter' suffered no harm from any attributes that science might bestow or take away from it, science presented no danger to materialism. But this gain was achieved by emptying 'matter' of all content. If matter is defined simply by the fact of being something other than the perceiving subject, it is clear that this can

equally be said of any 'substance' that is regarded as differing from the content of perception. 'Matter' becomes simply another term for 'everything', without implying any of the attributes—spatial, temporal, or dynamic—that we generally associate with 'materiality'. Secondly, this definition readmits the vague dualism that it purports to exclude. If everything 'outside' the subject is material, then either the subject itself is not material or we must extend the definition of matter to comprise subjective phenomena. The formula that 'matter is primary and mind secondary' appears to presuppose that mind and matter are different, and is thus contrary to materialist monism. Lenin's work does not answer these problems or deal with them consistently, and there is no point in trying to probe more closely: the obscurities of his text are not due so much to inherent philosophical difficulties as to Lenin's indolent and superficial approach and his contempt for all problems that could not be put to direct use in the struggle for power.



first phase of the Revolution; but neither Lenin nor any other Bolshevik leader regarded plundering as an expression of communist doctrine. On the contrary, Lenin maintained that increased labour productivity was the hallmark of socialist superiority, and he relied mainly, if not wholly, on technical progress to bring about socialism. He wrote, for instance, that if scores of regional electric power-stations were constructed—which, however, would take at least ten years—even the most backward parts of Russia would pass straight to socialism without any intervening stage (*The Tax in Kind*, May 1921; *Works*, vol. 32, p. 350). It was in fact the Bolsheviks who established the idea that global production indices are the basic evidence for the success of socialism; although of course not in so many words, they sanctified the principle of production for its own sake, irrespective of whether it makes life better for the producers, i.e. the whole working community. This was an important aspect, though not the only one, of the cult of state power as the supreme value.

#### 10. Lenin as a polemicist. Lenin's genius

THE great bulk of Lenin's published work consists of attacks and polemics. The reader is invariably struck by the coarseness and aggressiveness of his style, which are unparalleled in the whole literature of socialism. His polemics are full of insults and humourless mockery (he had in fact no sense of humour at all). It makes no difference whether he is attacking the 'economists', the Mensheviks, the Kadets, Kautsky, Trotsky, or the 'workers' opposition': if his opponent is not a lackey of the bourgeoisie and the landowners he is a prostitute, a clown, a liar, a pettifogging rogue, and so on. This style of controversy was to become obligatory in Soviet writing on topics of the day, though in a stereotyped, bureaucratic form devoid of personal passion. If Lenin's opponent happens to say something he agrees with, the man is 'forced to admit' whatever it is; if a dispute breaks out in the enemy camp, one of its members has 'blurted out' the truth about another; if the author of a book or article does not mention something that Lenin thinks he ought to have mentioned, he has 'hushed it up'. His socialist adversary of the moment 'fails to understand the ABC of Marxism'; if, however, Lenin changes his mind on the point at issue, the one who 'fails to understand the ABC of Marxism' is he who maintains what Lenin was maintaining the day before. Everyone is constantly suspected of the worst intentions; anyone who differs from Lenin on the most trifling matter is a cheat, or at best a stupid child.

The purpose of this technique was not to satisfy any personal dislike, still less to arrive at the truth, but to achieve a practical object. Lenin himself confirmed this ('blurted it out', as he would have said of anyone else) on an occasion in 1907. On the eve of reunion with the Mensheviks the Central

Committee had brought Lenin before a party tribunal for 'impermissible' attacks on them: he had said in a pamphlet, among other things, that the St. Petersburg Mensheviks had 'entered into negotiations with the Cadet Party for the purpose of selling workers' votes to the Cadets', and had 'bargained with the Cadets to smuggle (*prolashchit'*) their man into the Duma, in spite of the workers, with the aid of the Cadets'. Lenin explained his action to the tribunal as follows. 'The wording [i.e. that just quoted] is calculated to evoke in the reader hatred, aversion and contempt for people who commit such deeds. Such wording is calculated not to convince, but to break up the ranks of the opponent; not to correct the mistake of the opponent, but to destroy him, to wipe his organization off the face of the earth. This wording is indeed of such a nature as to evoke the worst thoughts, the worst suspicions about the opponent, and indeed, as contrasted with the wording that convinces and corrects, it "carries confusion into the ranks of the proletariat"' (*Works*, vol. 12, pp. 424-5). Lenin, however, is not expressing penitence for this. In his opinion it is right to incite to hatred instead of appealing to argument, unless the adversary is a member of the same party: and at the time of the remarks complained of, the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were two separate parties on account of the split. He rebukes the Central Committee for 'remaining silent about the fact that at the time the pamphlet was written a united party did not exist in the organization from which it emanated (not formally, but in essence), and whose aims it served . . . It is wrong to write about Party comrades in language that systematically spreads among the working masses hatred, aversion, contempt, etc. for those who hold other opinions. But *one may and one must write* in that strain about an organization that has seceded. Why must one? Because when a split has taken place it is one's duty *to wrest* the masses from the leadership of the seceding section' (*ibid.*, p. 425). 'Are there any limits to a permissible struggle stemming from a split? No Party standards set limits to such a struggle, nor can there be such limits, for a split implies that the Party has ceased to exist' (p. 428). We may thank the Mensheviks for provoking Lenin to this avowal, which is confirmed by the activity of his whole life: no holds are barred, and all that counts is to achieve one's object.

Unlike Stalin, Lenin was never actuated by motives of personal revenge: he treated people—and this, it should be emphasized, included himself—exclusively as political tools and instruments of the historical process. This is one of the most salient features of his personality. If political calculation so required, he could pelt a man with mud one day and shake hands with him the next. He vilified Plekhanov after 1905, but ceased to do so at once when he found that Plekhanov was opposed to the liquidators and the empiriocritics and was, with the prestige of his name, a valuable ally. Up to 1917 he hurled anathemas at Trotsky, but all this was forgotten when Trotsky became a Bolshevik and proved



to be a highly gifted leader and organizer. He denounced the treachery of Zinoviev and Kamenev in publicly opposing the plan for an armed uprising in October, but afterwards he allowed them to occupy high positions in the party and the Comintern. When someone had to be attacked, personal considerations went by the board. Lenin was capable of shelving disputes if he thought it possible to agree on basic issues—for example, he overlooked Bogdanov's philosophical errors until the latter opposed him over the question of the party being represented in the Third Duma; but if the dispute concerned something he considered important at the time, he showed the adversary no mercy. He derided questions of personal loyalty in political quarrels. When the Mensheviks accused Malinovsky, one of the Bolshevik leaders, of being an Okhrana agent, Lenin rebutted these 'base slanders' with the utmost ferocity. After the February Revolution it came to light that they were true, whereupon Lenin attacked Rodzyanko, the president of the Duma. Rodzyanko, it appeared, had been informed of Malinovsky's role and had brought about his resignation from the Duma, but had not told the Bolsheviks (who at this time were covering Rodzyanko's party with abuse), on the ground, forsooth, that when he received the information from the Minister of the Interior he had given his word of honour not to reveal it. Lenin was full of pseudo-moral indignation at the fact that the Bolsheviks' enemies had abstained from helping them on the ridiculous pretext of 'honour'.

Another characteristic of Lenin's is that he often projected his hostility into the past in order to show that the opponent had always been a villain and a traitor. In 1906 he wrote that Struve had been a counter-revolutionary as early as 1894 ('The Victory of the Cadets and the Tasks of the Workers' Party'; *Works*, vol. 10, p. 265), although no one could have supposed this from Lenin's arguments with Struve in 1895, when they were still collaborating. For years Lenin regarded Kautsky as a theorist of the highest authority, but after Kautsky took up a 'centrist' position during the war Lenin denounced him for having shown 'opportunism' in a pamphlet of 1902 (*The State and Revolution; Works*, vol. 25, p. 479) and claimed that he had not written as a Marxist since 1909 (preface to a pamphlet by Bukharin, Dec. 1915; *Works*, vol. 22, p. 106). Throughout 1914-18, in his attacks on the 'social chauvinists', Lenin invoked the Basle Manifesto of the Second International, which called on parties to have nothing to do with the imperialist war; but after the final breach with the Second International it appeared that the Manifesto was a deception by 'renegades' (*Notes of a Publicist*, 1922; *Works*, vol. 33, p. 206). For many years Lenin insisted that he did not stand for any separate trend within the socialist movement, but that he and the Bolsheviks held to the same principles as the social democrats of Europe, especially Germany. But in 1920, in '*Left-Wing' Communism—an Infantile Disorder*, it was revealed that Bolshevism as a brand of political thought had existed

since 1903, which indeed was the case. Lenin's retroactive view of history was of course nothing in comparison to the systematic falsification of Stalin's day, when it had to be shown at all costs that the current assessment of individuals and political movements was equally valid for all past years. In this respect Lenin only made a modest beginning, and often adhered to a rational mode of thought: for instance, he maintained to the end that Plekhanov had rendered great services in popularizing Marxism and that his theoretical works should be reprinted, although Plekhanov at the time was wholly on the side of the 'social chauvinists'.

Since Lenin was interested only in the political effect of his writings, they are full of repetitions. He was not afraid to repeat the same ideas again and again: he had no stylistic ambitions, but was merely concerned with influencing the party or the workers. It is noteworthy that his style is at its coarsest in factional dispute and when he is addressing party activists, but that he speaks to the workers in much milder terms. Some of his works addressed to them are masterpieces of propaganda, such as the pamphlet *Political Parties in Russia and the Tasks of the Proletariat* (May 1917), which gives a concise and lucid account of the position of the respective parties on the main questions of the hour.

In theoretical debates, too, he was more concerned to overwhelm the adversary with words and abuse than to analyse arguments in detail. *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* is an outstanding example, but there are many others. In 1913 Struve published a book entitled *The Economy and Prices*, in which he argued that value in Marx's sense, independent of price, was a metaphysical and non-empirical category and was economically superfluous. (This was not a new idea but had been put forward by many critics from Conrad Schmidt onwards.) Lenin commented in these terms: 'How can one help calling this most "radical" method most flimsy? For thousands of years mankind has been aware of the operation of an objective law in the phenomenon of exchange, has been trying to understand it and express it with the utmost precision, has been testing its explanations by millions and billions of day-by-day observations of economic life; and suddenly a fashionable representative of a fashionable occupation—that of collecting quotations (I almost said collecting postage stamps)—comes along and "does away with all this": "worth is a phantom"' ('Socialism Demolished Again', Mar. 1914; *Works*, vol. 20, p. 200). Lenin proceeds to explain: 'Price is a manifestation of the law of value. Value is the law of price, i.e. the generalized expression of the phenomenon of price. To speak of "independence" here is a mockery of science' (*ibid.*, p. 201). Then the summing-up: 'Expelling laws from science means, in fact, smuggling in the laws of religion.' And the judgement: 'Does Mr. Struve really think he can deceive his readers and disguise his obscurantism with such crude methods?' (*ibid.*, pp. 202, 204). This is a typical



example of Lenin's treatment of an adversary. Struve had said that value cannot be calculated independently of price; Lenin says that to speak of independence is a mockery of science. There is no attempt to meet the real argument, which is drowned in a welter of verbiage and abuse.

It should be repeated, however, that Lenin did not exempt himself from this purely technical, instrumental attitude towards people and affairs. He had no thought of personal gain; unlike Trotsky for instance, he was in no way a *poseur* and was not given to theatrical gestures. He regarded himself as an instrument of the revolution and was unshakably convinced that he was in the right—so convinced that he was not afraid to stand alone, or almost alone, against his political opponents; he resembled Luther in the steadfastness of his belief that God, or rather History, spoke through his lips. He rejected with scorn the reproach, made, for example, by Ledebour at Zimmerwald, that he was calling on the Russian workers to shed blood while himself remaining safely in a foreign country. Such objections were absurd from his point of view, since it was to the advantage of the revolution that he should operate from abroad; given Russian conditions there could not be a revolution without the emigration. In any case no one could accuse him of personal cowardice. He was capable of assuming the heaviest responsibility, and always took up a clear-cut attitude in any dispute. He was certainly right in reproaching the leaders of all other socialist groups with being afraid to seize power. The others found it safer to put their faith in historical laws; Lenin, who was not afraid, played for the highest stakes and won.

Why did he win? Certainly not because he correctly foresaw the course of events. His prophecies and estimates were often wrong, sometimes glaringly so. After the defeat of 1905 he believed for a long time that another upsurge was imminent; when he realized, however, that the tide of revolution had subsided and that there would have to be long years of work in reactionary conditions, he immediately drew all the inferences from the situation. When Wilson was elected President of the United States in 1912 he declared that the two-party system in America was bankrupt *vis-à-vis* the socialist movement. In 1913 he stated no less categorically that Irish nationalism was extinct in the working class. After 1917 he expected a European revolution any day, and thought he could run the Russian economy by means of terror. But all his misjudgements were in the direction of expecting the revolutionary movement to be stronger, and to manifest itself earlier, than it actually did. They were fortunate errors from his point of view, since it was only on the basis of false estimates that he decided on an armed insurrection in October 1917. His mistakes enabled him to exploit the possibilities of revolution to the full, and were thus the cause of his success. Lenin's genius was not that of foresight, but of concentrating at a given moment all the social energies that could be used to seize power, and

subordinating all his efforts and those of his party to this one aim. Without Lenin's firmness of purpose, it is unthinkable that the Bolsheviks could have succeeded. But for him they would have prolonged the boycott of the Duma beyond the critical moment; they would not have ventured on an armed uprising to secure power for themselves alone; they would not have signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and they might not, at the last moment, have adopted the New Economic Policy. In critical situations Lenin committed violence on the party, and his cause prevailed as a result. World communism as we know it today is truly his work.

Neither Lenin nor the Bolsheviks 'made' the Revolution. Since the turn of the century it had been clear that the autocracy was in a precarious state, though no 'historical laws' prescribed the manner of its downfall. The February Revolution was due to the coincidence of many factors: the war, peasant demands, memories of 1905, the conspiracy of the liberals, support from the Entente, the radicalization of the working masses. As the revolutionary process developed, the slogan was that of Soviet power, and those who supported the October Revolution wanted power for the Soviets, not for the Bolshevik party. But 'Soviet power' was an anarchist Utopia, the dream of a society in which the mass of the people, most of it ignorant and illiterate, would in permanent mass rallies decide all economic, social, military, and administrative questions. It can hardly be said that Soviet power was even overthrown. The slogan 'the Soviets without the communists' was frequently used in popular anti-Bolshevik revolts, but it meant nothing in practice and the Bolsheviks knew this. They were able to enlist support for themselves *as a Soviet government*, and to canalize the energies of the Revolution at a time when they were the only party prepared to govern single-handed.

None the less, the actual revolutionary process was much more Soviet than specifically Bolshevik, and for some years the culture, mood, and habits of the new society reflected the fact that it originated in an explosion in which the Bolsheviks were the best-organized force but were by no means a majority of society. The Revolution was not a Bolshevik *coup d'état*, but a true revolution of the workers and peasants. The Bolsheviks alone were able to harness it for their own ends; their victory was at once a defeat for the Revolution and a defeat for communist ideas, even in their Bolshevik version. Lenin described the dangers ahead with admirable clarity at the Eleventh Party Congress in March 1922 (the last he attended). Speaking of the communists' weakness *vis-à-vis* the culture inherited from Tsarist times, he said:

If the conquering nation is more cultured than the vanquished nation, the former imposes its culture upon the latter; but if the opposite is the case, the vanquished nation imposes its culture upon the conqueror. Has not something like this happened in the capital of the RSFSR? Have the 4,700 Communists (nearly a whole



army division, and all of them the very best) come under the influence of an alien culture? True, there may be the impression that the vanquished have a high level of culture. But that is not the case at all. Their culture is miserable, insignificant, but it is still at a higher level than ours. (*Works*, vol. 33, p. 288)

This is one of Lenin's most penetrating observations on the state he had created. The slogan 'learn from the bourgeoisie' was put into practice in a way that was both tragic and grotesque. With enormous labour and only partial success the Bolsheviks set about assimilating, as they are still doing, the technical achievements of the capitalist world. With no labour at all, they adopted swiftly and completely the methods of government and administration of the Tsarist chinovniks. The revolutionary dreams have survived only in the form of phraseological remnants decorating the regime's totalitarian imperialism.

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3. *Negative dialectics*

THERE IS, as far as I am aware, no summarized version of what is regarded, no doubt rightly, as the most complete and general exposition of Adorno's thought, namely *Negative Dialectics*. Probably it would be impossible to compile such a summary, and probably Adorno was well aware of this and deliberately made it so. The book may be called an embodied antinomy: a philosophical work that sets out to prove, by example or argument, that the writing of philosophical works is impossible. The difficulty of explaining its content is not only due to its extremely intricate syntax, which is evidently intentional, or the fact that the author uses Hegelian and neo-Hegelian jargon without any attempt to explain it, as though it were the clearest language in the world. The pretentious obscurity of style and the contempt that it shows for the reader might be endurable if the book were not also totally devoid of literary form. It is in this respect a philosophical counterpart to the formlessness that manifested itself some time earlier in the plastic arts, and later in music and literature. It is no more possible to summarize Adorno's work than to describe the plot of an 'anti-novel' or the theme of an action painting. It can no doubt be said that the abandonment of form in painting did not lead to the destruction of art, but actually liberated pure painting from 'anecdotic' work; and, similarly, the novel and drama, although they consist of words, have survived the loss of form (which can never be complete) to the extent that we are able to read Joyce, Musil, and Gombrowicz with understanding. But in philosophical writing, the dissolution of form is destructive in the highest degree. It may be tolerable if it is due to the author's attempt to catch fleeting 'experience' in words and to make his work directly 'expressive', like Gabriel Marcel; but it is hard to endure a philosopher who continues to deal in abstractions while at the same time contending that they are a meaningless form of discourse.

With this reservation we may try to give an idea of Adorno's argument. The main theme that pervades his book and is expressed, for example in his critique of Kant, Hegel, and the existentialists appears to be as follows. Philosophy has always been dominated by the search for an absolute starting-point, both metaphysical and epistemological, and in consequence, despite the intentions of philosophers themselves, it has drifted into a search for 'identity', i.e. some kind of primordial being to which all others were ultimately reducible: this was alike the trend of German idealism and positivism, of existentialists and transcendental phenomenologists. In considering the typical traditional 'pairs' of opposites—object versus subject, the general versus the particular, empirical data versus ideas, continuity versus discontinuity, theory versus practice—philosophers have sought to interpret them in such a way as to give primacy to

inference, methodical research and historical events, everyday work and the political struggle, are true if they stand up to the cognitive means at our disposal (*den verfügbaren Erkenntnismitteln standhalten*) ('Zum Problem der Wahrheit', *ibid.*, vol. i, p. 246). This explanation is far from being unambiguous. If it means that critical theory, whatever the social circumstances in which it is evolved, is in the last resort subject to the rules of empirical verification and is judged as true or false accordingly, then it is no different epistemologically from the theories it condemns as 'traditional'. If, however, something more is meant, namely that in order to be true a theory must stand the empirical test and be 'socially progressive' as well, then Horkheimer fails to tell us what to do if these two criteria conflict. He merely repeats generalities about truth not being 'supra-historical' and about the social conditioning of knowledge, or what he calls the necessary 'social mediation' between a concept and its object; he assures us that the theory is not 'static', that it does not 'absolutize' either the subject or the object, and so on. All that is clear is that 'critical theory' refuses to accept Lukács's party dogmatism and seeks to maintain its status as theory while also refusing to acknowledge empirical criteria of verification. In other words, it exists by virtue of its own ambiguity.

Critical theory, thus understood, also comprises no specific Utopia. Horkheimer's predictions are confined to trite generalities: universal happiness and freedom, man becoming his own master, the abolition of profit and exploitation, etc. We are told that 'everything' must be changed, that it is not a matter of reforming society but of transforming it, but we are not told how this is to be done or what will be put in its place. The proletariat no longer ranks as the infallible subject of history, though its liberation is still an objective of the theory. Since, however, the latter does not claim to be the effective lever of general liberation, there is nothing clearly left of it except the conviction that it constitutes a higher mode of thought and will contribute to the emancipation of mankind.

Horkheimer's remarks on the social preferences and interests involved in the conceptual apparatus used by various theories of society are certainly true, though they were not new even in his day. But the fact that the social sciences reflect different interests and values does not mean, as Horkheimer seems to think (following Lukács, Korsch, and Marx), that the difference between empirical and evaluative judgements has been 'transcended'.

In this sense the 'critical theory' is an inconsistent attempt to preserve Marxism without accepting its identification with the proletariat and without recognizing the class or party criteria of truth, but also without seeking a solution of the difficulties that arise when Marxism is truncated in this manner. It is a partial form of Marxism, offering no replacement for what it leaves out.



one concept or the other and so create a uniform language by means of which everything can be described: to identify aspects of the universe in respect of which all others are derivative. But this cannot be done. There is no absolute 'primacy': everything philosophy is concerned with presents itself as interdependent with its opposite. (This, of course, is Hegel's idea, but Adorno claims that Hegel was afterwards untrue to it.) A philosophy which continues in traditional fashion to strive to discover the 'primal' thing or concept is on the wrong track, and, moreover, in our civilization it tends to strengthen totalitarian and conformist tendencies, by seeking order and invariability at any cost. Philosophy in fact is impossible; all that is possible is constant negation, purely destructive resistance to any attempt to confine the world within a single principle that purports to endow it with 'identity'.

Thus summarized, Adorno's thought may seem desperate or sterile, but it does not seem that we have done it an injustice. It is not a dialectic of negativity (which would be a metaphysical theory), but an express negation of metaphysics and epistemology. His intention is anti-totalitarian: he is opposed to all ideas that serve to perpetuate a particular form of domination and reduce the human subject to 'reified' forms. Such attempts, he argues, take on a paradoxical 'subjectivist' form, especially in existentialist philosophy, where the petrification of the absolute individual subject as the irreducible reality involves indifference to all social relationships that increase the enslavement of man. One cannot proclaim the primacy of this monadic existence without tacitly accepting everything that lies outside it.

But Marxism too—especially in Lukács's interpretation, though he is not expressly mentioned in this context—serves the same totalitarian tendency under colour of criticizing 'reification'. 'The remaining theoretical inadequacy in Hegel and Marx became part of historical practice and can thus be newly reflected upon in theory, instead of thought bowing irrationally to the primacy of practice. Practice itself was an eminently theoretical concept' (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 144). Adorno thus attacks the Marxist-Lukácsist 'primacy of practice', in which theory is dissolved and loses its autonomy. In so far as his opposition to the 'philosophy of identity' is turned against the anti-intellectualism of Marxism and its all-absorbing 'practice', he defends the right of philosophy to exist; he even begins his book with the statement that 'Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed' (p. 3). At this point Adorno clearly departs from Marxism: there may, he argues, have been a time when Marx's hopes for the liberation of humanity by the proletariat and the abolition of philosophy by its identification with 'life' were realistic, but that time has passed. Theory must abide in its autonomy, which of course does not mean that theory in its turn has any absolute 'primacy'; nothing whatever has 'primacy', everything depends on everything else and, by the

same token, has its own measure of 'substantiality'. 'Practice' cannot fulfil the tasks of theory, and if it claims to do so it is simply the enemy of thought.

If there is no absolute primacy it is also the case, in Adorno's opinion, that all attempts to embrace the 'whole' by means of reason are bootless and serve the cause of mystification. This does not mean that theory must resolve itself wholly into particular sciences as the positivists would have it: theory is indispensable, but for the present it cannot be anything but negation. Attempts to grasp the 'whole' are based on the same faith in the ultimate identity of everything; even when philosophy maintains that the whole is 'contradictory' it retains its prejudices concerning 'identity', which are so strong that even 'contradiction' can be made their instrument if it is proclaimed to be the ultimate foundation of the universe. Dialectic in the true sense is thus not merely the investigation of 'contradiction', but refusal to accept it as a schema that explains everything. Strictly speaking, the dialectic is neither a method nor a description of the world, but an act of repeated opposition to all existing descriptive schemata, and all methods pretending to universality. 'Total contradiction is nothing but the manifested untruth of total identification' (p. 6).

In the same way there is no epistemological absolute, no single unchallengeable source of wisdom; the 'pure immediacy' of the cognitive act, if it exists, cannot be expressed except in words, and words inevitably give it an abstract, rationalized form. But Husserl's transcendental ego is also a false construction, for there are no acts of intuition free from the social genesis of knowledge. All concepts are ultimately rooted in the non-conceptual, in human efforts to control nature; no concepts can express the whole content of the object or be identified with it; Hegel's pure 'being' proves in the end to be nothingness.

The negative dialectic can, as Adorno says, be called an anti-system, and in that sense it appears to coincide with Nietzsche's position. However, Adorno goes on to say that thought itself is negation, just as the processing of any substance is a 'negation' of its form as presented to us. Even the statement that something is of a certain kind is negative inasmuch as it implies that that something is not of another kind. This, however, reduces 'negativity' to a truism; it is not clear how there could be any philosophy that is not 'negative' in this sense, or whom Adorno is arguing against. His main intention, however, appears to be a less truistic one, namely to put forward no definite answers to the traditional problems of philosophy but to confine himself to exploding philosophy as it is today, since by its urge towards 'positiveness' it inevitably degenerates into acceptance of the *status quo*, namely the domination of man by man. The bourgeois consciousness at the time of its emancipation combated 'feudal' modes of thought but could not bring itself to break with 'systems' of all kinds, since it felt that it did not represent 'complete freedom'—from this observation of Adorno's we gather that he stand for 'complete freedom' as against 'systems'.



In his critique of 'identity' and 'positiveness' Adorno continues a traditional motif taken over by the Frankfurt school from Marx: the critique of a society which, being subject to the domination of 'exchange-value', reduces individuals and things to a common level and a homogeneous anonymity. A philosophy which expresses and affirms that society cannot do justice to the variety of phenomena or the interdependence of different aspects of life; on the one hand it homogenizes society, on the other it reduces people and things to 'atoms'—a process in which, Adorno observes, logic plays its part also: on this point he is faithful to the tradition of recent Marxist philosophy, which inveighs against logic while ignoring its modern developments.

Science, too, it appears, is a party to the general conspiracy of civilization against man, as it identifies rationality with measurability, reduces everything to 'quantities', and excludes qualitative differences from the scope of knowledge; Adorno does not suggest, however, that a new 'qualitative' science is ready and waiting to take over.

The upshot of his critique is not to defend relativism, for that too is part of 'bourgeois consciousness'; it is anti-intellectual (*geistesfeindlich*), abstract, and wrong, because what it treats as relative is itself rooted in the conditions of capitalist society: 'the alleged social relativity of views obeys the objective law of social production under private ownership of the means of production' (p. 37). Adorno does not say what 'law' he refers to, and, true to his contempt for bourgeois logic, does not reflect on the logical validity of his criticism.

Philosophy in the sense of a 'system' is impossible, he argues, because everything changes—a statement he enlarges on as follows. 'The invariants, whose own invariance has been produced (*ein Produziertes ist*), cannot be peeled out of the variables as if all truth were then in our possession. Truth has coalesced with substance, which will change; immutability of truth is the delusion of *prima philosophia*' (p. 40).

On the one hand, concepts have a certain autonomy and do not emerge simply as copies of things; on the other, they do not enjoy 'primacy' as compared with things—to agree that they do would mean accepting bureaucratic or capitalist government. 'The principle of dominion, which antagonistically rends human society, is the same principle which, spiritualized, causes the difference between the concept and its subject matter (*dem ihm Unterworfenen*)' (p. 48). Hence nominalism is wrong ('The concept of a capitalist society is not a *flatus vocis*'—p. 50 n.), and so is conceptual realism: concepts and their objects subsist in a constant 'dialectical' association, in which primacy is obliterated. In the same way positivist attempts to reduce knowledge to that which is simply 'given' are misguided, as they seek to 'dehistoricize the contents of thought' (p. 53).

Anti-positivist attempts to reconstruct an ontology are no less suspect; for ontology as such—not any particular ontological doctrine—is an apologia for the

*status quo*, an instrument of 'order'. The need for an ontology is genuine enough, since the bourgeois consciousness has replaced 'substantial' by 'functional' concepts, treating society as a complex of functions in which everything is relative to something else and nothing has a consistency of its own. Nevertheless, ontology cannot be reconstructed.

At this point, as at many others, the reader may well wonder how Adorno intends his propositions to be applied. What are we to do if ontology and the lack of it are both bad and are both likely to involve us in the defence of exchange-value? Perhaps we should not think of these questions at all, but declare ourselves neutral in philosophical matters? But Adorno will not have this either: it would be a surrender of another kind, an abandonment of reason. Science, just because it puts faith in itself and refuses to seek self-knowledge by any methods other than its own, condemns itself to being an apologia for the existing world. 'Its self-exegesis makes a *causa sui* of science. It accepts itself as given and thereby sanctions also its currently existing form, its division of labour, although in the long run the insufficiency of that form cannot be concealed' (p. 73). The humanistic sciences, dispersed in particular inquiries, lose interest in cognition and are stripped of their armour of concepts. Ontology, which comes to science 'from outside', appears with the abruptness of a pistol-shot (in Hegel's phrase) and does not help them to acquire self-knowledge. In the end we do not know how to escape from the vicious circle.

Heidegger's ontology not only does not cure this state of affairs, but proposes something even worse. Having eliminated from philosophy both empiricism and Husserl's concept of the *eidōs*, he seeks to apprehend Being—which, after this reduction, is pure nothingness; he also 'isolates' phenomena and cannot conceive them as aspects (*Momente*) of the process of manifestation; in this way phenomena are 'reified'. Heidegger, like Husserl, believes that it is possible to proceed from the individual to the universal without 'mediation', or to apprehend Being in a form unaffected by the act of reflection. This, however, is impossible: Being, however conceived, is 'mediated' by the subject. Heidegger's 'Being' is constituted, not simply 'given': 'We cannot, by thinking, assume any position in which that separation of subject and object will directly vanish, for the separation is inherent in each thought; it is inherent in thinking itself' (p. 85). Freedom can be sought only by observing the tensions that arise between opposite poles of life, but Heidegger treats these poles as absolute realities and leaves them to their fate. On the one hand he accepts that social life must be 'reified', i.e. he sanctions the *status quo*, while on the other he ascribes freedom to man as something already gained, thus sanctioning slavery. He attempts to rescue metaphysics, but wrongly supposes that what he is trying to rescue is 'immediately present'. All in all, Heidegger's philosophy is an example of *Herrschaftswissen* in the service of a repressive society. It calls on



us to abandon concepts for the sake of a promised communion with Being—but this Being has no content, precisely because it is supposed to be apprehended without the ‘mediation’ of concepts; basically it is no more than a substantivization of the copula ‘is’.

It would seem that, speaking in as general terms as possible, the main thrust of Adorno’s attack on Heidegger’s ontology lies in the Hegelian contention that the subject can never be wholly eliminated from the results of metaphysical inquiry, and that if we forget this and attempt to place subject and object ‘on opposite sides’ we shall fail to comprehend either one or the other. Both are inseparable parts of reflection, and neither has epistemological priority; each is ‘mediated’ by the other. Similarly, there is no way of apprehending by cognition that which is absolutely individual—what Heidegger calls *Dasein* or *Jemeinigkeit*. Without the ‘mediation’ of general concepts, the pure ‘this thing here’ becomes an abstraction; it cannot be ‘isolated’ from reflection. ‘But truth, the constellation of subject and object in which both penetrate each other, can no more be reduced to subjectivity than to that Being whose dialectical relation to subjectivity Heidegger tends to blur’ (p. 127).

The passage in which Adorno comes closest to explaining what he means by ‘negative dialectics’ is as follows: ‘In a sense, dialectical logic is more positivistic than the positivism that out-laws it. As thinking, dialectical logic respects that which is to be thought—the object—even where the object does not heed the rules of thinking. The analysis of the object is tangential to the rules of thinking. Thought need not be content with its own legality; without abandoning it, we can think against our thought, and if it were possible to define dialectics, this would be a definition worth suggesting’ (p. 141). It does not appear that we can infer more from this definition than that the dialectic need not be cramped by the rules of logic. In another passage we are indeed told that it is freer still: for ‘Philosophy consists neither in *vérités de raison* nor in *vérités de fait*. Nothing it says will bow to tangible criteria of any “being the case”: its theses on conceptualities are no more subject to the criteria of a logical state of facts than its theses on factualities are to the criteria of empirical science’ (p. 109). It would be hard indeed to imagine a more convenient position. The negative dialectician declares, firstly, that he cannot be criticized from either the logical or the factual point of view, as he has laid down that such criteria do not concern him; secondly, that his intellectual and moral superiority is based on his very disregard of these criteria; and thirdly, that that disregard is in fact the essence of the ‘negative dialectic’. The ‘negative dialectic’ is simply a blank cheque, signed and endorsed by history, Being, Subject, and Object, in favour of Adorno and his followers; any sum can be written in, anything will be valid, there is absolute liberation from the ‘positivist fetishes’ of logic and empiricism. Thought has transformed itself dialectically into its opposite. Anyone

who denies this is enslaved to the ‘identity principle’, which implies acceptance of a society dominated by exchange-value and therefore ignorant of ‘qualitative differences’.

The reason why the ‘identity principle’ is so dangerous, according to Adorno, is that it implies, firstly, that each separate thing is what it is empirically, and secondly, that an individual object can be identified by means of general concepts, i.e. analysed into abstractions (an idea of Bergson’s, whom Adorno, however, does not mention). The task of the dialectic, on the other hand, is firstly to ascertain what a thing is in reality, not merely to what category it belongs (Adorno does not give examples of an analysis of this kind), and secondly to explain what it ought to be according to its own concept, although it is not yet (an idea of Bloch’s, to whom Adorno also does not refer in this context). A man knows how to define himself, while society defines him differently in accordance with the function it assigns to him; between the two modes of definition there is an ‘objective contradiction’ (again no examples given). The object of the dialectic is to oppose the immobilization of things by concepts; it takes the position that things are never identical with themselves; it seeks out negations, without assuming that the negation of a negation signifies a return to the positive; it recognizes individuality, but only as ‘mediated’ by generality, and generality only as an aspect (*Moment*) of individuality; it sees the subject in the object and vice versa, practice in theory and theory in practice, the essence in the phenomenon and the phenomenon in the essence; it must apprehend differences but not ‘absolutize’ them, and it must not regard any particular thing as a starting-point *par excellence*. There cannot be a point of view that presupposes nothing, such as Husserl’s transcendental subject; the delusion that there can be such a subject is due to the fact that society precedes the individual. The idea that there can be a spirit which comprises everything and is identical with the whole is as nonsensical as that of a single party in a totalitarian regime. The dispute as to the primacy of mind or matter is meaningless in dialectical thinking, for the concepts of mind and matter are themselves abstracted from experience, and the ‘radical difference’ between them is no more than a convention.

All these precepts concerning the dialectic should, in Adorno’s opinion, serve definite social or political ends. It even appears that criteria of practical action can be deduced from them. ‘For the right practice, and for the good itself, there really is no other authority than the most advanced state of theory. When an idea of goodness is supposed to guide the will without fully absorbing the concrete rational definitions, it will unwittingly take orders from the reified consciousness, from that which society has approved’ (p. 242). We thus have a clear practical rule: firstly there must be an advanced (*fortgeschritten*) theory, and secondly, the will must be influenced by ‘concrete rational definitions’. The



object of practice, thus enlightened, is to do away with reification which is due to exchange-value; for in bourgeois society, as Marx taught, the 'autonomy of the individual' was only apparent, an expression of the contingency of life and the dependence of human beings on market forces. It is hard to gather from Adorno's writings, however, what non-reified freedom is to consist of. In describing this 'complete freedom' we must not, in any case, use the concept of self-alienation, as it suggests that the state of freedom from alienation, or the perfect unity of man with himself, has already existed at some former time, so that freedom can be achieved by going back to the starting-point—an idea which is reactionary by definition. Nor is it the case that we know of some historical design that guarantees us a joyful future of freedom and the end of 'reification'; up to now there has been no such thing as a single process of universal history: 'history is the unity of continuity and discontinuity' (p. 320).

There can be few works of philosophy that give such an overpowering impression of sterility as *Negative Dialectics*. This is not because it seeks to deprive human knowledge of an 'ultimate basis', i.e. because it is a doctrine of scepticism; in the history of philosophy there have been admirable works of scepticism, full of penetration as well as destructive passion. But Adorno is not a sceptic. He does not say that there is no criterion of truth, that no theory is possible, or that reason is powerless; on the contrary, he says that theory is possible and indispensable and that we must be guided by reason. All his arguments go to show, however, that reason can never take the first step without falling into 'reification', and it is thus not clear how it can take the second or any further steps; there is simply no starting-point, and the recognition of this fact is proclaimed as the supreme achievement of the dialectic. But even this crucial statement is not clearly formulated by Adorno, nor does he support it by any analysis of his concepts and maxims. As with many other Marxists, his work contains no arguments but only *ex cathedra* statements using concepts that are nowhere explained; indeed, he condemns conceptual analysis as a manifestation of positivist prejudices to the effect that some ultimate 'data', empirical or logical, can provide philosophy with a starting-point.

In the last resort Adorno's argument boils down to an assortment of ideas borrowed uncritically from Marx, Hegel, Nietzsche, Lukács, Bergson, and Bloch. From Marx he takes the statement that the whole mechanism of bourgeois society is based on the domination of exchange-value, reducing all qualitative differences to the common denominator of money (this is Marx's form of romantic anti-capitalism). From Marx also comes the attack on Hegelian philosophy for subjecting history to an extra-historical *Weltgeist* and asserting the primacy of 'that which is general' over human individuals, substituting abstractions for realities and thus perpetuating human enslavement. Again from Marx comes the attack on Hegel's theory of subject and object, in which

the subject is defined as a manifestation of the object, and the object as a subjective construction, thus producing a vicious circle (but it is not clear how Adorno avoids this vicious circle, as he denies absolute 'priority' to either subject or object). Adorno departs from Marx, on the other hand, in rejecting the theory of progress and historical necessity and the idea of the proletariat as the standard-bearer of the Great Utopia. From Lukács comes the view that all that is evil in the world can be summed up in the term 'reification' and that perfected human beings will cast off the ontological status of 'things' (but Adorno does not say what the 'de-reified' state will be like, still less how it will be attained). Both the Promethean and the scientific motif of Marxism are discarded, and there remains only a vague romantic Utopia in which man is himself and does not depend on 'mechanical' social forces. From Bloch, Adorno derives the view that we possess the idea of a Utopia 'transcending' the actual world, but that the especial virtue of this 'transcendence' is that it cannot, in principle, have any definite content at the present time. From Nietzsche comes the general hostility to the 'spirit of the system' and the convenient belief that a true sage is not afraid of contradictions but rather expresses his wisdom in them, so that he is forearmed against logical criticism. From Bergson comes the idea that abstract concepts petrify changeable things (or, as Adorno would say, 'reify' them); Adorno himself, on the other hand, contributes the hope that we can create 'fluid' concepts that do not petrify anything. From Hegel, Adorno takes the general idea that in the cognitive process there is a constant 'mediation' between subject and object, concepts and perception, the particular and the general. To all these ingredients Adorno adds an almost unparalleled vagueness of exposition: he shows no desire whatever to elucidate his ideas, and clothes them in pretentious generalities. As a philosophical text, *Negative Dialectics* is a model of professorial bombast concealing poverty of thought.

The view that there is no absolute basis for human reasoning can certainly be defended, as is shown by sceptics and relativists who have propounded it in various forms. But Adorno not only adds nothing to this traditional idea but obscures it by his own phraseology (neither subject nor object can be 'absolutized'; perceptions cannot be 'abstracted' from concepts; there is no absolute 'primacy' of practice, etc.), while at the same time imagining that this 'negative dialectic' can lead to some practical consequences for social behaviour. If we do try to extract intellectual or practical rules from his philosophy, they reduce to the precepts: 'We must think more intensively, but also remember that there is no starting-point for thought' and 'We must oppose reification and exchange-value'. The fact that we can say nothing positive is not our fault and not Adorno's, but is due to the domination of exchange-value. For the present, therefore, we can only negatively 'transcend' existing civilization as a whole. In this way the 'negative dialectic' has provided a convenient ideological slogan



for left-wing groups who sought a pretext for root-and-branch destruction as a political programme, and who extolled intellectual primitivism as the supreme form of dialectical initiation. It would be unjust, however, to accuse Adorno of intending to encourage such attitudes. His philosophy is not an expression of universal revolt, but of helplessness and despair.

#### 4. Critique of existential 'authenticism'

EXISTENTIALISM was clearly the main competitor of the Frankfurt school as regards the critique of 'reification', and was far more influential as a philosophy. German thinkers rarely used the term, but on the face of it the intention of their anthropological theories was the same: to express in philosophical language the contrast between the self-determining consciousness of the individual and the anonymous world of social ties conforming to rules of their own. Thus, in the same way as the attacks on Hegel by Marx, Kierkegaard, and Stirner contained a common element, namely their critique of the primacy of impersonal 'generality' over real subjectivity, so the Marxists and existentialists were on common ground in criticizing the social system which confined human beings to socially determined roles and made them dependent on quasi-natural forces. The Marxists, following Lukács, called this state of things 'reification' and ascribed it, as did Marx, to the all-powerful effect of money as a leveller in capitalist conditions. Existentialism did not concern itself with explanations such as the class struggle or property relationships, but it too was fundamentally a protest against the culture of developed industrial societies, reducing the human individual to the sum of his social functions. The category of 'authenticity' or 'authentic being' (*Eigentlichkeit*), which plays an essential part in Heidegger's early writings, was an attempt to vindicate the irreducible identity of the individual subject as against the anonymous social forces summed up in the term 'the impersonal' (*das Man*).

Adorno's attack on German existentialism was thus perfectly understandable: he wished to assert the claim of the Frankfurt school to be the sole fighter against 'reification', and to prove that existentialism, while appearing to criticize reification, in reality endorsed it. This is the purpose of *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit: zur deutschen Ideologie* (1964), in which he joins issue principally with Heidegger but also with Jaspers and occasionally Buber, Bollnow, and others. Adorno accepts the idea of 'reification' and the Marxist view that it results from the subjection of human beings to exchange-value, but he rejects the idea of the proletariat as the saviour of humanity and does not believe that 'reification' can be done away with simply by nationalizing means of production.

The main points of Adorno's attack on existentialism are as follows.

Firstly, the existentialists have created a deceptive language, the elements of which are intended, by some peculiar 'aura', to arouse a magic faith in the independent power of words. This is a rhetorical technique which precedes any content and is merely designed to make it appear profound. The magic of words is supposed to take the place of an analysis of the true sources of 'reification' and to suggest that it can be cured simply by incantations. In reality, however, words cannot directly express irreducible subjectivity, nor can they generate 'authentic being': it is quite possible to adopt the watchword of 'authenticism' and believe that one has escaped from reification, while in fact remaining subject to it. Moreover—and this seems to be the essential point—'authenticism' is a purely formal catchword or incantation. The existentialists do not tell us in what way we are to be 'authentic': if it suffices simply to be what we are, then an oppressor and murderer is doing his duty by being just that. In short (though Adorno does not put the point in these words), 'authenticism' does not imply any specific values and can be expressed in any behaviour whatsoever. Another deceptive concept is that of 'authentic communication' as opposed to the mechanical exchange of verbal stereotypes. By talking of authentic communication the existentialists seek to persuade people that they can cure social oppression simply by expressing thoughts to one another, and conversation is thus turned into a substitute for what should come after it (Adorno does not explain what this is).

Secondly, 'authenticism' cannot in any case be a cure for reification because it is not interested in its sources, namely the rule of commodity fetishism and exchange-value; it suggests that anyone can make his own life authentic, while society as a whole continues to be under the spell of reification. This is a classic case of distracting people's attention from the real causes of their slavery, by conjuring up the illusion that freedom can be realized in the individual consciousness without any change in the conditions of communal life.

Thirdly, the effect of existentialism is to petrify the whole area of 'non-authentic' life as a metaphysical entity which cannot be done away with but can only be resisted by an effort confined to one's own existence. Heidegger, for instance, speaks of empty, everyday chatter as a manifestation of the reified world, but he regards it as a permanent feature, not realizing that it would not exist in a rational economy that did not squander money on advertising.

Fourthly, existentialism tends to perpetuate reification not only by distracting attention from social conditions but by the way in which it defines existence. According to Heidegger, individual human existence (*Dasein*) is a matter of self-possession and self-reference. All social content is excluded from the idea of authenticity, which consists of willing to possess oneself. In this way Heidegger actually reifies human subjectivity, reducing it to a tautological state of 'being oneself', unrelated to the world outside.



## Epilogue



MARXISM has been the greatest fantasy of our century. It was a dream offering the prospect of a society of perfect unity, in which all human aspirations would be fulfilled and all values reconciled. It took over Hegel's theory of the 'contradictions of progress', but also the liberal-evolutionist belief that 'in the last resort' the course of history was inevitably for the better, and that man's increasing command over nature would, after an interval, be matched by increasing freedom. It owed much of its success to the combination of Messianic fantasies with a specific and genuine social cause, the struggle of the European working class against poverty and exploitation. This combination was expressed in a coherent doctrine with the absurd name (derived from Proudhon) of 'scientific socialism'—absurd because the means of attaining an end may be scientific, but not the choice of the end itself. The name, however, reflected more than the mere cult of science which Marx shared with the rest of his generation. It expressed the belief, discussed critically more than once in the course of the present work, that human knowledge and human practice, directed by the will, must ultimately coincide and become inseparable in a perfect unity: so that the choice of ends would indeed become identical with the cognitive and practical means of attaining them. The natural consequence of this confusion was the idea that the success of a particular social movement was a proof that it was scientifically 'true', or, in effect, that whoever proved to be stronger must have 'science' on his side. This idea is largely responsible for all the anti-scientific and anti-intellectual features of Marxism in its particular guise as the ideology of Communism.

To say that Marxism is a fantasy does not mean that it is nothing else. Marxism as an interpretation of past history must be distinguished from Marxism as a political ideology. No reasonable person would deny that the doctrine of historical materialism has been a valuable addition to our intellectual equipment and has enriched our understanding of the past. True, it has been argued that in a strict form the doctrine is nonsense and in a loose form it is a commonplace; but, if it has become a commonplace, this is largely thanks to Marx's originality. Moreover, if Marxism has led towards a better understanding of the economics and civilization of past ages, this is no doubt connected with the fact that Marx at times enunciated his theory in extreme, dogmatic, and unaccept-

able forms. If his views had been hedged round with all the restrictions and reservations that are usual in rational thought, they would have had less influence and might have gone unnoticed altogether. As it was, and as often happens with humanistic theories, the element of absurdity was effective in transmitting their rational content. From this point of view the role of Marxism may be compared to that of psychoanalysis or behaviourism in the social sciences. By expressing their theories in extreme forms, Freud and Watson succeeded in bringing real problems to general notice and opening up valuable fields of exploration; this they could probably not have done if they had qualified their views with scrupulous reservations and so deprived them of clear-cut outlines and polemical force. The sociological approach to the study of civilization was expounded by writers before Marx, such as Vico, Herder, and Montesquieu, or contemporary but independent of him, such as Michelet, Renan, and Taine; but none of these expressed his ideas in the extreme, one-sided, dogmatic form which constituted the strength of Marxism.

As a result, Marx's intellectual legacy underwent something of the same fate as Freud's was to do. Orthodox believers still exist, but are negligible as a cultural force, while the contribution of Marxism to humanistic knowledge, especially the historical sciences, has become a general underlying theme, no longer connected with any 'system' purporting to explain everything. One need not nowadays consider oneself or be considered a Marxist in order, for instance, to study the history of literature or painting in the light of the social conflicts of a given period; and one may do so without believing that the whole of human history is the history of class conflict, or that different aspects of civilization have no history of their own because 'true' history is the history of technology and 'production relations', because the 'superstructure' grows out of the 'base', and so forth.

To recognize, within limits, the validity of historical materialism is not tantamount to acknowledging the truth of Marxism. This is so because, among other reasons, it was a fundamental doctrine of Marxism from the outset that the meaning of a historical process can be grasped only if the past is interpreted in the light of the future: that is to say, we can only understand what was and is if we have some knowledge of what will be. Marxism, it can hardly be disputed, would not be Marxism without its claim to 'scientific knowledge' of the future, and the question is how far such knowledge is possible. Prediction is, of course, not only a component of many sciences but an inseparable aspect of even the most trivial actions, although we cannot 'know' the future in the same way as the past, since all prediction has an element of uncertainty. The 'future' is either what will happen in the next moment or what will happen in a million years; the difficulty of prediction increases, of course, with distance and with the complication of the subject. In social matters, as we know, predictions are



especially deceptive, even if they relate to the short term and to a single quantifiable factor, as in demographic prognoses. In general we forecast the future by extrapolating existing tendencies, while realizing that such extrapolations are, always and everywhere, of extremely limited value, and that no developmental curves in any field of inquiry extend indefinitely in accordance with the same equation. As to prognoses on a global scale and without any limitation of time, these are no more than fantasies, whether the prospect they offer is good or evil. There are no rational means of predicting 'the future of humanity' over a long period or foretelling the nature of 'social formations' in ages to come. The idea that we can make such forecasts 'scientifically', and that without doing so we cannot even understand the past, is inherent in the Marxist theory of 'social formations'; it is one reason why that theory is a fantasy, and also why it is politically effective. The influence that Marxism has achieved, far from being the result or proof of its scientific character, is almost entirely due to its prophetic, fantastic, and irrational elements. Marxism is a doctrine of blind confidence that a paradise of universal satisfaction is awaiting us just round the corner. Almost all the prophecies of Marx and his followers have already proved to be false, but this does not disturb the spiritual certainty of the faithful, any more than it did in the case of chiliastic sects: for it is a certainty not based on any empirical premisses or supposed 'historical laws', but simply on the psychological need for certainty. In this sense Marxism performs the function of a religion, and its efficacy is of a religious character. But it is a caricature and a bogus form of religion, since it presents its temporal eschatology as a scientific system, which religious mythologies do not purport to be.

We have discussed the question of continuity between Marxism and its embodiment in Communism, i.e. Leninist-Stalinist ideology and practice. It would be absurd to maintain that Marxism was, so to speak, the efficient cause of present-day Communism; on the other hand, Communism is not a mere 'degeneration' of Marxism but a possible interpretation of it, and even a well-founded one, though primitive and partial in some respects. Marxism was a combination of values which proved incompatible for empirical though not for logical reasons, so that some could be realized only at the expense of others. But it was Marx who declared that the whole idea of Communism could be summed up in a single formula—the abolition of private property; that the state of the future must take over the centralized management of the means of production, and that the abolition of capital meant the abolition of wage-labour. There was nothing flagrantly illogical in deducing from this that the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the nationalization of industry and agriculture would bring about the general emancipation of mankind. In the event it turned out that, having nationalized the means of production, it was possible to erect on this foundation a monstrous edifice of lies, exploitation, and oppression.

This was not itself a consequence of Marxism; rather, Communism was a bastard version of the socialist ideal, owing its origin to many historical circumstances and chances, of which Marxist ideology was one. But it cannot be said that Marxism was 'falsified' in any essential sense. Arguments adduced at the present day to show that 'that is not what Marx meant' are intellectually and practically sterile. Marx's intentions are not the deciding factor in a historical assessment of Marxism, and there are more important arguments for freedom and democratic values than the fact that Marx, if one looks closely, was not so hostile to those values as might at first sight appear.

Marx took over the romantic ideal of social unity, and Communism realized it in the only way feasible in an industrial society, namely, by a despotic system of government. The origin of this dream is to be found in the idealized image of the Greek city-state popularized by Winckelmann and others in the eighteenth century and subsequently taken up by German philosophers. Marx seems to have imagined that once capitalists were done away with the whole world could become a kind of Athenian *agora*: one had only to forbid private ownership of machines or land and, as if by magic, human beings would cease to be selfish and their interests would coincide in perfect harmony. Marxism affords no explanation of how this prophecy is founded, or what reason there is to think that human interests will cease to conflict as soon as the means of production are nationalized.

Marx, moreover, combined his romantic dreams with the socialist expectation that all needs would be fully satisfied in the earthly paradise. The early socialists seem to have understood the slogan 'To each according to his needs' in a limited sense: they meant that people should not have to suffer cold and hunger or spend their lives staving off destitution. Marx, however, and many Marxists after him, imagined that under socialism all scarcity would come to an end. It was possible to entertain this hope in the ultra-sanguine form that all wants would be satisfied, as though every human being had a magic ring or obedient jinn at his disposal. But, since this could hardly be taken seriously, Marxists who considered the question decided, with a fair degree of support from Marx's works, that Communism would ensure the satisfaction of 'true' or 'genuine' needs consonant with human nature, but not whims or desires of all kinds. This, however, gave rise to a problem which no one answered clearly: who is to decide what needs are 'genuine', and by what criteria? If every man is to judge this for himself, then all needs are equally genuine provided they are actually, subjectively felt, and there is no room for any distinction. If, on the other hand, it is the state which decides, then the greatest emancipation in history consists in a system of universal rationing.

At the present time it is obvious to all except a handful of New Left adolescents that socialism cannot literally 'satisfy all needs' but can only aim at a just



distribution of insufficient resources—which leaves us with the problem of defining ‘just’ and of deciding by what social mechanisms the aim is to be effected in each particular case. The idea of perfect equality, i.e. an equal share of all goods for everybody, is not only unfeasible economically but is contradictory in itself: for perfect equality can only be imagined under a system of extreme despotism, but despotism itself presupposes inequality at least in such basic advantages as participation in power and access to information. (For the same reason, contemporary *gauchistes* are in an untenable position when they demand more equality and less government: in real life more equality means more government, and absolute equality means absolute government.)

If socialism is to be anything more than a totalitarian prison, it can only be a system of compromises between different values that limit one another. All-embracing economic planning, even if it were possible to achieve—and there is almost universal agreement that it is not—is incompatible with the autonomy of small producers and regional units, and this autonomy is a traditional value of socialism, though not of Marxist socialism. Technical progress cannot coexist with absolute security of living conditions for everyone. Conflicts inevitably arise between freedom and equality, planning and the autonomy of small groups, economic democracy and efficient management, and these conflicts can only be mitigated by compromise and partial solutions.

In the developed industrial countries, all social institutions for the purpose of evening out inequalities and ensuring a minimum of security (progressive taxation, health services, unemployment relief, price controls, etc.) have been created and extended at the price of a vastly expanded state bureaucracy, and no one can suggest how to avoid paying this price.

Questions such as these have little to do with Marxism, and Marx’s doctrine provides virtually no help in solving them. The apocalyptic belief in the consummation of history, the inevitability of socialism, and the natural sequence of ‘social formations’; the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, the exaltation of violence, faith in the automatic efficacy of nationalizing industry, fantasies concerning a society without conflict and an economy without money—all these have nothing in common with the idea of democratic socialism. The latter’s purpose is to create institutions which can gradually reduce the subordination of production to profit, do away with poverty, diminish inequality, remove social barriers to educational opportunity, and minimize the threat to democratic liberties from state bureaucracy and the seductions of totalitarianism. All these efforts and attempts are doomed to failure unless they are firmly rooted in the value of freedom—what Marxists stigmatize as ‘negative’ freedom, i.e. the area of decision which society allows to the individual. This is so not only because freedom is an intrinsic value requiring no justification beyond itself, but also because without it societies are unable to reform themselves: despotic

systems, lacking this self-regulating mechanism, can only correct their mistakes when these have led to disaster.

Marxism has been frozen and immobilized for decades as the ideological superstructure of a totalitarian political movement, and in consequence has lost touch with intellectual developments and social realities. The hope that it could be revived and made fruitful once again soon proved to be an illusion. As an explanatory ‘system’ it is dead, nor does it offer any ‘method’ that can be effectively used to interpret modern life, to foresee the future, or cultivate utopian projections. Contemporary Marxist literature, although plentiful in quantity, has a depressing air of sterility and helplessness, in so far as it is not purely historical.

The effectiveness of Marxism as an instrument of political mobilization is quite another matter. As we have seen, its terminology is used in support of the most variegated political interests. In the Communist countries of Europe, where Marxism is the official legitimation of the existing regimes, it has virtually lost all conviction, while in China it has been deformed out of recognition. Wherever Communism is in power, the ruling class transforms it into an ideology whose real sources are nationalism, racism, or imperialism. Communism has done much to strengthen nationalist ideologies by using them to seize power or hold on to it, and in this way it has produced its own gravediggers. Nationalism lives only as an ideology of hate, envy, and thirst for power; as such it is a disruptive element in the Communist world, the coherence of which is based on force. If the whole world were Communist it would either have to be dominated by a single imperialism, or there would be an unending series of wars between the ‘Marxist’ rulers of different countries.

We are witnesses and participators in momentous and complicated intellectual and moral processes, the combined effects of which cannot be foreseen. On the one hand, many optimistic assumptions of nineteenth-century humanism have broken down, and in many fields of culture there is a sense of bankruptcy. On the other hand, thanks to the unprecedented speed and diffusion of information, human aspirations throughout the world are increasing faster than the means of satisfying them; this leads to rapidly growing frustration and consequent aggressiveness. Communists have shown great skill in exploiting this state of mind and channelling aggressive feelings in various directions according to circumstances, using fragments of Marxist language to suit their purpose. Messianic hopes are the counterpart of the sense of despair and impotence that overcomes mankind at the sight of its own failures. The optimistic belief that there is a ready-made, immediate answer to all problems and misfortunes, and that only the malevolence of enemies (defined according to choice) stands in the way of its being instantly applied, is a frequent ingredient in ideological systems passing under the name of Marxism—which is to say that



Marxism changes content from one situation to another and is cross-bred with other ideological traditions. At present Marxism neither interprets the world nor changes it: it is merely a repertoire of slogans serving to organize various interests, most of them completely remote from those with which Marxism originally identified itself. A century after the collapse of the First International, the prospect of a new International capable of defending the interests of oppressed humanity throughout the world is less likely than it has ever been.

The self-deification of mankind, to which Marxism gave philosophical expression, has ended in the same way as all such attempts, whether individual or collective: it has revealed itself as the farcical aspect of human bondage.

## New Epilogue

THERE IS LITTLE to add, in this Epilogue to the Epilogue, to the few sentences written in the New Preface. After all that has happened in the last decades, we cannot foresee the possible vicissitudes of Marxism (assuming there is something to foresee) in its various, mutually unrecognisable incarnations or the future fate of communist ideology and its institutional bodies—although corpses may be a better word. Communism in its Leninist–Stalinist version seems to have been crushed; ‘capitalism’—i.e., the market—seems to be continuing its triumphant conquest of the world. Let us not forget, however, that the most populous country on earth, China, now experiencing a flamboyant, dazzling expansion of the market (accompanied both by gigantic corruption and by an extremely high rate of growth), is in some important respects continuing its insane Marxist past—a past which, unlike the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, it never officially repudiated. Maoist ideology may be dead there, but the state and the Party still exert strict control over the way people think; independent religious life is persecuted and stifled, as is, of course, political opposition. Despite the existence of numerous non-governmental bodies, the law does not exist as an independent organ (law, in the proper sense, can be said to exist only if a citizen can take legal action against the state organs and have a chance of winning); there are no civil liberties and no freedom of opinion. Instead there is slave labour on a mass scale, concentration camps (in which it takes place), and the brutal repression of national minorities, of which the barbaric destruction of Tibetan culture is the best known but by no means the only example. This is not a Communist state in any recognisable sense but a tyranny that grew out of a Communist system. Numerous academics and intellectuals extolled its glory when it was at its most savage, destructive, and foolish. This fashion seems to have ended. Whether this country will ever adopt the norms of Western civilization is uncertain; the market favours development in this direction but by no means guarantees it.

Will Russian imperialism return, after the demise of the Soviet regime? It is not inconceivable—we can observe a certain amount of nostalgia for the lost empire—but if it does, Marxism will have nothing to contribute to this rebirth.

Whatever the proper definition of capitalism, the market, combined with the rule of law and civil liberties, seems to have obvious advantages in assuring a



tolerable level of material well-being and security. And yet, despite these social and economic benefits, 'capitalism' is continually attacked, from every side. These attacks have no coherent ideological content; they often use revolutionary slogans even though no one can explain what the revolution in this context is supposed to mean. There is some remote relationship between this vague ideology and communist tradition, but if traces of Marxism can be discovered in anti-capitalist rhetoric, it is a grotesquely distorted kind of Marxism: Marx championed technical progress and his attitude was strongly Eurocentric, including a lack of interest in the problems of underdeveloped countries. The anti-capitalist slogans we hear today contain a poorly articulated fear of rapidly growing technology, with its possibly sinister side effects. No one can be certain whether our civilisation will be able to cope with the ecological, demographic, and spiritual dangers it has caused or whether it will fall victim to catastrophe. So we cannot tell whether the present 'anti-capitalist', 'anti-globalist', and related obscurantist movements and ideas will quietly fade away and one day come to seem as pathetic as the legendary Luddites at the beginning of the nineteenth century, or whether they will maintain their strength and fortify their trenches.

But we may safely predict that Marx himself will become more and more what he already is: a chapter from a textbook of the history of ideas, a figure that no longer evokes any emotions, simply the author of one of the 'great books' of the nineteenth century—one of those books that very few bother to read but whose titles are known to the educated public. As for my three, newly combined volumes, in which I tried to sum up and assess this philosophy and its later ramifications (provoking the fury—very predictable but less widespread than I had expected—of Marxists and Leftists), they may perhaps be useful to the dwindling number of people still interested in the subject.

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