RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE
Liberté Égalité Fraternité

Université de Toulouse

Doctorat de l'Université de Toulouse

délivré en co-tutelle avec Université « Ca' Foscari » de Venise

préparé à l'Université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès

Epistemologie clandestine : le probleme de la dialectique dans l'oeuvre d'Evald Ilyenkov

---

Thèse présentée et soutenue, le 4 septembre 2025 par

Giorgi KOBAKHIDZE

École doctorale
ALLPHA - Arts, Lettres, Langues, Philosophie, Communication

Spécialité
Philosophie

Unité de recherche
ERRAPHIS - Équipe de Recherches sur les Rationalités Philosophiques et les Savoirs

Thèse dirigée par
Charles WOLFE et Pietro Omodeo

Composition du jury
M. Matthieu RENAULT, Président, Université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès
Mme Daniela STEILA, Rapporteure, Università degli studi di Torino
M. Vittorio MORFINO, Rapporteur, Università degli Studi di Milano Bicocca
M. Alexis CUKIER, Examinateur, Université de Poitiers
M. Charles WOLFE, Directeur de thèse, Université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès
M. Pietro Daniel OMODEO, Co-directeur de thèse, Università Ca'Foscari Venezia

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisors, Prof. Charles T. Wolfe and Prof. Pietro Daniel Omodeo, whose competent guidance, incisive criticism and wholehearted support constitute the conditions of possibility for the existence of this thesis. Their mentorship has been a privilege I appreciate dearly. I also thank the members of my research unit ERRAPHIS for the collegial and stimulating intellectual environment that pushed me to revise my ideas, discover new perspectives and maintain an open-minded attitude. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the administrative and maintenance staff at the University of Toulouse Jean Jaurès and Ca'Foscari University, whose work helped create a reliable and welcoming environment throughout my research.

I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my friends, whose companionship helped me through the difficult moments, and to my partner, whose relentless encouragement sustained me with patience all along. I am also grateful for everyone who took on the necessary everyday tasks on themselves so I would be able to focus on my research. Finally, I extend my deepest thanks to my family: to my mother, for her care and steadfast belief in me; to my father, for his invaluable contribution this study; and to my sister, to whom I owe the very opportunity to write this thesis.

Author's note

The present thesis is partially based on my published and forthcoming articles and book sections, which have been reworked, expanded or reformulated in line with the goals and structure of this thesis. These include:

- Kobakhidze, Giorgi. "Evald Ilyenkov and the Imperialist Unconscious in Soviet Philosophy." *Studies in East European Thought* 76, no. 3 (September 2024): 407–24.
- Sascha Freyberg and Giorgi Kobakhidze. "Beyond Ideology Revisiting Dialectical Materialism in the Soviet Tradition." In *The History and Philosophy of Materialism*, edited by Charles T. Wolfe and John Symons, 334–51. London: Routledge, 2024
- Giorgi Kobakhidze. "In Search of Lost Method: Re-Reading Marx with Louis Althusser and Evald Ilyenkov." *Historical Materialism Journal*, no. Western Marxism Special Issue (Forthcoming).
- Giorgi Kobakhidze. "Stalin's Dark Humanism: Soviet Logic and Evald Ilyenkov." In *Who Thinks Concretely? Essays on Evald Ilyenkov*, edited by Isabel Jacobs, Martin Küpper, and Trevor Wilson, Vol. 9. Contemporary Russian Philosophy Series. Leiden: Brill, Forthcoming.
- Giorgi Kobakhidze. "La Dialectique de La Matière Pensante Dans La « Cosmologie de l'Esprit » d'Evald Ilyenkov." In *L'activité de la matière*, edited by Guillaume Coissard and Arnaud Pelletier, 125–42. Paris: J. Vrin, 2024.

The thesis is also followed by two appendices containing my translations of two of Ilyenkov's major essays into French. These have been translated into French for the first time. Appendix A contains the translation of Ilyenkov's 1962 encyclopedia article "The ideal". Appendix B carries his "Cosmology of the Spirit", translated in collaboration with Paul Dablemont. Both are prefaced with short introductions. Appendix A has already been published:

- Ilyenkov, Evald. "L'idéel." Translated by Giorgi Kobakhidze. *Astérion* 27 (2022).

Appendix B is under review, to be published in the journal *Philosophie*.

As it pertains to quotes from Russian, French or Italian, they are all translated by me unless indicated otherwise. If the reference of the quote in the footnote is transliterated, the translation of the quote is my own. Where possible, I used existing English translations of Ilyenkov's works. Nonetheless, certain translations appear problematic. Where that is the case, I opted for translating the quoted passages myself and indicated the Russian original source. I have at times also referenced different translations/editions of the same work for Ilyenkov, as well as other authors. This is due to the accuracy of the existing translations in the specific passage quoted.

Table of contents

Table of contents 4
Introduction 6
Methodology 17
Antinomies of Soviet Marxism: Early debates 19
Soviet Marxism and The Thing-in-Itself 22
Must Science Be Dialectical? 25
Spinoza after the October revolution 28
The scholastic dialectics of stalinism 32
The "Thaw": metaphor, event 35
The Other 1960s 37
The Myth of Two Philosophies 40
Chapter I 43
Dialectical Logic 43
Politics of the absolute: Spinoza, Hegel, Marx 43
Soviet philosophy as a metascience 47
The Ilyenkov-Korovikov Theses 50
Backlash 55
Against the ontological gaze 61
Western Sovietology (and why it's insufficient to understand Ilyenkov) 68
Logic as the place of the political in Soviet philosophy 72
Formal Logic before 1946 77
The revival of formal logic 81
Formal Logic After the War 83
Logic and the mechanization of production 85
Stalin's linguistics 87
Dialectical logic 91
Hegel against syllogisms 96
Marx's and logical radicalism 100
Debating dialectical logic in postwar Soviet Marxism 105
Discussions on Logic at Moscow State University and *Voprosi Filosofii* 107
Ilyenkov's intervention 111
A clandestine critique 116
Chapter II 120

Thinking Matter 120
A materialist phantasmagoria 120
Material Activity or Active Materiality? 126
The stages of Soviet ecology 132
Can Marxism think ecologically? 135
Active matter in dialectical and New materialisms 138
The political contingency in cosmic cycles 141
Ilyenkov and the theory of identity 149
On Spinoza's theory of truth and error 154
Ilyenkov's critique of Feuerbach 156
Marx's and the materialism of practice 159
Dialectics and critical realism 163
Chapter III 167
Transformative Practice 167
Particularism 167
Dialectics of the abstract and the concrete: The italian reception 173
Reading Ilyenkov with Althusser 179
Marx on method 185
Contradiction between Structure and Totality 188
Re-reading surplus-value 193
Spinoza: A theoretical impasse 197
Ilyenkov's concept of the ideal 200
The ideal between dialectics and semiotics 216
Questioning the notion of activity 219
The political economy of the ideal 224
The ideal and anthropocentrism 227
Conclusion 229
Une partie de la thèse en français 235
Bibliography 265
Appendix A 281
Introduction à la Cosmologie de l'esprit d'Evald Ilyenkov 281
Cosmologie de l'Esprit 287
Appendix B 323
Avant-propos du traducteur 323
L'idéel 328

Clandestine Epistemology: the problem of dialectics in the work of Evald Ilyenkov

Introduction

The 1960s in the Soviet Union are often depicted as the moment of re-awakening, when the capacity for critical thought began to reassert itself following its dogmatic suppression in the Stalin era. The concept of thought and the correlated question of what it means to think became central in the post-Stalin philosophical landscape. Various theories of thinking elaborated at the time tried to ground the autonomy of thought, emphasize its social nature or define its inherent structures. The prominent Soviet Marxist Evald Ilyenkov, the protagonist of this thesis, played a crucial role in developing a dialectical concept of thought[1] that would understand it as a social process, confronting individual mental activity as an external force:

[1] Employing the term "thought" as such evidently raises the question of its implied universalism. With Ilyenkov's major sources in mind, it becomes clear that the object is European philosophical thought.

"as much an objective component as mountains and trees, the moon and the stars…"[2] and arising from an activity [*deatel'nost*'] that implies a complex interplay of material and ideal phenomena. Ilyenkov saw the task of dialectical materialism in elaborating a *theory of ideality* that would ground its particular sort of materiality, while simultaneously avoiding its identification with physiology or language. Building on Marx's definition of value as a *purely ideal form*,[3] neither mental nor physical, Ilyenkov expanded the concept of the ideal, defining it as an emergent moment of social practice, irreducible to individual organs like the brain, even if embodied in them. The two main problems that animated Ilyenkov's philosophy were the criticism of reductionism - understood as a scaling down of complex ontological strata to the simpler - and that of dualism - the view of a split world populated by inanimate objects and supernatural entities. Drawing on the legacy of German idealism, Spinoza and Marx, Ilyenkov sought to articulate a monistic materialism able to account for non-material phenomena as possessing a "peculiar objectivity."[4] While remaining rooted in Marx's epistemological framework, he tried to transcend its limits and produce a systematic exposition of dialectics – an unfinished task that Marx himself had famously envisioned but never completed.[5]

However, Ilyenkov's own project remained unfinished due to the recurring ideological persecution he was subjected to by the *nomenklatura*, which made it difficult for him to freely pursue his line of thought to conclusions and ultimately, in March 1979, resulted in his suicide. Constrained by his historical moment, Ilyenkov had to spend considerable time and effort into undoing the damage done to Marxism by Stalinism. As Abdusalam Guseynov recounts his experience:

---

[2] Alex Levant and Vesa Oittinen, eds., *Dialectics of the Ideal: Evald Ilyenkov and Creative Soviet Marxism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015). p. 74.

[3] "The price or money-form of commodities is, like their form of value generally, quite distinct from their palpable and real bodily form; it is therefore a purely ideal or notional form." - Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy; v.1*, Penguin Classics (London New York: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1990). p. 189.

[4] Levant and Oittinen, *Dialectics of the Ideal*. p. 67

[5] "When I have cast off the burden of political economy, I shall write a 'Dialectic'." - Karl Marx, "Letter to Joseph Dietzgen in Petersburg" London, 9 May 1868; *in Marx Engels Collected Works*, Volume 43: Marx & Engels 1868-70: Letters: April 1868 - July 1870 (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 31.

> The political pressure on philosophy went so far in the 1930s and the 1940s that its subsequent existence could be nothing else but the retroactive straightening movement. The philosophy of the 1950s–1980s… was essentially the negation, moreover the conscientious and persistent negation, of the philosophy of the 1930s and the 1940s.[6]

This circumstance could explain why a large part of the scholarship on Ilyenkov's legacy depicts him as a solitary combatant against the ossified dogma of the communist party.[7] His own thought is best understood as an attempt at rescuing Soviet dialectical materialism from its theoretical impasse through a critical commentary on that tradition's philosophical constructs. His intervention was conditioned by the specific historical conjuncture of a state socialist system in transition from an authoritarian governance to a more democratic administration.[8] Ilyenkov not only supported, but actively participated in this transition by contributing his intellectual labor to it. The ultimate failure of the Soviet democratization project of the sixties was felt by him as the failure of his own life's work.

However, while resistance to the crude Marxism of the officialdom was an important aspect of Ilyenkov's thought, I believe that his philosophy deserves to be studied in its own right and by way of a critique of its various shortcomings, ambivalences and contradictions, taken beyond its original limits. Soviet studies, western or local, tended to elevate Stalinist *Diamat* (dialectical materialism) as the pinnacle of Soviet Marxism. Consequently, theories that were different from the doctrine got forcibly tethered to it either as precursors, supposedly containing

---

[6] Abdusalam Guseynov, "The Philosophy of the Russian Sixtiers in the Humanist Context: A Philosophical Reflection," in *Philosophical Thought in Russia in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: A Contemporary View from Russia and Abroad*, Ed. by Vladislav. A. Lektorsky and Marina F. Bykova (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), p. 96.

[7] See for example: Sergey Mareev, *From the History of Soviet Philosophy: Lukács – Vygotsky – Ilyenkov* (Moscow: Kul'turnaia revoliutsiia, 2008).

[8] For a detailed sociological account of this process see: Aleksandr Bikbov, *Grammatika porjadka: istoričeskaja sociologija ponjatij, kotorye menjajut našu real'nost'*, Serija Social′naja teorija (Moskva: Izdat. Dom Vysšej Školy Ėkonomiki - VŠĖ, 2014).

the germ of the subsequent dogma,[9] or as deviations, reduced to a project of rejecting it. This Stalin-centric interpretation can become reductive and foreclose important lines of inquiry.

Through a critical reconstruction of Ilyenkov's philosophy, I will argue that the latter offers an epistemology of non-material, intangible yet peculiarly objective phenomena as forms of social practice and with this, proposes to contribute to bridging the gap between knowledge and its object. An understanding of the successes, failures and ultimate outcome of that attempt will be the contribution of the present thesis. Ilyenkov wanted to decenter the correlation of thought and matter away from the notions of internality and externality. The "chief defect" (Marx) of all hitherto existing philosophy for him, was the closure of thought upon itself and the consequent rendering of the material world as external. His step-by-step elucidation of the relationship between matter and thought enables us to comprehend the processes of mediation through which the ideal and the material interpenetrate and co-determine each other. His intervention, I will argue, aims to reconcile the materialist view of the human as a natural being, bearer of biological apparatuses and subject to physical laws with the post-critical view of the natural itself as socially constructed through scientific and cultural practices. This synthetic project gives rise to two principal interpretations, corresponding to the two poles of Ilyenkov's intervention. Scholarship that emphasizes the ontological, object-oriented character of his dialectic tends to classify Ilyenkov among the naive realists with their reflection theory that saw dialectics in non-human nature.[10] Conversely, commentators that highlight his philosophy

[9] See Maria Chehonadskih, *Alexander Bogdanov and the Politics of Knowledge after the October Revolution.* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023). p. 10.

[10] Oittinen, to be sure, does not identify Ilyenkov with the naive realism of the Soviet kind completely, but qualifies this parallel in the following way: "Ilyenkov was fully aware of the banality and inviability of Soviet "diamat" (dialectical materialism), and his own "program" can be characterized as an attempt to restore genuine philosophical culture in the USSR by returning to the Hegelian tradition… However, the Soviet intellectual tradition left its mark even on the thinking of a scholar as alien to dogmatism as Ilyenkov. This is most evident in the "ontologism" that, beginning with the works of A. M. Deborin, constituted a characteristic feature of diamat-style philosophizing. This ontologism is expressed in the assertion that reality, as such, is inherently dialectical." Vesa Oittinen, "Dialekticeskye Varijatsii Ilyenkova, Ili Pocemu Ne Kant Vmesto Gegelja," *Logos* 1 (69) (2009). p. 90.

of personality and its theory of cognition present him as a Kantian-style humanist who reinforces the subject-object division.[11]

Ilyenkov offers material for both of these interpretations. Taken separately, his insistence on the exclusively human origin of the ideal ends up mirroring the very dualism he sought to dissolve. While his suggestion that thought becomes objectified in the process of labor is in line with Marx's own departure from subjectivity-centered thought, his understanding of labor as purposeful human activity neglects the part non-human actors play in the process, culminating in an anthropocentric vision of Marxism. Yet, in light of the general spirit of Ilyenkov's project, which aimed to fuse ontology with epistemology, such a separation looks one-sided, just as the ontological reading does when divorced from his concern for the possibilities of cognition.

To work through this tension, I offer to explore a different, alternative reading of Ilyenkov's philosophy, based on a rarely explicated line of his thought that allows one to situate his humanism as a condition for a non-anthropocentric theory. The paradoxical amalgamation of non-anthropocentric humanism is a productive contradiction which goes back to Marx's *1844 Manuscripts*, that famous evidence of its author's "humanist phase". Yet, as Kolozova notes, Marx's "Humanist phase is radically non-anthropocentric,"[12] in that it privileges a notion of objectivity over positivism. In particular, I will show that in Ilyenkov the human ultimately becomes the predicate of its own activity - labor. In this sense, his humanism does not lead to an admiration of some unique humanness, but rather *particularizes* the human in the larger cosmic vision of materialism. Following Spinoza, Ilyenkov defined thinking as *a mode of action of the body,* disassociating it (initially) from the human in order to re-inscribe it in the movement of matter.

As for the presence of objective dialectics in his work, I claim that Ilyenkov grasped ontology not as a first philosophy, but as inherent to dialectical logic, included in it as a necessary aspect of the latter. Indeed, if as Ilyenkov held, dialectical logic differs from the formal in that it does not concern the concept alone, but rather the relation of the concept to its

[11] Valentin Tolstyh, *Eval'd Vasil'evič Il'enkov*, Filosofy Rossii vtoroj poloviny XX veka (Moskva: ROSSPÈN, 2009). p. 39.

[12] *Katerina Kolozova - "Marx vs. Hegel,"* Video, 2021.

object, of the ideal to the material, then logic and ontology could not be separated. I quote Ilyenkov to illustrate this point:

> The only way of attaining a rational resolution of contradictions in theoretical definition is through tracing the mode in which they are resolved in the movement of objective reality, the movement and development of the world of things "in themselves.[13]

The quote marks around the term *in themselves* suggest a rejection of its Kantian definition, opening the door for the charge of pre-critical metaphysics. The decisive question here can be posed as follows: Does the subject-object dialectic in Ilyenkov's philosophy allow for unmediated access to the physical world? The answer is far from straightforward. Ilyenkov's "science of thought" differs from the Kantian "science and critique of cognition" in that it does not take the cognitive mediation of the subject's access to the object as a barrier, but rather as that which makes such access possible. As he claims in his 1954 manifesto "Theses on the object of philosophy":

> Dialectical laws, in their purity and abstractness, can be studied and clarified by philosophy only as logical categories, as laws of dialectical thought. Only by making theoretical thinking, the process of cognition, its object does philosophy include in itself the study of the most general characteristics of being, and not the reverse, as it is so often maintained. Philosophy is the science of scientific thinking, its laws and forms.[14]

"Being" seems to be understood here as part of "theoretical thinking", rather than an entity upon itself, readily given to philosophy. In order to avoid reverting to a pre-critical position while elaborating a dialectical ontology, Ilyenkov employs the Marxian method of the passage from the abstract to the concrete, thoroughly analyzed in his 1960 book *The Dialectics of the*

---

[13] Evald Ilyenkov, *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982). p. 244.

[14] Evald Ilyenkov and Valentin Korovikov, "Theses on the Question of the Interconnection of Philosophy and Knowledge of Nature and Society in the Process of Their Historical Development," in *Philosophical Thought in Russia in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century. A Contemporary View from Russia and Abroad* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019). p. 67.

Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital. As he explains there, knowledge grasps its object as an organic whole, by crystallizing the development of its interrelations as exemplified by Marx's treatment of the commodity form. Situating the problem in this way implies at the same time situating oneself in relation to it. Hence, one moves away from a cartesian-style beginning with an absolute truth and an isolated ego. Instead, Marx's method, according to Ilyenkov, begins with the historically conditioned object, always already embedded in a concrete totality and engaged from a determinate standpoint. Yet, this methodological precept does not imply a primacy of the subject over the object, but a recognition of the historical limits of the finite subject's capacity of cognition, without, nevertheless, relativizing its knowledge to an individual.

The choice of Ilyenkov for my thesis is determined by my standpoint in regards to the historical split between Soviet and Western Marxism.[15] Ilyenkov's interpretation of Marx's philosophy resists classification within these conventional frameworks,[16] as it fundamentally rejects these categories. While elements of his thought resonate within both currents - provided they are not perceived as monolithic - he does not comfortably fit within either the dialectical materialism of the Soviet tradition or the historical materialism once prevalent in the West. Ilyenkov's rejection of this division is not merely rhetorical but is inherent to the very architecture of his philosophical ideas. As a careful reader of Marx's work and a staunch critic of its various simplifications, Ilyenkov provides important insights for rethinking Marxism at its philosophical core. A materialist most interested in ideality, Ilyenkov exposed the mechanistic and reductionist Marxism of his Soviet contemporaries, shattering the well-established hierarchization of base and superstructure that precluded Soviet philosophers from elaborating a Marxist theory of culture. By highlighting the dialectical relations of transformation of the material into the ideal, he opened the way for thinking of knowledge as a material practice, a corporeal activity of a socialized subject. Yet in a typically Soviet manner of understanding Engels' dialectics of nature as a continuation of Marx's unexplicited philosophy, Ilyenkov also stands in opposition to the exclusively culturalist strands in Western Marxism, that, in their visible forms, separate Marx's social dialectic from its Engelsian

[15] As theorized by Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1989).

[16] I limit the discussion here to Western and Soviet Marxisms, leaving aside other currents. This is done not because Chinese, Argentinian, Indian or Caribbean Marxisms don't provide interesting insights for our purposes, but in order to limit the scope of my reconstruction. For the objective of situating Ilyenkov's philosophy, the split between precisely those two currents plays a determining role.

extension to non-human nature.[17] If Ilyenkov's understanding of Marx's and Engel's work as complimentary is typically Soviet, his reading of Engels is hardly so. In particular, what interests him is not the world "as it is" but our being-in-the-world and the world's practical transformation through labor. With this approach, Ilyenkov strives to avoid falling into the old nature against culture dichotomy and chooses instead to pursue a theoretical line that merges ontology with epistemology. In light of the current debates on ecosocialism and the Anthropocene, this perspective renders Ilyenkov as contemporary as any living Marxist.[18] How close he comes to achieving this goal will become clearer as we move forward.

I will begin by tracing Ilyenkov's intellectual development, from his early philosophical pursuits to his published works and the extensive posthumous corpus that remained obscured due to Soviet censorship. I will identify three distinct characteristics that, in my view, are essential to defining Ilyenkov's conception of Marxism. These are: 1. The combination of Hegelian dialectics with a Spinozist ontology, 2. The peculiar objectivity attributed to non-material entities and 3. A linking of a Marxist critique of political economy with a philosophical anthropology rooted in the concept of activity. Together, these characteristics suggest that Ilyenkov's work constitutes a pivotal moment in the history of Marxist thought. This inquiry aims at defining that moment.

But, to demonstrate my argument, I will first reconstruct the antecedents to Ilyenkov's philosophy in order to show how the earlier Soviet debates inform his thinking. To this end, I will revisit pre-revolutionary and early Soviet discussions between figures such as V. Lenin, G. Plekhanov, A. Bogdanov, A. Deborin and L. Axelrod on the nature of Hegelian dialectics, Spinoza's substance monism and Kantian epistemology. These often-contentious discussions, shaped by intense yet sometimes flawed interpretations, laid the groundwork for what would later be consolidated as "Soviet Marxism". After a brief description of the process of the Stalinization of Soviet philosophy, I will pass to Ilyenkov's own historical moment, the Khrushchev "Thaw" and the Brezhnev "Stagnation". An analysis of the re-constitution of the public sphere in the 1960s after Stalin's death will allow me to characterize the particular, in-between position Ilyenkov occupied within it.

---

[17] We could name Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Korsch, or the early Georg Lukács, among others. The common thread here is the anti-realist position. This list hardly exhausts "Western Marxism", but it does express one of its major inflections.

[18] Yuliya Yurchenko, "Humans, Nature and Dialectical Materialism," *Capital & Class* 45, no. 1 (March 2020). p. 7.

With this in mind, we will begin our reading of Ilyenkov's textual production with his early "Theses on the subject of philosophy", which aimed to shift the focus of Soviet Marxism away from the elaboration of abstract "dialectical laws of nature" and towards the study of scientific thinking. This move, I claim, intended to correct dialectical materialism's naive realist inflection by introducing the question of cognition as the condition of possibility for an "intelligent materialism" (Lenin). While Ilyenkov rejected certain aspects of his "Theses" on a number of occasions, his rejection was due to the immense pressure produced by several punitive party meetings stretched out for years, as my analysis of the minutes of those meetings will show. Moreover, his subsequent output clearly maintained the main principles expressed in the "Theses."

Taking the shift of Soviet Marxism from a naive realism to a more complex epistemological setting as my point of departure, I seek to analyze Ilyenkov's philosophical oeuvre as a systematic endeavor to reconcile ontology and epistemology within the parameters of dialectical materialism. The sources that provide Ilyenkov with the necessary theoretical tools for this project - Marx, read through Hegel *and* Spinoza - give an image of a Marxism that, distanced from its orthodox interpretations, demands revitalization in the context of contemporary Marxist discourse. My engagement with Ilyenkov's thought unfolds as a critical examination of this possible philosophical lineage, orienting my inquiry around the following questions: How does thought grasp its object in the process of knowledge when the two terms are not external to each other? Where are the limits of Spinoza in Ilyenkov's project and how does Hegel help to transcend them? How is the human-nature relation conceived in a philosophy that synthesizes humanism with a dialectics of nature? And finally, how does Ilyenkov theorize exploitation, domination and communism? The philosophical questioning will be accompanied by what could be called an externalist inquiry into the historical reasons for Ilyenkov's choice of subjects like Marx's method and the concept of the ideal in the context of a state socialist economy in its transitory phase.

Indeed, if traditional European metaphysics consistently accompanied Ilyenkov's intellectual development, it did so in view of a political concern. Namely, his critique of German idealism doubles in his - less perceptible - critique of society. If it is true, as Shaffer and Shapin argued, that "Solutions to the problem of knowledge are solutions to the problem of social order,"[19] then Ilyenkov's epistemological engagement with Hegel, Marx, or Kant can

[19] Steven Shapin, Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1985). p. 332.

be read as a veiled critique of his contemporary Soviet society. Ilyenkov was envisioning an alternative socialist modernity after Stalinism, focusing on the education system, technology and the labor process. In this sense, his dialectical logic aimed to liberate Soviet Marxism from its technocratic orientation,[20] make possible a materialist philosophy of education that would break free from the "epistemological ghetto" of narrow specialization and theorize a concrete universality that could arise from below, rather than impose itself from above. In this regard, the theoretical identity of thought and being that he strove to articulate appears as a reflection of the dialectical identity of the individual with the common that would be brought about practically by communism.[21]

Ilyenkov's thought exemplifies a project of revitalizing Marxism by confronting its theoretical limitations. Engaging with it, therefore, is not merely an exercise in historical reconstruction. My intention is to contribute to the theory and cultural history of post-Stalinism, by problematizing the understanding of its official philosophy of Marxist humanism. The latter, in my view, did not simply strive to subvert Stalinist ideology but envisioned an alternative that merits scholarly engagement on its own grounds. Essential epistemological issues such as collaborations or confrontations between philosophy and natural science, the relations between technology and economy or the conceptions of ecology in socialism constitute a historical legacy that matters beyond its geographical region and historical temporality. Ilyenkov's critique of scientism in Soviet philosophy echoes in certain debates in science studies,[22] his

[20] "If, on the other hand, science and technology elude historical-materialist understanding, mankind might go, not the way of socialism, but that of technocracy; society would not rule over technology but technology over society, and this not only applies to the western world where technocratic thought is based on positivism; it is no less true of some socialist countries which revere technocracy in the name of 'dialectical materialism'."Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Humanities Press, 1978). p. 3.

[21] Here I follow Keti Chukhrov's thesis according to which: "The trigger for such dialectics of matter and mind convergence is the politico-economic conditions of communism." Keti Chukhrov, *Practicing the Good: Desire and Boredom in Soviet Socialism* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), p. 294.

[22] Monika Woźniak and Andrzej W. Nowak, "Fighting for Philosophy in the Marxian Sense: Introduction to Evald Ilyenkov's "On the State of Philosophy [Letter to the Central Committee of the Party]," *Studies in East European Thought* 76, no. 3 (September 2024), p. 554.

outlook on cybernetics is relevant in the research on cognitive capitalism[23] and his work in psychology is already used in the field of educational sciences today.[24]

[23] Keti Chukhrov, "Towards the Space of the General: On Labor beyond Materiality and Immateriality," *E-Flux*, no. 20 (2010), p. 5.

[24] Annalisa Sannino, Harry Daniels, and Kris D. Gutiérrez, "Activity Theory Between Historical Engagement and Future-Making Practice," in *Learning and Expanding with Activity Theory*, ed. Annalisa Sannino, Harry Daniels, and Kris D. Gutiérrez (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1–16.

Methodology

In its multiple shapes and forms, Soviet Marxism came out of the experience of historical socialism, actualizing it today thus requires a certain work of translation that would navigate the "epistemological gaps"[25] between that event and the present. Some of the concepts that embodied Soviet philosophical discourse have since been discredited as ideological. In this regard, the problem studied here dictates a specific methodology.

In addition to the systematic analysis of texts that constitutes a major part of this thesis, I employ the methods of the sociology of philosophical practice and political epistemology. The latter will allow me to trace the relations between scientific advances and politics in the Soviet Union as it focuses on the values and goals that drive intellectual work. Late Soviet philosophy developed in a constant oscillation between intellectual and ideological motivations, as well as under heightened administrative control. In this context, the 2014 publication of Alexander Bikbov's *The Grammar of Order: A Historical Sociology of the Concepts That Change Our Reality* represents a turning point for research on late Soviet discourse and philosophy in particular. Bikbov employs the method of sociohistorical semantics, tracing patterns in academic publications from the late 1950s onwards, demonstrating, for instance, a shift in the theoretical focus of various disciplines from the "construction of communism" (a popular topic in academic publications of the Stalinist era) to the "harmoniously developed personality" (a concept integral to Ilyenkov's theoretical project). This latter concept proves to be a key notion in the political language of state administration and a structuring element of the symbolic order of late Soviet life. As Bikbov shows, by the 1960s, the concept of personality became not only the foundation for the (re)creation of disciplines such as sociology or the psychology of personality, but also entered Soviet criminal law and even featured in the speeches of party leaders, thereby becoming a central component of the state's hegemonic imaginary. The sociological approach allows us to consider the concepts theorized by Ilyenkov not as expressions of mere intellectual preference, but as sites of confrontation between the conservative and reformist camps within Soviet philosophy. By taking into account the various

[25] Keti Chukhrov, "Epistemological Gaps between the Former Soviet East and the 'Democratic' West," *E-Flux* 41 (2013).

administrative mechanisms regulating the production of knowledge, this approach offers a better understanding of the specificities of late Soviet philosophy.

This method also helps to avoid the typical gesture in Soviet studies of isolating an individual author to defend the uniqueness of their work. My objective is rather to go beyond the constructed memory around Ilyenkov and to place him within the broader context of Soviet philosophical culture. This entails moving beyond the common narrative that draws a distinction between, on the one hand, the "official and dogmatic Soviet philosophy" of party cadres, and on the other, the "creative and unofficial philosophy of the Soviet period." My method aims to transcend this binary opposition between dogmatic and creative authors in order to uncover the multidimensional history of late Soviet thought.

I thus reference events outside of philosophy in order to reconstruct, with highest possible accuracy, the context in which Ilyenkov's philosophy developed. Yet, this approach is not meant to answer a generic demand of contextualization. Ilyenkov's case requires it in a specific sense. The ideological saturation of philosophy in the Soviet Union often produces confusing situations. For example, why would Ilyenkov, who aimed to rethink dialectical materialism in a new light, become a defender of dialectical logic, which at the time, united the most conservative Stalinists on the philosophical scene? It is this and other such questions that call for a broader socio-historical optic.

Antinomies of Soviet Marxism: Early debates

The central problem that Soviet philosophy engaged with in its early stages was the one formulated by Engels as the fundamental question of philosophy: the relationship between thought and being. Engels, in addressing this question, presented a historical dichotomy, dividing philosophy into two irreconcilable camps: materialist and idealist. According to his distinction, materialists derive their conceptual frameworks from nature, positing it as the ontological foundation of thought, whereas idealists invert this order, conceiving nature as a product of the subject's logical structures. As will be demonstrated, this distinction posed significant challenges for Soviet philosophers, since any attempt at emphasizing the generative nature of experience risked being dismissed as idealism.[26] As Engels wrote:

> The principles of materialism are not the starting-point of the investigation, but its final result; they are not applied to nature and human history, but abstracted from them; it is not nature and the realm of humanity which conform to these principles, but the principles are valid in so far as they are in conformity with nature and history.[27]

This formulation is polemical and aimed at countering the erroneous "applying" of pre-defined principles to history or nature by Dühring. However, Engels' own position, privileging the "abstraction" of principles from nature, equally raises critical epistemological questions: how exactly does this process of abstraction occur? How does the subject ascertain that the principles abstracted are derived from nature and not merely an ideological projection of its own categories? In other words, what guarantees the continuity between concept and object, or the concepts "conformity with nature and history"?

Engels endeavored to resolve this issue by positing an immanence of subject and object. For him, the mind does not stand in external relation to matter but is historically and ontologically continuous with it. In this framework, the distinction between thought and being is internal to

[26] Alexander Bogdanov would be one of the first Marxists deemed an idealist for this very reason. Decades later Ilyenkov would share the same fate.

[27] Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976), p. 36.

being itself. Thought cannot be dismissed as simply a byproduct of matter, yet it is not entirely separate from it either. Thus, the concept does not encounter a separation in its movement towards the object. Such a view yields a monistic image of being and thought which regards them as ultimately identical. However, this brings us to a key point of contention in both Soviet Marxism and certain currents of Western Marxism: How can we construct an immanent ontology of being and thought without reducing one to the other? In other words, how can an ontology that asserts the existence of nature independently of social being simultaneously account for the specificity of social being without dissolving it into schematized natural processes?

This tension – between rejecting dualism on the one hand, and avoiding mechanistic, biologistic, or similar reductions on the other – has been the source of significant philosophical debate within postwar Marxism.[28] The later Georg Lukács, for example, contended that a non-reductive ontology necessitates the recognition of emergent continuities across distinct strata - such as the inorganic, the organic, and the social to preserve the autonomy of each without reifying them into self-contained realms.[29] The Soviet approach to this problem was to conceptualize the mind as immanent to matter – whether physical, chemical, or organic – simultaneously affirming its irreducibility to any of these strata.

Here lies one of the key distinctions between Soviet and Western Marxism. Namely, in the former's speculative nature. While Western Marxism - with notable exceptions - gravitated towards a "materialism without matter",[30] emphasizing social and historical materiality, Soviet philosophy consistently engaged with the concept of matter in both ontological and epistemological terms. Loren Graham would highlight this aspect of Soviet Marxism:

> In the Soviet Union philosophers have not attempted to divest Marx of his interest in all of reality, including physical as well as human nature; they have not followed the

[28] "although Lukács's and Althusser's most (in)famous writings, from 1923 and 1965 respectively, both entail rejections of a dialectical materialist naturalism of self-denaturalizing human nature, each of these two Marxist thinkers, in their self-criticisms, subsequently comes to accept precisely such a naturalism." Adrian Johnston, *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism. Volume Two: A Weak Nature Alone*, *Diaeresis* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020), p. 154.

[29] See: Georg Lukács, *Prolegomena zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins, Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins*, 1. Halbband, edited by Frank Benseler (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1984).

[30] Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx* (London: New York: Verso, 1995). p. 23.

> trend elsewhere in abandoning the effort to construct comprehensive explanations of reality based on studies of nature itself. They have recognized that one of the most intellectually attractive aspects of Marxism is its explanation of the organic unity of reality; according to Marxism, man and nature are not two, but one.[31]

As Graham later observes, this insistence on the unity of "man and nature" would ultimately serve to legitimize a totalizing, authoritarian ideology. The Soviet emphasis on matter and ontology indeed contributed to the rigid ideological posture of Soviet Marxism. But does a focus on matter necessarily entail uncritical metaphysics? Soviet studies frequently approach orthodox philosophers with the primary aim of exposing their dogmatism. However, as Maja Soboleva cautions, "One does not need to be a Marxist or a sympathizer with the Soviet Union to recognize that whenever we are inclined to see purely ideological content in it, we find, upon closer examination, that this originates in some sort of legitimately philosophical rumination."[32] By tracing the theoretical underpinnings of ostensibly dogmatic positions, we can discern the genuine philosophical inquiries they sought to address. In this light, the Soviet engagement with the concept of matter - and the multiple interpretations that emerged in the early years of these debates - renders dubious the simple identification of matter/ontology with dogmatism in Marxism.

---

[31] Loren R. Graham, *Science, Philosophy and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union*, An expanded, updated and revised ed. of "Science and philosophy in the Soviet Union" (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 29-30.

[32] Maja Soboleva, "Russian Marxism and Its Philosophy: From Theory to Ideology," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Russian Thought*, ed. Marina F. Bykova, Michael N. Forster, and Lina Steiner (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), p. 287.

Soviet Marxism and The Thing-in-Itself

In the early formulations of Soviet Marxism, the category of matter was equated with the notion of external reality. This was articulated most sharply in the polemic between Alexander Bogdanov and Vladimir Lenin concerning the status of the thing-in-itself. In defending the concept against the philosophical current of empiriomonism, Lenin, along with Plekhanov, sought to redefine the thing-in-itself, divesting it of its Kantian connotations of an unknowable noumenon. Rather than signifying a reality forever beyond human cognition, it was recast as referring to an external reality existing independently of individual subjectivity, but no transcendental limitation as he claimed, impeded its cognition. Lenin made this point explicitly: "There is definitely no difference in principle between the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself, and there cannot be any such difference. The only difference is between what is known and what is not yet known."[33] Georgi Plekhanov had earlier articulated a similar viewpoint: "Thus, matter is nothing else than the totality of things-in-themselves, in so far as these things constitute the source of our sensations."[34]

However, Soviet Marxism's firm attachment to a concept of matter left it vulnerable to challenges from contemporary scientific developments. The advent of radioactivity theory, for instance, undermined the idea of matter's homogeneity as a substance, which, as Helena Sheehan points out, destabilized the ontological claims of certain materialisms.[35] Philosophers like Ernst Mach, who sought to incorporate new scientific discoveries into philosophy, quickly found themselves at odds with Marxist thinkers:

> Marxists tended to view them with implacable hostility. Indeed, they seemed to perceive them as a greater danger than the explicitly idealist and anti-scientific philosophers, accusing them of bringing idealism into science itself. They could not be forgiven for contesting the claim of materialism to be the philosophy in the closest alliance with contemporary natural science.[36]

[33] Vladimir Lenin, *Collected Works*, 4th ed., vol. 14 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 103.

[34] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works Vol. 3* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), p. 212.

[35] Helena Sheehan, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science* (London: Verso, 2017), p. 147.

[36] Sheehan. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 146.

This concern over the potential erosion of objective reality resurfaced in the debate between Lenin and Bogdanov. The latter's critical positivism, which positioned experience as the core epistemological principle, reframed the physical world as "socially-organized experience."[37] This position entailed a radical demotion of the concept of objective truth, subordinating it to the structures of socially-mediated experience. What for Lenin constituted an immutable principle of epistemological realism - objective truth as a correspondence between thought and a reality external to and independent of thought - was thereby relativized. Lenin and Plekhanov viewed Bogdanov's ideas as a veiled form of idealism that was incompatible with the scientific foundations of Marxism. Lenin went so far as to label Bogdanov's philosophy as "fideism", accusing it of denying objective reality and opening the door to religious thinking.[38]

This was a considerable accusation within the Marxist framework. Realism formed an important aspect of Marx's epistemology.[39] At no time throughout his intellectual development did Marx reject the existence of material objects outside of cognition. What distinguished Marx's realism from a purely ontological stance, however, was his insistence on the constitutive role of social practice in mediating and transforming that reality. Marx's epistemology is thus marked by a dialectical intertwining of cognition and praxis, where social practice is not merely a passive reflection of an external world but an active, generative force in the production of knowledge. Lenin, in his pre-revolutionary years, leaned heavily toward the realist side of this spectrum. In his efforts to expunge Mach's influence from Russian Marxism, Lenin reduced the role of practice to simply verifying the truth of subjective ideas. For Lenin, if practice confirmed an idea about an object, that idea could be considered valid because it accurately reflected the material world, which was defined primarily in terms of externality. This approach relegated the creative, generative role of practice to secondary importance. Practice served as a criterion for knowledge, rather than an active agent in its production. Since Lenin's later shift towards a more dialectical approach, seen in his *Philosophical Notebooks*, was never fully adopted by Stalinist philosophers, the traditional correspondence theory of truth became entrenched as the dominant epistemological framework within Russian Marxism. This ossification of Lenin's earlier realist epistemology into an

[37] Alexander Bogdanov, *Empiriomonizm (1904-1906)* (Moscow: Respublika, 2003). p. 234.

[38] Lenin, *Collected Works*. Vol. 14. p. 344.

[39] Thomas B. Bottomore, ed., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, 2. rev. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 285.

inflexible orthodoxy ensured that the dynamic, dialectical relation between thought, being and practice was obscured, leading to an entrenchment of a static conception of materialism within the Soviet philosophical tradition.

Must Science Be Dialectical?

Despite the tumultuous conditions of the Civil War (1917–1923), intellectual life following the October Revolution was marked by lively albeit often quite anti-philosophical discussions. As the civil war progressed, a lot of Bolsheviks grew increasingly frustrated with protracted philosophical discussions,[40] Lenin subsumed some of the more fashionable trends at the time under the label of "ultra-leftism". However, a kind of mechanistic materialism, characterized by scientistic sentiments, was common, enjoying considerable popularity within Bolshevik circles. Leading figures such as Bukharin and Trotsky actively propagated mechanistic interpretations in an effort to recruit natural scientists to the Marxist cause. Bukharin's ambition extended to the reduction of biological phenomena to the principles of physics and chemistry,[41] while Trotsky, addressing a congress of chemists in 1925, went so far as to declare that they were already Marxists even if they themselves were unaware of it.[42] This mechanistic orientation, while reflective of a broader tendency among Bolshevik intellectuals, nonetheless provoked intense debates regarding the foundational tenets of Marxist philosophy - specifically, the relationship between dialectical materialism and the natural sciences, as well as the status of dialectics itself as a methodological principle.[43]

One of the best known controversies of the late 1920s was the debate between the "mechanists" and the "dialecticians," which centered on the status and applicability of dialectical principles within the natural sciences. Although the debate encompassed a wide array of positions, it can, with considerable simplification, be interpreted as a struggle for

[40] David Joravsky mentions two extreme positions: In 1920, Emmanuel Enchmen (1891-1966), put forth his Theory of New Biology, "a travesty of the neuro-physiological school of psychology" (Joravsky) which rejected anything other than physiological and physical concepts, believing the 'mind' to be a fiction to suppress the proletariat. – David Joravsky, *Soviet Marxism and Natural Science: 1917-1932* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 94; Sergei Minin (1882-1962), on the other hand, sought to do away with philosophy altogether, leaving only science: "In a word the proletariat retains and must retain science, only science, but no kind of philosophy." – Sergey Minin, "Filosofiju Za Bort!," *Pod Znamenem Marksizma*, no. 5–6 (1922), p. 123, 127.

[41] Nikolay Bukharin, *Ataka*, 2nd edition (Moscow: State Publishing House, 1924), p. 150.

[42] Lev Trotsky, *Sochineniia, XXI* (Moscow: State Publishing House, 1925), p. 281.

[43] Graham, *Science, Philosophy and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union*, pp. 8-11.

academic and intellectual hegemony between competing conceptions of materialism and dialectics within the broader framework of *Diamat*.

The principal forum for these discussions, and the most important platform linking philosophical discourse to political imperatives, was the journal *Under the Banner of Marxism*, founded in 1922. Abram Deborin (Joffe), a prominent advocate of the Leninist theoretical orientation, assumed the role of editor in 1926, solidifying his influence within Soviet philosophical circles.

A central point of contention in these debates was the question of whether dialectical materialism could serve as a universal methodological framework encompassing both the natural and social sciences. The 'dialecticians' - or Deborinites - emphasized the Hegelian heritage in Marxist thought, asserting that dialectics should be elevated to a universal theory capable of grasping nature, society, and thought as interrelated and dynamic processes. In this view, the principles of dialectics were not confined to human history or social relations but were also at work within the domain of natural science. The "mechanists" opposed this stance, arguing that such a transposition of dialectical principles onto natural science was both unnecessary and misleading.

The understanding of natural science as inherently dialectical was put under question before the beginning of the debate in the context of discussions about teaching in higher education. The question was the following: Would it be effective to let non-Marxist scientists teach students or must they adopt Marxism as a prerequisite? The physicist and philosopher Arkady Timiryasev (1880–1955), a leading mechanist, contended that natural scientists did not require philosophical training because their empirical practice already aligned spontaneously with the principles of dialectical materialism. In contrast, proponents of the Deborinite camp, such as the philosopher Solomon Gonikman (1897–1979), maintained the primacy of philosophical knowledge and argued that Hegel's dialectics provided the foundational structure for any rigorous understanding of scientific phenomena.[44] The two factions thus formed along the dividing line between two conceptions of dialectical materialism: For the scientistically-minded mechanists *Diamat* was an explicit formulation of the implicit methodology of natural science.[45] As Lyubov Axelrod (1868-1946), another leading mechanist, would claim:

[44] Solomon Gonikman, "Uchenie Gegelia o 'Deistvitel'nosti,'" *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* 3 (1924).

[45] In this vein, one of the leading Marxists in Soviet Ukraine, Semyon Semkovskii (1882-1937), would claim in 1924 that Einstein's theory of relativity was a form of dialectical materialism in physics. Interestingly enough, that same position would be tactically used on the Deborin side by Boris Hessen.

"dialectics must receive *the content of contemporary science.* The simple transmission of some well-known Hegelian propositions is devoid of any serious significance."[46] Deborin for his part stated the conflict in the following way:

> We demand the re-working of the new data in each field of knowledge from the point of view of materialist dialectics, while various 'critics', often without being aware of it, are inclined towards the 're-working' of dialectical materialism from the point of view of *particular* facts, of a *particular* science…[47]

Although Deborin's position would ultimately prevail during the Stalinist period, when the imposition of a rigid "dialectical" orthodoxy placed all scientific disciplines under strict ideological oversight, Deborin himself would be condemned yet spared from execution.[48]

[46] Lyubov Akselrod, "Otvet na 'Nashi raznoglasiia' A. Deborina," *Krasnaia nov*, no. 5 (1927), p. 144.

[47] Abram Deborin, "Engel's i Dialekticheskoe Ponimanie Prirody," *Pod Zn. Marks*, no. 10–11 (1925), p. 5.

[48] Stalin is reported to have said the following in a meeting with philosophers: "In my view, Deborin is a hopeless case, but he should remain as editor of [Under the Banner of Marxism] so we'll have someone to beat." - Ross Wolfe, "Hegel and Stalinism: The Murder of Jan Sten," *The Charnel-House*, https://thecharnelhouse.org/2024/08/13/hegel-and-stalinism-the-murder-of-jan-sten/.

Spinoza after the October revolution

If the controversy on dialectics placed Hegel on the stand, the one on materialism summoned Spinoza. In fact, Plekhanov suggested a philosophical lineage tracing Marx's materialism directly back to Spinoza. He asserted that Spinoza's doctrine of substance, which he equated with matter, offered a correct solution to the problem of the relationship between matter and thought. This view was notably reinforced by Plekhanov's anecdotal recollection of a personal conversation with Engels in London in 1899, where to his question on the validity of Spinoza's substance monism Engels replied: "Of course… old Spinoza was quite right."[49] Plekhanov's interest in Spinoza was primarily metaphysical and laid the ground for an ontological interpretation that would remain hegemonic (although not uncontested) in official Soviet Marxism until its end.[50] Yet Plekhanov was not the only Russian Marxist displaying an interest in Spinoza. At least four major strands of Soviet Spinozism have been identified: Plekhanov and his students (led by Deborin), the so-called Mechanists, the Stalinist "orthodox" Marxists and the "revisionists."[51]

Plekhanov's followers A. Deborin (1881-1963), N. Karev (1901-1936), I. Luppol (1896-1943), J. Sten (1899-1937) and L. Mankovski (1900-1964) continued the ontological line, advancing a strict demarcation between Spinoza's materialist content and his theological form, which they regarded as mere rhetorical camouflage necessitated by the ideological constraints of Spinoza's era.[52] In their efforts to assimilate Spinoza within a Marxist framework, they reconstructed him as an atheist materialist whose doctrine of substance prefigured Marx's own materialist conception of history. With the help of Plekhanov's political standing, this amalgamation of Spinozian monism, Hegelian dialectics and Engels' *Naturphilosophie* determined the subsequent evolution of Soviet philosophy. But it did so through a militant

[49] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works Vol. 2* (Progress Publishers, 1976), p. 339.

[50] Spinoza's political doctrine, on the other hand, was the subject of choice for Russian non-Marxists. See: George L. Kline, ed., *Spinoza in Soviet Philosophy a Series of Essays* (London: Routledge, 2021); Justin Steinberg, "Russian Marxism and the Materialist Interpretation of Spinoza," in *The History and Philosophy of Materialism*, ed. Charles Wolfe and John Symons (London: Routledge 2024), 351–63.

[51] As Kline notes, these labels are not accurate descriptions of the philosophers they were attached to. Yet these were the terms that historically were employed in relation to these groups and I continue to use them here for that reason.

[52] Lev Mankovski, *Spinoza i Materializm* (Moscow: State Publishing House, 1930), p. 46.

confrontation with those readings that did not end up in the official canon. The Mechanists, for example, held that Spinoza's religious language was not external to his materialism and could not be explained away in the manner of Mankovski, but rather rejected, in order to realize the full potential of the *principle of conformity to law*. This principle served to strengthen the argument of the intelligibility of matter, fundamental for Soviet dialectical materialism. The task was of utmost importance. In her work on Spinoza's materialism, Lyubov Axelrod argued that the correct understanding of his philosophy was crucial to the development of dialectical materialism.[53]

The so-called orthodox camp, headed by M. Mitin, criticized the "contemplative" nature of Spinoza's materialism, the absence of motion in the attributes of his substance and the ahistorical character of his metaphysics.[54] Despite these criticisms, Stalinist theorists did not discard Spinoza but rather redefined him as an ally in the ideological struggle against religion, a figure who could be mobilized for the atheistic campaigns of the Stalinist regime. The efforts of orthodox Marxists were later aided by A. Lunacharsky, who in his *Baruch Spinoza and the Bourgeoisie* argued that: "There is not the slightest share of clericalism or monasticism in Spinoza."[55]

The suppression of alternative interpretations culminated in the eventual Stalinization of Soviet philosophy. The Deborinites, who had initially achieved a temporary victory over the Mechanists in the early 1930s, were soon denounced as "Menshevizing idealists," while the Mechanists were criticized for their "vulgar" reductionism. Both groups were marginalized, with many of their members persecuted or executed during the purges. It has been claimed that the 1925-1932 debates around Spinoza were not conflicts between mutually exclusive readings but essentially "differences of emphasis."[56] Yet, as Soboleva argues, an exception must be made for one member of the "revisionist" camp, namely Bogdanov, who vigorously opposed Plekhanov's interpretation of Spinoza and proposed an alternative monist materialism based on a synthesis of Spinozian and Kantian elements with Empiricism and Marxism.

---

[53] Lyubov Akselrod, "Spinoza i Matetializm," *Krasnaia Nov*, no. 7 (1925), p. 144.

[54] Mark Mitin, "Spinoza i Dialekticheski Materializm," *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* I I-I 2 (1932), p. 173.

[55] Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Barukh Spinoza i Burzhuaziya," *Zhurnal'no- Gazetnoe Ob''edinenie* (1933), p. 1.

[56] Kline, *Spinoza in Soviet Philosophy a Series of Essays*, p. 18.

Bogdanov challenged Plekhanov's identification of Spinoza's substance to matter, pointing to the polysemic nature of the concept, which does not possess an unchanging meaning but rather morphs in relation to different social and historical contexts, making it impossible to equate early modern and 20th century usages with each other.[57] The main features identified in Bogdanov's criticism of Plekhanov's Spinozism concern the narrowing down of the thesis on the unity of substance to the one on the parallelism of attributes, the attribution of thinking to matter in general and the absolutization of the concept of matter as the thing-in-itself.[58] On the matter of Spinozism, Plekhanov did not respond.[59]

Besides the identification of Spinoza's substance to matter by Plekhanov, Bogdanov also criticized Lenin's identification of matter with "objective reality". This move, Bogdanov claimed, dogmatized materialism by relegating consciousness to a mere copy of the external world. After developing a materialist philosophy that claimed a monist position while rejecting "dialectics of nature" and the theory of reflection, Bogdanov dismissed Plekhanov's metaphysics of a world beyond consciousness. One of the consequences of his intervention was, as mentioned above, the loss of the ontological status of truth. If a world beyond individual consciousness could no longer serve as the reference to which the latter would correspond to, then truth had no objective value. Instead, as Bogdanov writes:

> Truth expresses the relationship of the human collective to the things of its experience. The power or value of truth derives from the fact that it is crystallized social experience.[60]

Yet instead of rejecting any sort of objectivity, Bogdanov sought objectivity in collective experience, differentiating it from an individual, subjective one. This emphasis on collective

---

[57] Aleksandr Bogdanov, "Predely Nauchnosti Rassuzhdenija," *Vestnik Kommunisticheskoj Akademii*, no. 21 (1927), p. 262.

[58] Maja Soboleva, "Marxism as Spinozism? One Episode in the History of Soviet Philosophy," *Studies in East European Thought* 74, no. 3 (September 2022), pp. 325-236.

[59] Daniela Steila, "Interpretations of Spinoza in Early Russian Marxism," *Studies in East European Thought* 74, no. 3 (September 2022), p. 289.

[60] Aleksandr Bogdanov, *The Philosophy of Living Experience: Popular Outlines*, Historical Materialism Book Series, volume 111 (Leiden Boston: Brill, 2016), p. 101.

experience marked a decisive shift from the individualist epistemology of the theory of reflection and aligned more closely with Marx's own focus on the social nature of human cognition.[61] Ironically, it was precisely this emphasis on collectivity that would later be deployed against Bogdanov in the campaign to discredit his philosophical contributions.[62]

The debates of the 1920s - initially marked by genuine theoretical inquiry - would give way to a dogmatic orthodoxy that foreclosed further exploration of the relationship between dialectics and scientific practice, reducing *Diamat* to a rigid framework of political control rather than a living philosophy of praxis.

[61] Soboleva, "Russian Marxism and Its Philosophy", p. 280.

[62] In November of 1921, in Pravda, an article by Bukharin titled "For the congress of Proletkult" singled out a small platform within Proletkult called "We - the collectivists" and accused it of Bogdanovite Menshevism. The platform, inspired by Bogdanov's pre-revolutionary ideas on collective cognition, was presented by Bukharin as bearing the general spirit of Proletkult, thus identifying Menshevism with the whole institution. The critique of Bogdanov was renewed in the campaign against Proletkult in the 1920s with the publication of the second edition of *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*. In the two prefaces, Lenin and V.I. Nevsky respectively mounted a parallel attack on Bogdanov and Proletkult. Bukharin contributed to the campaign with an article in Pravda (November 1921). 1922 saw the publication of the third volume of Bogdanov's *Tektology*, widely considered as the precursor of cybernetics and systems theory. Yet, without much consideration, the book was branded as idealist and simply a new articulation of the old *Empiriomonism*. - Alla Morozova, *"Neleninskij bol'ševizm" A.A. Bogdanova i "vperedovcev": idei, al'ternativy, praktika* (Moskva Sankt-Peterburg: Nestor-istoriâ, 2020), p. 463.

The scholastic dialectics of Stalinism

From 1930, discussions in Soviet philosophy took a sharply authoritarian character. The process of the active Stalinization of philosophy, of establishing "Stalin as the coryphaeus of philosophical science,"[63] was initiated in 1930 with the publication of a pivotal article in *Pravda* authored by three "orthodox Marxists," Mark Mitin, Pavel Yudin, and Vassily Ral'tsevich, collectively known as the "troika." This article, entitled "On the New Tasks of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy," received the explicit endorsement of the newspaper's editorial board and primarily targeted the Deborinites. The latter were criticized for inactivity in the effort of exposing Trotskyists, creating a gap between theory and practice and displaying a yielding attitude towards idealism. The first article was followed by a whole series of hit-pieces that began the campaign against Deborin under the title of "bolshevizing" philosophy.

If Deborinites and Mechanists debated fundamental questions of materialism, the new philosophical elite, headed by Mitin and Yudin, focused on accusations of counterrevolutionary activity and sabotage.[64] Having effectively destroyed the Deborinite camp, Mitin launched an attack on the Mechanists. 1931 saw the transformation of the communist journal *Under the Banner of Marxism* into a platform for witch-hunts against "subversives." Mechanists were accused of theorizing "right wing opportunism," and covertly propagating bourgeois ideology. Considering the penalties these charges carried, the ritualized letters of self-criticism that followed do not appear surprising.

[63] In his 1956 letter to the Presidium to the Central Committee of the CPSU, Deborin recalled the moment Mitin and Yudin visited his apartment and demanded that he officially recognize Stalin as "the coryphaeus of philosophical science." Sergey Korsakov, "Bor'ba Akademika A. M. Deborina Za Nauchnuyu i Obshchestvennuyu Reabilitaciyu: Povest' v Dokumentakh i Svidetel'stvakh," *Filosofskij Zhurnal* 1, no. 12 (2014). p. 132. Marina Bykova states that Stalin's position was recognized as "philosophical leadership" officially endorsed by the Party Central Committee in January 1931." Marina F. Bykova, "Stalin and Philosophy in Soviet Russia," in *Stalin Era Intellectuals*, by Vesa Oittinen and Elina Viljanen, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2022), p. 53.

[64] Yehoshua Yakhot, "The 'Leninist Stage' in Soviet Philosophy," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 20, no. 3 (October 1979), pp. 303–8.

The creation of the so-called Leninist stage in philosophy, orchestrated by the central committee and executed by Mitin, paradoxically erased Lenin from Soviet philosophy by simply invoking his name without engaging with his works. As Yakhot writes:

> At this time, all of philosophy was being refashioned according to Stalin's yardstick. In the program for dialectical materialism published in 1937, Lenin is hardly mentioned. Stalin dominates. In the list of literature recommended for various topics, there is not a single work by Lenin; students are advised to read only Stalin and … Beria. In two places a joint anthology by Lenin and Stalin is listed, but there are no separate works by Lenin. The mask had finally been cast aside. Lenin's denigration was patently clear."[65]

The real effect on the Stalinization of philosophy on Soviet materialism can be found in the works of Stalin himself, namely, the infamous fourth chapter of the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Short Course)* published in 1938. This short chapter came to determine the coordinates of philosophical materialism in the Soviet Union until the condemnation of the cult of personality at the 20th congress. In it, Stalin opposed materialism to idealism and dialectics to metaphysics. Dialectics and materialism were identified with the worldview of the party, henceforth functioning as ideologemes with meanings as shifting as the party line itself. The substantial questions of dialectical materialism such as becoming, development, interconnection, contradiction and nonreduction, were schematized as universal laws, allowing for a supposedly exact science of society. The dialectical in Stalin's *Diamat* did not come from Hegel. If for Lenin, the study of Hegel's *Logic* was indispensable for

[65] Yehoshua Yakhot, *The Suppression of Philosophy in the USSR (the 1920s & 1930s)* (Oak Park: Mehring Books, 2012), p. 322. This account has been challenged by David Bakhurst, who argued that Lenin's works were more present in the curricula then Yakhot noted. See: David Bakhurst, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy: From the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov*, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 95. Nonetheless, it is without doubt that the Leninist stage aimed to strengthen the cult of Stalin as the sole worthy student of Lenin. In his article summarizing the advances made in 1932, Yudin described Stalin as "an outstanding dialectician" and the guarantor of the bright future for the Soviet Union. In his *Militant Problems of Materialist Dialectics*, published in 1936, Mitin praised Stalin for his superficial report on the agrarian question.

understanding Marx's *Capital*, Stalin accused Hegel's philosophy of being too aristocratic and omitted the negation of the negation from his list of dialectical laws.

The doctrinal reconfiguration of Hegelian dialectics reached its apogee in the philosophical debates of the 1940s. In 1942, the third volume of the famous Soviet textbook *History of Philosophy* was published. But unlike the previous two volumes, which had been published before the war with Germany, the number of copies received by bookshops was remarkably small, and much of the edition was simply destroyed.[66] The reason for this was stated in the resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party published in the journal *Bolshevik* under the title "Deficiencies and errors in the demonstration of the history of German philosophy of the 18th and 19th centuries."[67] It stated that the authors had not sufficiently demonstrated Hegel's "reactionary reasoning," and that the difference between his dialectic and that of Marx had been overlooked. The ideological constraints imposed on the interpretation of the history of philosophy rendered genuine philosophical inquiry impossible. Instead, a mechanical form of scholasticism - dominated by the practices of citationism and the exposure of heretical deviations - supplanted critical engagement. Philosophical practice became subordinated to the demands of ideological conformity, with Stalin's interventions reducing complex philosophical questions to simplistic antinomies, thereby emptying the dialectical method of its critical, self-reflective character. In this sense, the transformation of Soviet philosophy under Stalin must be understood not merely as an institutional or political reconfiguration but as a profound epistemic break.

[66] Vladimir Esakov, "K Isrorii Filosofskoi Diskusii 1947 Goda," *Voprosi Filosofii*, no. 3 (1993), p. 86.

[67] Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, "O nedostatkakh i oshibkakh v osveshchenii istorii nemeckoi filosofii konca XVIII i nachala XIX vekov," *Bolshevik*, 1944, 6–7 edition, p. 15.

The "Thaw": metaphor, event

Evald Ilyenkov is often depicted as a prominent representative of the "sixtiers" generation, symbolizing the free-thinking spirit of the Soviet Thaw. These contextualizing narratives often end up simplifying his relation to his period by regarding the Thaw as a fixed event or clean break, while in fact, it largely remains a problem. Rather than marking a clear discontinuity with late Stalinism, the Thaw represents an ongoing subject of debate within Soviet historiography, with scholars in disagreement over its precise relation to the broader dynamics of historical change and continuity. To properly situate Ilyenkov within this contentious historiographical landscape, it is necessary to engage with the scholarly literature surrounding the Thaw and its key intellectual agents, the *Shestidesiatniki* (Sixtiers).

The metaphor of the Thaw [*Ottepel'*] that came to designate the late 1950s and 1960s in the Soviet Union was borrowed from Ilya Ehrenburg's 1954 novel with the same title, published in the literary journal *Novy Mir*.[68] The metaphor suggested a sense of change, hope, awakening and renewal that followed the death of Stalin in March 1953. The affective dimension reflected the political one, as the Thaw saw major reforms and transformations. Besides the more well-known moments like Khrushchev's 1956 "secret speech" denouncing the cult of Stalin, the Thaw witnessed other attempts at rethinking the political violence of the past. In 1961, the Third Program of the CPSU abandoned the formula "dictatorship of the proletariat" in favor of "all-peoples state" and stressed socialist self-government over top-down administration. Concrete events within the Thaw include:

> …the mass exculpation of political prisoners, the open reassessment of society's fundamental principles, the immense diversification of language and the overall cultural landscape, as well as the government-sponsored opening to the West.[69]

[68] *Novy Mir* would become the main platform of reform-oriented literature. In 1962, the journal published Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's "One day in the life of Ivan Denisovich" that recounted the life of a prisoner in a gulag.

[69] Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd, eds., *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, Repr. in paperback (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), p. 27.

For these and other reasons,[70] Kozlov and Gilburd claim, borrowing a term from the French historian Michel Vovelle, that the Thaw can be understood as a "constitutive event", as it inaugurated a plurality of novel practices and intellectual paradigms. However, this period is also characterized by affects that the metaphor of the Thaw might obscure, such as anxiety and uncertainty. These are usually linked to the moments of the Thaw that reveal continuity with late Stalinism, rather than a rupture. Such moments include, among others, the persistence of productivism at the expense of welfare,[71] continuing repression and surveillance[72] and violation of socialist legality.[73] Anatoly Pinsky offers a long bibliography of works that emphasize continuity "without ignoring change."[74] Interestingly, this scholarship focuses more on the experience and perceptions of the lower classes, rather than the intelligentsia. This would suggest that a markedly optimistic view of the Thaw was concentrated mainly in the intelligentsia and had little effect outside it. As Sheila Fitzpatrick argues: "In the meagre sources available on lower-class Soviet opinion, one looks in vain not only for references to the Thaw but also for recognition that any such significant socio-political phenomenon existed."[75] This event is hence incomprehensible without looking at its protagonists.

[70] "The year 1956 alone witnessed Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' at the Twentieth Party Congress, uprisings in Poland, the Hungarian Revolution, the release of exiled nationalities, the publication and triumphant reception of Vladimir Dudintsev's novel Not by Bread Alone, the Picasso exhibition, and Yves Montand's visit to Moscow – so many events that historians now devote separate studies to this year alone. In 1957 followed the Moscow Youth Festival and the launch of Sputnik." – Kozlov and Gilburd, *The Thaw*, p. 31.

[71] Katerina Clark, "'Wait for Me and I Shall Return': The Early Thaw as a Reprise of Late Thirties Culture?" in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s* (University of Toronto Press Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2013), p. 88.

[72] Kozlov and Gilburd, *The Thaw*, p. 22.

[73] Brian LaPierre, *Hooligans in Khrushchev's Russia: Defining, Policing, and Producing Deviance during the Thaw* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), p. 6.

[74] Anatoly Pinsky, "Soviet Modernity Post-Stalin: The State, Emotions, and Subjectivities," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 16, no. 2 (March 2015), p. 396.

[75] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Afterword: The Thaw in Retrospect," in *The Thaw*, by Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd (University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 486.

The Other 1960s

The term "sixtiers," originally coined by Stanislav Rassadin in 1960, emerged as a designation for a new genre of youth fiction that had gained prominence at the close of the 1950s. However, the Russian term *Shestidesiatniki* carried a deeper historical resonance, referring to the radical intelligentsia of the 1860s. This earlier, 19th century cohort of *Shestidesiatniki* was epitomized in the figure of Evgeny Bazarov, the nihilist hero of Ivan Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons*. Bazarov came to embody the defining characteristics of independent thought, defiance of authority and self-sacrifice - traits that resonated within the revolutionary ethos of Russian utopian socialism. Such qualities would later be reanimated in the image of the new intellectual emerging in the post-Stalinist period, one who navigated the tension between dissent from Stalinist despotism and a continued commitment to the foundational principles of socialism. Central to this new generation's self-conception was the project of democratizing state socialism, often through a return to Lenin's legacy, distorted during the Stalinist years. This double-sided orientation positioned the sixtiers as both critics of the Stalinist autocracy and proponents of the broader socialist project - an ambivalence that rendered them suspect in the eyes of the anti-communist dissidents of the 1970s, who perceived them as politically naïve, and later generations, for whom they appeared anachronistic and irrelevant. Their aspirations for a non-capitalist alternative to Stalinism were seen as utopian, if not "complicit" with the oppressive regime. Sometimes called "brave within the allowed limits,"[76] these urban intellectuals, artists, writers, musicians and philosophers appeared infantile to the following generation, raised in the grey days of Brezhnev-era stagnation.

Whatever the meaning of the term - creative and audacious, or uncritical and compromising - the sixtiers and their time constitute the most under-researched period in Soviet studies: "It was as if historians presumed the Soviet order to have taken final shape by the late 1930s, perhaps by the end of the Second World War at the latest, viewing the subsequent decades as a postscript."[77] The prevalence of historical scholarship that stressed continuity over change between late Stalinism and the Thaw contributed to this forgetting.

---

[76] Dmitrij Bykov, *Šestidesjatniki: literaturnye portrety*, Žizn′ zamečatel′nych ljudej Serija biografij, vypusk 1922 (1722) (Moskva: Molodaja gvardija, 2019), p. 8.

[77] Kozlov and Gilburd, *The Thaw,* p. 23.

As with historical writing, post-Stalin era Soviet philosophy has been of equally little interest. "I haven't read it, but I condemn it!" - a common exclamation for Soviet Marxists has dialectically returned against them, as their intellectual legacy remains "highly contested, yet poorly researched".[78] Historical-philosophical scholarship on the late Soviet period, which comprises the post-Stalin Thaw, the stagnation and the Perestroika, is ridden with Cold War paradigms that present the time as a monolith, hiding from view the concrete, heterogenous perspectives that claimed anti-capitalism while struggling against Stalinism.

Interestingly, this disregard was not limited to anti-communist scholars. Western left-wing intellectuals demonstrated a marked disinterest in serious engagement with Soviet theoretical currents. While the radicalism and revolutionary fervor of the 1960s in the West have been mythologized as a period of unparalleled creativity and political experimentation, the Soviet 1960s garnered comparatively little attention, despite the fact that contemporary witnesses even likened the atmosphere to the euphoric spirit of the February Revolution of 1917.[79] Yet, emblematic figures of Western Marxist thought were quick to dismiss these developments. Louis Althusser notoriously referred to the late Soviet turn towards the young Marx's anthropology as "no more than ashes, *theoretically*",[80] while Theodor Adorno remarked that dialectics in the Soviet Union had been transformed into a kind of "state religion".[81] It is not our aim here to defend Soviet Marxism against these critiques - some of them well-founded - but rather to indicate that beyond the homogenous authoritarian discourse that was Stalinist *Diamat*, late Soviet Marxism presented a wide array of theoretical perspectives that are often in contradiction with the hegemonic doctrine. These perspectives underwent a multitude of failures, exemplified most vividly by the crushing of the Prague spring in 1968. Yet, that a concrete experience of resistance ends in failure does not mean that nothing took place, or that it offers no lesson. The historiography of the Thaw reveals the necessity of understanding it not as a singular, fixed event, but a heterogeneous process marked by overlapping temporalities and contradictory experiences. The juxtaposition of change and continuity, optimism and disorientation, suggests that the Thaw was hardly a definitive departure from Stalinism. The

[78] Alex Levant, "E.V. Ilyenkov and Creative Soviet Theory: An Introduction to 'Dialectics of the Ideal,'" *Historical Materialism* 20, no. 2 (2012), pp. 125-26.

[79] Fitzpatrick, "Afterword", p. 484.

[80] Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (Allen Lane, 1969), p. 157.

[81] Theodor W. Adorno, *An Introduction to Dialectics: 1958* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), p. 54.

question of whether Ilyenkov's philosophy can be adequately read as a product of this epoch is hence not an easy one.

The Myth of Two Philosophies

The most significant development in Soviet philosophical culture between 1945 and 1952 was the establishment of a new journal, *Voprosi Filosofii* [Questions of Philosophy] (founded in 1947), which replaced *Under the Banner of Marxism* (discontinued in 1944) as the primary philosophical journal. A thorough reform of Soviet philosophical thought, however, did not occur until after Stalin's death in 1953 and the subsequent denunciation of his cult of personality at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in 1956. This period, marked by the condemnation of Stalin's purges and the revision of many previous convictions, heralded a rise in philosophical output. As Evert Van der Zweerde reports:

> The number of professional philosophers grew from some 1,500 in 1955 to some 7,000 in 1967, and doubled to 14,000 over the following eight years... The trend in the output of candidate's dissertations increased from 66 in 1947 to 234 in 1953... The output of doctoral dissertations showed an even greater increase.[82]

This expansion was part of a broader trend of growing academic education and professionalization within the Soviet Union, but it also reflected a renewed interest in philosophical inquiry. The sixtiers, often referred to as the "children of the 20th Congress", confronted the crisis of official Marxism-Leninism. In doing so, they frequently faced marginalization as they challenged the entrenched philosophical orthodoxy. Many gained a degree of autonomy from ideological constraints by specializing in the history of philosophy.

However, the divide between these younger thinkers and the established Soviet philosophical authorities should not be overstated, in order to avoid reproducing the dualist narrative mentioned above, which draws a sharp distinction between the dogmatic "Soviet philosophy" of party officials (e.g., P.N. Fedoseyev, F.V. Konstantinov, M.T. Iovchuk) and the more creative, independent "philosophy of the Soviet period" (e.g., E.V. Ilyenkov, M.K. Mamardashvili). While this reading reflects real conflicts among Soviet philosophers, such a

[82] Evert Van Der Zweerde, *Soviet Historiography of Philosophy*, vol. 57, Sovietica (Dordrecht: Springer, 1997), p.40.

binary oversimplifies the complex and interconnected nature of the intellectual circles. As Guseinov observes:

> …those were the trends and aspects of one and the same intellectual community that intertwined and influenced each other. Individuals exemplifying those trends worked on the same projects, co-authored the same texts, and that such podia of innovative philosophical thought as *The Philosophical Encyclopedia* and, for many years, the journal *Voprosy filosofii* [Questions of Philosophy] were under the most dogmatic of philosophical dogmatists.[83]

Some distinctions can be attributed to institutional settings. As Loren Graham notes, the divide between ontological and epistemological approaches in the sixties reflected the differing emphases between official university teaching, which remained dominated by ontological materialism, and the more research-oriented opportunities at the Academy of Sciences, where more nuanced positions could be explored, albeit with limited influence on educational practices.

Yet, despite the persistence of old *Diamat* as the hegemonic framework, it was increasingly challenged in fields such as methodology, science studies (*Naukovedenie*), logic, and epistemology. Figures such as Ilyenkov and Alexander Zinoviev (1922–2006) contributed to these internal critiques, while philosophers like Merab Mamardashvili (1930–1990), Vladimir Bibler (1918–2000), and Piama Gaidenko (1934–2021), pushed the boundaries of Soviet philosophical thought in new directions.

In the first chapter, I will attempt to deconstruct the metaphysical categories mobilized in postwar Soviet Marxism by historicizing their emergence and contextualizing their usage in the larger political conjuncture. The privileged object of this chapter will be dialectical logic, admittedly an exotic concept for contemporary readers. Yet it was in the framework of dialectical logic that Ilyenkov sought to reconcile ontology and epistemology in Marxism. As this historical reconstruction will make clear, dialectical logic was the name of a multiplicity of theories, as well as ideological operations. While some of those were mere tools for reinforcing one's own authority, others, like Ilyenkov's own interpretation, aimed to maintain Soviet philosophy's emphasis on antagonisms and contradictions in the period of political

[83] Guseynov, "The Philosophy of the Russian Sixtiers in the Humanist Context", p. 91.

stabilization. I will identify a *period of normalization* beginning after the end of the war and lasting until Stalin's death, when a series of party directives introduced theoretical imperatives aimed at pacifying internal conflicts in the Soviet Union. My discussion will cover two early texts by Ilyenkov, which would set the stage for his lifelong project. I will read these texts in the light of political developments of the time. I evoke as expressions of normalization, among other moments, Stalin's intervention in Soviet linguistics, which displaced the class-principle in favour of the notion of "universally human", the abandoning of the dual science (bourgeois and proletarian) paradigm, as well as the transition to the automation of Soviet production, which created a demand for formal quantitative methodologies.

However, I am not only interested in intellectual history. My goal is rather to see what remains relevant *theoretically* from this inexistent discipline. In this sense, I bring into discussion the Hegelian origins of dialectical logic, the modes of reading it by Engels and Dietzgen and philosophical surveys of its Soviet version by the so-called Western Sovietologists. Most importantly, I argue that dialectical logic is not, as is commonly held, Engels' contraband in Marxism. Instead, Marx himself aimed to contribute to such a logic, as we will see towards the end of the chapter.

Chapter I

Dialectical Logic

Politics of the absolute: Spinoza, Hegel, Marx

Based on the above reconstruction of Soviet Marxism, we could define the latter as the philosophy that strives to synthesize Hegel with Spinoza in order to achieve what Anton Syutkin calls the "politics of the absolute",[84] where substance and subject coincide, with the result of this coincidence hypostasizing neither of the two terms. Not a total substance that engulfs the subject as its individual expression, nor an expanded subject that envelops the substance as its own other, but rather a generative substance and an autonomous subject coexisting in an immanent unity. Such a synthesis means an epistemological recognition of the irreducibility of thought to being with an ontological understanding of the immanence of being itself. In this sense, Soviet Marxism is the materialist heir of German idealism, navigating and often reproducing in its own style the same pitfalls between subjectivism and ontologism, irrationalism and panlogism that animated the conflicts between Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and the romantics. Following Engels, the Soviets valued Spinoza for having mended the Cartesian split which had bifurcated the world into two distinct substances: an autonomous, self-determining soul, and a passive, inert body. The Spinozian "parallelism" that reconciled thought with extension provided the Soviets with an ontological grounding of their emerging materialism. Following Marx, the Soviets attributed to Hegel the break with the hyperstable cosmology of Newtonian mechanics,[85] the fundamental stasis and self-sameness of everything

[84] Anton Syutkin, "Marksistskaya kontrreformatsiya: Absolyut i istoriya v materialisticheskoy dialektike Mikhaila Lifshitsa," *Neprikosnovennyy zapas* 2, no. 148 (2023), p. 10.

[85] I mention Newton here in the same way he was understood by Soviet philosophers, that is, as an antipode to a dialectical worldview, which does not align with his own metaphysics. See: McGuire, J.

existing. With Hegel, the ontotheology of a univocity fixed in God became split open by negativity that animated the "inanimate" substance-subject. Therefore, Soviet philosophers argued, Hegel's dialectic could be embedded in Spinoza's substance to account for the relation between its attributes, introducing motion, tension and contradiction in what otherwise appeared an immutable absolute. Doing this from a Marxist perspective implied several correctives, such as the replacement of negativity with labor, logical contradictions with "real oppositions", etc. These questions will be taken up in this chapter.

Our periodization of Soviet Marxist philosophy can be summarized in the context of the above definition. Syutkin offers a noteworthy effort in this direction. As he recounts, the early debates end in the triumph of the identification of the absolute with matter, transforming Marxism into a philosophy of nature. Through a set of evolutionary phases, nature produces the subject as its own self-reflection. The I is derived from the not-I. The problem with this solution consists in the deflation of the autonomy of the subject and obfuscation of the possibility for change:

> Dialectical materialism speaks of nature unfolding according to dialectical laws, but says nothing about the change of the world. Or, to be more precise, change of the world occurs within the framework of Soviet dialectical materialism, but it is a "law" of this world, its positive property.[86]

Even the event of the October revolution, in such a view, becomes the expression of an inherent law of matter in movement. The dialectics of nature are transposed to history with no change in genesis, content or structure, effectively eradicating the place of political practice.

Stalin's "revolution from above" represents the further de-politicization of dialectics by linking the decisions of the party to the objective laws of the absolute, famously exemplified by the Bolshevik principle of partisanship [*partiinost*'] in philosophy. In this framework, it was the party and later the figure of Stalin himself that expressed the universal point of view of matter. Yet, Stalinism, especially in its later form, restored Russian imperial culture, rather than any form of universality.

E., and P. M. Rattansi. "Newton and the 'Pipes of Pan.'" *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 21, no. 2 (1966), pp. 108–43.

[86] Syutkin, "Marksistskaya kontrreformatsiya" p. 12.

When we get to the Thaw and Ilyenkov in light of the history presented here, we are tempted to read the latter's critique of Soviet *Diamat* as a subjectivist correction to an ontology that deified matter and appointed the party as its prophet. That is the route Syutkin takes, likening Ilyenkov's later emphasis on practice in the context of Soviet Activity Theory to a restoration of Fichteanism in Soviet Marxism:

> A critique of dynamic Spinozism from a Marxist position can lead to the rehabilitation of Fichteanism. In other words, the refusal to identify the Absolute with natural substance entails the risk of absolutizing the activity of the collective human subject.[87]

Instead, the author claims, siding with the position of the Soviet philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Lifshitz, transformative activity in Ilyenkov must be situated in a larger ontological framework:

> The transformative activity of man, so highly valued by "creative" Marxists, is indeed important, but as a self-reflection of nature. On this basis, Lifshitz gives his own interpretation of Marx's eleventh thesis of Feuerbach: man should not change the world, but help the world that changes itself.[88]

While I follow Syutkin's reconstruction of Soviet Marxism, his view of Ilyenkov's intervention, seen through the lens of Lifshitz, classifies Ilyenkov as a subjectivist based on only one aspect of the latter's philosophy. Granted, any de-absolutization of one term in a dialectical unity could lead to a re-absolutization of the other. De-absolutizing the substance *could* re-absolutize the subject. But is this what Ilyenkov had in mind? Or more importantly, is this what he ended up with? The question of substance or subject for Ilyenkov was not that of emphasis, but determined the possibility of philosophy as such. To limit Ilyenkov's intervention in Soviet Marxism to the passage from the derivation of the I from the not-I to a derivation of the not-I from the I does not do justice to his position. For Ilyenkov, a philosophy that absolutized nature, or matter in Soviet terms, transformed

[87] Syutkin, "Marksistskaya kontrreformatsiya" p. 13.

[88] Syutkin, "Marksistskaya kontrreformatsiya" p. 15.

philosophy into an "abstract restatement of science",[89] which, to Ilyenkov's mind, was no philosophy at all. His own position in regards to this question, I believe, can be found in an early text, the "Theses on the subject of philosophy", to which I now turn.

[89] Monika Woźniak and Andrzej W. Nowak, "Fighting for Philosophy in the Marxian Sense: Introduction to Evald Ilyenkov's "On the State of Philosophy [Letter to the Central Committee of the Party]," *Studies in East European Thought* 76, no. 3 (September 2024), p. 547.

Soviet philosophy as a metascience

In May 1954, at the department of the history of foreign philosophy of Moscow State University (MGU), Ilyenkov, along with his friend and fellow student Valentin Korovikov, publicly (around 200 attendees) defended the "Theses on the object of philosophy."[90] The question tackled in the theses was at the core of Soviet Marxist theory. Before passing to Ilyenkov's view on the subject, a brief look of the party's general line on this issue is in order.

At the time of Ilyenkov's intervention, Soviet philosophers understood the object of their study as nothing less than "the world as a whole".[91] If particular sciences concerned themselves with different fractions of the world, philosophy rose above them as the universal science of the *laws of development of nature, society and thought*. From this definition of what philosophy is, Soviet Marxists derived the idea of what it does: synthesizing the results of positive sciences into a dialectical worldview. The synthetization program can be seen as the hegemonic understanding of philosophy's task in Soviet *Diamat* in its later stages. This is clearly perceptible in 1958, when an All-Union Congress on the Philosophical Problems of Natural Sciences was held in Moscow, convened by the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences and the Ministry of Higher Education. The congress was attended by around 600 scientists, including guests from the Eastern Bloc, and was chaired by then director of the Institute of Philosophy Pyotr Fedoseyev. Once head of the department of dialectical materialism, Fedoseyev was as much an insider to the party as he was an outsider to the dialectical tradition. His closing speech at the congress contains programmatic remarks and can shed light on the development of the party line in Soviet philosophy after the death of Stalin.

The text describes the state of scientific research in the Soviet Union, symptomatically oscillating between an optimistic picture of achievements and a distrustful language about enemy influences. After assuring the audience that the presentations they had heard were in no way directed by the party, the latter limiting itself to a few "comradely advices",[92] Fedoseyev

[90] Full title: "Theses on the Question of the Interconnection of Philosophy and Knowledge of Nature and Society in the Process of their Historical Development."

[91] Georgij Aleksandrov, ed., *Istorija Filosofii Vol. 1* (Politizdat, 1941), p. 24.

[92] Pyotr Fedoseyev, "Vsesoyuznoe Soveshc˘anie Po Filosofskim Voprosam Sovremennogo Estestvoz-Nanija," *Uspekhy Fiziceskikh Nauk* T.LXVIII, no. 4 (1959), p. 719.

goes on to apologize for the slight deviations that nonetheless slipped through the cracks. These, he argued, were simply individual cases and in no way expressions of a systemic problem since the class interests behind idealism in science had been successfully eradicated. According to Fedoseyev, in the absence of a bourgeois class, Soviet science was safe from ideological prejudice. The bulk of his criticism was thus directed outwards, against Western philosophies, guilty, to his mind, of rejecting "objective reality":

> Moreover, all the efforts of neopositivists, pragmatists, semanticists, existentialists and the like are aimed at proving that objective reality does not exist outside our consciousness and that philosophy is not capable and should not even try to solve such, from their point of view, "metaphysical" problems as those about the essence of the world, the existence of matter, space, time, laws, etc.[93]

The lumping together of heterogeneous, even opposing traditions, common in Soviet philosophical discourse, leaves an impression of banality. Yet, it is precisely in these transparently unoriginal attacks that the core of postwar Stalinist *Diamat* is expressed. The famous slogan of the struggle against idealism is defined as the struggle against those theories, supposedly prevalent in the West, that strive to transform the world into a product of an individual consciousness (subjective idealism) or of a superior being like *Geist* (objective idealism). Against this antirealist tendency, Soviet Marxism, in its official version, presents itself as the last bastion of objectivity.

Fedoseyev's position deviated considerably from the "teachings of the classics." For Lenin, and Engels before him, positive sciences could dictate the directions materialist philosophy might have developed in. The distinction is thus made between the materialism of science and the materialism of philosophy. While he differentiated between philosophical and scientific concepts of matter, Lenin admitted the possibility of the latter affecting the former.[94] Stalinist Marxism did not. The value of natural science for philosophy was defined vaguely, as a barrier shielding philosophers from falling into speculation: "Philosophers recognize that they need to be closer to natural science, to natural scientists, if they do not want to remain in the realm of

[93] Fedoseyev, "Vsesoyuznoe Soveshc˘anie" p. 722.

[94] Thomas Nemeth, "Althusser's Anti-Humanism and Soviet Philosophy," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 21, no. 4 (November 1980), p. 371.

abstractions, of abstract categories".[95] Moreover, a report on the congress published a year later in the journal "Advances in Physical Sciences" reads:

> The congress emphasized the important task of philosophical generalization of the outstanding achievements of modern sciences – quantum and relativity theories, cybernetics, biophysical and biochemical research in the study of heredity, etc.[96]

Science provided the raw material that philosophy was to transform into a final product. But this also introduced a hierarchy within intellectual labor, giving philosophy an advantage of higher qualification. Ultimately, scientific research was to be (or remain) *subordinated* to philosophical supervision and surveillance. Here, Fedoseyev's "comradely advices" begin to sound like orders:

> Philosophy synthesizes the whole experience of science and should therefore serve as a compass for its development, guide this diverse process, warn against fundamental errors and deviations from the correct path, of which the history of science knows so many examples.[97]

Philosophy is upheld as the science of sciences, overseeing and potentially restricting research if its findings "deviate" from the Marxist–Leninist canon. Under the banner of strengthening a "creative union of philosophers and scientists", the congress positioned philosophy as the discipline that structures others. This attitude in the Stalinist distribution of sciences engendered an anachronism that employed old theories to evaluate new propositions. The quintessential expression of this paradigm and a grim historical backdrop for the 1958 congress, was the Lysenko affair, where the imposition of a "dialectical" lens onto natural sciences resulted in an ideological blockade of research.

[95] Fedoseyev, "Vsesoyuznoe Soveshc˘anie" p. 720.

[96] Fedoseyev, "Vsesoyuznoe Soveshc˘anie" p. 717.

[97] Fedoseyev, "Vsesoyuznoe Soveshc˘anie" p. 718.

The Ilyenkov-Korovikov Theses

Ilyenkov and Korovikov's theses, defended three years before Fedoseyev's address painted a very different picture of philosophy and its object. Their text would lead to a direct confrontation with the Soviet philosophical establishment. Indeed, this moment is often considered as the beginning of Ilyenkov's struggle against conventional *Diamat* philosophy. Yet, while Ilyenkov's position did contradict the official line, the context of the writing of these theses does not suggest that the authors intended to declare war. First, it is essential to note that the theses were not a spontaneous proclamation of dissent but were instead a commissioned project. Korovikov's memoirs recall that the authors were "asked to present theses on the object of philosophy to the department for discussion."[98] Who this offer came from remains unknown.[99] Second, Ilyenkov's personal notebooks, which contain preliminary sketches of the theses, include multiple favorable references to canonical party ideologues such as A. Zhdanov and even Stalin.[100] Third, the position that sparked the conflict - that the object of philosophy is thinking and not the world as a whole - was not an unprecedented innovation. It was legitimised by Engels and Lenin and had been already expressed by Soviet philosophers before

[98] Vladislav Lektorsky, ed., *Filosofiiya ne konchaetsya: iz istorii otechestvennoĭ filosofii, XX vek* (Moscow: rossiyskaya politicheskaya entsiklopediya, 1998), p. 474.

[99] We could speculate that the offer came from Teodor Oizerman, who at the time was the Head of the Department of History of Philosophy and supervised a number of the "sixtier" philosophers, including Ilyenkov. The latter's notebooks containing the sketches for the "Theses on the object of philosophy" opens with the following: "In T.I. Oizerman's lecture there was a point with which I gladly agreed: that to outline the object of philosophy, its specificity, is the same as to clarify the relation of philosophy to other sciences." However, nothing definitive can be taken from this. Evald Ilyenkov and Valentin Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam: o predmet'e filosofii* (Moscow: Kanon+, 2016), p. 169.

[100] Evald Ilyenkov, and Valentin Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam: o predmet'e filosofii* (Moscow: Kanon+, 2016), p. 179; 196. Given Ilyenkov's critical view of Stalinism throughout his career, these early references come as a surprise. Stalin was included in the list of the "classics" of Marxism in the 1930s and subsequently excluded in 1953-1954. One could speculate therefore that these references were ritualistic, since Ilyenkov's notebooks date from the same year. Although, it is quite possible that Ilyenkov was sincere as well, especially since these were personal notebooks.

the controversial theses, although not in a fully open manner. Besides the Soviets, the Bulgarian Marxist Todor Pavlov, who in his *Theory of Reflection* - published twice in the Soviet Union and used as a textbook - defended this position openly. Finally, the text carefully avoids the militant style typical of most notorious documents written in thesis form, reserving explicit disagreements for its conclusion. Nonetheless, the effect of the theses exceeded its authors' expectations and marked an opening in the history of Soviet Marxism. While at moments obscure, the document offers a window into the internal debates of postwar Soviet philosophy. Going back to it will allow us to situate the coordinates of those debates. As we will see, the theses introduced a break in a longstanding intellectual tradition of Soviet Marxism, pushing it to examine its own presuppositions.

The beginning of the text states, in uncontroversial terms, the importance of historicizing the relationship between philosophy and the sciences. This relationship, it is argued in the second thesis, should be retraced by looking at the changing of the object of philosophy throughout its history. This process, in turn, takes place independently from the individual philosopher's intentions. The way such an inquiry is to proceed, according to the authors, is by questioning the social conditions that lead to the emergence of philosophy as a particular form of social consciousness, a form of the division of intellectual labour, grounded in a need that no other form could satisfy.

After dismissing several potential answers to this question,[101] Ilyenkov and Korovikov link the emergence of philosophy to the need for scientific knowledge generally, different from religion. Hence philosophy is understood in a typically Hegelian manner, both as a science and as a form of consciousness, hierarchically priming over religion (and myth). Yet, philosophy, it is argued, was historically elevated to the status of a metascience, a domain that compensates for the finite knowledge of positive sciences by speculating on the synthetic unity underlying the diverse phenomena described by those sciences. The story the authors reconstruct is the following. Beginning from Aristotle's philosophy, which is read as the synthesis of the struggle between idealism and materialism in ancient Greece, philosophy is individuated as the

[101] llyenkov and Korovikov describe as anachronistic the position that philosophy responded to the human drive for a synthetic knowledge and the discontent with the partial one. Attributing this view to positivism, the authors cite George Henry Lewes' *History of Philosophy* as an example. Such a view is rejected on the count that philosophy in ancient Greece was a synthetic form of knowledge and the differentiation of sciences happened later.

knowledge that strives to grasp "primary substances". This concept is taken to be a mystified representation of a social problem:

> …by what necessity does the subject of philosophical research since the time of Aristotle become that which carries the name "primary substance" [*sushchnost*], "substance as such" – in distinction from, and even in opposition to, those "substances" that can be directly disclosed in the very phenomena of nature and society by means of their theoretical analysis, and, on the other hand, what kind of reality has that object, which is studied in a form mystified by conceptions of "primary substance?"[102]

The answer to this question is given with a reference to Engels. The specifically philosophical form of knowledge appears when one is confronted with the notions used to grasp natural or social phenomena. Philosophy, in this view, assumes its role by clarifying the relationship between these concepts and the objects they are meant to grasp. The realisation of this function of philosophy was, according to Ilyenkov, the achievement of dialectical materialism. Before Marx, however, both materialism and idealism shared the view of philosophy as a metascience by ontologizing theoretical constructs. If, as the authors argue, materialism conceived of our notions as the general forms of the development of nature, as in D'Holbach, idealism committed the symmetrical error of generalization, with the simple difference that it took its own conclusions as forms of development of an absolute spirit, as in Hegel. Both of these traditions in Western philosophy use the advances of natural science of their day and generalize them, transforming philosophy into a science of sciences. Hence, the origin of the metascience conception of philosophy lies in the striving for a comprehensive, interconnected image of the world, an ambition unattainable through the aggregation of empirical scientific data alone.

Philosophy thus begins to be understood as an image of the world, theoretically higher than individual sciences. As we saw above, such an understanding of philosophy was common in the Soviet Union, it was therefore troubling for party intellectuals when in the fifth thesis, Ilyenkov and Korovikov stated that the appearance of dialectical materialism breaks the historical continuity of viewing philosophy as the science of sciences. The historical accuracy of this claim can be debated, but its polemical function is clear.

[102] Evald Ilyenkov and Elena Illesh, *Ot Abstraktnogo k Konkretnomu: Krutoĭ Marshrut: 1950-1960* (Moskva: Kanon+, 2017), pp. 245-246.

Having established the origin of the conception of philosophy as a metascience in its evolution "historically in the form of a system of concepts, reflecting the world as a whole, in its most general properties," the theses move to dialectical materialism, which, according to the authors, ultimately sublated the dualism between philosophical and positive knowledge. The need for philosophies of specific sciences - such as a philosophy of biology or a philosophy of history - arose from the inability of positive sciences to theorize the interconnections within their categories. These philosophical "doublings," they argue, reflect the historical tension between philosophy and positive knowledge. Yet this dualism is ultimately *illusory*, a vestige of philosophy's historical role in compensating for the incompleteness of finite scientific knowledge. Dialectical materialism, according to Ilyenkov and Korovikov, transcends this dualism.

Marx and Engels, the authors assert, recognized that the task of science in the 19th century was to appropriate all the advances philosophy made in its two-thousand-year history, or, put briefly: "to think correctly, accurately, in the theoretical analysis of phenomena."[103] What is meant in this rather obscure phrase is an anti-empiricist approach to positive science, as exemplified by Marx's treatment of political economy in the *Capital*. What Marx did, according to the authors, is not to add a philosophy of political economy to political economy proper. Rather than appending a "philosophy of political economy" to the field, Marx infused the science of political economy with a philosophical critique, rendering obsolete the need for a separately standing philosophical framework for the discipline. In this sense, Marx neither abandoned philosophy, nor created a philosophy of political economy, but instead reconstituted its categories using a dialectical materialist method. When positive sciences themselves reach the point of grasping their object dialectico-materialistically, hence, as an organically interconnected whole, philosophy, as a separate domain creating representations of the world would become not only redundant but "*antiquated and reactionary.*"[104]

What Ilyenkov does here is not, to our mind, a statement of fact, or a "reminder." Dialectical materialists were neither the first in arguing for limits to knowledge, nor were they unanimous regarding the existence of such limits.[105] By claiming that the "objective content" of philosophy is constituted by human notions, Ilyenkov shifts the epistemic parameters of dialectical

[103] Ilyenkov and Illesh, *Ot Abstraktnogo k Konkretnomu*, p. 252.

[104] Ilyenkov and Illesh, *Ot Abstraktnogo k Konkretnomu*, p. 253.

[105] Ilyenkov's complicated and rather under-researched relation to Kant's epistemology will be discussed in chapter II.

materialism towards a different direction. In particular, the domain of philosophy gets limited to thought, while natural phenomena remain accessible only through mediation by other sciences. Anticipating the accusation of idealism, the theses attempt to give a materialist definition of thought as always in relation with matter through social practice.

This reorientation leads to a profound reversal: it is logic that elucidates ontology, not ontology that grounds logic. With this move, Ilyenkov entered in opposition to the official doctrine in Soviet Marxism. If, for Fedoseyev, synthesizing the advances of positive sciences, ontologizing them, constituted the task of philosophy, Ilyenkov rejects this operation as an unwarranted generalization of epistemological observations on ontological grounds. If philosophy is the study of thought, which, as Ilyenkov stressed, escapes formal quantification, then the quantitative methodologies of modern sciences cannot directly inform philosophical inquiry. Transferring the causal determination of natural sciences to the philosophy of history, for example, eschews contingency from its understanding and begets a linear conception that favors the "stagist" interpretations of historical materialism.

Ilyenkov and Korovikov grant (to the Soviet establishment) that dialectics are not endemic to philosophy but can be found in all sciences. This position is fully in accordance with the general line of Soviet Marxism at the time, which had retained this Deborinite position while marginalizing Deborin himself. It also gave ideological legitimacy to party oversight on natural and social sciences. Yet in the following paragraph, the authors claim that these dialectical laws can only be grasped as logical categories, as laws of thinking, and *only then* can philosophy speak of being. This second position was ferociously opposed by Soviet philosophical nomenklatura. The third and final paragraph of the 14th thesis - most often cited by Ilyenkov's opponents - adds yet again, that such laws of thinking are analogous with the "corresponding objective universal forms of the development of objective reality."[106] However, the recurring lip-service to the orthodox view would not protect the authors from what was to come.

[106] Ilyenkov and Illesh, *Ot Abstraktnogo k Konkretnomu*, p. 254.

Backlash

The drawn out process of denouncing the "Theses on the object of philosophy" and their authors was inaugurated on the 16th of October 1954, at the party meeting of the faculty of philosophy and produced six resolutions from the Scientific Council.[107] At this still moderate meeting (the representatives of the Central and District Committees were not yet involved[108]), members of the party bureau such as the philosopher L. N. Suvorov criticized the authors for an "excessive fascination with the theory of knowledge",[109] which led, it was argued, to indifference towards the study of Russian philosophy among students. Russian philosophy of the 19th century, with some exceptions, notoriously rejected Kantian epistemology[110] and hence for the critics, the move to define the object of philosophy as thinking "appeared" Eurocentric.

However, certain students protested against the charges, supporting Ilyenkov and Korovikov. The meeting ended with only one accusation of "positivism" from A. D. Kosichev for rejecting the idea of general laws and a suggestion from Teodor Oizerman, the head of the

[107] David Bakhurst summarized the major points of the resolutions: "The first resolution was an act of self-criticism, admitting that the Council had not acted soon enough to prevent the propagation of Ilyenkov and Korovikov's supposedly 'anti-Marxist' views. Thereafter the Council lays into Ilyenkov and Korovikov. The second resolution castigates their stance as a pernicious idealist deviation. The third reproaches Ilyenkov and Korovikov for 'insincerity', for hypocritically making as to acknowledge their mistakes in public while continuing privately to hold fast to their heretical views. The fourth instructs faculty members to set students right about the philosophy of Marxism, particularly on those matters wrongly interpreted by Ilyenkov and Korovikov. The fifth enjoins the Dean to take decisive measures to prevent the further dissemination within the Faculty of anti-Marxist ideas connected with the theses. Finally, the sixth resolution charges the Presidium of the Faculty Council with reevaluating Ilyenkov's Candidate's dissertation, which he had defended, apparently successfully, in 1953." – David Bakhurst, *The Heart of the Matter: Ilyenkov, Vygotsky and the Courage of Thought*, Historical Materialism Book Series, volume 286 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2023), p. 115.

[108] Ilyenkov and Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam*, p. 24.

[109] Ilyenkov and Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam*, p. 25.

[110] Giorgi Kobakhidze, "Evald Ilyenkov and the Imperialist Unconscious in Soviet Philosophy," *Studies in East European Thought* 76, no. 3 (September 2024): 407–24.

department of the history of foreign philosophy, that Korovikov write an article based on the "Theses."[111]

On the 24th of February 1955, another party meeting at the faculty was convened on the matter. F. I. Georgiev, later the author of a number of books on the theory of cognition, accused Ilyenkov and Korovikov of "revisionism" for defining dialectical materialism as precisely a theory of cognition. Korovikov's answer that professor Georgiev "can't even properly give a course on dialectical and historical materialism"[112] indicates that the situation was not completely desperate at that point.

The internal life of the MGU, as well as that of the Communist Party at that time was dire. The "affairs" were rapidly multiplying, feeding the atmosphere of persecution. The Ilyenkov-Korovikov affair was preceded by the notorious "doctors affair" that reinforced antisemitic witch-hunts in the Soviet Union[113] and followed by the "Krasnopevtsev affair", where a number of history students were sent to labor camps for running an underground marxist group.[114] The so-called "gladiators affair" in 1955 implicated the philosophy faculty directly. It was discovered that highly placed members of the Soviet intelligentsia, such as the philosopher and minister of culture Georgy Alexandrov, professor of philosophy Vladimir Kruzhkov and historian of Russian literature Alexander Egolin, among others, had organized

[111] It is difficult to situate Oizerman's position in that period. Ilyenkov once called him a "cunning wise man." While he rejected the concept presented in the "Theses", Oizerman charged Ilyenkov and Korovikov with leading all the groups on the history of Marxism at the 4th year. - Ilyenkov and Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam*, p. 25. As for Kosichev, he would write a memoir after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in which he commended the young duo for their audacity. His own role in their persecution at the time is conveniently ignored in the memoir.

[112] Ilyenkov and Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam*, p. 28.

[113] Lev Naumenko, a friend and student of Ilyenkov, makes the connection between these two moments of Soviet history: "Why did the administration need this? Because a little episode was needed. Well, the story with the doctors had just ended. Something else was needed. And this all continued because they couldn't live without destroying someone, without poisoning. The leader, of course, was already dead, but the inertia, the habits remained..." - Ilyenkov and Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam*, p. 16.

[114] In 1957, L. N. Krasnopevtsev and others printed and distributed "anti-Khrushchev" leaflets which, according to the Sakharov Center, demanded de-Stalinization. They would receive lengthy prison sentences.

an illegal brothel. The men would use their political status to influence ballerinas and theatre students, bring them to a secret apartment and keep them there against their will.[115]

We can assume that such scandals were often deflected by scapegoating those in lesser standing. This was the case in 1955, when Ilyenkov was falsely accused of being the intellectual leader in a university affair. A number of students of the faculty of philosophy made "anti-party" remarks at the faculty's party meeting. This was reported to the authorities, who, in turn, pressured the professor of Russian philosophy Ivan Shchipanov for having tolerated such behaviour in his presence. To divert attention from himself, Shchipanov associated Ilyenkov's name to the names of the students that were accused of anti-Soviet behaviour, linking their "deviations" with the theoretical influence of the Ilyenkov-Korovikov theses.[116] Ilyenkov took this and other dramatic reactions to his theses for what they were, attempts at hiding the systemic problems of Soviet higher education, the reasons for which were to be found elsewhere. As he wrote in his March 1955 statement addressed to the Central Committee of the party:

> The real reasons are rooted, as far as I understand, in the extreme theoretical helplessness of a number of faculty members, which is why they have absolutely no authority either among students or among faculty.[117]

The accusations around the "Theses" were magnified on the 25th of March 1955, at the meeting of the Academic Council of the faculty of philosophy, which as Elena Illesh justly notes, took the tone of a trial. The dean of the faculty, V. S. Molodtsov, who had a particular dislike for Ilyenkov, opened with accusations that can be summarized as follows: The rejection of the subjective character of philosophy by the authors amounts to the negation of the

---

[115] The only English source about this to my knowledge is the following blog post: https://www.gw2ru.com/history/211210-ussrs-largest-sex-scandal. Bakhurst also references this episode while discussing the "Theses", although the nature of the scandal not specified: "Moreover, in Spring-Summer 1955, the former director of the Institute, G.F. Aleksandrov, who had stepped down in 1954, was under a storm of criticism and embroiled in a scandal of some kind, which led to his being exiled to Belorussia to head the sector of dialectical and historical materialism at the Institute of Philosophy and Law in Minsk." – Bakhurst, *The Heart of the Matter*, p. 126.

[116] Ilyenkov and Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam,* p. 21.

[117] Ilyenkov and Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam,* pp. 20-21.

bolshevik principle of partisanship, while their claim that positive science is in principle capable of grasping what philosophy calls "primary substances" is idealist and leads to the rejection of philosophy itself.

It was at this meeting that Ilyenkov and Korovikov got the chance to defend themselves. But as the minutes of those meetings show, the only possible defence at that point was a ceremonial self-criticism and the rejection of their position. Korovikov, who in February didn't mince words, now repeated the accusations levelled at him from the party organizations:

> I recognize that the theses were certainly unsuccessful and erroneous in a number of points and therefore, I objectively believe that they were not useful, even harmful.[118]

Ilyenkov, hesitant to enter into details, declares that he is in agreement with everything said by Korovikov and protests only against the usage of the word "insincere" in the party resolution about them. However, at the very end of his self-criticism, he "explains himself":

> In fact, we have seen the reduction of dialectics to a sum of examples, with which we feed the natural scientist and the jurist. Our theses originated from a concern for this.[119]

The reaction sparked by this remark is symbolic of the general atmosphere of those "debates." Ilyenkov was swiftly accused of negating the contribution of Soviet philosophy to natural science, an accusation that drowned out the critical argument Ilyenkov was presenting. The meeting continued on the 29th of March, but Ilyenkov and Korovikov were not given the chance to speak. Instead, they listened to the various metaphors that the creativity of their opponents could muster up, such as "philosophical perversion," uttered by A. P. Gagarin, a philosopher who had himself experienced persecution from the party before. Associating Ilyenkov and Korovikov with the names of Jan Sten and Karl Radek, Gagarin suggested they be considered "enemies of the people."

Attempting to shield themselves from the ongoing persecution, Ilyenkov and Korovikov wrote a letter to Khrushchev.[120] It is not known if the letter was sent and a part of it is missing, but it seems that Ilyenkov and Korovikov invested a lot in writing the letter. In it, they present

[118] Ilyenkov and Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam,* p. 37.

[119] Ilyenkov and Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam,* p. 41.

[120] Approximately written in August-September 1955.

the matter as holding a "general Party and scientific importance",[121] since as they claimed, real problems of the university were being swept under the rug by blaming the influence of the "Theses". Importantly, the authors of the letter claim that they "cannot, without compromising our Party and scientific conscience, renounce the positions we defended."[122] This further substantiates my claim that the self-criticisms of March of that year were only ceremonial.

On the 21st of September, another letter by the two philosophers was sent to the leader of the Italian communist party, Palmiro Togliatti. In April 1955, an article by Togliatti titled "From Hegel to Marxism" was published in the *Voprosi Filosfii*, where the latter attempted a synthetic account of Antonio Labriola's philosophy. In the article, Togliatti describes as "genius" Engels' position that philosophy "must be reduced to the methodology of history and natural sciences."[123] It is precisely this, that the two highlighted for Togliatti, writing that his position largely differs from the common opinion on the Soviet "philosophical front"[124] and asked him to further explain this view in print. Another letter was apparently written by Ilyenkov to Todor Pavlov, for which Ilyenkov paid dearly. It seems that Bulgarian students expressed the wish to bring the "Theses" with them and show them to Pavlov. Ilyenkov agreed and as a consequence was disciplined for implicating foreign figures in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union. The backlash on the letters was, of course, part of a larger tendency of Soviet distrust towards the communists of foreign countries. Indeed, both Togliatti and Pavlov expressed concern on the matter of the persecution of the young philosophers. A year later, however, Togliatti would support the Soviet crushing of the Hungarian revolution.

The "Theses" cost Ilyenkov his job at the MGU and postponed the attribution of the status of candidate[125] until 1956, even if he defended his candidate's thesis in 1953.[126] For the rest

---

[121] Ilyenkov and Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam,* p. 94.

[122] Ilyenkov and Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam,* p. 95.

[123] Palmiro Togliatti, "Ot Gegelya k Marksizmu" *Voprosi Filosofii*, N4, 1955. p. 56.

[124] Ilyenkov and Korovikov didn't hesitate to mention that the Dean of the faculty V. Molodtsov had asked the editorial board of *Voprosi Filosofii* to strike the indicated passage from Togliatti's article.

[125] Russian equivalent for PhD.

[126] Bakhurst comments on the controversy around Ilyenkov's candidate status: "The only real danger was that he would be stripped of his Candidate's dissertation, but Oizerman contrived that the committee established to reassess the work included M.M. Rozental', a philosopher, not of the old

of his life, he would work at the institute of philosophy.[127] In February 1956, Khrushchev's "secret speech" would finally ease the pressure on the "Theses", however, Ilyenkov's troubles were far from over.

guard, but of the old school – one of the few figures at mgu who was genuinely respected for his intellectual contribution. Oizerman was sure Rozental' could be trusted to affirm the merits of Ilyenkov's dissertation and stare down know-nothing opposition, and that, it seems, is what happened." Bakhurst, *The Heart of the Matter*, p. 125.

[127] The circumstances surrounding Ilyenkov's appointment at the institute were ambiguous for a long time. In his memoirs, Teodor Oizerman recounted intervening on Ilyenkov's behalf following his dismissal from the MGU, personally appealing to Alexandrov to secure the position. Yet, Ellena Illesh has unearthed evidence suggesting Ilyenkov was already employed at the institute prior to the controversy over the "Theses". While Oizerman's intervention may indeed have been decisive, it appears to have occurred earlier than he claimed. This is substantiated by a letter Ilyenkov wrote to the institute on January 7, 1954, in which he requested permission to dedicate more time to MGU, where he was leading a student seminar titled "Dialectics in Marx's Capital". He would be removed from that position following the controversy. Ilyenkov and Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam,* p. 18.

Against the ontological gaze

For readers of the classical texts of Marxism, it becomes clear that Ilyenkov and Korovikov are reworking Engels' critique of Dühring and Feuerbach and applying it to the Soviet context. To clarify the more obscure aspects of their theses and to appreciate their intervention, it is helpful to revisit Engels' reasoning about the object of philosophy.

In his *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* Engels attributes to dialectical thinking the task of the summation of the results of positive sciences. As we saw, it is precisely this task that Soviet Marxist philosophy, in its official line, set for itself. Yet by "dialectical thinking" Engels did not mean philosophy. On the contrary, his notion of dialectical thinking is the result of the sublation of philosophy of nature. Philosophy, Engels argues, historically undertook the synthesis of scientific results, but this role was necessitated only so long as the sciences themselves remained ensnared in a mechanistic paradigm, with their "inability to apprehend the universe as a process, as matter engaged in uninterrupted historical development."[128] This ahistorical view of nature precluded positive sciences to grasp their objects in their movement and connections:

> The old method of investigation and thought which Hegel calls "metaphysical", which preferred to investigate *things* as given, as fixed and stable, a method the relics of which still strongly haunt people's minds, had a great deal of historical justification in its day. It was necessary first to examine things before it was possible to examine processes. One had first to know what a particular thing was before one could observe the changes it was undergoing. And such was the case with natural science.[129]

Philosophies of nature came to fill this void with speculative, at times nonsensical, at others near-accurate accounts, giving philosophy the status of the science of sciences. However, three advances in science, writes Engels, brought it to a new stage and made philosophies of nature as such superfluous. These were the discovery of the cell and of the process of its development into different organisms, secondly, the transformation of energy and finally, Darwin's theory

[128] Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976), p. 22.

[129] Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, p. 42.

of evolution. According to Engels, these moments in the history of science mark the passage from a "metaphysical" method to a dialectical one, where interconnections between various spheres of nature are deduced from "facts provided by empirical natural science itself",[130] instead of natural philosophies. Reviving the latter would be, in this linear understanding of the development of science, a step backwards. Instead, Engels' materialism is not a philosophy at all. A characterization of this new materialism is given already eight years before his critique of Feuerbach, in *Anti-Dühring*, where he describes it as:

> …simply a world outlook which has to establish its validity and be applied not in a science of sciences standing apart, but in the real sciences. Philosophy is therefore "sublated" here, that is, "both overcome and preserved" overcome as regards its form, and preserved as regards its real content.[131]

If this dialectical conception of nature makes philosophies of nature obsolete, what, then, remains in the scope of philosophy? It is in answering this question that Engels makes the "epistemological" claim:

> For philosophy, which has been expelled from nature and history, there remains only the realm of pure thought, so far as it is left: the theory of the laws of the thought process itself, logic and dialectics.[132]

Such a view of philosophy justly recalls the Kantian "Copernican revolution." Was Engels, then, following Kant's critique in elaborating his materialism? Cat Moir provides a nuanced response to this question, respecting the ambiguities of the relation.[133] Both Marx and Engels show themselves to be followers of Kant in their denunciation of vulgar materialists in *The Holy Family* as well as what is known as *The German Ideology* by considering speculations on matter outside of experience as mystical. Engels famously defined matter as "a pure creation

[130] Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, p. 44.

[131] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works. 25: Frederick Engels: Anti-Dühring. Dialectics of Nature* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987). p. 129.

[132] Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, p. 59.

[133] Cat Moir, *Ernst Bloch's Speculative Materialism: Ontology, Epistemology, Politics*, Historical Materialism Book Series, Volume 202 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 35-41.

of thought and an abstraction",[134] attacking those that confused this concept with the thing in itself.[135] However, he has also been considered as taking a pre-Kantian position in his resistance to the idea of the incognoscibility of the thing in itself.[136] The question must be posed more specifically: When Engels distinguishes between the act of finding interconnections from the imagination of the philosopher on the one hand, and from the processes of nature themselves by the scientist on the other,[137] does he assume that natural science escapes the epistemological limits set to knowledge by Kant?[138] It would seem that Engels followed Kant only in criticizing the speculative propositions of natural philosophers but gladly accepted the propositions of the natural scientist as definitive evidence against a possible thing in itself.[139] Vesa Oittinen attributes this to an erroneous interpretation of the Kantian concept by Engels.[140] It would seem that Engels identifies the thing in itself with essence, while for Kant it designated the part of the thing that remains outside of the relation with the cognising subject. Natural science can

[134] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*. 25, p. 533.

[135] One of the original sins of Plekhanov, who died 7 years before the publication of Engels' *Dialectics of Nature*, where this claim about matter was made.

[136] "Although he rejected neo-Kantianism's dogged emphasis on the 'eternally unknowable thing in itself', Engels' insistence on the fact that matter was a 'concept' and an 'abstraction' evinces that he nevertheless shared a certain scepticism with the latter concerning absolute knowledge." Moir, *Ernst Bloch's Speculative Materialism*, p. 40.

[137] The view of the objectivity of the truth claims of natural science was also common in Soviet Marxism. Even a prominent Soviet gnoseologist M.A. Rozov, who strove to establish epistemology as an empirical science, expressed such views: "The epistemologist, being, like any other scientist, a carrier of reflexion, can at the same time be in another, supra-reflexive position." He found such a position in natural science, which he believed exemplified cognition as a process without a subject. – Mikhail Rozov, *Filosofiya nauki v novom videnii* (Moscow: Novyy khronograf, 2012), p. 106.

[138] Friedrich Albert Lange had already criticized the materialist view on science precisely for this reason. – Moir, *Ernst Bloch's Speculative Materialism*, p. 34.

[139] "If we are able to prove the correctness of our conception of a natural process by making it ourselves, bringing it into being out of its conditions and making it serve our own purposes into the bargain, then there is an end to the Kantian ungraspable "thing-in-itself". The chemical substances produced in the bodies of plants and animals remained just such "things-in-themselves" until organic chemistry began to produce them one after another, whereupon the "thing-in-itself" became a thing for us…" - Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, p. 19.

[140] Oittinen, Vesa, "Dialekticeskye Varijatsii Ilyenkova, Ili Pocemu Ne Kant Vmesto Gegelja," *Logos* 1 (69) (2009), pp. 81–93.

advance the knowledge of things ever further and deeper, but to say that the scientist grasps that which is outside of the cognizing relation is a contradiction in terms.

In the "Theses on the object of philosophy", Ilyenkov seems to reproduce Engels' error. Not only does he restate Engels' position on natural science abolishing the Kantian thing in itself, but his sketches for the "Theses" are laden with objections against interpreting the "epistemological" [Ilyenkov and Russian philosophers in general use the word *gnoseological*] position on the object of philosophy as neo-Kantian:

> Of course, this understanding can easily be perverted in the neo-Kantian sense and here one must be very careful.[141]

Ilyenkov "guards" against such an interpretation by reminding us that thinking is understood as always in a dialectical relation to material being, as corresponding to the "laws" of its object. Invoking the notion of practice, he argues that it is the absence of the latter notion in Kant (and neo-Kantians) that renders him idealist. Positing a dialectical concept of thought, Ilyenkov challenged the dominant doctrine of reflection, the epistemological extension of Soviet ontologism. Remembering Ilyenkov's 1962 article "The Ideal", Tamara Dlugatch commented that: "After his work, cognition could not be understood as a mere reflection."[142]

Ilyenkov does not share the theory of reflection - where the mind is a copy of external matter[143] - characteristic of the "ontological gaze."[144] In fact, in the text of the theses, the term reflection figures very rarely. During the discussion of the theses at the faculty, the audience protested against the dismissal of the term, to which Anatoly Arseniev, a friend of Ilyenkov, answered that the concept of reflection should be rejected, referring to the fact that Lenin

---

[141] Ilyenkov and Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam*, p. 188.

[142] Tamara Dlugatch and Aleksey Savin, "Kantom Ja Interesovalas Vsegda," *Istoriko-Filosofskiij Ezhe-Godnik*, 2019, p. 299.

[143] To be precise, Lenin himself, who this theory is attributed to, revised his position, describing the trajectory of relation between matter and mind as a "zigzag" rather than mirroring. Plekhanov too, preferred to speak of "hieroglyphs" more than simple copies. However, these revisions leave untouched the underlying assumption that the mind is external to the world it reflects.

[144] Vesa Oittinen, "Ontologism in Soviet Philosophy: Some Remarks," *Studies in East European Thought* 73, no. 2 (June 2021), p. 206.

abandons it in his *Philosophical Notebooks.*[145] Indeed, Ilyenkov was not alone in his struggle against dogmatic Marxists. Besides Arseniev, two directors of the institute of philosophy, P. Kopnin and B. Kedrov (on occasion), supported Ilyenkov's positions. Andrey Maydansky also points out that, in the later edition of his *Dialectics of the Ideal*, Ilyenkov took out around twenty phrases and seven of them contained the concept of reflection.[146] To be sure, Ilyenkov often used the term, but mostly to argue that the question was not as simple as the term would suggest. As we will see, the motivations behind his philosophical positions are antithetical to the dualism of the doctrine of reflection.

Thirdly, while Ilyenkov's philosophy heavily stresses the function of the universal, his conception of dialectics is essentially a *particularist*[147] one. In the "Theses on the Object of Philosophy", we see an attempt to break with the founding division of Soviet philosophy between dialectical materialism as ontology and historical materialism as social philosophy. Ilyenkov rejects the idea of two branches as a deviation from Marx's thought and argues against the notion of dialectics as a worldview, or a collection of universal laws governing matter. What Ilyenkov valued in Marx was precisely that the latter abandoned philosophy's ambition for an objective description of the world as a whole. As early as 1953, Ilyenkov wrote in his notebooks:

> This is the fundamental qualitative difference between Marxist philosophical materialism and the old materialism, which shared with idealism one common sin peculiar to any other philosophy, except Marxist - contemplativity, unwillingness to grant the positive sciences the right to confer a worldview significance on their results, the pretension to possess supra-scientific, speculative knowledge, to the absolute truthfulness of its constructions and models of the world, to the exhaustive explanation of the entire complexity of the objective world.[148]

We can see here a clear rejection of philosophy's ambition for omniscience. To use Frederic Jameson's terms, what we find in Ilyenkov is not the dialectic with a capital D, an

[145] Vladislav Lektorsky, "O rugatel'nom slove «gnoseolog» i razvitii nauki pod ideologicheskim davleniem gosudarstva," 2014, https://oralhistory.ru/talks/orh-1559. p. 18.

[146] Andrey Maydansky, "Dialektika Idealnogo," *Logos* 1, no. 69 (2009), p. 4.

[147] This very important characteristic of his dialectics will be discussed in more detail in Chapter II.

[148] Ilyenkov and Korovikov, *Strast'i po tezisam,* p. 187.

all-encompassing system that knows no outside, but a plurality of local dialectics, particular cases of dialectical relations that follow the logic of objects rather than imposing universal schemas.[149]

Ilyenkov's intervention aimed to shift Soviet philosophy away from ontology, towards logic. Yet, logic is understood here not analytically – in terms of systematizing formal judgments in language – but dialectically – as a study of the relationships of transformation between ideal and material parameters of social life. Therefore, his move away from ontologism did not imply an exclusively epistemological posture. In 1955, during a special session held in the Institute of Philosophy under the agenda of "The theoretical errors of comrade E.V. Ilyenkov", the latter defended himself from accusations of "gnoseologism" by stating that: "...to reduce philosophy only to the theory of cognition is to narrow down its subject matter."[150] This reduction was understood by Ilyenkov as belonging to Kantianism.

Instead, what we have here is a different, albeit yet unexplicated conception of the subject-object relation. David Bakhurst argues that Ilyenkov understands the subject–object relation as mediated by notions and concepts. But, instead of these concepts constituting barriers to the knowledge of the physical world, they serve as tools that help to access it since they themselves form in corporeal beings that are part of the material world. In *Consciousness and Revolution*, Bakhurst characterizes Ilyenkov's position as follows:

> Though we have access to reality insofar as it is idealized, it is false that an idealized reality is mind-dependent. The point of Ilyenkov's insistence that ideal properties are genuine, objectively existing properties of objects, and not mental projections, is to allow him to argue that, whereas the individual subject can only relate to an idealized environment, that environment is mind-independent.[151]

What Ilyenkov argues for is an immanent theory of identity [*tozhdestvo*] between thought and being. The difference between speculative theories of identity and that of Ilyenkov's lies in the introduction of social practice as a transformative agent. The latter consists of an elaborate process where ideal and material phenomena are entangled with each other in a

[149] Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 5.

[150] Ilyenkov and Illesh, *Ot Abstraktnogo k Konkretnomu*. p. 87.

[151] David Bakhurst, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy: From the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov*, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 209.

mutually productive relationship, hence the question about the primacy of either thought or being loses its meaning. We will see in Chapter III that such a notion of social practice is not without its issues, even if it appears more dialectical in contrast to reflection theory. Yet, what results from this is an ontology of change that, borrowing Hardt and Negri's formulation, is not a theory of foundation but "a theory about our immersion in being and about being's continuous construction."[152] Indeed, any ontology of foundation (hence, most of them), would be untenable in a pair with dialectics, which is geared towards undermining any foundation. The methodology by which contact between subject and object is achieved here relies on Marx's dialectic of the abstract and the concrete, which aims to replace Hegel's speculative logic with the specific logic of the specific object. A detailed discussion of that method will be given in the following chapter. Before that however, we must enter into the larger framework that houses this method, that of dialectical logic.

[152] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form*, Theory out of Bounds 4 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 287.

Western Sovietology (and why it's insufficient to understand Ilyenkov)

The first major effort to study post-Stalinist Soviet philosophy and dialectical logic in particular was undertaken by the so-called Western Sovietology, headed by the Polish priest and philosopher J. M. Bochenski at the Institute for Eastern Europe in the University of Fribourg. Sovietologists like J. M. Bochenski, T. J. Blakely, K. G. Ballestrem and others approached Soviet philosophy by maintaining a strict distinction between philosophy and ideology, differentiating the two based on their positioning, goals, and methods. Philosophy, it was argued, maintained an open-ended relationship with knowledge, assuming the possibility of comprehending the world. Ideology, in contrast, categorically affirmed the knowability of reality and integrated elements into its system that were not necessarily derived from prior analysis. Furthermore, ideology's primary aim was not merely to acquire knowledge but to shape attitudes.[153] However, such a rigid separation of knowledge from its conditions of production, circulation, and effects failed to account for the lived process of knowledge formation. It was certainly insufficient to capture the symbiotic relationship between philosophy and ideology in the Soviet Union. A rather schematized notion of ideology and as a consequence, an uncritical notion of scientificity common in Sovietological literature was enough for identifying dogmatic positions, but insufficient for grasping the internal contradictions of Soviet philosophy.

Faced with what initially appeared to be an incoherent assemblage of normative statements, Western Sovietologists sought to bring order to Soviet philosophy by cataloguing its various currents, formalizing its debates, and tracing conceptual developments. Blakely identified five central themes in Soviet Marxism: abstraction, practice, truth, the psycho-physical problem, and the relationship between dialectics, logic, and the theory of knowledge. Within these thematic disputes, he saw two principal camps: the "modernists" and the "classicists". The former sought to modernize Soviet Marxism, while the latter adhered strictly to the foundational texts of Marxist philosophy, resisting any innovation.[154]

[153] Thomas J. Blakeley, "Is Epistemology Possible in Diamat?," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 2, no. 2 (June 1962), pp. 95–103.

[154] Blakeley, "Is Epistemology Possible in Diamat?", p. 100.

A fundamental assumption of Soviet Marxism, already apparent to the Sovietologists, was its simplified equation that paired being with matter and objectivity while opposing them to thought, spirit, and subjectivity. This strict dichotomy entailed that no objective element could enter the domain of subjectivity and vice versa. Consequently, thinking came to be understood as a purely neural activity of the individual brain. This equation, typical for the classicists, was challenged by modernists who sought to reject such rigid distinctions altogether.

On the theme of abstraction, classicists followed Engels' claim that essential knowledge was attainable, defining abstraction as a process that eliminates secondary properties to reach the essence of an object. Modernists rejected this purely negative conception but, as Blakely noted, did not provide an alternative theoretical formulation. Similarly, the concept of truth was often used interchangeably with knowledge. Classicists upheld a correspondence theory, seeing truth as an objective relation between knowledge and its object. Modernists, influenced by the revival of formal logic, viewed truth as a correspondence between propositions, reflecting the divide between formal and dialectical logicians.[155]

Regarding practice, classicists held that it was both the foundation and criterion of truth, intrinsic to the process of cognition. Modernists, by contrast, saw practice as external to cognition while acknowledging its relational significance. The most contentious issue, however, was the problem of *Sovpadenye* (coincidence), concerning the relationship between dialectics, logic, and the theory of knowledge. Classicists, drawing from Lenin, maintained an absolute identity among these three domains, effectively collapsing their distinctions. Modernists, on the other hand, argued that while these disciplines coincided within dialectical materialism, they remained distinct sciences in their own right. Based on these divisions, Blakely characterized classicists as ideological, whereas modernists, by avoiding grandiose explanations of the world, were seen by him as engaging in genuine philosophical inquiry.[156]

Karl Ballestrem provided a more nuanced assessment yet ultimately succumbed to a similar dichotomy. Beginning his extensive study of Soviet dialectical logic with the assertion that it is “really no logic”,[157] Ballestrem traced two principal strands within Soviet thought: the Hegelian and the Aristotelian. The Hegelian strand, rooted in Hegel’s panlogism, posited an identity between the laws of thought and those of being, which, in the Soviet context, were

[155] Blakeley, “Is Epistemology Possible in Diamat?”, p. 98.

[156] Blakeley, “Is Epistemology Possible in Diamat?”, p. 103.

[157] K. G. Ballestrem, “Dialectical Logic,” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 5, no. 3 (September 1965), p. 139.

reinterpreted through the lens of materialism. Engels and Lenin, in reversing Hegel's schema, replaced the "Idea" with "matter," yet retained the panlogical structure, Ballestrem claimed.[158]

The Aristotelian strand in this account, derived from Lenin's doctrine of reflection, which established a dualistic relationship between the knowing subject and the known object. This dualism was further reflected in the ontological claim that consciousness, while distinct from matter, was not entirely separate from it. To reconcile a non-material consciousness with a materialist ontology, Soviet Marxists advanced a theory of dialectical monism: matter, through its self-unfolding, was posited as the sole existing substance. After Stalin's mechanization of dialectics in the *Short Course*, the 1950s witnessed a revival of dialectical philosophy that emphasized relational and processual elements. As Ballestrem noted, consciousness was reconceptualized not as inherently material but as emerging from matter through the process of social labor, thereby attaining the capacity to act upon matter through practice.[159]

This Hegelian resurgence led to a reconfiguration of the reflection theory, shifting from an individual to a social epistemology. V. Lektorsky, a follower of Ilyenkov, articulated this shift by emphasizing that the "genuine gnoseological subject is the social subject",[160] arguing that individuals only attain subjectivity through the acquisition of socially constituted modes of consciousness such as language, logical categories, and collective knowledge. As he stated, "The individual subject need not 'transcend' the limits of his own consciousness, because he is already originally 'outside' of himself and only makes sense as a part and a form of existence of the social subject."[161]

Ballestrem observed that Soviet philosophy sought to systematize these various developments into a coherent framework. The result was a complex synthesis that posited knowledge as both historical and logical. However, a fundamental misunderstanding of Hegel led to conceptual confusion. As Ballestrem noted, "the 'logical' is said to be the subjective, the realm of knowledge, while the 'historical' is the objective, reality in its development."[162] Yet, in Hegelian terms, the logical corresponds to the ontological order, while the historical pertains

[158] Ballestrem, "Dialectical Logic", p. 140.

[159] Ballestrem, "Dialectical Logic", p. 148.

[160] Vladislav Lektorsky, "Problema Sub'ekta-Ob'ekta v Teorii Poznaniya," *Voprosi Filosofii*, no. 5 (1964), p. 31. Vygotsky's influence is evident here.

[161] Lektorsky, "Problema Sub'ekta-Ob'ekta v Teorii Poznaniya," p. 34.

[162] Ballestrem, "Dialectical Logic," p. 159.

to the development of spirit and knowledge. Consequently, in their attempt to "reverse" Hegel, Soviet theorists paradoxically reaffirmed his framework, merely altering its terminology.

Bochenski, in his survey of Soviet logic, documented the institutional and ideological constraints under which formal logic operated. Bochenski chronicled various discussions on logic, including debates at the *VF* journal and seminars at the Institute of Philosophy. He concluded that while Soviet logic had not contributed significantly to the methodology of science or semantics - both dismissed as idealist - it had played an essential role in the philosophy of logic. As he remarked, "No other country is known in which so many problems of this discipline have been so much discussed as in the Soviet Union, and, while many things written are valueless, some others seem to contain interesting ideas."[163]

Despite these intellectual developments, Bochenski maintained that dialectical logic did not constitute a legitimate field of logic. He classified Soviet logicians into three categories: those who lacked understanding of the subject but wrote about it nonetheless, those adhering to an Aristotelian tradition, and those aligned with the Hegelian tradition.[164] This classification corresponded to Ballestrem's distinction.

While the efforts of these authors are to be commended, and their work still can serve as an introduction to late Soviet philosophy, their categorizations, formulated in real time, don't fully grasp the intellectual dynamics of Soviet Marxism. This is true in the case of Soviet logic, which we turn to now, and especially in the case of Ilyenkov, who as we will see, defied almost all of these categories.

[163] J. M. Bocheński, "Soviet Logic," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 1 (1961), p. 33.

[164] Bocheński, "Soviet Logic," p. 35.

Logic as the place of the political in Soviet philosophy

In 1952, the Scottish philosopher C.A. Campbell expressed bewilderment at the Soviet Union's enlistment of logic in the construction of socialism. As he observed:

> It is an interesting sociological fact that, in the communist society, even so excessively abstract a discipline as Logic should be called upon to make its specific contribution to the achievement of Marxist ideals.[165]

Campbell's surprise stems from a fundamental divergence in the conceptualization of logic: whereas in Western academia logic functioned as a traditional university discipline, in the Soviet Union it was regarded as a manifestation of the rationality underpinning communism. In fact, logic in Russia deviates from its classical orientations as early as the 19th century.

The prevailing narrative on Russian philosophy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries often emphasizes its focus on religious and anthropological ideas, portraying it as hostile to methodological and logical inquiry. However, recent scholarship challenges this perception. Valentin Bazhanov's studies trace the development of logic in Russian university philosophy from the imperial era to the mid-20th century, demonstrating its prominent role in intellectual life during this period.[166] Figures such as V. N. Ivanovsky (1867-1939), A. N. Vasilyev (1880-1940), M. I. Karinsky (1840-1917) or A. I. VVedensky (1858-1925) devoted much of their efforts to developing logical research in Russia.

Ivanovsky, a leading Russian philosopher in the early 20th-century, identified his philosophical orientation as "gnoseological,"[167] emphasizing the study of methodology, and claimed that this position faced hostility from philosophers such as Plekhanov, who thought such studies secondary.[168] Ivanovsky was not vehemently opposed to Marxism, recognizing the importance of Marx's sociological contribution to the studies of science. Yet he warned

---

[165] C. A. Campbell, "The Soviet Concept of Logic," *Soviet Studies* 3, no. 3 (1952), p. 286.

[166] See: Bazhanov 2007; 2012; 2018.

[167] Vladimir Ivanovsky, *Metodologicheskoye Vvedeniye v Nauku i Filosofiyu*, vol. 1 (Minsk, 1923).

[168] Valentin Bazhanov, *Logiko-gnoseologičeskoe napravlenie v otečestvennoj filosofii: pervaâ polovina XX veka M.I. Karinskij, V.N. Ivanovskij, N.A. Vasil'ev*, Filosofiâ Rossii pervoj poloviny XX veka (Moskva: ROSSPÈN, 2012), p. 149.

against the reduction of science to its social conditions, arguing that the development of science takes place on the basis of the scientific tradition, whose internal logic cannot be explained away with reference to external factors.[169] Ivanovsky thus partially accepted discussions about "proletarian science", but limited this notion to social science. At the same time, he criticized Bukharin's views on the supremacy of proletarian science in relation to its bourgeois counterpart by arguing that scientific knowledge was constituted by the scientific community, whose political, religious, psychological and everyday prejudices influence scientific work.[170] Interestingly, Ivanovsky's work on psychology gained recognition from the founder of the cultural-historical school Lev Vygotsky,[171] who commended Ivanovsky's move to define psychology as a natural science.[172] In the 1960s, Ivanovsky is mentioned but rather as representing an early stage of development of the philosophy of science.[173]

A. N. Vasilyev was a mathematician and a philosopher, as well as a socialist (he knew Marx personally). Following N. Lobachevsky's "imagined (non-Euclidian) geometry", Vasilyev proposed an "imagined (non-Aristotelian) logic" which did away with the law of non-contradiction. Moreover, he struggled for a recognition of the possibility of multiple logics, based on an even more radical (for his context) claim of the possibility of multiple worlds. Vasilyev was sympathetic to Marxism and towards the end of his life, proclaimed himself to be an "Engelsian in philosophy" and that dialectical materialism proved his theory of imagined logic.[174] Being ill, he was unaware that his conception was being criticized as formalist in the Soviet journals,[175] for example, by Valentin Asmus. Vasilyev died in 1940, but his work continued to be read in the late Soviet period. In 1962, V.A. Smirnov wrote a comprehensive

[169] Ivanovsky, *Metodologicheskoye Vvedeniye v Nauku i Filosofiyu*, p. XXIV.

[170] Bazhanov, *Logiko-gnoseologičeskoe napravlenie v otečestvennoj filosofii*, p. 187.

[171] Lev Vygotsky, *Sobranie Sochineniy v Shesti Tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Pedagogika, 1982), p. 417.

[172] The term natural can be confusing here. Neither Ivanovsky nor Vygotsky meant anything biological by it. Rather, it referred to the study of that which truly exists [*est'*]. The English translation of the Russian *Estestvennaya nauka* as "natural science" does not do it justice.

[173] Bonifaty Kedrov, "Klassifikatsiya Nauk," in *Filosofskaya Entsiklopediya*, by Fyodor Konstantinov (Sovetskaya entsiklopediya, 1964), p. 581.

[174] Bazhanov, *Logiko-gnoseologičeskoe napravlenie v otečestvennoj filosofii*, p. 312.

[175] Although, the word formalism had by then become a scare word, thrown at anything, from differing interpretations of dialectical materialism to the symphonies of Dmitri Shostakovich.

article on Vasilyev's work.[176] In 1973, it would be P. Kopnin who would write about Vasilyev.[177] Contemporary studies in paraconsistent logic and dialetheism have much to do with Vasilyev's early attempts at such theories.

Following the revolution, logic was swiftly expunged from universities. Until 1946, formal logic was condemned as a bourgeois science. The *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* of the 1930s classified formal logic as "a form of metaphysical thought, belonging to a lower stage in the development of human knowledge, and which has been replaced by dialectics."[178] The *Abridged Philosophical Dictionary* of the 1940s echoed this sentiment, criticizing formal logic for detaching formal truth from material truth, in contrast to the emerging dialectical logic.[179]

A significant shift occurred in 1946, when a resolution by the Central Committee led to the reinstatement of logic in secondary schools and universities. This directive resulted in the establishment of logic departments and sectors within higher education institutions. This pivotal moment invites inquiry into the motivations behind the party's abrupt reassessment of logic's role. A. Guseynov contends that the heightened emphasis on logic and epistemology in the 1960s, for example, was intrinsically linked to the democratic ethos introduced during the Thaw:

> The era of democracy was sanctioned philosophically through substantiation of the scientific Method and the role of Reason as a universal road to Truth. It was, therefore, only natural to expect that our philosophical road to democracy will also begin with examination of thinking and method.[180]

---

[176] Vladimir Smirnov, "Logicheskie Vzglyady N.A.Vasil'eva," in *Ocherki Po Istorii Logiki v Rossii*, ed. Pyotr Nikitin (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1962).

[177] Pavel Kopnin, "O Logicheskikh Vozzreniyakh N.A. Vasil'eva," in *Dialektika, Logika, Nauka*, by Kopnin, Pavel (Moscow: Nauka, 1973).

[178] Katerina Kolozova, William Paul Cockshott, and Greg Michaelson, *Defending Materialism: The Uneasy History of the Atom in Science and Philosophy* (London New York Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2025), p. 194.

[179] Kolozova, Cockshott, and Michaelson, *Defending Materialism*, p. 193.

[180] Guseynov, Abdusalam, "The Philosophy of the Russian Sixtiers in the Humanist Context: A Philosophical Reflection," in *Philosophical Thought in Russia in the Second Half of the Twentieth*

However, this interpretation appears incongruous with historical developments, as the revival of logic commenced under Stalin, largely due to his personal orders. Moreover, the interest in logic in the '60s carried a certain apolitical character as we see in the accounts of key figures involved. Members of the so-called Moscow Methodological (formerly "Logical") circle, for instance, explicitly distanced themselves from political engagement. To be sure, their stance did not signify an absence of political consciousness but rather a deliberate withdrawal from the omnipresent politicization characteristic of Soviet communism. Svetlana Tabachnikova, who studied the group, notes that this mode of disengagement was not unique to logicians; similar tendencies were observable among other intellectual groups, such as the poet Ernst Neizvestny's circle and the earlier group surrounding Viatcheslav Ivanov.[181]

The Soviet Georgian philosopher Merab Mamardashvili provides a compelling interpretation of this phenomenon, suggesting that Soviet students' preference for the logical theme of abstract and concrete reflected less an intellectual inclination than a political decision. Such themes afforded a domain seemingly insulated from ideological constraints, wherein "real" philosophy could unfold. In this context, an engagement with *Capital* as a work of logic, common in the Soviet '60s, transcended its overt political-economic content.[182] As both B. Grushin and Mamardashvili (both members of the logical circle at the time) argue, *Capital* offered a methodological framework that permitted free, experimental thought - an approach fundamentally distinct from the repetition of prefabricated ideological formulas. The significance of *Capital* in rekindling interest in logic stemmed not only from its status as mandatory reading but also from its capacity to provide a logic that evolved in tandem with its object of study. Corroborating Mamardashvili's assessment, Grushin articulates their detachment from ideological concerns:

Century: A Contemporary View from Russia and Abroad, Ed. by Vladislav. A. Lektorsky and Marina F. Bykova (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), p. 93.

[181] Svetlana Tabatchnikova, *Le Cercle de méthodologie de Moscou, 1954-1989: une pensée, une pratique*, Recherches d'histoire et de sciences sociales (Paris: Éd. de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2007).

[182] Tabatchnikova, *Le Cercle de méthodologie de Moscou,* p. 46.

> We weren't interested in purely political or ideological issues, we were preoccupied with our fundamentally 'positive' affair, with no intention of improving society. Neither at the time nor afterwards.[183]

Yet it remains to be seen why it was specifically logic, a technical and somewhat abstract discipline, that became the birthplace of postwar Soviet Marxism. To answer this question, a brief look at the opposition between formal and dialectical logic the USSR is in order.

[183] Tabatchnikova. *Le Cercle de méthodologie de Moscou*, p. 47.

Formal Logic before 1946

In the 1920s, formal logic was still considered a legitimate area of inquiry. A key example of a rigorous engagement with the field from a communist perspective was the Soviet mathematician A. Kolmogorov's 1925 article, "On the Principle of the Excluded Middle." In this work, Kolmogorov critically examined classical logic, arguing that formalism arbitrarily selected its premises, whereas intuitionism derived them from factual considerations, thereby approximating a more integrated logical system. As Greg Michaelson observes, Kolmogorov's position bore strong Hegelian influences, suggesting that alternative approaches to logic were still permissible within Soviet intellectual discourse at this time.[184]

The philosophical critique of formal logic can be traced back to Lenin's own Hegelian-influenced writings, which set the groundwork for its eventual rejection within Marxist epistemology. However, it was only with the defeat of the so-called mechanists that this rejection was institutionalized. I concur with Sovietologists in describing the mechanists as representing the Aristotelian line in Soviet philosophy, not only for their rejection of Hegelian dialectical logic but also more importantly, for their assertion that, beyond a certain degree of specialization, a science could become independent of the broader philosophical system from which it emerged. This latter claim, while not explicitly referencing Aristotle, echoed his conception of specialized disciplines functioning autonomously from overarching metaphysics.[185]

Despite its exclusion from philosophy, formal logic was not entirely dismissed in all intellectual fields. Soviet mathematicians in the early 1930s continued to explore formal logical methods and axioms, such as those developed by Frege and Russell, in purely academic terms. As the specialist of Soviet cybernetics Slava Gerovitch notes:

> Back in the 1930s, Soviet mathematicians discussed formalism, intuitionism, and logicism as important mathematical trends without attaching to them any particular ideological labels.[186]

[184] Kolozova, Cockshott, and Michaelson, *Defending Materialism*, p. 180.

[185] Kolozova, Cockshott, and Michaelson, *Defending Materialism*, p. 171.

[186] Slava Gerovitch, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak: A History of Soviet Cybernetics* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002), p. 31.

This relative openness, however, did not last. The politicization of formalism within mathematics was set in motion in the mid-1930s, as exemplified by E. Kolman's denunciation of Hilbert's mathematical formalism.[187] This development underscores an important characteristic of Soviet ideology in the 1930s: rather than being imposed in a strictly top-down manner, it was shaped through a dynamic interplay of political directives and contributions from scientists, philosophers, and cultural figures. As Gerovitch further explains, the politicization of formalism ultimately led to the dissolution of boundaries between distinct intellectual discourses:

> Formalism became a traveling label, a floating signifier, that could be stuck wherever logical or mathematical reasoning appeared in the sciences. Formalism not only traveled across disciplines; most important, it tied together different layers of discourse (scientific, philosophical, and political), effectively erasing boundaries between them.[188]

As a result, formal logic was increasingly marginalized within Soviet philosophy, and its treatment in official Soviet dictionaries of the late 1930s reflects this shift. Kolozova, Cockshott and Michaelson have compiled definitions that illustrate the stark condemnation of formal logic:[189]

· "The laws of formal logic are opposed to the law of dialectical logic. Formal logic is empty, poor, abstract, for the laws and categories which it sets up do not correspond to objective reality." (Concise Philosophical Dictionary, 1940)

· "Formal logic is always a most trustworthy weapon in the hands of the predominant exploiting classes, a bastion of religion and obscurantism. (From a 1934 work on Dialectical and Historical Materialism)"

· "Formal logic is a metaphysical form of thinking... the lowest stage in the development of human knowledge, replaced by dialectic as the highest form of thinking. (Great Soviet Encyclopaedia, 1936)"

[187] Kolozova, Cockshott, and Michaelson, *Defending Materialism*, p. 184.

[188] Gerovitch, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak*, p. 33.

[189] Kolozova, Cockshott, and Michaelson, *Defending Materialism*, 192-194.

Besides many letters of denunciation, E. Kolman is the author of several works on mathematics. He was part of the Soviet delegation at the well-known 1931 Second International Congress of the History of Science and Technology in London where, apart from delivering his presentation, he was responsible for the party discipline of the members. With his paper "The Present Crisis in the Mathematical Sciences and General Outlines for Their Reconstruction", Kolman described the contradictions in mathematics like those between the discrete and the continuous, the finite and infinite etc. as dialectical. With this, he aimed to emphasize the divorce from matter in bourgeois science:

> The most refined finesses of finitism, of metalogic, of mathematical atomistics, merely express the anxiety of bourgeois mathematicians to separate themselves from matter and dialectics by the veil of formal logic, guiding them directly into the desert of scholasticism.[190]

This critique was consistent with the prevailing Soviet position, which viewed formal logic as incapable of capturing change and movement – fundamental categories of dialectical materialism. The necessity of a dialectical logic as an alternative was a key point emphasized in Soviet contributions to the congress. The British Marxist scientist J. D. Bernal further elaborated on the role of dialectics in relation to the sciences, defining it not as a critique or substitute for scientific methodology but as a unifying framework that could coordinate and integrate the specialized sciences. As Bernal explained:

> It [dialectical materialism] is not a critique of science; it does not claim to be a substitute either for experimental method or for the logical proof of laws or theories, but it does in a very important way supplement science by providing a definite method of coordinating the larger groups of special sciences and in pointing the way to new experiment and discovery.[191]

---

[190] Ernst Kolman, "The Present Crisis in the Mathematical Sciences and General Outlines for Their Reconstruction," in *Science at the Crossroads*, ed. Nikolai Bukharin (London: F. Cass, 1971). As cited in Kolozova, Cockshott, and Michaelson, *Defending Materialism*, p. 184.

[191] John D Bernal, "Dialectical Materialism," in *Aspects of Dialectical Materialism*, ed. Levy et al. (London: Watts&Co., 1934), p. 98.

This instrumentalist approach to dialectics, later utilized by Soviet ideologues such as Fedoseyev, positioned dialectical materialism as an overarching methodology rather than a competing scientific discipline. In addition to Bernal, J. B. S. Haldane contributed to the discussion, arguing in a similar vein that formal logic, in its existing framework, struggled to adequately explain the complexities of the real world.[192]

Thus, by the late 1930s, formal logic had been effectively dismissed within Soviet philosophy. This period, often referred to as the "nihilist period" of formal logic, saw little serious engagement with the discipline, as its premises were increasingly regarded as incompatible with the ideological foundations of dialectical materialism. The Stalinist period marked a turning point for formal logic. In the 1933 *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* edited by Mitin, we read that formal logic reflects slow-moving social formations like feudalism. Including formal logic into the dialectical as one of its moments would be like "declaring alchemy as a moment of chemistry."[193] Mitin and Yudin attacked Valentin Asmus, who was once an opponent of formal logic himself but later embraced it. Because of his studying of formal logic, Asmus was accused of idealism and counter-revolutionary Trotskyism.[194]

[192] Kolozova, Cockshott, and Michaelson, *Defending Materialism*, p. 192.

[193] Mark Mitin, ed., *Dialekticheskij i Istoricheskij Materialism.* (Moscow: Partiynoe izdatel'stvo, 1933), p. 224.

[194] Sergey Korsakov, "Iz Istorii Vozrozhdeniya Logiki v SSSR v 1941-1946 Chast' I," *Logicheskie Issledovaniya* 21, no. 2 (2015), p. 146.

The revival of formal logic

Despite earlier ideological resistance, Stalin himself ordered the revival of formal logic, admittedly, for banal reasons. In May 1941, Stalin personally tasked P. Yudin with preparing a textbook of logic for schools. As Yudin recounts,[195] Stalin was frustrated with cadres that couldn't articulate their sentences properly when reporting to him. With a number of textbooks of logic of the pre-revolutionary period demonstratively placed on his desk, he reportedly told Yudin:

> Logic is not taught - people do not know how to reason consistently, they confuse concepts. Children are not taught from childhood to think correctly, consistently and logically… There is no division of logic into bourgeois and proletarian, people think alike. They must simply be taught to think.[196]

The old logic textbooks – Stalin pointed to the one by Georgy Chelpanov[197] - were to be reworked and "modernized." Lacking Soviet-trained specialists in logic, Yudin turned to Asmus and E. Kolman, assigning each the task of drafting a new textbook. Despite the turbulent times,[198] both philosophers presented drafts of their textbooks. Asmus' draft was criticized for

---

[195] Although I tend to believe Korsakov's account, an alternative version places Valentin Asmus in Stalin's office, instead of Pavel Yudin. In her book on Georgy Shchedrovitsky, Svetlana Tabachnikova discusses a recording of a meeting, subsequently transcribed by Shchedrovitsky, where Asmus reportedly recounted the same story: "According to him, Asmus had been summoned to Stalin's house at night, in the middle of the war - this was in 1942. Stalin told him: 'My officers can neither think nor express themselves in a logically correct manner. Could you teach them logic?' 'Which one?'Asmus is said to have asked, and received as an answer, "Formal logic, of course". After that he gave logic lessons for months to senior officers; this also took place at very late hours." - Tabatchnikova, *Le Cercle de méthodologie de Moscou, 1954-1989*, p. 82.

[196] Korsakov, "Iz Istorii Vozrozhdeniya Logiki v SSSR v 1941-1946 Chast' I", p. 148.

[197] It is noteworthy that Chelpanov opposed the introduction of Marxism into psychology, which made him lose his position at the institute of psychology in 1923. - Tabatchnikova, *Le Cercle de méthodologie de Moscou, 1954-1989*, p. 80.

[198] Before the books were finished, the members of the institute of philosophy had to evacuate due to the beginning of the war.

being overloaded and vague on the relation between the laws of thinking and those of being. Another reviewer pointed out that the textbook did not express well the meaning of dialectical contradictions, confusing those in thought with those in being. A noteworthy comment came from Aleksei Losev, the famous Soviet idealist and author of the seminal *Dialectics of myth*, who quipped that:

> The dialectic is knocking on the door of Comrade Asmus and asking him to let it into the textbook, but he does not like it and does not let it in. Comrade Kolman, on the other hand, loves dialectics and wants to introduce it, but it does not give itself to him.[199]

After years of revisions and mostly favorable reviews, Asmus' textbook finally got published in 1947 and subsequently re-published several times. In the 1940s, logic was taught at the *kafedra* of dialectical materialism, which was headed by the Stalinist philosopher Z. Beletsky. It was Beletsky that the party chose to edit Chelpanov's old textbook – "modernize" it, as Stalin required – and re-publish it. Throughout the 1940s, then, the institute of philosophy held numerous meetings on the book and discussed formal logic in general.

[199] Korsakov, Sergey, "Iz Istorii Vozrozhdeniya Logiki v SSSR v 1941-1946 Chast' I", p. 152.

Formal Logic After the War

As we will discover in this section, the fortunes of formal logic would change drastically. I will explore the following thesis accounting for this change: As the postwar political order in the Soviet Union stabilized, dialectical logic which stressed contradiction, opposition and antagonism got gradually replaced by formal logic, which corresponded better to the goals of mechanization of production, as Maria Menshikova highlights. Menshikova's detailed archival work on Soviet logic will constitute the basis of my discussion below.[200]

It would be useful to take a moment here to introduce some of the key figures of the postwar debates on logic in the Soviet Union. The mathematician Sofya Yanovskaya taught at the faculty of philosophy from 1955 to 1957. This period was especially productive for her since she led several courses on mathematical logic without repeating a single one.[201] Yanovskaya began as a convinced communist, participated in the civil war and in the 1930s published texts that called for grounding mathematics in class politics. In 1928, she co-authored with E. Kolman an article on Hegel and mathematics, which praised the passage from the abstract to the concrete.[202] Yanovskaya also edited Marx's *Mathematical Manuscripts*. While she enjoyed a reputation as a serious scholar, which was certainly warranted, she is also said to have insisted on executing a deserter from the Red Army. Some, like Ilyenkov's student S. Mareev, think she personally participated in the execution.[203] While unconfirmed, this story does not come as a surprise, as her active participation in the "Luzin affair" (A controversy over the condemnation of a Soviet Mathematician Nikolai Luzin) clearly shows her readiness to send her own colleagues toward the executioner.

Two other figures connected to Yanovskaya need to be mentioned, A. Cherkesov and P. Popov. The latter was the dean of the *kafedra* of logic at the faculty of philosophy and a

[200] Maria Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR" (Master's thesis, Moscow, State Academic University for the Humanities, 2018).

[201] Maria Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", p. 23.

[202] Sofiya Yanovskaya, "Kategoriya Kolichestva u Gegelya i Sushchnost' Matematiki," *Pod Znamenem Marksizma*, no. 3 (1928), p. 30–71.

[203] Maria Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", p. 24.

representative of the Imiaslavie (Onomatodoxy) movement within the Orthodox Church. He stood on the side of formal logicians.

As for Cherkesov, even though there is very little published under his name in the '40s, it is precisely at that time that his academic career took off, culminating in his occupying the position of the dean of the *kafedra* of logic at the MGU's faculty of philosophy. These are, among others, the names that would shape the Soviet discussion on logic in the postwar period.[204]

Menshikova poses a critical question: how did formal logic ultimately attain legitimacy and, over time, surpass dialectical logic both institutionally and theoretically? She explains this development with the sociologist Alexander Bikbov's thesis, which asserts that Soviet philosophy must be understood not merely as a university discipline but as a form of state science.[205] From the early years of Soviet rule, philosophy was a central concern for the Bolsheviks, who charged it with the ideological task of cultivating class consciousness among Soviet citizens. Consequently, as a state science, logic also was expected to serve the direct interests of the Party, thus shaping its institutional evolution and its eventual ascendancy over dialectical logic.

[204] Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", p. 25.

[205] Aleksandr Bikbov, *Grammatika porjadka: istoričeskaja sociologija ponjatij, kotorye menjajut našu real'nost'*, Serija Social′naja teorija (Moskva: Izdat. Dom Vysšej Školy Ėkonomiki - VŠĖ, 2014), p. 240.

Logic and the mechanization of production

The persistence and institutional success of formal logic in the Soviet Union, as argued by Menshikova, must be understood in conjunction with the rise of mechanization in production and the broader discourse on scientific-technical progress. While dialectical logic had long been positioned as the dominant epistemological framework within Soviet philosophy, its role became increasingly marginalized in contexts where the demands of technological development required formalized, rule-based systems. Menshikova contends that formal logic, unlike dialectical logic, was directly applicable to the mechanization of production, aligning with the Soviet Union's ambitions for economic and technological modernization.

The very notion of *scientific-technical progress* first gained traction in discussions on logic before becoming more widely embedded in political discourse. By the mid-1960s, it had become a central theme in the speeches of politicians and the writings of science popularizers.[206] According to Menshikova, formal logicians played a key role in shaping this discourse by emphasizing the applicability of their discipline to technology, particularly in the context of modelling thought and mechanizing industrial processes. The increasing interest in machine learning and cybernetics further reinforced the perceived utility of formal logic, as it offered a structured, quantifiable approach to cognition and computation.

In this shift, one can observe a stark contrast between the epistemological foundations of formal and dialectical logic. Formal logic came to represent the camp of quantification, assuming that thought could be systematized into laws and rules, making it suitable for technological applications. In contrast, dialectical logic maintained that thought, given its inherently contingent and open-ended nature, resisted such formalization. Ironically, this dynamic inverted the traditional positions of the two fields: formal logicians who often reproached dialecticians precisely for their reduction of thinking to the laws of dialectics, were now using the laws-based paradigm in their favor. Soviet dialecticians, on the other hand, historically associated with arguments about thinking conforming to the laws of being, now stressed the contingent nature of human thought against its quantification.

Menshikova describes the move to associate formal logic to mechanization as a successful translation of high-level political imperatives - particularly the emphasis on technical progress

[206] Bikbov, *Grammatika porjadka,* p. 256.

- into scientific discourse.[207] This translation is evident in various intellectual developments of the period. For instance, a 1959 editorial in *VF*, plausibly authored by Mamardashvili, argued that mathematical logic had established objective, exact laws capable of serving as a foundation for studying thought.[208] Similarly, under the initiative of Sofya Yanovskaya, Alan Turing's seminal paper "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" was translated into Russian further reinforcing the connection between formal logic, cybernetics and automation. This alignment was particularly important in maintaining global scientific competitiveness, as automation and cybernetics became key areas of international research. This ensured the continued institutional prominence of formal logic.

However, while the prioritization of formal logic over dialectical logic may have been politically expedient, it was not without its critics. Ilyenkov, one of the most prominent defenders of dialectical logic, found himself on the losing side of the intellectual shift from class struggle to scientific-technical progress. I will argue below that his critique, while certainly conceptual, was ultimately less about metaphysical questions concerning contradictions in matter and more about the broader socio-historical implications of the turn toward scientism. His emphasis on dialectical logic can thus be interpreted as a prescient warning about the alienating effects of an overly technical and formalized approach to knowledge. In his later work on pedagogy and psychology, as well as his continuous emphasis on the existence of alienation in socialism, this threat remained important.

The transition from a class-based approach to science to a formalist paradigm took place with Stalin's article on language. To understand this transition, key for Ilyenkov's own project, we must briefly explore the effect of Stalin's intervention on the logical debates.

[207] Maria Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", p. 40.

[208] Editorial, "Avtomatizatsiya i Nekotorye Voprosy Obshchestvennogo Razvitiya," *Voprosi Filosofii*, no. 8 (1959): 3–16.

Stalin's linguistics

Stalin's intervention in Soviet linguistics did not introduce novel ideas, but rather consolidated tendencies already present among Soviet linguists.[209] At the time of the publication of Stalin's text, Marr's "new doctrine on language," which emphasized class character, was losing its monopoly as the only Marxist approach to linguistics. Stalin's intervention established two key principles: first, that language exists above class relations, and second, that Marr had committed an idealist error by separating language from thought. This intervention had profound implications beyond linguistics, particularly in the field of logic.

Menshikova highlights that prior to the condemnation of Marrism, the Soviet Ministry of Education adhered to the view that logic was a class science. However, by the time of Stalin's intervention, formal logic had already gained legitimacy as an academic discipline. Therefore, while Stalin's text influenced the trajectory of formal logic, its impact should not be overstated. There is, however, a different way in which Stalin influenced the debates on logic. Following Stalin's decree, formal logicians began accusing proponents of dialectical logic of "cryptomarrism",[210] while dialectical logicians, in turn, denounced formal logicians as idealists for separating form from content - the same accusation Stalin had levelled against Marr. This also corresponded to their distinction between formal correctness and truth, already criticized by Hegel. Thus, even though the debate on logic unfolded primarily after Stalin's death and Khrushchev's "secret speech," its philosophical delineations remained firmly rooted in Stalin's arguments. The Soviet philosopher Osmakov underscores the theoretical implications of Stalin's intervention by distinguishing between logic and the science of logic:

> Stalin's works on linguistics teach us, above all, to distinguish the logic of man's thinking from the science of logic, i.e., to distinguish logic as a subject of scientific research from logic as the science of the actually existing logic of human thinking – in the same way as language must be distinguished from the science of language (linguistics). Literature in the field of logic has so far failed to draw that distinction.[211]

[209] Maria Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", pp. 12-13.

[210] Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", p. 14.

[211] I.I. Osmakov, "O Logike Myshleniya i o Nauke Logike," *Voprosi Filosofii* 3 (1950), p. 317.

This differentiation mirrored Stalin's broader ideological shift: while he did not abandon the class principle altogether, he sought to reframe scientific disciplines in a manner that emphasized their universal rather than class-based foundations. In this sense, one could still invoke class when talking about the science of logic or that of language, but not when talking about language or logic themselves. This prompts the question: what motivated Stalin's turn from an unrestricted application of the class principle in all sciences to a form of ideological universalism?

Svetlana Tabachnikova surveys several hypotheses to explain this shift.[212] One possibility, suggested by Van der Zweerde, is that Stalin sought to grant some sciences greater autonomy, although a reason is not given.[213] Another argument, put forth by R. Zapata,[214] N. Girard and U. Maas,[215] posits that Stalin recognized that rigid adherence to the class principle impeded the development of information technologies, thereby threatening the Soviet Union's ability to compete with Western military advancements. Alternatively, J.M. Gayman suggests[216] that Stalin's intervention in linguistics was a strategic response to the crisis in national minority policies. In the early Soviet period, national minorities had been supported through language policies - earning the USSR the label "Affirmative Action Empire."[217] However, by the postwar period, Stalin had reversed course, elevating Russian as the dominant language. Marrism, which posited that languages emerged from multiple origins and tended toward a universal linguistic unity, could have been perceived as a threat to national languages, whose preservation had become a matter of political necessity. Thus, Stalin's repudiation of Marrism

[212] Tabatchnikova, *Le Cercle de méthodologie de Moscou*, p. 85-89.

[213] Evert van der Zweerde, "Soviet Philosophy – the Ideology and the Handmaid. A Historical and Critical Analysis of Soviet Philosophy, with a Case-Study Into Soviet History of Philosophy," *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie* 57, no. 4 (1995): 757–59.

[214] René Zapata, *La Philosophie russe et soviétique*, Que sais-je ? (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1988), p. 111.

[215] Nicole Girard, "Sur une explication à l'intervention de J. Staline, ou la raison technologique," *Langages* 11, no. 46 (1977), pp. 3–23.

[216] Françoise Gadet, Jean-Marc Gayman, and Yvan Mignot, eds., *Les Maîtres de La Langue: Avec Des Textes de Marr, Staline, Polivanov*, Collection Action Poétique (Paris: F. Maspero : Action poétique, 1979), pp. 152-153.

[217] Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, The Wilder House Series in Politics, History, and Culture (Ithaca London: Cornell University Press, 2010).

reassured those concerned with national linguistic identity. The relationship between language and nationality was particularly strong in the Soviet Union, given Stalin's early thesis in his 1913 text on the national question where language was made a necessary attribute in recognizing a group as a nationality.

These hypotheses, rather than being mutually exclusive, collectively capture different facets of Stalin's ideological shift. The most plausible explanation is that this decision was driven by a combination of factors, all contributing to the broader *process of normalization* required after the war. As Tabachnikova argues:

> [Marrism] placed too much emphasis on sociological and ideological differences and divisions at a time when unity had become politically more profitable. In the USSR of the 'whole people,' where the antagonistic classes would have disappeared, what Stalin called, in attacking the positions of the Marrists, 'vulgar sociologism,' which reduced everything to the class struggle, must also disappear. The time had come, in politics, for a unifying ideology and culture. Russian quite naturally became the 'language of the whole people.'[218]

This account is corroborated by Menshikova who suggests a close relationship between state administration and academic research, arguing that the revolutionary application of the class approach receded as the Soviet order stabilized. In particular, Stalin's 1936 declaration of the end of class warfare within the Soviet Union marked a shift away from a militant class-based ideology in certain scientific disciplines, even as class struggle remained a dominant theme in international affairs and philosophy.[219]

In parallel with this ideological consolidation, Stalin also transformed the Marxist conceptual framework of scientific inquiry. As Gayman notes, he replaced the binary of proletarian and bourgeois science with a distinction between different instrumentalizations of the same scientific discipline. This shift marked a further dilution of Soviet Marxism's initial revolutionary character: in his text on linguistics, Stalin declared that communism would not be constructed through class struggle but rather through the top-down planning of the socialist state - contradicting the original Leninist expectation that the state would "wither away."[220]

---

[218] Tabatchnikova, *Le Cercle de méthodologie de Moscou,* p. 87.

[219] Maria Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", p. 14.

[220] Tabatchnikova, *Le Cercle de méthodologie de Moscou,* p. 88.

I argue that Stalin's postwar theoretical policies aimed at normalizing Soviet society by prioritizing universality over class antagonism, thereby obfuscating the real social conflicts that persisted within the USSR. At the same time, abandoning the dual-science paradigm (bourgeois and proletarian) opened new alleys in scientific inquiry, hitherto stifled by ideological concerns. This normalization process, as described by Menshikova, unfolded through various educational reforms and the introduction of theoretical maxims that supplanted the emptied-out notion of class struggle with a yet more abstract notion of universal humanness. One manifestation of this shift was the gradual relaxation of the Party's ideological grip on certain scientific disciplines.

A major catalyst for this particular change was the 1945 dropping of nuclear bombs by the United States, which underscored the urgency of unshackling Soviet scientific research from pseudo-dialectical constraints - especially in the realm of military science. This argument is reinforced by Michaelson, drawing on Lorentz, who recounts an episode from 1948: during the height of Lysenkoism in biology, some Soviet officials sought to extend class-based scientific limitations to other disciplines. However, when such an initiative targeted physics and mathematics, Lavrentii Beria, then head of the Atomic Missile Project, intervened to block it. Beria, reportedly persuaded by physicists that class-based restrictions would hinder progress, prioritized the advancement of Soviet military technology over ideological purity.[221]

Thus, Stalin's postwar ideological recalibration must be understood as part of a broader effort to stabilize Soviet society, consolidate state control, and ensure technological competitiveness in the emerging Cold War. While Stalin's ideological pivot did not entirely abandon class-based language, it redefined its application, prioritising state planning and national unity over the revolutionary dynamics that had characterized earlier Soviet policies. Having this in mind, we can pass to the concept of dialectical logic as it was developed by Soviet philosophers.

[221] Kolozova, Cockshott, and Michaelson, *Defending Materialism*. p. 199.

Dialectical logic

In the postwar period, dialectical logic faced both political constraints and deeply rooted theoretical difficulties. As Bonifaty Kedrov would recall:

> At the beginning of the 50s, on large all-union congresses on philosophy and logic, the former administration of the institute of philosophy of the Soviet Academy of Sciences expressed, in official order, declarations such as, for example, the recognition of dialectical logic is a knife in the back of dialectical materialism.[222]

We can briefly restate and summarize the difficulties for dialectical logic. Firstly, for a regime that sought to turn the society into a factory, dialectical logic was of no use. The five-year plans of Soviet industrialization structurally favored formal logic. As Menshikova reported:

> Formal logic was found to be applicable in the field of mechanization of production. . . the state was more interested in the development of formal logic as a discipline and therefore supported it institutionally.[223]

Secondly, the development of dialectical logic was hindered by the Stalinization of Soviet linguistics. Dialectical logic positioned itself as the logic of the working class and of communists, marking formal logic as bourgeois (although, Ilyenkov in particular didn't rely on such claims). Thus, with Stalin announcing language to be universally human and above class relations, proponents of dialectical logic lost their Marxist grounding. This made it difficult to open departments, introduce courses and write textbooks, rendering the work of disseminating the ideas of dialectical logic virtually impossible. To be sure, dialectical logic was mentioned in Soviet print, although mostly in ways that emptied it of meaning.

[222] Kedrov, Bonifaty, *Yedinstvo Dialektiki, Logiki i Teorii Poznaniya* (Moscow, 2006)., p. 12.

[223] Maria Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", p. 5.

It is commonly held that in the 1950s, this discipline was relatively obscure and wholly withdrawn from political life.[224] Yet, in a political regime whose claim to legitimacy rests on fidelity to dialectics, the weight of the stakes involved in defining dialectical logic become apparent. From the point of view of the nomenklatura, the latter emerges as the source of intelligibility of the ontology that legitimates Soviet power. In this regard, dialectical logic:

> grows to include all the basic questions about the nature of philosophy, about the compatibility of the philosophical disciplines among themselves, and on their relationships with the remaining sciences, natural and social. It determines how historical materialism relates to sociology, psychology, history, etc.[225]

But, for reform-minded philosophers like Ilyenkov, dialectical logic was a critical instrument that could expose naturalized forms of domination. It was this motive, I argue, that pushed him to begin revitalizing Soviet Marxism from that field. The plurality of theories classified under the term "dialectical logic" during the Soviet era is particularly striking. Tabachnikova aptly describes this situation:

> …there was the long-standing opposition between the advocates of formal logic and those of dialectical logic, into which every proposition had to inscribe itself. On the other hand, there was Ilyenkov's approach, which also qualified as 'dialectical logic.' Finally, there was their own research [that of G. Shchedrovitsky and A. Zinoviev], which they could only present under the label of 'dialectical logic.'[226]

This multiplicity of usages highlights the ambiguous nature of the term as it was employed in Soviet philosophical discourse. From a contemporary perspective, the concept of dialectical logic appears perplexing, largely because the Soviet understanding of logic differed significantly from the discipline as it is recognized today. Lenin, for instance, conflated logic,

---

[224] Valentin A. Bazhanov and Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, "Post-Soviet Marxism in the Soviet Era: Activity Approach to the Analysis of Science," *Epistemology & Philosophy of Science* 55, no. 3 (2018), p. 146.; Mikhail Rozov, *Filosofiya nauki v novom videnii* (Moscow: Novyy khronograf, 2012), p. 252.

[225] Tom Rockmore et al., *Marxism and Alternatives*, vol. 45, Sovietica (Dordrecht: Springer, 1981), p. 83.

[226] Tabatchnikova, *Le Cercle de méthodologie de Moscou,* p. 96.

dialectics, and the theory of knowledge, noting in his comments on Hegel that "three words are not needed: it is one and the same thing".[227] This perspective aligns with a broader 19th-century tradition that treated logic as a general theory of knowledge. Even within Soviet philosophy itself, the term was not without its ambiguities. Merab Mamardashvili, later reflected on this conceptual confusion:

> Dialectic was for us the shorthand designation of a process of thought, and not that inexorable process of essence [as in the case of Hegelianism]; it was a kind of logic of content and dialectical logic. But our group reluctantly called it 'dialectical logic,' because at the time dialectics […] was developed in a completely different style: it was nothing other than the speculative elevation of one's own transgressions of various laws of thought above the formal logic that they were abolishing, on the pretext that it did not dare to transgress these laws, whereas they [the Soviet philosophers] did… The system of this transgression - meaningless in most cases - was called 'dialectical logic' as the highest form of logic, as opposed to 'simple' formal logic. It was therefore necessary to pass between Charybdis and Scylla.[228]

The origins of dialectical logic as a distinct Soviet construct are commonly traced back to the intellectual lineage of Hegel, Engels, and Lenin. While references to the term appear in Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* and Lenin's *Once Again on the Trade Unions*, its systematic usage was primarily a product of Soviet discourse. Menshikova emphasizes an important aspect of dialectical logic, noting its function as a science of party-building. Engels' writings were instrumental in legitimizing dialectical logic within Soviet philosophy, particularly his endorsement of Hegel's critique of formal logic. In *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels provides a succinct summary of Hegel's section on syllogism in the *Science of Logic*:

> Dialectical logic, in contrast to the old, merely formal logic, is not, like the latter, content with enumerating the forms of motion of thought, i.e., the various forms of judgment and conclusion, and placing them side by side without any connection. On the contrary, it

[227] Vladimir Lenin, *Collected Works: Volume 38 (Philosophical Notebooks)* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), p. 319.

[228] As cited in: Tabatchnikova, *Le Cercle de méthodologie de Moscou,* p. 97.

derives these forms out of one another, it makes one subordinate to another instead of putting them on an equal level, it develops the higher forms out of the lower.[229]

Engels, largely in agreement with Hegel, asserted that dialectical logic should be understood as a system that deduces one form of movement of thought from another rather than juxtaposing them arbitrarily. As Menshikova argues, Engels' notebooks for *Dialectics of Nature* played a decisive role in establishing dialectical logic as a legitimate philosophical discipline rather than merely a methodology for party organization.

Another element of Soviet dialectical logic, the application of the class principle to logic, as Gregory Michaelson demonstrates, can be traced back to Joseph Dietzgen. A German worker and close associate of Marx, Dietzgen is sometimes credited with coining the term "dialectical materialism". In his letters to his son, he associated bourgeois exploitation with formal logic, arguing that the latter's emphasis on difference naturalized social divisions. Dietzgen's *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy* extends this critique by arguing that truth is confirmed not through words but through action.[230]

Another philosopher worth mentioning here is Francis Bacon. Alexander Vucinich reminds us that prior to the postwar elevation of logic as a central issue in Soviet Marxism, philosophers often credited Francis Bacon as a forerunner of materialist philosophy. Lunacharsky, for instance, recognized Bacon as the first thinker to articulate the social character of science and the variable nature of logic that constructs it.[231] An argument that could be used in favor of dialectical logic against the universalism of the formal.

This historical perspective is important for understanding how Soviet philosophers framed dialectical logic as a polemical tool. Dialectical logic was also often employed as a marker of "high theory,"[232] distinct from the more mainstream dialectical materialism. From this vantage point, dialectical logicians attacked their opponents as proponents of "elementary" logic and accused them of metaphysical thinking in the Hegelian sense. As Menshikova comments, since

[229] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works. 25*, p. 296.

[230] Kolozova, Cockshott, and Michaelson, *Defending Materialism*, p. 174.

[231] Alexander Vucinich, *Empire of Knowledge*, Reprint 2020 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), p. 132.

[232] Maria Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", p. 17.

remaining within the dialectical framework was mandatory, formal logicians struggled to respond adequately to such critiques.

Hegel against syllogisms

While today the idea of reading Hegel's dialectic as an alternative to formal logic sounds at best far-fetched, and in any case, a relic of the Soviet ideological fantasies, it has been taken up in a 2023 book by Jacob McNulty. In his *Hegel's Logic and Metaphysics*, McNulty presents a plausible case for such a reading by invoking the so-called logocentric predicament, the problem of grounding logic without recourse to logic itself. In brief, if logic is presupposed by any rational argument, then its laws can't be justified by that very argument, since it would imply circularly justifying logic with itself. This problem opens up a discussion on the possibility of an expanded logic, grounded in some form of metaphysical foundation. McNulty does not discuss the efforts of Soviet philosophers in this direction, but his work provides a systematic treatment of Hegel's views on the feasibility of dialectics as a non-formal logic. It is on that treatment that I'll base my own reconstruction of the question.

McNulty identifies elements in Hegel that distinguish his dialectic from the laws of non-formal logic. Firstly, the beginning of logic that passes from Being to Nothing through Becoming is neither inference nor judgment in the traditional sense. Hegel only arrives at the syllogism of formal logic later, these laws are not at work in the doctrine of being. This circumstance underscores the absurdity of the position of certain Soviet philosophers who declared formal logic to be a more basic case of dialectical logic – a position that Ilyenkov never endorsed. We could say that Hegel does follow the formal law of non-contradiction, but only in a non-formal way. As McNulty explains:

> Each arises because of the unique content they treat, not because of the form of statement made about it. Similarly, each is *sui generis*, rather than a token instance of some general type. I therefore think Hegel has good grounds to claim that the line he draws between dialectical contradictions and those of formal logic is nonarbitrary.[233]

It is no surprise that the author of the *Science of Logic* held logic in high regard. Yet one must be reminded that Hegel did not understand logic in the same vein as we do today, or even

[233] Jacob McNulty, *Hegel's Logic and Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), p. 127.

as most people did in his time. He understood logic as a general way of knowledge that included sensation and desire. As he writes:

> So much is logic natural to the human being, is indeed his very nature. If we however contrast nature as such, as the realm of the physical, with the realm of the spiritual, then we must say that logic is the supernatural element that permeates all his natural behavior, his ways of sensing, intuiting, desiring, his needs and impulses; and it thereby makes them into something truly human, even though only formally human – makes them into representations and purposes.[234]

What is important for our purposes here, is Hegel's relation to formal logic. As is well-known, Hegel opposed the conception of syllogistic logic as a system of three judgments as it neglected the relations of determination, stating that one was "immediately seized by boredom"[235] upon hearing these syllogisms. For Hegel, it is not that syllogisms distort the object by separating its aspects as isolated, but that the object itself is a syllogism, although one understood as relational in the line of S-P-U (singular-particular-universal), rather than as an ensemble of propositions: "All things are a syllogism, a universal united through particularity with singularity; surely not a whole made up of three propositions."[236] The terms used by Hegel to express these relations are subsumption, derivation, mediation, etc. Hegel describes the syllogism understood in content in the following way:

> The singular is some immediate concrete subject matter or other; particularity, one of its determinacies, properties or relations; universality, a yet more abstract, more singularized determinateness in the particular.[237]

Hegel also demonstrates how a qualitative syllogism based on its content renders formal syllogism incorrect:

---

[234] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, ed. George Di Giovanni, First paperback edition, Cambridge Hegel Translations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 12.

[235] Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 593.

[236] Hegel, *The Science of Logic,* p. 593.

[237] Hegel, *The Science of Logic,* p. 593.

> If from the middle term that a wall was painted blue it is concluded that it is blue, this is a correct inference. But, this conclusion notwithstanding, the wall can be green if it was also covered over with a yellow color, a circumstance from which alone it would follow that the wall is yellow.[238]

Given that the middle term is one possible contingent particularization of the singular that has infinite other aspects that could relate it to other universals, Hegel concludes: "It is only fair to hold that nothing is as unsatisfactory as such a formal syllogism, since which middle term is employed is a matter of chance or arbitrariness."[239] Hegel is of course reacting to Kant's excommunication of metaphysics from philosophy as dogmatic. For Kant, logic was self-evident and in large part complete as early as in Aristotle. Kant's views on logic are beyond the scope of our research. It will suffice to say that for Kant, logic certainly needed no grounding in a wider metaphysical framework. Jacob McNulty justly points to a contradiction here. Namely, Kant's standard of critique, which smites metaphysics out of the legitimate space of philosophy, is not applied to logic at all. McNulty thus claims that since Kant leaves the question of what justifies logic unanswered, his critique of metaphysics, which depends on logic, becomes vulnerable too.[240]

Hegel, in contrast to Kant, begins with indeterminate being and arrives at the laws of traditional logic hundreds of pages later. As McNulty notes, this means that Hegel derives these laws from the concept of being, rather than taking them for granted or pre-given. In this path, Hegel moves from the self-sufficient monadic concepts such as being or nothing which are negated through determination, leading to dyadic ones like cause and effect arriving finally to triadic ones that account for the relations between the previous dualisms. Logic is thus grounded in the dialectic.[241]

As we shall see in the next section, while Hegel laid the groundwork by deriving formal laws from dialectical movement, Marx's contributions complicate and extend this legacy, particularly in light of Soviet interpretations. In this context, I now turn to Marx's own views on logic, which, it turns out, were far more thought through than it appeared until now. This

---

[238] Hegel, *The Science of Logic,* p. 594.

[239] Hegel, *The Science of Logic,* p. 594.

[240] Jacob McNulty, "Logic Is Nothing without Metaphysics: Hegel and the Birth of Logic from Being," *IAI* (blog), 2025, https://iai.tv/articles/logic-is-nothing-without-metaphysic-auid-3064.

[241] Jacob McNulty, "Logic Is Nothing without Metaphysics".

reassessment challenges longstanding assumptions about the origins of dialectical logic and therefore, contributes to my broader task of tracing its development.

Marx's and logical radicalism

The Soviet concept of dialectical logic has often been dismissed as a distortion of Marxism, derived from Hegel, misinterpreted by Engels and Lenin, and smuggled into Marxist theory. However, a recent study by Charles Barbour challenges this narrative. In particular, Barbour argues that Marx's elaboration of historical materialism did not occur at the time of his critique of Feuerbach but earlier, during his engagement with logic. Marx's engagement with logic predates his encounter with Feuerbach, however, Engels' editorial choices obscured Marx's own contributions to dialectical logic. In the following discussion, we shall examine Barbour's thesis and assess its implications for understanding Ilyenkov's project of reconstructing Marx's logic.

As we will see, it is plausible that the common assumption regarding Engels' imposition of dialectical logic onto Marxism is not only inaccurate but, in fact, the reverse may be true. Specifically, Engels' editorial interventions may have disregarded Marx's own engagement with dialectical logic, placing undue emphasis on Feuerbach and the opposition between idealism and materialism. Barbour argues that:

> Marx had already developed a substantive critique of philosophical abstraction between 1839 and 1842, well before he became interested in Feuerbach, and when he was pursuing an intensive, documentable, but largely overlooked study of logic.[242]

Which leads him to assert that:

> The established narrative concerning Marx's reliance on Feuerbach should at the very least be supplemented with an account of his earlier encounter with the work of another, equally if not more important critic of Hegel – the logician and classicist Adolf Trendelenburg.[243]

In the present discussion I follow Barbour's exposition to contextualize Evald Ilyenkov's choice of logic in his interpretation of Marx. While Barbour's argument suggests that Marx's

[242] Charles Barbour, "The Logic Question: Marx, Trendelenburg, and the Critique of Hegel," *Historical Materialism* 32, no. 3 (November 8, 2023), p 253.

[243] Barbour, "The Logic Question", pp. 253-254.

engagement with logic demonstrates an exaggerated opposition between idealism and materialism, Ilyenkov maintained both axes as equally essential for understanding Marx's theoretical development and potentially repeating his philosophical gesture in the 20th century.

Barbour begins by deconstructing the notion that the idealism/materialism opposition was central to Marx's thought, tracing this idea's origins to Engels' *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. In this text, Engels contends that Marx, along with the Young Hegelians, appreciated Feuerbach's materialist inversion of Hegelian self-moving reason, which then lead to the elaboration of historical materialism. Engels' interpretation relies heavily on Marx's notes known as the *Theses on Feuerbach*. However, Barbour emphasizes that Engels was writing in an intellectual context marked by the rise of scientific naturalism, which displaced systematic philosophies like Hegel's own. Consequently, Engels' representation of Marx's epistemology may have been influenced by the prevailing intellectual climate:

> Engels thus sought to associate Marx's materialism with the empiricist, positivist, and physicalist ontologies of the natural sciences in ascendence at the time. And in doing so, he ascribed to Marx what now seems like a fairly crude representationalist epistemology, or a conception of truth as an accurate mental representation of an independent reality.[244]

The portrayal of Marx as a Feuerbachian naturalist was further reinforced by David Riazanov, the Soviet editor of the first *MEGA*. Riazanov based this claim on a letter in which Marx judged Feuerbach's *Preliminary Theses for the Reform of Philosophy* to be largely correct, save for its neglect of politics. As evidence, Riazanov pointed to Marx's use of subject-predicate language, akin to Feuerbach's own method. This line of reasoning was subsequently echoed by Shlomo Avineri in *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, where he argued that Marx's political critique was effectively an application of Feuerbach's materialism to political analysis.[245]

In contrast to this prevailing view, Barbour suggests that Marx arrived at his historical materialist position earlier than his engagement with Feuerbach - specifically, during the early 1840s, when he undertook a rigorous study of logic in response to Trendelenburg's critique of

[244] Barbour, "The Logic Question", p. 254.

[245] Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 10.

Hegel in *Logical Investigations*. Drawing on the work of Stephan Käufer, Barbour situates Marx within the 19th-century movement of "logical radicalism," which sought to rethink syllogistic logic by grounding it in a metaphysical system.[246]

Marx's library provides further evidence for this claim. As Barbour notes, it contained numerous treatises on logic, including Wilhelm von Eberstein's *Ueber die Verschaffenheit der Logik und Metaphysik der reinen Peripatetiker* (1800), Trendelenburg's *Logische Untersuchungen*, Johann Eduard Erdmann's *Grundriss der Logik und Metaphysik* (1841), and Karl Werder's *Logik: Als Commentar und Ergänzung zu Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik* (1841).

Marx's correspondence with Bruno Bauer in 1839 further corroborates Barbour's argument. Bauer expected Marx to launch a critique of Trendelenburg, suggesting that Marx's study of logic was not incidental but fundamental to his intellectual trajectory. Though no such text has been discovered, references to Trendelenburg in Marx's writings, as well as his familiarity with Trendelenburg's critical edition of Aristotle's *De Anima*, suggest a significant engagement with logical theory. Moreover, this focus on logic was intricately linked to Marx's political radicalism. Marx and Bauer were planning to establish a journal, *Annals of Atheism*, with the explicit aim of disrupting the dominant philosophical order. As Barbour notes:

> In it [a 1841 letter of Bauer to Marx], Bauer discusses their plan to produce a new journal to be called *Annals of Atheism*… 'Trendelenburg', he goes on to say, 'will naturally be one of the first offerings you make to the offended philosophy.' The implication is not only that Marx was planning to publish a critique of Trendelenburg in the *Annals of Atheism*, but also that Bauer perceived a direct relationship between atheism, the political project of combating the established order with 'the terrorism of pure theory', and the philosophical project of criticising Trendelenburg's logic.[247]

In the absence of a surviving manuscript, one wonders what Marx's alternative logic could look like. Barbour proposes three core elements to describe it. First, Marx's "Hegelian critique of Hegel" involves inverting the relationship between subject and predicate. Whereas Hegel conceived the subject as an organic whole, with its particular differentiations as predicates,

[246] Barbour, "The Logic Question", p. 259.

[247] Barbour, "The Logic Question", p. 269.

Marx reversed this structure, treating the particular as the subject and the totality as its predicate. Marx opposes the Hegelian idea that the state is the organic whole, from which the idea of political participation is derived. Instead, it is rather the opposite. A State cannot be independent of the subjects it is maintained or negated by. Such an isolated idea standing on its own appears to Marx to be a fetish of speculative philosophy.[248] This critique of Hegel's logic is crucial to Ilyenkov's approach, as Ilyenkov extends Marx's inversion, arguing that a Marxist dialectical logic must allow for particulars to develop into universals, rather than being alienated particularizations of a universal, as in Hegel.[249] A category like value-form begins as a singularity and only reaches (abstract) universality, e.g., formal subsumption of labor by capital at an advanced stage of the latter's development.

Secondly, Barbour demonstrates that Marx's well-known prioritization of the empirical over the conceptual emerges from his engagement with Trendelenburg. Like Trendelenburg, Marx criticizes Hegel for assuming a pre-existing concept behind empirical intuition, when in fact, the empirical precedes conceptual realization. This critique exposes the political implications of Hegel's logic: if existing relations are naturalized as necessary expressions of *Geist*, resistance becomes destined to fail. As Althusser would once note, "no Hegelian politics is possible strictly speaking, and in fact there has never been a Hegelian politician."[250]

Finally, Soviet Marxists, including Ilyenkov, emphasized the distinction between historical and logical contradictions. In *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx criticizes Hegel for conflating logical contradiction with historical contradiction. For Hegel, the state's harmonious operation is secured through the contradictory unity of its branches. Each branch of power affirms itself in its negation of the other and all three mediate each other. If we take the executive, legislative and sovereign as realizations of a prior idea, such a smooth functioning could be thinkable, but in actual historical reality, Marx notes, a state never exists as a logical idea. Hence, for Marx, just as for Trendelenburg, Hegel's dialectical confusion between logical and historical categories is unjustified. As we will see, Ilyenkov would take up this issue and offer a new perspective. Barbour concludes:

[248] Barbour, "The Logic Question", p. 275.

[249] Evald Ilyenkov, *Sobranie Sochineniy*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Kanon+, 2020). p. 447.

[250] Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London New York: NLB, 1970), p. 95.

> Understanding the inner rhythm of all of Marx's work would require dampening the assumption that it is organised around the opposition between materialism and idealism that Engels promoted so successfully, and considering it once again through the lens of logic.[251]

This perspective was not lost on Russian Marxists. As Plekhanov remarked:

> "Trendelenburg … in aiming his blows against dialectics, actually hit only its idealist basis … This shortcoming was eliminated by the materialist Marx."[252]

Having this theoretical background in mind, we can pass to the Soviet discussions on dialectical logic.

[251] Barbour, "The Logic Question," p. 278.

[252] Georgi Plekhanov, "From Idealism to Materialism: Hegel and the Left Hegelians," in *Selected Philosophical Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), p. 603. As cited in Barbour, "The Logic Question," 269.

Debating dialectical logic in postwar Soviet Marxism

In the postwar debates of Soviet Marxism, dialectical logic emerged as a response to a fundamental epistemological question: "how does the material world come to be reflected in the abstract domains of human thought? Alternatively, this question can be framed as follows: "Exactly how can logic be traced back to the material realm?"[253] The engagement with dialectical logic was thus positioned within broader discussions concerning the relationship between material reality and its concept.

In his study *Empire of Knowledge* on the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Alexander Vucinich examines how certain Soviet philosophers conceived of dialectical logic as the discipline concerned with the study of antinomial thought and the establishment of a rational foundation for scientific reasoning.[254] This definition, in turn, implies that logic is culturally and socially contingent, subject to historical change and ideological influence. However, Vucinich contends that this intellectual pursuit was somewhat distant from the principal ideological centers of Soviet epistemological power - a claim that appears to be only partially accurate. As he himself acknowledges, influential philosophical ideologues such as Konstantinov and Mitin actively opposed the increasing attention devoted to logic, underscoring its contested status within Soviet intellectual life.[255]

D.D. Comey, upon whom Vucinich relies, identifies three distinct strands of dialectical logic: content-oriented, general, and methodological. Respectively, these correspond to the empirical content of logic, a broader philosophical and historical analysis of logic, and the study of logical forms as they manifest in scientific theories.[256] This tripartite classification highlights yet again the complex and multifaceted nature of dialectical logic as it was debated within Soviet academia.

[253] David Bedford and Thomas Workman, "Ilyenkov and the Immanence of Logic," *Marxism & Sciences*, 2024, p. 35.

[254] Vucinich, *Empire of Knowledge,* p. 341.

[255] Vucinich, *Empire of Knowledge,* p. 341.

[256] David Dinsmore Comey, "Current Trends in Soviet Logic. Vol. 9 (1966), pp. 94-108.

Vucinich also provides a critical assessment of the relationship between science and philosophy in the Soviet context. He argues that the Stalinist ideal of an absolute unity between these two domains was inherently contradictory: whereas philosophy adhered to a rigid ontological materialism, science resisted the reduction of all complex phenomena to material processes. This intellectual tension gave rise to divergent responses among Soviet philosophers. While some reinforced the reductionist approach, others, such as Ilyenkov, sought to reconcile Marxist philosophy with anti-reductionist perspectives.[257]

Of particular relevance to this discussion is Vucinich's observation that Soviet philosophers who emphasized objectivity – defined as the existence of reality independent of human perception – found themselves increasingly at odds with advances in physics, particularly quantum theory. As the natural sciences blurred the boundary between subject and object by demonstrating the constitutive role of instruments, subjective perceptions, and conceptual frameworks in the production of scientific knowledge, Soviet philosophers remained committed to an absolute separation between subject and object.

[257] Vucinich, *Empire of Knowledge*,

Discussions on Logic at Moscow State University and *Voprosi Filosofii*

The intervention of Stalin marked a turning point in the Soviet discourse on logic, as reflected in the swift response of the *VF* journal. The journal signalled the shift in orthodoxy with an editorial that criticized the previous Marxist stance on formal logic:

> In our philosophical literature, a false, vulgarizing approach to formal logic has long been widespread. The nonsense position of the 'philosophical RAPPists [Group of Orthodox Soviet writers],' who throw logic away on the grounds that it is allegedly bourgeois, seriously damaged the cause of educating the Soviet people.[258]

Menshikova interprets this passage as marking the end of the abusive application of the class principle and implicitly affirming a concept of thought as universally human (*obschechelovecheskij*). This realignment initiated a prolonged debate in *VF*, with an initial exchange between K. Bakradze, defending formal logic, and V. Cherkesov, representing dialectical logic.

Bakradze challenged the accusation that formal logic was inherently metaphysical or bourgeois, arguing instead that only interpretations of logic could be categorized as such. He reinforced Stalin's distinction between class-determined science and universal human thought, subtly exposing the contradictions in the state-authorized program, which defined logic as studying "the forms of thought of Soviet people." Furthermore, he insisted on the separate objects of study of formal logic and dialectics, countering dialectical encroachments on his domain.[259]

Cherkesov, while distancing himself from the previously discredited "nihilist" position, ritualistically reiterated Stalin's position on the universality of thought. However, his argument took a critical turn when he contended that viewing thinking as universal was too abstract and neglected the historical specificities of thought in different periods. This perspective was

[258] As cited in: Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", p. 28

[259] Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", p. 29.

immediately challenged in the subsequent *VF* issue by Popov, who argued that if forms of thought changed alongside their objects, a coherent science of logic would be impossible.[260]

The same issue included articles by M. Strogovitch and I. Osmakov, as well as V. Tugarinov's discussion of the newly translated work of Tarski, edited by S. Yanovskaya, and her response to Tugarinov. On the side of formal logic, philosophers such as A. Vetrov, E. Voishvillo, Yanovskaya, V. Asmus, and N. Vorobiev defended their discipline, questioning the conflation of fixity with metaphysics, asserting dialectical logic as more of a methodology, and attacking logical positivism. Menshikova highlights Asmus's intervention, in which he critically addressed the purported dual versions of the same laws of thought, asking: "Where, when, and by whom were these double laws formulated?"

As the discussion gained institutional momentum, a series of debates took place at MGU in December 1950, based on the *VF* articles. While the minutes of these discussions are lost, Alekseev provided a summary in *VF*, highlighting the key opposition: formal logic upheld the three classical laws (identity, non-contradiction, and excluded middle), whereas dialectical logic emphasized the contradictory nature of objects.

The discussions reiterated the now-familiar rhetorical strategies: condemning formal logic as outdated, rejecting its separation from dialectical logic, and dismissing any distinction between formal correctness and truth. Some participants, like Rozhin, went so far as to label Wittgenstein and Carnap as obscurantists.[261] Yet, more substantial arguments also emerged. B. Kedrov, defending dialectical logic, opposed the integration of the two logics, rejecting the idea that formal logic could be a "particular case" of dialectical logic. While acknowledging their shared object, he distinguished their methodological foundations: formal logic adhered to the classical laws, whereas dialectical logic followed the four characteristics of dialectics.

In 1951, *VF* sought to conclude the debate by publishing a survey of letters received on the discussion. The survey emphasized key shifts, such as the rejection of the class principle and the critique of conflating dialectical and formal logic. The final editorial pronouncement established the coordinates of the new philosophical landscape: Soviet Marxism officially distanced itself from class-based epistemology, and the proposal to integrate formal logic into dialectical logic was rejected. Formal logic thus retained its autonomy and legitimacy, while dialectical logic was recognized as a discipline investigating thought in its relation to being.[262]

[260] Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", pp. 29-33.

[261] Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", p. 37.

[262] Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", p 38.

A subsequent debate on logic took place at MGU from February to March 1954, shortly before the presentation of the Ilyenkov-Korovikov Theses in May. As Menshikova notes, oral presentations in these discussions exhibited a lower degree of self-censorship, and the minutes remained unedited, providing valuable insight into the ongoing tensions. Ilyenkov also participated in this discussion. His intervention will be discussed further below.

Cherkesov opened the discussion by acknowledging the failure of previous debates to reconcile opposing positions. He lamented that formal logicians such as Bakradze and Asmus remained resistant to dialectical logic, while reiterating the standard critiques of formal logic. Asmus countered by challenging the hierarchical ordering of the two logics, particularly the implicit ranking of "forms of thought."[263]

Members of the Moscow Logical Circle also participated. B. Grushin supported dialectical logic but criticized Cherkesov for vulgarizing it. G. Shchedrovitsky likewise defended dialectical logic, though his memoirs reveal that the Circle of Logic privately ridiculed the term "dialectical", employing it primarily to maintain ideological legitimacy. Distinguishing his position from Cherkesov's, Shchedrovitsky argued that dialectical logic should concern itself with *scientific* thinking rather than thought in general.

Yanovskaya, for her part, rejected the characterization of formal logic as "elementary," pointing out that algebra is taught in elementary school yet remains a complex mathematical field. At the same time, she conformed to ideological expectations by emphasizing the importance of combating idealist deviations in logic education. Ilyenkov's intervention is described by Menshikova:

> Ilyenkov's argument is much more elegant than Cherkesov's, who earned a fair rebuke for his hidden Marrism, that is, his assertion of the class character of thinking. Cherkesov insisted on the political danger of formal logic, while Ilyenkov offered more of a conceptual critique: his radicalism in evaluating formal logic reached its highest point when he argued that formal logic had never truly dealt with the specificity of thought. According to Ilyenkov, the specificity of thinking is that it is 'capable of reflecting, of expressing the inner universal necessary regularities of an objective... subject,' which is arranged dialectically, rather than that it is expressed in judgments and inferences. Ilyenkov's verdict is uncompromising: 'All that rationality that somehow was and is in

[263] Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", p 39.

formal logic, dialectical logic will formulate with ease much more intelligibly and clearly.'[264]

As Menshikova notes, based on V. Maltsev's survey, the relationship between formal and dialectical logic remained unresolved, despite certain shared positions, such as the thesis that logical forms reflect objective reality. The stakes in these debates were not trivial. As Tabachnikova argues:

> By making formal logic part of Marxism-Leninism, we destine it to be subject to the latter's discursive regime, including its ideological aspect. On the other hand, by preserving the autonomous status of logic, it becomes possible to establish the same relationship between logic and dialectical materialism as dialectical materialism has with any other science; in this case, dialectical materialism is considered only as the general methodology of science.[265]

Ultimately, what decided the outcome of this intellectual struggle was the institutionalization of formal logic through textbooks and curricula. While mathematical and formal logicians succeeded in securing translations and integrating their field into Soviet academia, dialectical logicians failed to institutionalize their discipline. Attempts to establish a separate *kafedra* for dialectical logic at MGU in the mid-1960s were blocked, effectively marginalizing dialectical logic in Soviet philosophy.

[264] Menshikova, "Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR", p. 53.

[265] Tabatchnikova, *Le Cercle de méthodologie de Moscou,* p. 90.

Ilyenkov's intervention

Ilyenkov's philosophical project is marked by an attempt to reconcile two seemingly contradictory orientations in logic: its objective nature, as opposed to psychologism, and its limitation to the realm of thought. While Ilyenkov insists that logic corresponds to the forms of development of the objective world, he does not posit that logic is simply discovered as an external given.[266] Rather, logic is created from the basis of humanity's practical interaction with the material world. His conception of logic thus encompasses both the material and the ideal, integrating ontology and epistemology. This integration is evident in Ilyenkov's own formulation in *Dialectical Logic*, where thought is understood: "As the ideal component of the real activity of social man transforming both external nature and himself by his labour."[267]

This dialectical approach leads to Ilyenkov's opposition to formal logic's law of non-contradiction, as he emphasizes the role of objective contradictions in the development of thought:

> If any object is a living contradiction, what must the thought (statement about the object) be that expresses it? Can and should an objective contradiction find reflection in thought? And if so, in what form?[268]

Such a perspective situates Ilyenkov within a broader discourse on the mutability of logic. While some argue that logic changes its form according to the object it reflects, Ilyenkov maintains that logic studies the invariant forms of thought that remain the same across various sciences. He articulates this position in *Dialectical Logic*:

> Logic as a science is not at all interested in the 'specific features' of the thinking of the physicist or chemist, economist or linguist, but only in those universal (invariant) forms

[266] Bedford and Workman, "Ilyenkov and the Immanence of Logic", p. 36.

[267] Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic: Essays on Its History and Theory*, trans. H. Campbell Creighton (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 8.

[268] Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic,* p. 320. As cited in: Bedford and Workman, "Ilyenkov and the Immanence of Logic".

and laws within which the thinking of any person flows, and of any theoretician, including the logician by profession, who specially thinks about thought.[269]

This stance, however, appears paradoxical within dialectical logic's critique of formal logic, which posits that logic itself is historically contingent. Moreover, it contrasts with Ilyenkov's own earlier position, wherein he applied Hegel's critique of abstract universals to thought, arguing that what is worth studying about thinking is precisely its evolving and historically differentiated forms rather than its purported invariants. This tension suggests an unresolved issue within Ilyenkov's work: how to reconcile the necessity of invariant forms with the dialectical principle that all categories are historically and socially determined.

But Ilyenkov's *Dialectical Logic* was published in 1974. Let us go back to the 1950s. These debates came to a head in the 1954 February-March sessions at Moscow State University devoted to logic, where Ilyenkov intervened on the final day. The transcript of his presentation, preserved in the university archives and later published by Elena Illesh in *From the Abstract to the Concrete: A Twisted Path*, reveals his surprising initial sympathy toward the formal logicians' position that there can only be one science of theoretical thought. He commended Asmus, Vetrov, and Vorobiev for their coherence while criticizing dialecticians such as Alekseev for lacking a clearly articulated stance.[270]

Ilyenkov's own argumentation drew upon Engels and Lenin, who, according to him, understood the dialectics of nature as grounded in dialectical categories such as form and content, part and whole, and cause and effect. In contrast, he accused Asmus of "impoverishing" the understanding of thought by reducing its scope to the laws of formal logic - propositions, judgments, and syllogisms - neglecting the broader dialectical categories.

A central point of contention in these discussions was the definition of "dialectical logic." Asmus and others contended that Engels and Lenin used the term figuratively to refer to a general methodology rather than an actual alternative to formal logic. Ilyenkov challenged this revision, questioning the grounds on which dialectical categories were excluded from the domain of logic. Why must it be assumed that the "classics" used the term "form of thought" only in reference to propositions, judgments and syllogisms, never to the categories of the

[269] Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic,* p. 314. As cited in: Bedford and Workman, "Ilyenkov and the Immanence of Logic".

[270] Ilyenkov and Illesh, *Ot Abstraktnogo k Konkretnomu: Krutoĭ Marshrut,* p. 255.

dialectic? He also criticized Asmus' method of determining what is specific to thought by eliminating qualities common to both thinking and being. In doing so, Asmus concluded that dialectical categories, such as necessity and coincidence, could not be specific to thought, since they also applied to objective reality. Ilyenkov countered that this stance was idealist, as it severed the connection between being and thought.

The debate was further complicated by the institutional context. Since these sessions were formative for Soviet dialectical logic as a scientific discipline, the participants sought to establish its fundamental principles. The question of specificity was significant: for logic to be a legitimate science, it needed a distinct object of study. Formal logicians argued that the specificity of thought lay in its adherence to the laws of formal logic, whereas dialectical categories were common to both thought and matter. However, this argument risked idealism if it implied an absolute divorce between formal logical laws and objective reality. To circumvent this problem, formal logicians maintained that while syllogisms and judgments were specific to thought, they ultimately reflected general objective relations. This compromise, however, only added to the confusion.

Ilyenkov exposed the inconsistency in Asmus' position: if "specific" means "exclusive to", and if the laws of formal logic also reflect the objective world, then they cannot be specific to thought in the proposed sense. Instead, he suggested an alternative definition of specificity: thought's unique ability to reflect the inner necessary interconnections of the object existing outside of thinking. Thought, in this view, reproduces the object in the mind in the manner of Marx's architect. By contrast, what is *not* specific to thought are those aspects that fall under psychology, neurophysiology, or linguistics.

Rejecting the Stalinist conception of thought, language, and logic as "universally human", Ilyenkov criticized the formal logicians' view that thought had reached a finalized form thousands of years ago, remaining unchanged since. He saw this as an abstract universalization based on similarities across history, which ultimately reduced thought to a minimal set of traits. As he provocatively argued:

> Because of this, however much formal logicians may try to see in modern thought something that was not already described in Aristotle, due to their miserable

understanding of the specificity of human thought, time and again, they will only be seeing that which was present in the thought of a Pithecanthropus.[271]

Ilyenkov's position thus implies an identity theory between thought and its object, where the two ultimately coincide - but only as dynamic, processual terms. This coincidence, however, is not immediate; rather, it is achieved through a contradictory dialectical process of cognition. Herein lies the necessity of logic as a science: it serves as the epistemological framework that guides the movement toward the adequation of thought to its object. As Althusser remarked of Aquinas, truth is not a static *aequatio* between intellect and thing but an *adaequatio* - a movement toward equality.[272]

This dialectical movement underscores Ilyenkov's argument that forms of thought do not inherently coincide with the forms of the object but arrive at this coincidence through a mediated process. He illustrates this with Marx's analysis of the commodity in *Capital*. Marx operated with the Hegelian inverted definitive-specific syntax, which works backwards from the result to its constituting elements.[273] In this sense, the only coincidence one can speak of in case of Marx's treatment of the commodity is the coincidence of the logical categories with the inner relations of the object's development itself, not with its historical appearance.

Ilyenkov, in my view, is not well-prepared when speaking of formal logic. The reasons for this are not evident. Advances stemming from formal logic, especially in symbolic and mathematical logic, were more or less known on his side of the iron curtain. When he speaks of formal logic simply retelling what is given in sense-perception, unable to think anything not immediately given, he ignores certain schools such as Hilbert's formalism that are distinguished precisely by the lack of correspondents in objective reality in their language. Hilbert's work was translated into Russian before these sessions on logic were held.

His hierarchical division between sense-perception and theoretical thinking is also problematic. How does Ilyenkov discern what belongs to the object and what is contributed by

[271] Ilyenkov and Illesh, *Ot Abstraktnogo k Konkretnomu,* p. 263.

[272] Althusser as cited in Lilian Truchon, *Lénine épistémologue: les thèses de "Matérialisme et empiriocriticisme" et la constitution d'un matérialisme intégral* (Paris: Éd. Delga, 2013), p. 66.

[273] For a detailed analysis of the syntax of philosophical logic see: Yaroslav Hnatiuk, "The Historical Syntax of Philosophical Logic," *European Philosophical and Historical Discourse* 8, no. 1 (2022): 78–87.

perception in the idea of the object? The boundary between the two forms of cognition is hardly clear-cut. This distinction between the specifically theoretical thinking and sense-perception suggests an underlying metaphysical distinction between the inherent properties of the object and those of thought. Ilyenkov does not clarify these points at this early stage of development of his dialectical logic. Differentiating between empirical and scientific abstractions, he remarks:

> Simply demonstrating the same in a set, species or class of things can be done perfectly well by sense-perception alone. Thinking instead begins only where the consciousness of Man, with the help of its specific operations, derives such regularities that will repeat in the future as well.[274]

Here, he provides an illustrative example from Marx to highlight the relationship between form and operation [*приём*]. In formal logic, the operations of thought and the forms of thought are treated as distinct, with neither necessarily containing the characteristics or properties of the other within itself. However, Marx's analysis presents a different approach. For instance, Marx identifies a contradiction within the product of labor - specifically, the tension between use-value and exchange-value in the commodity. From this contradiction, he infers that the process that produced it, labor itself, must also be contradictory - namely, in the distinction between abstract and concrete labor. Such a conclusion would not have been attainable within the framework of formal logic.

[274] Ilyenkov and Illesh, *Ot Abstraktnogo k Konkretnomu,* p. 266.

A clandestine critique

Our discussion of Ilyenkov's intervention in the 1954 February-March sessions at Moscow State University makes clear that at this early stage, Ilyenkov was still beginning to sketch the conceptual architecture of dialectical logic, which remained problematic in the ways described above. The problems with his position stem from the lack of clarity concerning the so-called materialist inversion of Hegel's dialectic. Namely, if Hegel's idealist dialectic is driven by contradictions in thought, does the materialist inversion authorize us to speak of contradictions in objects? This classic theme in Marxism accompanied Ilyenkov's work all throughout his career and will therefore be addressed throughout the present work as well.

Yet the underdeveloped state of his project contrasts with the radical character of his positions. Formal logic *must* be thrown away, even if dialectical logic is still to be developed. I would argue that this contrast stems from the fact that Ilyenkov identified formal logic with the logic of his contemporary model of socialism itself. It was that logic which he strove to go beyond and destroy. It is in this that Ilyenkov's theory can be termed a clandestine critique. In a political context where direct social criticism, especially the Marxist kind, was severely punishable, philosophers had to resort to more convoluted forms. While Soviet writers and poets would commonly use Aesopian language and ambivalent phraseology, philosophers would shield themselves with quotes from the "classics" or reference either foreign or dead philosophers instead of the ones their criticism was really directed against. For example, Ilyenkov often criticized Bogdanov as a proponent of technocracy, but his real targets were his contemporaries such as the psychologist David Dubrovsky and philosopher Igor Narskii. Such was the case, I argue, with his critique of formal logic. While it was far from a purely instrumental usage - Ilyenkov did indeed dedicate his career to developing an alternative to formal logic - his critique was not confined to the theoretical problems of formal logic or its intelligibility but concerned the broader domination of the formal over the concrete. Be it the bureaucratization of Soviet socialism or the purely formal nationalization of property, Ilyenkov always made a connection between social phenomena and the modes of thinking correlated with them. I insist that his critique of formal logic was not an instrumentalization of philosophy for political goals - which would mirror the operation of his opponents - rather, it remained within the confines of the philosophical and targeted the political precisely from within them.

In this sense, Ilyenkov opposed what Adorno would term "a sort of administrative logic or administrative metaphysics",[275] in which the administered world is reflected.

This circumstance leads us back to the principal question of the chapter: Why did logic turn out to be the place of Soviet Marxism's renewal? On the one hand, rejecting Aristotelian logic was one of the founding intellectual gestures of modernity, as Bacon's critique of scholastic Aristotelianism attests. In this sense, it is not too surprising that the founding of an alternative socialist modernity after Stalin would target logic. However, why was it that this once obscure and technical branch of knowledge became the battlefield of new ideas in the Soviet philosophical culture, while disciplines that could be considered better-placed for this type of a renewal, such as history, remained (with notable exceptions), untouched by this critical spirit? The historian Alexander Dmitriev questions this circumstance in the following manner:

> How come Soviet philosophy and theory of history did not have its own Ilyenkov, a major thinker who would combine loyalty to Marx with a willingness to describe in a new way the 'continent of history' discovered by the founder?[276]

His answer points to the absence of a real political struggle in the Soviet Union. In the conditions marked by this absence, the more "in-demand" aspects of Marxism tended to be the more abstract ones. This is certainly one of the elements that could enter in the answer to our question, which requires considering multiple sections of Soviet history, politics, technology and theory. Besides the absence of a real political struggle, the choice of logic for the renewal of Marxism was conditioned by the presence of several elements that I sum up below.

As I hope to have demonstrated, Ilyenkov's engagement with dialectical logic should be read in the context of a broader process of intellectual and institutional normalization initiated by Stalin between 1945 and 1953. This process included, among other developments, the abolition of the class-based principle in Soviet linguistics, the discrediting of dual-science paradigms in favor of a unified conception of science, and the increasing automation of production - a process that privileged formalist approaches and cybernetic models. It was in this intertwinement of technology, economy and the humanities that Ilyenkov sided with dialectical logic. The idea of

[275] Theodor W. Adorno, *An Introduction to Dialectics: 1958*, ed. Christoph Ziermann, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge Malden: Polity press, 2017), p. 180.

[276] Alexander Dmitriev, "Krot Istorii v Spyachke: O Zakate Marksistskoy Teorii Istorii v Poslestalinskom SSSR," *Neprikosnovennyy Zapas* 2, no. 148 (2023), p 31.

a dialectical logic was important for Ilyenkov not only because of Lenin's favourable comments about it, or Engels' recasting of philosophy as logic, but most decisively as a theoretical tool for recognizing contradictions in a political climate of forced harmony. As Artemy Magun notes: "It is an important substantive trait of conservatism that it creates a (falsely?) harmonious picture of the status quo and downplays negativity."[277] Ilyenkov rarely engaged with the concept of negativity. However, in contrast to Soviet *Diamat*, dialectical logic in Ilyenkov's version, precisely as antinomial thought, preserves a space for contradiction and tension, refusing to smooth over antagonisms in favor of an ideologically coherent whole. His critical repositioning of philosophy from the status of a total science with privileged access to the whole to a particular and partial position reflects the same commitment to resisting ideological closure in thought. As we will see below, it is this *particularism* of Ilyenkov's dialectics, already apparent at this early stage of his intellectual development, that counterbalances the more speculative aspects of his philosophy.

Our discussion of the debates also clarifies a point raised by Bakhurst about Ilyenkov's political position. Namely, as Bakhurst argues, Ilyenkov's defence of dialectical logic aligned him with the most reactionary camp of Soviet philosophers.[278] Yet as we saw from the minutes of the debates, if Ilyenkov criticized formal logicians, he ridiculed almost all of the defenders of dialectical logic. His qualifying of Cherkesov's arguments as a "muddle" proves that he was not aligning himself with those philosophers at all.

Having established that Ilyenkov's choice of dialectical logic was not only conceptual, but fundamentally critical, I move on to seeing how its evolution maintained this critical character throughout his intellectual development. As we will see, the conceptual and political registers intertwined in a way that distanced dialectical materialism from teleological finalism and opened it to contingency.

However, while I continue to contextualize Ilyenkov's philosophy in relation to the Soviet philosophical culture, my aim is to bring his theory beyond that context. Contrary to common clichés about Soviet philosophy, I think it can be intelligible outside of its historical situation. Soviet thought has long been treated as a museum object, inviting only historical curiosity. Against this, I claim that radical perspectives rooted in the experience of state socialism represent a valuable archive. Therefore, my thesis discusses Ilyenkov in a double optic, that is,

[277] Artemy Magun, "Conservatism and the Dialectic of Ideology," *Studies in East European Thought*, November 18, 2024, p. 6.

[278] Bakhurst, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy,* pp. 170-171.

in his own time, and in relation to contemporary currents in materialist and dialectical philosophies. His move away from deterministic finalism marks an important point of departure not only within Soviet thought but also sets the stage for a productive engagement with more recent philosophical developments. In particular, the non-teleological orientation of Ilyenkov's work opens a compelling contrast with post-continental currents such as Speculative Realism, Actor-Network Theory and New Materialism - currents that similarly grapple with the nature of matter, agency, and ontology. The implications of this contrast will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter II

Thinking Matter

A materialist phantasmagoria

My initial purpose in this chapter is to establish a connection between Ilyenkov's epistemological position – namely, that philosophy gains access to being by taking theoretical thought as its object, as articulated in his *Theses on the Object of Philosophy* – and his ontological assertion that, just as there can be no thought without matter, there can be no matter without thought.[279] I will defend the hypothesis that this equality between the material and the ideal is the defining characteristic of Ilyenkovian philosophy. However, as we will see, maintaining that equality is not as easy as Ilyenkov thought. The general wager is that a dialectical materialism that does away with the 18th-century materialism postulate of the primacy of matter, offering instead an intertwined image of matter and thought, could help rethink the contemporary problems of Marxism from the ground up, especially in the realm of its relation to other critical theories. I will then propose a political interpretation of Ilyenkov's ontological claim, extrapolating it from its original context, suggesting that it contains elements of a philosophy of ecology. Finally, I will argue that Ilyenkov operates a political shift in Soviet dialectics, democratizing the notion of subject by transferring it from the party (as it was understood in Leninism and Stalinistm) to the ensemble of thinking beings. The ontological claim was expressed at about the same time as the epistemological position, in an early manuscript, to which we now turn.

Ilyenkov's first full-fledged attempt at reconciling thinking with matter in a dialectical framework took shape in the form of an essay bearing an elaborate title: *Cosmology of the Spirit: An attempt to give a basic outline of the objective role of thinking matter in the system*

[279] These claims can be understood respectively as the objective idealist and Spinozist components that make up his philosophy.

of universal interaction (A Philosophical-Poetic Phantasmagoria based on the principles of dialectical materialism).[280] The essay, rather exceptional for Soviet Marxism of the time, draws on Russian cosmism, Engels' *Dialectics of Nature*, and Spinozist ontology. It can be read in several ways: as a metaphysical treatise on being, a secular narrative of resurrection, a speculative thought experiment about the end of the world or even a science fiction novel (it indeed inspired some of the best Soviet sci-fi, notably the works of the Strugatsky brothers).[281] The intertwining of all these genres in a short essay makes a close reading difficult. In the following, I approach the manuscript primarily as a concrete enactment of Ilyenkov's proposition that the true object of philosophy is thought itself.

The text begins with the assertion that matter thinks. Matter is understood here as a universal substance in the Spinozist sense, rather than as the totality of individual material objects. To this claim, Ilyenkov adds a dialectical formulation: "not only can thought not exist without matter, [...] but matter cannot exist without thought [...]"[282] What follows is the speculative proof of this proposition. Ilyenkov addresses the Spinozist theme of thought and extension as necessary attributes of a single substance – that is, nature, or in Ilyenkov's case, matter (he maintains the identification, first introduced into Soviet philosophy by Georgi Plekhanov of Spinoza's substance with matter).[283] If thought is indeed a necessary attribute of matter, then matter, as a universal self-sufficient substance, necessarily possesses and reproduces thought. But this raises the question: What does the necessity of thought's existence consist of? What is its objective function in the cosmological dynamics of matter? Ilyenkov's question takes the teleological form: "for what purpose?" In answering, Ilyenkov draws on an idea from 19th-century thermodynamics. In particular, the idea, theorized among others by the German physicist Hermann von Helmholtz, concerning the universe's thermal death, based on the concept of entropy. According to this hypothesis, the universe is undergoing a slow but inevitable cooling, radiating heat outward until it reaches a final state of thermodynamic

[280] Evald Ilyenkov, "Cosmology of the Spirit," trans. Giuliano Vivaldi, *Stasis* 5, no. 2 (2017), pp. 164–90.

[281] Alexei Tsvetkov, "The Dialectician. Alexei Tsvetkov on Evald Ilyenkov," *Alexeytsvetkov.wordpress.com* (blog), September 12, 2013, https://alexeitsvetkov.wordpress.com/2013/09/12/ilienkov/.

[282] Ilyenkov, "Cosmology of the Spirit," p. 166.

[283] Daniela Steila, "Interpretations of Spinoza in Early Russian Marxism," *Studies in East European Thought* 74, no. 3 (September 2022), p. 285.

equilibrium: an absolute freezing point. Over time, Ilyenkov writes, Earth will necessarily lose energy sources, then its stored reserves will run out, heat will vanish, and all life will extinguish on a frozen celestial body.

In order to reject any notion of an external principle – divine intervention, metaphysical beginning or end – Ilyenkov claims that the movement of cosmic matter is cyclical, immanent, and autotelic. Thus, in the question "for what purpose?" the purpose of matter's development into thought is not external to its process but generated from within it. Hence, before the universe reaches the threshold of absolute freezing, it must, according to Ilyenkov, cyclically return to its original incandescent state of chaotic gas in a galactic nebula – thus initiating a new cycle. But how is such a reversal possible?

This is the moment the "objective role" of thought is unveiled. In order to avert the entropic death of matter, Ilyenkov argues, the function of intelligent, thinking beings is to set the planet ablaze, an act of self-destruction whose apocalyptic force would reinfuse matter with energy, thereby restarting the cosmic cycle. Naturally, those who ignite the apocalypse do not witness its consequences. This singular event of collective self-annihilation is the way thought fulfils its "cosmological duty"[284] to matter. In an ultimate gesture of self-negation, thought affirms itself as necessary – as the link that connects one cycle to the next, or the "beginning" to the "end" of this great circle. In this sense, thought does not merely accompany matter; it ensures its renewal, situating itself as the immanent condition for the continuity of matter's cosmic becoming. As Ilyenkov puts it:

> In these conditions, the thinking spirit sacrifices itself and, in this process, is not able to preserve itself. But its sacrifice takes place in the name of its duty to Mother Nature. The human, a thinking spirit, returns its old debt to nature. At some point, in its youth, nature engendered thinking spirit. Now, on the contrary, the thinking spirit, at the cost of its own existence, returns to mother nature, dying of "thermal death," a new incandescent youth – a state in which it is able once again to start colossal development cycles, which at some point again, at a different point in time and space will once more lead to the emergence of a new thinking brain, a new thinking spirit from its cooling core…[285]

[284] Ilyenkov, "Cosmology of the Spirit", p. 185.

[285] Ilyenkov, "Cosmology of the Spirit," pp. 183-184.

In positioning thought as both the immanent condition and regenerative force of matter, Ilyenkov's essay opens onto a speculative metaphysics where matter is neither inert nor subordinate, but fundamentally active, self-renewing and creative. With this active materiality, speculative temporality and attention to the non-human origin of thought, the text anticipates several key orientations of contemporary post-continental philosophy. One such current is New Materialism, which pushes away from passive notions of matter, rethinking questions of ontology in a new light. However, in its heterogeneous body of literature – featuring innovative readings of philosophers like Deleuze, Spinoza, Ruyer, Nietzsche and others – the absence of a dialogue with Marxism appears intriguing.[286] While Marx is widely credited with having recast materialism in political terms, neither he nor Marxist authors are commonly encountered as key interlocutors (with a few notable exceptions[287]) in the new materialist literature.

In what follows I read Ilyenkov's *Cosmology* as a way to examine the reasons for which Marxism has been side-lined in what is known as the material turn. Particularly, by attempting an ecological reading of the *Cosmology,* I argue that Ilyenkov develops the idea of an active matter that could serve as common ground from which New Materialist and Marxist ontologies could be compared. This will contribute to my attempt at recovering Ilyenkov's philosophy for contemporary problems.

New Materialists, while heterogenous in their approaches, understand the refusal of activity to matter as a direct consequence of the modern separation between nature and history. In such a bifurcated ontology, activity is attributed to human and historical dynamism, while nature is treated as a set of inert materials shaped according to human models. Karen Barad counters this from a posthuman standpoint:

> Posthumanism does not presume that man is the measure of all things. It is not held captive to the distance scale of the human but rather is attentive to the practices by which scale is produced. Posthumanism has no patience for principled claims presuming the banishment or death of metaphysics, especially when such haughty assertions turn out to be decoys for the covert resurrection of Man as the unspoken measure of what is and isn't

[286] See: Simon Choat, "Science, Agency and Ontology: A Historical-Materialist Response to New Materialism," *Political Studies* 66, no. 4 (November 2018), pp. 127–142,

[287] Thomas Nail, *Marx in Motion: A New Materialist Marxism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

> observable or intelligible. It doesn't abide by prohibitions against talk of ontology, restricting all deliberation to the epistemological (moored at the safe harbor of Man). Posthumanism eschews both humanist and structuralist accounts of the subject that position the human as either pure cause or pure effect, and the body as the natural and fixed dividing line between interiority and exteriority.[288]

It is immediately visible that structuralism and humanism get a rather superficial definition here. However, Barad's critique of ontological dualism aligns with Ilyenkov's own. Specifically, his opposition to the internal/external split between mind and matter positions his work within the broader problematic that Barad herself seeks to address. In this sense, Ilyenkov's account could be seen as resonating with the concerns articulated in Barad's programmatic passage, particularly regarding the active role of matter..

I will attempt to approach the problem of active matter through a brief consideration of how the nature/history dualism has been negotiated, reproduced or subverted within the Marxist tradition. But before this, I situate the problem with a short survey of the key moments of the rejection of Marxism within Western ecological thought. To do so, I discuss both critical readings of Marx in various ecology-focused fields, as well as the shortcomings of Marxist theory in relation to the natural sciences. I note that while Western Marxism rejected the idea of a philosophy of nature,[289] Soviet Marxism integrated such a philosophy into its own definition, keeping the concept of matter at the heart of its discussions, as shown in the first chapter. I will then outline the environmental history of the Soviet Union, whose breaks and continuities formed the political backdrop for Ilyenkov's intervention. This will allow me to continue contextualizing Ilyenkov's thinking while simultaneously relating it to contemporary critical theories. Finally, I argue that Spinoza's substance, in Ilyenkov's cosmological vision, dissolves the metaphysical dualism of history and nature – or of an autonomous subject and passive object – by conceiving humans not as a "kingdom within a kingdom", but as inherent to matter and in a mutually constitutive practical-ethical relationship with it. From this synthesis, I extrapolate an onto-epistemological notion of active matter that contrasts with

[288] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham London: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 136.

[289] Here again I limit "Western Marxism" to its anti-realist early representatives such as Korsch, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre etc. Differing perspectives certainly existed in what is called "Western Marxism", but a detailed analysis of that concept is beyond the scope of this thesis.

contemporary material turns, especially by its political character. The latter notion is consistent with Diderot's definition of "modern Spinozism"[290] as based on the understanding of matter as sensible in a sort of pantheistic metaphysics. Yet while such an understanding succeeds in thinking ontology and epistemology together, I will argue that it suffers from the same shortcomings that classical German philosophy identified with pantheism. Namely, what guarantees the place of an individual subject in the absence of an individualized (personified) absolute? Hegel's notorious reproach to Spinoza concerning the absence of the subject in the latter's system is one famous example of this problem.[291]

[290] Denis Diderot, "Spinosiste," in *Encyclopédie*, vol. XV, 1765, p. 474. For a discussion of Diderot's entry, see: Charles T. Wolfe, "Epigenesis as Spinozism in Diderot's Biological Project," in *The Life Sciences in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Ohad Nachtomy and ustin E. H. Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 181–201.

[291] Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 474.

Material Activity or Active Materiality?

The current geo-social conjuncture, described as the Anthropocene,[292] is accompanied by ontological turns across various disciplines and their intersections. From the philosophical discourse surrounding New Materialisms to interdisciplinary work in political epistemology,[293] ontology, as a theoretical orientation aiming to understand the constitution and transformation of the world, has re-emerged after being cast as dogmatic by Kant's Copernican revolution. One of the reasons for this return of ontology is ecological: the capacity of capital to subordinate the natural world to its imperatives of accumulation was historically facilitated by a conception of nature as inert and lifeless matter, a passive backdrop to the triumphant narrative of human progress.[294] Technologically mediated human material activity (now a geological force), which modifies nature to suit its needs, has erased the active materiality of nonhuman nature. Rethinking the modern separation between nature and history[295] – at the root of this anthropocentric view – has become urgent.

Against this elevation of the human at the expense of nature, authors associated with the label of posthumanism – R. Braidotti, J. Bennett, B. Latour, D. Haraway, among others – strive to extend the political beyond the anthropological by calling for a recognition of matter as active. This notion aims to decenter the classical distribution of agency, where nature is reduced to a passive setting upon which activity takes place.[296] Instead, what has long been considered

[292] Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, "The 'Anthropocene,'" *Global Change Newsletter*, no. 41 (2000): 17–18.

[293] "The Anthropocene and the ecological question in general require that political epistemology not be exhausted at the level of consciousness, values, world views and theory. It is necessary instead to strengthen its anchoring in ontology at all levels of the understanding of science, with regard to its origin, validity and above all goals." - Pietro Daniel Omodeo, "Geopraxis: A Concept for the Anthropocene," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History of Ideas* 11, no. 22 (2022), p. 24.

[294] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago London: University of Chicago Press, 2021), p. 7.

[295] Franck Fischbach, *La production des hommes: Marx avec Spinoza*, Nouvelle éd. revue et corrigée (Paris: J. Vrin, 2014), p. 55.

[296] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p. 150.

determined and dead[297] is revealed to be agential, intertwined with life and generative of hybrid formations that resist the "purifying"[298] operation characteristic of modern critical thought. As Latour puts it:

> The explanations we seek will indeed obtain Nature and Society, but only as a final outcome, not as a beginning. Nature does revolve, but not around the Subject/Society. It revolves around the collective that produces things and people. The Subject does revolve, but not around Nature. It revolves around the collective out of which people and things are generated. At last the Middle Kingdom is represented. Natures and societies are its satellites.[299]

On the way to such explanations, Latour disqualifies dialectics as the type of thinking that cemented Kant's ontological distinction by giving it the form of a contradiction. In this sense, Hegel, or his Marxist followers, did not resolve Kant's dualism, as they thought, but radicalized it to its ultimate version.[300] From this perspective, Marxism, in that form, cannot think ecologically.[301]

---

[297] "The inanimate-animate distinction is perhaps one of the most persistent dualisms in Western philosophy and its critiques; even some of the most hard-hitting critiques of the nature-culture dichotomy leave the animate-inanimate distinction in place. It takes a radical rethinking of agency to appreciate how lively even "dead matter" can be." - Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p. 419.

[298] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 46.

[299] Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 79.

[300] "Yet by believing that he was abolishing Kant's separation between things-in-themselves and the subject, Hegel brought the separation even more fully to life. He raised it to the level of a contradiction, pushed it to the limit and beyond, then made it the driving force of history. The seventeenth-century distinction becomes a separation in the eighteenth century, then an even more complete contradiction in the nineteenth." - Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 57.

[301] We can say that here Latour echoes Félix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies*: "Unlike Hegelian and Marxist dialectics, eco-logic no longer imposes a 'resolution' of opposites." - Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 52.

In the various rejections of Marxism within ecological thought – from deep ecology to more nuanced critiques by Anthony Giddens[302] or John P. Clark[303] – two main recurring categories are productivism and Prometheanism.[304] The first refers to the primacy of economic growth, the second to an ontology in which nature is merely an instrument for achieving human goals.[305] These categories are said to characterize both Marx's own work and its subsequent interpretations and applications. The narrative may be reconstructed as follows: Marx – shaped by his early engagement with Hegel – is cast as an advocate of nature's total humanization, a process to be achieved through accelerated industrialization.[306] In such a reading, the emancipatory vision of early Marx, centered on overcoming alienation through the reestablishment of continuity between humans and nature, is inverted: emancipation becomes the domination of nature, now conceived as a realm of external determination and quantitatively measurable, dead matter. Culture, in this view, emerges as the exclusive domain of freedom.

In *Marx with Spinoza*, Franck Fischbach identifies one of the earliest examples of this modern separation between nature and history being attributed to Marx.[307] The German philosopher Karl Löwith cites Marx's famous phrase from the *1844 Manuscripts*: "History is the true natural history of man."[308] Löwith argues that here Marx draws a strict line between the historical and the natural, using the concept of labor to separate humans from their environment – leading to the absolutization of history and relegation of nature to a static background. In rebutting Löwith, Fischbach offers a Spinozist reading of the *Manuscripts*,

[302] Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

[303] John P. Clark, "Marx's Inorganic Body:," *Environmental Ethics* 11, no. 3 (1989), pp. 243–58.

[304] It should, however, be mentioned that Marxism developed its own share of criticisms of productivism in operaist and post-operaist traditions, feminist social reproduction theories and ecomarxism.

[305] Timothée Haug, "La rupture écologique dans l'œuvre de Marx : Analyse d'une métamorphose inachevée du paradigme de la production" (PhD thesis defended under the supervision of Franck Fischbach, Strasbourg, Université de Strasbourg, 2022), p. 19.

[306] Dan Swain and Monika Woźniak, "Editorial: Ecosocialism in the Post-Communist Landscape," *Kontradikce* 6, no. 2 (2022), p. 5.

[307] Fischbach, *La production des hommes*, p. 55.

[308] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 146.

seeing in Marx a philosophical and political critique – rather than support – of the nature/history divide.[309]

While criticisms of Marx's alleged dualism have been repeatedly refuted,[310] those targeting 20th-century Marxisms are more compelling. From the founding gestures of Lukács (*History and Class Consciousness*) or Korsch (*Marxism and Philosophy*), to the trajectory of the Frankfurt School and phenomenological Marxism, the hypostasis of history over nature often resulted in a systematic neglect of ontological questions about matter. In their discussion of the relationship between new materialism and critical theory, Hartmut Rosa et al. explain the motivations for critical theory's anti-naturalist stance by evoking the history of naturalized forms of domination – such as racism, patriarchy, or social Darwinism. They write:

> Under these circumstances, progressive thinking often assumed that in order to make room for freedom and emancipation the realm of nature had to be curtailed. While in practice this led to its domination by science-driven technology and the exploitation and expropriation of natural "resources" [...] in theory this meant to de-naturalize the driving forces of such processes, that is, to demystify them and to uncover their real "nature" – which was no longer natural.[311]

This reaction against naturalized forms of domination helps to account for the anti-naturalism – and, by extension, the ontological indifference toward matter – that characterized many (post-)Marxist theoretical projects in the 20th century. However, such an explanation cannot fully account for the perspectives of those thinkers and traditions that did not adopt this

---

[309] "[…] la conception matérialiste de l'histoire suppose chez Marx, pour être bien comprise, non pas la reprise, comme le pense Löwith, de la coupure entre nature et histoire, mais au contraire une critique radicale de cette séparation que Marx considère comme typique de l'idéalisme philosophique – une critique dont la force réside, selon nous, dans le fait qu'en mettant au jour l'origine et les causes de la séparation *idéaliste* de la nature et de l'histoire, elle met également au jour le caractère *idéologique* de cette même séparation." - Fischbach, *La production des hommes*. p. 56.

[310] See: Andreas Malm, "Nature et Société : Un Ancien Dualisme Pour Une Situation Nouvelle," trans. Jean-François Bissonnette, *Actuel Marx* n° 61, no. 1 (2017), pp. 47–63.

[311] Hartmut Rosa, Christoph Henning, and Arthur Bueno, eds., *Critical Theory and New Materialisms*, Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2021), p. 4.

stance. I propose that the recurring separation between the natural and the historical within Marxist thought should be interpreted as an epistemological expression of the political divide between the dialectical naturalism of Soviet Marxism and the anti-Engelsian historicism of Western Marxism. The political schism between these two (schematically outlined) traditions was mirrored in their respective epistemologies: Soviet Marxism maintained a commitment to a philosophy of nature, while Western Marxism, in an effort to distinguish itself from the positivist form that commitment took in official Soviet ideology, gravitated toward a historically grounded constructivism and social theory. As Perry Anderson's classic study notes,[312] Western Marxism was marked by strong methodologism. Soviet Marxism, by contrast, is often described by the term ontologism.[313]

It is generally acknowledged that, in rejecting Engels' *Dialectics of Nature*,[314] Western Marxism abandoned ontological engagement with matter, thereby avoiding what it saw as the rigid orthodoxy of Soviet philosophical practice. However, as John Bellamy Foster argues, this foundational move also precluded Western Marxism from developing a systematic relationship to natural sciences[315] – and, one might add, from engaging substantively with the concept of matter's intrinsic activity. Even as socialist thinkers today increasingly abandon technological optimism in favor of ecological consciousness, the division between economic and ecological concerns remains hierarchically structured. Kohei Saito, for example, highlights the case of Marxist geographer David Harvey, who criticized ecological discourses as apocalyptic and dismissed natural limits through a constructivist lens, arguing that capital can transform any natural limit into a surmountable barrier.[316] This critique of natural limits as socially constructed risks underestimating their real and determining force. But is this constructivist

[312] Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 53.

[313] Vesa Oittinen, "Ontologism in Soviet Philosophy: Some Remarks," *Studies in East European Thought* 73, no. 2 (June 2021), pp. 205–17.

[314] Kohei Saito, "La Théorie Du Métabolisme Chez Marx à l'ère de La Crise Écologique Mondiale," *Tracés*, no. 40 (2021), pp. 161–82.

[315] John Bellamy Foster, *The Return of Nature: Socialism and Ecology* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2020), p. 41.

[316] Kohei Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism* (Cambridge New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 110-111.

orientation inherent to Marxist theory? Or can an alternative be found within the tradition itself? A brief look at Soviet environmental history can help us address this question.

The stages of Soviet ecology

Soviet environmental history is most commonly interpreted through two dominant lenses: the early revolutionary period, characterized by experimental ecological theories and conservationist ambitions, and the Stalinist era, marked by ecocidal policies and unbridled industrialization. However, it is in the largely under-studied period of late Soviet ecology (1950–1991) that we can identify significant shifts in the understanding of matter. As Igor Kobylin observed:

> In the post-Stalinist era, when the natural sciences attempted to assert relative independence from ideological dictates, nature – their primary object – also gained a certain "autonomy."[317]

This also revived the question of the activity of matter. Vladimir Sukachev, president of the Moscow Society of Naturalists, popularized his concept of *biogeocoenosis*, an alternative to the notion of ecosystem. Drawing explicitly from dialectical materialism, Sukachev's model sought to account not only for the dynamic interplay between living organisms and their environment but also for the active properties of the material environment itself. This formulation challenged mechanistic and reductive interpretations of nature. Foster has offered an important reconstruction of this legacy, elements of which inform the present analysis.

The early stages of Soviet ecology were marked by radical conservation policies and the creation of various state organizations for environmental studies. Beginning in 1924, with Lenin's support, the Soviet Union started establishing multiple nature reserves – protected territories used for scientific research. This represented both a political experiment and a theoretical corpus that cannot simply be dismissed by referring to the productivist, Promethean policies of Stalinism, which entirely reversed the initial revolutionary experience and subjected the environment to the industrial goals of the Five-Year Plans.

Under Stalin, the ideological climate grew increasingly hostile to scientific inquiry that was not directly subordinated to state industrial goals. Numerous researchers in biology, chemistry,

[317] Igor Kobylin, "Mysledeyatel'nostnaya" Guvernamental'nost': Istoriya i Klassovoe Soznanie Upravlentsa," *Neprikosnovennyy Zapas*, no. 1 (2021), p. 186.

and geology were imprisoned or executed, and Soviet ecology became a casualty of the state's embrace of industrial productivism. The nature reserves created in the 1920s and 1930s were repurposed to serve projects of acclimatization, where flora and fauna were relocated to new habitats as part of a larger effort to engineer nature. This practice, oriented around the literal production of nature, underscores the extent to which Stalinist ecological policy was driven by an instrumental logic. However, in their drive to subordinate nature to planning, Soviet officials were compelled to confront the *activity of matter*.[318]

Thus, under Stalin's regime, nature ceased to be understood as something to be conserved (as in Lenin's time) and became both a resource to be exploited and an obstacle to human development that had to be overcome and subdued through technological progress. Kazimir Malevich's remark that Soviet materialism was not truly materialist – since it pursued the traditional religious idea of dominating nature – resonates strongly in the Stalinist context.[319]

After Stalin's death and the weakening of Lysenko's grip on biology and agriculture, the path was cleared for the emergence of late Soviet ecology. This period was marked by what Foster calls a "dialectical global ecology",[320] or what Martin Babička terms "ecological techno-optimism",[321] which combined belief in technological progress with a romantic reverence for nature and a sharp awareness of environmental limits. This shift revived the Soviet conservation movement. Nature reserves were reinstated, student conservation brigades were created, and the Russian Society for the Protection of Nature – founded in 1924 and suppressed

[318] "Yet Soviet bureaucrats - just like my interviewees - spent much of their time dealing with the surprises, difficulties, and obstacles created by the stubborn resistance of infrastructure, equipment, and natural phenomena to Soviet government planning… the language of official Soviet documents in these and in- numerable other instances turned nearly animist; material objects and spaces were represented not simply as the setting for or tools of human actions, but also as coparticipants - sometimes assisting, often resisting - in socio eco- nomic processes." – Alexey Golubev, *The Things of Life: Materiality in Late Soviet Russia* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2020), p. 3.

[319] Kazimir Malevich, "Bog Ne Skinut. Iskusstvo, Tserkov', Fabrika," in *Sobranie Sochinenii, Stat'i, Manifesty, Teoreticheskie Sochineniia i Drugie Raboty, 1913–1929*, ed. A. S. Shatskikh and A. D. Sarabianov, vol. 1 (Moscow: Gileia, 1995), pp. 236–265.

[320] John Bellamy Foster, "Late Soviet Ecology and the Planetary Crisis," *Monthly Review*, no. 67.

[321] M. Babička, "A 'Right to Sadness': Late Socialist Environmentalism between Technocracy and Romanticism and the Czech Nature Writer Jaromír Tomeček," *Kontradikce* 6, no. 2 (2023), p. 68.

during Stalin's reign – saw a dramatic increase in membership. In 1971, while ecological issues were still largely secondary in Western Marxism, the world's first conference on the impact of humans on climate change was held in Leningrad.[322] Most of these late ecological movements emerged from the scientific community and were accompanied by innovative research based on a dialectical understanding of the interaction between living organisms and the environment – intended to serve as the foundation for ecological policies to regulate the metabolic rift.

This re-emergence of ecology in the post-Khrushchev era was characterized by the simultaneous mobilization of the natural and human sciences. Later works, such as *Philosophy and the Ecological Problems of Civilization* (1983) by Arcady Ursul,[323] drew from early Soviet ecological theorists like Vladimir Vernadsky (1863-1945) to argue for expanding ecological problems to cosmological dimensions and recognizing the anthropogenic impact on the environment. Late Soviet philosophy converged with the natural sciences to establish programs of ecological rehabilitation.

It was in the early stages of this third wave of Soviet ecological thinking – specifically in the early 1950s – that Ilyenkov composed his manuscript. Although the *Cosmology* did not attain canonical status within late Soviet ecological thought – due to its posthumous publication – it nonetheless constitutes a significant philosophical engagement with the planetary implications of human activity. Ilyenkov's work offers a striking example of Marxist philosophy grappling with ecological crisis through the lens of matter's activity.

[322] Oleg Anisimov, "Climate Is Not Always a Constant: On the Centenary of the Birth of Academician M.I. Budyko," *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 90, no. 1 (January 2020), pp. 106–15.

[323] Arkady Ursul, ed., *Philosophy and the Ecological Problems of Civilisation* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983), p. 42.

Can Marxism think ecologically?

If we attempt an ecological reading of Ilyenkov's essay today, the first question must concern the author's provocative proposition to set the planet on fire. In the context of contemporary realities, particularly the accelerating processes of global warming, one could suggest, in fact, that we are enacting precisely Ilyenkov's scenario. Certain commentators offer curious interpretations. Pietro Daniel Omodeo sees Ilyenkov's cosmology as a revival of the Stoic doctrine of *ekpyrosis*, in which the universe is cyclically destroyed by fire, as stellar combustion dries and burns the planet.[324] Boris Groys sees in the *Cosmology* a resurrection of the Aztec religion of Quetzalcoatl, a deity who self-immolates to save the world.[325] While these interpretations offer valuable symbolic insights, the core message of Ilyenkov's text is a dire warning: in the absence of conscious, collective intervention, the planet will be rendered uninhabitable.

From this point of view, the *Cosmology* cannot be reduced to mere historical curiosity. Rather, as I argued above, it holds potential significance for contemporary theoretical debates at the intersection of Marxism and ecology. Over the past decade, ecological readings of Marx have increasingly addressed the concept of metabolism and, more specifically, the theory of the metabolic rift. Andreas Malm offers a summary of this concept:

> Nature consists of biophysical processes and cycles. So does society: human bodies necessarily partake in metabolic exchanges with non-human nature. There is no reason this should inherently be harmful. However, over history, the relationships through which humans organize their *Stoffwechsel* [metabolism] can become broken and violently reconfigured, harming both people and nature. This constitutes a metabolic rift.[326]

This theory, developed by Foster, York, and Clark from Marx's comments on soil exhaustion, has been criticized by Jason W. Moore. The latter has raised objections to what he

[324] Pietro Daniel Omodeo, "A Cosmos Without a Creator: Cesare Cremonini's Interpretation of Aristotle's Heaven," *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 8, no. 2 (2019), p. 12.

[325] Alexei Penzin, "Contingency and Necessity in Evald Ilyenkov's Communist Cosmology," *E-Flux Journal*, no. 88 (2018), p. 6.

[326] Malm, "Nature et Société", p. 59.

perceives as an underlying dualism in the metabolic approach – one that implicitly posits two discrete ontological domains: society and nature. From his monist perspective, such a framework reproduces a "Cartesian dualism," insofar as the interaction between society and nature presupposes their prior separation. Responses to this critique include Dale Jacquette's "property dualism",[327] Adrian Johnston's "emergent dualism",[328] and Kohei Saito's discussion of "methodological dualism"[329] in *Marx in the Anthropocene*. Ilyenkov's dialectical phantasmagoria directly addresses this metabolic relationship and his monist ontology may help reframe the debate by offering a model that both affirms the unity of nature and society and preserves the internal differentiation required to conceptualize metabolic rifts and ecological crises. Just like with Barad and her notion of intra-action, Ilyenkov does not presuppose two separate entities but a mutual co-production.

In the *Cosmology*, the thermodynamic concept of entropy operates as a political metonymy for the destruction of habitable planetary space. Ilyenkov's engagement with entropy is especially significant in that it articulates a strong, biophysically grounded conception of planetary limits – a perspective frequently underestimated in Western Marxist traditions, which have privileged constructivist critiques of naturalism. While constructivist approaches have been instrumental in historicizing and denaturalizing essentialist claims about "nature", an adequate confrontation with the Anthropocene necessitates an account of the material finitude of the Earth's systems and resources. Ilyenkov addresses this tension not by reinforcing the opposition between the social and the natural (as per Latour's critique of dialectics), but by re-inscribing the social within the material. In other words, human time finds itself in the time of rocks and minerals, something that becomes a requirement in the Anthropocene. Moreover, this line of thought is consistent with Marx's original gesture. As G.A. Cohen stressed in his critique of Alfred Schmidt, Marx was not inscribing nature into the human realm but on the contrary, inscribing the social into the natural.[330] Ilyenkov thus advances a dialectical materialist conception of matter as inherently active – capable of participating in the very constitution of social processes. So how exactly does Ilyenkov think active matter?

---

[327] Malm. "Nature et Société", p. 52.

[328] Adrian Johnston, *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism. Volume Two: A Weak Nature Alone*, *Diaeresis* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2020), p. 133.

[329] Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene*. p. 249.

[330] G.A. Cohen, "Marxism: A Philosophy of Nature?," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 2 (1972), p. 15.

Active matter in dialectical and New materialisms

Given Ilyenkov's definition of thought as the necessary attribute of matter, I maintain that the *Cosmology* is built on the understanding that matter itself is active. Andrey Maydanski asserts that Soviet Marxists generally did not attempt to give an active definition of matter, as they were "hypnotized"[331] by Lenin's objectivist interpretation. It was therefore likely that after Stalin's death, the task of freeing Marxism from its dogmatic ossification involved reintroducing the "active aspect" of matter into dialectical materialism. This could not be done without challenging the hegemonic concept of thought as reflection, because if matter is active, then thought is not its reflection but rather its mode of action. In his later work, Ilyenkov would develop the idea of thought as a mode of action of a material body – an idea that placed him in direct opposition to the official Marxism of the party apparatus. This understanding of thought will be discussed in the third Chapter.

While adherence to Engels' *Dialektik der Natur* coupled with Spinoza's metaphysics of substance led to a reified interpretation of matter in Soviet Marxism (as in G. Plekhanov), the same combination in Ilyenkov's essay reveals a concept of matter as fundamentally active, in line with the developments of late Soviet ecology. Like Fischbach in his refutation of Löwith, Ilyenkov also turned to Spinoza to recover the anti-dualist Marx. As he would write in his 1974 *Dialectical Logic*:

> Ascribing only spatial, geometric properties to Nature is, as Spinoza said, to think of it in an imperfect way, i.e. to deny it in advance one of its perfections. And then it is asked how the perfection removed from Nature can be restored to her again.[332]

Oittinen corroborates this, noting that Ilyenkov

> especially insisted on the importance of Spinoza's ideas concerning the role of activity in the process of human cognition (the famous thesis, according to which Man's *cogitandi*

[331] Andrey Maydansky, "Reality as Activity: The Concept of Praxis in Soviet Philosophy," in *The Practical Essence of Man The 'Activity Approach' in Late Soviet Philosophy*, ed. Andrey Maydansky and Vesa Oittinen, vol. 108, Historical Materialism Book Series (Boston: Brill, 2015), p. 44.

[332] Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic: Essays on Its History and Theory*, trans. H. Campbell Creighton (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), pp. 32-33.

potentia equals to his *agendi potentia*, occurs in Spinoza in various formulations, for example in *Ethics* IV, prop. 24).[333]

Ilyenkov's understanding of activity may productively be compared with contemporary neo-materialist perspectives, insofar as both seek to move beyond the linguistic turn and place the non-human within ontological inquiry.[334] Whether in Karen Barad's emphasis on the agency of scientific instruments or in Ilyenkov's analysis of labor tools, there is a shared focus on material mediations that subvert anthropocentric subject-object dichotomies. In both frameworks, objects are not passive entities situated around a human core; rather, they are active participants in shaping, deforming, and generating relational fields. The Soviet activity approach achieves this decentering by privileging concrete activity as the primary unit of analysis. From this methodological standpoint, both subjects and objects are treated not as pre-given entities but as dynamic configurations constituted through activity. As Alex Levant notes:

> What distinguishes the activity approach from material turn theories, post-phenomenological or otherwise, is the way it understands relational reality. For the activity approach, subject and object are also not given in advance. However, rather than seeing us as inserted into "the self-organizing or 'intelligent' structure of living matter", the activity approach presents us as embedded in a set of social practices that give rise to our conceptions – including our conceptions of living and non-living matter.[335]

In simpler terms, the difference lies between a flattening of subjectivity and its complexification. From a late-Soviet perspective such as Ilyenkov's, the framework of New Materialism may be seen as problematic insofar as it tends to dissolve subjectivity in an overarching metaphysical plane. Despite its emphasis on dispersion, decentralization, and the relational constitution of agency, New Materialism often risks drowning the subject in the

---

[333] Vesa Oittinen, "Spinoza in Western and Soviet Philosophy: New Perspectives After Postmodernism," in *Philosophical Thought in Russia in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: A Contemporary View from Russia and Abroad*, ed. Marina Bykova and Vladislav Lektorsky (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

[334] Alex Levant, "Smart Matter and the Thinking Body: Activity Theory and the Turn to Matter in Contemporary Philosophy," *Stasis* 5, no. 2 (2017), pp. 248–64.

[335] Levant, "Smart Matter and the Thinking Body", p. 255.

substance (however understood), by assuming their direct coincidence, leaving aside mediations between them.

Thus, while Ilyenkov's cosmological materialism shares key features with Posthuman and New Materialist thought – such as an emphasis on the activity of matter, anti-dualist commitments, and ecological awareness – important differences remain in how each tradition conceptualizes material agency. Rather than presenting a generalized or diffuse account of agency, Ilyenkov offers a historically situated understanding, where activity is mediated by concrete social processes, in particular in the notion of practice. This anchoring of ontology in human practice, which I will address in more detail at the end of this Chapter, does not negate the non-human but reframes it within a dialectical approach that preserves the critical and political dimensions of materialism. However, this latter claim must be demonstrated, since simply anchoring a theory in practice does not guarantee its political character, especially in an essay that confronts the most necessary and inevitable event imaginable: the thermal death of the Earth.

The political contingency in cosmic cycles

Let us consider again the fundamental opposition of late Soviet Marxism between ontologists and epistemologists ("gnoseologists"). Put simply, this dichotomy unfolds between, on the one hand, an Engelsian reinvention of *Naturphilosophie*, where dialectics is conceived as an inherent property of matter itself, and on the other, a subjectivist corrective which interprets dialectics as a mode of human thought. The first sees its concepts as the properties of objects themselves, while the second sees concepts as constructed, not determining the objects, although representing the only way to understand them. As was demonstrated in the first chapter, this philosophical divergence is mirrored by a political split: between a teleological vision of communism as an imminent historical necessity, where the development of matter itself culminates in a classless society and a hypostasized humanism grounded in a strong theory of practice and labor. The latter tends to a more voluntaristic vision where the subject organizes reality as it sees fit, rarely encountering limits from the substance. Ilyenkov's *Cosmology* resists both of these positions when taken in isolation, and, through the culminating gesture of the essay, demonstrates that they are in fact inseparable aspects of a unified whole. What, then, are the specific problems that Ilyenkov identifies in each of these orientations?

I begin with the ontological tendency. Ilyenkov concedes to this camp the proposition that matter, in the course of its historical development, gave rise to the "thinking spirit." References to Engels abound. However, he maintains that to remain at this point is to tell only half the story. The view that thought emerges as a contingent accident within a chaotic cosmos is, for Ilyenkov, inadequate. As we saw, drawing on Spinoza - who by this operation becomes a dialectician[336] – Ilyenkov posits thought not as a derivative of matter but as its necessary attribute. That is, while matter historically produced thinking beings, it would be an error to conclude that thought is a mere byproduct of material development. In Spinozist terms, thought is not subordinate to substance but rather one of its essential modes of expression. Consequently, no ontological disjunction exists between thought and substance. To conceive of substance devoid of thought is to imagine being that cannot fully express its essence. Thus, to speak of thought is merely another way of speaking about substance. This radical immanence

[336] Ilyenkov, "Cosmology of the Spirit", p. 165.

of thought and substance – articulated by Ilyenkov in the mid-1950s – anticipated themes that would later become prominent in Deleuze's *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*.[337]

In opposition to what he terms "mechanistic materialism",[338] Ilyenkov argues – again following Engels – that the emergence of thought is intrinsic to the nature of matter. Although individual regions of matter may not manifest thought, the infinite and universal substance that is matter contains thought at every moment. It is on this point that Ilyenkov draws a critical line between dialectical and non-dialectical materialism, naming among the latter's representatives Galileo, Newton, Hobbes, and D'Holbach. In other words, only that materialism which sees thought as a necessary expression of matter qualifies as dialectical. Any materialism that regards thought as an accidental or dispensable phenomenon denies matter its "supreme (absolutely highest) form of motion",[339] reducing thought to mere physiology. By accepting Plekhanov's identification of matter and substance and deriving the necessity of thought from that postulate, Ilyenkov beats Soviet ontologism on its own turf.

There is, nevertheless, a curious harmony in the cyclical movement of cosmic processes. If the seamless continuity of this movement is eternally secured by the autotelic nature of matter, one might ask: in what sense can Ilyenkov's essay be understood as political? I would argue that what allows for such an interpretation is the presence of a contingent element embedded in the chain of necessary events. As noted, Ilyenkov's singular reading of Spinoza enables him to maintain that thinking beings – conceived as the necessary product of matter's development will re-emerge once the planet recovers its energy and a new cosmic cycle begins. Yet, this triumphant return is not unconditional. It presupposes a sacrificial act contingent upon the prior establishment of a communist society – one sufficiently conscious of its cosmic function to accept its own demise in order to preserve the planet and thereby enable life to develop anew. He writes:

> It is clear that to fulfill its universal and historical mission, the thinking spirit will find this condition only during the peak of its development, of its power; to that point which we, people of the twentieth century will obviously not live to see. Millions of years will

[337] Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin, 4. print (New York: Zone Books, 2005).

[338] Ilyenkov, "Cosmology of the Spirit", p. 166.

[339] Ilyenkov, "Cosmology of the Spirit", p. 167.

> pass, thousands of generations will be born and go to their graves, a genuine human system will be established on Earth, with the conditions for activity – a classless society, spiritual and material culture will abundantly blossom, with the aid of, and on the basis of which humankind can only fulfill its great sacrificial duty before nature.[340]

It is here, right at the end, in what looks like a lyrical digression from a heavily scientific tone, that the cemented teleological movement of history, so dear to Soviet Marxism, suddenly stumbles on contingency. It is *only* on the basis of a classless society that humankind can fulfill its "sacrificial duty." Ilyenkov's usage of the modal *will* ("a genuine human system will be established on Earth") maintains an order of necessity, typical of the text as a whole. However, this only signals a hypothetical imperative of the *if-then* logic, which posits requirements. This implies that the fulfilment of the objective is not a matter of time, but of struggle. As Maxim Spivakov comments:

> The project of universal self-destruction, nihilistic in form, turns out to be linked to the communist ideal of a classless society and of unalienated labor. Thinking, in its communist threshold, which alone assures thinking as such, poses a political demand to its non-communist past.[341]

In this sense, the question of whether thought and matter are separate or unified is not simply a metaphysical inquiry, but a fundamentally political one. The revolutionary act, identified with the advent of communism, appears in Ilyenkov's cosmology not as one ideological possibility among others, but as a potential inscribed in the very structure of matter itself. However, this inscription remains a possibility rather than a guarantee. It is evident, first and foremost, that Ilyenkov treats communism as a prospective horizon rather than a realized condition. Yet this prospect is not confined to the domain of human affairs, it is anchored within cosmic processes. As Artemy Magun notes:

> …if communism is a "hypothesis" as Badiou suggests, or a theorem yet to be proven (realized in practice), then it risks to be viewed as one more ideal. If communism is an

[340] Ilyenkov, "Cosmology of the Spirit," p. 189.

[341] Maxim Spivakov, "Myslyashchaya Plesen', Rasplastannaya Na Kamnyakh Dalekikh Planet. Filosofiya Eval'da Il'enkova i Myshlenie Nechelovecheskogo," *Mezhdunarodnyy Zhurnal Issledovaniy Kul'tury*, no. 4 (2021), p. 24.

ontological condition of humanity (even an "ecstatic" one), then it escapes historical determination and does not inspire much insurrectional activity.[342]

The careful interplay between history and the cosmos is meant to safeguard Ilyenkov from falling in these two possible traps. A wholly ontological concept of communism would render it ahistorical and politically inert – an outcome Ilyenkov clearly rejects. Conversely, a conception of communism as purely hypothetical and untethered from reality would contradict Marx's foundational materialist dictum: "We develop new principles for the world out of the world's own principles."[343] What Ilyenkov achieves through the introduction of this open possibility is twofold. First, the Hegelian schema of teleological development – where the end is contained within the beginning, as Althusser famously showed[344] – is subordinated to political agency, thereby transforming the dialectical movement into an indeterminate horizon. Secondly, the notion of necessity with its objective laws that underlies the whole essay, becomes limited by contingency in a political manner: The emergence of thinking beings is not a happy or unhappy accident, it is inscribed in the movement of matter. However, what is certainly not guaranteed by this inscription is the outcome of their emergence. While thinking beings will inevitably be presented with the conditions necessary for fulfilling their cosmic mission, there is no assurance that they will act upon them. To put this in political terms, as the essay itself suggests, communism is not the logical conclusion of a linear development of historical stages or social formations with their modes of production. Instead, its effective actualization hinges on a conscious intervention in the stream of cosmic matter.

As for the epistemological orientation of Soviet Marxism and its critique by Ilyenkov, things are less direct. I propose that despite assigning an existential function to human beings, Ilyenkov's *Cosmology* in fact constitutes a critique of anthropocentrism, a tendency that characterizes the epistemological orientation. The idea of life as a force opposing entropic decay has been interrogated by Thomas Nail, who contends that conceiving of human life as

[342] Artemy Magun, "Negativity in Communism: Ontology and Politics," *Russian Sociological Review* 13, no. 1 (2014), p. 14.

[343] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works: Volume 3*. (London: Lawrence & Wishart Electric Book, 2010), p. 144.

[344] Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Allen Lane, 1969), p. 130.

an inversion of cosmic entropy culminates in a form of anthropocentrism in which the human subject is cast as a heroic figure resisting the universe's inherent tendency toward disorder:

> We have made ourselves and the Earth into deep inversions of the general movement of the universe, which flows, cycles, and dissipates entropically. The crowning of this inversion is anthropocentrism. We look at the universe and think how wasteful it is. In the face of this waste, we believe life – and especially human life – is so special because it fights against cosmic entropy. We've cast ourselves as heroes in a universal drama of life versus death.[345]

Yet Nail's target seems to be an essentialist conception of life. Indeed, if life is understood as intrinsically antithetical to entropy, one arrives at a romanticized form of anthropocentrism. By contrast, Ilyenkov presents a more complex picture in which life – and, by extension, thought – can both oppose and accelerate entropy. His notion of thought resembles a phármakon: simultaneously remedy and poison. Nevertheless, the issue of anthropocentrism cannot be entirely dismissed. At first glance, the *Cosmology* might suggest that matter cannot exist without thought, and thought appears to be inseparably tied to human beings. Such a reading would elevate humanity to the status of an existential link in the cosmic chain. However, this interpretation results from a misreading of Ilyenkov's Hegelian and Engelsian vocabulary ("thinking Spirit", thought as the "highest flower", etc.). For Ilyenkov, what is necessary is not the human being per se, but rather the existence of thought as an attribute of matter. In this sense, it is not the human who thinks, but matter itself that thinks through the human. Thought thus transcends the human experience of thinking, it is in its origin non-human. Hence, Ilyenkov insists that future thinking bodies may not resemble humans at all.

In this sense, Spivakov is correct to liken Ilyenkov's vision to the neo-rationalist project of Reza Negarestani. They indeed share a common premise. Namely, as Negarestani describes his project:

[345] Thomas Nail, *Marx in Motion: A New Materialist Marxism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 19-20.

> Inhumanism is the labor of rational agency on human. But there is one caveat here: the rational agency is not personal, individual, or necessarily biological.[346]

For Ilyenkov too, thought, even in its human state, lies outside of the individual brain. To echo our main issue, that is, Ilyenkov's conception of the relation between ontology and epistemology, we can say the following: if ontology is to be understood as the study of what lies outside of human consciousness, the non-human, and that the only way to make that study possible, that is, to access that non-human, is through epistemology, through turning our gaze inwards, then it could follow that the innermost essence of the thinking human, or of human thought, is itself non-human. In this sense, the non-human is not primarily what surrounds the human but what remains in it, the absolute in the partial, the infinite in the finite. This is the inhuman essence that Negarestani's enlightenment attempts to access.[347] Yet, contrarily to Negarestani, thought in Ilyenkov is existentially dependent on a historicized and socialized world of other humans, artefacts and labor, in short, culture. If the premises of the two theories seem complementary, their ends are mutually exclusive. Against a machinic realization of autonomous, worldless thought, Ilyenkov speaks of it as always already social. Knowledge might not concern its social context but it is never independent from it.[348] The cosmological vision of thought, I would claim, is precisely what we get when we realize that biological sentience and rational sapience Negarestani so diligently distinguishes[349] are in fact just two of possibly endless expressions of thinking matter. As Marx wrote to A. Ruge in 1843: "Reason has always existed, but not always in a reasonable form."[350]

Thought, given that it is connected to matter, as Ilyenkov never ceases to repeat, must have an inhuman essence. This is the secret the cosmology is imparting on us. This alters the ending of the story. The final moment of the catastrophe, then, is the moment where the human

---

[346] Reza Negarestani, "The Labor of the Inhuman, Part II: The Inhuman," *E-Flux Journal*, no. 53 (2014), p. 3.

[347] Yoel Regev, *Nevozmozhnoe i Sovpadenie. O Revolyutsionnoy Situatsii v Filosofii* (Perm: Gile press, 2016), p. 16.

[348] A program that resembles Negarestani's in that it aims to schematize thought independent of its content was proposed in the late-Soviet context by G. Shchedrovitsky, who in many ways can be considered as the antipode of Ilyenkov.

[349] Negarestani, "The Labor of the Inhuman, Part II", p. 3.

[350] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works: Volume 3*, p. 143.

recognizes the nonhuman in itself. The ethical gesture of altruism of the human coincides with the evolutionary instinct of survival of the absolute. The hand that triggers the apocalypse is moved by the agency of the substance, not an individual human being. Yet, in contrast to right-wing accelerationist musings about the death-drive in the absolute, this sacrifice is not the end. In Ilyenkov's own words:

> The supreme product of development returns through the path of dissolution into its lowest forms, again connected in this way to the eter- nal big circle of universal matter.[351]

Indeed, the decomposition of the spirit into inorganic matter is a vivid visualization of the coincidence between subject and substance, albeit less triumphal than in Hegel.

Admittedly, Ilyenkov's Hegelian terminology poses difficulties for an anti-anthropocentric reading. Nevertheless, if one moves beyond this terminological issue, it becomes clear that the teleological question of why thought emerged, as well as the phantasmagorical proposal of a planetary fire, refer to a historically concrete condition. The "objective role" of thinking bodies, to which Ilyenkov refers, is less an allusion to a privileged metaphysical status than an assertion of the ontological entanglement of human beings with their material environment – a relation obscured by the technocratic and colonial epistemologies of capitalist modernity. By inscribing human history into the larger cosmic process, endowing it with a "cosmological debt", Ilyenkov decenters the status of the human as a master of nature and relegates it to a regional actor in the cosmic cycles of universal interaction. What he reverses here is not the general movement of the universe but precisely the human exceptionalism and prometheanism that legitimize the ecocidal extraction of resources from the planet. In this way, the *Cosmology* not only provides a speculative metaphysics of matter but also a critical intervention in the onto-political foundations of ecological thought.[352]

Undoubtedly, Ilyenkov's *Cosmology* – with its dramatic crescendo – remains, as its subtitle admits, a "phantasmagoria." Yet this characterization does not render it abstract or irrelevant. On the contrary, one cannot help but draw connections between its speculative narrative and the very real predicaments confronting human and non-human collectives in the Anthropocene.

---

[351] Ilyenkov, "Cosmology of the Spirit," p. 169.

[352] Yuliya Yurchenko, "Humans, Nature and Dialectical Materialism," *Capital & Class* 45, no. 1 (March 2021), pp. 33–43.

Yet it is also legitimate to ask: How does Ilyenkov's dialectic preserve the place of the subject when the latter is ultimately completely engulfed by the active and productive substance? Doesn't the final dissolution of the thinking spirit in infinite matter repeat the Stalinist unmediated identification of substance and subject? Or in another sense, how can we understand the fact that at the same time as Ilyenkov was publicly rallying against the Stalinist ontologization of dialectics, arguing that the latter was first and foremost a mode of thinking, he secretly wrote a treatise on ontology? Drawing on our earlier discussion of Ilyenkov's critical stance toward formalist and schematic conceptions of thought in the first chapter, a possible resolution to this contradiction begins to emerge. It can be argued that Ilyenkov was engaged in a "struggle on two fronts". On one side, he opposed Stalinist accounts that reduced thought to a mere epiphenomenon of matter, collapsing any meaningful distinction between the two. On the other, he resisted the opposite tendency: the wholesale separation of thought from material reality, a tendency reinforced by the revival of formal logic and, later, cybernetics. In this light, "Theses on the Object of Philosophy" and *Cosmology of the Spirit*, despite their stylistic differences, may be seen as components of a coherent philosophical project - one that seeks to resist both the pitfalls of objective idealism and the reductive tendencies of mechanistic materialism.

What is certain is that after the *Cosmology* Ilyenkov abandoned this speculative style for a more scholastic one, yet the theory remained the same. To properly analyze his interpretation of the theory of identity of thought and being, I now pass to a text that presented it without the ironic, at times absurd form seen in the *Cosmology*.

Ilyenkov and the theory of identity

Ilyenkov articulated his interpretation of identity theory within the history of philosophy across several works, though most of these were revised versions of a central essay in which the theme is addressed with the greatest consistency. This essay was published in the 1964 collection *Dialectics - The Theory of Cognition: Historical-Philosophical Sketches* under the title "The Question of the Identity of Thought and Being in Pre-Marxist Philosophy."[353] At the outset, Ilyenkov contends that the association of identity theory with Hegelianism was largely a consequence of Stalin's personality cult. Although this assertion may initially seem perplexing, Ilyenkov clarifies his position by referring to Stalin's role in reinstating formal logic. As discussed in previous sections, Stalin's conceptual separation of dialectics and logic – where the former pertains to being and the latter to thought – effectively foreclosed the possibility of conceptualizing an identity between thought and being. Such an identity presupposes an integrated framework, which dialectical logic aimed to provide. Consequently, identity theory was relegated to the margins, treated as a strictly Hegelian construct. However, Ilyenkov challenges this characterization, emphasizing that the concept of the identity of thought and being is by no means exclusive to Hegel. Indeed, while its roots can be traced as far back as Parmenides, Ilyenkov focuses instead on figures such as Spinoza and Feuerbach to substantiate his argument. It is at this moment that he introduces what he describes as a set of "incontestable facts." He underscores that, within dialectical reasoning, identity does not imply absolute sameness but rather the unity of distinct – even contradictory – elements. Identity, in this view, is realized in the process of transformation, in which one entity becomes another. It is through this dynamic of becoming that identity or coincidence can be meaningfully conceived. All of this appears simple enough:

> Anyone, in cognizing a thing, transforms it into a concept; and anyone, realizing his intention in an act, in the act of changing a thing, transforms his concept into a thing. There is no 'Hegelianism' in this, of course.[354]

[353] Evald Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii," in *Dialektika - Teoriya Poznaniya: Istoriko-Filosofskie Ocherki*, ed. Bonifaty Kedrov (Moscow: Nauka, 1964), pp. 21–54.

[354] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 22.

Hegelianism, according to Ilyenkov, originates not in the principle of becoming itself but in its idealist interpretation. However, Ilyenkov contends that a materialist interpretation of this process is not only possible but already present within the philosophical tradition. To articulate this alternative, he first revisits the Kantian thesis regarding the impossibility of verifying the correspondence between thought and that which lies beyond it. As Ilyenkov notes, if thought and its object do not share a common ground, how can one meaningfully assess the adequacy of a representation in relation to the object it purports to represent? The core of Ilyenkov's argument is that any comparison between a concept and an object presupposes the conceptualization of that object - thus transforming it into another representation. As a result, we are not comparing a representation to an independent, external thing, but rather one conceptual form to another. The very act of bringing the object into relation with the concept necessarily mediates it through thought, rendering the object itself a conceptual construct. Consequently, without a shared basis or third term, such comparisons become incoherent - analogous, as Ilyenkov puts it, to comparing "New York with snow".[355] This prompts the critical philosophical question: do thought and being possess a common substance, some underlying reality of which both are distinct modifications? Put differently, in what sense can thought and being be said to be the same?

In addressing this question, Ilyenkov turns - predictably - to Descartes. For Descartes, corporeal entities are defined by spatial extension, whereas thought, lacking such extension, is characterized as an entirely different substance. Each is thus self-contained and comprehensible only in its own terms. The resulting difficulty lies in the absence of any mediating principle that would allow one to deduce thought from extension or vice versa, since logical entailment presupposes a shared foundation. Nevertheless, the mutual influence of thought and corporeal reality is a basic, experiential fact of ordinary life. According to Ilyenkov, Descartes fails to resolve this contradiction. The resolution, he argues, is instead to be found in the philosophy of Spinoza.

By reconceptualizing thought and extension not as independently existing substances but as dependent attributes - expressions of a third, underlying reality - Spinoza, in Ilyenkov's reading, "splits the Gordian knot of the famous psychophysical problem".[356] When philosophers ask how can an idea that is not spatial, move a body located in space, or inversely, how can a body provoke an idea, "It is tacitly assumed that really existing nature (in Spinoza's

[355] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 24.

[356] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 27.

philosophy it is also "substance", "god") is something that is organically incapable of thinking."[357] Thus the idea that was implicit in the *Cosmology* gets an explicit formulation here: It is Nature that thinks through the human, rather than thought being something distinct and alien to nature. This is, according to Ilyenkov, "the essence of Spinozism".[358] From this point, Ilyenkov advances an argument that moves beyond the commonly accepted tenets of Spinoza's *Ethics*. He contends that if thought is an act carried out by a materially constituted, spatially extended body, then thought itself must also be spatially conditioned. In this view, the attribute - rather than being a passive property or quality - is understood as a form of activity, a dynamic mode of expression. Consequently, any inquiry into the causal relationship between thought and extension is fundamentally misguided. Such questions presuppose the independent existence of two distinct substances, whereas, in Spinoza's framework - as interpreted by Ilyenkov - they are simply two modalities of the same underlying reality.

> Between the thinking body and thinking there is no relation of cause and effect, but a relation of an organ to its function, to its mode of action… The thinking body cannot cause changes in thinking simply because its very existence as a thinking, i.e., acting body is directly thinking.[359]

Precisely as a mode of action, rather than its result, thinking is inseparable from the spatially situated body. This is why Ilyenkov criticizes the view that one can be expressed in the other:

> It is not thought, not thinking, that is expressed in the form of structural and spatial changes within the thinking body, just as, conversely, it is not the immanent movements of the thinking organ that are expressed in the changes of thought. Therefore, neither thinking can be understood by examining, however thoroughly, the shifts that arise within the thinking body, nor, on the contrary, these latter shifts by examining the act of "pure thought".[360]

[357] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 27.

[358] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 27.

[359] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 27.

[360] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 28.

From this statement it becomes clear why Ilyenkov saw nothing specifically Hegelian in Identity theory. As he notes, Hegel did not take Spinoza's position but rather reverted back to Descartes by arguing that pure, non-extended thought becomes the active mover of bodies and things. Ilyenkov's Spinoza-inspired definition of thought as a mode of action of a spatially determined structure reframes the classical philosophical question of interaction between the two terms. Yet, if the spatially situated body is only the organ through which thinking is performed, then attempts at grasping thinking through the study of the spatially situated body is like trying to understand the organism by looking solely at the organ. Instead:

> To understand thinking, one must understand the mode of being of the thinking body, not the structure of this body in its inactive state. This is the whole point of Spinoza's position.[361]

According to Ilyenkov, the "mode of being" of thought is situated in the relational positioning of the thinking body vis-à-vis other bodies - both thinking and non-thinking - and, more broadly, in its relation to infinite nature as a whole. The distinction he draws between thinking and non-thinking bodies hinges on the character of their movement: the thinking body organizes its movement freely, that is, in accordance with an internal necessity that is itself aligned with the external necessities of nature and the formal structures of other bodies. In consciously organizing its movement in relation to the world, the thinking body becomes capable of generating new forms. It is in this capacity that Ilyenkov attributes to it a "universal plasticity".[362] This plasticity should not be mistaken for formlessness; rather, it signifies the capacity for free form-creation [*формообразование*] - a dynamic and generative relation to form.[363] To grasp the nature of thought, then, is not to analyze the internal constitution of the thinking body in isolation, but rather to investigate the network of determinate relations through which it interacts with other forms. It is this relational ontology, Ilyenkov argues, that underpins Spinoza's theory of affects, his conception of truth and error, and his critique of teleological interpretations of nature.

[361] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 29.

[362] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 30.

[363] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 30.

On Spinoza's theory of truth and error

As it is with the nature of thought, whose understanding must occur through the study of the body's relation to others, rather than of its internal constitution, so it is with the notions of truth and error or good and bad. As Ilyenkov comments:

> 'Error' (and hence 'evil' and 'sin') is not a characterization of an idea and an action by their own composition, nor is it their positive property. The erroneous person also acts in strict accord with the form of a thing, but the question is what kind of thing it is. If it is 'insignificant,' 'imperfect' in itself, i.e., accidental, then the mode of action adapted to it is also imperfect. And if a man transfers this mode of action to another thing, that is when he gets into trouble.[364]

It is then at the point where a limited mode of action is generalized onto other things, or as Ilyenkov puts it, when "the relative is taken as the absolute", that error occurs. Thus, the more limited the part of the infinite nature the thinking body relates to, the higher the measure of its error and vice versa. Accordingly, the more passive the body, the more inadequate its ideas.

From the definition of error as the generalization of a particular mode of action adequate for a particular thing onto other things, Ilyenkov passes to Spinoza's critique of formal abstraction, which would precisely operate on formal analogies and hence commit that exact error. The idea of substance is not, as Ilyenkov points out, the result of identifying what is common to both thought and extension – that would be that they exist, which doesn't advance our understanding – rather:

> 'Substance' turns out to be an absolutely necessary condition, without which it is fundamentally impossible to understand the mode of interaction between the thinking body and the world within which it acts as a thinking body. This is a profoundly dialectical point.[365]

[364] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 31.

[365] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 32.

Understanding the substance thus begets the self-understanding of the thinking body itself. Inversely, by understanding its own motion in accordance with the contours of other bodies, the thinking body comes to know those bodies. In short, it is by knowing and acting in accordance with the contours of other forms that the thinking body acquires adequate ideas, the *scientia intuitiva* in Spinoza.

However, Ilyenkov addresses a critical remark to Spinoza, or, rather, aligns himself with Fichte's criticism of the latter. Namely, the thinking body does not only move in accordance with pre-given, ready-made forms of the bodies of infinite nature but through its activity, creates new bodies with new contours, thus transforming nature and negating the split between itself and the substance. According to Ilyenkov, this "weakness" of Spinoza's philosophy, as well as its strengths, come into sharper form in the subsequent development of materialist thought, particularly in the work of Feuerbach.

Ilyenkov's critique of Feuerbach

While Feuerbach initially reiterates Spinoza's position in opposition to Cartesian dualism, he is necessarily compelled to move beyond it, given his philosophical context - specifically, the need to engage with the attempts of German Idealism to overcome that very dualism "From the right",[366] as Ilyenkov notes in quotes. Feuerbach's critique of Hegel, which holds that the latter only solved the dualism in thought, thus resulting in tautology, is succinctly expressed by Ilyenkov:

> In the form of the product of the activity of the thinking spirit, nothing else is represented than the empirically obvious state of affairs in the real world, and all the complex 'magic of mediation' serves only to return to nature and man, under the guise of a 'gift of God,' the very determinations that were previously taken away from them by the act of abstraction.[367]

The problem lies, according to Feuerbach, in the way the question is put forth. Just like Spinoza countered Descartes, Feuerbach counters Hegel by arguing that there is no pure thought opposed to pure being, whose relations philosophy would have to define, but being itself includes thought. To exclude thought, and human thought in particular from the definition of being, thus to present it as non-thinking being, is to give it an insufficient definition. Feuerbach's idea, somewhat typical of his time, is to call upon medicine. For thought to be present there must be a living human brain. Nothing allows us to speak of thought separately from the brain. The question is thus reformulated. It is absurd to ask what is the relationship between the material brain and thought, because they are, Feuerbach believes, the same thing. Or, rather, thought is the function of the brain.

Herein lies the problem with Hegel and Schelling. If Feuerbach declares identity between thought and being to be a simple fact, needing no philosophical mediation, the idealists can only grasp it as a final result. At the point of departure, the two terms are instead considered as opposites. The reason for this is a major simplification on Feuerbach's part, which we could call an anatomical account of German idealism. Namely, the view of thought and being as

[366] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 34.

[367] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 35.

opposites arises subjectively because the brain, being an organ geared at grasping the external, objective world, does not, at the same time, grasp itself as material. Just as the eye oriented at the stars does not see itself, so the brain "forgets about itself" (Feuerbach) in the process of grasping what is external to it.

All this seems to constitute, in Ilyenkov's view, basic principles of any materialism. But - and it comes as no surprise - he moves on from Feuerbach on the basis of Marx's famous critique. Feuerbach wants the objective world, but takes that world as a given, rather than as subjective activity. Ilyenkov writes:

> ...in the 'contemplation of the individual' there is no distinction between those forms of natural material which are peculiar to it 'from nature' and those forms which are impressed upon it, as seals, by human activity. Both are merged in the notion of the surrounding (individual) world… Therefore, when Feuerbach is confronted with the question where and how 'man' (the 'thinking body') is in direct unity (contact) with the surrounding world, he answers: in contemplation.[368]

Feuerbach, it would appear, conceives of nature as an entity existing in itself, independent of and unmediated by subjective or transformative human activity. However, such a conception of nature was already largely untenable in Feuerbach's own historical moment. As Marx would later emphasize in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, nature is not a passive given but is already "humanized" - that is, shaped and transformed through practical activity. Consequently, the identity of thought and being cannot be grounded in passive contemplation or theoretical reflection alone; rather, it must be situated in praxis, in the material and transformative engagement of human beings with the world. As Ilyenkov writes: "We have yet to get to nature 'in itself'. It is not given in contemplation".[369] Relying on the notion of contemplation to guarantee the identity of thought and being, Feuerbach looks to sciences like physiology and anatomy to solve an essentially philosophical question. This is the principal distinction between Marx's and Feuerbach's materialism. The latter's medical interpretation of the identity problem, where thought is seen identical to the matter of the brain, has its place, Ilyenkov thinks, in medicine. But as soon as it is transported to philosophy and presented as the materialist

[368] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 42.

[369] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 43.

solution of the identity problem, it becomes erroneous. Ilyenkov grants to Feuerbach that thought does indeed take place in the brain:

> Indeed, human thinking - in contrast to Hegel's fantasies about it - is a quite material process taking place in the cerebral cortex; there is nothing under the skull but a set of quite material phenomena; as such, these phenomena are quite cognizable; everything cognizable can be practically reproduced in the form of a material 'model'. Such a material model of the brain is capable of performing all acts of thinking, of visualizing for us the complete, unconditional and absolute "identity of thought and matter", i.e. of practically solving the problem which various idealist philosophers had previously tried to solve 'speculatively'.[370]

Yet Feuerbach did not stop there and Ilyenkov is aware of this. The argument described above belongs to what Marxists like to call "vulgar materialism",[371] Feuerbach, on the other hand, claimed that it is not the brain that thinks, nor the brain embodied in a human body, but the human body in relation to its environment. Neither the brain, separated from the rest of the body can be said to think, nor the body separated from its environment. Thus, for Feuerbach, it is the human body situated in a material environment that thinks. Yet there is still something lacking to this position. Namely, it is not historical. This shortcoming, as is well-known, would be resolved by Marx.

[370] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 44.

[371] On the problematic nature of denigrating vulgarity while claiming to speak for the working class see: McKenzie Wark, "Four Cheers for Vulgar Marxism!!!!," *Public Seminar* (blog), April 25, 2014, https://publicseminar.org/2014/04/four-cheers-for-vulgarity/.

Marx's and the materialism of practice

Interestingly, in this otherwise typical account of the genesis of historical materialism, Ilyenkov points out that Marx rejected the view that contemplation grasps the "thing in itself".[372] As he summarized it:

> Between 'man in general' (as contemplating and thinking) and nature in itself, 'nature in general,' there is another important 'mediating link' that Feuerbach missed. This mediating link, through which nature is transformed into thought and thought into the body of nature, is practice, labor, production.[373]

The nature given in contemplation is already a subjectively transformed nature, reworked through human practice. Hence the subjectively impressed and "objective" qualities of nature are intertwined. What contemplation has to do with is not the object but "the objective activity of Man".[374] It is in the social production of their environment, in social praxis, that humans resolve the separation between thought and being. In fact, Ilyenkov seems to believe that social practice is capable not only of seeing nature in itself but also of discerning what in this image belongs to the "in itself" and what to the subjective. As he writes:

> For it is the very activity that transforms (changes, 'distorts') the 'true image of nature' that alone can show what this image is like before and without 'subjective distortions'. Hence, practice and only practice - and by no means 'passive theoretical contemplation' - is capable of resolving the question of which features of the object given in contemplation belong to the object of nature itself, and which are introduced by the transforming activity of man, i.e. by the 'subject'.[375]

It becomes clear that Ilyenkov places activity (social labor, to be exact) as the third term with thought and being, making it the demiurge that generates both. Only in such a framework can

[372] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 46.

[373] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 46.

[374] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 47.

[375] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 47.

he speak of activity revealing what belongs to the in-itself and what is instead artefactual. This contentious claim lies at the foundation of his theory, whose validity hence depends on that claim. For this reason, the third Chapter will be dedicated to evaluating this claim.

Ilyenkov's historical reconstruction of the problem of identity may be schematically summarized through a typological classification of positions. First, there are those who locate the realization of identity in thought itself, positing the primacy of the ideal over the material - among them Schelling, Fichte, and Hegel. Second, a materialist reductionist strand identifies the site of identity in the physiological substrate of the brain, as seen in the works of Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner. A third position, associated with Feuerbach, asserts that ideas are themselves material and locates identity in contemplative reflection. Finally, Marx and Engels represent a fourth position, which grounds the realization of identity not in abstract thought, biological matter, or passive contemplation, but in concrete social practice.

Whereas for other positions the comparison between concept and object becomes feasible only when both terms are brought onto the same ontological plane - either by reducing thing to concept in idealism or concept to thing in materialism - Marx, as interpreted by Ilyenkov, offers a different resolution. In Marx's view, the comparison between concept and thing is possible without collapsing one into the other, precisely because thinking is understood not as a transcendent or immaterial faculty, but as a material process functioning through human activity. Yet, unlike the reductionist view of the so-called "vulgar" materialists, Marx does not equate thought with the physiological operations of the brain. Rather, thought is grasped as the ideal expression of a socially mediated, practical engagement with the world - a functional moment within human activity itself. As Ilyenkov puts it:

> Therefore, the comparison of a concept with its object is not a comparison of thing with thing (as Feuerbach had it), but of the form of man's activity with the product and result of this activity. Before contemplating, man practically acts with real things, and in the process of this action all his concepts are formed. The real objective activity of man transforming nature is the act of identifying, or harmonizing, the form of man's activity with the form of a thing.[376]

Grounded in the primacy of human activity - specifically, the production of objects by humans for human use - Ilyenkov argues that representations emerge not only with respect to

[376] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 49.

these human-made objects but also in relation to elements of unmediated nature. However, this process is unidirectional: representations rooted in labor-mediated activity can extend to nature, but not the reverse. To illustrate this point, Ilyenkov draws on empirical observations from developmental psychology. For instance, children who are taught to use a spoon - an artifact of social labor - are subsequently able to develop modes of interaction with objects such as stones or trees. However, familiarity with naturally occurring objects alone does not engender an understanding of the functional use of a spoon. From this standpoint, it is the rationality inscribed in the products of labor that initiates and structures the development of rational concepts in the individual, who integrates them through practical engagement. Ilyenkov readily acknowledges the conceptual proximity of this account to Hegel's notion of objects as reified or externalized ideas. Yet, while granting Hegel due credit for correctly discerning the dynamics of objectification, Ilyenkov proceeds to formulate a distinctively materialist interpretation of the same process:

> If I transform 'my' representation of a thing, i.e. a verbally or visually fixed image of a thing, into a real deed, into an action with this thing outside of me, and through this deed into the form of an external thing, i.e. into an objectified result of the action, then I end up having before me (outside of myself) two 'things' quite comparable to each other in real space. But of these two things, one is simply a thing, and the other is a thing created according to a plan of representation, or an objectified (through action) representation. In comparing these two things, I compare them to each other as two 'external' objects - the representation and the thing - by which I verify the fidelity (correctness) of the representation.[377]

Ilyenkov appears, at this point, to conflate two fundamentally distinct notions. What he designates as "being outside of me" does not correspond, in the Kantian sense, to the thing as it exists independently of its relation to consciousness (the thing-in-itself), but rather to an object that exists materially in space. However, such an object, insofar as it is apprehended through its appearance to consciousness, must still be regarded as internal to the structure of experience - as a phenomenon, rather than as an entity wholly external to consciousness. Nonetheless, this is what Ilyenkov understands to be the core of Marxist philosophy, the complex process of identification between thought and being through social practice which

[377] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 50.

identifies concept with thing and thing with concept. From this perspective, the Marxist position asserts a unity between thought and being - inasmuch as they are mediated and unified in practical activity - while simultaneously maintaining their distinction, insofar as thought cannot be reduced to mere brain activity. It is precisely the study of these transformations - the becoming of the ideal into the real and the reciprocal becoming of the real into the ideal - that defines the task of philosophy. In this light, Ilyenkov's final judgment is unambiguous:

> Whoever does not accept this principle will be engaged either in pure 'ontology' or pure 'logic', or in alternating between them, but will never find a real entrance into dialectics as logic and theory of cognition, into Marxist-Leninist philosophy.[378]

[378] Ilyenkov, "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii", p. 54.

Dialectics and critical realism

Andrew Brown offers a compelling defense of Ilyenkov's philosophical position by engaging it in dialogue with Roy Bhaskar's frameworks of critical and dialectical realism. In particular, Brown draws upon Bhaskar's theory of Synchronic Emergent Powers Materialism (SEPM), which posits that thought, while emerging from the material structure of the brain, cannot be reduced to it. As Brown describes it:

> According to critical realism, some, as yet little understood, (presumably neurological) structure of the brain and central nervous system [CNS] exists at one 'stratum' of reality. Thoughts exist at another 'stratum' of reality. Although science, as yet, understands little of the processes involved, the relation between the (little known) neurological stratum and that of thoughts is one of 'emergence'. Thought is a real and emergent power of some complex neurological structure of the brain and CNS. This means that, without the brain and CNS, thoughts would not exist but that, at the same time, the brain and CNS are not identical to thoughts. Rather, thoughts 'emerge' from some (as yet unknown) neurological structure; this structure is the 'real essence' of thought.[379]

The passage above appears to resonate with Ilyenkov's conception of dialectical materialism, which posits the identity of being and thought not as an immediate equivalence, but as a mediated process of transformation between the two. While both accounts reject a reductive identification of thought with the physical substrate of the brain, their points of departure diverge significantly. For Ilyenkov, the "essence of thought" is not located in a neurological or cerebral structure, however complex or emergent, but is instead grounded in the domain of social practice. Thought, in this view, is fundamentally intersubjective, arising from and sustained through collective human activity.

Bhaskar contends that the prevalent philosophical tendency to conflate reality with the discursive or conceptual statements made about it is fundamentally mistaken. While

[379] Andrew Brown, "Developing Realistic Philosophy: From Critical Realism to Material Dialectics," in Critical Realism and Marxism, ed. Andrew Brown, John Michael Roberts, and Steve Fleetwood, Critical Realism--Interventions (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 174.

epistemological access to the world is necessarily mediated by concepts, it does not follow that reality itself is constituted by them. Ontology, therefore, must seek to apprehend objects as they exist independently of thought. This reframes the problem of identity between thought and being. Both Bhaskar and Ilyenkov assert the necessity of engaging with objects beyond the confines of subjective consciousness; however, they diverge in their conclusions. For Ilyenkov, the identity of thought and being - realized through social practice - constitutes the ultimate truth of both philosophy and praxis. In other words, the non-identity of the object with the object of thought is taken by Bhaskar as an argument against subjectivist identifications of the two, while for Ilyenkov the non-identity is only a moment in the identity, hence ultimately the two are isomorphic. Bhaskar's critical realism thus differs from dialectics, in the following sense:

> The notion of stratification gives substance to the dialectical notions of unity and difference. On the one hand, as equal members of the same hierarchy, strata have an aspect of unity (dualism or pluralism is rejected). On the other hand, the strata are not the same as, nor reducible to, one another; they have an aspect of difference (reductionism is rejected).[380]

This interpretation aligns with Ilyenkov's broader conception of dialectical materialism, as outlined in the introduction to the present work - namely, a framework that seeks to navigate a path between the pitfalls of reductionism and the limitations of dualism. But Brown correctly points out that there can be no inner structure of thought defined as its essence, as critical realism holds. To argue this point, Brown mobilizes Spinoza's definition of adequate ideas as the body's awareness of the shape of objects it encounters, or as expressing the fullness of the object it grasps. As he writes:

> The ideal consists in awareness of the spatial mode of activity of the body. It follows that the spatial and ideal are two different expressions of the mode of activity of the thinking body. In other words the mode of activity of the thinking body has a double expression; an 'inner' expression in ideas and an 'outer' expression in the mode of spatial activity of the body.[381]

[380] Brown, "Developing Realistic Philosophy", p. 174.

[381] Brown, "Developing Realistic Philosophy", p. 183.

The contradiction may be articulated as follows: if the mode of action of the thinking body is characterized by a potentially universal adaptability - namely, its capacity to modify its activity in accordance with the diverse range of objects it encounters - then it becomes problematic to ascribe this universality to an essence rooted in a particular, localized neural structure. The implication is that no specific neural configuration, given its inherent partiality, can adequately account for the essence of thought. In response to this tension, Brown advances a Spinozist interpretation of identity theory as a means of resolving the contradiction:

> Spinoza achieves the transcendence of this contradiction by rationally reconstructing the aspects of SEPM to demonstrate the identity of thought and the objects of thought. Thus Spinoza demonstrates an identity of opposites no more difficult to grasp than the identity that holds between a circle described by hand and all external objects in the shape or trajectory of a circle. Far from being idealist, the identity of thought and being arises through the materialist transcendence of the contradiction harboured within SEPM.[382]

Although finite and inherently limited, human thought demonstrates a capacity to adapt flexibly to any object of engagement. This universality - or, as Brown terms it, the "universalizing drive" of thought - must be understood as a manifestation of the universality intrinsic to substance itself. Accordingly, Spinoza can be regarded as a foundational figure in the development of dialectical materialism. Brown ultimately concludes:

> If Ilyenkov's position has any merit at all, then it is thus vital that the position receive genuine criticism. The heart of any such criticism would lie in the critique of the materialist identity theory put forward.[383]

Brown points out that Ilyenkov's dialectical materialism resists both reductive materialism and rigid dualism, proposing instead a socially mediated conception of thought that cannot be wholly situated in neurophysiological structures alone. While Bhaskar's critical realism shares with Ilyenkov an anti-reductionist orientation and a commitment to the reality of the non-conceptual world, it ultimately diverges from Ilyenkov's dialectics with its reference to neural

[382] Brown, "Developing Realistic Philosophy", p. 184.

[383] Brown, "Developing Realistic Philosophy", p. 187.

structure. By contrast, Ilyenkov proposes a radical thesis of identity that is not given, but achieved through the practical activity of the thinking body, whose capacity for universal adaptation reflects the ontological unity of substance. But is it sufficient to invoke social practice as a mediator to conclude that mind and matter converge in it? This is the question I will attempt to answer in the third Chapter.

Chapter III

Transformative Practice

Particularism

Ilyenkov's move away from an immediate identification of substance with subject (common in Stalinism) led him to question the relationship between Marx and Hegel. The product of this questioning became his first book, *The Dialectic of the Abstract and the Concrete in Scientific-Theoretical Thought,* published in 1960.[384] The book appeared in a heavily shortened form and the last part of the title was changed to "*in Marx's Capital*." It would seem that the latter change was demanded by the Stalinist philosopher Pyotr Fedoseyev, who at the time held the position of director at the Institute of Philosophy. Fedoseyev insisted that such dialectics were present only in Marx's *Capital* and not in theoretical thought as such. In itself, this position doesn't jump out as necessarily remarkable. However, given Fedoseyev's long-standing defence of dialectical oversight on all sciences, including those of nature, questions begin to arise. I reproduce below the table of contents of the original manuscript, crossing out those sections that were excluded in the published version.

Part One
The Categories of the Abstract and the Concrete as Categories of Dialectical Logic
Chapter 1. Metaphysical and Dialectical Understandings of "the Concrete"

1. Marx's Definition of "the Concrete" and Its Specific Features
2. ~~The Term "Concrete" and Its Historical Fate (Metaphysical Thinking and Empiricism)~~
3. ~~The Term "Concrete" and Its Historical Fate (Rationalism)~~

[384] Evald Ilyenkov, T*he Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982). The original version was only published posthumously in 1997: *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Scientific-Theoretical Thinking* [Диалектика Абстрактного и Конкретного в Научно-Теоретическом Мышлении] (Moscow: Rossiyskaya politicheskaya entsiklopediya, 1997).

4. ~~The Birth Pangs of Dialectics: Kant~~
5. ~~The Problem of the Concrete in Hegel's Idealist Dialectic~~
6. ~~Word and Abstraction as Forms of Consciousness~~
7. ~~The Mechanism of Consciousness and Abstraction~~
8. ~~Sensuousness and Consciousness~~
9. ~~Sensuousness, Abstraction, and Social Labor~~
10. ~~"Understanding" and "Reason"~~

Chapter 2. The Abstractions of Thought – Concepts

1. ~~On the Specific Perspective of Logic in Cognition~~
2. On the Relationship between Representation and Concept
3. The History of the Concept "Human" and the Lessons It Offers
4. The Concrete and the Dialectic of the Universal and the Particular
5. Concrete Unity as the Unity of Opposites
6. ~~Abstraction and Analysis~~

Chapter 3. The Coincidence of the Abstract and the Concrete – A Law of Thought

1. The Abstract as the Immediate Expression of the Concrete
2. Dialectical vs. Eclectic-Empirical Understandings of "Comprehensive Consideration"
3. The Spiral Character of Concreteness in Reality and Its Theoretical Reflection
4. ~~Relative Autonomy as the Objective Prototype of "the Abstract"~~
5. Concrete Abstraction (the Concept) and Practice

Part Two

The Ascent from the Abstract to the Concrete as a Logical Form Corresponding to Dialectics

Chapter 4. "The Concrete" and Dialectical Development

1. Hegel's Understanding of the Concrete as the Product of Development
2. Marx's View on the Process of Scientific Development
3. The Materialist Justification for the Method of Ascent from the Abstract to the Concrete in Marx
4. Adam Smith's "Induction" and David Ricardo's "Deduction": Locke's and Spinoza's Standpoints in Political Economy
5. "Deduction" and the Problem of Historicism

Chapter 5. Logical Development and Concrete Historicism

1. On the Distinction between Historical and Logical Methods of Inquiry
2. Logical Development as the Expression of Concrete Historicism in Research
3. Abstract and Concrete Historicism

Chapter 6. The Method of Ascent from the Abstract to the Concrete in Karl Marx's *Capital*

1. The Concrete Completeness of Abstraction and Analysis as a Condition for Theoretical Synthesis
2. Contradiction as a Fact of Scientific Development
3. Contradictions in the Labor Theory of Value and Their Dialectical Resolution in Marx
4. The Concrete as Contradiction in Its Development

At first sight, it seems the censor targeted almost all the discussions of German idealism and British empiricism. This is of little surprise if we consider Soviet censorship's relation to "bourgeois thought." It is rather more intriguing to see what the censor found unacceptable in those sections of the book that deal with Marx. One such section was "Relative Autonomy as the objective prototype of the 'abstract.'"

Ilyenkov defines relative autonomy as the classification tool that separates sciences from each other by delineating their objects. Each science abstracts from the concreteness of the given world those features that constitute its object, leaving aside others. He gives the example of political economy, which researches the production, circulation and distribution of goods, leaving aside the biological systems that these goods are embedded in. Surely, no political economy exists outside of ecosystems that constitute the environment, yet, Ilyenkov argues, for a particular science to operate, to have its own object, such a delineation is necessary. In this epistemological framework, relative autonomy differentiates complex systems from each other, even if they are ultimately connected in various ways. I quote Ilyenkov:

> The relative autonomy of each of the concrete processes of development, each form of movement, each historically emerging system of interaction is the objective basis for the classification of sciences and the delimitation of the subject of one science from the subject of another science; it is this relative autonomy that gives thinking the right within each science to abstract from the sensually given concreteness only that which

> relates to the system of internal interaction, which constitutes the specific subject of this science.[385]

This is shown in the example of Marx's treatment of capital. Marx depicts this system as self-moving, developing out of its own immanent contradictions, hence closed off. Undoubtedly, no such pure capitalism could exist. Political economy thus studies those features that define the inner logic of its object, the relative autonomy of its own development, which in real terms is part of a larger whole. As he writes:

> That is why political economy, for example, reveals in a systematic form the concrete totality of social and productive relations between people, leaving out the technological side of communication, the biological relations between individuals, although all these things do not and cannot really exist without each other.[386]

This theory does however raise the question on the ways one decides what is to be included in the "inner logic" of the object and what is to be viewed as secondary or external. Remaining with the example of political economy, we could say that at least in its classical and especially neoclassical versions, the object is delineated so narrowly that essential factors such as biodiversity, environmental damage and so forth simply evaporate. Deciding where the limits of this relative autonomy lies could determine a specific science's relation to its own social and material environment, possibly situating it as completely disconnected. This points to a problem in what I call, after Bakhurst,[387] the particularism of Ilyenkov's dialectics.

As mentioned in the first Chapter, Ilyenkov opposed the schematization of dialectics in Soviet Marxism, by arguing against declaring objects and events as expressions of pre-existing dialectical laws. To make his point, Ilyenkov stressed that dialectics was not a universal method applicable to any and all objects but a method that essentially molds itself in relation to the object's own internal logic. This of course implies that each object has its own internal logic, which the materialist dialectic must discern and follow. On the one hand, Ilyenkov's position saves dialectics from transforming into an empty set of laws. By particularizing the object, we can argue that Ilyenkov also particularizes the position of the one engaged in its study, thus

[385] Ilyenkov, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Scientific-Theoretical Thinking*, p. 97.

[386] Ilyenkov, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Scientific-Theoretical Thinking*, p. 97.

[387] Bakhurst, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy*, p. 157.

nearing a form of standpoint epistemology. Against the objectivism of reflection theory (or, of its common Soviet understanding), where ideas are exact copies of the "external world" we get, with Ilyenkov's particularism, a necessarily partial knowledge and the recognition of the partiality of the observer.

However, following the argument further, there necessarily arises the necessity of defining this inner logic of the object. How does one go about it? Which aspects of the object get to be included as constituting the "inner logic" and which aspects get left out? How broadly or narrowly must this logic be delineated and what are the risks of overdoing the work in either direction? Ilyenkov doesn't explicitly take on this question, preferring instead to provide examples from Marx. Yet, I argue that his particularism must be able to account for these questions, if it is to be considered as a legitimate alternative to the universalism of Orthodox Marxist epistemology.

It is wholly plausible that the section was excluded from the published book because it contained the following statement, which can easily be qualified as particularistic. Ilyenkov writes:

> All of the above is relevant not only to political economy, but also to any theoretical discipline. Each science is obliged to unfold a systematic understanding of precisely such forms of existence of its subject, which express its relative independence, rather than abstractly common to it with all others.[388]

And a little further he adds:

> Therefore, all the philosophical and logical principles that guided Marx in the study of the system of commodity-capitalist relations as a historically developed system of interaction, a system of internally connected forms of economic connection, are applicable in any science dealing with a relatively independent sphere of "being" or "consciousness", in any natural and social science.[389]

It is clear, especially from the ending of the quote, that Ilyenkov aims to present the dialectical method as the common basis for both social and natural sciences. This position was

[388] Ilyenkov, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Scientific-Theoretical Thinking*, p. 99.

[389] Ilyenkov, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Scientific-Theoretical Thinking*, pp. 99-100.

not foreign to Soviet orthodoxy, nor was it antithetical to it. As I attempted to show in the first chapter, Soviet Marxism strove to integrate social and natural science in a monist framework from the time of its inception. This monism remained legitimate throughout the various breaks and metamorphoses of this tradition. However, with Stalin's intervention in linguistics and the subsequent marginalization of dialectics in science, the above quote could raise a censor's eyebrow. A more explicit formulation, going directly against Stalin's differentiation between science and its object, can be read in Ilyenkov's following remark:

> The same applies, of course, to law, to ethics, to the system of forms of logical thought, and thus to the sciences about them as well.[390]

Soviet censorship was heavy-handed with Ilyenkov prior to the publication of the book, but what almost cost him the party membership took place after the publication. In fact, the book was finished already in 1958 but didn't see the light of day until two years later due to the so-called "Italian affair", which I will touch on shortly.

[390] Ilyenkov, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Scientific-Theoretical Thinking*, p. 100.

Dialectics of the abstract and the concrete: The italian reception

Despite the common narratives about Ilyenkov's book as a singular intervention, his attempt at rethinking the relationship between Marx's *Capital* and Hegel's *Science of Logic* was actually part of a whole Soviet tradition of the late '50s and early '60s. The work that is seen to have initiated the wave was the prominent Soviet philosopher Mark Rozental's 1955 *Questions of Dialectic in K. Marx's Capital.* Interestingly, Rozental was also the author of a short, somewhat dry preface for Ilyenkov's book on the same subject.[391] Rozental approached the method of passing[392] from the abstract to the concrete in analytic terms, although his treatment of the subject was one-sided. As Manolis Dafermos writes:

> By focusing on the analytical method, Rozental underestimated the synthetic character of the construction of Marx's *Capital* and the complexity of ascending from the abstract to the concrete. He did not go beyond some fragmentary remarks about general structure of Marx's *Capital*. Moreover, Rozental was far away from the systematic study of the relationship between Marx's *Capital* and Hegel's *Science of Logic*.[393]

In the same year, Ilyenkov published an article that contained the results of his candidate's dissertation. The article, titled "On the dialectics of the abstract and concrete in cognition", used Marx's *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* to argue against the empiricist identification of the concrete with the sensible, interpreting the concept instead, with Marx, as the unity of the diverse. This brings him to juxtapose the analytic operation of deconstructing an object into constituent parts with the genetic method of deriving diversity from a simple

[391] The two collaborated on a number of occasions. Rozental was also enlisted by Oizerman to help with Ilyenkov's candidate's defense. Ilyenkov often spoke highly of Rozental. For example, he defended Rozental from Lucio Coletti's criticism against him in an article I discuss below.

[392] I use the word passing as it is the established way of translating the German *Aufstieg*. Where the word "ascending" is used, it is a direct translation from the Russian *Voskhozhdeniye*.

[393] Manolis Dafermos, "Rethinking the Relationship between Marx's 'Capital' and Hegel's 'Science of Logic': The Tradition of Creative Soviet Marxism," *Capital & Class* 46, no. 1 (March 2022), p. 5.

"elementary form" (following Marx's famous definition of the commodity as the *Elementarform* or *Keimform* – germ form of bourgeois society). Ilyenkov's treatment of the question of the passage from the abstract to the concrete will become the main object in my discussion of his first book. However, the 1955 article is noteworthy because it was translated into Italian by Ignazio Ambrogio[394] and published in the third issue of *Critica Economica* in June of the same year. The translation happened thanks to the Italian Society of Cultural Relations with the Soviet Union, whose secretary, Umberto Cerroni, wrote a letter to Ilyenkov, asking him to get in touch with a number of Italian Marxists and send them more texts. Ilyenkov responded that he was working on a book on the same subject. In the second letter, the Society asked to see the manuscript for a potential translation to Italian. In the Spring of 1956, Ilyenkov was approached by an employee of that Society, Sergio D'Angelo, who presented himself as a member of the Italian Communist Party and reiterated the request about the manuscript. Ilyenkov was pleased to hear that Italian Marxists expressed interest in his work and in 1957, when the book was finally approved by the Scientific Council of the Institute and accepted by the publisher of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Ilyenkov gave a copy to D'Angelo. Soon after Ilyenkov was told that his book was going to be translated by the literary scholar Vittorio Strada.

Ilyenkov's book was published in Italian in 1961 by Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore,[395] translated by Strada and Alberto Sandretti.[396] The problem, however, was that at around the same time as he communicated with Ilyenkov, D'Angelo also got in touch with Boris Pasternak and smuggled out the manuscript of *Doctor Zhivago*, which Feltrinelli published in 1958.[397] The scandal following the publication of Pasternak's novel, which was categorized by the Soviet authorities as "anti-Soviet literature", would have dire effects on Ilyenkov, who nearly lost his party membership after the publication by Feltrinelli.

The Italian translation of Ilyenkov's book was prefaced by Lucio Colletti, who, it should be said, did a much better job of it then Rozental. Colletti's preface, titled "Dialettica scientifica e

---

[394] Who would become an editor of a considerable number of Italian translations of Russian texts, from Maiakovsky's poems to Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*.

[395] Feltrinelli had expressed solidarity with the Hungarian uprising and left the PCI in 1958, making him suspect in the eyes of Soviet authorities.

[396] Evald Ilyenkov, *La Dialettica Dell'astratto e Del Concreto Nel Capitale Di Marx*, trans. Vittorio Strada and Alberto Sandretti (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 1961). Sandretti is known today for his vast collection of Russian art.

[397] Boris Leonidovic Pasternak, *Il Dottor Zivago: Romanzo* (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 1958).

teoria del valore", positively evaluated Ilyenkov's contribution to the debates on Marx's method. Colletti defines the Marxist dialectic as a tauto-heterology[398] (a neologism common in Italian Marxism of the time, with origins in Plato) a method that grasps the identity-alterity of its object. Marx, according to Colletti, successfully combined theory and the empirical, the logical and the historical, without sacrificing one for another. It is precisely this notion of reason as relationality, as the unity of the determinate and the indeterminate, that Marx took from Hegel. Yet, while the latter hypostasized thought as a self-sufficient reality, declaring tauto-heterology as the quality of reason, Marx understood it as a function of the object itself. After a brief discussion of the reasons why Hegel reified the abstract, viewing it as the concrete itself, while qualifying the empirical as secondary, Colletti passes to his critique of Engels. The latter is accused of the same sin, which brings us to Colletti's critique of Soviet dialectical materialism.

The Soviets (Colletti mentions specifically Rozental), under the influence of Engels, reproduced the same mistake, this time in materialist terminology, of viewing general "laws" as the foundations of the empirical world. Abstract concepts such as synthesis, inclusion or reason came to be understood as foundational. This lead not only to an incorrect philosophy, but an apologetic one. In response, Colletti aims to re-secularize Marx by emphasizing that universal relations in the latter do not come before any empirical reality but only as its function or predicate, hence also as tools to understand that reality. It is in this that Marx's dialectic, according to Colletti, is scientific. Ilyenkov becomes, in this preface, a fellow fighter in Colletti's struggle, although the latter does not refrain from critical remarks to the book.[399] I will not discuss what Ilyenkov is commended for in the preface, as those questions will be raised in my analysis of the book itself. What is more interesting at this point is Colletti's critique.

Firstly, Colletti clears up the technical problems of the book. *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital* is only a first attempt, remaining entirely in the confines of the first volume of the German philosopher's work. Therefore, we cannot speak of a systematic treatment of Marx's logic by Ilyenkov. Secondly, despite his rigour and first-hand knowledge

[398] Ilyenkov, *La Dialettica Dell'astratto e Del Concreto Nel Capitale Di Marx*, p. X.

[399] Interestingly, Colletti understands the Soviet indifference towards the *Capital* before the late 1950s as the logical result of Marx's "conversion to metaphysics" in dialectical materialism. Following up on his comment, we can interpret the turn towards Marx's *Magnum Opus* in Ilyenkov's generation as an attempt to rescue Marx from this status of metaphysician.

of Hegel, Ilyenkov's argument suffers from an insufficient understanding of Marx's critique of Hegel. After commending Ilyenkov for his critique of induction, Colletti writes:

> The section dedicated to criticism of Hegel does not seem particularly clear and deep, although here Ilyenkov proves to be one of the least "Hegelians" among present-day Soviet dialectical materialists, and one of those (which is not a paradox) who demonstrates first-hand knowledge of the *Greater Logic*.[400]

This "surviving Hegelianism", as Colletti puts it, leads Ilyenkov to an erroneous understanding of the materialist theory of identity. Namely, by overemphasizing the side of synthesis and deduction at the expense of induction and analysis, he underestimates the mutual functioning of the two moments. Finally, Ilyenkov is criticized for at moments confusing rational contradictions with real oppositions, a common dispute in Soviet Marxism.

This latter point would constitute the main difference between the two Marxists. Ilyenkov responded to Coletti in a 1974 article "The Peak, the End and the New Life of Dialectics (Hegel and the End of the Old Philosophy)".[401] Reacting to Colletti's 1969 *Il marxismo e Hegel*, Ilyenkov criticized the Italian philosopher for his claim about the impossibility of materialist dialectics. This impossibility stemmed from Colletti's position that dialectical contradictions belonged only to the thinking about the object, not to the object itself. According to Colletti, Hegel identified contradictions in the material world to argue that the entirety of the external world is fleeting and transitory, while the absolute is not. Grouping Colletti with the Frankfurt school, Hermeneutics and the philosophy of language, Ilyenkov accused him of taking Hegel at his word. Undoubtedly, in panlogist (objective-idealist) dialectics, even the contradictory character of the objects, phenomena, events of the world stem from the contradictory nature of the spirit that produced them. In this sense, contradictions belong primarily to thought. Given this tendency contained in dialectics after Hegel, Colletti is right to be wary of the risk of casting empirical examples as confirmations of dialectical laws. However, what dialectics speaks of,

---

[400] Ilyenkov, *La Dialettica Dell'astratto e Del Concreto Nel Capitale Di Marx*, pp. LVII-LVIII. As translated in Andrey Maidansky, "The Ilyenkov Triangle: Marxism in Search of Its Philosophical Roots," *Stasis* 5, no. 2 (2017), p. 143.

[401] Evald Ilyenkov, "Vershina, Konec i Novaja Zhizn' Dialektiki (Gegel' i Konec Staroj Filosofii)," in *Filosofija i Kul'tura* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991), pp. 115–141.

according to Ilyenkov, is not the transitory nature of the external, material world as such, but of any material thing:

> In fact, dialectics in general (purified from its Hegelian limitation) proves the 'fragility and spectrality' not of the material world in general (as it seems to Colletti, who shared Hegel's basic illusion), but only the temporality (impermanence, non-eternity) of any given material thing, of any given - finite - state or entity within the infinite material world…[402]

The truly dialectical contradiction, Ilyenkov argues with Hegel, is not the difference of one thing from another but the internal difference of one from itself:

> Hegel's thinking in this point is extremely simple (although its expression in Hegel's own writings is not so transparent): we will only understand and "describe" a thing correctly when we have revealed not only its "actual being" in itself (and in its verbal definitions), but also those features of it, thanks to which it will sooner or later "perish", i.e., turn into "another" thing, into "its other" (as the living into the dead and the dead into the living).[403]

Interestingly, if in the '50s Ilyenkov held that such a conception was attainable only through a thorough epistemological investigation, in this article it is only sufficient to "look around yourself with open eyes".[404] The controversy raises again the old question of the relation between thought and matter, which for Ilyenkov, as we saw from his *Cosmology*, is that of a reciprocal dependence. Colletti didn't go far into this theme. While his engagement with Ilyenkov's book reveals certain limits in the latter, the genre of the preface didn't allow him to unpack the book's full depth. There is, however, another anti-Hegelian Marxist, who didn't engage with Ilyenkov in print at all (except for mentioning his name once), but could be productively compared with the Soviet philosopher to advance our reading further.

[402] Ilyenkov, "Vershina, Konec i Novaja Zhizn' Dialektiki", p. 123.

[403] Ilyenkov, "Vershina, Konec i Novaja Zhizn' Dialektiki", p. 120.

[404] Ilyenkov, "Vershina, Konec i Novaja Zhizn' Dialektiki", p. 116.

Reading Ilyenkov with Althusser

In 1974, Louis Althusser went to Moscow to speak at a congress on Hegel, bringing with him *Reading Capital* and *For Marx*, which he hoped to give to Ilyenkov. The latter was supposed to take part in the conference, but did not attend in the end. The books, conserved in Ilyenkov's archive, were signed: '*A Ilyenkov, avec la vive estime et en signe de fraternité théorique'*. Considering that Althusser notoriously opposed the re-actualisation of Marx's early writings[405] that took place after Stalin's death, and in which Ilyenkov played a major role, the words 'theoretical fraternity' seem surprising. Yet while their philosophies appear – and on many points are - antithetical, Ilyenkov and Althusser arrived at their positions through similar intellectual experiences.

Both philosophers, in the early stages of their theoretical trajectories, undertook the characteristically Marxist task of 'settling accounts' with philosophy. Althusser famously opposed the subjugation of Marxist critique to dialectical materialism, arguing that such a framework structured Marxist analysis as a narrative of an original unity of Man, alienated under capitalism and ultimately returned to itself (emancipated) through communism. This teleological schema, a proletarian *Odyssey* of sorts, left little room for an analysis of the contingency of historical processes. Instead, revolution and communism were conceived as necessary and inevitable outcomes of capitalism.

In a similar vein, Ilyenkov criticized the codification of dialectical materialism as it had been formalized in Stalin's *Short Course*, arguing that it conflated ontological claims about matter with Marx's social theory. Specifically, by asserting that the three laws of dialectics were universally and objectively applicable to both nature and society, this doctrine rendered political phenomena - such as revolution - intrinsic properties of matter in motion. If Marxist analysis was to proceed according to the tenets of Soviet *Diamat*, whereby fixed 'laws' were mechanically applied to all objects of study, then disparate phenomena, such as the French Revolution and the boiling of water in a teapot, could be interpreted as equivalent manifestations of the law of the transformation of quantity into quality.

[405] As he declared in *For Marx*, any restoration of Marx's early works on man '…is no more than ashes, *theoretically*.' Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Allen Lane, 1969), p. 157.

Despite the considerable differences in their historical and political conjunctures, the fact that the French Communist Party (PCF) largely replicated Soviet policies - including those pertaining to Marxist theory - meant that Althusser confronted challenges similar to those faced by Ilyenkov. One such challenge was the Stalinist elevation of dialectical materialism to the status of a state science, the 'highest instance' that imposed strict ideological limits on scientific inquiry. As we saw in the first chapter, Ilyenkov addressed this problem in his "Theses on the Object of Philosophy". Althusser, in turn, articulated his position in his 1966 'Letter to the Central Committee of the PCF'.

Responding to the PCF's alignment with Roger Garaudy and Louis Aragon in ongoing disputes within Marxist theory, Althusser underscored the party's stated commitment to 'neither impede such [scientific] debates nor impose its own *a priori* truths,'[406] as outlined in a recent resolution. However, both the PCF and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), as self-declared custodians of Marxist philosophy, routinely intervened in theoretical discussions and sought to determine their outcomes. Althusser's and Ilyenkov's opposition to this entailed aligning themselves with a materialist perspective that was, above all, defined by its rejection of idealism and, consequently, of a significant part of the philosophical tradition. However, this 'deflationary'[407] conception of philosophy - central to Marx's own position - bore an inherent risk: it could lead to a positivist orientation in which philosophy was dismissed in favor of the sciences, a position hinted at by Engels.[408]

The two seminal works published by Althusser in 1965 brought him considerable intellectual attention but also provoked various accusations. It was argued, among other things, that these texts displayed an uncritical endorsement of scientific research. In response to these criticisms, Althusser explicitly rejected the notion of a dialectics of nature and sought to distance himself from positivism, particularly in his *Philosophy Course for Scientists*. As Lewis reports:

[406] Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London New York: NLB, 1970), p. 154.

[407] Emmanuel Renault, *Marx et La Philosophie* (Paris: PUF, 2013), p. 17.

[408] Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1949), p. 37.

> By this time and at least in notes that he circulated to students, Althusser was directly criticizing Engels' dialectics of nature as idealist, had dropped any mention of Dialectical Materialism, and had started thinking of the relation between historical materialist research and class struggle in a way unmediated by formal structures.[409]

According to Althusser, positive sciences operate on the assumption of a mind-independent reality that can be adequately (non-ideologically) apprehended through the experimental method. However, as Lewis summarizes Althusser's position, this assumption is fundamentally flawed:

> Drawn as it is from observation of contemporary behaviors, the knowledge that positive sciences produce often reproduces and strengthens bourgeois ideology.[410]

Scientific positivism, in this sense, stood in direct opposition to Althusser's central epistemological claim that thought and reality are separated by a *décalage* rather than existing in a state of direct correspondence or original coincidence.

Ilyenkov, for his part, strongly opposed any philosophical approach that reduced itself to the 'abstract restatement of science'.[411] Like Althusser, Ilyenkov held that the ontological domains of thought and being are only ever united in and through practice and do not readily coincide. For both thinkers, then, there could be no unmediated access to a pre-given 'real.' Instead, Althusser sought to construct a conceptual framework designed not merely to understand historical *tendencies* but to intervene in them and generate new ones. Similarly, Ilyenkov entered the Soviet philosophical scene through a fundamental rejection of the entrenched positivism of *Diamat*. By shifting the focus of Marxist inquiry from 'matter in movement' to 'forms of thought,' he renounced Soviet Marxism's claim to have direct access to an objective, mind-independent reality.

---

[409] William S. Lewis, "Althusser's Materialisms: Dialectical, Historical, and Aleatory," in *The History and Philosophy of Materialism*, ed. Charles Wolfe and John Symons (New York, 2024), p. 387.

[410] Lewis "Althusser's Materialisms", p. 388.

[411] Monika Woźniak and Andrzej W. Nowak, "Fighting for Philosophy in the Marxian Sense: Introduction to Evald Ilyenkov's "On the State of Philosophy [Letter to the Central Committee of the Party]," *Studies in East European Thought 76,* no. 3 (September 2024), pp. 545–56.

Therefore, one can identify within the thought of both philosophers an attempt to move beyond a totalizing philosophical framework - exemplified by classical (second international) dialectical materialism - by developing a concrete approach that would preclude the imposition of pre-established principles or 'laws' onto Marxist analysis. At the same time, both Althusser and Ilyenkov successfully avoided the risk of a positivist absolutization of science by articulating alternative philosophical frameworks for Marxism. For this, both turned to Spinoza, yet in different ways. Ilyenkov integrated Spinozist ontology in dialectical logic, while Althusser replaced Hegelian causality with Spinozist epistemology. But the claim that these turns were based on - that thought lacks immediate access to being - necessarily reintroduced the classical epistemological question for Marxism: what is the relationship between concept and its object?

As Nick Nesbitt has recently showed, Althusser left this question unanswered.[412] The philosophical tension traversing his 'classical' period was the dual conviction in the separation of the object of knowledge from the real object on the one hand and the rejection of a Cartesian-style dualist epistemology on the other. Given that the readily available option of substance monism was equally rejected by Althusser as a philosophical reification of the real, his epistemological dualism remained unresolved, generating "disastrous consequences for the reception of Althusser's thought".[413]

If Althusser rejected substance monism as a Stalinist (and Plekhanovian) distortion of Spinoza's thought, Ilyenkov embraced the position, developing a reading of Spinoza that differed from the *Diamat* version. In light of this, we can assume that a parallel reading of the two philosophers could shed light on the shortcomings and advantages of each interpretation.

To work through this contraposition, I will focus on Althusser's *Reading Capital* and *For Marx,* the two works said to represent his "classical" period. These will be read in light of Ilyenkov's *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital* and *Dialectical Logic,* works with a similar intention – rethinking Marx's method at its philosophical core – but conceived in completely different theoretical terms. I will argue that beneath the evident contradictions between exorcising Hegel (Althusser) and resurrecting him (Ilyenkov), the two

[412] Nick Nesbitt, *Reading Capital's Materialist Dialectic: Marx, Spinoza, and the Althusserians*, vol. 318, Historical materialism book series (London: Brill, 2024), p. 56.

[413] Nesbitt, *Reading Capital's Materialist Dialectic,* p. 57.

Marxists converge in a political struggle against simplistic explanations of heterogeneous events.

While the typical image of Althusserian Marxism as a rigid, dogmatic system is not without foundation, it is underpinned by an attempt to liberate method from a centralised principle of resolution. But the search for a heterodox method leads Althusser to a rationalist position based on a strict separation between the empirical object and the object of knowledge (referred to by Marx as 'concrete-real' and 'concrete-in-thought'). A similar motive of overcoming reductionist hermeneutics runs through Ilyenkov's interpretation of Marx's method, which develops a critique of abstract universality against both idealism and "vulgar" materialism, aiming to provide a concept of totality conscious of the *risks* of totalisation.

Their divergence, on the other hand, can be identified on the metaphysical level of the quest for materialist epistemology which underlies their political struggle. Ilyenkov's attempt brings him to question the same epistemological relation between concept and its object, yet his answer differs considerably from the Althusserian position. Here, Spinoza plays the decisive role.

There is, however, a reservation to be mentioned. Althusser and Ilyenkov have already been subjects of a comparative analysis in an article by Andrey Maidansky. His concluding remark can be taken as our point of departure:

> The turn to Spinoza occurred in Ilyenkov and Althusser practically simultaneously. Both Marxists attempted to maximally bring Spinoza and Marx together, paying little attention to the differences of their philosophical 'optics' and ignoring Marx's critical darts addressed to Spinoza's concept of substance and his metaphysics in general. These were rather variations on Spinoza's theme, not particularly troubled about historical and philosophical adequacy.[414]

The present analysis, therefore, will not be a scholarly inquiry into the adequacy of each reading with the original. Instead, taking these readings as 'variations', I will attempt to formulate a problem they implicitly produce. To this end, I will first relay Marx's comments on his method as presented in the *Grundrisse*, then situate Ilyenkov's and Althusser's

[414] Andrey Maidansky, "The Ilyenkov Triangle: Marxism in Search of Its Philosophical Roots," *Stasis* 5, no. 2 (2017), p. 159.

interventions by outlining their theories of the social whole.[415] In the second part, I will examine their readings in action, by relating them to Marx's theory of surplus value. Finally, I will attempt to formulate a critical question based on the impasses that the contraposition will reveal.

[415] Althusser would later abandon the term ‘whole’, following Pierre Macherey’s advice.

Marx on method

The *Grundrisse* (1857-61), the work in which Marx assembled his preliminary notes and drafts for the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) and the first volume of *Capital* (1867), are curiously absent from Althusser's work in his so-called classical period. As Jorge Semprun noted,[416] the reason for this lack of interest is somewhat mysterious, since these manuscripts had been available since 1953 in German, a language Althusser knew well, as evidenced by his famous statement that *Capital* should be read in the language in which it was written "…at least for the fundamental theoretical chapters and all the passages where Marx's key concepts come to the surface".[417] Semprun rightly argues that the late publication of the *Grundrisse* renders some of Althusser's proposals precarious, and calls for their re-examination. However, this question poses no problem for our purpose, since the section of the *Grundrisse* that interests me – 'The Method of Political Economy' – was well known by Althusser under the title *Introduction to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (the first chapter of the *Grundrisse*), and featured prominently in several of his works, namely in the two in question in this article.

Marx opens by describing the method of classical political economy in order to differentiate it from his own. He does so by questioning the function of the point of departure. For a theory to be reflexive, aware of its own historical partiality, it must be situated in its time. Thus, any Cartesian beginning that starts from a transcendental truth must be rejected. Instead, the starting point is a historically specific object. This determines the direction of the movement of knowledge. Bourgeois economists tend to start from units such as the population, the state or some other "living organism"[418] and arrive at general determinations such as value. Here, we can affirm that the object from which classical political economy begins is the concrete, while the object it arrives at, these simple relations, is the abstract. Marx reverses this empiricist schema:

[416] Jorge Semprun, "Économie politique et philosophie dans les « Grundrisse » de Marx," *L'Homme et la société 7,* no. 1 (1968), p. 60.

[417] Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, p. 14.

[418] Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 122.

> The concrete concept is concrete because it is a synthesis of many definitions, thus representing the unity of diverse aspects. It appears therefore in reasoning as a summing-up, a result, and not as the starting point, although it is the real point of origin, and thus also the point of origin of perception and imagination.[419]

The concrete is not the starting point, but the result of the dialectical movement. Thus, the population already presupposes classes, which in turn presuppose the division of labor, and so on. Taken without its own presuppositions, a concept evaporates [*verflüchtigt*] to make way for abstract determinations. What is to be done instead is to pass from the abstract to the concrete, which, in this case, would be a concentration of multiple determinations. This is why *Capital* begins with an analysis of the commodity – the elementary form of bourgeois society.

What Marx is aiming at here is a correspondence between the logic of the development of knowledge and the logic of the object studied. This development of the object is its concrete historical development, which is reproduced by the observer as the 'concrete-in-thought'[420] [*Gedankenkonkretum*]. Acquiring the concrete-in-thought follows the epistemological circle: concrete (1) – abstract – concrete (2). The first concrete refers to the given object observable in perception, from which we abstract to distinguish what is essential in it by negating its accidental features, acquiring, through this operation, the general category of the first concrete, which has become the concrete of thought. Two moments, or stages, characterise this process: first, it involves going beyond what is immediately given in the object to arrive at what is constitutive of it. But since no essence can exist autonomously, without its own expressions, every abstraction must be concretised. Otherwise, we end up with a formally existing universal. Thus, once the internal principle has been grasped, the second stage, a return, must be carried out so that the internal principle doesn't remain at an abstract level, but finds its real form in the object. This return of the conceptual back to objective is what makes the concrete-in-thought a unity of different determinations, establishing a correspondence between knowledge and its object. What we are dealing with here is the replacement of speculative logic by *the*

[419] Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 122.

[420] The English translation of Marx's *Contribution to the critique of political economy* used here translates *Gedankenkoknkretum* as 'concrete mental category' (Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 123). Given the inaccuracy of this translation, we prefer to use 'concrete-in-thought', also found in the English translation of Althusser's *For Marx*.

logic of the specific object. In fact, this substitution is at the origin of the properly Marxian notion of abstraction. Marx's theory of the relationship between the concrete and the abstract has a dual and, at first glance, paradoxical character. It comprises, on the one hand, a Feuerbachian critique of Hegel's speculative movement and, on the other, a Hegelian overcoming of Feuerbach's anthropological turn. This is what Alberto Toscano describes as the "twisted" genesis'[421] of Marx's concept of abstraction. I will briefly sketch these two moments before turning to the contributions of Althusser and Ilyenkov.

Hegelian speculative abstraction works by crystallising a shared essence from different particulars, in other words, by negating their particularity and positing essence as their condition of existence. But without returning to concrete objects, the essence stands at a distance from them, as if it existed independently. Marx cannot accept an abstraction that gives rise to concrete objects while itself existing outside them. This is where Feuerbach comes in. With his anthropological turn, Feuerbach demystifies Hegel's hypostasised abstraction. By positing the human being as the concrete itself, he transforms abstraction into a mental separation, an alienation from the concrete character of sentient being, from the human character of humanity, presenting God, institutions, property, etc. as the alienated form of this real being. Evidently, such a position implies a political project of recovering this alienated essence in order to emancipate oneself from the shackles of abstraction. How did Althusser and Ilyenkov remedy this fallacy?

[421] Alberto Toscano, "The Culture of Abstraction," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 4 (2008), p. 68.

Contradiction between Structure and Totality

Althusser's critique of Hegelian dialectics and his development of a 'structuralist Marxism' marks a decisive shift in 20th-century Marxist theory. Althusser famously mounts a categorical critique of Hegelian concepts, characterising them with terms like "spiritual unity",[422] "expressive totality",[423] "religious reading"[424] and "stupefying conception."[425] The alternative he proposes is the "pre-given complex structured whole",[426] where we have to do with a "ruptural unity".[427] In this case, the difference between and within contradictions is not determined by the relationship of essence to its expressions. Instead of this expressive causality, Althusser suggests his own conception, which he calls *structural* or *metonymic*. We can understand this type of causality as an invisible presence, a kind of mark of the effectivity, which will be stronger in some elements and weaker in others, depending on the type of inequality that assembles a given structure.

Althusser's fundamental break with Hegelian dialectics rests on his rejection of totality as a self-developing whole. He argues that traditional Marxism, under Hegel's influence, has inherited a problematic notion of history where each contradiction is ultimately reconciled within an overarching essence. This, he contends, reduces the complexity of real contradictions by making them mere moments of a preordained historical development. Instead, Althusser introduces the concept of an *unequally assembled structure*, where contradictions exist in a decentered form, determined by the uneven relations between different elements. This means that contradiction does not arise from within a self-moving totality but is instead conditioned by the hierarchical organization of structures.

This position stands in sharp contrast to the Hegelian-Marxist approach developed by Ilyenkov, who argues that contradictions must be understood as *self-developing processes* rather than as functions of an overarching structure. Indeed, as Althusser was fighting the battle

[422] Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Allen Lane, 1969), p. 150.

[423] Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, p. 17.

[424] Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, p. 35.

[425] Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 65.

[426] Althusser, *For Marx*, p.127.

[427] Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 62.

against Hegel in France, Ilyenkov was fighting to rehabilitate Hegel in the Soviet Union.[428] This was not an easy task at the time. Ilyenkov's strong emphasis on Hegel was, as we saw, not welcomed by his colleagues and had political implications for his career. For Ilyenkov, the notion of totality is not an imposed unity but a concrete reality that emerges from the interaction of contradictions themselves. He draws on Hegel's distinction between *abstract and concrete universality* to make this point: whereas abstract universality imposes an external unity upon its particulars, concrete universality exists through its particulars, preserving their internal movement. In Hegel's system, the abstract universal represents an empty reflective identity, a "mere combination"[429] which "is not internally a synthesis",[430] while the concrete, in Hegel's own words, is "a unity of distinguished and distinguishable elements."[431] Marx could be said to be paraphrasing Hegel's formulation when he defines the concrete as a "synthesis of many definitions" or "unity of diverse aspects". In the case of the abstract universal, it is a matter of a generalization based on a random affinity or resemblance, an accidental trait that allows a certain grouping. But this generalization is far from innocent. The abstract universal always implies violence, because it imposes itself on all particular lived worlds and negates them. What makes a universal abstract for Hegel is the pure exteriority of negation, and consequently, what separates the concrete universal from the abstract is immanent negativity and internal unity rather than externally imposed unification:

> Such a universal that only *subsumes* is an *abstraction* that becomes *concrete* only in an *other*, in the particular. Purpose, on the contrary, is the *concrete universal* containing within itself the moment of particularity and of externality; it is therefore active and the impulse to repel itself from itself.[432]

Ilyenkov conceives of this universality as having difference as its condition of possibility, as a set of not nominal (abstract), but dialectical relations, which does not seek to deny

[428] Ilyenkov even wrote a preface to the 1970 Russian edition of the *Science of Logic*, but for unknown reasons, the book was released with a preface by Mark Rozental.

[429] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, ed. George Di Giovanni, First paperback edition, Cambridge Hegel Translations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 520.

[430] Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 520.

[431] Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 384.

[432] Hegel, *The Science of Logic,* p. 656.

difference in the name of an alleged unity, but "manifests itself"[433] [*обнаруживаем себя*] in the different particulars, and which itself exists as a particularity, making its internally differentiated nature the proof of its own truth. From Ilyenkov's perspective, therefore, Althusser's rejection of expressive totality merely replaces one abstract model with another. In contrast, Ilyenkov maintains that contradictions cannot be understood as pre-given positions within a structure but must be grasped in their real historical development. In fact, the concept of contradiction appears to be the major point of divergence between the two Marxists.

Althusser's concept of overdetermination challenges the classical Marxist idea that the contradiction between forces and relations of production is the "simple" or "primary" contradiction of history. Instead, he argues that contradictions are always overdetermined by multiple factors - political, ideological, economic - so that no single contradiction can be seen as the fundamental driving force. This position is meant to break with both economic determinism and Hegelian dialectics by emphasizing the plurality of contradictions rather than their ultimate subsumption within a unified development. For Ilyenkov, on the contrary, contradiction is not the coexistence of different determinations but the real self-negation of a form that generates its own transformation. From Althusser's perspective, however, Ilyenkov's approach risks lapsing into an idealist reading of contradiction, where these develop 'organically' without reference to the structured relations in which they are embedded. Althusser would likely argue that Ilyenkov underestimates the extent to which real contradictions are always already structured within a given social formation. If contradiction were purely self-moving, it would suggest a kind of historical teleology that Althusser explicitly rejects as apolitical. The key question here then becomes whether contradiction can be both structured and self-developing, or whether these two notions are fundamentally opposed.

Another major point of divergence concerns the relationship between scientific knowledge and ideology. Althusser's "On the Materialist Dialectic" makes a sharp distinction between science and ideology, arguing that ideology operates at the level of lived experience, while scientific practice constitutes a radical break with ideology. Knowledge production, in his framework, is not a reflection of reality but a process that transforms ideological

[433] Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic: Essays on Its History and Theory*, trans. H. Campbell Creighton (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 115.

representations into scientific concepts. This transformation occurs through a discontinuous rupture rather than through a gradual development of knowledge. This scientific practice is described in terms of two main functions: the reworking of the object, its "mutation" from ideology to science, from the abstract to the concrete, leaves the pre-scientific form of the object outside the new concrete object of knowledge produced by this practice, and introduces a discontinuity between the two, resulting in a ruptural unity. And yet, although this process is "real", for Althusser, it takes place from beginning to end in consciousness. Alfred Sohn-Rethel is right to criticize Althusser for this rationalist dualism: 'Althusser defeats the purpose of his search for this question by insisting 'que la production de la connaissance… constitue un processus qui se passe *tout entier dans la pensée.*'[434]

While he agrees that knowledge is not an immediate reflection of reality, Ilyenkov insists that scientific practice must be understood as part of the real movement of history rather than as an autonomous theoretical process. He thus opposed Althusser's idea that science can be separated from its historical and practical basis as non-Marxist. I cite Ilyenkov at length:

> According to his [Althusser's] conclusions, Marx resolved the problem of the relationship between the logical and the historical by distinguishing the process of thought from the real process. However, if we remain within the framework of this distinction alone, it turns out - or rather, begins to seem - that Marx does not establish any stable correlation between the two orders of development at all. Instead, he merely states that in some cases they coincide and in others they do not. From this follows the direct conclusion that a theorist, when determining the logical sequence of category development, may and should, in general, orient not toward the history of the subject being studied, but at best toward its 'conceptual history' - the history of its theoretical reproduction, the history of the science that represents it.[435]

[434]Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Humanities Press, 1978), p. 20.

[435] Evald Ilyenkov, "Logicheskoe i Istoricheskoe," in *Dialekticheskaya logika: Sobranie Sochineniy,* vol. 4 (Moscow: Kanon+, 2020). p. 35.

For Ilyenkov, thought is itself a social process, and the movement from ideology to science cannot be understood as a rupture that takes place 'entirely in thought,' as Althusser claims. Instead, scientific knowledge must be developed through the real contradictions of social life. Knowledge cannot be separated from its material conditions. Althusser, however, would likely respond that Ilyenkov's emphasis on the social and practical nature of knowledge production risks blurring the distinction between science and ideology. One way of evaluating these diverging readings would be to relate them to Marx's own construction of the theory of surplus-value.

Re-reading surplus-value

In analyzing the theory of surplus value, Fred Moseley recalls Marx's 1858 letter to Engels (the period in which he was working on the *Grundrisse*), in which Marx happily reports that a recent rereading of Hegel's *Logic* has proved very useful in developing his own method in the theory of profit: "In the method of treatment the fact that by mere accident I have again glanced through Hegel's *Logic* has been of great service to me."[436]

I wouldn't be the first to argue that what Marx is talking about here are the three moments of the Hegelian concept (universal, particular, singular), which not only provide a structure for his new finding, but also serve to identify the flaws in the old theory of classical political economy he debunked. Both Althusser and Ilyenkov devote a great deal of attention to the theory of surplus value, but it is above all the former who reserves a privileged place for it, as it informs his arguments in favor of Marx's supposed anti-Hegelianism. Yet, while Althusser provides an outline of Marx's process of conceptual development, he is unable to recognize it in its entirety and overlooks the debt he owes to Hegel's method. Ilyenkov's insistence on the Hegelian moments of the concept in his reading of *Capital* provides a fuller understanding of Marx's theory than Althusser, who presents surplus value as the pinnacle of Marx's overcoming of Hegelian dialectics.

The common thread running through Althusser's reconstruction of Marx's theoretical work on surplus value is *symptomatic reading*, where Marx identifies an absence in a text and fills it by changing the terms of the question:

> We know that Marx criticized Smith and Ricardo for constantly confusing surplus-value with its forms of existence: profit, rent and interest. The great Economists' analyses are therefore lacking a word. When Marx reads them he re-establishes this missing word in their texts: surplus-value.[437]

Indeed, classical political economists' confusion of surplus value with its "forms of existence" is the starting point for the formulation of Marx's theory. In this sense, Althusser's point of departure is the same as that of most research on the subject (including that of

[436] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, 1846– 1895 (New York: International Publishers, 1942), p. 102.

[437] Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, p. 223.

Ilyenkov). What makes Althusser's interpretation unique is the second part of this quote. The importance of the additional word – "surplus" – lies in its scientific function: it's not simply a word or term, but a concept. According to Althusser, it is through this conceptual addition that the whole system is rearranged in such a way that the mystified categories of classical political economy are laid bare. Mobilizing Engels, Althusser shows how surplus value had been produced by Marx's predecessors – Smith and Ricardo both speak of profit, rent, etc. – but, at the same time, not understood by them. What Marx offered was an insight into the part of value that emerged from the product of unpaid labor (surplus labor), enabling a systematic understanding of the reproduction of this fundamentally unequal relationship as a whole. This characterization fits in perfectly with the symptomatic method of reading that Althusser attributes to Marx: it's not a question of inventing a new category, but of identifying its operative absence, which is to say that it had been present all along, precisely in the form of a structuring absence. But the break that Althusser identifies between classical political economy and Marx does not require the eviction of the Hegelian method from Marx's reasoning in order to be considered valid. If we examine the structure of the theory of surplus value in *Capital*, Hegel's presence cannot go unnoticed.

Marx goes further than his predecessors by taking the category of profit out of the sphere of circulation and placing it in that of production, arguing that it is not in trade but in capitalist production that profit is generated, since the capitalist's purchase of labor power is what creates surplus-labor – the source of surplus-value. Marx sees that all particular forms of surplus value share the same source. Thus, surplus-value appears as a general form, a common universal of all particular forms, such as rent, interest, etc. These particular forms allow a formulation of their own generality as a category, of which they are concrete determinations or subdivisions. It's no coincidence that Marx begins with the general and then goes on to demonstrate the particularizations. Namely, the quantity of surplus value is shown by capital in general, which can be linked to Hegel's moment of universality, while its distribution is shown by competition, which corresponds to the Hegelian moment of particularity. Commenting on this question, Moseley notes:

> This connection between Marx's theory of surplus-value and Hegel's logic is strongly suggested by the fact that Marx used *the same German word* for his logical category as Hegel did for his logical category – '*allgemein*'. This obvious connection between Marx's logic and Hegel's logic has been obscured all these years by the fact that this same German word has been translated into *two different*

> *English words*: 'general' in translations of Marx, and 'universal' in translations of Hegel… Marx was using similar logic in this all-important aspect of his logical method…[438]

Marx needs the three moments of the Hegelian concept to argue that his predecessors don't understand the particulars they so meticulously analyze because they lack a universal (general). He then employs these intermediate moments himself in the construction of his theory of surplus value, which is clearly seen by Ilyenkov: "Only this concrete understanding of the 'universal' allowed Marx to uncover the real logic of the emergence and development of the system of capitalist production, and, in particular, the real relation of 'value' to 'surplus value"[439]

Ilyenkov emphasises the absolute irreducibility of surplus value to its constituent elements – the commodity-money relation and labor power. It is in their *movement* as a whole that this category can be observed. Althusser famously insisted that Marx abandoned the "Feuerbachian" terminology of the "inversion" of subject and predicate",[440] but his own method of "scientifically" dismantling and reassembling the category in question, as if in a laboratory, lacks this optic of the movement of the various parts as a whole. Five years before the publication of *Reading Capital*, Ilyenkov writes, almost as if anticipating Althusser:

> Such an operation of 'analytical dissection' of an object can always be done experimentally and in the 'mind'. It is possible to analytically decompose a living rabbit into such, say, 'constituent parts' as chemical elements, atoms, molecules, etc. But, having obtained along the way a pile of analytically identified 'constituent parts', we will not be able to perform, on the basis of the most detailed consideration of these 'constituent parts', the reverse operation – we will never be

[438] Fred Moseley, "The Universal and the Particulars in Hegel's Logic and Marx's Capital," in *Marx's "Capital" and Hegel's "Logic": A Reexamination*, ed. Tony Smith and Fred Moseley, vol. 64, Historical Materialism Book Series (Brill, 2014), p.11.

[439] Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Scientific-Theoretical Thinking [Диалектика Абстрактного и Конкретного в Научно-Теоретическом Мышлении]* (Moscow: Rossiyskaya politicheskaya entsiklopediya, 1997), p. 62.

[440] Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 25.

> able to understand from them – why they gave by their 'combination' a living rabbit, and not something else…[441]

For Ilyenkov, who reads this theory as a "living" organism, Althusser, "armed with the trenchant scalpel of science",[442] destroys the object by dissecting it analytically. If Althusser can register capital in general – the universal of particular capitals – he cannot account for the genetic relationship (which most Hegelian readings of *Capital* emphasize) that particular capitals possess with capital in general, and therefore remains with the formal sum of the parts that have constituted the concept, but not with the concept itself. In short, by avoiding an essentialist reduction, he introduces a formalist one. In this sense, if Althusser distinguishes his *philosophical* reading from that of a logician, in a formal sense, it is ultimately a logician's reading that he ends up with. Ilyenkov, on the other hand, with his expanded notion of (dialectical) logic, grasps Marx's argument in a more precise way:

> The incompleteness and consequent formality of Ricardo's abstraction consists precisely in the fact that it is formed, on the one hand, by an inability to abstract from the existence of other, developed types of value, and, on the other hand, by abstracting from the peculiarities of direct commodity exchange. Here the general is taken in the end completely isolated from the particular, the separate, and ceases to be its theoretical expression. This is what distinguishes the dialectical understanding of the universal from the purely formal one.[443]

[441] Ilyenkov, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concret*, p. 170

[442] Daniel Bensaïd, "La Mort de Louis Althusser," *Rouge,* 1990, 1421, p. 4.

[443] Ilyenkov *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concret*, pp. 343-344

Spinoza: A theoretical impasse

Thus far, we have established that Ilyenkov's Hegelian reading of Marx's method provides a more appropriate interpretation of the latter's dialectical approach than Althusser's structuralist framework, which entirely dispenses with Hegel's influence. What role does Spinoza play in this theoretical dispute? As previously noted, Althusser explicitly rejected a particular form of substance monism, which he attributed to the Stalinist and Plekhanovian tradition. This monism, in collapsing the distinction between the attributes of thought and extension into an all-encompassing concept of substance, effectively negated any meaningful differentiation between them. Logically, it would follow that the so-called "parallelism" of the attributes - where substance functions as the guarantor of identity between thought and extension - would also need to be abandoned. This is, at least, the interpretation advanced by Alain Badiou and Jean Matthys.[444]

However, according to Nick Nesbitt, Althusser did not break with Spinoza outright but rather radicalized his doctrine, transforming the concept of substance into that of structural causality. Nesbitt reminds us that, for Spinoza, substance was neither a particular thing nor the totality of all things but rather *that which is in itself and is conceived through itself*. By distancing himself from interpretations of substance as a concrete entity or as a fundamental term to which all that exists could ultimately be reduced, Althusser arguably develops a more rigorous Spinozist epistemology than Ilyenkov - one that conceptualizes structure as contingent and heterogeneous rather than as a unified, self-developing whole. Althusser's assertion that a structure exists only in its effects thus reflects a theory of radical immanence, one that refuses to posit any external principle governing its internal differentiation.

By contrast, Ilyenkov's theory of concrete universals appears to maintain a tension between essence and its expressions, insofar as the universal, in his account, exists alongside its particularizations as one particular among them. This arguably reintroduces a dualism between a universal essence and its determinate instances. However, when these theoretical positions are examined at the ontological level, the roles are reversed. Ilyenkov's account, despite its structural similarities to the paradigm of "expressive totality" criticized by Althusser, can

[444] Nesbitt, *Reading Capital's Materialist Dialectic*, p. 89.

nonetheless be said to maintain an anti-dualist position, as his universals are understood to exist not only in thought but also in mind-independent reality. By contrast, Althusser's theory of immanent structure, while rejecting expressive totality, remains confined within the attribute of thought, as it does not seek to reproduce the real object but rather to theorize it within a distinct epistemological register. Paradoxically, then, despite Althusser's attempt to develop a materialist dialectic that resists idealist dualism, his framework remains vulnerable to precisely such a dualism by maintaining a strict separation between the real object and the object of knowledge.

What implications do these theoretical divergences have for the common objective of both Althusser and Ilyenkov - namely, the elaboration of a Marxist dialectic aware of heterogeneity? A parallel reading of their respective positions proves particularly revealing in this regard. Althusser's critique of metaphysical guarantees of identity, whether in Hegel or in (certain readings of) Spinoza, poses a direct challenge to Ilyenkov's attempt to ground difference in concrete universality. From Althusser's perspective, Ilyenkov's articulation of the unity of the whole ultimately conforms to the model of expressive totality. This is the case regardless of whether, in Ilyenkov's Marxist framework, it is not *Spirit* or *Idea* that expresses itself in the various contradictions but rather its materialist equivalent. The issue, for Althusser, lies not in the particular substitution but in the underlying logic itself. If the whole is understood as expressing itself through its contradictions, and if those contradictions are viewed as subdivisions of the whole rather than as relatively autonomous contradictions operating within a structured social formation, then the framework ultimately retains a form of expressive causality - one in which the totality exerts absolute sovereignty over the genesis of its elements. Despite its explicit goal of doing justice to particular differences, Ilyenkov's materialist concrete universal ends up totalizing particularities in the concept of essence.

As I have sought to demonstrate, both Althusser and Ilyenkov undertook the task of constructing a theory of the social whole (or structure) that neither reduces its constitutive elements to an all-encompassing metaphysical category nor treats them as mere instances of preordained 'laws.' However, in rejecting such metaphysical guarantees of unity, Althusser simultaneously dispenses with the very mechanism that, within traditional dialectical thought, ensures the coherence of the totality. This absence of an integrative principle compels him to formulate a theory of a contingent and heterogeneous structure, one that proves particularly adept at analyzing contradictions without reducing them to expressions of a singular essence.

Nevertheless, by maintaining a strict epistemological distinction between the real object and the object of knowledge, Althusser ultimately fails to ground these contradictions within a materialist framework. Thus, despite his attempt to construct a dialectical approach free from metaphysical presuppositions, his structuralist epistemology leaves unresolved the fundamental issue of how structure itself relates to material reality. In other words, while Althusser succeeds in extricating contradictions from the constraints of an overarching essence, he does so at the cost of a materialist epistemology that adequately mediates the relation between concept and object. By contrast, Ilyenkov avoids the epistemological dualism that separates the object of knowledge from the real object, yet he ultimately collapses particular differences into the self-identical unity of substance. In light of these theoretical tensions, the following research question emerges: How can a Marxist dialectic account for heterogeneous contradictions without either falling into an epistemological dualism that severs concept from object or resorting to a totalizing framework that subordinates particular differences to an overarching essence? In attempting to answer this question, I propose to examine Ilyenkov's concept of the ideal, which grounds the materiality of knowledge.

Ilyenkov's concept of the ideal

The question of the objectivity of knowledge - or more specifically, the materiality of knowledge beyond its reduction to the physiological matter of the brain - is taken up by Ilyenkov in his long essay titled the "Dialectics of the Ideal", he formulates the problem in the following terms:

> The problem of ideality has always been an aspect of the problem of objectivity ("truth") of knowledge, i.e. the problem of those, and precisely those forms of knowledge, which are conditioned and explained not by the whims of personal psychophysiology, but by something much more serious, something standing above the individual psyche and completely independent of it. For example, mathematical truths, logical categories, moral imperatives and ideas of legal consciousness, that is, "things" that have a coercive value for any psyche and the power to limit its individual whims.[445]

On this count, Ilyenkov can be classified as a Platonist, although not much can be gathered about his position from this claim, as most dialectical materialists would readily accept such an illustrious genealogy. Ilyenkov references Plato in arguing against those that psychologize the ideal. In opposition to this line of argument, Plato is characteristically invoked as the paradigmatic philosopher of objective ideas. Within this framework, the ideal is to be understood not as a merely subjective or internal phenomenon, but as the form of social consciousness. As Ilyenkov contends, social consciousness is not the product of the mechanical aggregation or mere repetition of multiple individual consciousnesses. Rather, it constitutes a historically developed system of representations that confronts the individual as an external and objective reality. This system, insofar as it is socially and historically mediated, is not transmitted hereditarily but must be appropriated by each individual through their engagement with it. The ideal, in this sense, emerges not from within the isolated subject, but through the subject's active relation to a socially constituted field of meanings and representations. As Ilyenkov writes:

[445] Evald Ilyenkov, "Dialektika Idealnogo," *Logos* 19, no. 1 (2009), p. 10.

> It is equally obvious that all these externally imposed schemas and forms cannot be found as "natural" transcendental-psychological schemas or even as instinctive tendencies within the individual consciousness. All of them are assimilated in the course of upbringing, education, reformation, i.e. in the course of the individual's accession to the prior and independently existing spiritual culture, its schemas and forms. These are not immanent forms of work of the individual psyche, but forms of "another", external "subject".[446]

According to Ilyenkov, the problem of the ideal has little, if anything, to do with the physiological organization of the brain. However, to assert that the ideal is not reducible to psychological processes must not be taken to imply that it belongs to the same ontological order as natural material phenomena - such as mountains or stars. To illustrate this distinction, Ilyenkov turns to the example of a theatrical play. It is evident that a play is not confined to the subjective interiority of individual minds; rather, it exists as an object that can be apprehended and shared intersubjectively. And yet, it would be equally inaccurate to describe a play as a purely material object. Its material form - whether as a written script, performance, or stage setting - serves as the sensuous bearer of a content that transcends its immediate physical manifestation. In this sense, the play is not identical with its material substrate, but is a representation of something else - something qualitatively distinct, mediated through a particular material configuration. This leads Ilyenkov to offer a preliminary definition of the ideal, formulated in explicitly dialectical terms:

> By "ideality" or "ideal" materialism must mean that very peculiar and strictly fixable relation between at least two material objects (things, processes, events, states) within which one material object, remaining itself, acts as a representative of *the other object*, or, more precisely, of its *universal nature*, of the universal form and regularity of this other object, which remains invariant in all its changes, in all its empirically apparent variations.[447]

[446] Ilyenkov, "Dialektika Idealnogo", p. 30.

[447] Ilyenkov, "Dialektika Idealnogo", p. 13.

In this sense, *The Tragedy of King Lear* is ideal since it remains the same, despite its countless editions, translations or publications.[448] Hegel's treatment of the ideal is essential here (even the examples, like Shakespeare's tragedy, are inspired by him). As Ilyenkov recounts, the ideal for Hegel emerges at the moment when one materially sensible thing begins to represent quite another, in no way similar thing. It is for this reason, that Hegel sees ideality in the operations of the concept like mediation. But Ilyenkov makes a distinction between the material world "as it was before humans and independently of them" on the one side, and the world of representations on the other. However, these are not two separate things. The world of representations is the world existing independently of humans expressed in their historically formed social consciousness. As he writes:

> It is the actual (material) world as and the way it is represented in the historically formed and historically changing social (collective) consciousness of people, in the "collective" impersonal 'mind', in the historically established forms of expression of this 'mind'. In particular, in language, in its vocabulary, in its grammatical and syntactic schemes of linking words. But not only in language, but also in all other forms of expression of socially significant ideas, in all other forms of representation. This includes ballet performance, which, as we know, does not have a verbal text.[449]

In this sense, the problem of the ideal coincides with the problem of the spiritual. The ideal is precisely the spirit that lives on independently of the rise and demise of individual souls, who as Ilyenkov notes, might not even leave a mark on that spirit. However there seems to be a confusion present here. If the ideal is not the material world of things themselves, but that world as it's refracted in human experience of historically established forms of appearance, then it is indeed the same world, only differently considered. Ilyenkov clarifies this by describing the dialectics of the mutual transformations of the material into the ideal and vice versa. This process, or rather, two processes, material "life-activity" and its idealization, flow in cycles, where one's end becomes the other's beginning. These opposite processes move along a spiral, "with all the dialectical consequences that derive from this."[450] Yet it is unclear to what extent

[448] That the play remains the same could be debatable, but that is Ilyenkov's view.

[449] Ilyenkov. "Dialektika Idealnogo", p. 14.

[450] Ilyenkov, "Dialektika Idealnogo", p. 18.

this process, or Ilyenkov's description of it, remedies the confusion. The problem hasn't gone unnoticed. As Tarja Knuuttila comments:

> This comes close to seeing the ideal as some kind of extra layer imprinted upon the world. This vision easily leads to the conclusion that the ideal is especially prone to be represented by linguistic and symbolic means. Once again, we see how a dividing line emerges, separating the discursive realm from practical and material activity, even though the concept of the ideal strives to overcome this kind of borderline.[451]

In carefully separating the ideal from the real, Ilyenkov time and again reproduces the dualism he intends to destroy. Moving the separation further, Ilyenkov decides to exclude non-human animals from the sphere of ideality. His argument goes as follows: While all animals have the capacity to reflect the world in one way or another, and the more "advanced" ones do this through complex processes, what is absent is precisely the shared consciousness, a sphere of ideality that confronts the individual psyche. This is what Marx means with the term ideal and this is what, according to Ilyenkov, is missing in animals.[452] Marx, in arguing against Hegel's understanding of the ideal, defined it as "nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought."[453] For Hegel, it goes without saying, the ideal possessed an independent reality in itself. Marx thus wanted to reinscribe the ideal in the material world, as one of its processes arising with social labor. Yet by "the mind" he does not understand the anatomical head of an individual human body. Such an interpretation would completely change the substance of Marx's thinking on the subject. As Ilyenkov notes:

---

[451] Tarja Knuuttila, "Metamorphoses of Meaning: The Concept of the Ideal from a Semiotic Perspective," in *Dialectics of the Ideal*, vol. 60, Historical Materialism Book Series (London: Brill, 2014), p. 160.

[452] Ilyenkov's assumptions on animal psychology are not grounded in any research on the matter. Ivan Pavlov's experiments in conditioning seem to be the only zoophysiological literature he referenced until the '70s. However, towards the later period Ilyenkov is said to have been passionate about crow's usage of tools, sharing his observations about the phenomenon with his students in his seminars. I thus suppose that he was developing his views, potentially changing his position.

[453] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy; v.1*, ed. Friedrich Engels and Ernest Mandel, Penguin Classics (London New York, N.Y., USA: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1990), p. 102.

> And, as a direct consequence of this interpretation, the "ideal" begins to be interpreted in terms of cybernetics, information theory and other physical, mathematical and technical disciplines, begins to be represented as some kind of "code", as a result of "coding" and "recoding", transformation of some "signals" into other "signals", etc. It is natural that within the framework of the so understood "ideal" immediately fall infinitely many purely material processes and events observed in blocks of electrical engineering devices, machines and apparatuses, and in the end - all those purely physical phenomena, which are in one way or another connected with the fact of influence of one material system on another material system, causing in this other system some purely material changes.[454]

What troubles Ilyenkov in this "anatomical-physiological" interpretation of the ideal, then, is the confusion of material phenomena with the ideal. Where such confusion takes place, dialectical materialism renounces the category of relative autonomy (of the ideal), thus falling into "vulgar materialism". It would even be erroneous to call this an *interpretation* of the ideal, as Ilyenkov believes that it simply changes the subject of the conversation from one thing to a completely different one. The phenomena described above are rather "material preconditions",[455] essential for ideality to emerge but in no way ideality itself.

However, at this point, that is, from the difference between the ideal as a human representation, as the material transposed and translated in the human mind, Ilyenkov derives the difference between humans and non-human animals, as well as the difference between human labor and non-human agency in the process of that labor. Gradually, I would argue, Ilyenkov begins to confront and contradict his earlier ontological position, expressed in the *Cosmology*, about the activity of matter. In fact, by separating human representation from the rest of nature, he infringes on the onto-epistemology[456] he intended to develop with his claim on the equality between the ideal and the material. This infringement is, as it should be clear, anthropocentric:

[454] Ilyenkov. "Dialektika Idealnogo", p. 19.

[455] Ilyenkov. "Dialektika Idealnogo", p. 20.

[456] Mikahil Lifshitz's late project of "onto-gnoseology", where the ideal is the property of the non-human world, appears to correct this position.

> For the properly understood category of the "ideal" includes those, and only those forms of reflection which are peculiarly distinctive to man and are completely uncharacteristic and unknown to any other animal, even one possessing a highly developed higher nervous activity and psyche. It is these, and only these specific forms of reflection of the surrounding world by the human head that philosophy as a science has always considered under the name of "ideal" forms of psychic activity, and it is for the sake of distinguishing them from all others that it has kept this term.[457]

The separation of the ideal as human representation on the one hand, and forms of reflection in animals on the other, begets in Ilyenkov, for no apparent reason, an argument against the agency of the non-human in labor. Or, in other words, an anthropocentric notion of labor:

> But when bourgeois science discovered its bankruptcy and became completely confused in the insoluble contradictions of this delicate problem, it was forced to take the path of depreciating the fundamental notions of the labor theory of value. And then, retaining the term "labor," it began to understand by it the work of a donkey pulling a cart, the work of the wind turning the wings of a mill, the work of steam moving a piston, and in general the work of all the forces of nature which man has made to serve him in the process of his labor, in the process of "value production."[458]

What Ilyenkov decries here is the transformation of all concrete forms of labor (that of a watch-maker, a tailor, or a factory worker) into homogenized *abstract* labor that can be countable and measurable in socially necessary labor time and the general expenditure of cognitive and physical resources. For Ilyenkov, to speak of the labor exerted by something like a river is to reproduce this abstraction from concrete forms of labor. In order to maintain his critique of capitalist abstraction of labor, Ilyenkov thinks it necessary to refuse any agency to non-human nature. Therefore, the description I gave of Ilyenkov initially, relying on Cohen's critique of Schmidt, as a Marxist that inscribes culture within the realm of nature, is overturned. Here, with his theory of the ideal, it is Syutkin that seems to get it right, when he notes that:

[457] Ilyenkov. "Dialektika Idealnogo", p. 20.

[458] Ilyenkov. "Dialektika Idealnogo", p. 20.

"For Ilyenkov and his followers, it is human activity that gives meaning to nature; without this activity, nature is empty and insubstantial."[459]

We seem to be ending up with two Ilyenkovs, or, rather, with an unresolved antinomy immanent to his thought. Two possible explanations may be offered for this theoretical stance, though neither should be taken as a definitive resolution. Ilyenkov, like Marx, is acutely attentive to the epistemological and political risks associated with conflating subject and predicate. Following the trajectory of Feuerbach's critique of Hegel - a critique that Marx partially endorses - Ilyenkov remains wary of any formulation that positions the logical idea or concept as the subject of a real, material process. Such a move, rather than identifying a concrete material force (such as a social class, in Marx's analysis) as the actual subject, risks reverting dialectical analysis to its idealist form. Worse still, it threatens to reproduce the apologetic dimension of idealism, wherein conceptual abstraction serves to mystify and legitimize existing social relations. As Christoph Schuringa writes of Marx's opposition to Hegel's logical operation:

> The logical Idea gets to be the subject, instead of real human beings or other components of reality. Since the logical Idea is articulated into concepts, not into things, what this brings with it is a hypostatization of those concepts: predicates get to play the role of subjects. For example, monarchy, rather than the monarch, gets to play the role of subject. The monarch, in turn, gets to reappear as the predicate of this predicate. As a result, reality now looks like the mere appearance of what's really real: The Idea.[460]

This is why Ilyenkov is wary of any attempts at decentering subjectivity away from "social Man." Interestingly, Schuringa mentions that for Marx the subject could be "real human beings or other components of reality." It is here that Ilyenkov arguably departs from Marx himself. Ilyenkov restricts subjectivity to the real human being, leaving outside precisely these "other components of reality," however loosely they might be defined. David Bakhurst noted this circumstance as the most pressing issue in reading Ilyenkov today:

---

[459] Anton Syutkin, "Sovetskaya Teoriya Sub"ekta: Materialisticheskaya Dialektika E. Il'enkova i M. Lifshitsa," *Russkiy Logos* 1, no. Materialy mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii (2017), p. 289.

[460] Christoph Schuringa, *Karl Marx and the Actualization of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025), p. 65.

> I think the biggest challenge facing sympathetic interpreters of Ilyenkov today lies in finding an interpretation of his humanism that is not at odds with contemporary progressive views about our relation to non-human animals and the natural world more generally. Ilyenkov thinks that there is a very sharp distinction to be drawn between human minds – responsive to reasons and capable of self-conscious thought, intentional action, and self-determination – and those of non-human animals, whose mental lives are dictated by biological and environmental imperatives. Many thinkers today find such a severe opposition unsatisfying: it fails to do justice to the commonalities between human and animal minds and it places us somehow above and outside "nature." As a result, the natural world is seen merely as an object of human mastery and domination, as a means of humanity's self-development and fulfillment, but of no intrinsic value.[461]

Acknowledging the legitimacy of the problem described by Bakhurst, that of the anthropocentric tendency in Ilyenkov's thought, I would argue that it is determined by a specific reading of value. Indeed, another, maybe more precise example of the ideal as a representation of another thing in a material object is Marx's value-form. The form of use-value, for instance, is a universal form, applicable to any material object and unchanged by the variation of the material qualities of that object. As Marx famously put it: "Not an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as values".[462] Rather, value form is a separate, independent form, ideal yet real, that determines its material carrier. This bodiless form "decides the fate"[463] of all the bodies it possesses. As Ilyenkov writes:

> This is a quite objective (since it does not depend on the consciousness and will of the commodity-owner and is formed outside his consciousness) relation, within which the natural form of commodity B becomes the form of value of commodity A, or the body of commodity B becomes the mirror of the value of commodity A - the authorized

[461] Siyaveş Azeri et al., "Interviews: Rejuvenating the Revolutionary Essence of Marxist Theory at the Centennial of Evald Ilyenkov," *Marxism & Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2024) p. 154.

[462] Marx, *Capital I*, p. 138.

[463] Ilyenkov. "Dialektika Idealnogo", p. 21.

representative of its "value" nature, of the "substance" that is "embodied" both here and there.[464]

The value represented by the material object has little to do with the object's own qualities. Instead, it is imprinted on it through social practice in capitalism. When present, it begins to dominate that practice. Here lies, in my view, the second explanation of the problem of anthropocentrism in Ilyenkov. As long as Ilyenkov takes value form to be the prime example of the ideal, he is justified in claiming that such an ideal exists "thanks to" human activity and not "in nature" (as Mikhail Lifshitz held[465]). The value form is indeed a historical category of capitalism, not any inherent quality or attribute of matter, nature or some other name for substance. The ideal in this case is social in both origin and scope. It is either the form of a thing embodied in human activity or inversely, the form of that activity embodied in the object.

The contradiction, however, lies in Ilyenkov's confusion of this historical category with idealization in general. Ilyenkov seems to be generalizing Marx's description of value onto ideality as such. In this, Ilyenkov could be answering Marx's call to historicize. Alternatively, the generalization itself, while erroneous, can be attributed to the totalizing character of dialectical materialism. If a materialism is to be consistent, which for Ilyenkov means dialectical, then it cannot explain one moment of the ideal and ignore others, as that would leave the analysis at the level of abstraction. Instead, it must grasp the ideal as this ever-changing form that appears at times in objects and at other times in activity. One could argue that Ilyenkov abandoned here the lessons of his own particularism, inspired by Spinoza's theory of error, which forbade universalizing the logic of one thing onto another. The most plausible explanation, which I share, is contained in Siarhei Biareishyk's thesis, which states that the ideal as the active capacity of the body is actually trans-historical, while specific cases like value are historical.[466]

In all fairness, such a generalization taken from the analysis of value and extrapolated beyond it could be found in Marx's own work. It is present in the metaphor of the mirror, used by Marx to describe value as that which reflects the social nature of labor back to the worker.

---

[464] Ilyenkov. "Dialektika Idealnogo", p. 40.

[465] Mikhail Lifshitz, *Dialog s Ėval'dom Il'enkovym: problema ideal'nogo* (Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya, 2003).

[466] Siarhei Biareishyk, "Linguaggio, denaro, ideale: La lettura spinozista di Marx in Il'enkov," *Quaderni Materialisti*, no. 22 *Spinoza Rosso* (2023), pp. 57–71.

However, for Marx the mirror metaphor has an anthropological, even psychological function. The author of the *Capital* argues that one only begins to treat oneself as human when faced with the reflection the species-being of humanity in another person:

> In a certain sense, a man is in the same situation as a commodity. As he neither enters into the world in possession of a mirror, nor as a Fichtean philosopher who can say 'I am I', a man first sees and recognizes himself in another man. Peter only relates to himself as a man through his relation to another man, Paul, in whom he recognizes his likeness. With this, however, Paul also becomes from head to toe, in his physical form as Paul, the form of appearance of the species man for Peter.[467]

The tension in Ilyenkov's conception of the ideal reveals a deeper antinomy in his philosophy: between a transhistorical account of ideality grounded in human activity, and the historical specificity of certain ideal forms - namely, Marx's value form. While Ilyenkov's effort to maintain the uniqueness of human representation may be driven by a desire to avoid a reductionism in materialism, it ultimately leads him to reaffirm a strict anthropocentrism that runs counter to the more integrative vision of nature and culture he endorsed earlier. This contradiction, as Bakhurst and others have observed, renders Ilyenkov's legacy problematic for contemporary debates about non-human agency. Nevertheless, by situating the ideal as both socially generated and materially effective, Ilyenkov provides critical tools for rethinking the relation between thought, labor, and matter. The internal tensions I attempted to discern in his theory seem to represent symptoms of his historical conditions, as well as those of the philosophies he mobilizes. The latter is evident in regards to his account of German Idealism.

Ilyenkov concludes his essay on the ideal by stating that Marx deliberately aligned himself with Hegel rather than Kant in addressing the problem of ideality. As Ilyenkov argues, Kant sought to resolve this problem by directing his inquiry inward - toward the transcendental structures and schemata of consciousness. However, in doing so, Kant effectively bypassed the processes through which the ideal is objectified, externalized, alienated, and subsequently sublated through further acts of idealization. These dialectical transformations were, by contrast, fully thematized in Hegel's system, albeit in the language of Spirit. For Hegel, it was essential that the ideal be embodied in materially perceptible forms in order for Spirit to achieve self-recognition. An ideal - or activity - that remains unembodied in any external object remains

[467] Marx, *Capital I*, p. 144.

inaccessible to Spirit. Through acts of objectification - whether in speech, action, or material artifact - the Spirit comes to know itself, and what Ilyenkov terms "collective self-consciousness" emerges. Or, in Marx's terminology, this is the formation of Man's inorganic body. As long as we understand the ideal as a form, or function of the body's activity - and activity is indeed one of its moments - with other bodies, then the Kantian strategy is not feasible, since it does not concern itself with that activity. Hegel, by contrast, foregrounds activity as a constitutive moment of the ideal, and for this reason, becomes a major interlocutor for Marx, particularly in his analysis of value. It is Hegel's insight into the objectivity of the ideal that enables Marx to formulate his theory of the money-form. Ilyenkov illustrates this connection with the following example:

> A chemical analysis of a gold coin will not detect a single molecule of boot-polish in it, and vice versa. Nevertheless, a gold coin represents (expresses) the value of a hundred jars of boot-polish precisely by its weight and luster. And of course, this act of representation takes place not in the consciousness of the seller of boot-polish, but outside his consciousness in any "sense" of the word, - outside his head, in the space of the market, and without his having the slightest suspicion of the mysterious nature of the money form and the nature of the price of boot-polish. Anyone can spend money without knowing what money is.[468]

For Ilyenkov, the fact that money's validity does not reside in individual belief nor in any intrinsic property of the banknote itself serves as a compelling demonstration of the reality of the ideal. However, one may question whether this genuinely constitutes a refutation of Kant. It may be more accurate to characterize Ilyenkov's theory of the ideal not as a direct argument against Kantian philosophy, but rather as a departure from the Kantian problematic altogether - indeed, as an engagement with a fundamentally different set of concerns. Kant's inquiry centers on the universal and formal conditions of possible experience. The transcendental subject, as formulated by Kant, is not reducible to empirical psychology. Ilyenkov's suggestion that Kant mistakes universal structures for the "individual psyche" appears to conflate transcendental conditions with psychological content. The a priori categories of intuition - such as space and time - remain necessary preconditions for any individual to encounter, internalize, or critique the determinations of social consciousness. I would argue that the merit of Ilyenkov's

[468] Ilyenkov. "Dialektika Idealnogo", pp. 44-45.

argument consists not in its refutation of the a priori but in its socialization. In this sense, space and time, besides being the necessary categories for any individual experience, are constituted socially through shared experiences. This is what Ilyenkov means when he insists that the stars became culturally significant when they began to be used for geographic orientation. Ilyenkov is thus loyal to Hegel, who historicized the a priori for the first time. But the issue doesn't stop there. As I noted, Ilyenkov also socializes Kant similarly to someone like Émile Durkheim, who put the argument most clearly in the following manner:

> They [space and time] represent the most general relations which exist between things; surpassing all our other ideas in extension, they dominate all the details of our intellectual life. If men do not agree upon these essential ideas at any moment, if they did not have the same conceptions of time, space, cause, number, etc., all contact between their minds would be impossible, and with that, all life together.[469]

Of course, the question of how Kant's categories of judgment relate to those later developed by Hegel and Marx remains an important and complex one, though it lies beyond the scope of the present discussion. What is relevant here is that Ilyenkov defines idealism as the speculative assertion of the objectivity of the ideal as something existing independently of human social practice and cultural mediation. In this sense, his critique targets a particular ontological interpretation of the ideal, rather than the transcendental analytic as such.

Here Ilyenkov directs the reader's attention to the teleological character of social practice in industrial societies. Since in such societies, labor has a goal-oriented nature, that is, it is geared towards the realization of a certain end, then the ideal is the governing regulation of the conscious will driving that practice. In this sense, the ideal is once again presented as existing outside of an individual psyche, in the form of material objects outside individual consciousness. Of course, Ilyenkov concedes that the ideal passes in that individual consciousness as well, but that is only a fleeting moment. Its more stable existence is to be found in the social realm. From the Kantian point of view, as it is presented by Ilyenkov,[470] the Hegelian or even Marxist definition of the ideal turns out to be a simple, if not naive projection of an individual's psychology onto the objects outside it. As Ilyenkov puts it:

---

[469] Émile Durkheim, *Les Formes Elementaires de Ia Vie Religieuse: le Systeme Totemique en Australie* (Paris: Alcan, 1912), p. 29-30.

[470] It is noteworthy that he mentions Igor Narskii and David Dubrovsky as prime examples of such a view in the Soviet Union.

> And if so, the Platonic-Hegelian concept of 'ideality' begins to seem only an impermissible projection of the forms of consciousness and will (forms of thinking) onto the 'external world,' and the 'critique' of Hegel is reduced to reproaching him for having 'ontologized,' 'hypostasized' (i.e. interpreted as definitions outside the individual's consciousness of the existing world) the purely subjective forms of the human psyche. It follows logically that all categories of judgment ('quantity,' 'measure,' 'necessity,' 'essence,' etc.,) are only 'ideal,' i.e. only transcendental-psychological schemes of the subject's activity and nothing more.[471]

Marx, on the other hand, is said to have reversed this schema, in a way, socializing Kant with Hegel and materializing Hegel with Feuerbach:

> Marx, of course, had a completely different conception, according to which all logical categories without exception are only idealized (i.e. reflected, transformed into forms of human life-activity, first of all external, sensual-objective, and then 'spiritual') universal forms of existence of objective reality, the external world, existing independently of man and mankind. And not projections of the forms of the mental world onto the 'physical' world. The concept, as it is easy to see, is just the opposite of 'theoretical deduction'.[472]

These two paragraphs summarize the essence of Ilyenkov's position and the specific reading of the history of German philosophy that informs it. With respect to Kant, however, Ilyenkov appears to misconstrue a fundamental aspect of the latter's project. In fact, the bulk of his criticism is directed against the position that the ideal is a projection of individual "whims", which he attributes to Kant. In his effort to demonstrate the objective, socially mediated character of the ideal, Ilyenkov not only misrepresents Kant's position (however unintentionally), but also forecloses the concept of projection as a potentially legitimate philosophical category. In doing so, he bypasses more nuanced accounts of how subjective structures - whether transcendental or social - might participate in the constitution of objectivity without collapsing into relativism or arbitrariness.

---

[471] Ilyenkov. "Dialektika Idealnogo", p. 52.

[472] Ilyenkov. "Dialektika Idealnogo", p. 52.

This, I would argue, marks a significant limitation in Ilyenkov's conception of the ideal and takes away from the critical potential of the concept. In his determined effort to establish ideal forms as objectively and universally real - existing independently of individual consciousness and irreducible to mere subjective projection - he inadvertently foreclosed the possibility of critically engaging with ideational forms as projected constructions of particular historical or ideological consciousness. By excluding the category of projection from his framework, Ilyenkov leaves little conceptual space for the demystifying critique of categories that may function precisely as naturalized expressions of contingent, partisan, or hegemonic perspectives. In this sense, the critical task of unveiling the ideological character of certain ideal forms risks being occluded within his strongly objectivist account. While he is heavily influenced by Hegel's treatment of abstract universals as impositions, Ilyenkov's way of universalizing or objectifying ideal forms neglects their particular origin, contradicting the particularism his dialectic otherwise exhibits.

A number of his own prejudices such as his views on the "savage",[473] are particular (European, colonial) standpoints that present themselves as universal (human). Even if these projections are experienced as objective as they acquire the power of coercion and material efficacy, specifically in relation to individuals subjected to them, we must not forget that they are not truly objective or qualities of the "external world" but abstract universalizations of particular perspectives. In Ilyenkov's framework, it is this important distinction that becomes difficult to make. It could be a useful exercise here to compare Ilyenkov's reading of the history of Western philosophy to the standard Soviet reading of his time. Loren Graham has described the standard view on Soviet philosophy in relation to Kant's categories:

> The major distinction of the dialectical materialist approach to the categories is its heavy emphasis on natural science. Since, according to Marxism, being determines consciousness and not consciousness being, the material world, as reflected in human consciousness, determines the very concepts by which people think, that is, the categories.[474]

[473] Ilyenkov. "Dialektika Idealnogo", p. 27.

[474] Loren R. Graham, *Science, Philosophy and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union*, An expanded, updated and revised ed. of "Science and philosophy in the Soviet Union" (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 56.

Ilyenkov could be included in Graham's account of the (Soviet) Marxist interpretation of the categories. Concepts like quality, quantity, matter, substance etc. were understood by Soviet philosophers as concepts only as far as they were ideal reflections of material relations. Not ideal projections onto the raw data of unintelligible materiality. However, Ilyenkov was notoriously wary when it came to mobilizing natural science in philosophical discourse. What made the materialist dialectic scientific for Ilyenkov was not its proximity or "correspondence" with natural science but the presence of its own object of study, the relations of transformation between thought and being. This is, in my view, the core insight of Ilyenkov's theory of the ideal. Namely, it reinterprets Marx's famous phrase, alluded to by Graham. Yes, being determines social consciousness and not vice versa, as Marx held. But did Marx ever use a concept of pure being? What Marx means by being - and this is what Ilyenkov's theory makes abundantly clear - is that being is not dead matter but a dynamic organism of material and ideal dimensions that flow through each other, becoming each other and uniting as opposites in contradictions. The second definition given by Graham can also apply:

> Hegel's achievement in understanding the categories, according to Soviet dialectical materialists, was his realization that the categories are not static, but are in the process of development and are connected with each other. Thus, for example, the category "quantity" can grow into "quality."[475]

On this point too, Ilyenkov shares the accepted position in Soviet orthodoxy that the categories develop, interact with one another and change. As noted, Ilyenkov could join the call to historicize the a priori. Yet in contrast to someone like Foucault, Ilyenkov does not see the epistemic structure of a certain epoch in the discursive or conceptual apparatus that dominates it but the social practices specific to that epoch. The ideal here must be understood as a regulating force, as objective in relation to an individual psyche as a brick wall, which determines the ways of being, modes of acting of subjects. Ilyenkov ends his essay here. But I think this is where the political aspect of the ideal begins. I would argue that the ideal as a regulating force can either be understood as an imposed rule coercing mode of acting and being from above or a self-regulating culture organized from below. The latter would be a true concrete universal. as Ilyenkov himself hints at it:

[475] Graham, *Science, Philosophy and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union*, p.56.

Consciousness, in fact, only arises where an individual is forced to look at himself as if from the outside, as if through the eyes of another person, through the eyes of all other people - only where he is forced to proportion his individual actions to the actions of another person, i.e. only within the framework of jointly realized life activity. Only here, in fact, is the will required, as the ability to forcibly subordinate one's own drives and impulses to some law, to some requirement dictated not at all by the individual organics of one's own body, but by the organization of a "collective body", a collective organized around some common cause.[476]

[476] Ilyenkov. "Dialektika Idealnogo", p. 55.

The ideal between dialectics and semiotics

The apparent multiplicity - and at times, inconsistency - of definitions of the ideal throughout Ilyenkov's essay may initially suggest a lack of conceptual precision. How, one might ask, can the ideal simultaneously be conceived as process and product, object and form? Upon closer examination, this seeming ambiguity is more a reflection of the complex, dialectical nature of the concept than an indication of theoretical incoherence. Rather than constituting discrete or incompatible definitions, these variations can be understood as articulations of the different moments or determinations of the ideal as it unfolds in practice. Ilyenkov is very diligent in following the process in every moment, not skipping a step and in a truly Hegelian way, never forgetting what came before in describing what takes place after. Each formulation captures a specific phase or manifestation within the broader dialectical movement of the ideal's development. Consistent with Ilyenkov's own methodological commitments, the ideal must be grasped as a dynamic unity of becoming - "a thing that becomes another" - which may appear, at various points, as an object, a process, or a representation. More specifically, the ideal is best understood as a moment within a teleologically oriented praxis, particularly in the context of social labor. That is, it emerges as the conceptual anticipation of a product that has not yet materialized, but which nonetheless guides practical activity. As one of Ilyenkov's definitions makes clear:

> The ideal is a schema of the real, objective activity of man, agreeing with the form of the thing outside the head, outside the brain. Yes, it is precisely a schema, and only a schema, and not the activity itself in its flesh and blood.[477]

This particular definition stands out from others with a critical nuance. Ilyenkov emphasizes that the ideal must not be conflated with the activity "in its flesh and blood." While activity plays a constitutive role in generating and sustaining the domain of the ideal, it cannot be equated directly with the ideal itself without introducing a problematic subjectivism - one that undermines the claim that the ideal functions as an objective structure. Were the ideal reducible to the activity that produces it, it would cease to exist once that activity terminates and would fail to confront the subject as something external or autonomous. Thus, it is crucial to maintain

[477] Ilyenkov. "Dialektika Idealnogo", p. 23.

a conceptual distinction between the two. Conversely, it is equally inadequate to identify the ideal solely with a system of collective representations, as doing so would sever it from the concrete practices that give rise to it - thereby moving toward a form of abstract idealism. In this context, Tarja Knuuttila provides a pertinent example in her discussion of Umberto Eco's concept of the "encyclopedia", which illustrates a conception of representational systems abstracted from the material conditions of their production:

> By encylopedia, Eco means the totality of knowledge generated by humans, which is the cognitive background of any act of understanding or meaning-making. This knowledge is stored in our artefacts…[478]

Knuuttila draws a comparison between Eco's concept of the encyclopedia and Ilyenkov's notion of the ideal, noting that both appear to delineate an objectively existing sphere of representations, meanings, and values that confront the individual subject as external and autonomous. However, as she argues, Eco's semiotic framework ultimately detaches this system from its material referents - namely, the objects and concrete carriers of meaning - as well as from the practical activity through which such meanings are historically and socially constituted.

> As a result, despite his intention to the contrary, Eco seems to pass from the analysis of the ideal to idealism. This happens once the ideal is considered in terms of an independent system of meanings existing quite apart from signifying social practices. As Ilyenkov's account of the ideal focuses on the dialectical process in which the ideal is generated, his perspective provides an important corrective to Eco's vision.[479]

Ilyenkov thus appears to offer a more integrated account of the ideal - one that situates it firmly within the nexus of materiality and human activity. Rather than positing an autonomous or transcendent "layer" of representations that distribute meaning to material objects and outside of which those objects lose meaning, Ilyenkov seeks to ground the ideal within the very practices that produce and transform the material world. In doing so, he avoids the idealist tendency to "double" the world by constructing a separate realm of meanings divorced from

[478] Knuuttila, "Metamorphoses of Meaning", p. 146.

[479] Knuuttila, "Metamorphoses of Meaning", p. 147.

their practical genesis. According to Knuuttila, this enables Ilyenkov to articulate a materialist account of the ideal - one that does not sever meaning from its conditions of production but instead views it as immanent to praxis.

I am however reluctant to declare Ilyenkov successful at this point. It is true that he avoids reifying the ideal by positing it as a separate world of representations ordering the material world. But If Ilyenkov's philosophy appears as a valid materialist alternative to semiotic theories that tend to separate meaning from the practice of meaning-making (As Knuuttila holds), it is only so due to his notion of transformative practice that changes nature, bringing it into the human, social world. Yet, the notion of human activity that transforms nature and hence links mind with matter, must itself be questioned. In particular, what is meant exactly by "transforming"? This question is taken up by Edward Swiderski, who believes that "in the context of activity theory neither the concept of transformation nor the philosophy standing behind it is satisfactorily developed."[480]

[480] Edward M. Swiderski, "The Activity Approach and Metaphysics," in *The Practical Essence of Man The 'Activity Approach' in Late Soviet Philosophy*, ed. Andrey Maydansky and Vesa Oittinen, Historical Materialism Book Series (London: Brill, 2016), p. 76.

Questioning the notion of activity

In discerning the meaning of transformative activity Ilyenkov so often invokes in his theory of the ideal, Swiderski distinguishes between three types of transformation. The "robust", or metaphysically strong notion of transformation would imply that human activity enacts substantial change in nature as such, adding to the already changing substance. The second, more moderate conception, understands transformation as the inscription of meaning onto the objects of an independently existing natural world. Here, human activity is seen as interposing a culturally mediated layer - composed of symbols, artefacts, and meanings - between the social and material realms. Transformation, in this sense, involves the symbolic and practical structuring of nature without altering its ontological status. Finally, the weak notion withdraws from metaphysics altogether, focusing on the differentiation of human practices themselves, the Weberian notion of culture being a prime example. As he describes the strong version:

> On this reading of the Marxist backdrop of activity theory, to say that man transforms the world is to say that nature, through the offices of man's transformative activity, as an emergent, 'higher form' of natural processes, transforms itself. Here there is room for speaking of 'substantial change' in relation to transformative activity, but characterised relative to possibilities in the world of which the human being is an emergent active constituent.[481]

This so-called strong version of transformation, despite its metaphysical ambitions, appears relatively modest in its humanism. Indeed, as we saw with Syutkin and Magun, a philosophy which sees change as a positive property of the world, doesn't inspire action. Human activity, within this framework, is not understood as the source of meaning imposed upon an otherwise meaningless material substrate. Rather, it is understood as a specifically human modality of change - an expression of a larger ontological process of transformation that matter already undergoes independently of human intervention. Such a perspective is evident in Ilyenkov's *Cosmology* where human thought and activity are situated within, rather than set apart from, the dialectical unfolding of substance itself. It also aligns with his interpretation of the history

[481] Swiderski, "The Activity Approach and Metaphysics", p. 87.

of German philosophy as described above. Here is Swiderski explaining the historical-philosophical background of the strong version:

> Now in Marx's early writings, there is no rift, no dualism, between a meaningless material world and social man, the meaning-bestowing agent, as in the example of the (neo-Kantian) philosophy of culture sketched above. One reason for this absence is Marx's initial reliance on the Hegel–Feuerbach line. Hegel's identity of thinking and being, concept and object, becomes in Feuerbach's reworking of Hegel's idealism man's rootedness in nature, though in a special understanding thereof… Despite Marx's criticism, in his 'Theses on Feuerbach', of both Hegel and Feuerbach, his own notion of praxis preserves the gist, shall I say, of the 'philosophy of identity' which animated the thinking of his illustrious predecessors.[482]

The moderate version, instead renounces the metaphysical scope of the strong version:

> In the weaker version man 'interposes' between himself and brute nature a realm of artefacts of various kinds; in this way man institutes, constitutes, 'his' human world which is distinct from brute 'nature'. The issue for this conception of transformative activity concerns the relationship of the 'human' to the extra-human, natural world. In particular, is the 'human world' an objectively real world in the manner of (brute) 'nature'?[483]

This second, metaphysically "weaker" understanding of transformative practice is closer to Marx's way of employing the notion. Herein lies the difference for Swiderski. The strong version is, as he claims following Leszek Kolakowski's differentiation, part of the "Marxism of Engels". While the weaker version is that of the young Marx of the *1844 Manuscripts*. So how does Ilyenkov fare in this framework?

As discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the concept of practice occupies a foundational position in Soviet philosophy. In particular, Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, which emerged as a canonical text in the early philosophical debates of the Soviet tradition, defined practice as the criterion of truth. According to this formulation, practice

[482] Swiderski, "The Activity Approach and Metaphysics", p. 88.

[483] Swiderski, "The Activity Approach and Metaphysics", p. 78.

confers objectivity upon ideas by subjecting them to empirical testing and verification. However, this epistemological role tends to obscure or marginalize the generative and creative dimensions of practice - its capacity not only to validate ideas but to produce and transform the very conditions of objectivity. During the Stalinist period, the concept of practice was effectively reduced to an ideological token within an increasingly dogmatic and schematized version of dialectical materialism. In this context, it is unsurprising that anti-Stalinist Marxist philosophers sought to return to the concept in order to restore dynamism and critical reflexivity to dialectical thought. Ilyenkov is a paradigmatic example of this tendency. Yet, even during the more open and intellectually permissive phases of Soviet history, the concept of practice was often valorized rather than rigorously interrogated. As Swiderski rightly observes, the ideological weight attached to the term rendered a sustained critical analysis of practice nearly impossible within the Soviet intellectual climate. Beyond these contextual constraints, there is a more fundamental philosophical difficulty. As noted in Chapter I, this problem was identified early on by Western Sovietologists, who criticized the Stalinist conception of practice as both the foundation and the criterion of truth. They argued, plausibly, that assigning both functions to a single concept undermines its validity in either role. Ilyenkov, committed to revitalizing dialectical materialism in the aftermath of its Stalinist ossification, sought to reclaim the concept of practice. However, his appropriation of the term precluded a systematic critique of its internal tensions. Drawing on Swiderski's typology, we can claim that Ilyenkov's usage tends to oscillate between the strong (Engelsian) and weak conceptions of transformation. While his later writings frequently lean toward the weaker view - according to which human activity imbues matter with meaning - he occasionally invokes the stronger version, in which human practice is said to effect real ontological change in nature itself. This tension - between practice as the material transformation of nature and as the cultural production of "humanized nature" - constitutes one of the central unresolved antinomies of dialectical logic. More broadly, it reflects the philosophical difficulty inherent in reconciling Marx and Engels within a unified framework that draws simultaneously on Hegelian dialectics and Spinozist monism. For Ilyenkov, the challenge can be stated thus: if his theory of the ideal is aligned with the weak conception, in which human activity confers meaning onto otherwise inert matter, then he risks reproducing the very ontological dualism he so vigorously criticizes. On the other hand, if he is to be understood in terms of the strong conception - where transformative activity generates new ontological qualities in substance - he must clarify how the perceived changes are indeed those of the substance as such and not projections of the subject. Or, in Donald Davidson's

words, he must account for the relation between the intentional structures of subjectivity and the causal mechanisms involved in material transformation.

In his critical examination of the strong conception of transformation, Swiderski introduces an important distinction between the ontological creation of a new object and the mere reconfiguration of pre-existing material. Drawing on an example from Donald Davidson,[484] he considers the case of a carpenter constructing a desk from wood. This example serves to illustrate that the resulting object - the desk - does not constitute a qualitatively new ontological entity, but rather represents a rearrangement of already existing natural material. Swiderski thus suggests that such instances of human activity do not fulfill the metaphysical criteria implied by the strong version of transformation. He concludes:

> The challenge to the strong version of transformative activity consists precisely in finding a good argument to defend the claim that the carpenter has created an object different in kind from the materials to which he directs his energies.[485]

Swiderski doesn't go searching for an answer in Ilyenkov's work, yet we could argue that the latter thought this problem through and gave an organicist answer. If we recall his example of the rabbit in the *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital*, it becomes clear that Ilyenkov attributes ontological value to objects beyond their constituent parts. As in his example, one can deconstruct the rabbit into various atoms or molecules to find the constituent parts, but this operation will never explain how these molecules or chemical elements gave a rabbit and not something else. Moreover, we can supplement the argument by stating that a particular object can do things that its constituents parts would not be able to do were they not constituted in precisely that object and not something else. The affordability of an object is characteristic of that object in its shape, form and precisely, "arrangement". A potential objection, based on Swiderski's analysis, would claim that such emergent properties do not suffice to establish a change in *kind*, and that without a qualitative shift at this level, one cannot speak meaningfully of a new ontological entity. From Ilyenkov's Hegelian-Marxist standpoint, however, this position appears overly conservative or reductionist, insofar as it denies ontological status to emergent forms by subordinating them to their material substratum.

[484] Donald Davidson, "Agency," in *Essays on Actions and Events*, by Donald Davidson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 43–63.

[485] Swiderski, "The Activity Approach and Metaphysics", p. 80.

The absence of a clear resolution leaves open the question of whether his theory ultimately affirms a materialist continuity between thought and being or lapses into an anthropocentrism that privileges human agency as the exclusive bearer of meaning and transformation. In this sense, the legacy of the concept of practice in Ilyenkov's work remains ambivalent. Yet this does not harm the critical potential of the theory, which will be made explicit below.

The political economy of the ideal

Keti Chukhrov offers a substantial account of the ways in which Ilyenkov's theory of the ideal brings us closer to bridging the gap between matter and idea. What Chukhrov terms Ilyenkov's "speculative technique"[486] converging matter and idea is based on the recognition that any material activity in the extension is "thought-oriented".[487] This circumstance leads us to posit matter and idea, or body and concept as initially separate and distinct, yet moving towards each other. Every material activity in extension includes idealization and every idealization in thought includes materiality as its moment. As we already mentioned, Ilyenkov is against the idea of philosophy as either pure ontology or pure logic. Thus the two must be linked. Hence the reference to Spinoza. Yet, in the latter, thought and extension are parallel attributes. For Ilyenkov, on the other hand, the operation of convergence must be dialectical. As Chukhrov points out:

> Substance manifests itself in the modes that are discreet accidental selves, rather than incommensurable phenomena, determined by other selves.[488]

The concept of the object's non-self-being (*Anderssein* in Hegelian philosophy) corresponds precisely to its ideal dimension - a dimension that is notably absent in Spinoza's monistic framework (which notoriously ignores labor) but is empirically manifested in the artifacts produced through social activity. Put differently, the ideal signifies the object's non-coincidence with itself within the synthesis of thought and extension; it reflects the object's non-identity or non-self-sameness in the dialectical unity of thought and being. In the terms of Italian Marxists of the '60s, a tauto-heterology. Although the ideal is not reducible to materiality, it nonetheless manifests within the attribute of extension as the object's capacity to be or perform as another, thereby expressing its intrinsic potentiality for transformation.

Chukhrov effectively illustrates Ilyenkov's method for delineating the mechanisms through which transformation occurs between the material and the ideal. However, the metaphysical

[486] Keti Chukhrov, "On the Materialist Interpretation of the Ideal by Evald Ilyenkov," *Studies in East European Thought* 74, no. 1 (March 2022), p. 57.

[487] Chukhrov, "On the Materialist Interpretation of the Ideal by Evald Ilyenkov", p. 57.

[488] Chukhrov, "On the Materialist Interpretation of the Ideal by Evald Ilyenkov", p. 61.

status of transformative practice - specifically, the ontological weight attributed to the transformative function of social labor - is not problematized. Consequently, while Chukhrov convincingly demonstrates that Ilyenkov's Spinoza-Hegelian Marxism is oriented toward a dialectical convergence of thought and matter, the topos of this convergence - namely, social practice - persists as a speculative presupposition rather than a fully substantiated category. In this respect, Swiderski's critique retains its validity.

Yet Chukhrov makes another, no less important point that, in my view, guarantees Ilyenkov's relevance for contemporary Marxist theory and beyond. That point concerns the political economy of the ideal. More specifically, the critique of the ideal as an alienated force that confronts the subject from outside on the one hand, and the ideal as the active capacity of the subject itself, which transforms that "external" force into the genuine cultural property of each individual. As Ilyenkov writes in his 1962 encyclopedia article "The Ideal":

> the materialist understanding of the ideal becomes natural for someone in a communist society where culture does not oppose the individual as something externally assigned, something autonomous and alien but is a form of one's own dynamic activity"[489]

How, then, does Ilyenkov conceptualize the alienation of the ideal under capitalism, and what vision does he offer for its re-appropriation within communism? For Ilyenkov, the ideal emerges through the process of symbolization inherent in labor - the transformation of material into symbol, and subsequently of symbol into sign. This dialectical operation, which he locates in Marx's analyses of the commodity and the money-form,[490] can occur under conditions of creative, free labor or, conversely, under conditions of alienation. When labor is structured by deprivation and exploitation, the symbolic mediation of the material may impede the production of adequate ideas; in such cases, symbolization serves as a barrier rather than a medium for human self-realization. Yet, when abstracted from its determination by capitalist political-economic structures, the same act of symbolization also constitutes the condition of possibility for the formation of adequate ideas.[491] In this sense, the ideal is not inherently alienated; rather,

[489] Ilyenkov as cited in Chukhrov, "On the Materialist Interpretation of the Ideal by Evald Ilyenkov", p. 74.

[490] As noted by Siarhei Biareishyk in Siarhei Biareishyk, "Linguaggio, denaro, ideale: La lettura spinozista di Marx in Il'enkov," *Quaderni Materialisti*, no. 22 *Spinoza Rosso* (2023), pp. 57–71.

[491] Biareishyk, "Linguaggio, denaro, ideale", p. 71.

its alienation is a historically specific distortion of a more fundamental potentiality embedded in human practice. Under conditions of non-alienated, creative labor - conceived within a communist horizon - symbolization becomes the medium through which the subject is organically connected to a system of ideal representations. In this configuration, the symbolic order ceases to dominate the subject externally and instead functions as its true ideal inorganic body. While Siarhei Biareishyk suggests that this symbolic mediation may serve as a bridge between subject and substance, such a claim remains metaphysically fraught, particularly in light of the ambiguities surrounding the notion of "transforming nature". Nevertheless, these philosophical ambiguities do not diminish the critical force of Ilyenkov's conception of the ideal - as an unalienated cultural formation that, under communism, becomes a direct extension of the human subject. Ilyenkov articulates this vision most clearly in *Dialectical Logic*, where he writes:

> When, on the contrary, the individual only masters the ideal image formally, as a rigid pat-tern and sequence of operations, without under-standing its origin and links with real (not ideal-ised) actuality, he proves incapable of taking a critical attitude to this image, i.e. as a special ob-ject differentiated from him. Then he merges with it, as it were, and cannot treat it as an ob-ject correlated with reality and alter it accord-ingly. In that case, strictly speaking, it is not the individual who operates with the ideal image but the dogmatised image that acts in and through the individual. Here it is not the ideal image that is a real function of the individual but, on the contrary, the individual who is a function of the image, which dominates his mind and will as an externally given formal scheme, as an estranged image, as a fetish, as a system of unarguable rules coming inevitably from somewhere out of the blue. The idealist conception of the nature of the ideal corresponds to just such a conscious-ness.[492]

[492] Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic*, p. 282.

The ideal and anthropocentrism

As it becomes clear from our discussion, Ilyenkov's theory of the ideal gradually shifts from an initial ontological orientation toward a more anthropocentric philosophy of meaning-making - one that ultimately offers limited conceptual space for apprehending matter as active independently of human social relations. This tension, I argue, is not external to Ilyenkov's project but rather immanent to the broader ambitions of dialectical logic, which seeks to integrate ontological and epistemological dimensions within a unified philosophical framework. While Ilyenkov attempted to maintain the two branches of philosophy together by showing the mechanisms of transformation between the ideal and the material, he could not avoid oscillating either to one pole (in his early work), or to the other (in the work on the ideal). The idea of transformation turns out to be crucial here. While the strong metaphysical version of the notion, as presented by Swiderski, is better equipped for analyzing ontological questions, for example pertaining to the issues of the Anthropocene (transformative action as the ontological alteration of nature by humans), it lacks clarity as to how the intentionality of the subject is joined with the physical causal relations of change in matter. The moderate version, on the other hand, is philosophically more nuanced, but inadvertently reproduces the mind-matter dualism Ilyenkov tried to surpass (Activity as the cultural imprinting of meaning on otherwise meaningless matter). Without pretending to solve this issue, I would like to point to a possible way out of the contradiction. Namely, to Ilyenkov's so-called "anti-innatism".[493]

One can argue that Ilyenkov's emphasis on humans having the capability to make their own activity an object of reflection while animals are identical with their activity sounds anthropocentric, but while for Ilyenkov this capability is particular to humans, it does not represent a biologically coded and hereditarily transmitted marker but is developed anew every time, in every new individual, through her participation in sociality. In short, reflection is inherent not to humans but to the social relations they create in the course of their "life-activity." The human only becomes human when she acquires these objectively existing ideal schemas. Thus, humanity is not given itself. He differentiates Between humans as representatives of a human species and as biological variety. According to Bakhurst, Ilyenkov believes that "higher

[493] See Bakhurst, Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy", pp. 244-253 and Siyaves Azeri, "The Historical Possibility and Necessity of (Ilyenkov's) Anti-Innatism," *Theory & Psychology* 27, no. 5 (October 2017): 683–702,

mental functions are not genetically inherited capacities of the brains."[494] This insight, inspired undoubtedly from Lev Vygotsky's cultural-historical psychology, posits a human subject as a result of the interiorization of social norms and in no way pre-given biologically or otherwise. In this sense, Ilyenkov's anthropocentrism, while not fully evaporating, becomes considerably mediated by the category of social norms, which become the origin of the human capacity for idealization. Bakhurst rightly notes that Ilyenkov's radical rejection of the slightest mention of biology in the account of human subjectivity is rather unnecessary. Nonetheless, the anti-innatism thesis requalifies his anthropocentrism from a Kantian humanism where the subject (even if social or collective in Ilyenkov's case) institutes the world to a more dialectical position where the subject is both constituted and instituting, with all the problems that this double perspective entails.

[494] Bakhurst, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy*, p. 249.

Conclusion

It is now time to compare the Ilyenkov that was presented in the introduction to the one we are left with at the end of this study. But first, I shall indicate the shortcomings of my own work. While I attempted to analyze the core metaphysical proposition of Ilyenkov's dialectical logic, namely that of its identity theory, many aspects of his philosophy remain unexamined in this thesis. Given how closely interconnected Ilyenkov's various positions and views were, I do not have the right to claim that the elements I left out were irrelevant to my question. Most notably, I have chosen to leave out Ilyenkov's later engagement with cultural-historical psychology, his pedagogical work with deaf-blind children in Zagorsk and his last book *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism*. Besides these absences, I can retrospectively see shortcomings in my analysis of the subjects included in the thesis. Primarily, attention given to Ilyenkov's *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital* is rather insufficient and the book is only considered in relation to Althusser's *Reading Capital*. These are not secondary problems. A discussion of Ilyenkov's engagement with psychology and the resulting theory of personality could supplant my analysis with the necessary material for refining my positions on his humanism. Moreover, Ilyenkov's last book, with its defence of Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism,* poses a challenge to my interpretation of Ilyenkov's epistemology as different from reflection theory. Unfortunately, owing to the temporal and material limitations of this research, these themes could not be addressed. Given these constraints, this thesis does not claim to be exhaustive. Nevertheless, I would like to advance a set of considered claims.

Ultimately, I must report that Ilyenkov failed in converging matter and thought in the framework of dialectical materialism. It has become abundantly clear that neither his thought, nor that of Marx as read by Ilyenkov, appears as smooth and polished as his scholastic and didactic style of exposition might suggest. Behind the many triumphant conclusions about the "Marxist resolution" of this or that problem, lie unexamined conceptions that render them vulnerable. To summarize, Ilyenkov tried to reclaim dialectics from Soviet *Diamat* by abandoning its universalist scope, tying the method instead to the specific logics of specific

objects. In a word, he particularized Soviet dialectics. However, it is not enough to claim to follow the logic of the object. He had to account for the way his dialectic accessed the object's internal logic, or demonstrate that such a thing existed at all, instead of being his own projection. As we saw, Ilyenkov was far from seeing concepts as immediately expressing material phenomena. Indeed, such crude realism was precisely what he pushed away from. One look at his ever changing definitions of the ideal is sufficient to see how careful he was in avoiding reifying a dynamic object in a static concept. Yet, he believed such convergence to be ultimately possible. This implied several operations.

In his attempt to develop an alternative to the Orthodox version of dialectics, which understood thought to be an "internal" reflection of an "external" world and declared any object to be the expression of dialectical laws, Ilyenkov shifted the focus of Marxist philosophy from "the world as a whole" to "thought". By claiming that it is only through the study of thought and we can have access to being, he aimed to protect dialectics from ontologization, attributing methodological primacy to epistemology. At the same time, by changing the status of philosophy from a metascience into one particular science among others, he sought to introduce partiality in an otherwise strongly objectivist notion of knowledge stemming from the doctrine of reflection. This stance positioned Ilyenkov against the separation of Marxism into dialectical materialism (as pure ontology) and logic (as the study of correct propositions). In response, he proposed dialectical logic, the integrated discipline studying the transformations between thought and matter, supposed to surpass the dualist (idealist) separation between the two terms.

However, dialectical logic and the identity theory it was based on, besides being saturated with ideological meanings, had inherent problems. As I tried to demonstrate by crossreading the epistemological frameworks of Ilyenkov and Althusser, these problems stemmed from the general challenge of accounting for heterogeneous contradictions without succumbing either to an epistemological dualism that separates concept from object or to a totalizing framework, a sort of *Vereinigungsphilosophie*, that reduces particular differences to a unifying essence. If Althusser failed to converge thought with matter by renouncing both Hegelian expressive causality *and* substance monism (as it was developed in Soviet Spinozism), ultimately remaining with an epistemological dualism, Ilyenkov failed at the same task by taking practice to be the self-evident site of such convergence.

Ilyenkov's Spinozism is an example of endorsing the concept of the substance and remaining attentive to the risk - identified by Althusser - of homogenizing difference in the self-sameness of that vast whole. As we saw, Ilyenkov tried to avoid this with two main strategies: concrete universality and particularism. My discussion of the two authors showed

that the first strategy, that of concrete universality did not succeed in guaranteeing the autonomy of particular difference as it followed an expressive causality. His dialectic of the abstract and the concrete correctly captures Marx's method and allows us to see the way Marx's theory of value goes beyond that of classical economists. However, Ilyenkov's usage of the Hegelian concrete universality can only think difference on the basis of unity. The second strategy, that of particularism, has more potential, even if it is not without its problems. Namely, by differentiating various objects on the basis of their internal logic, which attributes them relative autonomy from the concrete totality they are otherwise embedded in, Ilyenkov manages to dilute the objectivism of naive realist epistemology of Soviet *Diamat.* Particularism maintains the multiplicity of objects in a tension with the substance, never fully reducing them to it, but neither severing them from it completely. But as I already argued, such an approach would benefit from insights of feminist standpoint epistemologies, as the questions of how and by whom is that internal logic articulated remain undertheorized in Ilyenkov. The question of the objectivity of knowledge also doesn't find an answer in particularism, but rather in the theory of the ideal.

While that theory is a highly nuanced account of operations involved in social practice, such as objectification, idealization, alienation, etc, the validity of its core claim hinges on the metaphysical scope of "practice." In other words, the specific objectivity and materiality of the ideal Ilyenkov advances is grounded in a concept that is said to surpass the limit between appearance and the in-itself. But as practice does not by itself account for the access to things beyond their correlation with consciousness, Ilyenkov ends up repeating the typically Soviet gesture of explaining away Kant by identifying matter with the thing in itself.

Moreover, Ilyenkov's concept of activity or practice (he uses the two interchangeably) suffers from other shortcomings. For example, its principle characteristic as a goal-oriented action begets a rationalist understanding that downplays the question of how those goals are set, or what ways are chosen to reach them. In this sense, supplanting the concept with insights from affect theory (Ilyenkov ignores the question of affects in Spinoza), or a theory of pre-conscious investments (as do Deleuze and Guattari, for example), would greatly advance what Ilyenkov began. But the most important problem in Ilyenkov's theory of the ideal, identified in this thesis, is its anthropocentrism. What is more, this problem does not only hinder the theory itself but constitutes a departure from Ilyenkov's own understanding of thought as an attribute of substance. In particular, by claiming that the ideal belongs to exclusively human practice - thereby redefining substance from matter/nature to labor - Ilyenkov contradicts his

earlier ontology, expressed in the *Cosmology*, which situated thought as intertwined with matter.

In this sense, we can say that the theory of the ideal gives us a glimpse of the difficulties that arise when we try to extrapolate a non-reductive, yet radically immanent ontology from Ilyenkov's *Cosmology of the Spirit*. The latter essay contains, as we saw, elements of a philosophy of ecology, with its conceptualizations of human-nature ethics as political and of those political ethics as cosmological. The arguments presented in the *Cosmology*, I maintain, were radically non-anthropocentric, peripheralizing the status of the human in the larger cycles of matter in movement and foregrounding the non-human dialectics of thought. It was this attention to the non-human that allowed me to undertake a comparative analysis of Ilyenkov's philosophy with some of the contemporary currents in materialism.

Yet the speculative framework of the planet's heat death structuring the plot of the essay could only provide Ilyenkov with an aesthetics, or poetics of the convergence between matter and thought. The theory of the ideal represents Ilyenkov's attempt at grasping that convergence conceptually and as we saw, this attempt ends up reversing the initial claims where matter can be said to be active and productive, replacing them with an anthropocentric framework where matter only received cultural meaning through human activity.

Besides the explanations I offered in the last chapter, such as anti-innatism, I would like to highlight another, noteworthy perspective relevant to this problem. Namely, Siarhei Biareishyk's interpretation of the ideal as transhistorical.[495] According to Biareishyk, the ideal is the transhistorical capacity of the thinking body, or in other words, the transhistorical function of the substance. In this way, the value-form, which Ilyenkov analyzes extensively as a prime example of the ideal, is only a historical form of abstraction that this function of the substance assumes in capitalism. This move considerably lessens the anthropocentric hold on Ilyenkov's theory. Moreover, Ilyenkov's own engagement with Spinoza offers theoretical resources for rethinking the nature-culture relation that determines his notion of the ideal. Namely, the Spinoza-inspired definition of thought as the body's capacity to act in accordance with the contours of other bodies implicitly highlights the affordability of material objects and therefore their availability for receiving some meanings and rejecting others. In this sense, the relation could be reframed as a negotiation[496] between social practice and matter, rather than a

[495] Biareishyk, "Linguaggio, denaro, ideale", p. 71.

[496] I would like to thank Marina Sportelli for providing me with this term that better expresses my argument.

unilateral imprinting of meaning on a meaningless surface. These are only indications but they could potentially bring us to revise Ilyenkov's theory in accordance with the materialist onto-epistemology he himself wished to articulate.

By claiming that Ilyenkov fails in converging matter with thought I don't mean to reject the relevance of the theory of the ideal for contemporary materialist philosophies. Despite its problems, the concept of the ideal remains a valuable case for the development of a non-reductive materialism equipped to account for symbolic systems of representation. With its drive towards socializing the notion of cognition, it can become a solid counter to individualist epistemologies of certain empiricisms and rational choice theories. Finally, one hardly needs to argue that social practice accesses the thing in itself in order to use this category in studying the history and philosophy of science. Praxeological approaches to science, for example in political epistemology, that focus on practitioners such as teachers, accountants or statisticians, open us to a world of insights that remain invisible within more traditional approaches.[497]

The tensions and contradictions observed in our discussion of Ilyenkov correspond to my initial claim concerning the multidimensionality of Soviet thought against its understanding as monolithic. In this sense, seeming contradictions such as the one between Ilyenkov's anti-Stalinist views and his choice of the Stalinist-held camp of dialectical logic, or the one between Ilyenkov's epistemologically oriented "Theses" and the ontologically oriented *Cosmology*, came to be explained by the specific conjuncture that shaped his thought. The historical discussion in the first chapter brought to the fore the intersection between economics, technology and science in the 1950s and 1960s. In light of that conjuncture, Ilyenkov's emphasis on dialectics was revealed to represent not only a conceptual alignment with Hegel and Marx, but a critical stance against the forced normalization initiated by Stalin. This circumstance points to the political core in Ilyenkov's dialectical logic. As I insisted, Ilyenkov didn't instrumentalize philosophy for political ends but extrapolated the political core at the heart of the theory itself. It is true that dialectical logic, as it was understood by Ilyenkov, is far from a finished project. As we saw, it is marked by simplifications, unexamined presuppositions and artificial homogenizations, especially as it pertains to uniting Hegel and Spinoza. Nonetheless, our discussions of Hegel's views on formal logic, McNulty's attempt at rehabilitating dialectical logic and Marx's early interest (as shown by Barbour) in such a project clearly demonstrates that this type of logic is not the product of Soviet speculative fantasies but

[497] See for example: Senthil D. Babu, *Mathematics and Society: Numbers and Measures in Early Modern South India* (Oxford University Press, 2023).

rooted in the historical-philosophical legacy of Marxism and German idealism. In the end, Ilyenkov's philosophy offers ample material for developing a materialism that is both immanent and non-reductive, yet I can not claim that this objective was reached by Ilyenkov himself.

Nevertheless, sublating the separation between ontology and epistemology remains a prescient task for any philosophy in the Anthropocene. In this sense, work on converging matter and thought must continue and Ilyenkov shows us a way beyond the pair of naive realism and social constructivism, demonstrating that dialectical materialism has an important contribution to make to this task.

Une partie de la thèse en français

Introduction

Les années 1960 en Union soviétique sont souvent présentées comme un moment de rééveil, où la capacité de pensée critique commence à se réaffirmer après sa suppression dogmatique durant l'ère stalinienne. Le concept de pensée, ainsi que la question corrélée de ce que signifie penser, devient central dans le paysage philosophique post-stalinien. Diverses théories de la pensée élaborées à cette époque tentent d'enraciner l'autonomie de la pensée, d'en souligner la nature sociale ou d'en définir les structures inhérentes. Le marxiste soviétique éminent Evald Ilyenkov, protagoniste de cette thèse, joue un rôle crucial dans le développement d'un concept dialectique de la pensée,[498] la comprenant comme un processus social, affrontant l'activité mentale individuelle comme une force extérieure : « aussi objective que les montagnes et les arbres, la lune et les étoiles… »,[499] émergeant d'une activité (*deatel'nost'*) impliquant une interaction complexe entre les phénomènes matériels et idéels.

Ilyenkov voit dans le matérialisme dialectique la tâche d'élaborer une théorie de l'idéalité qui enracine sa forme particulière de matérialité, tout en évitant de l'identifier à la physiologie ou au langage. S'appuyant sur la définition marxienne de la valeur comme forme purement idéele,[500] ni mentale ni physique, Ilyenkov élargit le concept d'idéel, le définissant comme un

[498] L'emploi du terme « pensée » en tant que tel pose évidemment la question de son universalisme implicite. En gardant à l'esprit les principales sources d'Ilyenkov, il devient clair que l'objet est la pensée philosophique européenne. Ce défi sera abordé dans les sections suivantes.

[499] Alex Levant and Vesa Oittinen, eds., *Dialectics of the Ideal: Evald Ilyenkov and Creative Soviet Marxism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015). p. 74.

[500] "The price or money-form of commodities is, like their form of value generally, quite distinct from their palpable and real bodily form; it is therefore a purely ideal or notional form." - Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy; v.1*, Penguin Classics (London New York: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1990). p. 189.

moment émergent de la pratique sociale, irréductible à des organes individuels comme le cerveau, même s'il s'y incarne. Deux grandes problématiques animent sa philosophie : la critique du réductionnisme — compris comme la réduction de strates ontologiques complexes à des niveaux plus simples — et celle du dualisme — la vision d'un monde scindé entre objets inanimés et entités surnaturelles.

S'inspirant de l'idéalisme allemand, de Spinoza et de Marx, Ilyenkov cherche à formuler un matérialisme moniste capable de rendre compte des phénomènes immatériels en tant que dotés d'une « objectivité particulière ».[501] Bien qu'ancré dans le cadre épistémologique marxien, il tente d'en dépasser les limites pour produire une exposition systématique de la dialectique — tâche inachevée que Marx lui-même avait envisagée sans jamais la mener à terme.[502]

Cependant, le projet d'Ilyenkov demeure inachevé, en raison des persécutions idéologiques récurrentes que lui infligeait la nomenklatura, l'empêchant de poursuivre librement sa réflexion jusqu'au bout et le menant, en mars 1979, à se suicider. Confronté à son époque, Ilyenkov doit consacrer un temps et un effort considérables à réparer les dégâts causés au marxisme par le Stalinisme. Comme le rapporte Abdusalam Guseynov :

> La pression politique sur la philosophie alla si loin dans les années 1930 et 1940 que son existence ultérieure ne pouvait être qu'un mouvement de redressement rétroactif. La philosophie des années 1950 à 1980… fut essentiellement la négation, de plus une négation consciencieuse et persistante, de la philosophie des années 1930 et 1940.[503]

Cette situation peut expliquer pourquoi une grande partie de la recherche consacrée à l'héritage d'Ilyenkov le dépeint comme un combattant solitaire contre le dogme ossifié du parti

---

[501] Levant and Oittinen, *Dialectics of the Ideal*. p. 67.

[502] "When I have cast off the burden of political economy, I shall write a 'Dialectic'." - Karl Marx, "Letter to Joseph Dietzgen in Petersburg" London, 9 May 1868; *in Marx Engels Collected Works*, Volume 43: Marx & Engels 1868-70: Letters: April 1868 - July 1870 (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 31.

[503] Abdusalam Guseynov, "The Philosophy of the Russian Sixtiers in the Humanist Context: A Philosophical Reflection," in *Philosophical Thought in Russia in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: A Contemporary View from Russia and Abroad*, Ed. by Vladislav. A. Lektorsky and Marina F. Bykova (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), p. 96.

communiste.[504] Sa propre pensée se comprend au mieux comme une tentative de sauver le matérialisme dialectique soviétique de son impasse théorique, par un commentaire critique des constructions philosophiques de cette tradition. Son intervention est conditionnée par la conjoncture historique spécifique d'un système socialiste d'État en transition d'un régime autoritaire vers une administration plus démocratique.[505] Ilyenkov ne s'est pas seulement montré favorable à cette transition : il y a activement participé par son travail intellectuel. L'échec final du projet de démocratisation soviétique des années 1960 fut ressenti par lui comme l'échec de son propre travail de toute une vie.

Cependant, si la résistance au marxisme simpliste de l'appareil officiel constitue un aspect important de sa pensée, sa philosophie mérite selon moi d'être étudiée pour elle-même, en en critiquant les diverses lacunes, ambivalences et contradictions, au-delà de ses limites initiales. Les études soviétiques, qu'elles soient occidentales ou locales, avaient tendance à ériger le Diamat (matérialisme dialectique) stalinien en sommet du marxisme soviétique. Par conséquent, les théories qui s'en distinguaient étaient soit reliées de force à celui-ci en tant que précurseurs contenant le germe du dogme ultérieur,[506] soit rejetées comme de simples déviations. Cette lecture centrée sur le Stalinisme est réductrice et ferme des pistes de recherche importantes.

À travers une reconstruction critique de la philosophie d'Ilyenkov, je soutiendrai qu'il propose une épistémologie des phénomènes immatériels, intangibles, mais dotés d'une objectivité particulière, en tant que formes de la pratique sociale, et ce faisant, il tente de combler le fossé entre la connaissance et son objet. Une compréhension des succès, des échecs et du résultat final de cette tentative constituera l'apport de la présente thèse. Ilyenkov voulait décentrer la corrélation entre pensée et matière des notions d'intériorité et d'extériorité. Le «

[504] Voir: Sergey Mareev, *From the History of Soviet Philosophy: Lukács – Vygotsky – Ilyenkov* (Moscow: Kul'turnaia revoliutsiia, 2008).

[505] Voir: Aleksandr Bikbov, *Grammatika porjadka: istoričeskaja sociologija ponjatij, kotorye menjajut našu real'nost'*, Serija Social′naja teorija (Moskva: Izdat. Dom Vysšej Školy Ėkonomiki - VŠĖ, 2014).
[506] Voir: Maria Chehonadskih, *Alexander Bogdanov and the Politics of Knowledge after the October Revolution.* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023). p. 10.

principal défaut » (Marx) de toute philosophie jusqu'alors était, pour lui, la clôture de la pensée sur elle-même, rendant le monde matériel purement extérieur.

Son élucidation progressive de la relation entre matière et pensée nous permet de comprendre les processus de médiation par lesquels l'idéel et le matériel s'interpénètrent et se co-déterminent. Son intervention vise, selon moi, à réconcilier la vision matérialiste de l'humain comme être naturel, porteur d'organes biologiques et soumis à des lois physiques, avec la vision post-critique du naturel comme construit socialement à travers les pratiques scientifiques et culturelles. Ce projet synthétique donne lieu à deux interprétations principales, correspondant aux deux pôles de l'intervention d'Ilyenkov. Les recherches insistant sur le caractère ontologique et objectal de sa dialectique tendent à le classer parmi les réalistes naïfs, partisans de la théorie du reflet, qui voient la dialectique dans la nature non humaine.[507] À l'inverse, les commentateurs mettant en avant sa philosophie de la personnalité et sa théorie de la cognition le présentent comme un humaniste à la Kant, maintenant la division sujet-objet.[508]

Ilyenkov fournit des éléments pour les deux interprétations. Prise isolément, son insistance sur l'origine exclusivement humaine de l'idéel finit par reproduire le dualisme qu'il cherchait à dépasser. Si sa suggestion selon laquelle la pensée se trouve objectivée dans le processus du travail est en ligne avec l'abandon marxien de la pensée centrée sur la subjectivité, sa conception du travail comme activité humaine finalisée néglige le rôle des acteurs non humains dans ce processus, culminant en une vision anthropocentrique du marxisme. Pourtant, à la lumière de l'esprit général du projet d'Ilyenkov, visant à fusionner ontologie et épistémologie,

[507] Oittinen, bien sûr, n'identifie pas complètement Ilyenkov au réalisme naïf du type soviétique, mais nuance ce parallèle de la manière suivante : « Ilyenkov était pleinement conscient de la banalité et de l'inviabilité du "diamat" (matérialisme dialectique) soviétique, et son propre "programme" peut être caractérisé comme une tentative de restaurer une véritable culture philosophique en URSS en revenant à la tradition hégélienne... Cependant, la tradition intellectuelle soviétique a laissé sa marque même sur la pensée d'un érudit aussi étranger au dogmatisme qu'Ilyenkov. Cela est particulièrement évident dans l'« ontologisme » qui, à partir des travaux d'A. M. Deborin, a constitué un trait caractéristique de la philosophie du style diamant. Cet ontologisme s'exprime dans l'affirmation que la réalité, en tant que telle, est intrinsèquement dialectique". Vesa Oittinen, "Dialekticeskye Varijatsii Ilyenkova, Ili Pocemu Ne Kant Vmesto Gegelja," *Logos* 1 (69) (2009). p. 90.

[508] Valentin Tolstyh, *Eval'd Vasil'evič Il'enkov*, Filosofy Rossii vtoroj poloviny XX veka (Moskva: ROSSPÈN, 2009). p. 39.

une telle séparation paraît unilatérale — tout comme l'interprétation ontologique, lorsqu'elle est déconnectée de son intérêt pour les possibilités de la cognition.

Pour dépasser cette tension, je propose d'explorer une lecture alternative de la philosophie d'Ilyenkov, fondée sur une ligne de pensée rarement développée, permettant de situer son humanisme comme condition d'une théorie non anthropocentrique. Cette fusion paradoxale d'un humanisme non anthropocentrique constitue une contradiction féconde, remontant aux Manuscrits de 1844 de Marx, célèbre témoignage de sa « phase humaniste ». Or, comme le note Kolozova, cette « phase humaniste est radicalement non anthropocentrique »[509] en ce qu'elle privilégie une notion d'objectivité sur le positivisme. Je montrerai notamment que, chez Ilyenkov, l'humain devient en fin de compte le prédicat de son activité propre — le travail. En ce sens, son humanisme ne conduit pas à une admiration de quelque essence humaine unique, mais particularise l'humain dans une vision cosmique plus large du matérialisme. Suivant Spinoza, Ilyenkov définit la pensée comme un mode d'action du corps, la dissociant (dans un premier temps) de l'humain pour la réinscrire dans le mouvement de la matière.

Concernant la présence d'une dialectique objective dans son œuvre, je soutiens qu'Ilyenkov conçoit l'ontologie non comme une première philosophie, mais comme inhérente à la logique dialectique, incluse en elle comme aspect nécessaire. En effet, si, comme le soutient Ilyenkov, la logique dialectique se distingue de la logique formelle en ce qu'elle ne concerne pas seulement le concept, mais sa relation à l'objet — l'idéel au matériel — alors logique et ontologie ne peuvent être séparées. Je cite Ilyenkov pour illustrer ce point:

> La seule façon d'atteindre une résolution rationnelle des contradictions dans une définition théorique est de retracer la manière dont elles se résolvent dans le mouvement de la réalité objective, le mouvement et le développement du monde des choses « en soi ».[510]

Les guillemets autour du terme « en soi » suggèrent un rejet de sa définition kantienne, ouvrant la voie à l'accusation de métaphysique pré-critique. La question décisive pourrait alors se formuler ainsi : la dialectique sujet-objet dans la philosophie d'Ilyenkov permet-elle un accès non médiatisé au monde physique ? La réponse n'est pas évidente. La « science de la pensée »

[509] Katerina Kolozova - *"Marx vs. Hegel,"* Video, 2021.

[510] Evald Ilyenkov, *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982). p. 244.

d'Ilyenkov diffère de la « science et critique de la connaissance » kantienne en ce qu'elle ne considère pas la médiation cognitive de l'accès du sujet à l'objet comme un obstacle, mais comme ce qui rend cet accès possible. Comme il le déclare dans son manifeste de 1954, *Thèses sur l'objet de la philosophie* :

> Les lois dialectiques, dans leur pureté et abstraction, ne peuvent être étudiées et clarifiées par la philosophie qu'en tant que catégories logiques, en tant que lois de la pensée dialectique. Ce n'est qu'en faisant de la pensée théorique, du processus de connaissance, son objet que la philosophie inclut en elle l'étude des caractéristiques les plus générales de l'être, et non l'inverse, comme on le soutient si souvent. La philosophie est la science de la pensée scientifique, de ses lois et de ses formes.[511]

L'« être » semble ici compris comme faisant partie de la pensée théorique, plutôt que comme une entité donnée en soi à la philosophie. Afin d'éviter un retour à une position pré-critique tout en élaborant une ontologie dialectique, Ilyenkov emploie la méthode marxienne du passage de l'abstrait au concret, analysée en profondeur dans son ouvrage de 1960 *La dialectique de l'abstrait et du concret dans le Capital de Marx*. Comme il l'explique, la connaissance saisit son objet comme un tout organique, en cristallisant le développement de ses interrelations, à l'image du traitement marxien de la forme marchande. Situer ainsi le problème implique en même temps de se situer par rapport à lui. On s'éloigne ainsi d'un commencement cartésien fondé sur une vérité absolue et un ego isolé. Au contraire, la méthode de Marx, selon Ilyenkov, commence avec un objet historiquement conditionné, toujours déjà enraciné dans une totalité concrète et abordé à partir d'un point de vue déterminé. Or, ce principe méthodologique n'implique pas une primauté du sujet sur l'objet, mais une reconnaissance des limites historiques de la capacité de cognition du sujet fini, sans pour autant relativiser sa connaissance à l'individu.

Le choix d'Ilyenkov pour ma thèse est déterminé par ma position vis-à-vis de la scission historique entre le marxisme soviétique et le marxisme occidental.[512] L'interprétation que

[511] Evald Ilyenkov and Valentin Korovikov, "Theses on the Question of the Interconnection of Philosophy and Knowledge of Nature and Society in the Process of Their Historical Development," in *Philosophical Thought in Russia in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century. A Contemporary View from Russia and Abroad* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019). p. 67.

[512] Comme l'a théorisé Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1989).

donne Ilyenkov de la philosophie de Marx résiste à toute classification dans ces cadres conventionnels,[513] car elle rejette fondamentalement ces catégories. Bien que certains éléments de sa pensée résonnent dans les deux courants – pour autant qu'on ne les considère pas comme monolithiques –, il ne s'inscrit ni dans le matérialisme dialectique de la tradition soviétique, ni dans le matérialisme historique qui a dominé en Occident. Le rejet de cette division par Ilyenkov n'est pas simplement rhétorique, il est inhérent à l'architecture même de ses idées philosophiques. En lecteur attentif de Marx et en critique résolu de ses diverses simplifications, Ilyenkov offre des perspectives essentielles pour repenser le marxisme en son cœur philosophique. Matérialiste particulièrement préoccupé par l'idéalité, Ilyenkov a dénoncé le marxisme mécaniste et réductionniste de ses contemporains soviétiques, brisant ainsi la hiérarchisation bien établie entre infrastructure et superstructure qui empêchait les philosophes soviétiques d'élaborer une théorie marxiste de la culture. En mettant en lumière les relations dialectiques de transformation du matériel en idéel, il a ouvert la voie à une conception de la connaissance comme pratique matérielle, activité corporelle d'un sujet socialisé.

Et pourtant, dans une manière typiquement soviétique de comprendre la dialectique de la nature d'Engels comme une continuation de la philosophie implicite de Marx, Ilyenkov s'oppose également aux courants strictement culturalistes du marxisme occidental, qui, dans leurs formes visibles, dissocient la dialectique sociale de Marx de son prolongement engelsien vers la nature non humaine.[514] Si la lecture d'Ilyenkov des œuvres de Marx et d'Engels comme complémentaires est typiquement soviétique, son interprétation d'Engels, en revanche, ne l'est guère. Ce qui l'intéresse n'est pas le monde « tel qu'il est », mais notre être-au-monde et la transformation pratique du monde par le travail. Avec cette approche, Ilyenkov cherche à éviter de retomber dans la vieille dichotomie nature/culture et poursuit plutôt une ligne théorique qui fusionne ontologie et épistémologie. À la lumière des débats contemporains sur l'écosocialisme

[513] Je limite ici la discussion aux marxismes occidentaux et soviétiques, en laissant de côté les autres courants. Ce n'est pas que les marxismes chinois, argentin, indien ou caribéen n'apportent pas d'éclairage intéressant pour notre propos, mais pour limiter la portée de ma reconstruction. Pour situer la philosophie d'Ilyenkov, le clivage entre ces deux courants joue un rôle déterminant.

[514] On pourrait citer Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Korsch ou le jeune Georg Lukács, entre autres. Le point commun est la position anti-réaliste. Cette liste n'épuise pas le « marxisme occidental », mais elle en exprime l'une des principales inflexions.

et l'Anthropocène, cette perspective rend Ilyenkov aussi actuel que n'importe quel marxiste vivant.[515] La portée de cette ambition apparaîtra plus clairement au fil de notre progression.

Je commencerai par retracer le développement intellectuel d'Ilyenkov, depuis ses premières réflexions philosophiques jusqu'à ses œuvres publiées, en passant par l'important corpus posthume longtemps resté dans l'ombre en raison de la censure soviétique. J'identifierai trois caractéristiques distinctes qui, selon moi, sont essentielles pour définir la conception du marxisme chez Ilyenkov :

1. La combinaison de la dialectique hégélienne avec une ontologie spinoziste,
2. L'objectivité particulière attribuée aux entités non matérielles,
3. L'articulation d'une critique marxiste de l'économie politique avec une anthropologie philosophique fondée sur le concept d'activité.

Ensemble, ces caractéristiques suggèrent que l'œuvre d'Ilyenkov constitue un moment charnière dans l'histoire de la pensée marxiste. Cette recherche vise à définir ce moment.

Mais pour étayer mon argumentation, je reconstruirai d'abord les antécédents de la pensée d'Ilyenkov afin de montrer comment les débats soviétiques antérieurs nourrissent sa réflexion. Pour ce faire, je reviendrai sur les discussions pré-révolutionnaires et du début de l'ère soviétique entre des figures comme V. Lénine, G. Plekhanov, A. Bogdanov, A. Deborine et L. Axelrod à propos de la dialectique hégélienne, du monisme de la substance spinoziste et de l'épistémologie kantienne. Ces débats souvent conflictuels, forgés par des interprétations intenses mais parfois erronées, ont jeté les bases de ce qui sera plus tard consolidé sous le nom de « marxisme soviétique ». Après une brève description du processus de stalinisation de la philosophie soviétique, je passerai au moment historique d'Ilyenkov : le « dégel » sous Khrouchtchev et la « stagnation » sous Brejnev. Une analyse de la reconstitution de la sphère publique dans les années 1960 après la mort de Staline me permettra de caractériser la position particulière, intermédiaire, qu'Ilyenkov y occupait.

C'est dans ce contexte que nous commencerons notre lecture de la production textuelle d'Ilyenkov avec ses premières « Thèses sur le sujet de la philosophie », qui visaient à détourner le marxisme soviétique de l'élaboration de lois abstraites de la dialectique de la nature vers l'étude de la pensée scientifique. Ce déplacement, soutiendrai-je, visait à corriger l'inflexion réaliste naïve du matérialisme dialectique en introduisant la question de la cognition comme

[515] Yuliya Yurchenko, "Humans, Nature and Dialectical Materialism," *Capital & Class* 45, no. 1 (March 2020). p. 7.

condition de possibilité d'un « matérialisme intelligent » (Lénine). Bien qu'Ilyenkov ait rejeté certains aspects de ses « Thèses » à plusieurs reprises, ce rejet était dû à l'immense pression exercée par des réunions punitives du parti qui se sont étalées sur plusieurs années, comme le montrera mon analyse des procès-verbaux de ces réunions. En outre, sa production ultérieure maintient clairement les principes essentiels exprimés dans les « Thèses ».

Prenant pour point de départ ce passage du marxisme soviétique d'un réalisme naïf à un cadre épistémologique plus complexe, j'analyserai l'œuvre philosophique d'Ilyenkov comme une tentative systématique de réconcilier ontologie et épistémologie dans les paramètres du matérialisme dialectique. Les sources qui fournissent à Ilyenkov les outils théoriques nécessaires à ce projet – Marx lu à travers Hegel et Spinoza – esquissent une image d'un marxisme qui, s'éloignant de ses interprétations orthodoxes, réclame une revitalisation dans le contexte des débats marxistes contemporains. Mon engagement avec la pensée d'Ilyenkov s'articule comme une enquête critique sur cette lignée philosophique possible, orientant ma recherche autour des questions suivantes :

- Comment la pensée saisit-elle son objet dans le processus de connaissance, lorsque les deux termes ne sont pas extérieurs l'un à l'autre ?
- Où se situent les limites de Spinoza dans le projet d'Ilyenkov et comment Hegel permet-il de les dépasser ?
- Comment la relation entre l'humain et la nature est-elle conçue dans une philosophie qui synthétise humanisme et dialectique de la nature ?
- Et enfin, comment Ilyenkov théorise-t-il l'exploitation, la domination et le communisme ?

Ce questionnement philosophique sera accompagné de ce que l'on pourrait appeler une enquête externaliste sur les raisons historiques du choix par Ilyenkov de sujets comme la méthode de Marx et le concept d'idéel dans le contexte d'une économie socialiste d'État en phase de transition.

En effet, si la métaphysique européenne traditionnelle a accompagné le développement intellectuel d'Ilyenkov, c'est toujours en lien avec une préoccupation politique. Sa critique de l'idéalisme allemand se double d'une critique – moins perceptible – de la société. S'il est vrai, comme l'ont affirmé Shaffer et Shapin, que « les solutions au problème de la connaissance sont des solutions au problème de l'ordre social »,[516] alors l'engagement épistémologique

[516] Steven Shapin, Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1985). p. 332.

d'Ilyenkov avec Hegel, Marx ou Kant peut être lu comme une critique voilée de la société soviétique contemporaine. Ilyenkov envisageait une modernité socialiste alternative après le Stalinisme, en se concentrant sur l'éducation, la technologie et le processus de travail. En ce sens, sa logique dialectique visait à libérer le marxisme soviétique de son orientation technocratique,[517] à rendre possible une philosophie matérialiste de l'éducation qui échapperait au « ghetto épistémologique » de l'hyper-spécialisation et à théoriser une universalité concrète émergeant par le bas plutôt qu'imposée d'en haut. À cet égard, l'identité théorique de la pensée et de l'être qu'il cherchait à formuler apparaît comme le reflet de l'identité dialectique entre l'individu et le commun que le communisme réaliserait pratiquement.[518]

La pensée d'Ilyenkov incarne un projet de revitalisation du marxisme par la confrontation à ses limites théoriques. S'y engager n'est donc pas un simple exercice de reconstitution historique. Mon intention est de contribuer à la théorie et à l'histoire culturelle du post-Stalinisme, en questionnant la compréhension de sa philosophie officielle du marxisme humaniste. Cette dernière, selon moi, ne visait pas simplement à subvertir l'idéologie stalinienne, mais formulait une alternative qui mérite une attention académique propre. Des questions épistémologiques essentielles comme les collaborations ou les confrontations entre philosophie et sciences naturelles, les relations entre technologie et économie, ou les conceptions de l'écologie dans le socialisme, constituent un héritage historique qui dépasse son ancrage géographique ou temporel. La critique du scientisme dans la philosophie soviétique qu'élabore Ilyenkov résonne dans certains débats des *science studies*,[519] sa vision de la

[517] « Si, en revanche, la science et la technique échappent à la compréhension historico-matérialiste, l'humanité risque de s'engager non pas dans la voie du socialisme, mais dans celle de la technocratie ; ce n'est pas la société qui domine la technique, mais la technique qui domine la société, et cela ne vaut pas seulement pour le monde occidental où la pensée technocratique est fondée sur le positivisme ; c'est tout aussi vrai pour certains pays socialistes qui révèrent la technocratie au nom du « matérialisme dialectique ». Alfred Sohn-Rethel, Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology (Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Humanities Press, 1978). p. 3.

[518] Nous suivons ici la thèse de Keti Chukhrov selon laquelle : « Le déclencheur de cette dialectique de la convergence de la matière et de l'esprit, ce sont les conditions politico-économiques du communisme », Keti Chukhrov, Practicing the Good: Desire and Boredom in Soviet Socialism (Minnesota: Minnesota press, 2020), p. 294.

[519] Monika Woźniak and Andrzej W. Nowak, "Fighting for Philosophy in the Marxian Sense: Introduction to Evald Ilyenkov's "On the State of Philosophy [Letter to the Central Committee of the Party]," *Studies in East European Thought* 76, no. 3 (September 2024), p. 554.

cybernétique est pertinente pour les recherches sur le capitalisme cognitif,[520] et ses travaux en psychologie sont aujourd'hui mobilisés dans le champ des sciences de l'éducation.[521]

[520] Keti Chukhrov, "Towards the Space of the General: On Labor beyond Materiality and Immateriality," *E-Flux*, no. 20 (2010), p. 5.

[521] Annalisa Sannino, Harry Daniels, and Kris D. Gutiérrez, "Activity Theory Between Historical Engagement and Future-Making Practice," in *Learning and Expanding with Activity Theory*, ed. Annalisa Sannino, Harry Daniels, and Kris D. Gutiérrez (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1–16.

Méthodologie

Sous ses formes multiples, le marxisme soviétique est issu de l'expérience du socialisme historique. L'actualiser aujourd'hui exige un certain travail de traduction, afin de naviguer à travers les « écarts épistémologiques »[522] entre cet événement et notre présent. Certains concepts qui structuraient le discours philosophique soviétique sont désormais discrédités comme idéologiques. En ce sens, le problème étudié ici impose une méthodologie spécifique.

En plus de l'analyse systématique des textes qui constitue une part majeure de cette thèse, j'emploie les méthodes de la sociologie de la pratique philosophique et de l'épistémologie politique. Cette dernière me permet de retracer les liens entre progrès scientifiques et politiques en URSS, en m'intéressant aux valeurs et objectifs qui orientent le travail intellectuel. La philosophie soviétique tardive s'est développée dans une oscillation constante entre motivations intellectuelles et idéologiques, sous un contrôle administratif renforcé. Dans ce contexte, la publication en 2014 de *La Grammaire de l'ordre* d'Alexandre Bikbov représente un tournant pour les recherches sur le discours et la philosophie soviétiques tardifs. Bikbov y emploie la méthode de la sémantique sociohistorique, en traçant les motifs récurrents dans les publications académiques dès la fin des années 1950. Il y démontre, par exemple, un glissement du centre d'intérêt théorique depuis la « construction du communisme » (thème central de l'ère stalinienne) vers la « personnalité harmonieusement développée » (concept au cœur du projet théorique d'Ilyenkov). Ce dernier est devenu une notion clé du langage politique de l'administration d'État et un élément structurant de l'ordre symbolique de la vie soviétique tardive. Comme le montre Bikbov, dès les années 1960, ce concept fondait la (re)création de disciplines telles que la sociologie ou la psychologie de la personnalité, pénétrait le droit pénal soviétique et figurait même dans les discours des dirigeants du Parti, devenant ainsi une composante centrale de l'imaginaire hégémonique de l'État.

L'approche sociologique permet donc de considérer les concepts théorisés par Ilyenkov non comme de simples préférences intellectuelles, mais comme des lieux de confrontation entre les

[522] Keti Chukhrov, "Epistemological Gaps between the Former Soviet East and the 'Democratic' West," *E-Flux* 41 (2013).

camps conservateurs et réformateurs de la philosophie soviétique. En prenant en compte les divers mécanismes administratifs de régulation de la production du savoir, cette approche permet de mieux comprendre les spécificités de la philosophie soviétique tardive.

Cette méthode permet aussi d'éviter le geste typique des études soviétiques consistant à isoler un auteur pour défendre la singularité de son œuvre. Mon objectif est au contraire de dépasser la mémoire construite autour d'Ilyenkov et de le replacer dans le contexte plus large de la culture philosophique soviétique. Cela implique de dépasser le récit habituel qui oppose, d'un côté, la « philosophie soviétique officielle et dogmatique » des cadres du Parti, et de l'autre, la « philosophie créative et non officielle » de la période soviétique. Ma méthode vise à transcender cette opposition binaire entre auteurs dogmatiques et créatifs afin de faire émerger une histoire multidimensionnelle de la pensée soviétique tardive.

Je fais donc référence à des événements extérieurs à la philosophie pour reconstruire, avec la plus grande précision possible, le contexte dans lequel la pensée d'Ilyenkov s'est développée. Cette approche ne répond pas à une simple exigence de contextualisation : le cas d'Ilyenkov l'impose de manière spécifique. La saturation idéologique de la philosophie en URSS produisait souvent des situations déroutantes. Par exemple, pourquoi Ilyenkov, qui cherchait à repenser le matérialisme dialectique sous un nouveau jour, est-il devenu un défenseur de la logique dialectique, alors même qu'elle était à l'époque soutenue par les staliniens les plus conservateurs ? C'est ce type de questions qui nécessite une perspective sociohistorique élargie.

Antinomies du marxisme soviétique : les débats initiaux

Le problème central auquel la philosophie soviétique s'est confrontée à ses débuts est celui formulé par Engels comme la question fondamentale de la philosophie : le rapport entre la pensée et l'être. Engels, en abordant cette question, proposa une dichotomie historique, divisant la philosophie en deux camps irréconciliables : matérialiste et idéaliste. Selon sa distinction, les matérialistes tirent leurs cadres conceptuels de la nature, qu'ils posent comme fondement ontologique de la pensée, tandis que les idéalistes inversent cet ordre, concevant la nature comme un produit des structures logiques du sujet. Comme nous le verrons, cette distinction a posé des difficultés importantes aux philosophes soviétiques, toute tentative de mettre en avant le caractère génératif de l'expérience risquant d'être rejetée comme de l'idéalisme.[523] Comme l'écrivait Engels :

> Les principes du matérialisme ne sont pas le point de départ de l'investigation, mais son résultat final ; ils ne s'appliquent pas à la nature et à l'histoire humaine, mais en sont abstraits ; ce ne sont pas la nature et le monde humain qui se conforment à ces principes, mais ces principes qui sont valides dans la mesure où ils sont conformes à la nature et à l'histoire.[524]

Cette formulation est polémique et vise à contrer l'erreur de Dühring consistant à « appliquer » des principes préétablis à l'histoire ou à la nature. Cependant, la position d'Engels, qui privilégie l'« abstraction » des principes à partir de la nature, soulève également des questions épistémologiques cruciales : comment se produit exactement ce processus d'abstraction ? Comment le sujet peut-il s'assurer que les principes abstraits proviennent bien de la nature et ne sont pas une simple projection idéologique de ses propres catégories ? Autrement dit, qu'est-ce qui garantit la continuité entre concept et objet, ou la « conformité aux faits » des concepts vis-à-vis de la nature et de l'histoire ?

[523] Alexandre Bogdanov sera l'un des premiers marxistes à être considéré comme un idéaliste pour cette même raison. Des décennies plus tard, Ilyenkov connaîtra le même sort.

[524] Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 2021), p. 36.

Engels tenta de résoudre ce problème en postulant une immanence du sujet et de l'objet. Pour lui, l'esprit ne se trouve pas dans un rapport externe à la matière, mais il est historiquement et ontologiquement continu avec elle. Dans ce cadre, la distinction entre pensée et être est interne à l'être lui-même. La pensée ne peut être réduite à un simple sous-produit de la matière, sans pour autant s'en détacher totalement. Ainsi, le concept ne rencontre pas de séparation dans son mouvement vers l'objet. Une telle vision donne une image moniste de l'être et de la pensée, les considérant comme finalement identiques. Cela conduit cependant à un point de tension essentiel, tant dans le marxisme soviétique que dans certains courants du marxisme occidental : comment construire une ontologie immanente de l'être et de la pensée sans réduire l'un à l'autre ? Autrement dit, comment une ontologie qui affirme l'existence de la nature indépendamment de l'être social peut-elle, en même temps, rendre compte de la spécificité de l'être social sans le dissoudre dans des processus naturels schématisés ?

Cette tension – entre le rejet du dualisme, d'une part, et l'évitement de réductions mécanistes, biologisantes ou assimilées, d'autre part – a nourri d'importants débats philosophiques au sein du marxisme d'après-guerre.[525] Le Lukács tardif, par exemple, soutenait qu'une ontologie non réductrice nécessite la reconnaissance de continuités émergentes entre des strates distinctes – l'inorganique, l'organique et le social – pour préserver l'autonomie de chacune sans les réifier en sphères autosuffisantes.[526] L'approche soviétique consista à conceptualiser l'esprit comme immanent à la matière – qu'elle soit physique, chimique ou organique – tout en affirmant son irréductibilité à ces strates.

C'est ici qu'apparaît une distinction essentielle entre le marxisme soviétique et le marxisme occidental : à savoir, la nature spéculative du premier. Tandis que le marxisme occidental – à quelques exceptions notables près – tendait vers un « matérialisme sans matière »,[527] mettant l'accent sur la matérialité sociale et historique, la philosophie soviétique s'est engagée de

[525] « Bien que les écrits les plus célèbres de Lukács et d'Althusser, datant respectivement de 1923 et de 1965, impliquent tous deux le rejet d'un naturalisme matérialiste dialectique de la nature humaine autodénaturante, chacun de ces deux penseurs marxistes, dans leurs autocritiques, en vient par la suite à accepter précisément un tel naturalisme. » Adrian Johnston, *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism. Volume Two: A Weak Nature Alone*, *Diaeresis* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020), p. 154.

[526] Voir: Georg Lukács, *Prolegomena zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins, Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins*, 1. Halbband, edited by Frank Benseler, (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1984).

[527] Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx* (London: New York: Verso, 1995). p. 23.

manière constante avec le concept de matière, tant sur le plan ontologique qu'épistémologique. Loren Graham soulignait cet aspect du marxisme soviétique :

> En Union soviétique, les philosophes n'ont pas cherché à débarrasser Marx de son intérêt pour l'ensemble de la réalité, y compris la nature physique aussi bien qu'humaine ; ils n'ont pas suivi la tendance observée ailleurs consistant à abandonner l'effort de construire des explications globales de la réalité fondées sur l'étude même de la nature. Ils ont reconnu que l'un des aspects intellectuellement les plus séduisants du marxisme est son explication de l'unité organique de la réalité ; selon le marxisme, l'homme et la nature ne font qu'un.[528]

Comme Graham le remarque plus tard, cette insistance sur l'unité de « l'homme et la nature » servira en fin de compte à légitimer une idéologie autoritaire et totalisante. L'accent soviétique mis sur la matière et l'ontologie a, en effet, contribué à la rigidité idéologique du marxisme soviétique. Mais un tel accent implique-t-il nécessairement une métaphysique non critique ? Les études soviétiques abordent fréquemment les philosophes orthodoxes avec pour but principal d'en exposer le dogmatisme. Toutefois, comme le souligne Maja Soboleva, « nul besoin d'être marxiste ni sympathisant de l'Union soviétique pour reconnaître que, chaque fois que nous sommes enclins à ne voir en elle qu'un contenu idéologique, un examen attentif révèle qu'elle prend sa source dans une véritable réflexion philosophique ».[529] En retraçant les fondements théoriques de positions apparemment dogmatiques, on peut discerner les interrogations philosophiques authentiques qu'elles tentaient de traiter. Dans cette optique, l'engagement soviétique avec le concept de matière – et les multiples interprétations qui en ont émergé dans les premières années – remet en question l'identification simpliste de la matière/l'ontologie avec le dogmatisme en marxisme.

---

[528] Loren R. Graham, *Science, Philosophy and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union*, An expanded, updated and revised ed. of "Science and philosophy in the Soviet Union" (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 29-30.

[529] Maja Soboleva, "Russian Marxism and Its Philosophy: From Theory to Ideology," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Russian Thought*, ed. Marina F. Bykova, Michael N. Forster, and Lina Steiner (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), p. 287.

Le marxisme soviétique et la chose en soi

Dans les premières formulations du marxisme soviétique, la catégorie de matière était assimilée à la notion de réalité extérieure. Cela fut exprimé de manière particulièrement aiguë dans la polémique entre Alexandre Bogdanov et Vladimir Lénine concernant le statut de la chose en soi. En défendant ce concept contre le courant philosophique de l'empiriomonisme, Lénine, avec Plekhanov, tenta de redéfinir la chose en soi, en la débarrassant de ses connotations kantiennes de noumène inconnaissable. Plutôt que de désigner une réalité à jamais hors de portée de la cognition humaine, elle fut reconceptualisée comme une réalité extérieure existant indépendamment de la subjectivité individuelle — sans qu'aucune limite transcendantale, selon lui, n'entrave sa connaissance. Lénine formula cela explicitement : « Il n'y a absolument aucune différence de principe entre le phénomène et la chose en soi, et il ne peut y en avoir. La seule différence est entre ce qui est connu et ce qui ne l'est pas encore. »[530] Gueorgui Plekhanov avait déjà exprimé un point de vue similaire : « Ainsi, la matière n'est rien d'autre que la totalité des choses en soi, dans la mesure où ces choses constituent la source de nos sensations. »[531]

Cependant, l'attachement ferme du marxisme soviétique à une conception figée de la matière le rendait vulnérable aux défis posés par les développements scientifiques contemporains. L'avènement de la théorie de la radioactivité, par exemple, remettait en cause l'idée d'une homogénéité substantielle de la matière, ce qui, comme le note Helena Sheehan, déstabilisa les affirmations ontologiques de certains matérialismes.[532] Des philosophes comme Ernst Mach, qui cherchaient à intégrer les nouvelles découvertes scientifiques à la philosophie, se heurtèrent rapidement à l'hostilité des penseurs marxistes :

> Les marxistes avaient tendance à les considérer avec une hostilité implacable. En effet, ils semblaient les percevoir comme un danger plus grand encore que les philosophes explicitement idéalistes et anti-scientifiques, les accusant d'introduire l'idéalisme dans la

[530] Vladimir Lenin, *Collected Works*, 4th ed., vol. 14 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 103.

[531] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works Vol. 3* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), p. 212.

[532] Helena Sheehan, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science* (London: Verso, 2017), p. 147.

science elle-même. On ne leur pardonnait pas de contester la prétention du matérialisme à être la philosophie la plus étroitement alliée à la science naturelle contemporaine.[533]

Cette inquiétude face à une possible érosion de la réalité objective refit surface dans le débat entre Lénine et Bogdanov. Le positivisme critique de ce dernier, qui plaçait l'expérience au centre du processus épistémologique, redéfinissait le monde physique comme une « expérience socialement organisée ».[534] Cette position impliquait une remise en cause radicale de la vérité objective, désormais subordonnée aux structures de l'expérience médiée socialement. Ce qui, pour Lénine, constituait un principe immuable du réalisme épistémologique — la vérité objective comme correspondance entre la pensée et une réalité extérieure indépendante de cette pensée — devenait ainsi relativisé. Lénine et Plekhanov considéraient les idées de Bogdanov comme une forme masquée d'idéalisme, incompatible avec les fondements scientifiques du marxisme. Lénine alla jusqu'à qualifier la philosophie de Bogdanov de « fidéisme »,[535] l'accusant de nier la réalité objective et d'ouvrir la voie à la pensée religieuse.

C'était une accusation lourde dans le cadre du marxisme. Le réalisme formait un aspect central de l'épistémologie de Marx.[536] À aucun moment de son développement intellectuel, Marx ne rejeta l'existence d'objets matériels indépendants de la cognition. Ce qui distinguait cependant le réalisme de Marx d'une position purement ontologique, c'était son insistance sur le rôle constitutif de la pratique sociale dans la médiation et la transformation de cette réalité. L'épistémologie de Marx est ainsi marquée par un enchevêtrement dialectique entre cognition et praxis, où la pratique sociale ne se limite pas à refléter passivement un monde extérieur, mais constitue une force active et génératrice dans la production du savoir.

Lénine, dans ses années pré-révolutionnaires, penchait fortement vers le pôle réaliste de ce spectre. Dans ses efforts pour éliminer l'influence de Mach du marxisme russe, Lénine réduisit le rôle de la pratique à un simple critère de vérification des idées subjectives. Pour lui, si la pratique confirmait une idée à propos d'un objet, cette idée pouvait être considérée comme valide parce qu'elle reflétait fidèlement le monde matériel, défini essentiellement en termes d'extériorité. Cette approche reléguait au second plan le rôle créatif et génératif de la pratique.

---

[533] Sheehan. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 146.

[534] Alexander Bogdanov, *Empiriomonizm (1904-1906)* (Moscow: Respublika, 2003). p. 234.

[535] Lenin, *Collected Works*. Vol. 14. p. 344.

[536] Thomas B. Bottomore, ed., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, 2. rev. ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 285.

Elle servait de critère de vérité, mais non comme agent actif de sa production. Le passage ultérieur de Lénine vers une approche plus dialectique, visible dans ses *Cahiers philosophiques*, ne fut jamais pleinement adopté par les philosophes staliniens. Ainsi, la théorie traditionnelle de la vérité comme correspondance devint le cadre épistémologique dominant dans le marxisme russe. Cette ossification de l'épistémologie réaliste de Lénine en une orthodoxie inflexible eut pour conséquence de masquer la relation dialectique et dynamique entre pensée, être et pratique, conduisant à un enracinement d'une conception statique du matérialisme dans la tradition philosophique soviétique.

La science doit-elle être dialectique ?

Malgré les conditions tumultueuses de la guerre civile (1917–1923), la vie intellectuelle après la Révolution d'Octobre fut marquée par des discussions animées, bien que souvent fortement anti-philosophiques. À mesure que la guerre progressait, de nombreux bolcheviks se montraient de plus en plus frustrés par les débats philosophiques prolongés,[537] et Lénine qualifia certains courants alors en vogue d'« ultra-gauchisme ». Toutefois, un certain matérialisme mécaniste, marqué par des penchants scientistes, était largement répandu et jouissait d'une grande popularité dans les cercles bolcheviques. Des figures de proue comme Boukharine et Trotski promouvaient activement des interprétations mécanistes dans le but de rallier les scientifiques à la cause marxiste. Boukharine ambitionnait de réduire les phénomènes biologiques aux principes de la physique et de la chimie,[538] tandis que Trotski, s'adressant à un congrès de chimistes en 1925, alla jusqu'à déclarer qu'ils étaient déjà marxistes sans le savoir.[539]

Cette orientation mécaniste, bien qu'illustrative d'une tendance plus large parmi les intellectuels bolcheviques, déclencha des débats intenses sur les fondements de la philosophie marxiste — en particulier sur la relation entre le matérialisme dialectique et les sciences naturelles, ainsi que sur le statut même de la dialectique comme principe méthodologique.[540]

L'une des controverses les plus connues de la fin des années 1920 fut celle entre les « mécanistes » et les « dialecticiens », centrée sur le statut et l'applicabilité des principes

[537] David Joravsky évoque deux positions extrêmes : En 1920, Emmanuel Enchmen (1891-1966) a présenté sa Théorie de la nouvelle biologie, « une parodie de l'école neuro-physiologique de la psychologie » (Joravsky) qui rejetait tout ce qui n'était pas des concepts physiologiques et physiques, croyant que l'« esprit » était une fiction pour supprimer le prolétariat. - David Joravsky, Soviet Marxism and Natural Science : 1917-1932 (Londres : Routledge, 2013), p. 94 ; Sergei Minin (1882-1962), quant à lui, cherchait à se débarrasser complètement de la philosophie pour ne garder que la science : « En un mot, le prolétariat conserve et doit conserver la science, rien que la science, mais aucune sorte de philosophie. » - Sergey Minin, « Filosofiju Za Bort ! », Pod Znamenem Marksizma, no. 5-6 (1922), p. 123, 127.

[538] Nikolay Bukharin, *Ataka*, 2nd edition (Moscow: State Publishing House, 1924), p. 150.

[539] Lev Trotsky, *Sochineniia, XXI* (Moscow: State Publishing House, 1925), p. 281.

[540] Graham, *Science, Philosophy and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union*, pp. 8-11.

dialectiques aux sciences de la nature. Bien que le débat recouvrît un large éventail de positions, on peut, avec une certaine simplification, l'interpréter comme une lutte pour l'hégémonie intellectuelle entre conceptions concurrentes du matérialisme et de la dialectique au sein du cadre plus large du Diamat (matérialisme dialectique).

Le principal forum de ces discussions — et la plus importante plateforme reliant discours philosophique et impératifs politiques — fut la revue *Sous la bannière du marxisme*, fondée en 1922. Abram Deborine (Joffé), un partisan éminent de l'orientation théorique léniniste, en prit la direction en 1926, consolidant ainsi son influence dans les cercles philosophiques soviétiques.

Un point central de ces débats portait sur la question de savoir si le matérialisme dialectique pouvait constituer un cadre méthodologique universel englobant à la fois les sciences naturelles et les sciences sociales. Les « dialecticiens » — ou Deborinistes — insistaient sur l'héritage hégélien dans la pensée marxiste, affirmant que la dialectique devait être élevée au rang de théorie universelle capable d'appréhender la nature, la société et la pensée comme des processus dynamiques et interconnectés. Selon eux, les principes de la dialectique ne se limitaient pas à l'histoire humaine ou aux relations sociales, mais s'appliquaient également au domaine des sciences naturelles.

Les mécanistes s'opposaient à cette position, soutenant qu'une telle transposition des principes dialectiques aux sciences naturelles était à la fois inutile et trompeuse. L'idée que la science naturelle serait par essence dialectique fut remise en question avant même le début de la controverse, dans le cadre de discussions sur l'enseignement supérieur. La question posée était la suivante : serait-il efficace de laisser des scientifiques non marxistes enseigner aux étudiants, ou devaient-ils adopter le marxisme comme préalable ?

Le physicien et philosophe Arkadi Timiriazev (1880–1955), un des chefs de file des mécanistes, soutenait que les scientifiques n'avaient pas besoin de formation philosophique, leur pratique empirique coïncidant déjà spontanément avec les principes du matérialisme dialectique. En revanche, des partisans du camp Deboriniste, comme le philosophe Solomon Gonikman (1897–1979), défendaient la primauté du savoir philosophique et affirmaient que la dialectique hégélienne fournissait la structure de base pour toute compréhension rigoureuse des phénomènes scientifiques.[541]

Les deux camps s'opposaient ainsi sur deux conceptions du matérialisme dialectique : pour les mécanistes d'orientation scientiste, le Diamat était une formalisation explicite de la méthode

[541] Solomon Gonikman, "Uchenie Gegelia o 'Deistvitel'nosti,'" *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* 3 (1924).

implicite des sciences naturelles.[542] Comme l'affirmait Lyubov Axelrod (1868–1946), une autre mécaniste influente : « la dialectique doit recevoir le contenu de la science contemporaine. La simple transmission de quelques propositions hégéliennes bien connues est dépourvue de signification sérieuse. »[543]

Deborine, pour sa part, résumait ainsi le conflit :

> Nous exigeons la réélaboration des données nouvelles de chaque domaine de connaissance du point de vue du matérialisme dialectique, tandis que divers 'critiques', souvent sans s'en rendre compte, tendent à 'réélaborer' le matérialisme dialectique à partir de faits particuliers issus d'une science particulière…[544]

Bien que la position de Deborine ait fini par prévaloir sous la période stalinienne, lorsque l'imposition d'une orthodoxie « dialectique » rigide plaça toutes les disciplines scientifiques sous une stricte surveillance idéologique, Deborine lui-même fut condamné — mais épargné de l'exécution.[545]

---

[542] Dans cet esprit, l'un des principaux marxistes de l'Ukraine soviétique, Semyon Semkovskii (1882-1937), a affirmé en 1924 que la théorie de la relativité d'Einstein était une forme de matérialisme dialectique en physique. Il est intéressant de noter que cette même position sera tactiquement utilisée par Boris Hessen du côté de Deborin.

[543] Lyubov Akselrod, "Otvet na 'Nashi raznoglasiia' A. Deborina," *Krasnaia nov*, no. 5 (1927), p. 144.

[544] Abram Deborin, "Engel's i Dialekticheskoe Ponimanie Prirody," *Pod Zn. Marks*, no. 10–11 (1925), p. 5.

[545] Staline aurait déclaré ce qui suit lors d'une réunion avec des philosophes : « À mon avis, Deborine est un cas désespéré, mais il devrait rester rédacteur en chef [de *Sous la bannière du marxisme*] pour que nous ayons quelqu'un à battre. » - Ross Wolfe, "Hegel and Stalinism : The Murder of Jan Sten", The Charnel-House, https://thecharnelhouse.org/2024/08/13/hegel-and-stalinism-the-murder-of-jan-sten/.

Spinoza après la révolution d'octobre

Si la controverse sur la dialectique plaçait Hegel sur le banc des accusés, celle sur le matérialisme convoquait Spinoza. En effet, Plekhanov suggérait une lignée philosophique faisant remonter directement le matérialisme de Marx à Spinoza. Il affirmait que la doctrine spinoziste de la substance — qu'il identifiait à la matière — apportait une solution correcte au problème de la relation entre matière et pensée. Cette vision fut notamment renforcée par un souvenir anecdotique de Plekhanov, évoquant une conversation personnelle avec Engels à Londres en 1899 : à sa question sur la validité du monisme de la substance chez Spinoza, Engels aurait répondu : « Bien sûr… le vieux Spinoza avait parfaitement raison. »[546] L'intérêt de Plekhanov pour Spinoza était principalement métaphysique et posa les bases d'une interprétation ontologique qui allait rester hégémonique (bien que non sans contestation) dans le marxisme soviétique officiel jusqu'à sa fin.[547]

Cependant, Plekhanov ne fut pas le seul marxiste russe à s'intéresser à Spinoza. Au moins quatre grands courants du spinozisme soviétique ont été identifiés : Plekhanov et ses élèves (sous la direction de Deborin), les soi-disant mécanistes, les marxistes « orthodoxes » staliniens et les « révisionnistes ».[548]

Les disciples de Plekhanov — A. Deborin (1881-1963), N. Karev (1901-1936), I. Luppol (1896-1943), J. Sten (1899-1937) et L. Mankovski (1900-1964) — ont poursuivi la ligne ontologique, avançant une stricte démarcation entre le contenu matérialiste de Spinoza et sa forme théologique, qu'ils considéraient comme un simple camouflage rhétorique imposé par

[546] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works Vol. 2* (Progress Publishers, 1976), p. 339.

[547] La doctrine politique de Spinoza, en revanche, était le sujet de prédilection des non-marxistes russes. Voir : George L. Kline, éd : George L. Kline, éd. S*pinoza in Soviet Philosophy a Series of Essays* (Londres : Routledge, 2021) ; Justin Steinberg, « Russian Marxism and the Materialist Interpretation of Spinoza », in *The History and Philosophy of Materialism*, ed. Charles Wolfe et John Symons, (Londres : Routledge 2024), 351-63.

[548] Comme le note Kline, ces étiquettes ne sont pas des descriptions exactes des philosophes auxquels elles étaient attachées. Pourtant, ce sont les termes qui, historiquement, ont été employés en relation avec ces groupes et nous continuons à les utiliser ici pour cette raison.

les contraintes idéologiques de son époque.[549] Dans leurs efforts pour assimiler Spinoza au cadre marxiste, ils le reconstruisaient comme un matérialiste athée dont la doctrine de la substance préfigurait la conception matérialiste de l'histoire chez Marx. Grâce au poids politique de Plekhanov, cette synthèse entre le monisme spinoziste, la dialectique hégélienne et la *Naturphilosophie* d'Engels détermina l'évolution ultérieure de la philosophie soviétique. Mais cela se fit à travers une confrontation militante avec les lectures qui ne furent pas intégrées au canon officiel.

Les mécanistes, par exemple, estimaient que le langage religieux de Spinoza n'était pas extérieur à son matérialisme et ne pouvait être écarté comme le proposait Mankovski, mais devait au contraire être rejeté afin de réaliser pleinement le potentiel du principe de conformité à la loi. Ce principe servait à renforcer l'idée de l'intelligibilité de la matière, fondamentale pour le matérialisme dialectique soviétique. La tâche était d'une importance capitale. Dans ses travaux sur le matérialisme de Spinoza, Lyubov Axelrod soutenait que la compréhension correcte de sa philosophie était cruciale pour le développement du matérialisme dialectique.[550]

Le camp dit « orthodoxe », dirigé par M. Mitin, critiquait le caractère « contemplatif » du matérialisme spinoziste, l'absence de mouvement dans les attributs de sa substance et le caractère anhistorique de sa métaphysique.[551] Malgré ces critiques, les théoriciens staliniens ne rejetèrent pas Spinoza, mais le redéfinirent comme un allié dans la lutte idéologique contre la religion, une figure mobilisable pour les campagnes athées du régime stalinien. Les efforts des marxistes orthodoxes furent ensuite appuyés par A. Lounatcharski qui, dans son ouvrage *Baruch Spinoza et la bourgeoisie*, affirmait : « Il n'y a pas la moindre part de cléricalisme ni de monachisme chez Spinoza. »[552]

La suppression des interprétations alternatives culmina dans la stalinisation de la philosophie soviétique. Les déborinistes, qui avaient temporairement triomphé des mécanistes au début des années 1930, furent bientôt dénoncés comme des « idéalistes mencheviks », tandis que les mécanistes furent critiqués pour leur réductionnisme « vulgaire ». Les deux groupes furent marginalisés, nombre de leurs membres persécutés ou exécutés lors des purges.

---

[549] Lev Mankovski, *Spinoza i Materializm* (Moscow: State Publishing House, 1930), p. 46.

[550] Lyubov Akselrod, "Spinoza i Matetializm," *Krasnaia Nov*, no. 7 (1925), p. 144.

[551] Mark Mitin, "Spinoza i Dialekticheski Materializm," *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* I I-I 2 (1932), p. 173.

[552] Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Barukh Spinoza i Burzhuaziya," *Zhurnal'no- Gazetnoe Ob''edinenie*, (1933), p. 1.

Il a été avancé que les débats de 1925 à 1932 autour de Spinoza n'étaient pas des conflits entre lectures mutuellement exclusives, mais essentiellement des « différences d'accent ».[553] Pourtant, comme le souligne Soboleva, une exception doit être faite pour un membre du camp « révisionniste » : Bogdanov. Celui-ci s'opposa vigoureusement à l'interprétation de Spinoza par Plekhanov et proposa un matérialisme moniste alternatif, basé sur une synthèse d'éléments spinozistes et kantiens avec l'empirisme et le marxisme.

Bogdanov contestait l'identification faite par Plekhanov entre la substance spinoziste et la matière, soulignant le caractère polysémique du concept, qui ne possède pas de sens invariable, mais évolue selon les contextes sociaux et historiques, rendant impossible toute équivalence entre ses usages à l'époque moderne et au XXe siècle.[554] Les principales critiques de Bogdanov contre le spinozisme de Plekhanov portaient sur la réduction de l'unité de la substance au parallélisme des attributs, l'attribution de la pensée à la matière en général, et l'absolutisation du concept de matière comme chose en soi.[555] Plekhanov ne répondit jamais à la remise en cause de son interprétation de Spinoza par Bogdanov.[556]

Outre la critique de l'identification substance = matière chez Plekhanov, Bogdanov s'attaqua également à celle de Lénine qui assimilait la matière à la « réalité objective ». Selon lui, cela figeait le matérialisme en reléguant la conscience à une simple copie du monde extérieur. Ayant développé une philosophie matérialiste revendiquant une position moniste tout en rejetant la « dialectique de la nature » et la théorie du reflet, Bogdanov écartait la métaphysique de Plekhanov fondée sur un monde au-delà de la conscience. Une conséquence de cette critique fut, comme mentionné plus haut, la perte du statut ontologique de la vérité. Si un monde extérieur à la conscience individuelle ne pouvait plus servir de référence, alors la vérité ne pouvait plus avoir de valeur objective. Au lieu de cela, Bogdanov écrit :

---

[553] Kline, *Spinoza in Soviet Philosophy a Series of Essays*, p. 18.

[554] Aleksandr Bogdanov, "Predely Nauchnosti Rassuzhdenija," *Vestnik Kommunisticheskoj Akademii*, no. 21 (1927), p. 262.

[555] Maja Soboleva, "Marxism as Spinozism? One Episode in the History of Soviet Philosophy," *Studies in East European Thought* 74, no. 3 (September 2022), pp. 325-236.

[556] Daniela Steila, "Interpretations of Spinoza in Early Russian Marxism," *Studies in East European Thought* 74, no. 3 (September 2022), p. 289.

> La vérité exprime la relation du collectif humain aux choses de son expérience. La puissance ou la valeur de la vérité vient du fait qu'elle est une expérience sociale cristallisée.[557]

Pour autant, Bogdanov ne rejetait pas toute forme d'objectivité, mais la cherchait dans l'expérience collective, en la distinguant de l'expérience individuelle et subjective. Cet accent mis sur l'expérience collective représentait un tournant décisif vis-à-vis de l'épistémologie individualiste de la théorie du reflet, et se rapprochait davantage de l'attention portée par Marx à la nature sociale de la cognition humaine.[558] Ironiquement, c'est précisément cet accent mis sur la collectivité qui fut ensuite utilisé contre Bogdanov dans les campagnes de discrédit de ses contributions philosophiques.[559]

Les débats des années 1920 — marqués à l'origine par une véritable recherche théorique — allaient céder la place à une orthodoxie dogmatique, qui mit fin à toute exploration approfondie du rapport entre dialectique et pratique scientifique, réduisant le Diamat à un cadre rigide de contrôle politique plutôt qu'à une philosophie vivante de la praxis.

---

[557] Aleksandr Bogdanov, *The Philosophy of Living Experience: Popular Outlines*, Historical Materialism Book Series, volume 111 (Leiden Boston: Brill, 2016), p. 101.

[558] Soboleva, "Russian Marxism and Its Philosophy", p. 280.

[559] En novembre 1921, dans la *Pravda*, un article de Boukharine intitulé « Pour le congrès de Proletkult » épinglait une petite plate-forme au sein de Proletkult appelée « Nous - les collectivistes » et l'accusait de menchévisme bogdanovien. Cette plate-forme, inspirée par les idées prérévolutionnaires de Bogdanov sur la connaissance collective, est présentée par Boukharine comme porteuse de l'esprit général de Proletkult, identifiant ainsi le menchévisme à l'ensemble de l'institution. La critique de Bogdanov a été renouvelée dans la campagne contre Proletkult dans les années 1920 avec la publication de la deuxième édition de *Matérialisme et Empiriocriticisme*. Dans les deux préfaces, Lénine et V.I. Nevsky ont respectivement lancé une attaque parallèle contre Bogdanov et Proletkult. Boukharine contribue à la campagne par un article dans la *Pravda* (novembre 1921). 1922 voit la publication du troisième volume de la *Tektologie* de Bogdanov, largement considérée comme le précurseur de la cybernétique et de la théorie des systèmes. Pourtant, sans grande considération, le livre a été qualifié d'idéaliste et de simple nouvelle articulation de l'ancien empiriomonisme. - Alla Morozova, « Neleninskij bol′ševizm » A.A. Bogdanova i « vperedovcev » : idei, al′ternativy, praktika (Moskva Sankt-Peterburg : Nestor-istoriâ, 2020), p. 463.

La dialectique scolastique du Stalinisme

À partir de 1930, les discussions en philosophie soviétique prirent un tournant résolument autoritaire. Le processus de stalinisation active de la philosophie — établissant « Staline comme coryphée de la science philosophique »[560] — débuta en 1930 avec la publication dans *Pravda* d'un article fondateur signé par trois « marxistes orthodoxes » : Mark Mitin, Pavel Yudin et Vassily Ral'tsevich, collectivement appelés la « troïka ». Cet article, intitulé *Sur les nouvelles tâches de la philosophie marxiste-léniniste*, reçu l'approbation explicite de la rédaction et visait principalement les déborinistes. Ces derniers furent critiqués pour leur passivité dans la dénonciation des trotskistes, pour leur coupure entre théorie et pratique, et pour leur attitude conciliante envers l'idéalisme. Cet article fut suivi d'une série de publications à charge, lançant la campagne de « bolchevisation » de la philosophie.

Alors que déborinistes et mécanistes débattaient de questions fondamentales du matérialisme, la nouvelle élite philosophique, dirigée par Mitin et Yudin, se concentra sur des accusations d'activités contre-révolutionnaires et de sabotage.[561] Après avoir efficacement démantelé le camp déboriniste, Mitin s'attaqua aux mécanistes. En 1931, la revue *Sous la bannière du marxisme* fut transformée en plateforme pour des chasses aux sorcières contre les « subversifs ». Les mécanistes furent accusés de théoriser « l'opportunisme de droite » et de propager secrètement une idéologie bourgeoise. Compte tenu des sanctions encourues, les lettres d'autocritique qui suivirent ont peu de quoi surprendre.

---

[560] Dans sa lettre de 1956 au Présidium du Comité central du PCUS, Deborine évoque le moment où Mitin et Yudin ont visité son appartement et exigé qu'il reconnaisse officiellement Staline comme « le coryphée de la science philosophique ». Sergey Korsakov, « Bor'ba Akademika A. M. Deborina Za Nauchnuyu i Obshchestvennuyu Reabilitaciyu : Povest' v Dokumentakh i Svidetel'stvakh », Filosofskij Zhurnal 1, no. 12 (2014). p. 132. Marina Bykova affirme que la position de Staline a été reconnue comme une « direction philosophique » officiellement approuvée par le Comité central du Parti en janvier 1931." Marina F. Bykova, « Stalin and Philosophy in Soviet Russia », dans *Stalin Era Intellectuals*, par Vesa Oittinen et Elina Viljanen, 1ère éd. (Londres : Routledge, 2022), p. 53.

[561] Yehoshua Yakhot, "The 'Leninist Stage' in Soviet Philosophy," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 20, no. 3 (October 1979), pp. 303–8.

La création du soi-disant stade léniniste de la philosophie, orchestrée par le comité central et exécutée par Mitin, effaça paradoxalement Lénine de la philosophie soviétique, se contentant d'invoquer son nom sans se confronter à ses écrits. Comme l'écrit Yakhot :

> À cette époque, toute la philosophie était refaçonnée selon les critères de Staline. Dans le programme de matérialisme dialectique publié en 1937, Lénine est à peine mentionné. Staline domine. Dans la liste des lectures recommandées pour divers sujets, on ne trouve aucun ouvrage de Lénine ; les étudiants sont invités à lire uniquement Staline et… Béria. À deux reprises, une anthologie conjointe Lénine-Staline est mentionnée, mais aucun texte séparé de Lénine. Le masque était tombé. Le mépris de Lénine était évident.[562]

L'effet réel de la stalinisation de la philosophie sur le matérialisme soviétique se trouve dans les œuvres de Staline lui-même, notamment dans le tristement célèbre chapitre IV de *L'Histoire du Parti Communiste de l'Union Soviétique (cours abrégé)*, publié en 1938. Ce chapitre allait fixer les coordonnées du matérialisme philosophique en URSS jusqu'à la dénonciation du culte de la personnalité au XXe congrès. Staline y opposait matérialisme et idéalisme, dialectique et métaphysique. La dialectique et le matérialisme furent identifiés à la vision du monde du Parti, devenant ainsi des idéologèmes aux significations aussi mouvantes que la ligne du Parti elle-même. Les questions substantielles du matérialisme dialectique — le devenir, le développement, l'interconnexion, la contradiction et la non-réduction — furent schématisées en lois universelles, prétendant faire de celui-ci une science exacte de la société.

La dialectique dans le Diamat de Staline ne venait pas de Hegel. Si, pour Lénine, l'étude de la *Logique* de Hegel était indispensable à la compréhension du *Capital* de Marx, Staline accusa

---

[562] Yehoshua Yakhot, *The Suppression of Philosophy in the USSR (the 1920s & 1930s)* (Oak Park : Mehring Books, 2012), p. 322. Ce récit a été contesté par David Bakhurst, qui a soutenu que les œuvres de Lénine étaient plus présentes dans les programmes d'études que ce que Yakhot a indiqué. Voir : David Bakhurst, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy : From the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov*, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 95. Néanmoins, il ne fait aucun doute que l'étape léniniste visait à renforcer le culte de Staline en tant que seul élève digne de Lénine. Dans son article résumant les avancées de 1932, Yudin décrit Staline comme « un dialecticien exceptionnel » et le garant de l'avenir radieux de l'Union soviétique. Dans son ouvrage *Problèmes Militants de la Dialectique Matérialiste*, publié en 1936, Mitin fait l'éloge de Staline pour son rapport superficiel sur la question agraire.

la philosophie hégélienne d'être trop aristocratique et omis la négation de la négation dans sa liste des lois dialectiques.

La reconfiguration doctrinale de la dialectique hégélienne atteignit son apogée dans les débats philosophiques des années 1940. En 1942, le troisième volume du célèbre manuel soviétique *Histoire de la philosophie* fut publié. Mais contrairement aux deux premiers volumes, parus avant la guerre contre l'Allemagne, très peu d'exemplaires arrivèrent en librairie, et une grande partie du tirage fut détruite.[563] La raison fut exposée dans une résolution du Comité central du Parti communiste, publiée dans la revue *Bolshevik* sous le titre : *Défauts et erreurs dans l'exposé de l'histoire de la philosophie allemande des XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*. On y reprochait aux auteurs de ne pas avoir suffisamment démontré le caractère « réactionnaire » de la pensée de Hegel, et d'avoir négligé la différence entre sa dialectique et celle de Marx.[564]

Les contraintes idéologiques imposées à l'interprétation de l'histoire de la philosophie rendirent toute enquête philosophique authentique impossible. À la place, une forme mécanique de scolastique — dominée par la citation et la traque des déviations hérétiques — supplanta l'engagement critique. La pratique philosophique fut subordonnée aux exigences de conformité idéologique, les interventions de Staline réduisant les questions philosophiques complexes à de simples oppositions binaires, vidant ainsi la méthode dialectique de son caractère critique et autoréflexif. En ce sens, la transformation de la philosophie soviétique sous Staline doit être comprise non seulement comme une reconfiguration institutionnelle ou politique, mais comme une rupture épistémique profonde.

[563] Vladimir Esakov, "K Isrorii Filosofskoi Diskusii 1947 Goda," *Voprosi Filosofii*, no. 3 (1993), p. 86.
[564] Comité central du parti communiste de l'Union soviétique, « O nedostatkakh i oshibkakh v osveshchenii istorii nemeckoi filosofii konca XVIII i nachala XIX vekov », Bolchevik, 1944, édition 6-7, p. 15.

Bibliography

Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund. *An Introduction to Dialectics: 1958*. Edited by Christoph Ziermann. Translated by Nicholas Walker. Cambridge Malden (Mass.): Polity press, 2017.

Akselrod, Lyubov. "Otvet na 'Nashi raznoglasiia' A. Deborina." *Krasnaia nov*, no. 5 (1927): 136–64.

———. "Spinoza i Matetializm." *Krasnaia Nov*, no. 7 (1925).

Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*. London: Allen Lane, 1969.

———. "Letter to the Central Committee of the PCF, 18 March 1966." *Historical Materialism* 15, no. 2 (2007): 153–72. https://doi.org/10.1163/156920607X192110.

———. *The Future Lasts Forever: A Memoir*. New York, NY: New Press, 1993.

Althusser, Louis, and Étienne Balibar. *Reading Capital*. Translated by Ben Brewster. London New York: NLB, 1970.

Althusser, Louis, Étienne Balibar, Jacques Bidet, G. M. Goshgarian, and Louis Althusser. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. London New York: Verso, 2014.

Alexandrov. Georgy. *Istorija Filosofii*. Vol. 1. Moscow: Politizdat, 1941.

Anderson, Perry. *Considerations on Western Marxism*. London: Verso, 1989.

Anisimov, Oleg. "Climate Is Not Always a Constant: On the Centenary of the Birth of Academician M.I. Budyko." *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 90, no. 1 (January 2020): 106–15. https://doi.org/10.1134/S1019331620010037.

Artinian, Arto, David Bakhurst, Pham Minh Duc, Isabel Jacobs, Martin Küpper, Kyrill Potapov, Monika Woźniak, and Siyaveş Azeri. "Interviews: Rejuvenating the Revolutionary Essence of Marxist Theory at the Centennial of Evald Ilyenkov." *Marxism & Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2024): 139–76.

Avineri, Shlomo. *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*. Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

Azeri, Siyaves. “The Historical Possibility and Necessity of (Ilyenkov’s) Anti-Innatism.” *Theory & Psychology* 27, no. 5 (October 2017): 683–702. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354317714339.

Babička, M. “A ‘Right to Sadness’: Late Socialist Environmentalism between Technocracy and Romanticism and the Czech Nature Writer Jaromír Tomeček.” *Kontradikce* 6, no. 2 (2023). https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:18b3c3f7-a7d9-474e-beb1-80a4692f7cbc.

Babu, Senthil D. *Mathematics and Society: Numbers and Measures in Early Modern South India*. Oxford University Press, 2023.

Bakhurst, David. *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy: From the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov*. Modern European Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511608940.

———. *The Heart of the Matter: Ilyenkov, Vygotsky and the Courage of Thought*. Historical Materialism Book Series, volume 286. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2023.

Balibar, Étienne. *The Philosophy of Marx*. London ; New York: Verso, 1995.

Ballestrem, K. G. “Dialectical Logic.” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 5, no. 3 (September 1965): 139–72. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01044028.

Ballestrem, Karl G. *Die Sowjetische Erkenntnismetaphysik Und Ihr Verhältnis Zu Hegel*. Vol. 27. Sovietica. Dordrecht: Springer, 1968. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-3452-4.

Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham London: Duke University Press, 2007.

Barbour, Charles. “The Logic Question: Marx, Trendelenburg, and the Critique of Hegel.” *Historical Materialism* 32, no. 3 (November 8, 2023): 252–81. https://doi.org/10.1163/1569206x-bja10026.

Bazhanov, Valentin A. *Istoriâ logiki v Rossii i SSSR: konceptual'nyj kontekst universitetskoj filosofii*. Moskva: Kanon+, 2007.

———. *Logiko-gnoseologičeskoe napravlenie v otečestvennoj filosofii: pervaâ polovina XX veka M.I. Karinskij, V.N. Ivanovskij, N.A. Vasil'ev*. Filosofiâ Rossii pervoj poloviny XX veka. Moskva: ROSSPÈN, 2012.

———. “Post-Soviet Marxism in the Soviet Era: Activity Approach to the Analysis of Science.” *Epistemology & Philosophy of Science* 55, no. 3 (2018): 137–52. https://doi.org/10.5840/eps201855354.

Bedford, David, and Thomas Workman. “Ilyenkov and the Immanence of Logic.” *Marxism & Sciences*, 2024, 29. https://doi.org/10.56063/MS.2403.03102.

Bellamy Foster, John “Late Soviet Ecology and the Planetary Crisis.” *Monthly Review*, no. 67 (2015).

Bensaïd, Daniel. “La Mort de Louis Althusser.” *Rouge*, 1990, 1421 edition. https://danielbensaid.org/la-mort-de-louis-althusser/.

Bernal, John, “Dialectical Materialism.” In *Aspects of Dialectical Materialism*, edited by Levy, Hyman, John MacMurray, Ralph Fox, Robert Page Arnott, and John D. Bernal. London: Watts&Co., 1934.

Biareishyk, Siarhei. “Linguaggio, denaro, ideale: La lettura spinozista di Marx in Il’enkov.” *Quaderni Materialisti*, no. 22 *Spinoza Rosso* (2023): 57–71.

Bikbov, Aleksandr. *Grammatika porjadka: istoričeskaja sociologija ponjatij, kotorye menjajut našu real'nost'*. Serija Social′naja teorija. Moskva: Izdat. Dom Vysšej Školy Ėkonomiki - VŠĖ, 2014.

Blakeley, Thomas J. “Is Epistemology Possible in Diamat?” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 2, no. 2 (June 1962): 95–103. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01046641.

Bocheński, J. M. “Soviet Logic.” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 1 (1961): 29–38.

Bogdanov, Aleksandr. *Empiriomonizm (1904-1906)*. Moscow: Respublika, 2003.

———. “Predely Nauchnosti Rassuzhdenija.” *Vestnik Kommunisticheskoj Akademii*, no. 21 (1927): 244–90.

———. *The Philosophy of Living Experience: Popular Outlines*. Historical Materialism Book Series, volume 111. Leiden Boston (Mass.): Brill, 2016.

Bottomore, Thomas B., ed. *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*. 2. rev. ed., 12. [Dr.]. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.

Brown, Andrew, Michael John Roberts, and Steve Fleetwood, eds. *Critical Realism and Marxism*. Critical Realism--Interventions. London: Routledge, 2002.

Brown, Andrew. “Developing Realistic Philosophy: From Critcal Realism to Material Dialectics.” In *Critical Realism and Marxism*, edited by Andrew Brown, John Michael Roberts, and Steve Fleetwood, 168–87. Critical Realism--Interventions. London: Routledge, 2002.

Bukharin, Nikolay. *Ataka*. 2nd edition. Moscow: State Publishing House, n.d.

Bykov, Dmitrij. *Šestidesjatniki: literaturnye portrety*. Žizn′ zamečatel′nych ljudej Serija biografij, vypusk 1922 (1722). Moskva: Molodaja gvardija, 2019.

Bykova, M. F. and Vladislav Lektorsky, eds. *Philosophical Thought in Russia in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: A Contemporary View from Russia and Abroad*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.

Bykova, Marina F. "Stalin and Philosophy in Soviet Russia." In *Stalin Era Intellectuals*, by Vesa Oittinen and Elina Viljanen, 36–56, 1st ed. London: Routledge, 2022. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003219835-3.

Campbell, C. A. "The Soviet Concept of Logic." *Soviet Studies* 3, no. 3 (1952): 278–87.

Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. "O nedostatkakh i oshibkakh v osveshchenii istorii nemeckoi filosofii konca XVIII i nachala XIX vekov." *Bolshevik*, 1944, 6–7 edition.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*. Chicago London: University of Chicago Press, 2021.

Choat, Simon. "Science, Agency and Ontology: A Historical-Materialist Response to New Materialism." *Political Studies* 66, no. 4 (November 2018): 1027–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321717731926.

Chukhrov, Keti. "Epistemological Gaps between the Former Soviet East and the 'Democratic' West." *E-Flux* 41 (2013).

———. "On the Materialist Interpretation of the Ideal by Evald Ilyenkov." *Studies in East European Thought* 74, no. 1 (March 2022): 57–74. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-021-09425-2.

———. *Practicing the Good: Desire and Boredom in Soviet Socialism*. Minneapolis: *E-flux*, 2020.

———. "Towards the Space of the General: On Labor beyond Materiality and Immateriality." *E-Flux*, no. 20 (2010). https://www.academia.edu/24659531/Towards_the_Space_of_the_General_on_Labor_beyond_Materiality_and_Immateriality.

Clark, John P. "Marx's Inorganic Body:" *Environmental Ethics* 11, no. 3 (1989): 243–58. https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics198911315.

Clark, Katerina. "'Wait for Me and I Shall Return': The Early Thaw as a Reprise of Late Thirties Culture?" In *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, 85–108. University of Toronto Press Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2013.

Cohen, G.A. "Marxism: A Philosophy of Nature?" *Radical Philosophy*, no. 2 (1972): 2–28.

Comey, David Dinsmore. “Current Trends in Soviet Logic.” *Inquiry*, no. 9 (1966): 94-108. https://doi.org/10.2307/2270818.

Dafermos, Manolis. “Rethinking the Relationship between Marx’s ‘Capital’ and Hegel’s ‘Science of Logic’: The Tradition of Creative Soviet Marxism.” *Capital & Class* 46, no. 1 (March 2022): 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/03098168211029003.

Davidson, Donald. “Agency.” In *Essays on Actions and Events*, by Donald Davidson, 43–63. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Deborin, Abram. “Engel’s i Dialekticheskoe Ponimanie Prirody.” *Pod Zn. Marks*, no. 10–11 (1925).

Deleuze, Gilles. *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. Translated by Martin Joughin. 4. print. New York: Zone Books, 2005.

Diderot, Denis. “Spinosiste.” In *Encyclopédie*, Vol. XV, 1765.

Dlugatch, Tamara, and Aleksey Savin. “Kantom Ja Interesovalas Vsegda.” *Istoriko-Filosofskiij Ezhe- Godnik*, 2019.

Dmitriev, Alexander. “Krot Istorii v Spyachke: O Zakate Marksistskoy Teorii Istorii v Poslestalinskom SSSR.” *Neprikosnovennyy Zapas* 2, no. 148 (2023): 28–42.

Durkheim Émile, *Les Formes Elementaires de Ia Vie Religieuse: le Systeme Totemique en Australie.* [Translation, 1915], Paris: Alcan, 1912.

Editorial. “Avtomatizatsiya i Nekotorye Voprosy Obshchestvennogo Razvitiya.” *Voprosi Filosofii*, no. 8 (1959): 3–16.

Engels, Friedrich. *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science*. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976.

———. *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976.

———. *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1949.

Esakov, Vladimir. “K Isrorii Filosofskoi Diskusii 1947 Goda.” *Voprosi Filosofii*, no. 3 (1993): 83–106.

Fedoseyev, Pyotr. “Vsesoyuznoe Soveshc˘anie Po Filosofskim Voprosam Sovremennogo Estestvoz- Nanija.” *Uspekhy Fiziceskikh Nauk* T.LXVIII, no. 4 (1959).

Fischbach, Franck. *La production des hommes: Marx avec Spinoza*. Paris: J. Vrin, 2014.

Fitzpatrick, Sheila. “12 Afterword: The Thaw in Retrospect.” In *The Thaw*, by Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd, 482–92. University of Toronto Press, 2012. https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442661059-016.

Foster, John Bellamy. *The Return of Nature: Socialism and Ecology*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2020.

Gerovitch, Slava. *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak: A History of Soviet Cybernetics*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002.

Giddens, Anthony. *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

Girard, Nicole. “Sur une explication à l’intervention de J. Staline, ou la raison technologique.” *Langages* 11, no. 46 (1977): 3–23. https://doi.org/10.3406/lgge.1977.1902.

Golubev, Alexey. *The Things of Life: Materiality in Late Soviet Russia*. Ithaca, [New York]: Cornell University Press, 2020.

Gonikman, Solomon. “Uchenie Gegelia o ‘Deistvitel’nosti.’” *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* 3 (1924).

Graham, Loren R. *Science, Philosophy and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union*. An expanded, Updated and Revised ed. of "Science and Philosophy in the Soviet Union". New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Guattari, Félix. *The Three Ecologies.* London ; New York: Continuum, 2005.

Guseynov, Abdusalam. “The Philosophy of the Russian Sixtiers in the Humanist Context: A Philosophical Reflection.” In *Philosophical Thought in Russia in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: A Contemporary View from Russia and Abroad*, Ed. by Vladislav. A. Lektorsky and Marina F. Bykova., 91–102. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. https://mgimo.ru/library/publications/guseynov_a_a_the_philosophy_of_the_russian_sixtiers_in_the_humanist_context_a_philosophical_reflecti/.

Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form*. Theory out of Bounds 4. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

Haug, Timothée. “La rupture écologique dans l’œuvre de Marx : Analyse d’une métamorphose inachevée du paradigme de la production.” PhD thesis defended under the supervision of Franck Fischbach, Université de Strasbourg, 2022.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *The Science of Logic*. Edited by George Di Giovanni. First paperback edition. Cambridge Hegel Translations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Hnatiuk, Yaroslav. "The Historical Syntax of Philosophical Logic." *European Philosophical and Historical Discourse* 8, no. 1 (2022): 78–87.

Ilyenkov, Evald. *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Scientific- Theoretical Thinking [Диалектика Абстрактного и Конкретного в Научно-Теоретическом Мышлении]*. Moscow: Institute of Philosophy of Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1960.

———. *La Dialettica Dell'astratto e Del Concreto Nel Capitale Di Marx*. Translated by Vittorio Strada and Alberto Sandretti. Milano: Feltrinelli Editore Milano, 1961.

———. "Vopros o Tozhdestve Myshleniya i Bytiya v Domarksistskoy Filosofii." In *Dialektika - Teoriya Poznaniya: Istoriko-Filosofskie Ocherki*, edited by Bonifaty Kedrov, 21–54. Moscow: Nauka, 1964.

———. *Dialectical Logic: Essays on Its History and Theory*. Translated by H. Campbell Creighton. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977.

———. *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982.

———. "Vershina, Konec i Novaja Zhizn' Dialektiki (Gegel' i Konec Staroj Filosofii)." In *Filosofija i Kul'tura*, 115–41. Moscow: Politizdat, 1991.

———. "Dialektika Idealnogo." *Logos* 19, no. 1 (2009): 3–63.

———. "Cosmology of the Spirit." Translated by Giuliano Vivaldi. *Stasis* 5, no. 2 (2017): 164–90. https://doi.org/10.33280/2310-3817-2017-5-2-164-190.

———. "Logicheskoe i Istoricheskoe." In *Dialekticheskaya logika: Sobranie Sochineniy*, Vol. 4. Moscow: Kanon+, 2020.

———. *Sobranie Sochineniy*. Vol. 4. Moscow: Kanon+, 2020.

Ilyenkov, Evald and Korovikov, Valentin. "Theses on the Question of the Interconnection of Philosophy and Knowledge of Nature and Society in the Process of Their Historical Development." In *Philosophical Thought in Russia in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century. A Contemporary View from Russia and Abroad*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.

———. *Strast'i po tezisam: o predmet'e filosofii*. Moscow: Kanon+, 2016.

———. *Filosofiya i kul'tura*. Politizdat. Accessed June 7, 2025. http://archive.org/details/ilyenkov-filosofia-i-kultura.

Ilyenkov, Evald, and Elena Illesh. *Ot Abstraktnogo k Konkretnomu: Krutoĭ Marshrut: 1950-1960*. Moskva: Kanon+, 2017.

Ivanovsky, Vladimir. *Metodologicheskoye Vvedeniye v Nauku i Filosofiyu*. Vol. 1. Minsk, 1923.

Jameson, Fredric. *Valences of the Dialectic*. Paperback ed., 1. publ. London: Verso, 2010.

Johnston, Adrian. *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism. Volume Two: A Weak Nature Alone*. *Diaeresis*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2020.

Joravsky, David. *Soviet Marxism and Natural Science: 1917-1932*. London: Routledge, 2013.

Kedrov, Bonifaty. "Klassifikatsiya Nauk." In *Filosofskaya Entsiklopediya*, by Fyodor Konstantinov, 577–84. Sovetskaya entsiklopediya, 1964.

———. *Yedinstvo Dialektiki, Logiki i Teorii Poznaniya*. Moscow, 2006.

Kline, George L., ed. *Spinoza in Soviet Philosophy a Series of Essays*. London: Routledge, 2021.

Knuuttila, Tarja. "Metamorphoses of Meaning: The Concept of the Ideal from a Semiotic Perspective." In *Dialectics of the Ideal*, 60:145–63. Historical Materialism Book Series. London: Brill, 2014.

Kobakhidze, Giorgi. "Evald Ilyenkov and the Imperialist Unconscious in Soviet Philosophy." *Studies in East European Thought* 76, no. 3 (September 2024): 407–24. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-023-09620-3.

Kobylin, Igor. "Mysledeyatel'nostnaya" Guvernamental'nost': Istoriya i Klassovoe Soznanie Upravlentsa." *Neprikosnovennyy Zapas*, no. 1 (2021): 183–98.

Kolman, Ernst. "The Present Crisis in the Mathematical Sciences and General Outlines for Their Reconstruction." In *Science at the Crossroads*, edited by Nikolai Bukharin. London: F. Cass, 1971.

Kolozova, Katerina, William Paul Cockshott, and Greg Michaelson. *Defending Materialism: The Uneasy History of the Atom in Science and Philosophy*. London New York Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2025.

Kolozova, Katerina. - *"Marx vs. Hegel."* Video, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-b0xhs7LmI

Kopnin, Pavel. "O Logicheskikh Vozzreniyakh N.A. Vasil'eva." In *Dialektika, Logika, Nauka*, by Kopnin, Pavel. Moscow: Nauka, 1973.

Korsakov, Sergey. “Bor’ba Akademika A. M. Deborina Za Nauchnuyu i Obshchestvennuyu Reabili- Taciyu: Povest’ v Dokumentakh i Svidetel’stvakh.” *Filosofskij Zhurnal* 1, no. 12 (2014): 117–39.

———. “Iz Istorii Vozrozhdeniya Logiki v SSSR v 1941-1946 Chast’ I.” *Logicheskie Issledovaniya* 21, no. 2 (2015): 145–69.

Kozlov, Denis, and Eleonory Gilburd, eds. *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*. Repr. in paperback. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014.

LaPierre, Brian. *Hooligans in Khrushchev’s Russia: Defining, Policing, and Producing Deviance during the Thaw*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012.

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Lektorsky, Vladislav. ed. *Filosofiiya ne konchaetsya: iz istorii otechestvennoĭ filosofii, XX vek*. Moscow: rossiyskaya politicheskaya entsiklopediya, 1998.

———. “O rugatel’nom slove «gnoseolog» i razvitii nauki pod ideologicheskim davleniem gosudarstva,” 2014. https://oralhistory.ru/talks/orh-1559.

———. “Problema Sub’ekta-Ob’ekta v Teorii Poznaniya.” *Voprosi Filosofii*, no. 5 (1964): 24–34.

Lenin, Vladimir. *Collected Works*. 4th ed. Vol. 14. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977.

———. *Collected Works: Volume 38 (Philosophical Notebooks)*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976.

Levant, Alex. “E.V. Ilyenkov and Creative Soviet Theory: An Introduction to ‘Dialectics of the Ideal.’” *Historical Materialism* 20, no. 2 (2012): 125–48. https://doi.org/10.1163/1569206X-12341247.

———. “Smart Matter and the Thinking Body: Activity Theory and the Turn to Matter in Contemporary Philosophy.” *Stasis* 5, no. 2 (2017): 248–64. https://doi.org/10.33280/2310-3817-2017-5-2-248-264.

Levant, Alex, and Vesa Oittinen, eds. *Dialectics of the Ideal: Evald Ilyenkov and Creative Soviet Marxism*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015.

Lewis, William S. “Althusser’s Materialisms: Dialectical, Historical, and Aleatory.” In *The History and Philosophy of Materialism*, edited by Charles Wolfe and John Symons. New York, 2024.

Lifshitz, Mikhail. *Dialog s Ėval'dom Il'enkovym: Problema Ideal'nogo*. Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya, 2003.

Lunacharsky, Anatoly. “Barukh Spinoza i Burzhuaziya.” *Zhurnal’no- Gazetnoe Ob’’edinenie*, 1933.

Macherey, Pierre. *Introduction à l’"Éthique" de Spinoza: deuxième partie, La réalité mentale*. Nouvelle éd. Quadrige. Paris: PUF, 2024.

Magun, Artemy. “Conservatism and the Dialectic of Ideology.” *Studies in East European Thought*, November 18, 2024. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-024-09656-z.

———. “Negativity in Communism: Ontology and Politics.” *Russian Sociological Review* 13, no. 1 (2014): 9–25.

Malevich, Kazimir. “Bog Ne Skinut. Iskusstvo, Tserkov’, Fabrika.” In *Sobranie Sochinenii, Stat’i, Manifesty, Teoreticheskie Sochineniia i Drugie Raboty, 1913–1929*, edited by A. S. Shatskikh and A. D. Sarabianov, 1:236–65. Moscow: Gileia, 1995.

Malm, Andreas. “Nature et Société : Un Ancien Dualisme Pour Une Situation Nouvelle.” Translated by Jean-François Bissonnette. *Actuel Marx* n° 61, no. 1 (2017): 47–63. https://doi.org/10.3917/amx.061.0047.

Mankovski, Lev. *Spinoza i Materializm*. Moscow: State Publishing House, 1930.

Marx, Karl. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977.

———. *Capital III*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959.

———. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.* Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977.

Marx, Karl. and Friedrich Engels. *Selected Correspondence, 1846– 1895*. New York: International Publishers, 1942.

Mark Mitin. *Dialekticheskiy i Istoricheskiy Materializm*. Moscow: Politizdat, 1933.

Mark Mitin and I. Razumovskiy, eds. *Dialekticheskij i Istoricheskij Materialism.* Moscow: Partiynoe izdatel’stvo, 1933.

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *Collected Works: Volume 3*. London: Lawrence & Wishart Electric Book, 2010.

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *Collected Works. 25: Frederick Engels: Anti-Dühring. Dialectics of Nature*. Progress Publishers, 1987.

Marx, Karl, Ben Fowkes, David Fernbach, and Karl Marx. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy; v.1*. Edited by Friedrich Engels and Ernest Mandel. Penguin Classics. London New York, N.Y., USA: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1990.

Maydansky, Andrey. “Dialektika Idealnogo.” *Logos* 1, no. 69 (2009).

———. “Reality as Activity: The Concept of Praxis in Soviet Philosophy.” In *The Practical Essence of Man The ‘Activity Approach’ in Late Soviet Philosophy*, edited by Andrey Maydansky and Vesa Oittinen, 108:42–58. Historical Materialism Book Series. Boston: Brill, 2015.

———. “The Ilyenkov Triangle: Marxism in Search of Its Philosophical Roots.” *Stasis* 5, no. 2 (2017): 136–63. https://doi.org/10.33280/2310-3817-2017-5-2-136-163.

———, ed. *The Practical Essence of Man: The “activity Approach” in Late Soviet Philosophy*. Historical Materialism Book Series, v. 108. Boston: Brill, 2015. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004273146.

McNulty, Jacob. *Hegel’s Logic and Metaphysics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.

———. “Logic Is Nothing without Metaphysics: Hegel and the Birth of Logic from Being.” *IAI* (blog), 2025. https://iai.tv/articles/logic-is-nothing-without-metaphysic-auid-3064.

Menshikova, Maria. “Diskussii o dialekticheskoj logike v SSSR.” Master’s thesis, State Academic University for the Humanities, 2018.

Minin, Sergey. “Filosofiju Za Bort!” *Pod Znamenem Marksizma*, no. 5–6 (1922).

Mitin, Mark. “Spinoza i Dialekticheski Materializm.” *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* I I-I 2 (1932).

Moir, Cat. *Ernst Bloch’s Speculative Materialism: Ontology, Epistemology, Politics*. Historical Materialism Book Series, Volume 202. Leiden: Brill, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004272873.

Morozova, Alla. *“Neleninskij bol'ševizm” A.A. Bogdanova i “vperedovcev”: idei, al'ternativy, praktika*. Moskva Sankt-Peterburg: Nestor-istoriâ, 2020.

Moseley, Fred. “The Universal and the Particulars in Hegel’s Logic and Marx’s Capital.” In *Marx’s “Capital” and Hegel’s “Logic”: A Reexamination*, edited by Tony Smith and Fred Moseley, 64:113–39. Historical Materialism Book Series. Brill, 2014. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004270022.

Nail, Thomas. *Marx in Motion: A New Materialist Marxism*. New York (N.Y.): Oxford University Press, 2020.

Negarestani, Reza. “The Labor of the Inhuman, Part II: The Inhuman.” *E-Flux*, no. 53 (2014): 1–14.

Nemeth, Thomas. “Althusser’s Anti-Humanism and Soviet Philosophy.” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 21, no. 4 (November 1980): 363–85. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00819105.

Nesbitt, Nick. *Reading Capital’s Materialist Dialectic: Marx, Spinoza, and the Althusserians*. Vol. 318. Historical materialism book series. London: Brill, 2024.

Oittinen, Vesa. “Dialekticeskye Varijatsii Ilyenkova, Ili Pocemu Ne Kant Vmesto Gegelja.” *Logos* 1 (69) (2009): 81–93.

———. “Ontologism in Soviet Philosophy: Some Remarks.” *Studies in East European Thought* 73, no. 2 (June 2021): 205–17. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-020-09380-4.

———. “Spinoza in Western and Soviet Philosophy: New Perspectives After Postmodernism.” In *Philosophical Thought in Russia in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: A Contemporary View from Russia and Abroad*, edited by Marina Bykova and Vladislav Lektorsky. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.

Oittinen, Vesa, and Elina Kristiina Viljanen, eds. *Stalin Era Intellectuals: Culture and Stalinism*. Erscheinungsort nicht ermittelbar: Taylor & Francis, 2023.

Omodeo, Pietro Daniel. “A Cosmos Without a Creator: Cesare Cremonini’s Interpretation of Aristotle’s Heaven.” *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 8, no. 2 (2019): 9–42. https://doi.org/10.5840/jems20198211.

———. “Geopraxis: A Concept for the Anthropocene.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History of Ideas* 11-Hybridization in the History of Ideas; Geoanthropology, no. 22 (2022). https://doi.org/10.13135/2280-8574/7337.

Osmakov, I.I. “O Logike Myshleniya i o Nauke Logike.” *Voprosi Filosofii* 3 (1950): 317–30.

Pasternak, Boris. *Il Dottor Zivago: Romanzo*. Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 1958.

Penzin, Alexei. “Contingency and Necessity in Evald Ilyenkov’s Communist Cosmology.” *E-Flux*, no. 88 (2018).

Pinsky, Anatoly. “Soviet Modernity Post-Stalin: The State, Emotions, and Subjectivities.” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 16, no. 2 (March 2015): 395–411. https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2015.0036.

Plekhanov, Georgi. “From Idealism to Materialism: Hegel and the Left Hegelians.” In *Selected Philosophical Works*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976.

———. *Selected Philosophical Works Vol. 2*. Progress Publishers, 1976. http://archive.org/details/georgi-plekhanov-selected-philosophical-works-vol.-2-progress-1976.

———. *Selected Philosophical Works Vol. 3*. Progress Publishers, 1976. http://archive.org/details/georgi-plekhanov-selected-philosophical-works-vol.-3-progress-1976.

Renault, Emmanuel. *Marx et La Philosophie*. Paris: PUF, 2013.

Rockmore, Tom, William J. Gavin, James G. Colbert, and Thomas J. Blakeley. *Marxism and Alternatives*. Vol. 45. Sovietica. Dordrecht: Springer, 1981. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-8495-0.

Rosa, Hartmut, Christoph Henning, and Arthur Bueno, eds. *Critical Theory and New Materialisms*. Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2021.

Rozov, Mikhail. *Filosofiya nauki v novom videnii*. Moscow: Novyy khronograf, 2012.

Rudinesco, Elisabeth. *Les Maîtres de La Langue: Avec Des Textes de Marr, Staline, Polivanov*. Edited by Françoise Gadet, Jean-Marc Gayman, and Yvan Mignot. Collection Action Poétique. Paris: F. Maspero : Action poétique, 1979.

Saito, Kohei. "La Théorie Du Métabolisme Chez Marx à l'ère de La Crise Écologique Mondiale." *Tracés*, no. 40 (2021): 161–82. https://doi.org/10.4000/traces.12425.

———. *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism*. Cambridge New York: Cambridge University press, 2022.

Sannino, Annalisa, Harry Daniels, and Kris D. Gutiérrez. "Activity Theory Between Historical Engagement and Future-Making Practice." In *Learning and Expanding with Activity Theory*, edited by Annalisa Sannino, Harry Daniels, and Kris D. Gutiérrez, 1–16. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511809989.002.

Schuringa, Christoph. *Karl Marx and the Actualization of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025.

Semprun, Jorge. "Économie politique et philosophie dans les « Grundrisse » de Marx." *L'Homme et la société* 7, no. 1 (1968): 57–68. https://doi.org/10.3406/homso.1968.1099.

Shapin, Steven, Simon Schaffer, and Thomas Hobbes. *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1985.

Sheehan, Helena. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science. 1: The First Hundred Years*. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Pr, 1985.

Smirnov, Vladimir "Logicheskie Vzglyady N.A.Vasil'eva." In *Ocherki Po Istorii Logiki v Rossii*, edited by Pyotr Nikitin. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1962.

Soboleva, Maja. "Marxism as Spinozism? One Episode in the History of Soviet Philosophy." *Studies in East European Thought* 74, no. 3 (September 2022): 319–32. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-021-09427-0.

———. "Ontologism in the Theoretical Philosophy of Nikolai Bukharin." *Studies in East European Thought* 73, no. 2 (June 1, 2021): 193–204. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-020-09365-3.

———. "Russian Marxism and Its Philosophy: From Theory to Ideology." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Russian Thought*, edited by Marina F. Bykova, Michael N. Forster, and Lina Steiner, 269–91. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-62982-3_13.

Sohn-Rethel, Alfred. *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Humanities Press, 1978.

Spivakov, Maxim. "Myslyashchaya plesen', rasplastannaya na kamnyakh dalekikh planet. Filosofiya Eval'da Il'enkova i myshlenie nechelovecheskogo." *Mezhdunarodnyy zhurnal issledovaniy kul'tury*, no. 4 (2021): 21–34. https://doi.org/10.52173/2079-1100_2021_4_21.

Steila, Daniela. "Interpretations of Spinoza in Early Russian Marxism." *Studies in East European Thought* 74, no. 3 (September 2022): 279–96. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-021-09410-9.

Steinberg, Justin. "Russian Marxism and the Materialist Interpretation of Spinoza." In *The History and Philosophy of Materialism*, edited by John Symons and Charles Wolfe, 351–63, 2024.

Swain, Dan, and Monika Woźniak. "Editorial: Ecosocialism in the Post-Communist Landscape." *Kontradikce* 6, no. 2 (2022): 5–14. https://doi.org/10.46957/con.2022.2.1.

Swiderski, Edward M. "The Activity Approach and Metaphysics." In *The Practical Essence of Man The 'Activity Approach' in Late Soviet Philosophy*, edited by Andrey Maydansky and Vesa Oittinen, 75–96. Historical Materialism Book Series. London: Brill, 2016.

Syutkin, Anton. “Sovetskaya Teoriya Sub"ekta: Materialisticheskaya Dialektika E. Il’enkova i M. Lifshitsa.” *Russkiy Logos* 1, no. Materialy mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii (2017): 284–92.

———. “Marksistskaya kontrreformatsiya: Absolyut i istoriya v materialisticheskoy dialektike Mikhaila Lifshitsa.” *Neprikosnovennyy zapas* 02, no. 148 (2023): 03–27.

Tabatchnikova, Svetlana. *Le Cercle de méthodologie de Moscou, 1954-1989: une pensée, une pratique*. Recherches d’histoire et de sciences sociales, 110 110. Paris: Éd. de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2007.

Tolstyh, Valentin Ivanovič. *Èval'd Vasil'evič Il'enkov*. Filosofy Rossii vtoroj poloviny XX veka. Moskva: ROSSPÈN, 2009.

Toscano, Alberto. “The Culture of Abstraction.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 4 (2008): 57–75. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276408091983.

Trotsky, Lev. *Sochineniia, XXI*. Moscow: State Publishing House, 1925.

Truchon, Lilian. *Lénine épistémologue: les thèses de “Matérialisme et empiriocriticisme” et la constitution d’un matérialisme intégral*. Paris: Éd. Delga, 2013.

TsK VKP(b). “O Nedostatkakh i Oshibkakh v Osveshchenii Istorii Nemetskoy Filosofii Kontsa XVIII i Nachala XIX Vv.” *Bol’shevik*, no. 7–8 (1944).

Tsvetkov, Alexei. “The Dialectician. Alexei Tsvetkov on Evald Ilyenkov,.” *Alexeytsvetkov.wordpress.com* (blog), September 12, 2013. https://alexeitsvetkov.wordpress.com/2013/09/12/ilienkov/.

Ursul, Arkady, ed. *Philosophy and the Ecological Problems of Civilisation*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983.

Valiavicharska, Zhivka. *Restless History: Political Imaginaries and Their Discontents in Post-Stalinist Bulgaria*. Montreal (Québec): McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2021.

Van Der Zweerde, Evert. *Soviet Historiography of Philosophy*. Vol. 57. Sovietica. Dordrecht: Springer, 1997. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-015-8943-7.

Vucinich, Alexander. *Empire of Knowledge*. Reprint 2020. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520347267.

Vygotsky, Lev. *Sobranie Sochineniy v Shesti Tomakh*. Vol. 1. Moscow: Pedagogika, 1982.

Wolfe, Charles T. "Epigenesis as Spinozism in Diderot's Biological Project." In *The Life Sciences in Early Modern Philosophy*, edited by Ohad Nachtomy and ustin E. H. Smith, 181–201. New York: Oup Usa, 2014.

Woźniak, Monika, and Andrzej W. Nowak. "Fighting for Philosophy in the Marxian Sense: Introduction to Evald Ilyenkov's "On the State of Philosophy [Letter to the Central Committee of the Party]." *Studies in East European Thought* 76, no. 3 (September 2024): 545–56. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-024-09627-4.

Yakhot, I. "The 'Leninist Stage' in Soviet Philosophy." *Studies in Soviet Thought* 20, no. 3 (October 1979): 303–8. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00832486.

———. *The Suppression of Philosophy in the USSR (the 1920s & 1930s)*. Oak Park, Mich: Mehring Books, 2012.

Yanovskaya, Sofiya. "Kategoriya Kolichestva u Gegelya i Sushchnost' Matematiki." *Pod Znamenem Marksizma*, no. 3 (1928): 30–71.

Yoel Regev. *Nevozmozhnoe i sovpadenie. O revolyutsionnoy situatsii v filosofii*. Perm: Gile press, 2016.

Yurchenko, Yuliya. "Humans, Nature and Dialectical Materialism." *Capital & Class* 45, no. 1 (March 2021): 33–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309816820929123.

Zapata, René. *La Philosophie russe et soviétique*. Que sais-je ? 2412. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1988.

Zweerde, Evert van der. "Soviet Philosophy – the Ideology and the Handmaid. A Historical and Critical Analysis of Soviet Philosophy, with a Case-Study Into Soviet History of Philosophy." *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie* 57, no. 4 (1995): 757–59.

Appendix A

Introduction à la Cosmologie de l'esprit d'Evald Ilyenkov

Une caractéristique particulière de la culture soviétique tardive réside dans la multiplicité des philosophies spéculatives qu'elle a cultivées. Les théories et concepts considérés en Occident comme excessivement métaphysiques ont acquis un attrait singulier dans les sociétés où un matérialisme strict était imposé par l'État. Diverses philosophies de la nature, des conceptualisations continues de la matière et des visions cosmiques du temps ont différencié le marxisme soviétique de son homologue occidental, plus structuraliste.

La "Cosmologie de l'Esprit" d'Evald Ilyenkov est un exemple emblématique de cette spécificité. Rédigé au milieu des années 1950 et publié pour la première fois à titre posthume en 1988, cet essai renverse complètement la vision simpliste du marxisme soviétique comme un scolasticisme dogmatique. Son auteur, un jeune philosophe revenu de la guerre et ayant commencé à enseigner à l'Université d'État de Moscou (MGU), se retrouvera bientôt à l'avant-garde d'une lutte pour libérer la philosophie soviétique de l'emprise des idéologues du parti. Dans ce texte de jeunesse, dont nous avons le plaisir d'introduire ici la traduction en français, Ilyenkov énonce une thèse qui aurait facilement pu être considérée comme hérétique à son époque : *«* Non seulement la pensée ne peut exister sans la matière… *mais la matière ne peut*

exister sans la pensée. » Communiste convaincu jusqu'à sa mort,[565] Ilyenkov affirmait que ce postulat ne contredisait en rien le matérialisme dialectique. Bien au contraire, il le considérait comme la seule manière possible de concevoir la relation entre la matière et la pensée dans les paramètres de cette philosophie. Il développa par la suite une image concrète de cette relation sous une forme mêlant les genres philosophique, prosaïque et poétique, qu'il qualifia lui-même de « phantasmagorie ».

S'inspirant de l'idée de la mort thermique de l'univers, issue de la physique du XIXe siècle, Ilyenkov confronte « l'esprit pensant » à la froide réalité d'une mort lointaine mais inéluctable par l'entropie. La matière se refroidit progressivement en raison de la dissipation de l'énergie, et il n'existe pas de processus anti-entropique connu dans la nature. L'humanité est donc vouée à disparaître d'une planète qui, un jour, deviendra un astre gelé dans l'espace. C'est dans ce scénario apparemment apocalyptique qu'Ilyenkov identifie la raison profonde de l'apparition de la pensée dans un monde matériel. Lorsque toutes les réserves d'énergie seront épuisées et que la planète sera au bord de l'entropie totale, « l'esprit pensant », suggère-t-il, devra embraser le monde dans un acte sacrificiel, le réduisant en flammes pour générer l'énergie nécessaire au démarrage d'un nouveau cycle cosmique. Ce faisant, l'esprit remplirait son ultime devoir : rembourser sa dette cosmologique envers la matière.

Cette vision dramatique est profondément influencée par plusieurs traditions intellectuelles. Ilyenkov mobilise d'abord l'ontologie spinoziste pour soutenir que des êtres pensants, une forme de *res cogitans*, réapparaîtront après le début d'un nouveau cycle cosmique, puisque, comme le soutient Spinoza, la pensée est un *attribut nécessaire* de la substance. L'émergence dialectique de l'esprit à partir de la matière témoigne de l'influence hégélienne qu'Ilyenkov avait déjà commencé à assimiler durant les années de guerre. Par ailleurs, la circularité des cycles cosmiques, qui fait de l'histoire humaine un épisode dans le cadre plus vaste du temps planétaire, s'inscrit dans la continuité de la *Dialectique de la nature* d'Engels, dont la présence est manifeste tout au long de l'essai. Enfin, une influence plus indirecte mais tout aussi indéniable est celle du cosmisme russe, ce mouvement politico-mystique qui imaginait la résurrection de tous les morts par des moyens scientifiques.

[565] Ilyenkov se donne la mort en 1979, après une série de persécutions idéologiques de la part de la *nomenklatura* du parti communiste.

Sur le travail de ces influences majeures Ilyenkov va construire sa propre version de la relation matière/esprit qui va s'avérer beaucoup plus élaborée que ce que l'on peut y comprendre à première vue. En effet, si l'on analyse de plus près le texte, on peut s'apercevoir que la cosmologie dévie d'un matérialisme pur car, par cette idée d'un esprit ou d'une idée comme état ou propriété de la matière, Ilyenkov disqualifie toute possibilité de dualisme Matière/Idée et dépasse de loin le monisme de type spinoziste qu'il avait pris comme modèle. La relation matière/esprit qu'il pense est différente et est bien plus complexe que ces deux modèles traditionnels. Dire que la pensée est une propriété (ou un attribut) de la matière entraîne une instanciation de la pensée par la celle-ci : la matière engendre l'esprit en tant que sa propriété, propriété considérée comme différente de la matière ; un simple monisme est donc exclu et en même temps, la relation portée par les deux éléments ne fait que renforcer un effacement de tout potentiel dualisme matière/esprit (et on retrouve ici quelques fils de la philosophie de l'esprit, notamment chez John Searle) : il va plus loin en proposant une double relation d'implication assez inédite. D'un côté, la matière engendre l'esprit mais de l'autre l'esprit est la seule possibilité pour la matière de réamorcer son cycle. Nous pourrions dire qu'ils forment une combinaison ou un système interdépendant plutôt qu'un tout ou une opposition.

Ilyenkov propose dans la *Cosmologie de l'esprit* une *émergence* de l'esprit à partir de la matière et un sacrifice de celui-ci pour faire émerger celle-là. Et c'est bien cette émergence qui caractérise la relation, d'abord empêchant toute forme de relation simple et précédemment envisagée. Il ne s'agit pas d'y voir un tout ou deux entités distinctes mais un système interdépendant d'émergence – la double relation d'implication dont nous parlions plus haut, une coexistence tellement imbriquée que l'un ne peut plus exister sans l'autre – double relation qui efface la question ontologique de l'existence première ou de la matière ou de l'idée, respectant en profondeur cette circularité hégélienne qui marque toute la *Cosmologie de l'esprit*. Pour Ilyenkov, et par son argumentation, la vieille question de savoir lequel des deux est premier perd de sa pertinence et il développe une ontologie complexe à plusieurs niveaux où certes la matière peut garder une certaine préséance à un niveau historique mais la perd aux niveaux logique et métaphysique.

En allant plus loin, on pourrait envisager un parallèle assez dessiné entre ce système interdépendant d'émergence et une philosophie de l'absolu – sous l'angle de la coïncidence de la substance et du sujet. Il ne s'agit pas de simplement souligner les influences du texte (Hegel et Spinoza – les deux grands artisans de l'Absolu), mais d'insister aussi sur l'acte sacrificiel en

tant que pratique sociale liant inexorablement substance et sujet. Le marxisme soviétique s'est toujours heurté à la problématique idéaliste allemande de la substance et du sujet, et a développé deux branches distinctes : l'une gravitant autour du pôle de la substance (comme chez Lénine, Plekhanov, Deborine, etc.), l'autre autour du pôle du sujet (chez Bogdanov ou Ilyenkov). Ilyenkov refuse de faire un choix entre ces deux directions et a justement besoin de saisir un sujet et *matériellement* – institué par la substance (nature, matière) – et *dialectiquement*, donc sans réduire ce sujet à la substance, en effaçant son autonomie. La Cosmologie est donc vraisemblablement une tentative de fonder cette tension où le sujet à la fois est matériel et conserve son autonomie précisément dans la possibilité du sacrifice, qui ne peut être garanti que par le fait que le sujet devienne communiste.

Ilyenkov réinjecte une forme d'idéalisme dans le matérialisme là où la doctrine du *diamat* s'efforce de gommer tout idéalisme (principalement dans la dialectique hégélienne). L'absence d'un ancrage profond dans un matérialisme clair fait de cette production un article difficilement publiable dans le contexte soviétique de l'époque, c'est peut-être pourquoi Ilyenkov le partageait avec certains étudiants et collègues plutôt qu'essayer de le faire publier[566].

De façon plus surprenante, on pourrait dire qu'Ilyenkov pense déjà à ce que pratiquera la philosophie analytique dès les années 1980 : c'est-à-dire une véritable déconstruction des arguments cartésiens, leibniziens, humiens, berkeleyens entre autres ce que John Searle, en passant par la perspective perceptuelle, appelle le « Mauvais Argument », résultant dans une impossibilité à la fois et d'un monisme et d'un dualisme tels que pensés par la tradition, et prenant en compte le côté matériel de la production de la pensée (les processus biochimiques ou neurobiologiques par exemple) sans pour autant verser dans un déterminisme pur.

Enfin, il nous paraît intéressant de soulever un dernier point – peu abordé par les commentateurs – concernant la vision à long terme d'Ilyenkov dans ce texte au sujet des effets de la technique. Alors que nous ne mourrons pas du froid cosmique grâce à la technique, un point qui met en valeur le techno-optimisme de l'auteur, Ilyenkov ne fait pas mention – assez curieusement au beau milieu d'un risque de guerre nucléaire – de la possibilité que l'homme lui-même provoque sa perte par la technique. Peut-être, et contrairement à l'époque, est-il

[566] À ce sujet, voir l'article qui mentionne comme source *Ilyenkov: zhit' filosofiei* (Evald Ilyenkov: To live by philosophy) écrit par un ami and collègue d'Ilyenkov, Sergei Mareyev (Moscow: Akademitcheski Projet, 2014), 156–71.

aujourd'hui facile de voir que la technique, même si elle est devenue un prolongement de l'humanité, est impliquée largement dans les processus de destruction de l'habitat humain et animal, et provoque de nombreux conflits, etc. On peut se poser la question de savoir si pour Ilyenkov et dans le contexte de la *Cosmologie de l'esprit* cette dérive, ce problème de la technique est un effet du capitalisme avec sa nécessité de classes. La technique ravage le monde (local, régional, global) par ses conséquences : non seulement au niveau climatique – la partie émergée de l'iceberg dans la *Cosmologie* – mais aussi par les guerres, les famines ou plus généralement la pauvreté. S'agit-il là d'un effet direct des systèmes capitalistes ? De l'optimisation et l'accroissement des flux intrinsèques à son existence ?

Là où il faut certainement replacer la *Cosmologie de l'esprit* dans son contexte, c'est qu'on se trouve dans une relation particulière à la technique : une forme de prométhéisme ; l'humanité maîtrise la technique avancée et l'utilise pour surpasser les obstacles de la nature. Mais Ilyenkov pose lui-même des limites à cet optimisme envers la technique en précisant que le scénario proposé dans ce texte n'est possible que dans le cadre d'une société communiste, c'est-à-dire dans une perspective postrévolutionnaire où la société sans classes a triomphé et l'antagonisme des classes a été vaincu, et ne restent à combattre que les questions de la mort de l'humanité et du refroidissement général de l'univers.

On peut donc mettre à la base de cet optimisme technique la conception et l'achèvement d'une société dépourvue de toute aliénation : hors du système communiste soviétique Ilyenkov aurait probablement changé de perspective sur la technique dès ou même bien avant la *Cosmologie*. C'est d'ailleurs ce qu'il fait dans ses textes ultérieurs, où sa relation à la technique se complexifie et il se mue en porte-parole d'une philosophie soviétique moins favorable à la technique, jugeant aliénante cette relation encombrante entre homme et technique. En effet il faut se rappeler de l'utilité de la technique dans la pensée soviétique : celle-ci est principalement existante pour corriger les éventuelles erreurs humaines et alléger la charge du travailleur. Évidemment Ilyenkov a tout de suite entrevu les conséquences d'un tel rapport à la technique, c'est-à-dire la création d'un nouveau type d'aliénation qui empêche structurellement la société soviétique de réunir les conditions nécessaires au plein développement créatif de ses sujets. Pour lui compter sur la technique était donc contradictoire avec l'absence d'aliénation totale réclamée par la réalisation complète de la société communiste et cette aliénation se devait d'être surmontée dans le socialisme.

Pour clore cette brève introduction, on peut constater combien la *Cosmologie* d'Ilyenkov est difficile à situer, car elle propose un mélange de visions diverses et souvent contradictoires : anthropocentrisme et anti-humanisme, dialectique et téléologie, changement et répétition. Cependant, son intérêt dépasse largement le cadre historique. Relue aujourd'hui, dans la conjoncture géo-sociale de l'Anthropocène, l'essai d'Ilyenkov nous rappelle notre profonde interdépendance ontologique avec notre environnement et les implications politiques qui en découlent. Comme l'a écrit Yulia Yurchenko :

« [La Cosmologie d'Ilyenkov] n'est ni un plan évolutif, ni une sortie, mais avec sa vision dialectique, noosphérique et moléculaire qui efface toutes les binarités, concrètes ou abstraites, c'est un bon point de départ pour envisager un au-delà du capitalocène et du productivisme, et de leurs tendances écocidaires. »[567]

Quelle que soit l'interprétation qu'on choisit de cette eschatologie marxiste d'Ilyenkov, sa conclusion essentielle reste indiscutable : sans intervention consciente, la planète suit une trajectoire inévitable vers l'inhabitabilité.

[567] Yuliya YURCHENKO, « Humans, nature and dialectical materialism » Capital & Class. 45. 030981682092912. 10.1177/0309816820929123. 2020, p. 8.

Cosmologie de l’Esprit

Evald Ilyenkov

Une tentative d'établir, en termes généraux, le rôle objectif de la matière pensante dans le système d'interaction universelle (fantasmagorie philosophico-poétique basée sur les principes du matérialisme dialectique).

Nous pouvons dire, sans commettre un crime contre les axiomes du matérialisme dialectique, que la matière possède toujours la pensée, se pense toujours elle-même.

Cela ne signifie pas, bien sûr, que dans chacune de ses particules, à chaque instant, elle a la capacité de penser et qu'elle pense actuellement. Ceci est vrai pour la matière dans son ensemble, en tant que substance infinie dans le temps et l'espace.

Elle engendre sans cesse – en raison d'une nécessité inhérente à sa nature – des êtres pensants et y reproduit continuellement l'organe de la pensée – le cerveau pensant. Et – en vertu de l'infinité de l'espace – cet organe existe donc dans son actualité à chaque instant fini, quelque part au sein de l'espace infini. Ou, au contraire, dans chaque point fini de l'espace – cette fois en vertu de l'infinité du temps – la pensée aussi se réalise tôt ou tard (à supposer que ces mots soient généralement applicables au temps infini) et chaque particule de matière en vertu de cela [pour cette raison], à un certain point au sein du temps infini, fait partie du cerveau pensant, c'est-à-dire qu'elle pense.

C'est pourquoi nous pouvons dire que, dans chaque moment actuel du temps, la pensée est une propriété intrinsèque de la matière – si, en un point de l'espace infini, la matière détruit l'organe de la pensée, le cerveau pensant, alors, avec la même nécessité de fer, elle le reproduit au même moment en un autre point.

L'organe par lequel la matière se pense elle-même ne disparaît donc à aucun moment du temps infini – et la matière possède donc constamment la pensée comme l’un de ses attributs. Elle ne peut pas le perdre un seul instant. Nous devons en outre supposer que le cerveau pensant actuel existe toujours au sein de l'infini, simultanément dans toutes les phases de son

développement : en certains points – dans la phase d'émergence, en d'autres – dans la phase de déclin, et encore ailleurs – dans la phase de l'épanouissement le plus élevé de son développement et de sa puissance.

« …la matière se meut selon des lois qui, à un stade déterminé – tantôt ici, tantôt là – produisent nécessairement dans des êtres organiques l'esprit pensant ».[568] En ce sens, le matérialisme dialectique rétablit sous une forme rationnelle la position simple et profonde de Bruno-Spinoza ; dans la matière, prise comme un tout, le développement à chaque moment fini du temps est effectivement complet, tous les stades et toutes les formes de son développement nécessaire y sont simultanément actualisés. Considérée dans son ensemble, la matière ne se transforme pas : À aucun moment elle ne peut perdre un de ses attributs, ni en acquérir de nouveaux.

Naturellement, ceci non seulement ne contredit pas, mais au contraire présuppose que dans chaque sphère finie de son existence – aussi grande soit-elle – il y a toujours un développement réellement dialectique. Mais ce qui est vrai de chaque partie « finie » de la matière n'est pas vrai de la matière dans son ensemble, de la matière comprise comme substance.

En tant que substance, la matière ne peut pas être représentée comme la simple somme de ses parties « finies », et toutes les affirmations théoriques vraies pour chacune de ses parties finies deviennent fausses pour la matière dans son ensemble, dans son cycle éternel, fermé sur lui-même.

Pour chaque sphère finie de son existence, il est vrai que la pensée émerge sur la base et après l'existence d'autres formes plus simples d'existence de matière et n'existe pas toujours, tandis que d'autres formes de matière existent toujours, constituant une condition préalable et nécessaire à la naissance de la pensée.

Mais pour la matière dans son ensemble, comprise comme une substance universelle, cette position n'est plus correcte. Ici, une autre position serait correcte :

---

[568] Engels, F. *Dialectique de la nature*. Traduit de l'Allemand par Émile Bottigelli. Paris : *Éditions sociales*, 1968. pp. 154-155

Non seulement la pensée ne peut exister sans la matière (ceci est reconnu par tous les matérialistes, y compris les matérialistes métaphysiques comme Holbach), mais *la matière ne peut exister sans la pensée*, et seul un matérialiste-dialecticien, un matérialiste du type de Spinoza, peut partager cette position.

Comme il n'y a pas de pensée sans matière, comprise comme substance, il n'y a pas non plus de matière sans pensée, comprise comme son attribut.

Se représenter la matière dans son ensemble – comme une substance universelle – dépourvue de la pensée comme un de ses attributs, c'est se la représenter mal, plus pauvre qu'elle ne l'est en réalité. Cela signifierait, dans la définition théorique de la matière comme substance (puisqu'elle n'est pas seulement une catégorie purement gnoséologique), omettre arbitrairement l'une de ses définitions universelles et nécessaires en tant qu'attribut. Cela signifierait donner une définition erronée de la matière comme substance, la réduire à une catégorie purement gnoséologique.

Lénine, on le sait, considérait qu'il était absolument nécessaire « d'approfondir le concept de matière jusqu'au concept de substance », car c'est seulement dans ce cas qu'il perdra sa signification purement gnoséologique.

Et aussi inattendue que la thèse « De même qu'il n'y a pas de pensée sans matière, il n'y a pas de matière sans pensée » puisse paraître, c'est précisément dans cette thèse que se trouve l'unique distinction principale qui sépare le matérialisme dialectique (le matérialisme de Spinoza, Engels et Lénine) du matérialisme mécaniste (le matérialisme de Galilée, Newton, Hobbes et Holbach). Pour ce dernier, cette position est hors de portée.

Le matérialisme mécaniste ne comprend la pensée que comme un produit de la matière, comme une des propriétés de la matière – et donc comme une propriété plus ou moins aléatoire : « ... Pour lui, que la matière développe à partir d'elle-même le cerveau pensant de l'homme est un pur hasard, bien que nécessairement déterminé pas à pas là où cela se produit ».[569] Selon

[569] *Id*.,

p. 167

[3] *Ibid.*

ce point de vue, la pensée peut aussi ne pas se produire du tout – car elle n'est qu'une exception plus ou moins fortuite, le produit d'un heureux concours de circonstances – sans aucun détriment pour la matière dans son ensemble.

« En réalité, c'est de par sa nature même que la matière parvient à former des êtres pensants – s'oppose à cette position Engels – et, par suite, cela se produit toujours nécessairement, là où les conditions en sont données. »[3] Et ces « conditions » adéquates ne sont pas non plus un pur hasard – elles sont elles-mêmes créées avec la même nécessité de fer par le même mouvement universel, et donc nécessairement la matière dans son ensemble actualise par nécessité la pensée constamment et ne peut la perdre pour un instant de son existence dans le temps et l'espace infinis.

Si par conséquent la philosophie en tant que science ne considère que les formes universelles (infinies) d'existence et de développement de la matière et si ses principes scientifiques ne concernent que ces formes, alors la philosophie dialectique-matérialiste doit contenir non pas le principe suivant : « Il n'y a pas de pensée sans matière, mais il y a de la matière sans pensée », mais un autre principe comprenant la compréhension de la dialectique infinie de leur relation : « Comme il n'y a pas de pensée sans matière, il n'y a pas de matière sans pensée ». Cette position est beaucoup plus conforme à la fois à la perspective générale de la philosophie sur la question et à sa solution dialectique (et pas seulement matérialiste).

Le point suivant dans la conception dialectique-matérialiste du problème, peu exposé jusqu'à présent mais très contraignant, concerne la compréhension de la pensée, de la matière pensante, comme une forme de mouvement et de développement absolument suprême.

La pensée est incontestablement le produit suprême du développement universel, le stade le plus élevé de l'organisation des interactions, la limite de la sophistication de cette organisation.

Non seulement la science ne connaît pas une forme organisée supérieure au cerveau pensant, mais en principe la philosophie ne peut pas admettre cette hypothèse comme possible, car celle-ci rend la philosophie elle-même impossible.

Dans ce cas, la thèse d'une cognoscibilité fondamentale du monde environnant s'effondre, rendant impossible tout système philosophique, autre que le scepticisme ou une forme positiviste d'agnosticisme. Si la matière est en général capable d'engendrer une forme de mouvement plus élevée que le cerveau pensant, une forme qui serait située dans la même relation fondamentale avec le cerveau pensant, par laquelle, par exemple, le mouvement biologique serait lié au chimique, alors une telle hypothèse serait complètement équivalente à la reconnaissance d'une sphère de la réalité qui est fondamentalement inconnaissable par la pensée.

En effet, cette hypothétique forme de développement (encore plus organisée qu'un cerveau pensant) ne peut pas être rapportée à la sphère des phénomènes matériels : elle présupposerait, comme sa condition historiquement nécessaire et sa condition historiquement dépassée, surmontée par le développement, non seulement une nature existant au-delà, en dehors et indépendamment de la pensée, mais aussi la pensée elle-même. Il s'agirait d'une certaine forme de développement qui ne serait possible que postérieurement à la pensée et fondée sur elle. En d'autres termes, la pensée se conserverait en elle comme un moment « sublimé », surmonté, secondaire et insignifiant – à la manière dont le mouvement chimique et mécanique dans un organisme vivant est transformé en une forme secondaire de son existence.

Les lois de cette forme hypothétique de développement ne pouvaient pas être réduites aux lois de la pensée, ni être déduites (c'est-à-dire comprises) de ces lois. Sinon, cette forme de développement serait fondamentalement inconnaissable pour la pensée, mais - en tant que forme organisée supérieure - elle dominerait la pensée comme un domaine mystérieux de la réalité, dont les lois sont fondamentalement inaccessibles.

Nous reviendrions ainsi à la conception améliorée d'Emmanuel Kant : le monde des phénomènes (aussi bien ceux qui nous entourent que ceux de la pensée elle-même) se transformerait en une forme de manifestation extérieure d'une certaine « essence » supérieure en fonction de ses lois – une essence qui est fondamentalement, en tant que chose en soi, inconcevable.

En d'autres termes, par cette admission, nous rendrions fondamentalement possible tout type de mysticisme et de diablerie… Nous admettrions qu'il existe toujours un certain « quelque chose » au-dessus de la nature et de la pensée, et ce « quelque chose », en vertu de sa

complexité surnaturelle, serait fondamentalement inconnaissable et inconcevable pour la pensée.

Et quel que soit le nom que l'on donnerait à cette forme de développement plus élevée que le cerveau pensant, la forme plus complexe de l'organisation du mouvement, son essence resterait exactement la même que celle des concepts de Dieu, de Providence, d'Esprit du monde, etc.

Cette perspective, qui découle nécessairement de l'hypothèse de la possibilité d'une organisation du mouvement du processus universel plus élevée que le cerveau pensant, serait tout aussi idéaliste que l'idéalisme absolu du système hégélien, mais elle diffèrerait de ce dernier en ce qu'elle supposerait nécessairement que cette réalité supérieure soit inconcevable pour la pensée. En d'autres termes, sa perspective serait la plus proche de la perspective kantienne.

Chez Hegel, si la Raison surhumaine est autorisée, la pensée se voit toujours attribuer la capacité de se développer jusqu'à un tel niveau, où, sans cesser d'être la pensée, elle devient égale en puissance à cet Esprit du monde. Dans la logique, selon Hegel, les lois de la pensée coïncident et correspondent aux lois de l'absolu. Cela signifie que la pensée - quoi que par voie détournée - est tout de même élevée au rang de la réalité suprême. En somme, dans la *Phénoménologie de l'esprit*, la pensée humaine devient identique à l'absolu, appréhendant des lois auxquelles la raison absolue se soumet et se convertit ainsi en une incarnation de cette réalité suprême, devenant la forme la plus élevée du mouvement, au-dessus laquelle il n'y a rien et ne peut plus rien y avoir.

Et cette compréhension a marqué un pas en avant par rapport à la conception de Kant. Et il est clair que l'hypothèse d'une forme de développement de l'univers plus organisée que la pensée (quelle que soit la manière dont on l'interprète, matérialiste ou idéaliste) est parfaitement équivalente à l'adoption de la thèse de l'incognoscibilité fondamentale du monde, des lois supérieures auxquelles il se soumet dans son existence.

Le matérialisme dialectique – puisqu'il n'est pas un système de données scientifiques interprétées de manière positiviste, mais un système de philosophie en tant que science particulière – doit accepter (comme tout système philosophique, à l'exception des systèmes

agnostiques ou sceptiques) que le cerveau pensant est absolument la forme la plus élevée d'organisation de la matière, et que la pensée, en tant que faculté du cerveau, est également la limite ultime que la matière universelle peut atteindre en général dans son développement graduel.

Ainsi, la pensée est le produit suprême du développement de l'univers. En lui, lors de la naissance du cerveau pensant, la matière universelle atteint un stade à partir duquel toutes les possibilités de développement ultérieur « vers le haut » – sur la voie de la sophistication de l'organisation des formes de mouvement – sont épuisées.

Après cela, le chemin ne peut qu'aller « vers le bas », sur la voie de la décomposition de cette organisation, jusqu'à un niveau purement biologique-physiologique dans le cas de la détérioration mentale, ou plus loin encore, jusqu'à la simple chimie dans le cas de la mort physiologique du cerveau.

Une autre voie « vers le haut » est exclue. La matière pensante du cerveau, dont la forme de mouvement est la pensée, est la limite absolue et inéluctable du développement progressif.

C'est une conclusion foncièrement nécessaire de toute philosophie scientifique, à l'exclusion, comme nous l'avons déjà montré, de l'agnosticisme et du scepticisme – une conclusion dont la nécessité impérieuse a été reconnue par tous les systèmes de philosophie scientifique – ceux de Spinoza ou de Fichte, Hegel ou Engels.

Les différences entre le matérialisme et l'idéalisme suivent une autre ligne – celle de l'interprétation de la pensée elle-même et de ses relations avec le monde matériel. Mais tous les systèmes philosophiques sont également d'accord pour reconnaître la pensée comme la forme suprême du développement de l'univers. Car cette reconnaissance est une condition nécessaire à l'existence et au développement de la philosophie elle-même. Si ce n'était pas le cas, la philosophie ne pourrait pas tirer une seule conclusion responsable et catégorique, elle ne pourrait même pas être considérée comme une science du tout.

Ainsi, le cerveau pensant avec sa capacité de penser est la limite absolue du développement en tant que développement graduel. Mais le caractère graduel du développement n'est pas la

seule forme de développement. Sinon, cela conduirait à un mauvais infini. Alors que le véritable infini a, on s'en souvient, la forme d'un cercle, d'un cycle.

Le produit suprême du développement retourne par décomposition à ses formes les plus basses, entrant ainsi à nouveau dans le cycle éternel de la matière universelle.

Et ce grand cercle, qui n'a ni début ni fin, où la matière universelle ne perd aucun des attributs qu'elle possède et n'en acquiert aucun nouveau, comprend, sous forme d'anneau, tous les cycles « finis » possibles de développement.

Le caractère circulaire de l'infini est le seul qui corresponde à la vision dialectique. L'alternative à cette conception ne peut être qu'une représentation qui contient l'idée d'un « début » et d'une « fin » du développement universel, d'une « cause première », d'un « état égal à lui-même », etc.

Ainsi, la pensée en tant qu'attribut (et, de plus, en sa qualité de produit suprême du développement universel) est incluse dans ce grand cercle éternel de la matière universelle, renouvelant sans cesse ses cycles. Elle apparaît comme l'un des maillons du cycle du développement, comme un maillon à travers lequel le grand cercle passe en quelque sorte dans sa totalité avec une certaine nécessité de fer.

En d'autres termes, le cerveau pensant apparaît comme l'un des maillons nécessaires, verrouillant le grand cercle général [*всеобщий*] de la matière universelle [*мировой*]. Dans le sens d'un développement « graduel », c'est absolument le point culminant du cercle, suivi ensuite par le retour de la matière à des formes plus élémentaires et antérieures – à la biologie, à la chimie, à la masse liquide ardente ou au brouillard incandescent des corps célestes, à la poussière des nébuleuses, raréfiée, froide et indifférenciée, à la brume gazeuse des espaces intergalactiques, au pur déplacement mécanique des particules élémentaires, etc.

Notons ici une conséquence importante qui découle inévitablement de la reconnaissance d'une forme de développement absolument supérieure. Ayant reconnu – comme une disposition théoriquement nécessaire – l'impossibilité d'une forme supérieure à la pensée, à un

cerveau pensant, nous devons forcément accepter aussi une limite « inférieure » – une limite en dessous de laquelle l'existence de la matière s'avère impossible.

Évidemment, nous en sommes encore très loin. Mais il est nécessaire de le supposer théoriquement. Si l'on admet que toute matière organisée, plus élevée et plus complexe que le cerveau pensant, ne peut exister en raison de la nature même des choses, on reconnaît de la même façon une limite opposée – la limite de la simplicité de l'organisation de la matière, la forme simple ultime du mouvement, le début relatif du cycle. Sinon, une absurdité se produit : dans un « sens » – vers la sophistication de l'organisation de la matière et de la forme de son mouvement – une limite est acceptée, tandis que dans l'autre direction – vers la « simplification » de son organisation - un mauvais infini est assumé. Engels admet complètement une telle condition dans laquelle toutes les propriétés particulières de la matière disparaissent, tandis que seules subsistent les propriétés qui la caractérisent comme matière simple, en supposant qu'un tel état se réalise « dans *la sphère gazeuse de la nébuleuse* ». Toutes les substances dans cette condition, affirme Engels, « *se fondent en pure matière en tant que telle*, n'agissant que comme matière et non selon leurs propriétés spécifiques. »[570]

Il faut ajouter ici que la physique contemporaine, dans ses tentatives de révéler les lois les plus simples reliant l'espace, le mouvement et le temps, arrive à l'idée de la « quantification » de l'espace et du temps, à l'idée de « quantum » élémentaire de l'espace, du temps et du mouvement, comme cette limite de divisibilité à partir de laquelle, si on la franchit, l'interconditionnalité objective du mouvement, du temps et de l'espace disparaîtrait. La particule dans laquelle la forme pure du mouvement mécanique est réellement réalisée (et pas seulement en termes abstraits) est une particule dépourvue de toutes les propriétés autres que purement mécaniques – « mécanique » s'entend ici non pas au sens de la physique newtonienne mais au sens de la théorie de la relativité dans sa forme rationnelle, dans la forme matérialiste dialectique.

Il faut évidemment admettre une telle particule, une particule dépourvue de propriétés chimiques, électriques et autres. D'un point de vue philosophique et théorique, cela n'a rien de « mécaniste », mais c'est la conclusion qui découle automatiquement de la reconnaissance du niveau suprême d'organisation de la matière. Il est impossible de reconnaître une forme

[570] *Id.*, p. 198

absolument supérieure sans accepter son contraire, la forme absolument inférieure, absolument la plus simple de la matière et de son mouvement.

Avec l'atome disparaissent les propriétés chimiques, avec l'électron disparaissent les propriétés électriques de la matière et quelque part, évidemment, il existe une frontière qui ne peut être franchie sans détruire les propriétés mécaniques (c'est-à-dire la connexion du simple mouvement avec les caractéristiques spatiales et temporelles de la réalité objective).

Cet état, peut-être, se matérialise non pas dans une « sphère gazeuse de la nébuleuse », comme le supposait Engels ; la sphère gazeuse elle-même, très probablement, est en quelque sorte un stade d'interaction plus compliqué, mais sous la forme d'un « champ » comme forme absolument inférieure d'organisation de l'interaction de la matière, comme réalité de la matière qui ne peut être décomposée davantage, comme indifférenciation absolue de sa condition.

C'est la deuxième prémisse de l'hypothèse.

La troisième prémisse philosophique et théorique de l'hypothèse est la position incontestable selon lequel « tout ce qui existe est digne de mort », que chaque forme « finie » d'existence a son début et sa fin. Cette condition s'applique aussi bien au système solaire planétaire actuel qu'à l'humanité qui l'habite.

Il est clair qu'à un moment donné, dans les ténèbres du futur, l'humanité cessera d'exister et que le flux éternel du mouvement de l'Univers finira par emporter et effacer toute trace de culture humaine. La Terre elle-même sera un jour dispersée dans la poussière de l'espace cosmique et sera dissoute dans le cycle éternel de la matière universelle...

C'est une dialectique et une perspective presque indifférente pour nous – avant que cela ne se produise, des millions d'années se seront écoulées, des centaines de milliers de générations seront nées et descendues dans la tombe. Mais il arrive inexorablement un temps où l'esprit pensant s'éteindra sur Terre pour renaître ailleurs dans l'Univers infini.

Il s'agit d'une perspective incontestable à tous points de vue. Il est aussi ridicule d'en être triste que d'être triste du fait que tout dans le monde est interconnecté, que la quantité se transforme en qualité, que la pensée ne peut exister sans le cerveau, etc.

Ce fait n'est donc pas du tout une question d'émotion, mais une question de compréhension.

Mais si, d'un point de vue pratique, ce fait nous est totalement indifférent et n'a aucune influence sur notre vie (après tout, un individu ne se croise pas les mains, bien qu'il sache que tôt ou tard il devra quitter la vie), d'un point de vue théorique, cette perspective n'est pas dépourvue d'intérêt.

On ne peut ignorer que, sous une forme ou une autre, ce problème a toujours scintillé dans la conscience humaine.

Dans une mise en scène naïve et mystique, il est connu comme le problème du but ultime de l'existence humaine, ce but suprême pour lequel l'esprit pensant se réalise dans l'univers et pour lequel l'humanité subit de telles souffrances et tourments.

La réponse, bien sûr, a toujours eu une teinte idéologique. La réalisation des objectifs moraux suprêmes, de la loi morale ou – comme chez Hegel – l'objectif de la conscience de soi de l'Esprit du monde : toutes ces options différentes nous sont connues.

Le matérialisme dialectique a pour la première fois supprimé rationnellement cette formulation de la question en rejetant l'idée de tout « but » de l'existence de l'univers, et a résolu le problème du « but » dans la catégorie de l'interaction universelle.

L'humanité avec sa pensée est incluse dans le réseau de cette interaction générale, elle y naît, s'y développe et y disparaîtra un jour. La notion d'un « but suprême » pour l'existence de l'humanité est rationnellement supprimée dans la compréhension de la nécessité de son émergence, de son développement et de sa mort dans et par cette interdépendance générale de toutes les formes de mouvement de la matière universelle.

L'émergence, le développement et la disparition de l'humanité sont objectivement conditionnés par ce système infini d'interaction – en lui, dans sa compréhension, il est nécessaire de chercher le sens et la justification de la place et du rôle de l'humanité dans

l'univers – chercher la réponse à la question qui, en termes idéalistes, ressemble à une question sur la finalité ultime de l'existence de l'humanité.

« La genèse historique » de l'histoire de l'Homme est entièrement expliquée de manière rationnelle et matérialiste par la science. Le développement biologique d'une certaine espèce de singe, puis le travail en tant que forme sociale d'interaction de l'organisme avec le milieu environnant, en tant que processus de « l'autoproduction de l'Homme », en tant que processus caractérisé par l'auto-développement, se reflète dans la conscience idéologique sous la forme de « buts » immanents à l'humanité.

Une explication pleinement rationnelle de l'auto-développement de l'Homme a été donnée par les enseignements de Marx et d'Engels, leur matérialisme historique, qui a supprimé, une fois pour toutes, l'idéalisme dans son dernier refuge.

L'histoire de l'humanité apparaît désormais comme un processus nécessaire d'auto-développement, dont les ressorts moteurs sont en elle-même, dans les contradictions internes de son développement, et qui n'a besoin d'aucun but transcendant ou transcendantal pour son explication.

De ce point de vue, il serait utile d'esquisser les prospects de l'avenir de manière plus concrète que cela n'a été fait jusqu'à présent. Que l'humanité, ainsi que la terre, périssent à un moment donné est indiscutable et ne doit pas être remis en question.

Toute la question se résume à savoir comment cela se produira. Quelles sont les conditions qui rendront la fin de l'humanité aussi inévitable que sa genèse, dans le cadre de l'interaction générale ?

Ici il y a immédiatement un doute : est-il possible de formuler une réponse raisonnable à cette question ? Est-il possible de dire quelque chose à ce sujet autrement que par une rêverie poétique ?

Nous tenterons d'abord d'établir et de résumer toutes les conditions théoriques indiscutables de la tâche, afin d'observer si elles suffisent à trouver une solution au moins un iota plus

concrète que l'idée générale, d'une manière ou d'une autre, de disparition inévitable de l'humanité.

La réponse, naturellement, ne peut être trouvé que par une analyse plus concrète de cette interaction universelle dans laquelle se manifeste l'histoire de l'humanité et qui détermine en définitive toutes les perspectives plus ou moins lointaines de tout ce qui existe.

Ainsi, tout d'abord, le destin de l'humanité est étroitement lié au destin futur de la Terre et –, plus largement, au destin du système solaire. C'est, pour ainsi dire, le maillon le plus proche d'interaction universelle qui détermine directement la fin inévitable de l'humanité.

C'est pourquoi la plupart des hypothèses théoriques sur la fin de l'existence humaine font appel à la notion qu'à un certain moment, dans les ténèbres de l'avenir, le soleil se refroidira progressivement, les réserves de chaleur de la planète seront épuisées et l'humanité commencera donc à décliner.

Cette idée est la seule envisageable, car la destruction de l'humanité à la suite d'un accident tragique (collision de corps cosmiques, etc.) ne mérite pas d'être prise en compte. Car même si un hasard de ce genre ne peut être exclu, il ne peut servir de base à une compréhension théorique de la question. Il serait absurde de supposer que la genèse de l'humanité est postulée sur une nécessité de fer, alors que sa fin n'est liée qu'au hasard. Ici et là, il y a une dialectique des deux. Le hasard lui-même doit être comprise dans le cas de la fin de l'humanité, aussi, comme une manifestation de processus nécessaires. Dans le cas d'une collision purement accidentelle, cette dialectique n'existe pas : la collision des corps célestes n'est qu'un des accidents qui peuvent se produire. Ce qu'il faut ici, cependant, c'est un type de hasard nécessaire, qui n'en est obligatoirement pas un. Nous devons trouver une perspective qui se produira (même dans le cas où ce hasard, précisément ce hasard très spécifique, ne se produit pas) à travers n'importe quel autre événement contingent.

Engels, on le sait, acceptait – comme une perspective plus dialectique – l'hypothèse du refroidissement progressif du soleil et de la terre.

Dans sa description, le prospect apparaît comme suit : « …inexorablement l'heure viendra où la chaleur déclinante du soleil ne suffira plus à fondre la glace descendant des pôles; où les

hommes, de plus en plus entassés autour de l'équateur, finiront par n'y plus trouver suffisamment de chaleur pour vivre ; où peu à peu la dernière trace de vie organique disparaîtra et où la terre, globe mort et refroidi comme la lune, tournera dans de profondes ténèbres, en décrivant des orbites de plus en plus étroites autour d'un soleil également mort, jusqu'à ce qu'enfin elle y tombe. »[571]

Le système solaire, semble-t-il, peut s'attendre précisément à cette perspective et l'humanité, en considérant cela de manière abstraite, doit partager ce même destin avec lui.

C'est la conclusion nécessaire qui découle de la compréhension de la place de l'Homme dans le milieu le plus proche de son existence, dans la sphère la plus proche de l'interaction universelle.

Mais la question se pose : n'y a-t-il pas des circonstances factuelles qui l'emportent sur cette possibilité abstraite ? Cette perspective n'a-t-elle pas été esquissée de manière un peu trop abstraite ?

Que le soleil et les planètes finiront par se refroidir est indiscutable. Mais l'humanité – et plus encore à mesure que nous avançons – cesse d'être le jouet obéissant des circonstances extérieures. Sa puissance augmente d'année en année. Elle trouve des moyens toujours plus nouveaux et plus efficaces de libérer les réserves de chaleur, de mouvement, d'énergie accumulées sous d'autres formes que le rayonnement solaire direct.

Plus l'humanité se développe, plus les réserves d'énergie (plus elles sont cachées et plus elles sont accumulées de manière concentrée, plus elles sont puissantes) s'ouvrent devant elle et deviennent une condition de son existence...

Et cela ne rend-il pas insensée la perspective de la mort par manque de rayonnement solaire direct ?

La perspective suivante ne semble-t-elle pas insensée :

[571] *Id.*, p. 32

- L’humanité s’oriente vers une utilisation de plus en plus intensive de l’énergie et du mouvement intra-atomique (et la tendance est à des structures de plus en plus élémentaires), et plus elle pénètre « dans les profondeurs » de la matière, plus elle y libère de l'énergie, plus elle devient indépendante de la chaleur solaire « toute prête », et d'autre part,
- Elle devra périr précisément par manque de chaleur solaire directe « toute prête », elle devra (précisément au sommet de ses pouvoirs), se figer comme un chiot impuissant sur la planète gelée…

Le développement de la puissance productive de l'humanité n’élimine-t-il pas le danger de périr du froid cosmique, de la froideur de l'espace intergalactique ?

En tout cas, en tant que tendance de son développement, le pouvoir de l'Homme sur les structures internes de la matière et sur l'énergie motrice qu'elles renferment est directement opposé à la perspective de périr par manque d'énergie, de mouvement, de chaleur.

La tendance de la nature extérieure est de priver l’humain de la possibilité d'utiliser la chaleur « toute prête » du soleil, non créée par lui. Mais l’homme crée lui-même les conditions de son existence, et la « chaleur » qu'ils reçoivent du noyau de la matière ne constitue pas une exception. C'est aussi une condition de l'existence humaine, créée par l'existence même de l'humanité, et sans cette condition, l'existence humaine n'aurait pas sa place dans la nature.

Ainsi, à la lumière des développements les plus récents de l'humanité, la perspective tracée par Engels au cours du siècle dernier semble plutôt abstraite et, par conséquent, fausse.

Il serait parfaitement absurde que l'humanité – qui maîtrise déjà les réserves d'énergie intranucléaire – dans des millions d'années se retrouve impuissant face au froid, au simple manque de chaleur.

Oui, elle recevra de moins en moins de chaleur extérieure. Mais elle en produira de plus en plus par elle-même, en extrayant « du dedans » de la matière ses réserves concentrées qui (et c'est théoriquement indiscutable) sont absolument infinies dans leurs plus infimes particules de glace tourbillonnant dans l'espace intergalactique.

Après tout, l'énergie émise par le soleil ne se perd pas sans laisser de trace – elle s'accumule, sous d'autres formes et il suffit de pouvoir l'extraire.

Et il ne fait aucun doute que l'humanité – surtout sous la menace de périr par le froid – serait capable de le faire. Même aujourd'hui, alors que la menace du refroidissement du soleil est très lointaine en termes pratiques, elle a déjà fait des progrès considérables à cet égard. On ne peut qu'imaginer ce dont l'humanité sera capable dans les millions d'années qui nous séparent de ce moment ! Et il convient de tenir compte de ce facteur pour abandonner l'hypothèse ci-dessus.

Il est clair que l'humanité ne mourra pas selon les perspectives initialement prévues (ni de froid, ni d'un simple manque de chaleur). Il est évident qu'il faut renoncer à cette hypothèse.

Mais nous venons de réfuter la seule hypothèse raisonnée, une hypothèse fondée sur la compréhension de la place de l'Homme au sein de l'interdépendance universelle, et nous n'avons pas proposé de nouvelle hypothèse pour la remplacer. De la même manière, il faut abandonner l'idée que l'humanité trouve sa fin à la suite de sa dégénérescence physiologique, de sa déchéance physiologique. La physiologie est la même chose que la nature, et l'Homme évolue vers un pouvoir de plus en plus grand sur la nature avec le matériel donné de son activité.

En extrayant l'énergie accumulée à l'intérieur des particules élémentaires, en transformant librement certains types de mouvement en d'autres, certains éléments chimiques en d'autres, à la fois plus et moins complexes que les originaux, et en gouvernant en même temps son propre développement physiologique, en le dirigeant dans un sens déterminé (du point de vue des nouvelles conditions), l'humanité a, en apparence, tout le potentiel pour échapper au gel, ou au « froid » et à la famine…

Elle semble être en mesure de créer – au moins dans une petite partie de l'espace – un environnement artificiel et de le maintenir, le préserver et le reproduire sans l'aide de l'énergie généreuse et abondante du Soleil.

C'est déjà une tendance bien définie dans le développement de l'humanité.

Mais ce que l'humanité (la matière pensante en général) n'est pas en état de supporter, malgré son pouvoir sur la nature – quel que soit le niveau atteint par ce pouvoir – c'est l'état de la matière universelle opposé au froid de l'espace intergalactique, un état auquel l'évolution du monde conduit tout aussi inévitablement qu'au refroidissement : la « jeunesse » ardente et incandescente de la matière cosmique, l'état de gaz incandescent de la jeune nébuleuse naissante, point de départ d'un nouveau cycle cosmique.

Cet état de vapeur ardente, dans lequel tous les éléments se transforment en tourbillons tournoyant frénétiquement et où il est fondamentalement impossible de préserver la moindre frontière artificielle derrière laquelle les humains pourraient se cacher, la moindre « coquille » arbitrairement robuste et résistante à la chaleur, capable de séparer un environnement artificiel du reste, du monde « non-humain », s'avère évidemment être cette limite absolue au-delà de laquelle l'existence de la matière pensante est déjà impossible. Il est peut-être possible pour l'humanité d'échapper à la mort sur une planète glacée. C'est en principe possible.

Mais aucun effort ne la sauvera de la mort dans l'ouragan du « feu » mondial qui, à un moment donné, ramènera la jeunesse volcanique sur notre île mondiale.

Ainsi, si le froid des espaces du monde n'est pas la limite absolue de l'existence de la matière pensante (ce qui, bien sûr, n'exclut pas du tout le fait que, dans certains cas, il peut être la cause immédiate de la mort, comme la collision tragique et accidentelle des corps célestes), alors c'est dans l'état de vapeur incandescente, par lequel tout système cosmique passe inévitablement au cours de son cycle, qu'il faut, apparemment, voir cette limite.

Le crépuscule, le dépérissement, la fin, la disparition de la matière pensante reste également, dans ce cas, inévitable – les principes de la dialectique et du matérialisme sont ici aussi pleinement préservés. Mais le tableau concret de cette finale s'avère quelque peu différente. Avant tout, les limites de l'existence de la matière pensante s'éloignent quelque peu dans le temps. La fin inévitable viendra de ce point de vue un peu plus tard (bien que ce « un peu plus tard » signifie en réalité quelques millions d'années supplémentaires), et pendant cette période supplémentaire, l'humanité, sans aucun doute, renforcera son pouvoir sur la nature, et atteindra des sommets de puissance qu'il est actuellement impossible d'imaginer, même à l'aide de la fantaisie poétique la plus débridée.

Mais – et c'est l'essentiel – il y a parmi les conditions de résolution du problème une circonstance théoriquement cruciale, qui pourrait ne pas être rappelée dans le cas où l'on suppose que l'humanité mourra du froid sur la terre glacée, voyageant autour d'un soleil glacé, circonstance qui apparaît maintenant au premier plan. Il s'agit de savoir dans quelles circonstances la matière universelle qui se refroidit va nécessairement se transformer en une nébuleuse incandescente, devenir un ouragan grandiose, chauffé à des milliards de degrés Celsius, rassemblant en son centre toutes les réserves de mouvement dispersées par rayonnement et donnant ainsi une nouvelle vie à la matière universelle de l'espace cosmiques, s'évanouissant dans le désert glacé de la soi-disant « mort thermique ».

Le commencement de ce nouveau cycle de développement de la matière cosmique – le point où la matière dispersée par le rayonnement des étoiles et son mouvement propre sont de nouveau concentrés d'une manière ou d'une autre sous la forme d'une nébuleuse incandescente en rotation, attirant en son centre toutes les particules précédemment dispersées et l' énergie de leur mouvement dans l'espace – s'avère être la limite absolue à laquelle disparaissent inévitablement toutes les conditions dans lesquelles un esprit pensant peut exister.

La fin de la matière pensante coïncide, dans le temps et selon les circonstances, avec le début d'un nouveau cycle de développement de la matière dans les étendues cosmiques – le moment où a lieu la renaissance ardente des mondes mourants.

Ce point – où la matière et le mouvement, irrémédiablement perdus par le rayonnement, sont en quelque sorte concentrés à nouveau, accumulés sous forme d'amas de gaz et de vapeurs incandescents tourbillonnant comme des ouragans, s'avère être le point où la matière pensante doit disparaître de manière absolument nécessaire.

Mais cette même question sur l'esquisse concrète de la fin de l'humanité, sur la disparition de la matière pensante, se pose en rapport avec celle des conditions naturelles, dans lesquelles le processus par lequel les mondes mourant de la « mort thermique » renaissent pour une nouvelle vie devient possible et même inévitable.

En d'autres termes, les conditions de la renaissance ardente des systèmes cosmiques sont aussi celles qui rendent la mort de la matière pensante, la mort de l'esprit pensant, absolument inévitable.

Les deux problèmes fusionnent ainsi en un seul.

Et l'aspect le plus intéressant est que chacune de ces questions considérées séparément, dans l'abstraction de l'autre, n'est toujours pas résolue par la science, et peut-être (et c'est là que réside notre hypothèse) fondamentalement insoluble en utilisant une telle approche.

Nous avons établi que la question de la mort du cerveau pensant ne peut être résolue en dehors des conditions créées par le développement des systèmes cosmiques, au sein desquels se déroule l'histoire du développement de l'esprit pensant, et nous sommes arrivés à la conclusion que l'inévitabilité absolue de cette mort coïncide avec le début de la renaissance ardente des mondes mourant de la « mort thermique ».

Considérons maintenant la question sous un autre angle, celui des propres destins des systèmes cosmiques.

Ne semble-t-il pas que ce problème soit fondamentalement insoluble en dehors de l'étude des facteurs introduits dans le cours du processus universel par l'esprit pensant, ces conditions qui se créent avec son indispensable participation ?

En d'autres termes, ne semble-t-il pas que ces deux processus sont impossibles à comprendre en dehors de leur interaction avec l'autre ? Ne semble-t-il pas que le processus de la renaissance ardente des mondes, s'éteignant en même temps en état de « mort thermique » ne peut être compris sans prendre en compte le rôle actif de l'esprit pensant dans le cycle universel, de la même façon que la mort de l'esprit ne peut être comprise en dehors de ses liens avec ce processus cosmique ?

Nous analyserons de manière plus détaillée les conditions de la tâche théorique en partant cette fois non pas des problèmes de la pensée, mais des conditions cosmiques elles-mêmes, des lois purement immanentes de l'auto-développement et de la mort des systèmes cosmiques au sein desquels naît, fleurit puis se fane la fleur suprême de l'univers – son esprit pensant.

Que le destin de l'esprit pensant soit conditionné par les destins de processus plus vastes – cosmiques – c'est aussi ce que nous plaçons à la base même de notre hypothèse.

Mais c'est précisément là que nous sommes confrontés à un problème encore non résolu (et peut-être insoluble du point de vue duquel il a été considéré jusqu'à présent).

C'est le problème de la soi-disant « mort thermique » de l'univers. Ce problème peut être brièvement exprimé comme suit.

Tous les corps et systèmes de corps célestes connus de la science, perdent progressivement – par rayonnement – leurs réserves d'énergie interne, et les perdent irrévocablement, se refroidissant progressivement dans la vaine tentative de chauffer, au moins d'un milliardième de degré, son environnement.

Ce faisant, la matière en mouvement des corps célestes réchauffés se disperse uniformément dans l'espace intergalactique, se transformant en vapeur froide et glacée, dont la température est comparable au zéro absolu et ne s'en distingue que de façon infime.

Le processus lié à l'émission de chaleur dans l'espace universel peut, à ce stade, être considéré comme irréversible, et même absolument irréversible, au point qu'il semble y avoir une tendance à ce que toute la matière universelle, et son mouvement intrinsèque, soient partagés en parts absolument égales dans la sphère intergalactique et l'Univers entier, dans son ensemble, se dirige progressivement vers une condition de « mort thermique », c'est-à-dire vers cet équilibre stable qui exclut toute possibilité de transition inverse vers un état différencié.

A la fin du siècle dernier, Clausius a même calculé que 453 des 454 parties de l'énergie active du mouvement de la matière universelle ont déjà été perdues.[572] Toute la part restante de l'énergie active a déjà, selon ses calculs, été transformée en un état hautement concentré, en un état singulier « égal à lui-même » de « mort thermique ».

[572] En fait, c'est Helmann von Helmholtz qui a fait ce calcul.

Du point de vue philosophico-théorique, il s'agit, comme Engels l'a déjà démontré, d'une absurdité qui présuppose « l'origine du monde ». Mais jusqu'à présent, le processus inverse n'a pas été révélé ni expliqué. Le lieu et le mode de sa réalisation ne sont pas clairs. Une seule chose est claire : s'il n'avait pas eu lieu quelque part, d'une manière ou d'une autre, alors l'Univers dans son ensemble ne pourrait pas exister et, en raison de l'infinité du temps, il se serait déjà transformé depuis longtemps en une nébuleuse indifférenciée, dont la température dans toutes ses parties serait absolument égale et dont le mouvement serait absolument uniformément réparti entre toutes les particules de matière, chacune d'elles étant ainsi pratiquement immobile et n'interagissant avec ses voisines d'aucune autre manière, si ce n'est de manière purement mécanique...

Seul le processus qui tend précisément vers un tel état sans vie de la matière universelle nous est connu, alors que nous est inconnue la tendance inverse, contredisant ce processus – le processus par lequel la redistribution inverse du mouvement a lieu dans l'Univers – bien que théoriquement il soit absolument clair qu'un tel processus existe et ne puisse pas ne pas exister.

Pratiquement, les choses peuvent être présentées comme suit :

« …à l'exception d'une portion infiniment petite la chaleur des innombrables soleils de notre univers-île se perd dans l'espace sans réussir à élever la température de l'espace, ne fût-ce que d'un millionième de degré centigrade. Que devient cette énorme quantité de chaleur ? S'est-elle épuisée à jamais dans la tentative de réchauffer l'espace, a-t-elle pratiquement cessé d'exister ne subsiste-t-elle plus que théoriquement dans le fait que l'espace s'est réchauffé d'une fraction décimale de degré qui commence par dix zéros et plus ? »[573]

Il est clair, en théorie, que ce n'est pas le cas, que la matière uniformément refroidie de l'espace intergalactique dans laquelle tout corps céleste se transforme progressivement, en raison du rayonnement, d'une manière ou d'une autre (et cette manière ne peut être que naturelle), se concentre, de façon inverse, en amas de gaz hautement incandescents et engendre de nouvelles étoiles, de nouveaux mondes, de nouveaux systèmes planétaires.

Mais comment cela se produit-il réellement et concrètement, de quelle manière, reste encore un mystère entier.

[573] *Id.*, p. 34

Théoriquement, la question, comme l'a montré Engels, ne peut être résolue que si elle est énoncée clairement, et la manière dont elle est énoncée suppose une vision matérialiste dialectique des choses. Du point de vue de la dialectique matérialiste, cette question doit et ne peut être posée que de la manière suivante :

« … une fois montrée la façon dont la chaleur rayonnée dans l'espace de l'univers redevient *utilisable*. La théorie de la transformation du mouvement pose cette question sous une forme absolue, et il n'y a pas moyen d'y échapper en ajournant l'échéance sous de mauvais prétextes ou en éludant la réponse. Mais que, de ce fait, les conditions de la solution soient déjà données par la même occasion »[574] - c'est évident.

Nous avons formulé cette condition plus haut : la solution doit reposer sur la condition théoriquement indiscutable que le processus « inverse » – le processus de concentration du mouvement dispersé dans les amas de gaz incandescents – a lieu d'une manière ou d'une autre, quelque part constamment au sein de l'Univers et constitue une condition interne constante de son existence. Et toute la question consiste à établir, à découvrir ce processus.

« Rien d'étonnant à ce qu'elle ne soit pas encore résolue ; il est possible qu'il s'écoule beaucoup de temps encore avant que nous en soyons là, avec nos petits moyens. Mais elle sera résolue, aussi certainement qu'il est établi qu'il ne se passe pas de miracles dans la nature et que la chaleur primitive de la sphère nébuleuse ne lui est pas transmise par miracle de l'extérieur du monde. »[575]

Il convient de noter qu'aujourd'hui encore, au milieu du vingtième siècle, cette question n'a toujours pas été résolue, tout comme elle ne l'avait pas été à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle.

L'affirmation générale que la quantité totale (die Masse) de mouvement est infinie, c'est-à-dire inépuisable, est également inefficace pour surmonter nos difficultés dans chaque cas particulier ; de cette façon aussi, nous n'arriverons pas à la renaissance de mondes morts, à l'exclusion des cas prévus dans les hypothèses susmentionnées et invariablement liés à la perte

[574] *Id*., p. 236

[575] *Ibid*.

d'énergie, c'est-à-dire dans des cas temporaires. Le cycle ici n'est pas atteint, et ne le sera pas tant que la possibilité d'une nouvelle utilisation de la chaleur rayonnée ne sera pas découverte.[576] Cette question ne peut donc pas concerner des cas individuels, mais doit être résolue en relation avec le cycle général de la matière universelle. Ce cycle en lui-même, à l'intérieur de lui-même, dans ses cycles attributifs et nécessaires, doit nécessairement conduire à la renaissance des mondes morts sous la forme d'une nébuleuse incandescente.

Il faut donc chercher la solution non seulement sous une forme concrètement physique (concrète-astronomique) mais aussi sous une forme philosophique générale. En d'autres termes, la possibilité et la nécessité d'une telle renaissance doivent être démontrées et recherchées à l'intérieur, dans la forme attributive et nécessaire de l'existence de la matière universelle – et non en dehors d'elle et non dans des événements contingents qui ne concernent que des cas uniques.

En effet, dans ces cas particuliers, le problème peut même être résolu, mais il ne sera toujours pas résolu au sens général.

Le problème, en termes généraux, peut donc être résumé comme suit : la physique et l'astronomie détiennent jusqu'à présent des données concernant le processus de dispersion de la matière et le mouvement des corps stellaires – un processus qui tend à conduire à l'état de ce qu'on appelle la « mort thermique ». Le concept de « mort thermique » n'est rien d'autre que l'expression théorique de la tendance du processus lié à l'émission de chaleur et de lumière dans l'espace intergalactique.

Mais la recherche en sciences naturelles n'a pas encore démontré le processus inverse – le processus de renaissance des mondes morts, le processus de transformation de la vapeur glacée de l'espace intergalactique en nébuleuse incandescente.

Qu'un tel processus, par une voie spontanée inhérente à la nature même de la matière en mouvement, se produise en permanence est une conclusion théorique incontestable. Sans un tel processus, l'Univers existant ne pourrait être préservé et reproduit dans l'éternité de manière

[576] *Ibid*.

naturelle, il représente une nécessité absolue, supposée intrinsèquement par le mouvement de la matière universelle, une condition d'existence de l'Univers.

Si ce processus n'existe pas, alors il existe un « dieu », « l'origine de l'univers », une « cause première » qui fait sortir la matière d'un état pratiquement immobile de « mort thermique », et autres diableries et mysticismes.

En outre, l'idée que « l'entropie du monde » « ne peut pas être éliminée de façon naturelle, mais, au contraire, peut être créée » (c'est l'idée de « mort thermique » exprimée en termes de thermodynamique), équivaut à la négation de la loi universelle de la conservation et de la transformation de l'énergie. Cette idée suppose, comme l'a montré Engels, que l'énergie, mouvement actif, se perd quantitativement ou qualitativement.

La loi de conservation et de transformation de l'énergie suppose que l'énergie ne peut être conservée qu'au cours de ses transformations qualitatives et ce mouvement ne peut être unilatéral, irrévocable à aucun de ses maillons. Toutes les formes de mouvement de la matière, d'une manière ou d'une autre, se transforment réciproquement en d'autres, elles sont réciproquement réversibles. Si ce n'était pas le cas, l'Univers existant aujourd'hui ne pourrait pas exister sans l'interférence constante de forces surnaturelles, tandis que la loi de conservation de la matière et du mouvement deviendrait une fiction.

C'est pourquoi tout le problème consiste à découvrir et à montrer comment de manière naturelle la chaleur émise dans l'espace universel peut être réutilisée ; où et comment cette matière et ce mouvement dissipés par le rayonnement s'accumulent à nouveau sous une forme capable de se transformer en amas de gaz extraordinairement chauds et denses, en îlots mondiaux de gaz incandescent attirant en son centre toute la matière pratiquement « immobile » dispersée dans les espaces environnants et construisant à partir d'elle son corps - le corps de futurs étoiles, soleils, systèmes planétaires, et ainsi de suite.

Nous nous permettons ici de proposer notre hypothèse quant au lieu et au mode de fonctionnement de ce processus, qui fait régulièrement passer la matière universelle de l'état de « mort thermique » à l'état de nuages de gaz incandescents, et qui s'effectue avec une nécessité inhérente à la nature même de la matière en mouvement.

L'hypothèse est la suivante.

Pourquoi ne pas présupposer que ce processus inverse se déroule avec la participation de la matière pensante, de l'esprit pensant – comme l'un des attributs de la matière universelle – et que sans sa participation, sans son aide, ce processus serait impossible et inconcevable ?

Ce présupposé n'affecte ni n'ébranle (même de la manière la plus minime) aucun principe, même le plus insignifiant, du matérialisme et de la dialectique matérialiste.

En effet, l'esprit pensant reste le produit suprême du développement de la matière, sa génération nécessaire, son attribut.

Le développement de la matière pensante du cerveau reste imbriqué dans la chaîne de l'interaction matérielle universelle et est généralement conditionné et déterminé par celle-ci.

La matière – en tant que substance – conformément à ce présupposé, reste, par la nature des choses, primaire. Les processus nécessaires à son développement font naître, à un moment donné, le cerveau pensant en tant qu'attribut.

La matière pensante du cerveau – comme une forme absolument suprême de mouvement de la matière universelle – ne génère rien de surnaturel à partir d'elle-même. Au contraire – sa disparition apparaît comme une simple transformation en d'autres formes plus élémentaires de mouvement, sa mort s'avère être la naissance d'une autre forme de mouvement de la matière.

Et le seul aspect nouveau auquel notre hypothèse nous conduit est que la mort de la matière pensante est nécessairement liée à la transformation de la matière refroidissante de l'espace interstellaire en une nébuleuse incandescente, et représente un facteur nécessaire dans ce dernier processus.

Rien d'antimatérialiste, ni même de non-matérialiste n'est introduit par cette hypothèse dans la compréhension de ce processus. La pensée elle-même est un processus naturel, et il n'y a rien d'étonnant à ce qu'elle se produise, en tant que telle, dans d'autres processus naturels et affecte activement leur déroulement.

En effet, le matérialisme dialectique et historique ne nie nullement l'impact inverse de la pensée sur les processus matériels. Dans ce cas, nous avons affaire à l'une des formes spécifiques de cet impact actif inverse. Rien de plus.

De cette façon, tous les principes de la dialectique et du matérialisme non seulement ne sont pas remis en question mais, au contraire, sont mis à la base de l'hypothèse.

De plus, dans ces conditions, toute une série de principes philosophico-théoriques du matérialisme dialectique acquièrent une forme d'expression un peu plus concrète, sans compter que la question de « l'entropie du monde » est essentiellement résolue.

En effet, si la substance [*вещество*] pensante du cerveau est la même matière, alors la pensée (considérée non pas sous son aspect gnoséologique étroit mais en fonction de sa place et de son rôle parmi les autres formes de mouvement et de développement de la matière) est aussi une forme du mouvement de la matière, elle en est même la forme suprême (« Le mouvement n'est pas seulement changement de lieu : il est aussi, dans les domaines supramécaniques, changement de qualité. »[577]) alors rien n'interdit de considérer la pensée (du point de vue du processus général de transformation quantitative et qualitative de certaines formes de mouvement en d'autres) comme l'un des maillons du cycle universel de la matière, comme l'une des formes en lesquelles toutes les autres formes se transforment et qui, à l'inverse, se reviennent à ces formes initiales ou contribuent à leur transformation réciproque.

Dans ces conditions – puisque la matière pensante du cerveau est le produit suprême du développement universel – il est raisonnable de supposer qu'au cours du cycle universel de transformations mutuelles d'une forme de mouvement de la matière universelle en d'autres, elle occupe une place particulière, joue un rôle particulier – un rôle que d'autres formes de mouvement organisées de façon moins complexe ne peuvent pas jouer. Et ce rôle particulier, qui convient à sa place dans le système des formes de mouvement de la matière universelle – en tant que forme suprême de mouvement – est décrit dans notre hypothèse.

En réalité, ce rôle se présente comme suit : l'humanité (ou un autre ensemble d'êtres pensants), à un certain point très élevé de son développement – un point qui est atteint lorsque

[577] *Id.*, p. 207

la matière des espaces cosmiques plus ou moins vastes dans lesquels l'humanité vit, se refroidit et se rapproche de l'état de soi-disant «mort thermique » – à ce point fatidique pour la matière – d'une manière ou d'une autre (inconnue de nous, bien sûr, vivant à l'aube de l'histoire du pouvoir humain), contribue à la mise en route du processus inverse – par rapport à la dispersion du mouvement – le processus transformant les mondes mourants et gelés en l'ouragan ardent et incandescent de la nébuleuse émergente.

L'esprit pensant se sacrifie lui-même et, dans ce processus, n'est pas en mesure de se préserver. Mais son sacrifice a lieu au nom de son devoir envers Mère Nature. L'humain, esprit pensant, rend sa vieille dette à la Nature. À un moment donné, dans sa jeunesse, la nature a engendré l'esprit pensant. Maintenant, au contraire, l'esprit pensant, au prix de sa propre existence, rend à mère nature, mourant de « mort thermique », une nouvelle jeunesse incandescente – un état dans lequel elle est à nouveau capable d'entamer les cycles colossaux de son développement, qui, une fois de plus, à un autre endroit du temps et de l'espace, conduiront à nouveau à l'émergence, à partir de ses entrailles refroidies, d'un nouveau cerveau pensant, d'un nouvel esprit pensant…

Dans cette perspective, la définition de la pensée en tant qu'attribut réel (et non seulement « mode ») de la matière est rendue compréhensible.

Sinon, la pensée ne peut être qualifiée d'attribut.

En effet, le concept d'attribut comprend que la forme donnée du mouvement de la matière représente un produit absolument nécessaire de son existence – et donc une condition absolument nécessaire, ne pouvant disparaître, de son existence infinie.

En d'autres termes, la caractérisation de la pensée comme attribut présuppose qu'elle (en tant que forme suprême du mouvement) soit un lien absolument nécessaire par lequel la matière passe tout le temps, encore et encore, dans chacun des cycles finis de son grand cercle – une forme que ce grand cercle reproduit encore et encore avec la nécessité de fer inhérente à sa nature.

Par conséquent, l'émergence de l'esprit pensant dans le cadre du cycle universel n'est pas un hasard, qui aurait pu tout aussi bien ne pas avoir lieu, mais une condition intrinsèque de sa propre réalisation. Sinon, il ne s'agit pas d'un attribut mais seulement d'un « mode ».

Après tout, si l'on suppose que l'esprit pensant est né quelque part à la périphérie du cycle de la matière universelle seulement pour disparaître rapidement sans laisser de trace ni de fruits, s'enflammant un bref instant sur une planète qui se refroidit pour seulement s'éteindre à nouveau, ne laissant dans son sillage que des ruines de culture matérielle que le courant de son mouvement incessant dispersera tout aussi rapidement dans l'univers – si l'on suppose un tel destin pour l'esprit pensant, alors on se retrouve avec une compréhension très étrange [du concept]« d'attribut ».

Car dans ce cas, la pensée s'avère être quelque chose comme de la moisissure sur une planète qui se refroidit, quelque chose comme la maladie sénile de la matière, et certainement pas la plus fleur suprême de la création, pas le produit suprême du développement universel du monde.

Dans ce cas, la pensée, même si elle continue à être appelée la « fleur suprême » de la matière, s'avère être une fleur vide – une fleur belle mais absolument infertile, qui a fleuri quelque part à la périphérie du développement universel pour se faner aussitôt sous la rafale glaciale ou ardente de l'ouragan de l'Univers infini... Tout le développement véritable de la matière universelle, dans ce cas, se fait en marge de son développement, complètement indépendamment de lui, et son apparition n'a absolument aucune influence sur le sort du développement universel.

La pensée devient un épisode absolument stérile qui, à droit égal, aurait tout aussi bien pu ne pas se produire sans que cela ne nuise à tout le reste.

Un tel rôle ne correspond guère à la place de la pensée dans le système des formes de mouvement de la matière universelle. La forme suprême de son mouvement ne peut être sa forme la plus inféconde et la plus inutile de toutes.

Il y a beaucoup plus de raisons de supposer que la matière pensante – en tant que forme qualitativement suprême de mouvement de la matière universelle – joue un rôle non

négligeable dans le processus du cycle universel – un rôle correspondant à la complexité et à la hauteur de son organisation.

Pourquoi ne pas supposer alors dans ce cas que la pensée est précisément la forme qualitativement supérieure dans laquelle s'effectue l'accumulation et l'utilisation fructueuse de l'énergie émise par les soleils ?

C'est-à-dire ce même lien qui manque encore, pour qu'un véritable cycle soit possible, et non un processus unilatéral et irréversible de dispersion de la matière et du mouvement dans l'espace intergalactique ? Pourquoi ne pas présupposer que la matière, dans son développement, crée spécifiquement, avec l'aide et sous la forme du cerveau pensant, ces mêmes conditions dans lesquelles l'énergie émise par le soleil n'est pas gaspillée en vain en simple chauffage de l'espace universel, mais s'accumule dans la forme qualitativement suprême de son existence, et est ensuite utilisée comme un « déclencheur », comme un détonateur, initiant le processus de renaissance inverse des mondes mourants sous la forme d'une nébuleuse incandescente ?

Oui, dans cette forme qualitativement supérieure du mouvement, accumulée sous la forme de culture matérielle, sous la forme du pouvoir des êtres pensants sur la matière morte, sous la forme de la pensée et de ses produits, – dans cette forme de mouvement qualitativement supérieure se transforme une infime partie de la chaleur rayonnée par les soleils dans l'espace mondial. Mais la petitesse quantitative de cette fraction est tout à fait compensée par le fait qu'elle s'accumule sous une forme qualitativement supérieure – de telle sorte que la nature elle-même (sans la médiation de la pensée) ne peut convertir la chaleur gaspillée inutilement par le rayonnement.

L'humanité est déjà capable de libérer ces réserves de mouvement qui, sans elle, resteraient reliées et mortes dans des structures nucléaires, et il n’y a rien d’étonnant ni de mystique dans l'hypothèse selon laquelle, à l’avenir, l'humanité s’avèrera capable de libérer de son état lié une telle quantité d'énergie qui suffirait à transformer la matière refroidissante de notre île stellaire en un océan de vapeurs incandescentes

La culture matérielle et spirituelle des êtres pensants, qui se manifeste très rarement dans la nature et dont l'apparition requiert des conditions extraordinairement spécifiques, s'avère être

la forme de mouvement sous laquelle se produit une accumulation concentrée de la chaleur émise par les soleils – une chaleur qui se dissipe inutilement par tous les autres canaux et qui, sous cette forme seulement, est à nouveau utilisée comme moyen, comme méthode, pour la renaissance ardente des zones gelées du grand Univers.

En réalité, on peut l'imaginer ainsi : à un certain point, très élevé, de leur développement, les êtres pensants, accomplissant leur devoir cosmologique et se sacrifiant, produisent consciemment une catastrophe cosmique– provoquant un processus inverse de la « mort thermique » de la matière cosmique, c'est-à-dire un processus conduisant à la renaissance des mondes mourants sous la forme d'un nuage cosmique de gaz et de vapeurs incandescents.

En termes simples, la pensée s'avère être le seul lien de médiation nécessaire, grâce auquel le « rajeunissement » ardent de la matière universelle devient possible ; elle s'avère être cette « cause efficiente » immédiate qui conduit à l'activation instantanée de réserves infinies de mouvement lié, de la même manière qu'elle initie actuellement une réaction en chaîne, détruisant artificiellement une petite quantité du noyau de matière radioactive.

Dans ce cas, le processus aura apparemment aussi la forme d'une réaction « en chaîne », c'est-à-dire une réaction d'autoproduction en spirale – une réaction qui crée par son propre mouvement les conditions de son propre déroulement à une échelle en expansion à chaque instant. Ce n'est que dans ce cas précis que la réaction en chaîne se propage non pas aux réserves de matière [*вещество*] radioactive accumulées artificiellement, mais aux réserves de mouvement de l'Univers accumulées naturellement, aux réserves liées à l'état de « mort thermique » dans l'espace universel.

Pour le dire simplement, cet acte prend la forme d'une grandiose explosion cosmique en chaîne, dont la matière (substance explosive) se révèle être l'ensemble des structures élémentaires dispersées par rayonnement dans l'espace universel.

> Du point de vue de la physique contemporaine, cela ne semble pas du tout inconcevable.

Après tout, il est clair que plus la structure artificiellement détruite est petite, plus les réserves d'énergie interne libérées lors de sa destruction sont importantes. La destruction de la

structure chimique (qui se produit dans la combustion la plus simple) donne une quantité comparativement faible d'énergie libérée. Une quantité d'énergie incomparablement plus grande est libérée lors de la destruction du noyau atomique. Plus la structure à détruire est « simple », plus la quantité d'énergie libérée est importante, ce qui montre que plus la structure matérielle est fine et simple, plus ses liaisons internes sont fortes, plus elle est difficile à détruire, mais plus on obtient d'énergie si une réaction en chaîne peut être réalisée.

Si l'on peut esquisser une perspective du développement de la science et de la technique dans l'avenir, la tendance est claire : l'Homme se dirige vers une destruction en chaîne de structures de matière de plus en plus simples et donc de plus en plus solides libérant ainsi de plus en plus d'énergie liée à ces structures. Et quelle que soit la dépense d'énergie nécessaire pour détruire la première particule, c'est-à-dire pour initier une réaction en chaîne, cette dépense n'est en rien comparable à la quantité totale de mouvement libérée dans une telle réaction.

Et la perspective est théoriquement la suivante : si une unité structurelle de matière infiniment petite pouvait être détruite, une quantité d'énergie proportionnellement infinie serait libérée en retour – quantité suffisante pour détruire et transformer une masse infiniment grande de matière refroidie en vapeurs incandescentes.

Ainsi, l'ancienne formulation de l'existence de la loi de la conservation de la matière et du mouvement énoncée par Leibnitz, trouve sa confirmation sous un jour nouveau – si le plus petit grain de poussière était détruit, tout l'Univers s'effondrerait. L'Univers infini tout entier ne peut évidemment pas être détruit par un tel acte, mais, dans la mesure où la structure destructible, en termes de taille et de complexité d'organisation, tend vers une limite infiniment petite, la quantité d'énergie libérée dans ce cas tend vers l'infini. La zone de la matière universelle, capturée par le processus et incluse dans la chaîne de réaction, reste donc limitée par certaines bornes. Quelles sont ces limites, il est bien sûr impossible de le dire maintenant, tout comme il est impossible d'indiquer la taille et les caractéristiques qualitatives de cette particule, dont la destruction est nécessaire pour déclencher ce processus. Mais ce processus explique pleinement la possibilité de transformer n'importe quelle masse finie de matière refroidie en une nébuleuse incandescente capable de donner naissance à de nouveaux mondes.

De ce point de vue, l'hypothèse semble résister à la critique de principe.

La pensée apparaît ainsi comme le maillon même du cycle universel, par lequel le développement de la matière universelle est contenu dans cette forme du grand cercle – à l'image du serpent qui se mord la queue, comme Hegel aimait à l'exprimer à propos du véritable infini (contrairement au « mauvais »).

Le problème, de cette façon, est résolu en respectant toutes les conditions. Aucun des principes du matérialisme n'a été affecté. Plusieurs thèses de la dialectique ont même acquis une forme d'expression encore plus concrète. La pensée est comprise comme un attribut réel de la matière, comme produit suprême du développement général, comme la fleur suprême de la matière qui s'épanouit avec nécessité en son sein et donne en outre les fruits nécessaires du point de vue du développement universel. La loi de conservation et de transformation de la matière et du mouvement a également été respectée et réalisée concrètement. Et en même temps, une voie possible a été montrée, sur laquelle l'utilisation de la chaleur émise par les étoiles permet un processus inverse – un processus de concentration de la matière et du mouvement dans une nébuleuse dense et chauffée, dans une masse incandescente de gaz en rotation. Mais ce qui n'est pas moins important et intéressant du point de vue des problèmes de l'interrelation entre la matière et de la pensée, c'est que cette hypothèse attribue à celle-ci, à l'esprit pensant, un rôle dans le déroulement du cycle universel, qui correspond bien plus à sa position sur l'échelle du développement, que la représentation selon laquelle tout le développement de la culture spirituelle et matérielle, toute l'histoire de l'esprit pensant aboutit à un résultat nul, à une simple mort, ne laissant aucune trace.

L'hypothèse fondée sur la prise en compte de la place et du rôle que l'esprit pensant joue nécessairement dans le système d'interaction universelle de la matière universelle, en tenant compte des circonstances objectives qui émergent dans l'univers au-delà de la volonté et de la conscience, clarifie le but même « suprême » et « ultime » de l'existence de l'esprit pensant dans le système de l'univers, sur lequel toutes les religions ont toujours spéculé. Ce « but ultime » lui-même est compris comme une conscience nécessairement réalisable, reflétant la place de l'esprit pensant dans le système des conditions objectives assumées par le développement de la matière universelle.

Et ce « but » – objectivement dérivé – est infiniment plus grandiose et majestueux que toutes ces fantaisies pathétiques inventées par les religions et les systèmes philosophiques qui leur sont associés.

Le but suprême et ultime de l'existence de l'esprit pensant s'avère cosmiquement grandiose et pathétiquement sublime. Cette hypothèse sur la fin de l'humanité se distingue des autres non pas en ce qu'elle établit comme cette fin la mort universelle– la mort, le dépérissement, la destruction représentent un résultat absolument nécessaire dans toute hypothèse – mais seulement en ce que la mort y est décrite non pas comme une fin insensée et infructueuse, mais comme un acte essentiellement créatif, comme prélude à un nouveau cycle de vie pour l'Univers.

Aucune autre hypothèse ne semble pouvoir reconnaître une telle signification à l'Homme et un tel sens à sa disparition.

La mort est, dans tous les cas, inévitable, et aucune hypothèse ne peut manquer de reconnaître cette inévitabilité. Et l'unique différence entre les hypothèses possibles ne consiste qu'en des interprétations différentes du sens objectif et du rôle de l'acte de la mort au sein du cycle général de la matière universelle, de la place et du rôle de cet acte dans le système des interactions universelles.

L'hypothèse proposée se distingue par l’atout que la mort de l'humanité (et de l'esprit pensant en général) n'apparaît pas, sous cet angle, insensée, comme dans toute autre hypothèse possible, mais justifiée comme un acte absolument nécessaire du point de vue du cycle universel de la matière universelle, se développant selon ses lois objectives.

Dans ce cas, la pensée reste un épisode historiquement transitoire dans le développement de l'univers, un produit dérivé (« secondaire ») du développement de la matière, mais un produit absolument nécessaire – une conséquence qui devient simultanément une condition d'existence de la matière infinie.

Dans le rapport de la matière et de la pensée apparaît une véritable dialectique– un conditionnement réciproque, au sein duquel la matière, bien que toujours primaire et

déterminante (première par nature), apparaît néanmoins comme conditionnée par l'influence active inverse de la pensée.

La pensée se révèle être un attribut réel, et la thèse : « De même qu'il n'y a pas de pensée sans matière, il n'y a pas de matière sans pensée » acquiert un sens réel et concret.

La pensée apparaît alors non seulement comme la fleur suprême la plus merveilleuse de l'univers, mais aussi comme une fleur qui n'est pas infertile, comme une fleur qui, par sa mort, engendre un fruit absolument nécessaire dans la perspective du cycle universel.

La mort de l'esprit pensant devient un acte véritablement créatif, qui transforme les déserts glacés de l'espace intergalactique, plongés dans les ténèbres, en masses tournoyantes de mondes incandescents, lumineux, chauds et ensoleillés ; un système qui devient le berceau d'une nouvelle vie, un nouvel essor de l'esprit pensant, immortel comme la matière elle-même…

La mort de l'esprit pensant devient ainsi son immortalité. Et une fois de plus – dans un avenir infiniment lointain – de nouveaux êtres dans lesquels la nature fera évoluer un esprit pensant, contempleront, comme nous aujourd'hui, les mondes stellaires, brillant dans le ciel de leur terre, avec la fière conscience que ces mondes doivent leur existence à l'esprit pensant autrefois disparu, à son grand et beau sacrifice.

Dans l'éclat du ciel étoilé, l'être pensant verra toujours le témoignage de la puissance et de la beauté de l'immortel, même dans sa mort de son esprit pensant – sa propre puissance objectivée sur le monde sensible, physiquement perceptible et donc indubitable.

Le ciel étoilé, comme toute la nature environnante, sera pour l'être pensant un miroir dans lequel se reflète sa propre nature infinie. À travers le rayonnement des étoiles, à l'esprit pensant parlera – dans un langage qu'il est le seul à comprendre – l'esprit pensant immortel éternellement renaissant dans ses produits.

Et dans la contemplation de la nature éternelle, l'Homme – comme tout être pensant – sera fier de lui-même, de l'échelle cosmique de sa propre mission universelle et historique – de sa place et de son rôle en tant qu'être pensant dans le système des interactions universelles.

Dans la conscience de l'énormité de son rôle dans le système de l'univers, l'Homme trouvera également un sens élevé de son but suprême – les objectifs ultimes de son existence dans le monde. Son activité sera empreinte d'un pathos nouveau, devant lequel s'effacera le pathos pitoyable des religions.

Ce sera le pathos de la vérité, le pathos de la vraie conscience de son rôle objectif dans le système de l'univers.

Il est clair que l'esprit pensant ne pourra remplir sa mission historico-universelle qu'au sommet de son développement, de sa puissance – au point que nous, gens du XXe siècle, ne le verrons pas de notre vivant. Des millions d'années passeront, des milliers de générations seront nées et iront au tombeau, un système véritablement humain de conditions d'activité – une société sans classes – sera établi sur Terre, une culture spirituelle et matérielle s'épanouira richement, et avec l'aide et sur la base de laquelle, l'humanité pourra remplir son grand devoir sacrificiel envers la nature.

Pour nous, qui vivons à l'aube de la prospérité humaine, la lutte pour cet avenir reste la seule forme réelle de service aux buts suprêmes de l'esprit pensant. Notre hypothèse n'ajoute rien et n'enlève rien à la lutte et à l'activité actuelles, elle ajoute seulement une conscience fière – et jusqu'à présent purement esthétique – que l'activité de l'humanité est rendue spirituelle non seulement par le pathos des buts humains « finaux », mais par le fait qu'elle a, en plus de ceux-ci, une signification universelle et historique, et qu'elle matérialise des buts immortels déterminés par le système entier de l'interaction universelle.

Et à la lumière de cette nouvelle hypothèse, les mots ingénieux de la *Dialectique de la nature* résonnent avec une force prophétique encore plus grande :

« Mais ici, ou bien il nous faut recourir au Créateur, ou bien nous sommes obligés de conclure que la matière première, incandescente des systèmes solaires de notre univers-île a été produite naturellement, par des transformations du mouvement qui sont inhérentes par nature à la matière en mouvement et dont, par conséquent, les conditions doivent être

reproduites aussi par la matière, même si ce n'est que dans des millions et des millions d'années et plus ou moins par hasard, mais avec la nécessité qui est aussi inhérente au hasard. »[578]

Et – avec l'aide de notre hypothèse – nous obtenons une nouvelle base pour la certitude que :

« Dans toutes ses transformations, la matière reste éternellement la même, qu'aucun de ses attributs ne peut jamais se perdre et que, par conséquent, si elle doit sur terre exterminer un jour, avec une nécessite d'airain, sa floraison suprême, l'esprit pensant, il faut avec la même nécessité que quelque part ailleurs et à une autre heure elle le reproduise. »[579]

Et donc, ajouterons-nous, l'esprit pensant n'est pas la fleur vide, qui s'épanouit un court instant pour se faner aussitôt, mais il est tout autant une condition d'existence de la matière qu'une conséquence nécessaire de celle-ci, c'est-à-dire une condition intérieurement supposée, infinie et universelle de l'existence de la matière universelle, attribut actuel de la matière comme substance infinie de l'univers.

Texte écrit dans les années 1950 (date exacte inconnue) et publié à titre posthume en 1988 dans la revue Nauka i Religiya [Science et Religion]. Ильенков Э.В. *Космология духа* / Наука и религия. 1988. №8

Traduit du russe par Giorgi Kobakhidze et Paul Dablemont

[578] *Id*., p. 34

[579] *Id*., p. 35

Appendix B

Avant-propos du traducteur

Evald Ilyenkov est né en février 1924 dans la ville de Smolensk, d'un père écrivain et d'une mère institutrice. À partir de 1933, il grandit à Moscou, dans la première maison coopérative d'écrivains soviétiques, où il commence à connaître les traditions littéraires russes et européennes qui imprègneront plus tard ses écrits philosophiques. En 1941, Ilyenkov s'inscrit au département de philosophie à l'Institut de Philosophie, Littérature et Histoire de Moscou, mais ses études sont interrompues lorsqu'il est appelé par l'armée Soviétique, pour participer à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale. Les lettres qu'il rédige en temps de guerre témoignent des horreurs qu'il y endure. Il y décrit la quotidienneté de la mort et l'« agréable compagnie des cadavres ». En 1944, il envoie une lettre d'adieu à sa bien-aimée : « Maintenant, je suis là où je devais être. Maintenant, mes chances de rester en vie sont considérablement réduites. Mes chances de rester indemne sont pratiquement nulles ». Ce qui le console dans ces moments difficiles, ce sont ses livres et sa musique. Il lit Lermontov et Tolstoï, se plonge dans Hegel et écoute Wagner. Devant la ruine de Berlin, il se souvient du final de la *Götterdämmerung* (le Crépuscule des dieux) de Wagner. Ilyenkov combattra jusqu'à Berlin en tant que commandant de batterie d'artillerie et sera décoré plusieurs fois.

Après la guerre, Ilyenkov applique son antifascisme militant au domaine de la philosophie. Il se lance alors dans une critique radicale de l'essentialisme et du déterminisme – ce qu'il appelle néo-positivisme – sous leurs formes conservatrices ou libérales, tant dans le marxisme soviétique que dans les traditions intellectuelles occidentales. Dans *Le biologique et le social chez l'homme*, il nous met en garde vis-à-vis du risque consistant à « déverser sur Mère Nature notre propre culpabilité ». La culpabilité à laquelle Ilyenkov fait référence réside dans notre mépris des conditions sociales et dans leur inadéquation avec le libre développement d'un être humain créatif. Sa conception de la personnalité fondée sur la définition de Marx de l'essence humaine comme somme totale de toutes les relations sociales était à la base de sa pratique pédagogique, plus connue sous le nom d'expérience Zagorsky. Avec des enfants malvoyants, malentendants et atteints de troubles du langage, il parvient à prouver qu'en dépit de tels états pathologiques, par une socialisation appropriée, les humains sont capables de développer leurs facultés créatives et de participer pleinement à la société. L'un de ses étudiants sourds-aveugles, Alexandre Souvorov, deviendra docteur en psychologie.

L'Idéel d'Evald Ilyenkov est l'un des textes phares du « marxisme créatif » soviétique, dont l'auteur est une figure clef. Ilyenkov entre ici en dialogue avec Hegel, Spinoza, Marx et d'autres pour construire un schéma dialectique, proposant un discours matérialiste sur les phénomènes

non matériels. Le texte paraît en 1962, dans l'encyclopédie philosophique soviétique à laquelle Ilyenkov a contribué avec une section sur le matérialisme dialectique. Les philosophes russes contemporains, comme Valery Podoroga, se souviennent que la publication de cet article a suscité de vives discussions théoriques parmi les étudiants de l'époque, découragés par le marxisme soviétique officiel. Mais elle a également alimenté les accusations de « révisionnisme » et de « gnoséologisme » lancées par les philosophes du parti dit orthodoxe. Ilyenkov lui-même n'aurait pas été d'accord avec cet usage du terme. En tant que lecteur et traducteur attentif de Lukacs, il était convaincu que l'orthodoxie se référait à l'adhésion à la méthode dialectique, et non pas à « une adhésion sans critique aux résultats de la recherche de Marx »[580]. Comme le dit Vessa Oittinen : Ilyenkov est un hérétique orthodoxe.

Le gnoséologisme, dans le vocabulaire des philosophes soviétiques, était plus un idéologème qu'un concept. Ilyenkov en a été accusé en raison de son insistance sur la compréhension de la philosophie avant tout comme Logique. Une telle conception remonte à la période fondatrice de la philosophie soviétique lorsque l'Union Soviétique nouvellement formée s'est donné pour tâche de développer une philosophie matérialiste qui était censé d'être une partie programmatique de l'État prolétarien. La place de Hegel était cruciale dans cette tâche. Comme Lénine l'a écrit :

« On ne peut pas appliquer telle quelle la logique de Hegel, ni la prendre comme un donné. Il faut en tirer les nuances logiques (gnoséologiques), après les avoir débarrassées de l'*Ideenmystik* : c'est encore un grand travail. »[581]

Cette directive de Lénine apparaît dans plusieurs des textes d'Ilyenkov et saisit en grande partie ce qu'il essayait de produire. Il rejetait l'opinion, dominante à son époque, selon laquelle la philosophie représente une métascience qui devrait dicter des règles générales aux autres sciences, ou proposer des lois universelles régissant le monde. Il considérait au contraire la philosophie comme une « science spéciale », une science parmi d'autres, dont l'objet d'étude privilégié est l'idéel.

---

[580] Lukacs, Georg. *Histoire et conscience de classe. Essai de dialectique marxiste.* Traduit de l'Allemand par Kostas Axelos et Jacqueline Bois. Paris : *Éditions de Minuit*, 1960. p. 17

[581] Lenine, V.I. Cahiers Philosophiques. Paris : Éditions Sociales, 1973. p. 250

Il faut noter ici que le mot russe pour science, *Nauka* a plus d'affinités avec le mot allemand *Wissenschaft*, qui implique une recherche plus holistique des connaissances, et moins avec le mot anglais *science* avec ses connotations positivistes qui le sépare des sciences humaines. Ainsi, lorsqu'Ilyenkov qualifie la philosophie de science, il entend par là toute discipline engagée dans une recherche systématique visant à la connaissance dans les sciences naturelles et humaines. Ilyenkov défendait « l'intégrisme culturel » – une conception moniste de la science qui insiste sur une étroite relation entre la science et d'autres pratiques de la vie quotidienne comme l'économie, la culture et la politique – contre la différenciation des disciplines, qui dominait à son époque.

Dès son apparition sur la scène philosophique, Ilyenkov s'est défini comme un penseur oppositionnel. Déjà en 1954, il s'était trouvé mêlé à un scandale avec son camarade Valentin Korovikov pour avoir déclaré, dans une conférence intitulée « thèses sur le sujet de la philosophie »[582], qu'il n'existe pas de *diamat* et *d'ismat* – les termes soviétiques désignant la philosophie officielle du parti communiste – et qu'il existe seulement une compréhension dialectique de l'histoire. La réaction ne s'était pas faite attendre : « [Ilyenkov et Korovikov] nous invitent à la sphère étouffante de la pensée » avait en effet déclaré le doyen du département de philosophie de l'époque, le professeur V. Molodtsov. « Nous n'y allons pas », assurait encore ce dernier. Ilyenkov a plus tard été forcé de quitter la Faculté, mais il n'a pas cessé pour autant de s'exprimer face au pouvoir chaque fois qu'il l'a jugé nécessaire. Il l'a fait avec une véhémence égale qu'il s'agisse d'une question aussi mineure que la traduction incorrecte par l'institut du marxisme-léninisme d'un mot dans l'une des éditions des *Thèses sur Feuerbach* de Marx – dans une lettre à l'institut du marxisme-léninisme, vers la fin des années 50 – ou qu'il s'agisse d'une question aussi considérable et déterminante que le déclin de l'intérêt pour la philosophie chez les jeunes à cause de la « perversion positiviste » de cette dernière par le *diamatchiki* – dans une lettre au comité central du parti *sur la condition de la philosophie*, vers la fin des années 60. Ilyenkov a adressé ces lettres à ceux-là mêmes qui le considéraient comme un ennemi et qui le qualifiaient déjà en 1955 « d'idéaliste menchevisant ».

La chasse aux sorcières constante qui le prenait pour cible a bel et bien eu son effet. Et sa dépression, qu'il appelait son humeur hypochondriaque, s'alimentait d'ailleurs tant des attaques personnelles dirigées contre lui que des événements mondiaux, tels que l'invasion soviétique

[582] Titre complet : *Thèses sur le rapport entre la philosophie et les connaissances de la nature et de la société dans leur évolution historique*

de la Tchécoslovaquie ou le conflit sino-vietnamien. Selon les termes de Hegel : « Le malheur extérieur doit devenir la douleur intérieure de l'homme »[583]. En mars 1979, Evald Ilyenkov se suicide en se tranchant la carotide. Dans une lettre commémorative, son ami proche le critique littéraire marxiste Mikhaïl Lifshitz décrit le suicide d'Ilyenkov comme un geste de refus catégorique et cite Thomas Mann : « On s'habitue à ne pas s'habituer »[584].

Je remercie Arthur Garrigue pour sa contribution à la traduction.

Giorgi Kobakhidze

[583] Hegel, G.W.F. *Leçons sur la philosophie de l'histoire*. Traduction par J. Gibelin. Paris : *Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin*, 1998. p. 248

[584] Mann, Thomas. *La montagne magique*. Traduit par Claire de Oliveira. *Fayard*, 2016 p. 703

L'idéel

Evald Ilyenkov

L'idéel est l'image subjective de la réalité objective, c'est-à-dire le reflet du monde extérieur dans les formes de l'activité humaine, dans les formes de sa conscience et de sa volonté. L'idéel n'est pas un fait individuel-psychologique, et encore moins physiologique, mais un fait socio-historique, un produit et une forme de production spirituelle. L'idéel se réalise dans diverses formes de conscience sociale et de volonté de l'homme en tant que sujet de la production sociale de la vie matérielle et spirituelle. Selon Marx, « ...l'idéel n'est rien d'autre que le matériel transposé et traduit dans la tête de l'homme »[585].

La solution matérialiste au problème de l'idéel a d'abord été développée par Marx et Engels en se fondant d'une part sur le dépassement critique du concept objectif-idéaliste – directement inspiré de Hegel – et d'autre part sur la théorie perceptive-matérialiste du reflet de Feuerbach, du point de vue de l'activité concrète-objective de l'homme social. Les grands principes de cette solution ont été formulés pour la première fois par Marx dans les *Thèses sur Feuerbach* (1845).

Toutes les formes de résolution du problème de l'idéel dans l'histoire de la philosophie gravitent autour de deux pôles : sa compréhension matérialiste et sa compréhension idéaliste. Le matérialisme pré-marxiste, rejetant à juste titre les notions spiritualistes et dualistes de l'idéel en tant que substance distincte s'opposant au monde matériel, considère l'idéel comme une image, comme le reflet d'un corps matériel dans un autre corps matériel, c'est-à-dire comme un attribut ou comme la fonction d'une matière expressément organisée. Cette compréhension matérialiste générale de la nature de l'idéel qui constitue l'essence de la ligne de Démocrite - Spinoza - Diderot - Feuerbach, indépendamment des différentes variantes de sa concrétisation par les matérialistes individuels, a également servi comme point de départ pour la solution marxiste-léniniste du problème. Les points faibles du matérialisme pré-marxiste, apparus chez les matérialistes français (notamment Cabanis, La Mettrie), plus tard présents chez Feuerbach comme tendance, puis qui ont constitué une figure indépendante du matérialisme dit vulgaire

[585] Marx, K. *Le Capital.* Tome 1. Quadrige/PUF: 1993, p. 17.

(Buchner, Vogt, Moleschott etc.) au milieu du XIXe siècle, étaient liés à une compréhension anthropologique-naturaliste non historique de la nature humaine. Ces points faibles ont conduit à un rapprochement et, finalement, à une identification directe de l'idéel avec les structures matérielles nerveuses-physiologiques du cerveau. L'ancien matérialisme découlait de la compréhension de l'homme en tant que partie de la nature ; mais sans associer le matérialisme à l'histoire, il ne pouvait pas comprendre l'homme avec toutes ses particularités comme produit du travail transformant à la fois le monde extérieur et lui-même. Par conséquent, l'Idéel ne pouvait être compris comme le résultat et la fonction active du travail, de l'activité concrète-objective de l'homme social – comme une image du monde extérieur apparaissant dans le corps pensant, non comme le résultat d'une perception passive, mais comme un produit et une forme de transformation active de la nature, à la fois l'extérieur et la nature de l'homme lui-même, par le travail de générations se remplaçant les unes les autres au cours du développement historique. C'est pourquoi la principale transformation que Marx et Engels apportent à la compréhension matérialiste de la nature de l'idéel concerne tout d'abord le côté actif des rapports de l'homme pensant avec la nature, c'est-à-dire cet aspect qui a premièrement été développé par un idéalisme « intelligent » selon le mot de Lenine et qui renvoie à la ligne de Platon - Fichte - Hegel, laquelle a soulevé de façon abstraite et unilatérale ce côté de la question.

Le fait principal sur lequel les systèmes classiques d'idéalisme objectif se sont développés est le fait réel de l'indépendance de la culture entière de l'humanité et des formes de son organisation par rapport à la personne individuelle, et plus largement : le fait réel de la transformation des produits généraux de l'activité humaine en général – tant matérielle que spirituelle – en une force indépendante de la volonté et de la conscience des gens. Cette « aliénation » du produit de l'activité et des formes mêmes d'activité humaine conduit au fait que les formes d'activités humaines s'opposent réellement à un individu et lui sont imposées par la force en tant que nécessité extérieure, et peuvent donc être représentées comme les forces et les capacités de quelque sujet surindividuel : Dieu, l'Esprit absolu, l'« Ego » transcendantal, la Conscience du monde, etc. Cette aliénation se trouve, comme l'a montré Marx, au sein de la religion et de l'idéalisme. Dans ces deux formes de conscience sociale, une personne est consciente de ses propres forces et capacités, mais elle en a conscience sous le couvert des forces et capacités d'un être mystique autre qu'elle-même. Cette aliénation philosophico-religieuse des capacités humaines n'est pas du tout le fruit de l'ignorance ou de l'incompréhension, à l'instar de ce que pensaient les matérialistes français et Feuerbach, elle est plutôt une sorte de reflet de la réalité : l'aliénation réelle de l'homme dans les conditions de

développement naturelle des rapports sociaux, la véritable attitude de l'individu face aux capacités socio-humaines et aux formes d'activités dans ces conditions. Dans la forme de la religion et de l'idéalisme se reflète le fait de l'indépendance de la culture sociale collective et des formes de son organisation par rapport à une personne individuelle, et plus largement - la transformation des produits généraux de la production sociale (tant matérielle que spirituelle) en une force sociale particulière, opposée aux individus, qui domine leur volonté et leur conscience. C'est précisément parce que « cette coopération elle-même n'est pas volontaire, mais naturelle » que cette force sociale s'oppose, et donc « elle leur apparaît au contraire comme une puissance étrangère, située en dehors d'eux, dont ils ne savent ni d'où elle vient ni où elle va, qu'ils ne peuvent donc plus dominer et qui, à l'inverse, parcourt maintenant une série particulière de phases et de stades de développement, si indépendante de la volonté et de la marche de l'humanité qu'elle dirige en vérité cette volonté et cette marche de l'humanité. »[586] Ce pouvoir de la totalité social sur un individu est directement révélé et agit comme l'État, le système politique de la société, comme un système de restrictions morales, éthiques et juridiques, de normes de comportements publiques et, en outre, de normes et de critères esthétiques, logiques etc. Dès l'enfance, un individu devra tenir compte des exigences et des limites qui sont exprimées et sanctionnées socialement, avec beaucoup plus de prudence que vis-à-vis de l'apparence directement perçue des choses et des situations individuelles, ou encore vis-à-vis des désirs, des pulsions et des besoins organiques de son corps.

Le secret de la naissance de la conception spiritualiste de l'idéel est clairement perceptible dans les enseignements de Platon. Platon constate que la vie et l'activité humaine sont régies non pas directement par les lois de la nature, mais par les lois de l'État. C'est la différence entre l'homme et l'animal. Par État, Platon entend donc non seulement la structure judiciaire ou politique, mais aussi tout le système des formes générales de la culture, déterminant de façon directe le comportement d'un individu, sa volonté et sa conscience – y compris les normes grammaticales du langage, les règles de l'artisanat et de l'art, les rituels religieux, etc. En ce sens, l'État, selon Platon, s'oppose à l'individu comme une réalité surnaturelle particulière, à laquelle un individu est obligé de s'habituer par imitation dès l'enfance. Dès lors, le problème de la connaissance se pose de manière tout à fait différente. Avant Platon, la connaissance est comprise comme un état intérieur de l'individu. Pour cette raison, on tente de résoudre la

[586] Marx, K. Engels, F. *L'idéologie Allemand*. Trad : H. Auger, G. Badia, J. Baudrillard, R. Cartelle. Paris : *Éditions Sociales*, 1968. p. 63

question de la connaissance sur la base de l'étude de la relation d'une personne individuelle avec le monde entier, ou d'une âme individuelle, comprise corporellement, avec le monde qui lui est extérieur. A l'inverse, Platon en vient à comprendre l'homme non comme un corps singulier, mais comme une personne formée par l'État, c'est-à-dire une personne qui a appris les normes générales de la culture et qui y obéit. L'individu devient en premier lieu une incarnation singulière de l'État, ou un État incarné, et l'individu constitue le représentant plénipotentiaire de l'État. C'est une opération idéaliste bien caractéristique : le sujet se présente comme l'État sans-visage, alors que l'individu n'est que son instrument. Ainsi, la question de la relation entre la connaissance et la réalité se pose comme une question de relation entre les normes et les formes sociales directes de la culture humaine, individualisées dans une personne, et le monde des corps singuliers perçus de manière sensorielle, auquel appartient le corps singulier de la personne elle-même. Ce n'est pas par hasard que Hegel a loué Platon précisément pour le fait que dans sa doctrine « …la réalité de l'esprit – de l'esprit en tant qu'il est opposé à la nature – apparaissait à Platon dans sa plus haute vérité, à savoir comme organisation d'un État… »[587] et non dans l'organisation d'une âme individuelle. En d'autres termes, la question platonicienne du rapport de l'esprit avec la nature s'est posée comme une question du rapport de la nature humaine, c'est-à-dire de toutes les formes de choses perçues sensoriellement et créées par l'homme, avec la nature vierge. Lors de l'énoncé d'une telle question, l'activité de l'individu par rapport à la nature est mise en évidence. Mais l'activité pratique réelle de l'homme est comprise par l'idéalisme comme une conséquence, comme une expression externe de l'activité de ces normes et catégories générales, dont le représentant particulier est la personne individuelle. Les normes universelles de la culture, que Platon appelle les idées, qui organisent la volonté consciente d'un individu – et à travers elle l'ordre des choses dans le monde humain – agissent comme des « proto-figures », comme des « figures actives », qui forment la substance de la nature, y compris l'être corporel de l'homme lui-même. De ce fait, la matière naturelle n'agit pour l'idéalisme objectif que comme une possibilité pure, comme argile passive et sans forme, façonnée par la puissance créatrice de proto-figures idéales. Le fondement d'une telle mystification est le fait que toutes les figures communes – sans exceptions enregistrées dans la parole et dans les formes de l'imagination spatiale – naissent en réalité non pas dans l'acte de passivité de la perception de l'homme individuel non touché par le travail de la nature, mais dans le processus de transformation pratique du sujet de la nature

[587] Hegel, G.W.F. *Leçons sur l'histoire de la philosophie.* Tome 3. Trad : Pierre Garniron. Paris : *Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin,* 1972. p. 474

par l'homme social : la société. Ces figures communes naissent et fonctionnent comme des formes de détermination sociale-humaine de la volonté intentionnelle d'un individu, c'est-à-dire comme des formes d'activité. En fait, toutes les figures communes sont cristallisées dans le cadre de la culture spirituelle de manière totalement non intentionnelle, indépendante de la volonté et de la conscience des individus, alors même qu'elles sont cristallisées par leurs activités. Mais dans la perception, elles agissent précisément comme des formes de choses créées par l'activité humaine, ou comme des « empreintes » apposées sur la matière naturelle par l'activité de l'homme, aliéné dans les formes de matière extérieure de la volonté intentionnelle. On ne traite la nature en tant que telle que dans la mesure où elle est, d'une manière ou d'une autre, impliquée dans le processus du travail social, transformée en un matériau, un moyen, une condition de l'activité humaine. Même le ciel étoilé, que le travail humain impacte peu, ne devient un objet d'attention et de perception de l'homme que lorsqu'il a été transformé par la société en un moyen d'orientation dans le temps et l'espace – en « instrument » d'activité vitale de l'organisme socio-humain, à la fois « organe » de son corps, horloge, boussole et calendrier naturel. Les formes universelles, les régularités de la matière naturelle se manifestent, et c'est pourquoi elles sont comprises précisément dans la mesure où cette matière a déjà été réellement transformée en matériau de construction du « corps non organique de l'homme », le « corps propre physique » de la civilisation, et c'est pourquoi les formes universelles des « choses elles-mêmes » agissent pour l'homme directement comme des « formes actives » du fonctionnement de ce « corps non organique de l'homme »[588]. C'est pourquoi il n'est pas difficile pour l'idéaliste platonicien-hégélien de mystifier les formes et les tendances universelles de la nature elle-même – révélées et éprouvées par la pratique de l'homme en tant que formes d'action expéditive, de volonté rationnelle, comme les empreintes qu'il appose à la substance de la nature – en tant que produits de « l'aliénation » des formes de cette volonté vers l'extérieur, dans la matière naturelle. Sous cette forme inversée, l'idéalisme dépeint le fait réel de l'activité humaine par rapport à la nature, ce qui ne pouvait être pris en compte dans la théorie pré-marxiste du matérialisme. « Le principal défaut, jusqu'ici, du matérialisme de tous les philosophes – y compris celui de Feuerbach est que l'objet, la réalité, le monde sensible n'y sont saisis que sous la forme d'objet ou d'intuition, mais non en tant qu'activité humaine concrète, en tant que pratique, de façon non subjective. C'est ce qui explique pourquoi l'aspect actif fut développé par l'idéalisme, en opposition au matérialisme,

[588] Marx, K. *Manuscrits Économico-Philosophiques de 1844*. Traduits présentés et annotés par Franck Fischbach. Paris : *J. Vrin*, 2007.

— mais seulement abstraitement, car l'idéalisme ne connaît naturellement pas l'activité réelle, concrète, comme telle. »[589]

Ne connaissant pas la pratique matérielle en tant que telle, l'idéalisme ne connait et ne prend en compte cette pratique que comme une expression extérieure de l'activité spirituelle, comme une incarnation extérieure dans la substance de la nature, comme des plans qui auraient supposément mûri dans les caches de la pensée créatrice et de l'imagination, puis auraient été déployés avec l'aide des mains humaines à l'extérieur, dans la matière naturelle. C'est le secret de l'idéalisme, la racine de tous ses vices, son péché originel.

L'idéel n'existe directement que sous la forme (moyen, figure) de l'activité d'une personne sociale, c'est-à-dire sous la forme d'un matériel assez concret, orienté vers le monde extérieur. Ainsi, si l'on parle du système matériel, dont la fonction et le mode d'existence est l'idéel, alors ce système n'est que l'homme social en unité avec le monde concret, à travers lequel il mène son activité vitale spécifiquement humaine. L'idéel n'est en aucun cas réductible à l'état de la matière qui se trouve sous la couverture crânienne d'un individu, c'est-à-dire le cerveau. Ce n'est pas le cerveau en tant que tel qui pense, qui agit de manière idéelle, mais une personne qui possède un cerveau, et qui est en unité avec le monde extérieur. L'idéel est une fonction spécifique de l'être humain en tant que sujet de l'activité du travail social, exercée sous des formes créées par un développement antérieur. Afin d'exposer le fondement terrestre des illusions idéalistes sur l'idéel, Marx et Engels écrivent : « Cette somme de forces de production, de capitaux, de formes de relations sociales, que chaque individu et chaque génération trouve comme des données existantes, est la base concrète de ce que les philosophes se sont représentés comme « substance » et « essence de l'homme », de ce qu'ils ont porté aux nues ou qu'ils ont combattu… »[590].

En analysant le problème de la relation production-consommation, c'est-à-dire le problème politico-économique et non le problème psychologique, Marx énonce la formule suivante : « S'il est clair que c'est la production qui fournit du dehors son objet à la consommation, il est

[589] Marx, K. *Thèses sur Feuerbach*. Dans : Marx, K. Engels, F. *L'idéologie Allemand*. Trad : H. Auger, G. Badia, J. Baudrillard, R. Cartelle. Paris : *Éditions Sociales*, 1968. p. 31

[590] Marx, K. Engels, F. *L'idéologie Allemand*. Trad : H. Auger, G. Badia, J. Baudrillard, R. Cartelle. Paris : *Éditions Sociales*, 1968. p. 70

donc tout aussi clair que c'est la consommation qui *pose idéalement* l'objet de la production comme image intérieure, besoin, impulsion et fin. »[591] Mais la consommation, comme le montre Marx, n'est que le moment intérieur de la production, ou la production elle-même, car elle crée non seulement un objet extérieur, mais aussi un sujet capable de produire et de reproduire cet objet et de le consommer de façon appropriée ; en d'autres termes, la production crée la forme d'activité humaine elle-même, ou la capacité de créer un objet d'une certaine forme et de l'utiliser adéquatement, c'est-à-dire en accord avec son rôle et sa fonction dans l'organisme social. Sous la forme d'une capacité active de l'homme en tant qu'agent de production sociale, l'objet considéré comme résultat de production existe idéalement, c'est-à-dire en tant qu'image intérieure, en tant que besoin, en tant qu'incitation et but de l'activité humaine. L'idéel n'est donc rien d'autre qu'une forme de chose, mais en dehors de cette chose, à savoir : dans l'homme, en tant que forme de son activité. C'est une forme d'activité humaine socialement déterminée. Dans la nature elle-même, y compris dans la nature de l'homme en tant qu'être biologique, il n'y a pas d'idéel. En relation avec l'organisation naturelle du corps humain, cette forme a le même caractère « externe » que dans sa relation avec la matière, dans laquelle elle est réalisée ou objectivée sous la forme d'une chose externe et sensorielle. Ainsi, la forme d'une cruche se dressant sous les bras d'un potier, ne consiste à l'avance ni en un morceau d'argile, ni en une organisation anatomique-physiologique du corps de l'individu agissant comme un potier. Ce n'est que lorsque l'homme entraîne les organes de son corps sur les objets créés par l'homme pour l'homme qu'il devient le porteur de « formes actives » d'activité socio-humaine, qui crée ces objets. Il est clair que l'idéel, c'est-à-dire la forme d'activité sociale et humaine active, est directement incarné, ou, comme on aime le dire aujourd'hui, « encodé » sous la forme de structures nerveuses et corticales cérébrales, c'est-à-dire de façon tout à fait matérielle. Cependant cette existence matérielle de l'idéel n'est pas l'idéel lui-même, mais seulement la forme de son expression dans le corps organique de l'individu. C'est une forme d'activité humaine socialement déterminée qui correspond à la forme de son objet et de son produit. Il est clair qu'essayer d'expliquer l'idéel des propriétés anatomiques et physiologiques du cerveau est aussi ridicule que d'essayer d'expliquer la forme monétaire du produit du travail à partir des caractéristiques physiques et chimiques de l'or. Le matérialisme, dans ce cas, ne consiste pas du tout à identifier l'idéel avec les processus matériels qui se produisent dans la tête. Le matérialisme s'exprime ici précisément dans la compréhension du fait que l'idéel en tant que forme d'activité humaine socialement déterminée, créant un objet

[591] Marx, K. *Manuscrits de 1857-1858 dits « Grundrisse ».* Paris : *Éditions Sociales*, 1980. p. 48

d'une certaine forme, naît et existe non pas « dans la tête », mais avec l'aide de la tête dans l'activité réelle de l'homme en tant qu'agent réel de la production sociale. C'est pourquoi les définitions scientifiques de l'idéel sont obtenues sur la base d'une analyse matérialiste de « l'anatomie et de la physiologie » de la production sociale de la vie matérielle et spirituelle de la société, et en aucun cas de l'anatomie et de la physiologie du cerveau en tant qu'organe du corps individuel. C'est précisément le monde des produits du travail humain dans l'acte constamment renouvelable de sa reproduction qui est, comme l'a dit Marx, « la psychologie humaine qui est sensuellement représentée devant nous » ; la théorie psychologique pour laquelle ce « livre ouvert » de la psychologie humaine est inconnu ne peut pas être une vraie science. Lorsque Marx définit l'idéel comme « le matériel transposé et traduit dans la tête de l'homme », il ne conçoit pas cette « tête » au sens naturel, scientifique du mot. Nous entendons ici la tête de l'homme socialement développé, dont toutes les formes d'activité sont des produits et des formes de développements socio-humains, des formes directement sociales et généralement significatives, depuis les formes de langage, le vocabulaire et le système syntaxique jusqu'aux catégories logiques. Le matériel extérieur se transforme en un fait social, en propriété de la personne sociale, c'est-à-dire en idéel, lorsqu'il est exprimé sous ces formes. La « transformation » directe de la matière en idéel consiste dans l'expression du fait extérieur dans un langage – cette « réalité directe de la pensée », c'est-à-dire l'idéel. Mais le langage lui-même est aussi peu idéel que la structure nerveuse et physiologique du cerveau. Là encore, ce n'est pas l'idéel, mais seulement la forme de son expression, son existence matérielle-concrète. C'est pourquoi le néo-positivisme (Wittgenstein, Carnap, etc.) qui identifie la pensée (c'est-à-dire l'idéel) avec le langage, avec le système des « termes » et des « énoncés », commet la plus grande erreur naturaliste, tout comme les enseignements qui identifient l'idéel avec les structures et les fonctions du tissu cérébral. Ici aussi, seule la forme de son expression matérielle est prise comme idéel. Le matériel est vraiment « transposé » dans la tête humaine, et pas simplement dans le cerveau en tant qu'organe du corps de l'individu, seulement dans le cas où il est exprimé dans des formes de langage directe, universellement significatives (le langage entendu ici dans un sens large, qui comprend le langage des plans, schémas, modèles, etc.). En d'autres termes, la chose ne s'idéalise que lorsqu'on la recrée activement à partir du langage des mots et des schémas, par la capacité de transformer « la parole en acte » et l'acte en chose.

C'est ce que Spinoza a très bien compris. Ayant établi que la pensée est l'activité du corps pensant qui est en rapport avec des corps réels dans l'espace réel, et non avec des « signes » ou

des « concepts », il fait le lien entre les « idées adéquates », exprimées dans les mots d'une langue, et la capacité de reproduire des formes verbales données dans l'espace réel. C'est justement là qu'il procède à la distinction entre une détermination exprimant l'essence de la chose, c'est-à-dire l'image idéelle de l'objet, et des définitions nominales, formelles, qui fixent une propriété de l'objet, plus ou moins accidentellement choisie. Il explique cette distinction par l'exemple d'un cercle, d'une circonférence. Un cercle peut être défini comme « une figure dont les lignes tirées du centre à la circonférence sont égales »[592], mais cette définition « n'explique nullement l'essence du cercle, elle ne montre qu'une de ses *propriétés.* »[593] De surcroît, il ne s'agit que d'une propriété dérivée, secondaire. Ce n'est pas la même chose lorsque la définition comprend « la cause prochaine. » Le cercle doit alors être défini de la manière suivante : « une figure décrite par toute ligne dont une extrémité est fixe et l'autre mobile »[594]. Cette dernière définition établit une façon de construire une chose dans l'espace réel. Ici, la définition nominale apparaît en même temps que l'action réelle d'un corps pensant le long du contour spatial réel de l'objet de l'idée. C'est alors que la personne possède une idée adéquate, c'est-à-dire une image idéelle d'une chose, et pas seulement des signes, des marques exprimées par des mots. C'est une compréhension profonde – et matérialiste – de la nature de l'idéel. L'idéel existe là où il y a une capacité à recréer un objet dans l'espace, en partant d'un mot, d'une langue – en conjonction avec la nécessité de cet objet et la disposition matérielle de l'acte.

La détermination de l'idéel est donc essentiellement dialectique. C'est quelque chose qui n'existe pas et qui existe simultanément. Une chose qui n'existe pas en tant qu'extérieure, perçue par les sens, et qui existe en même temps comme une capacité opérationnelle d'une personne. Il s'agit d'une existence qui est cependant égale à la non-existence, ou à l'existence actuelle de la chose extérieure dans la phase de sa formation dans l'activité du sujet, sous la forme d'une image intérieure, de ses besoins, de ses incitations et de son but. C'est en ce sens que l'être idéel d'une chose est différent de son être réel. Mais il diffère tout aussi fondamentalement des structures matérielles du cerveau et du langage par lesquelles cette chose existe chez le sujet. Contrairement aux structures du cerveau et du langage, l'image idéelle de l'objet est une forme d'objet externe, et non une forme du cerveau ou du langage. En

[592] Spinoza, B. *Traité de la réforme de l'entendement*. Trad : S. Auffret. Paris : *Éditions Mille et une nuits*, 1996. p. 16

[593] Ibid.

[594] Ibid.

ce qui concerne la différence entre l'image idéelle et l'objet extérieur, elle réside dans le fait que l'image idéelle n'est pas directement objectivée dans la substance extérieure de la nature mais dans le corps organique de l'homme et dans le corps du langage en tant qu'image subjective. L'idéel immédiat est donc l'existence subjective d'un objet, ou son « existence étrangère », l'existence d'un objet dans un autre et à travers un autre, comme l'a exprimé Hegel. Il convient en même temps de noter que dans les traductions de Hegel, le terme « idéel » (*ideelle*) est traduit par « idéalisé » afin de séparer ce sens de l'idéal, en tant que problème associé à l'idéal, qui dans l'œuvre de Hegel est un problème d'esthétique. L'idéel comme forme d'activité de l'homme social existe là où, comme le dit Hegel, se trouve le processus de « suppression (*Aufhebung*) d'extériorité », c'est-à-dire le processus de transformation du corps de la nature en sujet de l'activité humaine, en sujet du travail, puis en produit de cette activité. Ceci peut être exprimé de la manière suivante : la forme de la chose extérieure impliquée dans le processus de travail est « supprimée » dans la forme subjective de l'activité concrète et cette dernière est fixée concrètement dans le sujet par les mécanismes supérieurs de l'activité nerveuse. Puis, le revers de ces mêmes métamorphoses : la signification exprimée verbalement se transforme en action, et par l'action elle se transforme en forme de la chose extérieure, perçue par les sens, c'est-à-dire en objet. C'est dans ce mouvement cyclique, renouvelé sans cesse, que l'idéel – l'image idéelle d'une chose – existe.

Du point de vue de Marx, une chose – extérieure et indépendante de la conscience et de la volonté d'une personne, existante et perçue sensoriellement – est le début et la fin de ce mouvement cyclique, qui revient constamment « à soi-même ». Mais précisément parce que ce mouvement est de nature cyclique, son début et donc sa fin ne se voient pas dans les choses et les activités avec elles, mais dans les mots et les activités avec les mots. Dans ce cas, le schéma est exactement l'inverse de celui de Marx : parole - acte - chose, et puis retour. Ce schéma est le secret de toute la construction hégélienne, exposée dans la Phénoménologie de l'esprit et, plus largement, de tout idéalisme objectif – y compris la théologie. La Bible elle-même commence par la thèse « au commencement était la parole ». Sur ce point, Hegel ne se distingue des auteurs de la Bible que par le fait que chez lui, au début, il n'y avait pas seulement la parole mais une activité avec la parole. Selon Hegel, c'est dans la parole et à travers elle que l'esprit, idéel au début, devient « un objet à soi-même », trouve une forme dans laquelle il peut se confronter à lui-même et agir « en lui-même », en changeant activement sa propre « nature aliénée ». La seconde métamorphose chez Hegel consiste en un changement de la chose extérieure selon le plan et le schéma produit par l'activité avec les mots, au niveau du langage,

au niveau de la pensée. Dans ce cas, la forme de la chose extérieure créée par le travail réel de l'homme commence également à apparaître comme une « nature aliénée de l'esprit », un « être extérieur », un « être-autre de l'idéel ». De ce fait, l'acte final de « suppression de l'extériorité » consiste à retrouver et à reconnaître, dans le monde qui nous entoure, le « miroir de l'esprit », une copie extérieure du monde intérieur idéel. C'est pourquoi les catégories universelles de logique fixées verbalement (les formes universelles du développement de l'esprit de l'humanité, c'est-à-dire la culture spirituelle dans son ensemble) sont la cause cible de l'histoire, et donc le « début absolu » de tous les cycles de l'activité humaine. Telle est la mystification à laquelle est soumise, chez Hegel, la véritable essence de l'activité humaine. La relation réelle entre l'activité immédiate-concrète avec les choses et l'activité avec les mots est posée « la tête en bas ». La parole apparaît comme le premier « corps » (logiquement et historiquement) de l'image idéelle, tandis que la forme du produit extérieur du travail est la seconde incarnation corporelle dérivée de cette image idéelle. La troisième phase consiste à « supprimer » à nouveau cette extériorité, à reconnaître sous la forme d'une chose extérieure l'activité « aliénée », l'image de l'idéel, et à exprimer à nouveau cet idéel dans la parole – dans une composition logique.

L'idéalisme, c'est-à-dire la représentation de la nature comme quelque-chose d'idéelle en soi, est atteint par une substitution plus ou moins consciente : certains phénomènes naturels sont substitués à leur reflet idéel dans la science, c'est-à-dire dans la nature idéalisée auparavant. Cela ressort clairement du raisonnement de Hegel concernant les corps en collision, les masses matérielles : « Mais comme les masses se heurtent et se pressent, et qu'il n'y a pas d'espace vide laissé entre elles, c'est dans ce contact que commence à se produire l'unité idéale de la matière. Et il est important de voir comment cette unité interne (*Innerlichkeit*) se produit, comme il est en général important de voir comment la notion arrive à l'existence (*Existenz*) dans le sens déterminé. »[595]. Cette « arrivée à l'existence » consiste, selon Hegel, dans le fait qu'au sein du choc que constitue l'acte du contact : « deux points matériels ou atomes [...] coïncident en seul point, dans un seul moment d'identité »[596] , ce qui signifie que « l'être pour-soi n'est pas l'être pour-soi (Ihr Fürsichseyn ist nicht

[595] Hegel, G.W.F. *La Philosophie de la Nature*. Tome 1. Trad: A. Vera. Paris: *De Ladrange*, 1866. p. 248

[596] Ibid.

Fürsichseyn). »[597]. Mais « être autre », tout en restant « soi-même », implique de posséder, outre un être réel, un être idéel. C'est le secret de « l'idéalisation » de la nature (matière) par Hegel : dès le début, Hegel ne parle pas de la nature elle-même, mais de la nature telle qu'elle apparaît dans la mécanique newtonienne, c'est-à-dire la nature déjà idéalisée auparavant et exprimée à travers des concepts spécifiques de la physique newtonienne. C'est aussi le secret de la vitalité d'une telle tournure idéaliste de la pensée : en parlant de la nature, nous sommes toujours obligés d'utiliser les expressions et les concepts de la science moderne. Mais l'idéalisme, en faisant passer ces expressions pour quelque chose de directement en unité avec la nature elle-même, fétichise ainsi le stade atteint de la connaissance de la nature, la transformant en un absolu, l'immortalisant.

C'est parce qu'il a mis ce schéma « la tête en bas » que Marx a pu apprendre toutes les avancées formelles de Hegel dans la compréhension de l'idéel. L'idéel arrive directement à l'existence dans le symbole et à travers le symbole, c'est-à-dire à travers le corps extérieur de la parole, sensoriellement perçu, visible ou audible. Mais ce corps, restant soi-même, se présente en même temps comme l'existence d'un autre corps, et son existence idéelle comme signification est quelque chose d'absolument différent de sa forme corporelle, perçue directement par les oreilles ou les yeux. La parole comme signe, comme nom, n'a rien à voir avec ce qu'elle est. Le point commun ne peut être trouvé que dans l'acte qui consiste à transformer la parole en acte et, par cet acte, en une chose ; puis, par le processus inverse, par la pratique et l'assimilation de ses résultats.

L'homme existe en tant qu'être humain, en tant que sujet d'activité orienté vers le monde qui l'entoure et vers lui-même, depuis et jusqu'à ce qu'il produise et reproduise activement sa vie réelle dans des formes créées par lui-même, son propre travail. Et ce travail, cette transformation réelle du monde et de lui-même, qui se déroule sous des formes socialement développées et légitimées, est précisément ce processus qui commence et continue en totale indépendance vis-à-vis de la pensée, au sein duquel naît et fonctionne, au fur et à mesure de sa métamorphose, l'idéel, l'idéalisation de la réalité, de la nature et des relations sociales, ainsi que le langage des symboles, comme corps extérieur de l'image idéelle du monde externe. Voici le mystère de l'idéel ainsi que sa résolution. Pour rendre plus compréhensible l'essence de ce mystère, aussi bien que la façon dont il a été résolu par Marx, analysons le cas le plus typique

[597] Ibid. p. 249

d'idéalisation de la réalité, l'acte de naissance de l'idéel : le phénomène politique et économique du prix. « Le prix, ou forme-monnaie des marchandises, est, comme leur forme-valeur en général, une forme qui diffère de leurs formes corporelles tangibles, une forme qui n'est donc qu'idéelle ou imaginée »[598]. Tout d'abord, soyons attentifs au fait que le prix, en tant que catégorie de l'économie politique, est une catégorie objective et non un phénomène psychophysiologique. Cependant, le prix est une forme « qui n'est qu'idéelle ». Tel est le matérialisme de la conception marxiste du prix. L'idéalisme, au contraire, consiste à affirmer que le prix, parce qu'il n'est « qu'idéel », existe seulement en tant que phénomène subjectif-psychique. Cette dernière interprétation du prix a été donnée par nul autre que Berkeley, qui a agi non seulement comme philosophe mais aussi comme économiste. Critiquant la conception idéaliste de l'argent, Marx montre que le prix est la valeur du produit du travail humain, exprimée en argent, par exemple dans une certaine quantité d'or. Mais l'or en soi, par nature, n'est pas de l'argent. Il n'est de l'argent que parce qu'il prend en charge une sorte de fonction sociale – une mesure de la valeur de toutes les marchandises. La forme de l'argent n'est donc pas la forme de l'or en tant que tel, mais la forme d'un autre objet, apposé comme un sceau, de l'extérieur sur l'or. Cet autre objet, dont la forme est en fait de l'or, est un système de relations sociales entre les personnes dans le processus de production et d'échange de produits. De là vient la forme idéelle du prix. L'or en circulation, restant lui-même, est cependant directement la forme d'existence et de mouvement d'un « autre », représente et remplace cet « autre » dans le processus de circulation des marchandises et de l'argent, et constitue sa métamorphose. « Dans le prix, d'un côté, la marchandise se rapporte à l'argent comme à quelque chose qui est en dehors d'elle, et, deuxièmement, elle est elle-même posée *idéellement* comme argent, puisque l'argent a une réalité distincte d'elle… A côté de l'argent réel, la marchandise existe maintenant comme argent posé idéellement. »[599] « Après que l'argent a été posé réellement comme marchandise, la marchandise est posée idéellement comme argent. »[600] Ce placement idéel, ou le placement d'un produit réel comme image idéelle d'un autre produit, se fait dans le processus de circulation de la grande masse des marchandises. Ce placement émerge comme un instrument pour résoudre les contradictions qui ont mûri au cours de ce processus, en son sein – non dans la tête, certes, mais pas sans l'aide de la tête – comme un moyen de satisfaire le besoin qui est apparu dans le circuit des marchandises. Ce besoin n'a aucun sens biologique.

[598] Marx, K. *Le Capital*. Tome 1. Quadrige/PUF: 1993, p. 108

[599] Marx, K. *Manuscrits de 1857-1858 dits « Grundrisse ».* Paris : *Éditions Sociales*, 1980. p. 150

[600] Ibid. p. 151

C'est la nécessité d'un organisme social. Ce besoin, agissant comme une contradiction non résolue de la forme de marchandise, est satisfait, est résolu par le fait qu'une marchandise est « arrachée » à une famille égalitaire de marchandises et se transforme en un étalon directement social des dépenses socialement nécessaires du travail, légalisé d'abord par la coutume, puis par la législation. Le problème, comme le dit Marx, surgit en même temps que les moyens de le résoudre. Dans l'échange réel, avant même l'apparition de l'argent (avant la transformation de l'or en monnaie), une certaine situation se présente : « Jamais ne s'instaure un trafic où des possesseurs de marchandises comparent et échangent leurs articles contre d'autres articles différents sans que dans ce trafic diverses marchandises appartenant à divers possesseurs ne soient échangées contre une seule et même tierce marchandise et comparées à elle en tant que valeurs. Cette tierce marchandise, en devenant l'équivalent d'autres marchandises différentes, acquiert immédiatement - même si c'est dans d'étroites limites - la forme d'équivalent universel ou social. »[601] C'est sur cette base-là que surgit la possibilité et la nécessité d'exprimer le rapport d'échange mutuel des deux marchandises par la valeur d'échange du troisième, et ce troisième n'entre pas directement dans l'échange réel, mais sert seulement comme mesure commune de la valeur des marchandises échangées. Et de la même manière, cette troisième marchandise, quoiqu'elle n'entre pas physiquement en échange, participe quand même à l'acte d'échange, présente seulement de manière idéelle, c'est-à-dire en représentation, dans le raisonnement des possesseurs des marchandises, en parole, sur papier, etc. Mais ce faisant, elle devient un symbole des relations sociales entre les gens. Toutes les théories dérisoires de l'argent et de la valeur qui réduisent la valeur et ses formes au pur symbolisme, au « nom de la relation », à un « signe » conventionnel ou légalement établi, sont liées à cette circonstance. Ces théories, en fonction de la logique de leur naissance et de leur construction, sont organiquement liées – et semblables comme le sont des jumeaux – à ces enseignements philosophiques et logiques qui, ne sachant pas comprendre l'acte de naissance de l'idéel à partir du processus de l'activité objective-pratique de l'homme social, finissent par énoncer les formes d'expression de cet idéel dans le discours, en termes et expressions de phénomènes conventionnels. Derrière ces phénomènes il y a cependant quelque chose de mystiquement insaisissable : ou bien « l'expérience » des néo-positivistes, ou bien « l'existence » des existentialistes, ou encore « l'essence eidétique » de Husserl et de ses semblables, non corporelle, mystique, intuitivement saisie. La logique de l'émergence de telles théories de l'idéel et de sa réduction au symbole, au signe de relations sans objet – ou de liaisons en tant que telles, de liaisons sans matière, de

[601] Marx, K. *Le Capital*. Tome 1. Quadrige/PUF: 1993, p. 101

substrat – a été examinée par Marx dans le Capital, où il démontre son caractère extrême et sa vacuité. « Le fait que les marchandises, sous la forme de prix, ne sont transformées qu'idéalement en or et que par suite l'or n'est transformé qu'idéalement en monnaie, a donné lieu à la théorie de *l'unité de mesure idéale de la monnaie*. Comme il n'entre dans la détermination des prix que de l'or ou de l'argent figuré, que l'or et l'argent fonctionnent seulement comme monnaie de compte, on a prétendu que les termes de livre, shilling, pence, thaler, franc, etc., au lieu de désigner des fractions de poids d'or ou d'argent ou du travail matérialisé de quelque manière que ce soit, désignaient au contraire des atomes de valeur idéaux. »[602] Et puis il a été facile de passer à l'idée que le prix des marchandises correspond à de simples « noms de relations » ou à des « proportions », de purs signes. Ainsi, les phénomènes économiques objectifs se transforment en simples symboles, derrière lesquels se cache la volonté qui fait leur substance, leur représentation, l'« expérience intérieure » du « Moi » individuel, interprétée au sens de Hume et Berkeley. C'est exactement par le même schéma que les idéalistes modernes transforment, en logique, les termes et les énoncés – la coquille verbale de l'image idéelle d'un objet – en « simples noms de rapports », dans lesquels « l'expérience » d'une personne individuelle symbolise l'activité du langage. Les rapports logiques se transforment simplement en « noms de connexions » – de quoi à quoi, on ne sait pas. Il faut souligner en particulier que la transformation idéelle de la marchandise en or, et donc de l'or en symbole des relations sociales, se déroule à la fois dans le temps et en essence plutôt que par la transformation réelle de la marchandise en argent, c'est-à-dire par le tintement de la pièce de monnaie. L'or devient la mesure de la valeur de toutes choses en tant que marchandises plutôt qu'un moyen de circulation, il fonctionne comme l'argent d'abord de manière « purement idéelle »[603]. « L'argent ne fait circuler que des marchandises déjà transformées *idéellement* en argent, non seulement dans la tête de l'individu singulier, mais encore dans la représentation de la société (immédiatement dans la représentation des partenaires au cours du procès d'achat et de vente). »[604] C'est un point fondamentalement important dans la compréhension marxiste du phénomène du prix, mais aussi du problème de l'idéel, du problème de l'idéalisation de la réalité en général. Cet acte d'échange suppose toujours le système déjà formé de relations entre les personnes médiatisées par les choses et il

[602] Marx, K. *Contribution à la critique de l'économie politique*. Trad : Maurice Husson et Gilbert Badia. Paris : *Éditions Sociales*, 1972. p. 56

[603] Voir : Marx, K. *Le Capital*. Tome 1. Quadrige/PUF: 1993, p. 142

[604] Marx, K. *Manuscrits de 1857-1858 dits « Grundrisse ».* Paris : *Éditions Sociales*, 1980. p. 147

s'exprime toujours en ce qu'une des choses perçues sensoriellement, le corps – ce peut être le corps de la personne individuelle – « est arraché » à ce système et, ne cessant pas d'y fonctionner comme un corps distinct perçu sensoriellement, se transforme en représentant de tout autre corps de ce système, en corps sensoriellement perçu de l'image idéelle. Cette chose, restant elle-même, est en même temps l'incarnation extérieure d'une autre chose, non de son image directement corporelle, sensoriellement perçue, mais de son essence, c'est-à-dire de la loi de son existence au sein de ce système, qui crée en général cette situation originale. Cette chose devient ainsi un symbole, dont la signification reste toujours en dehors de sa forme directement perceptible, dans d'autres choses perçues sensoriellement et ne se révèle qu'à travers tout le système de relations des autres choses à cette chose, ou, inversement, de cette chose à toutes les autres. Étant réellement retirée de ce système, la chose sensoriellement perçue perd son rôle, la signification d'un symbole, se transforme à nouveau en chose sensoriellement perçue habituelle avec d'autres choses similaires. Cela montre que son existence et son fonctionnement en tant que symbole ne lui appartenait pas en tant que tel, mais appartenait seulement au système dans lequel elle se trouvait. Ses propriétés intrinsèques, sa forme perçue physiquement et sensoriellement, n'ont donc rien à voir avec son être en tant que symbole. La coquille corporelle, sensoriellement perceptible, le « corps » d'un symbole (le corps de la chose qui a été transformée en symbole) est pour son être en tant que symbole quelque chose de complètement insignifiant, fugace, temporaire, « l'existence fonctionnelle » d'une telle chose absorbe complètement son « existence matérielle ».[605] Et si cela a lieu, le corps matériel de cette chose est alors mis en accord avec sa fonction. En conséquence, le symbole se transforme en signe, c'est-à-dire en objet, qui ne signifie plus rien en soi, mais représente seulement, exprime un autre objet avec lequel il n'a rien en commun, comme le nom de la chose avec la chose elle-même. C'est la dialectique de la transformation d'une chose en symbole, et d'un symbole en signe, qui est tracée dans *Le Capital* par la problématique de l'émergence et de l'évolution de la forme monnaie de la valeur. L'existence fonctionnelle du symbole est précisément qu'il n'est pas lui-même, il n'est pas son propre corps perçu sensoriellement, mais un autre. Et en même temps il est un moyen, un outil pour identifier l'essence des autres choses perçues sensoriellement, c'est-à-dire leur signification universelle, socio-humaine – c'est-à-dire leur rôle et leur fonction au sein du corps social – mais directement ; la loi de production et de reproduction des choses par l'activité humaine. En d'autres termes, la fonction du symbole est simplement d'être un corps direct de l'image idéelle de la chose extérieure, ou, plus précisément,

[605] Marx, K. *Le Capital*. Tome 1. Quadrige/PUF : 1993, p. 146

de la loi de son existence, de l'universel. Le symbole, retiré du processus réel de métabolisme entre l'homme social et la nature, cesse d'être un symbole en général. Autrement dit, cette chose corporelle, sensoriellement perceptible, cesse d'être la coquille corporelle de l'image idéelle – son « âme » disparaît de son corps, car son « âme », qui existait dans la chose et à travers elle, était exactement l'activité concrète de l'homme social, cette même activité qui effectuait le métabolisme entre la nature « vierge » et la nature humanisée. Sans image idéelle, les êtres humains ne peuvent pas du tout métaboliser la nature et il n'est plus possible d'agir comme intermédiaire entre les choses de la nature, puisque ces choses sont impliquées et fonctionnent comme matériel, moyen ou instrument de la production sociale, et que l'image idéelle requiert précisément pour sa réalisation de la « matière matérielle » – ce qui comprend le langage avec ses symboles linguistiques. Ainsi, le travail social donne naissance à un besoin de langue, puis à la langue elle-même, la parole, et non l'inverse, comme dans le cas néo-positiviste. Lorsqu'une personne agit avec un symbole ou un signe plutôt qu'avec un objet, en s'appuyant sur le symbole et le signe, elle n'agit pas de manière idéelle. Elle n'agit que verbalement. Il arrive souvent qu'au lieu de voir l'essence réelle d'une chose à l'aide d'un terme, un individu ne voit que le terme lui-même avec sa signification traditionnelle, il ne voit que le symbole, son corps perçu sensoriellement. Dans ce cas, l'ensemble des symboles linguistiques se transforme, en lieu et place d'un puissant instrument d'action réelle avec des choses réelles, en un fétiche qui bloque avec son corps la réalité qu'il représente. Par conséquent, au lieu de voir réellement et de changer consciemment le monde extérieur selon ses propres lois universelles exprimées sous la forme d'une image idéelle, cette personne commence à ne voir et à ne changer que l'expression verbale et terminologique de ce monde et pense qu'elle change le monde lui-même. Le monde et l'existence humaine pratique ne changent pas d'un iota et ne le remarquent même pas. Dans cette fétichisation de l'être verbal de l'idéel, Marx et Engels distinguent la philosophie hégélienne de gauche de l'époque de sa décadence. Cette fétichisation de l'être verbal de l'idéel, médiatisé par le système réel de relations sociales qu'il représente, constitue la fin absolument inévitable de toute philosophie qui ne comprend pas que l'idéel en tant que tel ne naît et ne se reproduit que par le processus de l'activité objective-pratique de l'homme social, changeant la nature, et que l'idéel n'existe en général qu'au cours de ce processus – et que tant que ce processus dure, continue, il se reproduit à une échelle élargie. Si, comme l'a noté Marx, ce processus s'arrête pendant même une semaine, non seulement l'idéel disparaît, mais aussi l'être humain lui-même en tant que sujet d'activité idéelle. Et lorsque la pensée, c'est-à-dire l'activité dans le plan idéel, l'activité avec des images idéelles, est interprétée différemment, non pas comme une activité avec des choses réelles basées sur et médiatisées par les symboles, mais

comme une activité avec les symboles eux-mêmes, cela est puni par telle ou telle forme de fétichisation à la fois du monde extérieur et des symboles. L'état actuel des relations sociales, leurs formes actuelles, d'une part, et l'expression actuelle de ces formes de réalité dans le langage, dans la terminologie actuelle et dans les structures syntaxiques, d'autre part, commencent à apparaître comme des « saints », comme des idôles pour le sauvage, comme une croix pour le chrétien, c'est-à-dire comme les seules incarnations « terrestres » possibles de l'idéel – son aspect terrestre véritable, bien que quelque peu déformé. Le plus comique est qu'une telle fétichisation de l'idéel sous la forme de son existence verbale et symbolique ne capture pas l'idéel lui-même. Elle saisit les résultats de l'activité humaine, c'est-à-dire le mouvement produisant ces résultats, mais pas l'activité humaine elle-même, qui crée et reproduit ces résultats. Elle ne saisit donc pas l'idéel lui-même, mais seulement les produits aliénés, congelés dans des choses extérieurs ou dans le langage. Cela n'est pas surprenant, car l'idéel, en tant que forme d'activité humaine, n'existe que dans l'activité, et non dans ses résultats, car l'activité est cette « négation » constante et durable des formes de choses actuelles, perçues sensoriellement, leur changement, leur « suppression » sous de nouvelles formes, procédant selon des lois universelles, exprimées dans les formes idéelles. Lorsqu'un objet a été créé, le besoin de la société a été satisfait, et l'activité s'est effacée dans son produit : l'idéel est mort. L'image idéelle du pain, par exemple, naît dans la tête d'une personne affamée ou d'un boulanger qui fait ce pain. Dans la tête d'un homme nourri et occupé à construire une maison, il n'y a pas de pain idéel. Mais si nous prenons la société dans son ensemble, il y a toujours un pain idéel, une maison idéelle et tout objet idéel dont l'homme réel s'occupe réellement dans le processus de production et de reproduction de sa vie réelle et matérielle, y compris le ciel idéel en tant qu'objet d'astronomie, comme le « calendrier naturel », « l'horloge » et « la boussole » de l'humanité. En conséquence, toute la nature dont s'occupe l'homme est idéalisée, et pas seulement la partie qu'il produit et reproduit ou utilise directement. Sans une idéalisation constamment renouvelée des objets réels de l'activité vitale socio-humaine, sans leur transformation en idéel, et donc sans symbolisation, l'homme ne peut absolument pas devenir un agent réel, sujet actif de la production sociale de la vie matérielle et spirituelle de la société, médiateur actif entre les corps de la nature et « la mesure de toutes choses » impliquées et impliquant dans le processus de production sociale. Des difficultés et des contradictions dialectiques qui surgissent dans le processus de l'activité socio-humaine naissent toutes les différentes notions fétiches de l'idéel, de la symbolisation primitive des rapports sociaux de production dans les symboles-fétiches des sauvages jusqu'au fétichisme éclairé des néo-positivistes, qui transforment les signes-symboles linguistiques en une force autonome,

extérieure et indépendante de l'homme, existant et agissant comme un dieu, comme le diable, comme la source de tous les biens et de tous les maux de l'histoire.

L'idéel agit toujours comme un produit et une forme de travail humain, un processus de transformation intentionnelle des matériaux naturels et des rapports sociaux effectué par l'homme social. L'idéel existe uniquement là où il y a un individu qui exerce ses activités sous les formes qui lui ont été données par le développement antérieur de l'humanité. C'est justement par le plan idéel de l'activité humaine qu'il se distingue de l'animal : « ce qui distingue d'emblée le plus mauvais architecte de la meilleure abeille, c'est qu'il a construit la cellule dans sa tête avant de la construire dans la cire. Le résultat auquel aboutit le procès de travail était déjà au commencement dans l'imagination du travailleur, existait donc déjà en idée »[606]. Il faut souligner une fois de plus que si nous comprenons la « tête » naturellement, c'est-à-dire comme un organe matériel du corps d'un individu, il n'y a pas de différence fondamentale entre l'architecte et l'abeille. La cellule de cire, que l'abeille fabrique, est également « à l'avance », sous la forme d'une activité d'insecte, « programmée » dans ses nœuds nerveux. En ce sens, le produit de l'activité de l'abeille est également fixé « idéalement » avant sa mise en œuvre réelle. Toutefois, les formes d'activité de l'animal propres à l'espèce à laquelle il appartient sont héritées en même temps que l'organisation structurelle et anatomique du corps, c'est-à-dire directement de manière matérielle. La forme d'activité, que nous pouvons désigner comme un être idéel d'un produit, n'est jamais séparée du corps de l'animal, sauf sous la forme de son produit réel direct. La principale différence entre l'activité humaine et l'activité animale est qu'aucune forme de cette activité, aucune aptitude n'est héritée avec l'organisation matérielle anatomique du corps animal. Ces formes d'activité – capacités actives – ne sont ici transmises qu'indirectement, par les formes d'objets créés par l'homme pour l'homme. Par conséquent, la maîtrise individuelle d'une forme d'activité définie par l'homme, c'est-à-dire une image idéale de son objet et de son produit, se transforme en un processus spécial qui ne coïncide pas avec le processus de formation directe d'un objet de la nature. C'est pourquoi la forme même de l'activité humaine devient un sujet particulier pour un être humain, un sujet d'activité particulière. « L'animal s'identifie directement avec son activité vitale. Il ne se distingue pas d'elle. Il est cette activité. L'homme fait de son activité vitale elle-même l'objet de sa volonté et de sa conscience. Il a une activité vitale consciente… Ce n'est pas une détermination avec

[606] Marx, K. *Le Capital*. Tome 1. Quadrige/PUF : 1993, p. 200

laquelle il se confond directement »[607]. Par conséquent, si l'idéel ci-dessus était défini comme une forme d'activité humaine ou comme une forme de chose dans le cadre d'une forme d'activité, alors cette définition serait, à proprement parler, incomplète. Elle ne caractérisait l'idéel que par son contenu réel conditionné objectivement. Mais l'idéel en tant que tel existe seulement là où la forme de l'activité elle-même, correspondant à la forme de l'objet extérieur, se transforme pour une personne en un objet particulier avec lequel elle peut agir particulièrement, sans toucher ou changer l'objet réel, cette chose extérieure, dont l'image est cette forme d'activité. C'est seulement l'homme qui cesse de « confluer » directement avec la forme de son activité vitale, en la séparant de lui-même et en la mettant devant lui, c'est-à-dire en la transformant en représentation. Puisqu'une chose extérieure n'est donnée à l'homme en général que parce qu'elle est impliquée dans le processus de son activité, parce qu'elle agit sous les formes de cette activité, dans le produit final, la représentation, l'image de la chose extérieure se confond toujours avec l'image de l'activité au sein de laquelle la chose extérieure fonctionne. C'est la base gnoséologique qui permet d'identifier la chose avec la représentation, le réel avec l'idéel, c'est-à-dire la racine gnoséologique des idéalismes de toutes sortes et de toutes nuances. Mais s'il est clair qu'une telle réification de la forme de l'activité elle-même, suite à laquelle il devient possible de prendre la forme de l'activité comme « la forme d'une chose » – et *vice versa* – la forme d'une chose elle-même en tant que produit et forme d'activité subjective, en tant qu'idéel, n'est pas encore de l'idéalisme. Ce n'est que ce fait réel, qui se transforme en tel ou tel type d'idéalisme ou de fétichisme uniquement sur la base de certaines conditions sociales et directement sur la base de la division spontanée du travail, où la forme d'activité est imposée à l'individu, indépendamment de lui et de processus sociaux qu'il ne comprend pas. La réification des formes sociales de l'activité humaine, caractéristique de la production marchande (fétichisme des marchandises), est similaire à cet égard à l'aliénation religieuse des capacités humaines actives dans la notion de dieux. Ce fait est déjà clairement réalisé dans les limites d'une perspective d'idéalisme objectif sur la nature de l'idéel. Le jeune Marx, tout en étant encore un hégélien de gauche, a noté que tous les dieux anciens avaient la même « existence réelle » que l'argent. « L'antique Moloch n'a-t-il pas régné ? L'Apollon de Delphes n'était-il pas une puissance réelle dans la vie des Grecs ? Sur ce point, la critique de Kant ne prouve rien elle non plus. Si quelqu'un s'imagine posséder cent thalers, si cette représentation n'est pas pour lui une représentation subjective quelconque, s'il y croit, les cent

[607] Marx, K. *Manuscrits Économico-Philosophiques de 1844.* Trad. et notes d'Émile Bottigelli. Paris *: Les Éditions sociales,* 1972. p. 61

thalers imaginés ont pour lui la même valeur que les cent thalers… Des thalers réels ont la même existence que des dieux imaginés. Un thaler réel a-t-il une existence ailleurs que dans la représentation, même si c'est une représentation universelle ou plutôt commune des hommes ? »[608] Cette analogie, dont la véritable nature a été révélée plus tard par Marx, sur la base de la compréhension matérialiste de la nature, de l'argent et des images religieuses, est ancrée dans le lien réel de la représentation des gens avec leurs activités réelles, avec les formes de pratique, dans le rôle actif de l'image idéelle (représentation). L'homme est capable de changer la forme de son activité – ou l'image idéelle de la chose extérieure – sans toucher à cette chose extérieure elle-même, jusqu'à un certain moment. Mais cela lui est possible uniquement parce qu'il peut séparer cette image idéelle de lui-même, l'objectiver et agir avec elle comme un objet existant, au lieu d'agir avec la chose extérieure réelle dont elle est l'image. L'exemple de l'architecte que Marx donne pour expliquer la différence entre l'activité humaine et celle de l'abeille en dit long sur ce point. L'architecte ne construit pas une maison uniquement dans sa tête mais avec l'aide de sa tête, en termes de représentations, directement sur papier *Whatman*, sur le plan de la planche à dessin. Il change ainsi son « état intérieur » en un « extérieur » avec lequel il peut agir comme il agirait avec un objet distinct. En modifiant cette image subjective (intérieure) objectivée, il modifie potentiellement l'image de la maison réelle également, c'est-à-dire qu'il la modifie de manière idéelle, dans ses possibilités. Cela signifie qu'il modifie directement un objet perçu sensoriellement au lieu d'un autre. La représentation avec laquelle la personne agit au lieu d'agir avec une chose réelle est objectivée sous la forme d'une parole perçue sensoriellement (audible ou visible), d'un dessin perçu visuellement, d'un modèle, etc. En d'autres termes, l'activité dans le plan de représentation qui modifie l'image idéelle d'un objet est également une activité sensorielle-objective qui modifie l'apparence perceptible de la chose sur laquelle elle est dirigée. Mais la chose dans le changement, la chose au sein de laquelle cette activité s'exprime, n'est qu'une notion objectivée ou une forme d'activité humaine fixée comme une chose. Cette circonstance permet de voiler la distinction philosophico-gnoséologique fondamentale entre l'activité matérielle et l'activité d'un théoricien ou d'un idéologue qui ne change directement que la forme verbale et la sémiotique de l'image idéelle. L'homme ne peut pas transmettre à une autre personne l'idéel en tant que tel, comme une forme pure d'activité. On peut observer les actions d'un peintre ou d'un ingénieur pendant cent ans, en essayant d'adopter la méthode de leurs actions, la forme de leur activité, mais de

[608] Marx, K. *Différence de la Philosophie de la Nature chez Démocrite et Épicure*. Trad : Jaques Ponnier. Bordeaux : *Éditions Ducros*, 1970. p. 286

cette façon on ne peut copier que les techniques extérieures de leur travail et en aucun cas l'image idéelle elle-même, la capacité la plus active. L'idéel en tant que forme d'activité subjective ne s'apprend que par une pratique active avec l'objet et le produit de cette pratique, c'est-à-dire par la forme de son produit, par la forme objective d'une chose, par sa « désobjectivation » active. C'est pourquoi l'image idéelle de la réalité concrète existe seulement comme forme (méthode, image) de l'activité vivante, qui correspond à la forme de son objet, et en aucun cas comme une chose, pas comme un « état » ou une « structure » matériellement fixe. En tentant d'interpréter l'idéel comme une « chose idéelle » ou un « objet abstrait » figé, comme une forme rigidement fixée, un problème insoluble apparaît : de quoi cette forme est-elle la forme ? Car une telle démarche transforme l'idéal en une substance autonome qui existe indépendamment de l'activité vivante humaine, comme son prototype supra-sensoriel et non-corporel. En même temps, c'est une forme d'activité humaine conditionnée par la forme du monde externe. Une fois que l'idéal est séparé de l'activité, il se transforme en une « chose sensorielle-suprasensorielle » avec des propriétés mystérieuses et mystiques. Un exemple en est la difficulté de comprendre les « chiffres », les « points » et autres « objets mathématiques abstraits », c'est-à-dire des images subjectives de la détermination quantitative du monde externe, interprétées comme des objets indépendants. L'idéal n'est rien d'autre qu'un ensemble de formes universelles d'activité humaine conçu par un individu, qui déterminent, en tant que but et loi, sa volonté et sa façon de mener son activité individuelle. Il est évident que le processus de réalisation individuelle de l'image idéelle, c'est-à-dire la forme générale abstraite de l'activité socio-humaine, est toujours lié à telle ou telle « déviation », ou, plus précisément, à la concrétisation de cette image, à sa correction en fonction de conditions concrètes, à de nouveaux besoins sociaux, à des caractéristiques matérielles, etc. Cela suppose la capacité à comparer consciemment l'image idéelle de la réalité avec la réalité elle-même, en dehors et indépendamment de cette image de l'existant, pas encore idéalisée, pas encore transformée en quelque chose d'idéelle. C'est dans ce cas que l'idéel agit comme un sujet particulier pour l'individu, qu'il peut modifier intentionnellement en fonction des exigences et besoins liés à l'activité. Au contraire, si l'image idéelle n'est assumée par l'individu que formellement, seulement comme un schéma et un ordre d'opérations rigides, sans comprendre son origine et son lien avec la réalité concrète non idéalisée, l'individu est incapable de traiter l'image idéelle de manière critique, c'est-à-dire comme un sujet particulier et distinct. Alors, c'est comme s'il se confondait avec l'image, il ne peut pas la mettre devant lui comme un sujet comparable à la réalité concrète et la changer en accord avec la réalité. Dans ce cas, l'individu n'agit pas avec et sur la base de cette image, mais c'est cette image

dogmatique qui agit en lui et à travers lui. Ici, ce n'est pas l'image idéelle qui constitue la fonction de l'activité de l'individu, mais, au contraire, l'individu devient la fonction de l'image qui domine sur sa conscience et sa volonté comme un schéma formel donné de l'extérieur, comme une image « aliénée », comme un fétiche, un système de « règles » indiscutables, tirées d'une source inconnue. C'est précisément ce type de conscience qui correspond à la compréhension idéaliste de l'idéel, en particulier depuis le prisme néo-positiviste.

Et inversement, la compréhension matérialiste de l'idéale s'avère naturelle pour l'homme dans une société communiste, où la culture n'est pas opposée à l'individu en tant que quelque chose d'extérieur qui lui est imposé, indépendant et étranger, mais est une forme de sa propre activité. Dans la société communiste – comme l'expose Marx – le fait que toutes les formes de culture ne sont que des formes d'activité humaine devient directement évident, alors que dans la société bourgeoise, ce fait n'est révélé que par une analyse théorique qui dissipe les illusions nécessaires à cette société.

« Tout ce qui a forme fixe, comme le produit, etc., n'apparaît que comme moment, moment évanescent de ce mouvement. Les conditions et les objectivations du procès sont elles-mêmes uniformément des moments de ce procès, et n'apparaissent comme sujets de ce procès que les individus, mais les individus dans des relations mutuelles qu'ils reproduisent aussi bien qu'ils en produisent de nouvelles. C'est le procès de leur propre mouvement perpétuel, procès au cours duquel ils se renouvellent tout autant qu'ils renouvellent le monde de la richesse crée par eux. »[609]

Ici, tout fondement de l'idée de l'idéel en tant que substance autonome et indépendante de l'activité des individus, de l'idéel en tant que détermination extérieure de leur activité, disparaît.

L'idéel est uniquement là où il y a une personnalité humaine, une individualité. C'est pourquoi le développement du problème de l'idéel relève en particulier de la psychologie, de la recherche du processus de formation de la personnalité et du processus d'action personnelle dans le plan idéel de la réalité. Le plan philosophique du problème de l'idéel est épuisé par la résolution d'une question sur la nature générale, socio-historique de l'idéel ; sur le rôle et la fonction de l'image idéelle dans le processus de transformation réelle, matérielle et pratique de

[609] Marx, K. *Manuscrits de 1857-1858 dits « Grundrisse ».* Paris : *Éditions Sociales*, 1980. p. 668

la nature par l'homme social ; et sur les conditions dans lesquelles un idéel est possible ou existe en général, en tant que forme d'activité de l'individu socialement déterminé.

Ce problème a été résolu pour la première fois uniquement sur la base du matérialisme, enrichi par les acquis de la dialectique philosophique, c'est-à-dire sur la base du matérialisme dialectique. Il ne pouvait pas et ne peut pas être résolu, en raison de sa nature même, sur une autre base.