

45 Ebd. S. 38. Ich übersehe nicht, daß Gramsci 'Theorie' zugleich auch als Instanz der *Kritik* der Politik denkt; die Identitätsthese läßt dies aber letztlich nicht zu.

46 Klenner 1991, S. 445.

47 Deutsch 1976, S. 30 f.

48 Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, B 218.

49 Der ontologische Determinismus ist - in Verbindung mit einem epistemologischen Abbild-Repräsentationismus - eine Voraussetzung theoretischer und politischer Interpretationshoheit gegenüber 'abweichendem epistemischen Verhalten'. Wer die WELT anders sieht, als *diese* Ontologie sie in ihrer REALITÄT verbürgt, kann nicht im Zustand der Wahrheit sein. Philosophisch durch einen Real-Monismus der WELT legitimierter Anti-Pluralismus ermöglicht die Einführung des Topos 'Verrat' in die Wissenschaft.

50 Vgl. Labica 1990.

51 Vgl. Fornet-Betancourt 1993.

52 Caso 1975, S. 82. Zur heutigen lateinamerikanischen Marx-Rezeption im Horizont der Philosophie und Theologie der Befreiung vgl. z.B. Dussel 1987.

53 Gramsci 1977, S. 198.

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Dialectic and Social Criticism

In this paper I will first give a brief account of Marx's method, emphasising its roots in Hegel's philosophy; then I will discuss a number of criticisms and problems facing it.

In the passage from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* from which the title of this Conference* is taken, Hegel outlines the dialectical method and contrasts it with two other approaches. The first of these is 'material thinking' (*das materielles Denken*): 'a contingent consciousness that is absorbed only in material stuff', a form of thought which is rooted in existing conditions and cannot see beyond them. At the 'opposite extreme' is the transcendent critical method of 'argumentation' (*das Raisonieren*), which involves 'freedom from all content and a sense of vanity towards it'. The dialectical method, Hegel maintains, must 'give up this freedom'. It refuses 'to intrude into the immanent rhythm of the Notion, either arbitrarily or with wisdom obtained from elsewhere'. Instead, it 'sink[s] this freedom in the content, letting it move spontaneously of its own nature ... and then ... contemplate[s] this movement' (Hegel 1970 p. 56; Hegel 1977 pp. 35-6).

Similar ideas are at the basis of Marx's method. He too forswears the 'freedom' to judge existing conditions by transcendent standards. The primary purpose of his work, he insists, is to understand capitalist society and 'the laws of motion' governing it, rather than to criticize it according to his own chosen values, or to put forward an ideal of how it ought to be. His method does not involve bringing critical standards to bear on society from the outside. On the contrary, he portrays values and critical standards as social and historical products, as inescapably historical and relative.

At the same time, however, Marx does not limit himself to social description and explanation. He explicitly criticizes capitalism and advocates socialism. For Marxism is not only a social theory, it is also, and essentially, a political outlook in which values and practical commitments play a fundamental role. Moreover, it claims to encompass these two aspects within the unity of a single whole.

Dialectic as Immanent Critique

These ideas are often criticized as confused and contradictory (Lukes 1985). A social theory of the kind Marx develops, it is argued, cannot generate a critical perspective. If ideas and values are simply the products of existing conditions, then they can only reflect and endorse those conditions in the manner of 'material thinking'. Criticism must involve appeal to transcendent values.

Marx, like Hegel, challenges this assumption. According to the dialectical approach, *existing conditions themselves* contain the basis for a critical perspective. For the existing social order is not simple and static - it contains tensions and conflicts. It includes negative as well as positive aspects: tendencies which oppose and negate it, as well as forces supporting and sustaining it. That is to say, negative and 'critical' tendencies are in the world. Critical ideas do not have to be brought from outside by a free critical consciousness, they are already contained immanently within existing conditions. This is the vital insight of the dialectical approach.

According to the dialectical view, tension and conflict give rise to change and development. The established order is not stable or ultimate. It is destined eventually to perish and be superseded. History takes the shape of a development through distinct stages. In the normal course of development, according to Marx, feudal society is succeeded by capitalism which, in turn, will give way to socialism. Each of these stages involves characteristic conflicts and, through their working out, undergoes a process of development. As a result, the conditions for the emergence of

the next stage gradually take shape within it. Thus the process of historical change is not an arbitrary succession of merely different and incommensurable forms. Each stage initially constitutes a progressive development – necessary and justified for its time, and relative to the conditions which it supersedes. Yet each stage is only a transitory form which, in its turn, will ultimately perish and be replaced by the ‘higher’ and ‘more developed’ form which emerges out of it, and on the basis created by it.

It is in this context that Marx criticizes capitalism and envisages socialism. He does not condemn capitalism in absolute terms, according to transcendent or universal standards. Rather, his critique is immanent in character; it is based on standards which are historical and relative. Relative to the feudal conditions which precede it, capitalism constitutes a progressive – indeed, a revolutionary – historical development. However, as the conditions for socialism develop and become immanent within it, capitalism increasingly becomes a hinderance to further development.

In this way, Capitalism can be criticized, not on the basis of transcendent standards, but from the perspective of the ‘higher’ form of socialism developing within it. According to this approach, moreover, the ‘higher’ stage of socialism is not simply an ideal based on transcendent or absolute values. Rather, it is the real anticipated outcome of forces and tendencies at work in present, capitalist, society. ‘Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things’ (Marx and Engels 1975b p. 49).

The Concept of Progress

These are the terms in which Marx criticizes capitalism and pictures socialism. As with Hegel’s philosophy, Marx’s approach relies crucially on the concept of progress. This concept has been the focus of much criticism (Nielsen 1989; Sayers 1989a). According to many writers, it merely disguises the problems inherent in the dialectical method without resolving them. If the term ‘progress’ is used purely descriptively to mean ‘whatever will come next’, then this approach reduces to a form of ‘material thinking’ which provides no basis for the value that is put on progress. Alternatively, the concept of progress tacitly embodies values. In that case, these values must be justified; and this cannot be done simply on the basis of a theory of history. For such value judgments cannot be deduced from any purely factual account of history. Marx is thus accused of confusing facts and values and committing the ‘naturalistic fallacy’ (Popper 1966 vol. 2 ch. 22).

Marxism is, indeed, a form of naturalism; but it is not thereby fallacious. More specifically, it is a form of historicism, which rejects the dualistic distinction of facts and values which this criticism presupposes. For Marxism is not a purely descriptive and explanatory theory on the model of physics or chemistry. It is also a form of socialism: practical ends are integral to it. In this respect, a more useful comparison is with medicine. Medicine has a practical end: the promotion of health. The end of health is not an arbitrary one in medicine; it is not freely chosen by doctors. On the contrary, it is an objective end which is given by the object of medicine – by the human body – as its end. Similarly, if Marx is correct in his analysis of capitalism, socialism is not merely a subjective preference of socialists; it is the objective tendency and end of history itself.

Thus the concept of progress in Marx has both a descriptive and an evaluative meaning. Capitalism is not only the stage after feudalism, it is also a ‘higher’ and ‘more developed’ stage than feudalism. ‘Higher’ in what sense? For Marx, historical development is measured primarily in terms of technological development. It is the fettering of the productive forces by the relations of production – relations which the productive forces have themselves created – which leads ultimately to revolutionary social change. The new social relations established as a result of such

change are progressive in the sense that they permit the continued expansion of the productive forces.

However, even if this picture of historical development is accepted, it is still not clear why economic development should be valued and regarded as ‘progressive’. One possible answer is that economic development results in a greater supply of goods to satisfy human needs; and this, it may be argued, is sufficient to show that economic growth is desirable and hence progressive in an evaluative sense (Cohen 1978). However, it is doubtful whether Marx adopts such a simple utilitarian picture, or whether it is satisfactory. For this picture presupposes that there is a given set of needs – a fixed human nature – which can provide a universal standard of evaluation. Whereas Marx maintains that economic growth leads to the development of new needs and the transformation of human nature. Human nature is socially and historically created.

There are different ways of responding to this. Some, like Rousseau, regard the growth of needs in a purely negative light. The greater our needs, he argues, the more dependent and unfree we become. Hegel and Marx take a different view. They regard the development of needs as an essential part of human development and as an aspect of the growth of freedom. Thus Hegel responds to Rousseau’s position by arguing that the simple and primitive life is the very opposite of genuine freedom. Rather, it is an animal-like and *merely* natural condition. ‘To be confined to mere physical needs as such and their direct satisfaction would simply be the condition in which the mental is plunged in the natural and so would be one of savagery and unfreedom’ (Hegel 1942 §194, p. 128).

For Marx, likewise, needs are not a purely negative feature of human life. The growth of human needs and the development of human productive powers are necessarily connected. As human powers develop new needs emerge; and, in turn, the growth of needs is the spur to the development of new powers (Sayers 1989b). The growth of needs thus constitutes an enlargement, a positive development, of human nature; and socialism, as Marx envisages it, will be a society based upon ‘the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces etc., created through universal exchange’ (Marx 1973 p. 488).

Moreover, the human development brought about by economic growth is not confined to the sphere of material needs. Economic development leads to the extension of social relations, and to the growth of human consciousness, reason and freedom. In this way, the value of progress is not only – or even primarily – utilitarian and economic, it is also moral and social. It lies in the development of social relations and of human nature in all its aspects.

Problems of Relativism

Even given that progress is to be valued because it leads to the development of human nature, problems remain. This account, it will be argued, must treat human development as a transcendent value if it is to be regarded as a criterion of progress. This criticism is justified if progress is measured by the standards of a universal and fixed human nature. It is important to reiterate, therefore, that Marx portrays human nature as historical and changing. The standard of progress it provides is historical and relative. The existing order is criticized in terms of standards which have been produced by that order itself. The needs and potentialities which capitalism can be criticized for denying are not universal and eternal ones. In part at least, they are needs and potentialities which have been created by capitalism itself.

In a different way, Hegel’s account of history is also vulnerable to the charge that it involves transcendent standards. He portrays history in teleological terms, as the ‘realization of reason’, as the development of ‘the Idea’ to self-consciousness and freedom. Historical development is aimed towards an end; and that end is present throughout the process as its determining purpose and goal.

Progress is measured by the degree to which the process approximates to its end.

Marx's fascination with this Hegelian picture is evident throughout his work (Elster 1985 ch. 2.4). As he himself says, he 'coquettes' with it at times. Nevertheless, Marx's considered theory of history is not a teleological one. In the first place, he explicitly criticizes and rejects this account in a number of places. 'History does *nothing* ... [it] is not, as it were, a person apart, using man as a means to achieve *its own* aims; history is *nothing but* the activity of man pursuing his aims' (Marx and Engels 1975a p. 93). Second, and more importantly, Marx spells out a causal account of history in which teleology plays no essential part. According to this theory, historical development arises out of the conflict between the forces and relations of production. Although history does indeed move in the direction of increasing rationality, reason is not its motive force. Thus capitalism creates the forces which will eventually produce socialism, but this is not its purpose or goal. It is a causal result. Though socialism is the conscious goal of the socialist movement, this movement is itself initially engendered by the causal forces at work in capitalist society.

In this respect, Marx's theory of history can be compared to Darwin's theory of evolution. Biological evolution follows a progressive path, but it is not a teleological process aimed at an end. Darwin explains evolution causally, in terms of mutations followed by natural selection. Evolutionary progress is not measured by approximation to an end; its criterion is purely relative. That man is a more highly evolved species than the ape implies no absolute standard of evolutionary success, for there is no end towards which evolution is aimed. It is a purely relative judgement, made in terms of increasing complexity, adaptability and differentiation of function.

The Present Situation

In recent years a more thorough-going scepticism about the idea of progress has been very influential. Following Nietzsche, it is widely argued that history exhibits only an arbitrary succession of social forms, which manifest the 'will to power' of victorious social groups (Nietzsche 1956; Foucault 1986). There is no space here to examine these views fully. I will remark only that the account of historical change they embody is highly questionable. Marx is surely right to argue that history cannot be understood as a manifestation of the will. The will as a determining force in history arises only as a *result*, as the outcome of a process of progressive development in which mankind only gradually acquires the capacity to control and determine its conditions of life, rather than being at the mercy of them. So far from history being the result of the will of social groups, at first it is the unforeseen and unintended outcome of the clash of many individual wills and of natural and social forces which are only gradually brought within human control. The gradually increasing power of the will as a social force is the result not the cause of historical development and progress.

In short, Marxism can be defended against this, and many of the other purely philosophical criticisms which are often brought against it. However, by itself, these arguments are not a sufficient response to the current scepticism about the idea of progress. For in recent years these philosophical issues have been overshadowed by more substantive ones. I will conclude by mentioning these, without trying to resolve them. In my view, they pose a far more serious challenge to Marxism and the dialectical perspective, and they set an agenda of issues to which Marxism must respond if it is to remain a living philosophy. For however defensible the idea of progress may be in purely theoretical and philosophical terms, it must ultimately be justified as an account of the actual course of history.

For much of the present century, this was not a problem. Marxism appeared to be remarkably confirmed by history itself. Marx's prediction that capitalism is only a particular and limited historical stage destined to be superseded, seemed justified by the succession of revolutions which

removed a large part of the world from its grip. Communism seemed to be a 'spectre' which was haunting not only Europe, but the whole world.

However, with the collapse of many of these communist regimes since 1989 this picture is in serious doubt. Some even maintain that the hope of a post-capitalist order is illusory. Capitalism and liberal democracy are the highest possible stage of development, the 'end of history'. Given the continuing crises and contradictions in the capitalist world, that is neither a plausible nor a tenable view. Nevertheless, if the Marxist account of history, and the idea of progress which I have argued is at its centre, is to survive as a living theory, it must be developed to comprehend and explain the turn that history has now taken. Either the idea of progress must be questioned and Marxism fundamentally rethought; or it must be shown how recent events can be reconciled with it. In either case, a fundamental rethinking the Marxist picture of the events of 20th century is needed. This I believe is the most urgent task facing the 'materialist friends of the dialectic' at present.

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