

IL POPOLO DI PENSA TORI
DI SAN TI DI PENSA TORI
DI NAVIGATORI

THE PHILOSOPHY OF MARX

A CRITIQUE OF HISTORICAL
MATERIALISM AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF
PRAXIS

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Translators Notes

Many Thanks to my friend Vivernu for helping me on this project. This took a large amount of my personal time, so I truly do hope people can learn what Gentile wrote. This work in my view is a major cornerstone of Fascist philosophy explaining its fundamental criticisms of Marxism. May this help to honor the memory of Gentile, who's arguably the most forgotten and important philosopher of the modern century; sincerely Zoltanous.

"It was Gentile who prepared the road for those — like me — who wished to take it." - Benito Mussolini as quoted in *The Ideology of Fascism: The Rationale of Totalitarianism* by A. James Gregor

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Preface

Here I collect two critical studies on the often criticized philosophy of Marx, which his followers and opponents alike passionately discuss today without any hope of a possible agreement neither on the special doctrines, nor on the same general course. Was he really a materialist, or not? Which doctrine is included under that fortunate type of historical materialism popularized around the world by him, along with his revolutionary idea? Is there really a relation between this historical materialism and the metaphysical materialism, in the strictest sense of the word?

In the first of the two studies¹, by interpreting and criticizing the historical materialism as historical philosophy, I did not suggest searching which philosophy was immanent in the historical concept — at least for what the author meant. On the contrary, I wrote that "The historical materialism there is no place to question spiritualism and materialism"; and I agreed with Croce on believing the very own denomination of historical materialism to be improper. I also abstained from denying that Marx and Engels were materialists, regardless of their historical concept; I instead induced myself to think that they, as materialists — as they had become by following "that philosophical movement, started by Left Hegelians and then followed with Moleschott, Vogt, Buchner meant a reaction to idealism" could have thought of their reaction to Hegel's philosophy as materialistic, by simple analogy! Now, in my new study, I examine and consider the philosophy of Marx as metaphysical materialism. Have I therefore changed my opinion?

Truly, no; it's also helpful to imply how and why these following studies of mine have not forced me to change the thoughts expressed in my first issue, which I'm now reprinting with little and light correction of form.

Yes, there is a metaphysical materialism in Marx as well, defined as historical materialism. But is it to believe that his historical philosophy was born from the depth of metaphysics, or that he devised metaphysics to justify his historical conception with a philosophical system? The analysis of Marx's metaphysical materialism that I've just done confirms to me that the historical philosophy wasn't actually born naturally from philosophy, but that from this one, that one was forcefully extracted, so that Marx (and Engels with him) could take a position in philosophy, after having conceived his revolutionary doctrine, as he himself had wanted to do, in Bruxelles in 1845. The economical and historical studies he'd had revolutionary pursued on the redaction of the French-German Annals, published in Paris in 1844 in collaboration with Arnaldo Ruge, had already been started when he and Engels began working on orienting themselves in philosophy. In fact, in the preface of June 28, 1883 to *The Communist Manifesto*, Engels fairly stated that;

the fundamental thinking of the manifesto: that the economical production and the social construct necessarily derived from any historical age, is the basis of the construct necessarily derived from any historical age, is the basis of the political history of the very same age; that in compliance with it (after the primitive common property of the soil), all of history was about battles between classes, exploited and exploiting classes, dominated

¹First published in *Studi Storici* by Crivellucci, VI (1897), 379-423.

and dominating classes, in the various degrees of the social progression; that this battle has now reached a degree in which the oppressed and exploited class (the proletariat) can not free itself from the oppressive and exploiting class (the bourgeoisie) without freeing the whole of society altogether and forever from oppression and exploitation — this fundamental thinking (which is all of the philosophy of history that I criticize in my first study) belongs only and exclusively to Marx.

He also adds in a footnote:

To this concept — which is, in my opinion, destined to produce in historical science — *Marx and I had both come close to several years prior to 1845*. My book on *The Condition of the Working Class in England* demonstrates it enough. But when I met Marx in Bruxelles in 1845, he *had already developed it*; such such that he expressed it to me just as I expressed it here now.²

So, clearly, this: since the historical materialism was built as metaphysics by Marx in 1845-46,³ then the revolutionary historical theory had been born before and independent of the metaphysical system in the mind of the founder of critical communism. And the critique that this metaphysical system will be subject to in my second study will easily show the effort with which the socialistic doctrine gets to be founded on a materialistic philosophy, which in itself is truly a contradiction of terms.

Thus the historical materialism can be contemplated in two ways; as philosophy of history, whose principle can be briefly expressed with the words with which Engels summarizes the fundamental concept of the *Manifesto*; — and as such it represents a special degree of Marx's thinking; and as metaphysics or intuition of the world, based on that forced construction that Marx designed in 1845-46, to take a stand in philosophy; and as such it represents a further degree on the development of Marx's thinking; a degree on which Marx didn't insist. It was, in fact, a superfetation of his thinking. In any case, these two cases of Marxist philosophy are separately studied on the two following parts of this work, which demonstrates, on the second part, something that was fleetingly implied in a note on the st part; that is to say that a false analogy made Marx (and Engels with him) believe that his economical understanding of history was to be connected with materialism. Of course, all of Karl Marx's philosophical thinking, as vague as it was left to be, fragmented and lacking any kind of rigorous scientific elaboration, is here exposed to an accurate analysis and a new critique, which could perhaps induce the theorists of communism to deal a little bit better with philosophy.⁴

Campobasso, February 20 1899.

²V. C. Marx and F. Engels, *Il manifesto del Partito comunista*, Milano, 1896, p. 8

³Look § III on the second study.

⁴It was permitted, in the volume of 1899 in which I gathered these studies, to have the following dedication to B. Croce, which is reported here as a document of the past, connected to these studies:

My Dear Friend, I wish that this pamphlet, of which you know the origins and in which you'll find many concepts that we've already discussed together in our frequent debates, were dedicated to you, as a sign of gratitude for the cordial thoughtfulness you often have towards my poor studies, and as a written declaration of the immense esteem I have of your intellect and temper.

From the number of times your name can be found in these pages, you'll be able to argue how much my spirit is gratified by conversing with yours. In fact, I admire your joyous union of speculative faculties with historical ones, of the need of principles to live with facts, with that of facts uniting and building an ideal organism, because it's an extremely rare type of realism in Italy — so easy to preach and so hard to comprehend, — from which I believe my thoughts do not differ much.

However, I'll often quote you to contradict you; and more than once, perhaps, our opinions oppose. But hopefully it won't go unnoticed to the clever reader, neither to you, that our fundamental judgement on the philosophy I criticize in this pamphlet is identical.

After all, you also won't doubt for a moment that our disagreements on these scientific researches could ever be the cause of the decrease of the affection your friend has for you etc.

Admonition

On this volume⁵ I've reprinted a juvenile work of mine of almost forty years ago (*La Filoso a di Marx*, studi critici, Pisa, Spierri, 1899) to suit the insisting desire of the scholars that sought it; especially after they discovered that even Lenin had payed attention to my pamphlet and had regarded it as one of the most remarkable studies done by non-Marxists on Marx.⁶ I'll also say that, after having restrained myself from publishing it for two or three decades because of a blurry memory of the essay having some faults, while it aged because of all of the studies that had come to light and the new documents of Marx's thinking available to scholars, I've induced myself to read once again those pages that hadn't crossed my mind anymore. I reread them with the touching curiosity with which we seldom look through our old papers to revive ancient experiences and images that have faded from our distant youth. And I reheard, here and there, voices that have never died out in me, and some fundamental things that I still recognize myself in and some others in which perhaps others more than me will be able to recognize the first seeds of thoughts that have later matured.

Therefore I have recognized in my book, despite its aging, a current documentary value, that has made me find life again where I feared death had come forever.

For this reason I approved the reprinting, but leaving the book as it was, with all of its faults, without adding nor erasing anything, to avoid doing something new that was and at the same time was not the previous one, deprived of that value that a document written before the end of former century has, when in Italy, others and I felt the necessity of the existence of a real kind of philosophy.

I therefore limited myself with simple adjustments of form, but I preserved so much as the traces of the juvenile abstrusenesses and uncertainties.

Rome, January 7 1937.
G. G.

⁵Reprinting this work in 1937, as an appendix to the *fondamenti della loso a del diritto*, Gentile starts with an admonition from which we've cut the part regarding the studies of Marx. (Note of the Editor)

⁶Lenin, Karl Marx, article published in the *Russian Encyclopedic Dictionary Granat*, VII edition, 1915. Today in Lenin, *Works*, Leningrad, 1948, vol. XXI, p. 70. (Note of the Editor)

Part I

A Critique of Historical Materialism

Chapter 1

Present Importance of Socialistic Studies

To some people, the scientific preeminence should be under the responsibility of the social matters, which should represent the very own traits of our age, although having already been debated and never let out of sight. I think it's appropriate to show how excessive this statement is from the start; especially to start by making a precise and important distinction in the matter that we're going to discuss.

It is true that a great clamor is rising everywhere, and perhaps not with no reason, it can be said that it's growing everyday to proclaim that preeminence; affirming that the dissertation of social problems is and must be the special task of our age, mature or close to being mature, to finally start finding the definitive solution to a matter as old as Man's consciousness, that is as old as the whole of Man's history.

However, even those who study the historical moment we're going through, are studying it with the calm critique of science, and they don't let themselves get stunned by clamorous statements. They stand by, where the rash screams can't come and disturb their judgment, and instead they concentrate on the actual state and reason of things, rather than on the multitude following the scream that caresses great hopes and raises infinite desires.

And actually, the supporters of that preeminence, don't care as much about the importance and the results of the studies made around the so-called social matter, as they do about the great crowd of those that discuss it and converse about it on a daily hand-to-mouth — in newspapers and books — or on how many people are right to take interest in it (and unfortunately there's too little of them!). But alas, if only science had to take into account the solutions. — perhaps sometimes original ones, and nevertheless always certain! — that have been devised in the crowd, that often takes part in discussions! Surely the history of every science would gain much in the number and amount of volumes that could be written; but perhaps some other parts would be lost. And think of the grave risk that would be taken if we were to really listen to the demands of anyone who speaks, without making a distinction between what has a scientific character and what doesn't, for a historical evaluation of a cultural movement we nevertheless live in: thus we'd miss the convenient perspective that the posterity will have, and we'd easily fall into misunderstandings, and the true science would get mistaken for improvised chatter, and now and then even with the trouble distress of political parties; which could be politically relevant, but it surely does not have anything to do with science.

Science certainly can and must report the real conditions of society, but it must not and cannot mix them and make them into one with what its essence is made up by. This essence is the actual product of the spirit's *formal elaboration*, where the conditions of society are destined to provide the plain *content*. And, together with the practical distress, all of the endless literary production that is

bundled up day by day in that field of study belongs to the content or the matter of science, because it never brings a new concept or view. Therefore, it counts as a conscious purpose of disclosure and propaganda, meaning that it serves to demonstrate the constantly rising interest on social matters, albeit without suggesting it. In this second case too, it is a sign of a non-proper science. It's an obvious distinction; but it never seems to have been so difficult to observe, and as important as it is today, to appreciate the range of studies that arise from contemporary socialism.

Because if, for the second half of the century, the branch of social sciences gathered under the title of sociology has represented the need to build a historical reality in a logical and scientifically intelligible system (although in an inadequate and philosophically incorrect form) towards which the greatest interest of the thinking as an effect of the idealistic speculation of the first decades of this century has oriented itself; then it wouldn't be easy to point out the construct of political and social doctrines that have proliferated around socialist movements, and those that tend to philosophize, in the history of the scientific or speculative spirit. Great faith, great dogmatism, scarce critique and arbitrary methods. Bold perspectives in the future on faltering fundamentals of a history that has been built more than it has been studied, inspected and understood. Very little and debatable hurried observations on economy, and a casual mix of general concepts taken here and there from current philosophies: all of it blended in a rudely pretentious doctrine, baptized with the German taste of pretentious names of scientific coin. This is the substance of socialistic literature, over which professional scholars waver between the disdain of *odi profanum vulgus* and the particular apprehension that things that have not been studied have.

However, when we talk about socialistic studies in particular, as we can, or as we think we can, barely, *speculatively* reconnect the genesis with the ideal renovation that made the cult of history flourish again, then we see that they don't bring many conquests or simple scientific observations. In fact, it is not right to consider those that are theorized on the future, until the dispute on what is asserted on the past, *sub indice*, remains as the necessary reason of the future. What is asserted on the past with intention and demand of a scientific theory surely wouldn't be little, if it were to be founded on solid principles, and proceeded with a true critical method; but neither the firmness of principles is supported by socialistic literature, nor it is aware of the requirements of a cautious scientific method.

Therefore, to attribute *unicuique suum* and to avoid the exaggeration of the range of these studies, we must not give them a greater value than what they actually possess and that many of us still insist on ignoring. Surely, for a longer time in Germany, France and England, philosophy has been seriously involved with these matters, which we have left to sectarian discussions or to the light and superficial judgement of the philosophers of particular sciences. They've also been slightly debated by the best philosophers, and they've mostly been dragged by newspapers and pulp fictions created to earn the easy approval of the most easily pleased public. The consequence of this general neglect from the only people who would be able to measure the theoretical value of certain doctrines (which, blindly taken, manage to create in the most stable beliefs and the strongest purposes) could be easily imagined, if only it could not be proved all around us everyday.

Such a radical change of the whole social group, in which we now live as a consequence of a progressive development, that has never been interrupted since we started living as a society, that is to say for as long as we've been — since, as proven by sociology, there aren't and there can not be people with no ethical bonds, meaning a family and a state, as we'd already said regarding philosophy, — can not support itself for long, without being sustained by a new radical intuition on life and history; that is, without it taking inspiration from a new philosophy. It's a fact proven by the history of socialism, that generally any utopia of an ideal adjustment of society is connected (either clearly or not) to a special philosophical route or system; so that it would be the same to remove the philosophical fundamentals from which the utopia is born, and to expose the very one

utopia; so we must expect that it could find its anchorage in philosophy, stating it, fully maturing its own relations with the philosophical ideas recalled, to accurately examine the titles that it has presented to be welcomed in the fair field of science.

Now it looks as though the last socialistic form — which holds the field undisputed, and which has received the first push from the thoughts and actions of Karl Marx and is therefore tied to his name and is properly called *critical communism* — has permanently formulated its theoretical doctrine. This theoretical doctrine is such that, were it to be demonstrated with evidence, it would make any debate on the many matters argued regarding socialism useless.

This doctrine consists in the so-called materialistic conception of history; for which, with a firm critique, we could determine a stable and necessary trend over the course of human events, so as to allow the further development of social forms.

Chapter 2

The Matter of The Materialistic Conception of History

Among the many matters, constantly risen and rekindled in social literature by the theatrical premises of socialism in recent years, there may be one of the most debated, upon which not even the most scholarly and influential socialists have been able to reach agreement. People are searching if this matter occupies the new doctrine with a spot in the history of philosophy in the strictest sense of the word. And if it does, what relation does it have with the philosophical systems from which it was born or after which it came to be?

By claiming to be a disciple of Georg Hegel, Karl Marx, author of this doctrine, confessed of pleasing himself with flirting (*kokettieren*) with the dangerous terminology of his master. But, was it just about words? His friend and colleague Friedrich Engels, when studying, in a special work,¹ a way to determine the dependence of historical materialism (the soul and core of critical communism) with the system said to be more directly consistent, he admitted the existence of a strong relation of that with the degenerated Left Hegelians; especially with Feuerbach's Hegelianism, the farthest from the master's spirit and principles.

So was the matter exhausted, just so that there would be nothing left to say about it? However, as if invited by Marx's expressions, there have been people that have tried in every way to connect the theory with the very own philosophy of Hegel, especially attempting to clarify the relation in the antithetical content and analogy in the form, that was pointed at by the author in *Das Kapital*; and there have been people who have judged Marxism as a true implementation of Hegelianism, and people who have resolutely criticized any mutual relevance, by only recognizing an insignificant comparison of words that needn't be taken into consideration. Meanwhile, while conversing on the nature and the form of the doctrine to establish its historical genesis, everyone has wandered around the matter so much that at this point the burdened matter is undefined now more than ever; and we're also starting the denomination of "historical materialism" to be incorrect, as it is by all means unjustified and a producer of misunderstandings. Hence the debate always endures; and the scholar of the history of philosophy can not lose interest in it.

And among our people, one of the most diligent enthusiasts of the history of philosophy and vigilant inquirers of the movement of modern thinking, professor Alessandro Chiappelli has engaged in it for some time, with his usual length of information, in a series of articles; and he's recently debated the matter in a long essay printed among the Acts of the R. Academy of moral and political science of the domestic traditions — since he belongs to the Spaventa family — to make research of

¹F. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie*, 2 Aufl. Stuttgart, 1895; already published in *Neue Zeit* in 1886. .

a speculative nature. Here I reference Benedetto Croce, who has made many ingenious and suitable observations around the historical materialism in a brief but rich essay, read in May 1896 at the Accademia Pontaniana, and he has finely noticed that perhaps it would be appropriate to study again once and for all these accomplished relations between scientifically socialism and Hegelianism with precision and critique.

The expository literature of historical materialism is also plentiful, if we consider how relatively recent is the time in which it has been distinctly formulated and in connection with the contemporary socialist movement.

It's a new visual angle, from which we've come to look at history. A new method and a new system, from which we've announced that we would have to start all over again to explain the human facts; a new explanation of life, and, in one word, a new philosophy, which is not yet intended to slowly prepare new ways of civilization realistically, via progressive and slow transmutations of the content and of the nature of the culture of a nation or a period of time; but it's already a tool and a theoretical interpretation of a social revolution, not platonically referring to a possible or probable condition to take place, but already resolutely started with enthusiasm and faith. This is what the new doctrine demands to be. It's no surprise then if it has drawn the attention of many, advocates and opponents alike, who want to get hold of expanding and conduct the fundamental ideas of the early authors, to reduce the new thinking to an organic unit. And just as in the binding of social movements, the one based on Marx has gradually taken over any other form of socialism, and it has added up and gathered almost every effort of the social class that arises against the present set of rules, just as new life-giving blows to the theoretical dissertation of the doctrine have come from the same practical foundation.

Fervet opus in Germany; but in Italy so far we have two important displays and dissertations on the materialistic theory of history thanks to professors and Antonio Labriola; although the former (who isn't a socialist) isn't really an interpreter of Marx's thinking and, while trying to elaborate the concept of the *economical foundations of the social constitution* on his own, has moved away from Marxism and has offered his side to severe and far critiques from those willing to recognize the seriousness of Marx's concepts. Otherwise, professor Labriola, who is undoubtedly the most competent one among those who have embraced this faith and this social science in Italy, has dedicated assiduous studies for many years to illustrate the doctrine of historical materialism in his most genuine and most accomplished form, that is to say the one proposed by Marx and which can be logically developed, according to the general views and the intention and the particular applications of the master, of respect to the different problems of philosophy, of law and of politics. For now, it has given light to two essays, first to display the genetic formation of the new historical doctrine and the reasons of its establishing in the classical document of the Marxist socialism that is *The Communist Manifesto*, published by Marx and Engels in London in February 1848, at the eve of the revolutions in Europe; secondly, to conduct from its various aspects and define the same doctrine with scientific prudence, examining and establishing the original meaning, defining its range, and especially getting himself to trim down every error of interpretation and of exaggeration, whence the inexperienced have overdone it. But we believe it appropriate to portray, from these very recent books of this talented professor from Rome, the lines of the new historical conception, that we intend to evaluate in relation to philosophy.

Chapter 3

Display of The Materialistic Conception of History

It has been said that the doctrine of historical materialism was first enunciated, with clear and sharp awareness, in the Manifesto of 1848, thrown to the workmen and all the proletarians of the world by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. But the true author of it, certified by Engels himself, is Marx, who had formerly matured the generating concept, and then developed it more deeply.

In the preface of a book that is rightly said to be the prodrome of *Capital*, entitled *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, Marx wrote, summing up the result of his meditations on the pace of history, in a passage that now everyone refers to and benefits from relying on:

In the social production of on their lives, people connect with one another in determined relationships, which are necessary and independent from their own free will, meaning in production relationships, which correspond to a specific degree of development of the material forces of production. The set of these relationships makes up the economical structure of society, that is the real foundation, from which a political and juridical upper structure rises, and to which specific forms of social conscience correspond. The manner of the production of material life determines the social, political and intellectual process of life. It is not the conscience of man that determines its being, it's his social being that determines his conscience instead.

At a certain point of their development, the productive material forces of society find themselves at odds with the preexistent relations of production (that is, with the relations of property, which is the juridical equivalent to this expression), on which these forces had moved. From being forms of development of the productive forces, these relations of production convert to obstacles. Thus an age of social revolution follows. With the economical foundation changing, the colossal higher structure dissolves and collapses more or less rapidly.

In consideration of this agitation, we must always distinguish between the material revolution, which can be nationalistically proven of respect to the economical circumstances of production, and the juridical, political, religious, artistic and philosophical (i.e. ideological) forms, from which people gain conscience of the conflict, and in whose name they execute it. Because, just as one can not judge what someone else is from what one seems to themselves, then a determined revolutionary age can not be valued from one's conscience; instead, this very own conscience must be explained with the contradictions of material life, that is with the conflict that exists between productive social forces and

social relations of production.

A social formation does not perish, until all the productive forces for which it has sufficient room have been developed; and new relations of production do not follow, if the material circumstances have not matured in the heart of the current society first. Therefore, humanity suggests the problems that it can fix; because, considering things closely, problems do not arise unless the material conditions for their solutions are already present, or are at least being developed.

In a rough view, the asian, ancient, feudal and modern-bourgeois forms of production can be considered as progressive ages of the economical formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production; — antagonistic, not in the sense of the antagonism that arises from the social conditions of the lives of individuals; — but the productive forces that develop in the soul of the middle-class society already put the material conditions into being for the solution of this antagonism. Thus, the early days of the human kind ceases with this formation of society

Here is all of Marx's thinking and work; here, in its native form, in a short formula and as a seed, is every part of the materialistic theory of history and the authentic source of any determination that the best interpreters give.

Now, in the quoted passage there's a sentence which is particularly remarkable and full of meaning, and which actually contains the philosophical concept of everything else: "*It is not the conscience of man that determines its being, it's his social being that determines his conscience instead.*" Where *man* is not to be intended as the human being in his natural state, as the French philosophers of the XVIII century did; but as the social man, the historical man, already equipped with all of the ideologies; and *social being* is to be intended as the conditions among which and for which life has to explain itself, in a determinate society; the conditions are neither political, religious, moral, scientific nor artistic, they are simply and solely economical; since these are the creators of all of the other particular forms.

The political, religious, moral, scientific and artistic conditions or formations are further structures of the man that has already entered society, meaning when he's permanently come out of his early days; and this logical and chronological priority, which happens in the first formation of the human cohabitation, repeats itself regularly any time the social form renews itself, for some internal revolution.

Therefore, such conditions or formations appear when man has already determined his material relevances in a certain way with other individuals of society; and in the new creations derived from the application of his activities to the needs of life in which he gradually gets satisfaction, he *naturally* can not either back out of the efficacy of its first foundation, nor he can act or move outside of the *artificial field*, as Labriola calls it, in which he has found himself as he came out of the early days. Hence, he can not either freely give himself a political form, nor a religion, morals, produce a science, an art. He must accept them, or even better, he must produce them just if they are appropriate, and they can only be appropriate in that first form, which is like second nature, and which has necessarily had to accommodate or, more precisely, to produce to solve the first natural needs of its existence. The building of its history can not be elevated but on the foundation that he's found himself laying. This higher building, this whole of additional historical forms of social life, makes up the complex or the organism of *ideologies* for communism; where the foundations (in which it is the first condition of society) would be its economical structure, the natural basis of all of history.

Thus, it is not by connecting with the erudite study of the mutual relations of different ideologies, that we retrace history or explain its origin and state its ultimate motive. Look into any complex fact of history. It'll appear to you as a complicated arrangement, which you'll unravel to understand it, resorting to analysis, and you'll take it apart in multiple and different elements; then you'll try to reconnect these elements under certain performed ideological categories; which, in the end, will put the keys of mystery in your own hands, indicating the more or less remote causes, containing the fundamental explanation of the fact that you'd wanted to rebuild and make comprehensible.

But in the meantime, you won't have made anything more than a deceiving tautology; you will have stayed in the surface, and, believing to have found the inspected cause, you will have settled for simply trading a fact with another fact, an effect with another effect, not even having suspected its communal cause.

The news couldn't be more important. The recent doctrine has made us aware of a serious illusion, to which our historical sense has always been subject; it demonstrates that the most powerful efforts made by the human spirit so far to understand itself, just like it has been done with history, are all unconsciously useless, so we have to go back where we started and give up all the science we had already achieved. A new visual angle, says Labriola; but much more different from those that we have been adopting for the historical study, that history appears as completely changed from this visual angle.

It's actually an overturning. Marx ironically observed that Hegel puts history on the head; we have to turn it upside down and put it back on the feet. This sentence — that declares the realistic purpose of Marx, while it stings or wants to sting (we'll see that it doesn't even touch it) the prior dialectic construction, that the great philosopher from Stuttgart made of history with his utmost idealism — shows the option in which the new doctrine wants to locate itself toward Hegelianism. History was *idealized* in this, while it was objectified in materialism, as Labriola says, it was naturalized; in the one First and Immanent in history was the Idea; in the other is, or it is believed to be, the opposite principle, but also its natural fundament, *matter*. Matter, well intended in a relative meaning, as a social substrate of any ideology.

As Labriola conveniently notices, in the terms of *naturalizing* history, a very dangerous ambush is hidden: "a great seduction", he says, for the hasty theorists of socialism. At this point, we like to notice that it looks like he remembers the idealistic origins of critical communism. And rightly so; because in times like this, of proud *scientific* charlatans, where all the ideas in vogue do all they can for the christening of science, while the latter condones a single order of elaborations of the human spirit, — those referring to the study of nature or that can be coordinated to it, — it's never enough to notice the great distinction that creates the appearance of the mentality, or the principle, as Labriola would say, "of the historical human becoming and living", in the facts that are offered to the study of man.

In Italy, a great study has been made to ally socialism with the so-called positive science, meaning, with this incorrect denomination, Darwinism or the naturalistic Evolutionism. The reason for this attentive justification, — since it a justification, in the eyes of those who have studied it, — is obvious. The desire for a union of poorly intended science and even more poorly devised; and since this sacred word of "evolution" now has to be employed for everything if we yearn for the respect or the consideration of certain philosophers, even the communist State (a most recent term and a consequence of the social movement) must come from a series of pre-ordered transformations, for that purpose. We also forget that if we shifted the battle for existence and the natural selection, which are principles that lead to Darwinism, from the natural and pre-human world (which is the one they belong to) to the historical human world, they would lead to a totally different social development, without a doubt, that communists do not want.

It's the revolution, not the evolution, that invokes the astute critical communism of Marx;

because it's by solving and destroying the antithesis that we solve an antithetic state or a social contradiction, instead of transforming it, — when it is possible to do so! — And against the followers of the so-called political and social *Darwinism* Labriola, with great intellect, observes this;

Any custom of cohabitation of traditions or institutions, even the most elementary known to us, such as the Australian tribes, divided into classes and with the bond every man of a class with every woman of another, detaches the human experience to the animal experience by far.

And it does so, as we say, for that 'prior to' ethic typical of man, that sociology — great enemy of 'prior to'! — has failed to deny.

Labriola accepts the deep view of Vico, about history being made by people — perhaps a much deeper view than Karl Marx had thought, taking it from Ludwig Feuerbach. And, on behalf of his doctrine, he avoids any alliance with the science of the unconscious and fatal animal transformations of the inferior nature. We're dealing with something else here: man doesn't move around nature anymore, but in an artificial environment, that is in a new world that he has created, distinguishing himself from any other species; because he's essentially modified the natural conditions, and he's made his own ones, which, as we've seen, will regulate all of history, lasting as a necessary substratum of it.

The new task of "naturalizing" history consists in recognizing the incessant efficacy of that on this; since, this way, we can omit "all the ideological views, which, in the interpretation of history, start with the assumption that human work and activity are the same as free will, election and design". However, we've come to recognize a necessary and immanent procedure in history.

Chapter 4

The Materialistic Conception and a Philosophy of History?

A necessary and immanent procedure in history. Therefore, there is a type of science that determines the law of the procedure, there is a philosophy of history. So does the historical materialism what to be one of the philosophies of history? This is a thorny matter, in which opinions are discordant, but to which no one has dedicated a critical discussion; even though it deals with the true essence of the historical doctrine of critical communism and, when determined negatively, it could seriously undermine the theoretical beliefs of socialists.

Actually, Labriola considers the historical materialism as "The ultimate and definitive philosophy of history". But Croce observes that the originality of it is, indeed, of having given up any claim of establish the law of history, of finding the concept to which the complex historical facts are reduced. There's the belief "that we must raise the materialistic conception of history, not by defining it as *the ultimate and definitive philosophy of history*, but by affirming that *it isn't even a philosophy of history*". But then, what is the value of the new conception, if it isn't a philosophy of history? Here lies the true fact of the matter.

Chiappelli hesitates, and fails to find a precise definition. In the past, recalling Labriola's second essay, he stated — perhaps not very precisely — that he "doesn't want it to be about a historical philosophy, but rather about a methodological view and a critique of history"; and adds, nevertheless: "but what is it, if not a universal conception of this?". Then he calls it "a new philosophy of history (I'm not sure if it's definitive), although it's extremely different from the old technological and metaphysical constructions, which imagined to sum up the whole course in a single view and include the meaning in a single law"; he also remembers that Engels too thought that the historical materialism wasn't a true philosophy of history anymore. — But it is certain that, in the analysis that he makes of the new doctrine in relation to Hegel's historical philosophy, and in the formal analogy that he acknowledges, he shows how he considers the historical materialism as a true philosophy of history, which, in fact, he states very frequently.

Of course we must examine if materialism could really be the theoretical expression of critical communism, since, as Croce claims, it isn't a philosophy of history, and if it's right to agree with Labriola that the scientific socialism enunciates "the beginning of the communistic production, neither as a critical hypothesis, nor as the aim of a voluntary election, but as the result of the immanent process of history".

This is what Labriola says about it, who we often come back to, because, by being loyal to Marxism he's felt the theoretical demands, thanks to the philosophical inclination of his mind, and he's managed to examine the speculative consequences of the principles of Marxism and their

scientific value. "The historical prediction", he says;

which is presented at the bottom of the doctrine of the Manifesto, and which the critical communism has then expanded and specified with the largest and most detailed analysis of the present world, surely had, for the circumstances of the time in which it first appeared, the heat of battle and the lively color of expression. But it didn't imply, just as it doesn't imply now, neither a chronological date, nor the early picture of a social configuration, like in the ancient and new prophecies and apocalypses.

Nevertheless, although this doctrine doesn't imply neither the year of the beginning of the new social form, nor its neither the year of the beginning of the new social form, nor its exact settlement, it does imply (and this is what matters) the new form that inevitably follows the present one.

The prediction that the Manifesto hinted to for the first time was neither chronological, nor a forewarning, nor a promise; to say it with a single word which in my opinion expresses everything in short, it was *morphological*.

Now, as a simply morphological, certain, that is to say no more Utopian but scientific (as it's made by the very same society that, as Labriola says, "in a moment of its general process, finds the cause of its fatal passing") prevision, can it take place if not based on the intuition of the general and necessary development of history?

We like to follow up this question with the following passages of the first essay of Labriola:

"This is about recognizing or not recognizing a *necessity* in the present development of the human things; this necessity transcends any fondness and any subjective acceptance of ours"¹ — "To find or not to find ourselves in a society like this, in the most advanced countries, so that society itself has to succeed to communism for the *laws immanent to its own becoming*[...]"¹ — "Our aims are rational, not because they're founded over matters drawn from the reasoning reason, but because they're deduced from the objective consideration of things; that is to say from the elucidation of their process, which is not and can not be a result of our free will, instead, our free will wins and subjugates us"² — "(*The Manifesto*) is a revelation, but not as an apocalypse or a promise of the millennium. The scientific and pondered revelation of the path that our civil society follows [...]; for the ways in which it's expressed, this revelation employs the definitive and fierce word of those who enunciate *the necessity of the fact in the fact itself*"³ — "The concept of this historical understanding was changed by elevating the need of a *new social revolution*, which was more or less explicit in the instinctive conscience of the proletariat, to a theory, and in its passionate and sudden movements, in the act that recognized the *inherent and immanent necessity* of the revolution. What seemed to be possible [...] became a process that had to be promoted, sustained and propagated"⁴ — "Here, we're in the *organic conception of history*. Here lies the *totality* and the *unity* of social life as we conceive it"⁵

¹ibid p. 18

²ibid p. 19

³ibid p. 28

⁴ibid p. 30

⁵ibid p. 90

But let us overlook the expressions and the explicit assertions; which would already be enough to precisely define Labriola's mindset and the range of the doctrine he presented. And let us get to the point of the matter.

Marx deserves credit for having understood — following Hegel — that human history is a process of becoming by antithesis, and for having seen — opposing Hegel — that it is not the Idea or any other abstract thing that develops dialectically, but society itself; that is, society in what is essential and original in itself, the economic fact, on which all social phenomena depend and derive. Two things must therefore be distinguished in Marx's historical doctrine: the first, borrowed from Hegel, which is the dialectical procedure; and the second, the content or subject of this procedure, which is opposed to that of Hegel. Therefore, there are two aspects from which the doctrine itself must be considered by those who wish to attempt a theoretical evaluation: the aspect of form and the aspect of content.

And as far as the form is concerned, it should first be noted that historical materialism also intends to determine a process. To determine, let us say: although Labriola may prefer saying to see or to surprise, or another verb that better expresses that objectivity of the new intuition, which is so dear to him, as a singular quality and prerogative of the materialistic conception of history. To determine scientifically is not the same as reasoning in the abstract, running after the demands of logic, and then pretending at all costs to make history walk on the stilts of our reasoning. Oh! history goes on by itself, and even lets us enjoy ourselves on our own stilts.

Isn't historical materialism a theory of history as well, but also a conception, an interpretation of it? And aren't theory, conception, and interpretation all subjective operations, or rather, in this case, operations of the mind of Karl Marx and of the critical communists, or rather of a few or very few of them? et Labriola speak of the *self-criticism that is in things themselves*. It is a purely metaphorical phrase, like many others used by him; which, if it means that historical materialism itself, according to the theory it advocates, is the ideological product of the real conditions, i.e. the economic conditions of society, it cannot, to be logical, not also repeat itself of any philosophy of history, past or future, whether metaphysical or theological, which has a historical date, which is remembered, i.e. in the series of historical events; each of which, as it has its place, must also have its reason for being. It is certain that in things, in history, understood as something external and independent of us, there is neither meaning nor law; but it is always we who see a history with a meaning, with a law according to which we think it moves; it is always we, in short, who shape history and the law that governs it.

Of this subjectivity, before which our philosophers of the first half of the century veiled so much — to whom we owe so much, ungrateful as we are for lack of *conscience!* — of this subjectivity, which E. Kant *discovered*, after so much criticism that has been exercised on it, it should no longer be the case to worry, because it does not differ a single point (except in the scientific accuracy of the word) from that objectivity, which Labriola so often invokes, and which he is pleased to recognize in his doctrine. This observation is by now obvious and unnecessary for Professor Labriola; but it is opportune because of the great confusion of philosophical terms and of the history of philosophy which can be seen all around since the waters have been stirred up. Above all, it is opportune when we see that in a writing destined also in Italy for propaganda, Engels does not doubt to explain the idealism of Hegel, which would have been intrinsically outdated, writing thus:

More (*the process of the master is read*), Hegel was an idealist; which means that, instead of considering his own ideas as the intellectual reflections of the objects and movements of the real world, he persisted in not considering the objects of the real world and the changes they undergo except as just as many reflections of his ideas. For him the idea of a thing pre-existed the thing itself, although one does not know where or how; the

world, after all, was created in the image of an eternal idea; it was but the realization of this absolute idea, which consequently was supposed to have an existence apart and independent from the real world.

And so Hegel repeats Plato, and consequently Kant says the same as Protagoras (and even worse, if we look at the most recent critique of the Abderita) and, to use an image of Hegel himself, we end up in the dark of night, when all the cows are black.

It has been said and it's usually repeated that whoever wants to understand Hegel's Logic should first read the *Phenomenology*, and remember that the key to this is in Kant's criticism. Now here Engels does not even suspect this historical need; and as we have seen, speaking of the Hegelian idea, he shows that he knows nothing of that subjectivity or *humanity* of science, which is equivalent, after Kant, to what is commonly called objectivity. We will return to this later.

It is necessary, therefore, to leave the metaphors aside; and even when speaking of an objective, realistic, and materialistic theory of the historical process, to remember that what is meant is always a scientific elaboration (that is, such that it may succeed in being necessary for the minds of all and yet be valid as universal) *of our concepts* (production, form of production, exchange, society, etc.); ours no more and no less than that theological and metaphysical concept of Providence, from which the old philosophy of history made the course of human events governed by preordained ends.

Historical materialism, therefore, also determines a process of development, in which history must run. Now whoever says process is determinable a priori, says necessity of the process; and whoever says necessary process already establishes the basis of a prediction of the future, in a given form, at least, and to a given extent. And it should be noted that to arrive at this scientific pre-determination of what bourgeois society is to become, is the main aim of the theorists of communism, because of the practical interests which animate their research. It is known that in the critique of the past they base the reason for the future, no longer, they say, vague or hoped for, but certainly expected, with the consciousness of its necessity. Necessity, Labriola warns, which does not come from a postulate of criticism, nor from destiny, nor from the command of law, but from the immanent process of history, *Objective necessity*, as he defines it elsewhere.

With all these characteristics, the materialistic conception of history cannot but be said to be a true philosophy of history.

Except that Croce cautiously invites us to observe that "the future stage of which *some* speak with such certainty, as something that is not already conjectured but of which science *determines* the advent, has no character of necessity (subjective), that is, of certainty; just as the forecasts of history, not excluding the same forecasts of socialism, can never have such a character". And elsewhere he warns against exaggerations, which in this case too may have been caused by that impulse, by that faith "which accompanies, like any practical action, even the practical action of socialism, and generates beliefs and expectations which are not always in agreement with cautious critical and scientific thought".

And here we really need to understand each other well. There is no science without prediction, that is, without laws that do not only include phenomena, and let's say past *events*, but also future phenomena, events yet to come. He who has a science in his hand, does not therefore become a prophet or an astrologer; and we all pity the poor Galileo who was forced to draw the horoscope, to serve the times and the wishes of the Great Duchess Cristina! But it is true that he sees a little further than others, whose visual virtue does not enhance any glass of science. That he sees, that is, that he must see into the future, is not in doubt: but what can he see? Here it is: all the single and concrete facts, and the temporal and spatial relations, and all the incidents of these facts do not fall within the domain of science, when they nevertheless escape from experience, because they are still to come. But beyond the facts, singularly considered with their particular relations, and

beyond the accidents, there are the facts generally looked at in what is constant, necessary, and essential; which, determined especially for past facts, is also determinable a priori for future facts, and is like the form which these will take, when they are to happen. In this sense, science always gives rise to morphological predictions, and no more than these; so that, in order to define historical materialism as a philosophy of history, it may suffice that it arrives, as Prof. Labriola wants, at one of these predictions.

Historical materialism, in order to have the right or the way to foresee the future form of society (whether near or remote, it doesn't matter; that historical periods determined by arithmetic, à la Ferrari and à la Bovio, are calculations made as a pastime!), should have grasped what is essential in the historical fact and seen the law of its real progress. What is essential in the historical fact is, for Hegel, the Idea, which develops dialectically; for Marx, the matter (the economic fact), which develops in the same way; and if Hegel with his Idea could make a philosophy of history, Marx can also make it; and he must be granted that his science, not the impulse of faith, makes him foresee what the present society is going to become, whenever it may be. The materialistic conception of history must know how to make this prediction, if it is true that it has discovered what is metaphorically called the substratum, and with less horror than old terms, one would say more properly the essence of history. It must know how to do it, because in the end it isn't a matter here of a prediction, but rather of a simple observation, and of a scientific observation, which must generate that certainty, that subjective necessity that Croce doesn't want to admit. The astronomer who foresees an eclipse of the moon or the sun, is not correct to say that he foresees it; because he does not see the future phenomenon, but the present phenomena which he knows from scientific experience will cause the future; and yet, speaking of these, he does nothing more than note the virtuality of the former. Now this virtuality of present society historical materialism says precisely that it has ascertained it, when it affirms that it is in front of what is *immanent* in the course of history. The immanent transcends the relations of time, and not even what is affirmed of it is therefore properly said to be foreseen; foresight presupposing that succession, which, at least as such, is the negation of the immanent. And here we have, or we should have, an immanent which is a perpetual becoming, the unity of succession and immanent, which is, however, always identical to itself in all moments of time, and can be seen in any of them, but speculatively and not experimentally, if historical materialism really looks at the substratum, at the essence of history. When it is said that ideologies do not explain history, but that it is they themselves that must be explained, and it is added that they are all explained by the economic conditions of society, one has already begun to philosophize; the experience is over. We must not, therefore, think of a prediction as an anticipation of what should be left to experience.

It is necessary, rather, to refer the circumstances to experience, which are like accidents, which always accompany phenomena, and which are not contemplated in the laws regulating them. But the circumstances, which often interfere with the regular course of the historical process, do not impair or spoil the character of the philosophical conception of historical materialism, which is praised for not putting aside and forgetting these circumstances: they, like the accidents of all phenomena, do not enter into the scientific elaboration of laws. Therefore, if Labriola is right in saying that "the genesis [of history, or of the struggle of economic classes that governs it, — which is the same thing] foreshadowed" he will then be able to write about the circumstances that variously make up the historical process:

The movement of history, taken in general, reveals itself to us as oscillating; or rather, to use a more proper image, it seems to us to unfold on a broken line, which often changes direction and breaks again, and at times it is as if it were retracting, and at times it stretches, moving far away from the initial point; a true *zig-zag*

But it must be pointed out, in order to be consequent, that this is such a *zig-zag*, that its resultant turns out to be a straight line; that is to say (leaving the image) that historical circumstances do not operate on the economic substratum, and therefore cannot deviate its dialectical movement, if they are superior constructions of the *economic man*; and if they are pertinent to the economic facts themselves, they themselves fall into the gear of those historical dialectics, which Marx has borrowed from Hegel. If this were not so, it would no longer be true that the economy is the essence of history, and that history is explained entirely by the variable conditions of history.

The circumstances, therefore, have nothing to do with the matter, which we wanted to discuss, of whether historical materialism was a new philosophy of history or not. If it were not such, we should add, how would it benefit socialism? and how would it have made it scientific from being utopian, as it was until Saint-Simon, as is being said? In fact, having removed that character of necessity from the historical process, which through the inevitable solution of the social antitheses must lead to the definitive communist order, what right do socialists have to appeal to this theory of history of theirs, in order to affirm that their ideal of society is no longer a hope to be cherished, a goal to which the conscious efforts of those who suffer should converge, but is already the necessary result of the same economic contradictions in which society finds itself at present in the most advanced nations? What would *Capital*, which is a critique of the past, have to do with critical communism, no longer utopianly vague in the manner of Fourier, and which would be a future state? Should it not have indicated two points in the history of the past which would determine a line which, prolonged in turn into the future, would lead to the democratic socialization of the means of production? Or else, how shall we say that historical materialism is the consciousness of contemporary socialism, and precisely the scientific consciousness?

"If historical materialism is stripped of every survival of finality and of the benignities of providence, it can afford no apology for either socialism or any other practical guidance for life."⁶ These words of Benedetto Croce sound to our ear as a condemnation of the materialism of history as a socialist doctrine. They mean that this new doctrine has not truly arrived, as they say, at the essence of the continuous historical course, at that dialectical immanent, which to be such, without finality and without providential plans, but by necessity of its nature, should ascend by the parable desired by the socialists, in the manner that from the embryo it develops little by little and climbs up and branches out and lives the plant. And beware of Croce who, if he applauds Marx's formula (*it is not man's consciousness that determines his being, but it is his social being that determines his consciousness*), where, as we have seen, is the sum of all materialist theory, is he not right to write that it is "*in the observation that through it (historical materialism) it is possible to make*, that one finds the true and intimate connection of historical materialism with scientific socialism," adding:

This assertion is as follows: — Society is now so constituted that socialism is the only possible solution which it contains within itself. An assertion and forecast of this kind moreover will need to be filled out before it can be a basis for practical action. It must be completed by motives of interest, or by ethical and sentimental motives, moral judgments and the enthusiasms of faith⁶

These other elements invoked by Croce are ideologies or effects of ideologies; and must they not, in both cases, germinate from the economic substratum? If they were independent, we would already have a confession of the insufficiency of the materialistic explanation of history; because we would have here nothing less than the greatest fact of history — the democratic socialization

⁶Meredith, C., translator. *Historical Materialism and the Economics of Karl Marx*. by Benedetto Croce, The Macmillan Company, 1914, p. 22.

of all the means of production — produced by reasons that have nothing to do with the economic substratum, and belong rather to those ideal categories that have been mocked.

It should also be noted that when it is said that the scientific observation of socialism itself is limited to the observation that the only possible solution that contains society as it is now shaped is socialism, we have not left the field of utopia, if we do not imply that the present conditions of society are themselves contradictory, so that a solution of the contradiction is, or at least appears *necessary*. Otherwise the proletarian who, in perfect conscience, makes the capitalist observe that socialism is the only possible solution, will be able to reply with a smile

Who told you that there must be a solution and that the face of the world must be changed, which, since its existence, has always counted servants and masters? — If we want to understand that there is only one possible solution or way out and that the solution or way out must necessarily be there, we fall at on our face into that necessity of historical conception from which Croce would like to subtract materialism and from which only socialism can draw that energy of scientific consciousness which it believes it can boast today.

But then, what about these other elements? They are there and must be there as a consequence of the very doctrine that historical materialism advocates. And how? This doctrine which discovers the source, hitherto unknown, of every religious form and of every morality, and which recognizes the characteristics of a bourgeois morality in that which is due to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, must it not also maintain that a period of social revolution due entirely to economic hardship and the greatest that history has matured — note that these revolutions are the pivots of history, according to historical materialism — also has a morality congruent with its real substratum? And if it fails in this point, which, as it is well said and clearly demonstrated, has matured this doctrine, to what is its value reduced?

This is indeed a serious objection that one thinks to make to those who hold historical materialism to a rigid or consequential philosophical or a prioriist conception. *Cave a consequentiariis!* The admonition in this case goes to the formers of the doctrine. It is observed that the conscious agitations of propaganda, with which they try to hasten the advent of the communist order, and the moral ideals to which the true socialist ideas must conform, intervene to take away from this rigor; ideals which are basically the cause and the motive of all propaganda.

Chiappelli sees, in this, an irreconcilable contradiction, pernicious to the same practical interests of socialism, which in fact strives to avoid it. In one of his essays, entitled *The Moral Idea in Socialism*, after having spoken about the absoluteness of the materialistic conception, he writes:

But the logic of things and of human life is stronger than the intentions of men. And not only, as is well known, did Malon oppose rigid Marxist materialism, but Liebknecht, one of the leaders of German socialism, warned in the Halle Congress: ‘Does not socialism contain the highest morality, anti-egoism, self-sacrifice, philanthropy?’ This means that no resolution of the social problem could be initiated without referring to the moral nature of man, and without tacitly renouncing economic materialism. And elsewhere he also observes: ‘A school or a party that wants to derive its rule of conduct from the doctrine of economic and social materialism, where it does not do with happy inconsistency the due reason to other elements (i.e., to moral impulses) runs the risk of converting the maxim from which socialism starts: ‘to each according to their own work’, into the other: ‘to each according to their own needs’, and ultimately substituting for this, at least implicitly, as Giddings noted, the other: ‘to each according to their own desires, which would mark the dissolution of every social order’. — Thus Benedetto Croce reminds us that an eloquent commentary on the thought of Marx and Engels was their political action, with which they showed well that they were convinced of ‘the effectiveness of

individual and collective efforts as co-operating and coordinating elements of objective forces', while theoretically, in the face of the utopians, they were forced to affirm that the so-called social question is not a moral question.

Vincenzo Gioberti, in his beautiful book *La Riforma Cattolica* (The Catholic Reform) — which tells us what a fruitful and healthy religious movement the subalpine philosopher could have aroused, if his life had been enough, and if that industriousness which, until it died, seemed untiring, had not been broken — he excellently theorized that Catholicism must have an objective side that responds to every subjective quality, so that there are as many Catholicisms as there are human spirits, and foreseeing an obvious objection, he hastened to warn: 'It will be said that the Pope, the bishops, etc., do not see Catholicism as I do. Those who make this objection do not understand me; *I reply that if they understood it in my way, I would not be right, but wrong.*'

Analogous to this objection is the difficulty of Chiappelli and Croce, to whom Marx and Engels could have replied: — Precisely because of the rigorous character of the law that we have found in the overall progress of history, we have enthusiasm of faith, high moral ideals, and we feel strong impulses to work, to prepare or hasten the solution of the social antitheses; and our whole moral being, all the ideologies in which we participate, are a result of the present economic conditions of society. — Just as, in order for Gioberti's doctrine on Catholicism to be true, he himself had to begin to understand it in his own personal and original way, and so had to do the Pope himself, who represents the substance and the norm of Catholicism; thus, in order that historical materialism might not appear as a mere dream far from reality, it was good, it was obvious and natural, that its authors themselves should show that they had a morality and certain principles informing their practical life, such as they had to have or could have had in a historical period, which was already maturing an economic revolution, with its social and ideological forms. But just as it was not strictly necessary in Gioberti's theory that each person, in the proper sense of the word, should have his own particular Catholicism, and it was therefore not strictly contradictory to his theory that he did not fundamentally disagree with the Pope in his understanding of Catholicism, in the same way one cannot claim in an absolute way that Marx and Engels, in addition to being the theorists that they were, should also be those politicians and authors of propaganda that they also were. It is true that with that historical theory of theirs it was very difficult for them to remain skeptical or pessimistic, on the sidelines, and leave it to others; but what if they had had a different temperament? If Gioberti, in the event that he had published his work, and, forced by the hostile contradictions, which towards him alive would have been so much harsher than they were, had — an impossible hypothesis for that invincible soul of his! — had he disavowed his doctrine, humbly declaring that he understood Catholicism in the manner of the Pope and the bishops, the doctrine which he had genially begun would have been less true. As far as historical materialism in particular is concerned, to Chiappelli and to those who would expect a materialistic practical morality of the theoretical conception that is said to be materialistic and to those who investigate whether, according to this doctrine, morality can become a vain *imaginatio*, it is enough to oppose a simple observation. Morality from the *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* onwards is, first of all, a fact. It does not have to be created by philosophy, but rather it has to be explained by philosophy; and only one can admit that theories radiate some reflection on actual morality. One can try to explain this *fact* by investigating its metaphysical, naturalistic, or materialistic foundation, but it is always what it is, with its own essence, and yet with certain general laws, constant and necessary among all men, which are such, among other things, because of their original ethical principle. Now what does it mean, towards historical materialism, as towards every philosophy of history, that morality is a *fact*? Fact means history; and history is what historical materialism must study

and elucidate, not what it must produce; it is its content, its *presupposition*, not its *product*; and what is presupposed cannot be denied. Thus, in Greek history, materialism finds a very high and very elect ideology, Platonic idealism; in contemporary German history it finds another high and severe ideology, Hegel's absolute idealism. Well then, what is his position with respect to these two ideologies, the most remote from materialistic principles? He would renounce his most fundamental principle (*it is not the consciousness of man etc.*) if he did not presume to discover a more or less close or distant origin and reason in the economic substratum of Greek and German history. And if in history there has been a place for the idealism of Plato and for that of Hegel, why should historical materialism not leave some for all idealisms and for all disinterested ethics that can ever form in the minds of men? To avoid this stumbling block, it is necessary to represent historical materialism not as having before it only the history that has happened, — which is not the proper object of a philosophy of history, — and almost as an instrument useful to give history a more rational course, — which would return to the old utopias, — but, as a science, which has for its object *the whole of history*, like every historical philosophy, and which, according to the image of Vico, among an immense ocean of doubts knows how to discern a single small land where one can stop his foot; from which there is a way to contemplate the course of history, seeing all that there is in it of immanent and necessary. Thus conceived, historical materialism must account for itself and for the whole of life; and as in life there is the beautiful and the good and the ugly and the bad, it must explain the beautiful and the ugly, and the good and the bad, that is, it must assign them a legitimate place. And since it is not a catechism, it cannot preach good or evil, that is, neither a utilitarian morality, as others believe, nor a disinterested morality, since it must keep to history, which is its object. It takes on the form and manner of a catechism when it warns of the importance of pedagogy in the formation of morals; and at the same time it leaves the proper sphere of a philosophy, losing sight of the first postulate of ethics: there is a morality among men.

But when the principle has been understood, that morality is a presupposition, and not a product of a historical doctrine, then it is to be believed that the objections inferred from the characters of socialist morality against the philosophical and absolute form of historical materialism can no longer be formulated.

Chapter 5

Critique of The New Philosophy of History

Formally considered, the materialistic conception of history has such a philosophical character — we believe we have proved it — that it does not suffer any criticism of inconsistency. Finally, we would like to consider one of them, which is the most common one made about communism. And it too seems to us that it arises in the form of historical materialism, and is therefore completely worthless unless it is first shown that the very form of materialism is false, that is to say that it has a form which is contradictory to its content. Let us mention the criticism that runs with Wagner's concise phrase: socialism passes too quickly from the ideologies of the past to a hyper-ideology of the future.

Critical communists can respond to this criticism by saying that this ideology of the future, which seems to be a hyper-ideology, like so many other ideologies of the past that were really hyper-ideologies, does not depend on it, but they do not expect it to depend on the economic substratum, which will become capable of producing it. That socialism, if it sharpens the antagonism between the social classes, approaches precisely for this reason the end of the antagonism, fully ripening the internal contradiction which must be resolved; and as it is in their theory that the revolution is generated by the contradiction, once the contradictions are over, the leaven of every revolution will also have disappeared. The idea will have been fully realized; and there will be no more reason for the antitheses. It would indeed seem that the great philosophy of the absolute will throw its royal mantle over its prodigal son, historical materialism, as if to surround him with the sacred respect that his high speculation demands.

But up to now we have considered — and we really cared to concentrate on this — the form that historical materialism as a philosophy of history inherited from Hegel. It is time to add something about the new content that the author of the new doctrine wanted to give to the old form.

In this respect everyone repeats — I don't know with how much reason — that Hegelianism has been intrinsically surpassed; and everyone believes that this has happened because Hegel's principle has been replaced by the opposite principle, which would be in truth the one that was needed, since it is endowed with those characteristics that the dialectical process requires.

Except that it is clear that to make such a substitution it was necessary first to understand the value of the Hegelian Idea. And we have referred above to what Engels wrote about it in one of the most important documents for the formulation of this materialistic theory. In this theory the very contrast which is made between matter (reality economic fact) and the Idea, already shows by itself that the Idea is conceived as transcending reality in the Platonic manner, in the act of developing according to logical laws which are equally transcendent, to which, as to the despotism

of a sovereign exterior, the historical process should conform obediently.

Now the historians of philosophy know that nothing more false can be said in the interpretation of Hegelianism; for after the *Critique of Pure Reason* the Platonic hypostases and transcendences are banished from philosophy. The Idea, far from being opposed to reality, is, for Hegel, the essence of reality. Everything is to represent reality, as it is only possible after the teachings of Kant and after all the psychological studies of this century, which have done nothing but add the necessary complement that Kantianism expected from the side of psychology. And the matter of historical materialism, far from being external and opposed to Hegel's Idea, is included within it, indeed it is one and the same thing with it, since (this consequence Hegelianism drew from Kant's a priori synthesis!) the relative itself (which is the matter we are talking about) is not only not outside the absolute, but is identical with it, because of that unity of the many and the one, which Giordano Bruno had been able to point out from afar, but which had first to become, in order to be found, a problem of knowledge. The relative is indeed different from and opposed to the absolute; but it is a diversity, an opposition a thousand miles away from what these communist Hegelians suppose; who believe that the relative is, or rather has been made to be, by none other than Hegel himself, on one side, here, down below, one does not know where precisely, but it is said to be in reality, in history, and the absolute up there, in heaven perhaps, but one does not even know where precisely: the one in short facing the other, in two enemy camps, one against the other armed. They attribute this position to Hegel; because, in truth, by calling themselves materialists in the proper sense of the word, they believe they have thrown away the absolute, as an empty phantom, in order to keep to the fact, to the data of experience, that is to say, to the relative. But in any case, in contrast to the absolute of Hegel, such is also the position in which they represent their relative. And so, persuaded that they are in front of two different things, one of which does not exist, it was natural that they believed they could or should replace one of them with the other, the real with the imaginary. Nothing more reasonable.

But the trouble begins when, having made the substitution, the relative is forced to play the part of the absolute, as the historical materialists have the reasonableness to claim. The absolute is immanent; but the absolute is imaginary; the relative is real; therefore, the relative is immanent. The absolute develops dialectically; therefore, for the same reason as before, the relative develops dialectically. The process of the absolute was determined a priori, precisely because it was a dialectical process of the immanent; and yet it was also determinable a priori, and, as it were, the proper object of the philosophy of history, the relative. Not all of this, to tell the truth, they explicitly affirmed; but all of it is implicit, as we have seen, in their affirmations.

The relative, a matter proper to experience, determinable a priori? Here is the reason for all the difficulties of Croce: all of which can be resolved, since we believe we have resolved them, only by recognizing in historical materialism those characteristics of the philosophy of history, which then, in turn, necessarily lead to this absurdity: to make an a priori of what is empirical, to say that what must be referred to experience is determinable a priori, and therefore to predict, what Croce is right not to want to grant, a *fact*; since that form — which would give rise to the *morphological prediction* — what else would it be but a historical fact? The fact is not predicted, because it is not the object of speculation, but of experience; and therefore does not belong to the philosophy of history, but to pure history (let us say history or historiography) which does not deal, as everyone knows, with anything but what has *already happened*.

And so we must have a little patience, it seems, and wait until *the fact will have happened*, the form of society will have changed, and history will tell us for what reasons of antithesis to be resolved the revolution had to happen. For the moment we can only hope for it, and in good faith even wait for it; so that, if modern socialism is to be called "scientific," no longer utopian, it must be understood only in the sense that it, unlike the utopias that have already passed away, no longer

addresses itself to metaphysical ideals of justice, or to forms of society equally conceived according to philosophical systems, but to the economic critique of social conditions; not in the sense in which it is most often accepted, that is, socialism, which already has the scientific (philosophical) consciousness of its necessity.

Therefore, in the end, historical materialism, if it wants to be more than a simple methodological view, useful to the historiographer, considered from the philosophical aspect it succeeds in being one of the most wretched deviations of Hegelian thought, in that it leads back to a metaphysics (necessary and absolute science) of reality, understood as an object in the pre-Kantian manner; and, what is more, it leads to the conception of a dialectic, determinable a priori, of the relative. But as a simple methodological view, does it really benefit the consciousness of critical communism?

Part II

The Philosophy of Praxis

Chapter 6

Philosophical Studies of Karl Marx

In the preface to his *Critique of Political Economy* (1859) Marx recalled that in 1845 in Brussels, together with Engels, he had waited to put into practice a certain plan to define the position of their ideas — especially concerning, as Engels later warned, the materialistic conception of history — against the ideological theories of German philosophy, and to come to terms, so to speak, with previous philosophical knowledge "in the form of a critique of post-Hegelian philosophy". The result would be a manuscript for two large volumes in octavo; which, sent to a printer in Westphalia, remained in print, until the events that occurred prevented its publication. "And we", concluded Marx, "abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the rats; all the more willingly, since we had already achieved our purpose, — which was to understand ourselves".

Friedrich Engels, in connection with a long review he had written two years earlier of a memoir on Feuerbach, said in 1888 that he had taken up and looked over that old scrap of 1845-46; and he declared that "in it the part on Feuerbach is not finished. The finished part consists of an exposition of the materialistic conception of history, which only proves how incomplete our knowledge of economic history was at the time".

This information on the studies that were being carried out by the two socialist writers around 1845 is precious; and it is worthwhile, in our opinion, to resolve the question, discussed in the most recent literature on historical materialism, even in Italy: that is, whether in the mind of Marx and his Metrodorus this tormented materialistic conception of history arose with the characteristics of a philosophical theory, intrinsically coordinated with a new special system of true philosophy.

In that manuscript, which it would be useful to bring to light, because it would serve, more and better than any other of his works, to reconstruct historically the birth and development of Marx's thought, we know in the meantime, from the testimony of one of the authors themselves, that, for better or worse, the new conception of history was set forth, which was then to be perfected and formulated in the *Manifesto*, and more consciously advocated in the *Critique of Political Economy*; and this conception was exposed in order to orient itself among the contemporary philosophical trends, and then develop a core of guiding principles that were the backbone of a new system. Marx says that in that work he clarified his own philosophical thought; and Engels adds that the new historical intuition already appeared. Whoever puts together the two testimonies, it seems to us that there can be no doubt of the scope with which it was outlined, already in '45, historical materialism in the mind of Marx.

Now, while agreeing with Croce, that for the writings of Marx, more than for the writings of any other thinker, "the interpreter must proceed with the lead at his feet: to do his work case by case, book by book, proposition by proposition, putting these various manifestations in relation to each other, but taking into account the various times, the factual circumstances, the fleeting impressions,

the mental and literary habits, and he must resign him self to recognizing the uncertainties and incompleteness, where they are one and the other, resisting the temptation to ascertain and complete them of his own accord"; while willingly accepting these prudent warnings, we believe that on the basis of the news reported there is no doubt that a point has been established, which must be the starting point of our investigation. In which it is not a question, for the moment and in this case, of researching what is critically acceptable at the bottom of historical materialism — a very important research, but essentially critical, and yet completely unrelated to the history of Marx's thought, which in any case must follow, not precede it — but rather of studying how this theory, which he used as the basis of a very serious social doctrine, was actually conceived by Marx. And if Marx as well as Engels, referring to such a voluminous work, and written when this theory was emerging in their minds and being formed, explicitly declare that it took the form of a philosophical system, so as to oppose contemporary systems, there is no prudence of interpretation that can revoke in doubt the philosophical scope that was really attributed to historical materialism, from the beginning, by the authors themselves. This is not the case of an unconscious thought, which one must be careful to trust; it is a matter of a deep mental work that takes shape in a vast writing.

This is not the case of an unconscious thought, which one must be careful to trust; it is a matter of a deep mental work that takes shape in a vast writing.

I therefore fully agree with Labriola when he approves of Sorel's intention to put the problem of philosophy back into the field. I therefore fully agree with Labriola, when he approves of Sorel's intention to put back into the field the problem of philosophy in general; giving himself the thought that "historical materialism may appear to be out of place until it has other philosophies against it, with which it does not harmonize, and until a way is found to develop the philosophy which is proper to it, as that which is inherent and immanent to its assumptions and premises"; and he believes, therefore, that he is carrying out the concept of this philosophy, proper to historical materialism in the mind of Marx himself. What in fact he tried to do in his letters to Sorel, attempting at the same time to determine the orientation of Marxism among today's philosophical directions.

But since there are many, around Labriola, *liacos intra muros*, who believe that he has, against the intentions of Marx, widened the scope of the materialistic doctrine of history without good foundation, it will be useful to put forward the documents of the genuine thought of Marx himself.

Chapter 7

Marx's Critique of Feuerbach

Friederich Engels, as an appendix to his writing on Feuerbach, published eleven theses or fragments, written by Marx on this philosopher, in Brussels in January 1845, and found by him in an old notebook of his friend.

"They are", he writes, "notes for a work to be done, not intended for printing, but invaluable as the first document, in which is laid the brilliant germ of the new intuition of the world (*der neuen Weltanschauung*)." These notes of Marx refer to Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, and indicate the evolution of the disciple with respect to the master, and thus the historical relations of Marxism with the degenerate Hegelianism of the left, represented especially by Feuerbach. It is therefore worth briefly recalling the characteristics of this philosophy, according to the work now cited.

For Hegel, philosophy and faith can and must get along: the same content is in both, in a different form. It has been observed that in this way he contradicted one of the fundamental principles of his logic: there must always be perfect parallelism between form and content. This is an unfair criticism, because Hegel did not deny the transformation of content into different forms; nor, therefore, that content and form in philosophy, and content and form in religion, proceeded from one another and with perfect correlation. He did not deny, I say, the diversity of the concrete contents, as they are implemented in the two different forms; but he affirmed the identity of the content abstractly considered, insofar as it is considered transcendently separate and of the philosophical form and the religious form. On the other hand, according to Hegel, "the form of feeling (*proper to religion*) is the form most inadequate to the spiritual content. This content, God himself, is not in its truth except in thought, and as thought".

Feuerbach, however, in *Essence of Christianity* (1841) opposed this sentence, stating that between philosophy and religion there is a diametrical opposition, as between the healthy and the infirm; one being produced by thought, the other by imagination and feeling. Faith and science can not be composed, therefore, to friendly peace. Hegel had said that man recognizes himself in his God; it is to say, however, that God knows himself in man. That is to say: in religion man does not want to know himself, nor even to know himself incompletely (to represent himself); he wants rather to satisfy himself in his physical needs. In what, in fact, is man's individual essence? In a continuous satisfaction of his own organic needs. And this he wants to find in God. The egoistic feeling, badly satisfied with the faintness of real life, pushes man to sublimate himself in an infinite power, which is divine power, omnipotence to satisfy all his needs. Man, therefore, through religion does not recognize himself, as a spirit, as an absolute, as universal, in God, but this absolute, spirit, universal, must, however, be recognized in particular individual, which as a physical organism lives through the incessant event of the emergence and satisfaction of needs. Not therefore the truth of the individual is in the universal, but the truth of this is in the individual. Matter does not merge

into spirit, but matter in spirit. Hegelian idealism turned upside down.

And since the root of religion is to be found in man as a physical individual, theology is transformed into anthropology; and this is essentially materialistic. The needs which stimulate the fantasies of the deification of human powers elevated to infinity, are in fact physical needs; and the essence of man therefore comes to be determined as purely physical and organic.

The critique of religion, therefore, was based on materialism. In fact, in *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1843) Feuerbach teaches that true philosophy can only be empirical, having as its object the sensible reality. The deepest and most important truths cannot be learned except by the way of the senses. And philosophy must not consider man as thought, reason; but for what he *really* is, a concrete sensible being, a living body. The Ego is precisely the body. So that philosophy itself, insofar as it has man as its object, succeeds in a physiological anthropology.

Like religion, all the facts that are considered the highest and noblest of human life and society, are products of man as an organic body, which lives by the continuous satisfaction of its needs.

The consequence of this philosophy is obvious: all history can have no other well-founded explanation than a materialistic one. Look for and study the needs of the human body in its actual existence; and you will have the reason for all human facts, small or great, individual or social. It is understood that the explanation of individual facts is to be sought in the immediate physical needs of the individual as such; whereas the explanation of social facts must come from the analysis of the needs of the individual as a member of society, or rather of a given society. If Feuerbach formulated his materialism with a typical expression by saying that *man is no more and no less than what he eats (der Mensch sei nur das, was er esse)*, and the explanation, therefore, of his work, as a pure and simple individual, can only be given by the needs of his stomach, the explanation of his historical facts can only arise from economic needs.

This is how historical materialism descended with plain and evident logic from the materialism of Feuerbach. No other philosophy than materialism can therefore be considered immanent in the materialistic conception of history. But let us see what observations Marx made about this philosophy as he prepared in 1845 to write about his own philosophical orientation. And therefore we give here translated as best we can the fragments printed by Engels.

1

The chief defect of all past materialism, including that of Feuerbach, is that the term of thought (*Gegenstand*), reality, the sensible, has been conceived only in the form of object or intuition; and not as human sensory activity, as praxis, and subjectively. Hence it came to pass, that the side of activity was developed by idealism in opposition to materialism, — but only in the abstract, because of course idealism knows nothing of actual sensory activity, as such. Feuerbach wants to make a real distinction between sensible and intelligible objects; but he does not conceive of human activity itself as an *objective* activity. Hence in the *Essence of Christianity* he considers only the theoretical content to be purely human; whereas praxis is conceived and fixed only in the sordid Judaic forms. Therefore he does not understand the meaning that the 'revolutionaries' give to practical-critical activity.

2

The question of whether objective truth comes to human thought is not a theoretical question but a practical one. In praxis man can prove the truth, that is, the reality and power (*Macht*), the positivity (*Diesseitigkeit*) of his own thought. The discussion of the reality or unreality of a thought, which is isolated from praxis, is a purely scholastic question.

3

The materialistic doctrine, that men are the product of the environment (*Umstände*) and of education, and that they vary with the change of environment and education, forgets that the environment is changed precisely by men, and that the educator himself must be educated. It therefore ends up, by necessity, by dividing society into two parts, one of which is conceived as being above the other (e.g. in Robert Owen). — The coincidence of the variety of the environment and of human activity can be conceived and understood rationally only as an inverted praxis

4

Feuerbach, from the fact of religious self-projection (*Selbstentfremdung*), arrives at a duplication of the world, in a religious, representative world and a real world. And his work consists in this: to resolve the religious world in its substratum. It escapes his notice, however, that having accomplished this work, the main thing still remains to be done. The very fact that the substratum of this religious world rises from itself, fixing itself in the clouds as an independent kingdom of its own, is then to be explained only by the duplication which this substratum makes of itself, from itself, and by the contradiction into which it enters itself. Therefore it must first be understood in its contradiction, and then practically undermined by the solution of the contradiction itself. Thus, for example, after having unveiled the mystery of the sacred family by means of the earthly family, the latter must be theoretically criticized and practically overthrown.

5

Feuerbach, not satisfied with *abstract thought*, appeals to *perceptible intuition*; but he does not conceive of sensibility as a practical human-sensitive activity.

6

Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence proper to man. But there is no human essence, almost an abstract inherent in the particular individual. In its reality it is nothing but the whole of social relations.

Feuerbach, not reaching the critique of this real essence, is therefore forced: 1) to abstract from the historical process and fix for himself the religious sentiment, and give us an abstract-isolated human individual; while: 2) in him the human essence can only be understood as a 'species' (*Gattung*), as an unspoken universality (*innere*), mute, that only *naturally* binds the many individuals.

7

Feuerbach therefore does not see that 'religious feeling' itself is a *social product*, and that the abstract individual, whom he analyzes, actually belongs to a specific social form.

8

Social life is essentially practical. All the mysteries that drive theories to mysticism find their rational explanation in human praxis and in the intelligence of this praxis.

9

The highest degree to which *intuitionist* materialism has led, that is, materialism which does not conceive of sensibility as a practical activity, is the intuition of individuals in 'bourgeois society'.

10

The point of view of the old materialism is bourgeois society; the point of view of the new, /human. society, or associated humanity.

11

Philosophers have only variously *interpreted* the world; but it is a question of *changing* it.

In these faithfully translated thoughts, it does not seem difficult to us to discern the design of a whole new speculative system, with its historical entanglement with an earlier philosophy, and with sure hints of a practical program logically consequent to it: in short, the whole skeleton of that philosophy, which is supposed to be inherent in the materialistic conception of history, placed at the foundation of the communist doctrine. And here we will attempt, with the help of these thoughts, a sketch of the new philosophy.

Chapter 8

Sketch of The Philosophy of Praxis

The keystone of this philosophical construction lies in the concept of "praxis". This concept, as Marx himself well notes, is new with respect to materialism, but in idealism it is as old as idealism itself; indeed, it was born in childbirth with it, right from the subjectivism of Socrates. Socrates could not conceive of a truth already beautiful and formed, that could be transmitted by tradition or teaching; and he thought instead that every truth is the final result of personal inquisitive work, in which the master can only act as a companion and collaborator to the disciple desirous of the truth. Hence the famous comparison of his art with the maieutic art of his mother Fenarete. He did not produce knowledge in the minds of the disciples; but they were only helped by him to form, to make this knowledge. Helped in praxis, Marx would say. Knowledge, therefore, was already for Socrates a productive activity, and was a subjective construction, a continuous and progressive praxis.

Nor did Plato let this very important doctrine slip away; on the contrary, he better defined it and developed it in his dialectic of ideas, all of which are endowed with creative energy. And up to Hegel there was no idealist who did not understand, more or less well, knowledge as a work of the human spirit, with the exception of the rare supporters of intellectual intuition.

Our Vico, usually boasted only as the founder of the philosophy of history, saw very deep into this matter. And in this concept of cognition as praxis lies the whole reason for his inexorable criticism of Descartes. To whom the Neapolitan philosopher could not forgive the fact that he had set as the starting point and foundation of science the immediate consciousness of thought (*cogito ergo sum*); where, according to him, when we do science, we must justify the fact of consciousness, reconstructing its birth and development: that is, not starting from the pure fact, but, as we now say, starting from the explanation of the fact itself, remaking it ourselves. *Verum et factum convertuntur*; truth, therefore, is discovered by doing it. And since it is the result, and not the given, of scientific research, this cannot proceed by analysis, as Descartes claims; — analysis, which would presuppose before itself the concept of the truth to be analyzed, but by synthesis, which is the productive activity of the mind. Hence the inestimable value of the divinations of the genius, of the happy intuitions, which create, almost, rather than make, the knowledge, so difficult to acquire. According to Vico, doing is the unchangeable condition of knowing. Hence the certainty of mathematics — and in this he agreed with Descartes — in which the objects of our knowledge are not given, but constructed.

These principles, already enunciated in the work *De antiquissima Italorum sapientia* (1710), he then had to admirably apply in the *Scienza Nuova*, in constructing his historical philosophy. And in truth, if one can know what is one's own work, the natural world is to be referred, Vico thought, to the cognition of God, who is its only factor; but the historical world, the product of human activity,

is the object of which men who have made it can achieve science. But for Vico this human activity was the activity of the mind of man; hence his concept that all history could be explained by the consideration and study of the modifications of the mind. The principle of operation changes in Marx, and instead of changes in the mind, the needs of the individual as a social being are the root of history. But the concept that is invoked of praxis remains the same.

Nor does it suffer criticism or correction. Labriola says very well that "thinking is producing. Learning is producing by reproducing. We only know what we ourselves are capable of producing, by thinking, working, trying and trying again; and always by virtue of the forces that are our own, in the social field and from the visual angle in which we find ourselves". What is the experiment, if not a remaking of what nature does, remaking it in conditions that facilitate and ensure the observation? Of course, this doing or remaking is not always a material and effective doing; on the contrary, most of the time it is purely a doing or remaking with thought. But does the same material and effective doing or remaking benefit the understanding of the fact because of the immediate mechanism, or not rather because of the gradual thinking of the individual parts of the mechanism? The answer is easy for those who consider that the mind has neither eyes nor hands nor instruments, except by metaphor; and the mechanics of external making cannot be accompanied except by successive representations. This original activity, which must be developed for the attainment of science, is most evident, e.g., in arithmetic calculation. You have the factors; you are looking for the product. This product is not a product which you have glimpsed by intuition; it is the result of an operation which you must perform. And what is said of this arithmetical product must be said of every product of knowledge, of all knowledge: it is not given, but must be arrived at by the active act of the mind. Given knowledge is not true knowledge if it is not understood, that is, if it is not true knowledge if it is not understood, that is, if it is not reconstructed; and therefore it is no longer given, but produced or reproduced.

And is science, in general, acquired all of a sudden, as if by a very sharp glance cast around a wide horizon? The remaking will be easier than the doing; and reading a scientific book is easier than writing it. But even in reading our spirit, if it wants to profit, cannot remain inert and passive; on the contrary it must accompany the intelligence of the author, in every moment of his progress, and therefore it too must develop an energy, and *do* it too. In the language one can already see traces of this very important concept of knowing or understanding that is a doing. The Latin word *facilis* (which remains in all Romance languages) derives from the verb *facere*; and etymologically therefore it would only mean "that can be done"; where, in Latin and in all Romance languages, it also means: that can be known or understood. Thus an operation is easy to do; and a truth is easy to know, or a theorem to understand.

This concept that knowledge goes hand in hand with activity, with praxis, is the soul of Froebel's pedagogical method. But Froebel did not derive this principle from a materialistic philosophy either; on the contrary, it has been well observed that the *thun* (doing), and the *genetisch-entwickelnd* method (of genetic development) so inculcated by Froebel effortlessly call to mind that doctrine (of Fichte) which from the primitive doing of the Ego attempted to develop all our science.

This principle wants Marx to transport abstract idealism into concrete materialism. He judges it to have been a very serious defect, indeed the main one, to have neglected it.

This concept demonstrates the philosophical acumen of the writer. In truth, what was, after all, the reproach he made against materialism in the theory of knowledge? This: to believe that the object, the sensitive intuition, the external reality is a *datum*, instead of a *product*; so that the subject, entering into relationship with it, should limit himself to a pure vision, or rather to a simple mirroring, remaining in a state of simple passivity. Marx, in short, reproached the materialists, and among them Feuerbach, for conceiving the subject and the object of knowledge in an abstract and false position. In such a position one would have the object opposed to the subject and without

any intrinsic relation to it, which is accidentally encountered, seen, known. But what is this subject without its object? And this object without the respective subject, of which is it the object? Subject and object are also two correlative terms, one of which necessarily draws behind the other. They are therefore not mutually independent, but rather inseparably linked to each other, so that their actual reality results from their relationship to the organism in which and through which they find their necessary fulfillment, and outside of which they are nothing but abstractions. The life of the subject is in its intrinsic relation to the object; and vice versa. Sever this relation; and you will no longer have life, but death. No longer two real terms of the fact of knowing, but two abstract terms.

They must therefore be conceived in their mutual relation. The nature of this relationship is made clear by what has been said about the activity of knowing. When one knows, one makes the object, and when one makes or constructs an object, one knows it; therefore the object is a product of the subject; and, since there is no subject without an object, it must be added that the subject, as he comes to make or construct the object, comes to make or construct himself; the moments of the progressive formation of the subject correspond to the different moments of the progressive formation of the object.

He who has known little is said to have developed his ideas, his thought; and as he increases his knowledge (object), he grows in the power of comprehension and understanding (subject). Knowledge, in short, is a continuous development; and, since it is essentially but a relation of two correlative terms, it amounts to a progressive parallel development of these two terms. The root meanwhile, the permanent cause of this development is in the activity, the doing of the subject, which forms itself, forming the object; *crescit et concrecit*; ἐπίδοσις ἐφ'αυτῷ (Aristotle).¹

Now, when materialism says: the spirit is a *tabula rasa*, on which the images of the external world are gradually written through the action of the senses; one thinks on the one hand of this *tabula rasa*, ready to receive the images of the external world; on the other hand, of the objects of this world, beautiful and formed, accomplished in themselves, which, if it falls to them to send images to that *tabula rasa*, send them; and if not, they remain what they are, without any loss of themselves, as they would have gained nothing from sending the images.

Here is the abstract position of materialism; it does not stand up to the most elementary criticism. Who describes the images on the *tabula rasa*? Is it the subject that forms them, or the object? And if the subject and the object exist, without these images, a product of the relation into which they may enter, if they exist therefore independent of each other, who is subject, as pure subject, and who is object as pure object? Questions which materialism can in no way answer without contradicting its presuppositions; for, it is known, an abstract cannot receive any determination, without conceiving itself in the conditions in which and for which it is concrete; that is, without denying itself as abstract.

Rather, we must recognize the legitimate motive that suggests such a position: the so-called objectivity of knowledge, whereby the object must be an object, pure object, without mixture of subjectivity. Because if knowledge acquires value from the object of which it gives us possession, this value no longer has it when the object is altered by the influence or contact of the subject, which must be the knowing principle opposed to the known. Hence the theory of intuitions, simple visions that make the sensible image of external objects pass into our spirit without the slightest modification. Therefore, pure object and intuition are the characteristics of objectivism — idealistic or materialistic — to which Marx wants to oppose subjectivism. Reality has hitherto been conceived, he says, as *object*, *intuition*, not as human activity, as *praxis*, not *subjectively*. Reality then, according to him, is a subjective production of man; a production, however, of sensory activity (*sinnliche*

¹The Greek phrase from Aristotle translates to "growth within itself". Then the Latin means "increases and grows".

Tätigkeit); not of thought, as Hegel and the other idealists believed.

From Feuerbach, therefore, go back to Hegel, who understood an indisputable truth: that knowledge is a continuous production, an incessant doing, an original praxis. But this his principle from the abstract idealistic conception of the spirit transfer to the real and concrete human sensory activity. Idealism did not deny sense; but it did not recognize it as such, but rather as a moment of thought, which is not active, productive as sense, but only as thought.

Now Feuerbach, in his *Essence of Christianity*, what did he do? He distinguished the Judaic forms of Christianity from its theoretical content; those products of praxis, this pure product of human thought: an absolute duality between fact and theory, between praxis and knowledge, which are instead one and the same thing. Feuerbach, in short, was not consequent to himself: he explained in a materialistic way the practical part of the history of Christianity; but he stopped before the ideologies, that is to say the speculative part, the last stronghold opposed to him by idealism and not conquered by him. And in this regard, before the same problem, Labriola observes:

It is the difficult understanding of how ideologies arise from the material ground of life, which gives strength to the argument of those who deny the possibility of a full genetic (*materialistic*) explanation of Christianity. In general, it is true that phenomenology or religious psychology, as it may be called, presents great difficulties and contains some very obscure points [...] But is this psychological difficulty a privilege of Christian beliefs? Is it not proper to the generation of all mythical and religious beliefs and ideas [...] The fact is that these psychic productions of the men of past centuries present special difficulties to our understanding. We cannot easily reproduce in ourselves the conditions that are necessary to approach the inner state of mind, which was respective to those products [...] Except that Christianity (and here I mean belief, doctrine, myth, symbol, legend, and not mere association in its *oikonomika*), is relatively easier for us, since it is closer to us. We live in the midst of it, and we are constantly considering its consequences and derivations in the literature and various philosophies familiar to us. We can, however, observe how the multitudes combine, wholesale, both the atavistic and the recent superstitions with a half-hearted or barely approximate acceptance of the most general principle, which unifies all confessions: — the fall and redemption. We see the Christian association at work, as much in what it does as in the struggles it sustains, and we are able to refer to the past by analogical combinations, which we seldom succeed in employing in the interpretation of beliefs remote from us. We still witness the creation of new dogmas, of new saints, of new miracles, of new pilgrimages; and, thinking back on the past, we can for the most part say: *tout comme chez nous!*

Well, do we not see that all these questions originate from interests, from material needs? These practical interests, these material needs have as their object the sensible reality, which they tend to procure, to do. Now their object is not really distinct and separate from the object of thought, as Feuerbach believes and wants it to be (*sinnliche, von den Gedankenobjekten wirklich unterschiedene Objekte*); for, if this were so, materialism would not be able to explain the whole work of man. This may seem to be of a double nature, practical and theoretical, to those who have not understood the concept of knowing as doing. But when doing is unified with knowing, the objects proper to knowing are also objects of doing, and vice versa; so that there is finally a single class of objects, relative to praxis (which is doing and knowing together) and produced by it. And if materialism suffices for the explanation of the objects *made*, it must also suffice for the explanation of the objects *known*, which are, after all, of the same nature as the former. Feuerbach's doctrinal constructions are explained by the abstract activity of the spirit, the true human activity, according to him; and thus he falls squarely within that idealism which he had resolutely denied.

Also according to Feuerbach, therefore, human activity is not properly objective (*gegenständliche Tätigkeit*), it does not produce objects opposed to man; but only objects, so to speak, subjective: knowledge, not facts. And with respect to knowing the true objects, that is, the sensible reality remains absolutely foreign to thought, independent of it. Feuerbach's capital error is that he was not consistent with himself; he introduced a duality into the very bosom of materialism, which is an essentially monistic philosophy, because he was unable to recognize the productive character of sensory activity, the shaper of all reality.

It is necessary, in short, to fulfill the materialistic intuition with the very fertile concept of the practical-critical energy; of the energy that is expressed by producing and knowing simultaneously what it produces: the new concept of the "revolutionaries".

Chapter 9

Realism of The Philosophy of Praxis

Thus the abstract is replaced by the concrete. The object, produced by human activity, fantasized independent of man, is replaced by the object intrinsically linked to human activity, which is developed in a process parallel to the process of its development. True realism begins.

And in this realism the scholastic questions, which wandered about the relation of abstracts as such, are forever denied. In what way, it was asked before, does the object reach the subject, or vice versa? In what way can objectivity, the reality of knowing, be explained? And so asking, of course, one wanted to derive a (real) relation from the abstract nature of the two terms. Now, it is clear that when these two terms are conceived in their proper, concrete condition of the mutual relationship of cause and effect, of activity and product, from which we have seen that they are bound to each other, those questions no longer have any reason to be. Thought is real because and insofar as it poses the object. Either thought is, and thinks; or it does not think, and is not thought. If it thinks, it does. Therefore reality, the objectivity of thought, is a consequence of its very nature. This is one of the first consequences of Marxist realism.

But pay attention to the meaning of thought, as it is determined in this philosophy. This philosophy wants to be materialistic, and therefore cannot admit thought as such: on the contrary, thought is considered a derived and accidental form of the sensory activity. This is the original activity; and in it therefore is the root and substance of thought. Therefore, when we speak of thought, no matter what we say, we always mean to speak of the ordinary conscious form of an original unconscious activity, which is the psychic. The organism of thought is none other than the organism of this activity, to which it is always necessary to refer in order to realize what is considered to be the product of thought, and therefore of all history.

But in this realistic materialism another of the main doctrines of abstract materialism is also corrected. All the materialists of the last century, and not a few of those who came after these speculations of Marx, hold that man is a product of environment and education. Helvétius and Rousseau, for example, denied any original difference between human traits, which are then differentiated in society. Montesquieu drew attention to the great influence of climates on the life of peoples; Cabanis, together with the ideologists, endeavored to demonstrate in general the relationship of the physical to the moral, the physical considering the effect of the moral. What are the consequences of these materialistic theories with respect to communistic theories? Here is Robert Owen, the great utopian, who accepts the ideas of these, and moved by a deep philanthropic feeling, criticizes the society that pretends to virtuous men by putting them in circumstances, which necessarily spoil the good native dispositions, and drag them to vice and crime; and advocates by example and theory the moral obligation to provide everyone with the appropriate conditions for a healthy formation of character. But whose obligation is this? Society itself, which should be modified according to the

criteria of these doctrines. Thus society would come to be divided into two distinct parts, one above the other and the cause of the latter's conduct. What in fact is an organic whole would become a disjointed whole of parts. The abstract would again take the place of the concrete. The truth is that these circumstances, whose influence determines the conduct and character of men, are themselves determined by men; and education itself supposes the educators, who must have been educated. The cause presupposes the effect, and is itself the effect.

What does this riddle mean? Society, which is an organic whole, is both cause and effect of its conditions; and we must seek in the very bosom of society the reason for all its changes.

There is the society that educates, and there is the society that is educated: the same society, which has already been educated, returns to educate. All education is therefore a practice of society, a continuous activity of man, who *crescit*, as we said, and *concrescit*; he educates, educating himself, and gradually increasing his own educating capacity. Thus, if circumstances form man, and are themselves formed by man, it is always man who operates by determining circumstances, which then react on him.

But, it is said however, the man who operates, is the social man, the society; the man on whom the circumstances react, is the individual. Except that, is there really this individual abstracted from society, or is it a creation of fantasy? Where is this man determined by circumstances, (social), if not in society? In truth the man we know is the social man. Nor is there any man who is in society and does not act upon it; just as there is no man upon whom the society in which he lives does not react.

The theory of the environment is therefore undermined by the new realism, which does not disavow materialism, but rather wants to confirm it and make it more and more logical. It wants to correct the abstract position in which materialists and utopians had placed man in front of the environment. Having conceived man in his real relationship with society, it is easy to rise from the dualism of environment and individual to the rigorous monism of materialism.

The activity of praxis, the only original activity is, — given the nature of the relation between subject and object, — the productive energy of the object; and it has perfectly parallel moments of development. Now if this praxis is knowing and doing, the objects of it are theoretical and practical, they are knowledge and facts; hence also circumstances, education, environment. But as the object grows, progresses, and changes, the subject also grows, progresses, and changes in parallel, due to the fact that the object itself grows, progresses, and changes. Therefore the effect reacts on the cause, and their relationship is reversed, the effect becoming the cause of the cause, which becomes an effect while remaining a cause; and there is, in short, a synthesis of cause and effect. Praxis, which had the subject as its principle and the object as its term, is reversed, returning from the object (principle) to the subject (term). And yet Marx noted that the coincidence of changing circumstances and human activity can be conceived and rationally explained only as praxis that reverses itself (*nur als umwälzende Praxis*).

In short, it is the usual rhythm already described (and not only described!) by idealism, — the only direction that had developed until Marx, the principle of praxis, — in the field, however, of abstract thought. Fichte said *thesis, antithesis, synthesis; being, not being, becoming*, Hegel said. And keeping an eye precisely on real life, Froebel, following in the footsteps of Fichte, had also established his triad, always with the same dialectical meaning: *Satz, Gegensatz* and *Vermittlung*; and *living, doing, knowing*.

The subject, Marx's practical activity, is the thesis; circumstances, education are the antithesis; the subject modified by circumstances and education, the synthesis. And since the subject is the original activity which posits the object, it is also the being, which denies itself by positing the object, since this position is a single determination of its activity; and, as Spinoza said, *omnis determinatici est negatio*. The object therefore (circumstances, education) is equivalent to the Hegelian non-being;

the contradiction of which, intrinsic to being, produces the becoming of being itself, that is, of the subject which is, as has been said, modified by the object (circumstances, education).

So that also in this way the correction of materialism consists in an application to matter of what Hegel had exactly discovered with respect to the spirit. For Marx does no more than substitute matter for thought; but matter that is endowed with the same activity which was once considered the privilege of thought; and this activity he endeavors to define with the same characteristics, since these characteristics had been exactly determined by Hegel.

I return to Hegel, who is a rational reversal of the historical process. No longer is society divided into two parts, one outside the other, which can, at its will, rightly or wrongly, operate on the other, and impose on it circumstances, education, conditions of life at its will. The necessity of rhythm in this organic whole which is society, and which can also be said to be social man, means that the conditions created by one part of society for the other, when two opposing parts of society emerge, are generated from the very bosom of society, which will then reconcile them by itself for the same reason for which it generated them. That is why the philanthropist Owen was a utopian, when he appealed to a feeling of justice to correct the real path of history. Society, by the intimate law of its development, is destined to resolve by itself the contradictions that have been produced within it in its development.

Chapter 10

Dialectical Law of Praxis and its Consequences

Everything lies in understanding the concept of praxis, since its dialectical process, now mentioned, derives from its very nature. Praxis is a creative activity, whereby *verum et factum convertuntur*. It is a necessary development, because it proceeds from the nature of the activity, and it comes to rest in the object, the correlate and product of the activity. But this object, which is made by virtue of the subject, is nothing but a duplication of the subject, a projection of itself, a *Selbstentfremdung*. The critique of this duplication, its recognition, is the consciousness of the occurrence of splitting of the subject then a synthesis and, consequently, an increase of the subject. It is not possible, Marx reflects, that the educator has not been educated. Here is the praxis that, by its nature, is overturned. It operates: it fixes itself in an object; it enters into contradiction, which of itself resolves itself into a synthesis; educator, educated, educated-educator. Such is the necessary development of praxis.

Thus, when Feuerbach, from his observation of the self-projection of religions, concludes that the religious world is a splitting of the real world, in which it must be resolved, that is, it must be recognized, he does not realize that the fundamental unity immanent in this duality must be the dialectical spring of a further synthesis. Unity is the real world; duality, produced by unity, presents us with a real world and a religious world, in the bosom of which is hidden the real, which has been denied because it has been overcome. Now the world cannot remain in its negation, because of the contradiction that we allow. Therefore, Marx concludes, the contradiction must be theoretically criticized, and at the same time practically resolved or revolutionized.

The negation of the real world is not resolved with the pure and simple negation of the religious world; it is resolved with the synthesis of the two worlds, that is, with the folding of religiosity on the real world and the *becoming* of this, that is, with becoming religious. And what is this world? Sensible reality, that is, praxis. The subject of praxis then, a new Saturn, creates and devours the gods.

And it was natural that this should escape Feuerbach, who, having rejected abstract thought, appealed to sensitive intuition; but then he had not conceived of this as practical activity. Hence the usual abstractness: the usual scholastic defect of not conceiving of the two terms (real world, or praxis, and religious world) in their actual relationship.

Thus he reduces the essence of religion to the essence of man; and this essence he understands as an abstract *quid* inherent in the individual. Man, as we have seen, according to Feuerbach, is what he eats. But man eats as a social individual; and to consider his need to eat, and the ways in which he satisfies this need, in and of itself, without considering how they are determined through

social circumstances, is always an abstract procedure, which can explain nothing of man's life and his history. The essence of man, Marx notes, is determined by the whole of social relations, in which man lives like a fish in water; and since society has a history in which it gradually assumes its concrete forms, man should not be studied, in Feuerbach's manner, as an abstract individual, isolated and outside the historical process, fixing, for example, the religious sentiment as an entity in itself, which is instead concomitant with all the other sentiments of life, and with them connected to the various social relations, according to the various historical periods. But Feuerbach was forced to deny society and therefore history, and to conceive of man as an individual, since he did not have the concept of praxis inherent in sensitive intuition; praxis which alone can explain the organism of society and the becoming of history. This is evident from the things said in the previous chapter; and it will be even more evident from what will be said below.

Note, meanwhile, what other criticism Marx sharply moves to this way of Feuerbach's understanding of the human essence. Understanding man as an individual, the universal *man*, the human essence cannot be determined otherwise than as a *species*; that is, as the mute universality that binds the many individuals internally by a simple *natural* bond (*bloss natürlich*). Beyond the individual, *sic et simpliciter*, there is, in short, nothing but the species, consisting of the natural identity of anatomical and physiological constitution of individuals; identity *muta*, as identity of fact, unconscious, which does not matter any intrinsic or necessary relationship between individuals.

The fact of society remains purely accidental; like the cosmic formation in atomistic philosophy. There are the atoms all similar to each other in quality. But this similarity of theirs would not lead them to agglomerate and form worlds, if there were not, beyond them, something else: emptiness and motion. But the principle of movement is not in them; on the contrary, they are the simple vehicle of movement. And in truth what other intuition, if not mechanics, can help to explain society, when reality is not conceived as praxis, as energy?

Here are two other profound modifications made by Marx to materialism, striving to strip it of its naturalistic character and its mechanistic form. Naturalism wants to explain man as an individual of the natural species, and abstracts from the spirit, or, let us say with Marx, from history, from society. And precisely for this reason, since it admits only individuals, it cannot attribute the origin of society to anything but an accidental fact, such as the consent and concordant deliberation of individuals. It cannot, I say, escape a mechanistic intuition. Let us recall Epicurus the atomist and his concept of the State, sculpted in the precept Xdfrs Puóarag; Hobbes the materialist and nominalist (the only reality is individuals, as such), also a participant in the mechanistic intuition of the world and society, explained by the hypothesis of the contract. It is natural that by reducing man to the pure natural individual, society should be denied, or, which is the same, declared accidental. And it is clear that Marx, in criticizing this doctrine, comes to deny in spite of all its materialism, naturalistic nominalism, and the consequent mechanism. But will this not be a real *deminutio capitis* of the materialistic conception? We shall see.

In the meantime, it is worth noting that, according to Marx, the individual as such is not real; the social individual is real. This is tantamount to affirming the original reality of society, to which the individual, the basis of Marx's materialistic view, is inherent. Now this is precisely a necessary consequence of the first theorem of this philosophy: that reality is praxis. We have seen, in fact, what an intimate relationship binds, through the concept of this essential praxis to reality, the subject of praxis to the object; and we have also seen that society is an object, that is, a product of praxis, whereby praxis is reversed and the individual is influenced by the society in which he lives.

Now, having admitted the originality of praxis, the individual cannot escape the efficacy of his own product, dissolve himself from the bonds of the society which is the effect of his praxis. Praxis is always the reason for concrete reality; and since it mediates between the individual and society, this and that are as original as it is. The individual, the subject of praxis, makes society, which

reacts to the styles of the individual, making him social. This reality, therefore, which is the social individual, beyond which history cannot retreat, is the result of the contradiction that is resolved by the dialectical law of its nature. And without the concept of dialectical praxis, this fact of society, or of social individuals, would not be explained. The earlier materialists clung to the hypothesis of the contract, which, contradictory in itself, is always based on a false nominalistic view. They conceived of individuals in the abstract. The new philosophy once again substitutes the concrete for the abstract.

But in order for this substitution to be possible, what had to be the concept of praxis? This praxis, whereby the individual outside of society and history is an abstract, clearly implies the necessity not only of society, but also of history, indeed of the historical course. The concrete individual of Marx differs from the abstract individual in that it is practical by nature, and yet *necessarily* practical. Now, if the effect of this praxis is society and the historical course, this course is just as necessary as the fact of society; and the study of this praxis, if it is possible a priori (and it seems to be, once a dialectical rhythm has been found in it), can serve as a basis for an a priori determination of the development of history.

And there is more. This praxis is essentially finalistic; not because it has a regulative, external end, but because it has an internal, constitutive one; that is, one which results from its essential nature. Praxis is the necessary relation of subject to object. Now it is evident that this praxis cannot but be directed to the production of the object; indeed in this production it properly consists. And this production is precisely its *end*. And if this praxis is determined in society, in history, in society and in history there is an immanent purpose of development. Each of their forms is the object, the end of the immanent and original praxis.

Chapter 11

Criticisms and Discussions

This is how from the bosom of Marx's philosophy derive the foundations of his philosophy of history, around which the work of interpreters and critics is now more and more troubled. The problem is twofold: first did Marx conceive his historical theory as a philosophy of history? Second, can one, independently of the actual thought of Marx, support historical materialism with the scope and meaning of a philosophical intuition?

These are two different, and distinct, questions. Labriola resolves the two questions in the affirmative; and precisely because his answer is affirmative not only with regard to the second, but also with regard to the first question, it was possible for me in the preceding *Critique* to detect from his writings the characteristics of Marx's historical materialism, considered as a philosophy of history. Benedetto Croce and Georges Sorel, who have not always made the proper distinction between the two questions, answer resolutely no to the second question, and also lean towards a negative answer to the first. Chiappelli, studying as a historian and interpreter the thought of Marx, and researching the historical relations with Hegelianism, has answered affirmatively to the first question, but not to the second; and has fought in all his writings the doctrine of historical materialism.

It is no use now to repeat the reasons why in the thought of Marx and of the communists who followed and who really wanted to oppose the previous utopians, historical materialism, the spring of the new communist conception, must have been and must be understood as a real philosophy of history.

But allow us a brief digression, which we will try to make as brief as possible, on what Croce and Sorel have written on the subject.

According to the first, historical materialism, in order to be critically acceptable, must be taken as a simple canon of historical interpretation, which does not "import any anticipation of results", but only an aid to seeking them; and it is of empirical origin.

This canon "of very rich suggestion", must be supported, moreover, by the discernment of the historian; because it cannot always be applied, indeed sometimes it is completely useless. It is a warning, in short, to the historian, so that he wants to take care if by chance the facts that he intends to reconstruct in their actual succession of causes and effects, do not have their deepest roots in the so-called economic substratum of society. Now I fear that with this interpretation historical materialism is denied in its essential part. Croce observes that the historian in possession of this canon resembles the critic of Dante's text, who in the well-known canon of Witte (the difficult lesson to be preferred to the easy one) knows that he has a simple instrument "which can be useful in many cases, useless in others, and whose correct and profitable use always depends on his discernment". But in this way we come to affirm that the history of human facts does not always lead to that

economic life in which historical materialism makes the real basis of all human things consist. For if it always and in every case, if history as a whole depended, as Marx wants it to, on the factual relations in which the individual lives in society for the necessary satisfaction of his needs — which, as Feuerbach had taught, determine its essence — there could be no case in which the historian would not have to use this instrument.

In order to avoid such a radical consequence, which I do not know if Croce wants to reach, it is necessary to understand historical materialism not as a canon similar to that of Witte, useful in many cases and in many others not; but as a canon, an instrument to be applied, case by case, always, by those who want to write a realistic history of any social fact; that is to say, not as a special canon, and of relative value, but as a general canon and of absolute value. Otherwise the novelty of materialism vanishes, as it becomes confused with that realism begun in modern history by our Machiavelli.

Now a canon of absolute value cannot stand without a philosophy of history that justifies it and is its rational foundation. What does it mean, in fact, that every historical problem is to be solved by the equation of the fact to an economic, of more or less difficulty, because of more or less mediated finding; if not that all historical reality has a First on which everything else depends, a unique substance cause of the infinite ways, that in historical development are manifested? And what else is this affirmation if not the core of a philosophical intuition?

And here is the dilemma: either the canon is special and relative, and historical materialism is denied; or the canon is general and absolute, and historical materialism is precisely a philosophy of history. But Croce will not allow us to reduce history to economic reality for historical materialism, and he will reject the formula we have just mentioned, which smells of metaphysics and monism a mile away. He notes that very serious difficulties are opposed to the interpretation of the genuine thought of Marx and Engels. In the first place, the fact that these two authors did not expound their historical doctrine in a book, but instead had it "scattered through a series of writings, composed in the course of half a century, at long intervals, where only the most casual mention is made of it, and where it is sometimes merely understood or implied";¹ Therefore, "desired to reconcile all the forms with which Marx and Engels have endowed it, would stumble upon contradictory expressions, which would make it impossible for the careful and methodical interpreter to decide what, on the whole, historical materialism meant for them".² In the second place, the special *forma mentis* of Marx, — "with which Engels had something in common, partly owing to congeniality, partly owing to imitation or influence",³ — who abhorred questions of concepts, thus sometimes falling into vagueness and exaggeration; and, thirsting for the knowledge of things, inclined rather to a concrete logic. Hence the double risk of the critics: to make Marx say what he did not think in order to stay too faithfully or too freely to his expressions.

Where it seems to me that the exegetical difficulties are somewhat exaggerated, because of a certain idea or prejudice in which Labriola has insisted so much in his essays on historical materialism; and it appears in those expressions we have referred to: *knowledge of things, concrete logic*; and similar metaphorical phrases, to which a rigorous meaning is attributed that they cannot have. What does knowledge of things mean? Either this is a metaphorical phrase, to mean knowledge of definite concepts; and this would be a degree, a moment of science, not science proper; or it is taken to mean knowledge of general concepts which are realized in real life; and then we go from the concrete to the abstract, since we have never seen a general concept among sensible things. So it is with concrete logic. Logic begins, when from the particular, to which real individuals conform, one

¹Meredith, C., translator. *Historical Materialism and the Economics of Karl Marx*. by Benedetto Croce, The Macmillan Company, 1914, p. 78.

²ibid p. 78-79

³ibid p. 79

passes to the general; and the logical concept is its first degree. Go back from the logical concept to the psychological concept or to representation, and you will have passed over the boundaries of logic, to re-enter psychology. Logic then, by its nature, can only be abstract.

But perhaps by expressions of this kind we mean that Marx was an enemy of abstract speculation, that in his knowledge and reasoning he always wanted to move in the field of facts, with the continuous aid of history and experience; and that in this precisely lies the meaning of his opposition to Hegelianism.

Now, I would have some doubts about this definition of his *forma mentis*. On the contrary, it would seem to me that all the productions of his genius demonstrate a speculative tendency that would disgrace any obstinate metaphysician.

In the meantime, here is the field of historical research to which his activity was directed and in which he left the deepest trace of his studies: the history and analysis of economic facts in a capitalist society, with the intention of finding a logical law of their transformation. Now it is Croce himself who, in one of the most valuable paragraphs of the memoir to which we refer, trying to define the scientific problem of *Capital*, writes:

As regards *method*, *Das Kapital* is without doubt an *abstract* investigation; the capitalist society studied by Marx, is not this or that society, historically existing [...] It is an ideal and formal society, deduced from certain hypotheses, which could indeed never have occurred as actual facts in the course of history. It is true that these hypotheses correspond to a great extent to the historical conditions of the modern civilised world; but this, although it may establish the importance and interest of Marx's investigation because the latter helps us to an understanding of the workings of the social organisms which closely concern us, does not alter its nature. Nowhere in the world will Marx's categories be met with as living and real existences, simply because they are abstract categories, which, in order to live must lose some of their qualities and acquire others.⁴

All of Marx's writings are philosophical, rather than historical and descriptive. And a letter of his, printed by his daughter, Eleonora Marx Aveling, written from Berlin to her father on November 10, 1837, when Marx was 19 years old, and was a student of law at that university, shows us that he was inflamed with passionate love for a certain Genny, to whom he dedicated many poems (of which three large notebooks have been preserved, even though he had burned many of them!); he is then around to write long treatises of *Metaphysics of Law*; then to compose a whole new system of metaphysics, and a philosophical dialogue; until he is persuaded at the end of the inanity of all his arbitrary constructions, he fights with himself, and studying with renewed zeal and intense ardor philosophy, law, history he ends up, as he says, to pass from an idealism nourished by the ideas of Kant and Fichte to the search for the idea in the very bosom of reality; and to make of the gods which he had hitherto placed above the earth, the very center of the earth; thus befriending the philosophy of Hegel, and entering into a circle of Hegelians.

This is the story of his youthful mind, as Marx himself tells it to his father; a story that bodes well for the future enemy of ideas, or ideality, and of abstractions! His *forma mentis* in those early studies is already determined. He will be able to pass from transcendence to immanence, and then from Hegel to Feuerbach (another step, according to him, on the same path); his mind will always be that which in his first movements had turned to poetry and abstract idealism. He will no longer be able to deviate from the path on which his Semitic speculative tendency has led him. And there is proof of this, as I said, the character of the scientific problem that was formed in his mind, matured and had a solution throughout his life. Because of this tendency, he, having conceived his

⁴ibid p. 50

revolutionary critique of political economy, felt the need to come to terms, as he says in the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* "*with ehemaligen philosophischen Gewissen*"; take, in short, a position in philosophy! Because of this tendency he will never be able to resist the temptation to flirt with Hegelian terminology! Other than frowning on philosophy, on abstractions! And everyone can see what speculative finesse of observation there is in the fragments on Feuerbach.

Certainly, the perpetual refrain of these fragments is to replace the abstract with the concrete. But what is the abstract that Marx hunts down? It is the abstract also criticized by Hegel, the term of the abstract intellect; the abstract in a philosophical sense that contrasts with the vulgar meaning of the word. Commonly, concrete are the single individuals separately considered, each one by itself, as they represent the actual, sensible reality. And these individuals are the abstract of Marx and Hegel. Hegel's abstract intellect is the faculty of immediate knowledge, that is to say, which is attached to the details as such, making abstraction from their connection, in which they are concrete. Degree surpassed by philosophical reflection, or speculative thought, which by its nature, does not neglect the details, but raises them in the whole, where they have their connection. The nexus, the general, which for vulgar and scientific reflection is transcendent, in philosophical intuition becomes immanent; and from the abstract it passes to the concrete, transcendence importing nothing but abstractness. What, then, does Marx do by referring every moment from the abstract to the concrete? Nothing more than philosophizing in the Hegelian manner and denying, overcoming it, immediate, positive, empirical cognition — that, if I am not mistaken, to which Croce wanted to allude in the phrase knowledge of things. On the contrary, Marx himself, by substituting materialism for idealism, thought of passing from ideas to things, and of opposing, as we see in the fragments on Feuerbach, diametrically to Hegelianism. But we will see in the conclusion of this paper how much reason he had to think so, and what a critic he was of his own doctrine.

One should therefore be more cautious, to take Marx's as a realistic, positive mind, — in the most common meaning of these words; not so much to be dismayed when others search at the bottom of his conceptions for a system; nor so much, therefore, to distrust the signification of philosophical phrases that recur in him, so well versed in the terminology of a philosophy, on which his thought was nourished throughout his youth; nor to make him in the end distort what he wanted; and if he wanted to philosophize, — since his nature drew him to it, — not to pretend that his philosophy is pure dross and not substance of his thought.

Marx's thought was formed and mature, before the cry arose in Germany: *Keine Metaphysik mehr!*⁵ before the marvelous naturalistic intuition of Darwinism created in all of Europe that realism or exaggerated positivism, which was the negation of all philosophy, while it certainly promoted the progress of the study of observation, of the *knowledge of things* and of *concrete logic*! It is true, as Labriola points out to the improvised proponents of a Darwinist and Spencerian Marxism, that when the first volume of *Capital* was published (July 25, 1867), in addition to Darwin's *Origin of Species*, all the main works of Spencer had already been published, and it is also true that at that time the war against all metaphysics was the watchword for almost all of Europe; but since when have the minds of great thinkers taken their shape and direction in old age? We must remember that Marx was born in 1818; and that, time and time again, he is always a Hegelian, formed among Hegelians and always anxious to reattach his doctrines to those of Hegelianism, even if he wanted them to be contrary to them.

No other thinker in our century, outside of the Hegelian circle, has been so anxious to find himself with Hegel! And finally it must be noted that in these fragments on Feuerbach in which there is so much philosophy and metaphysics, one already finds, by the declaration of Engels himself (who certainly had much less sympathy than Marx for metaphysics and Hegelianism), "*der geniale*

⁵The German best translates to "No more metaphysics"

Keim der neuen Weltanschauung"⁶ that is, of all historical materialism, as a general doctrine.

But, Croce observes, the ultimate thought of Engels is that *the dialectic is the rhythm of the development of things, that is, the internal law of things in their development*. Now "this rhythm is not determined a priori, and by metaphysical deduction, but rather it is observed and grasped a posteriori; and only because of the repeated observations and verifications that have been made in the various fields of reality, can it be presupposed that all facts take place through negations and negations of negations. Wouldn't this then be a kind of law of evolution? And can the law be said to absolutely dominate things when it is a product of observation? Or is it not rather a provisional generalization, a law of tendency?"

It is to be wagered that Marx would give voice this time to his critic, as to another of those philosophers who represent themselves abstractly as subject and object, in that false opposition which we saw criticized above in the first of his fragments on Feuerbach. A law in the philosophy of praxis, when subject and object are conceived in their necessary relation, cannot be determined otherwise than as a law immanent in things. The knowledge we have of things may not be complete; but when we rise from the things we have known to a generalization, which is considered the law of those things, this generalization grasps the essential, the necessary of our knowledge to which things, at this moment of our knowing, conform. So that a law, if it is born in a mind conscious of the demands of logic, must inevitably be drawn as a principle that dominates reality; that if this mind, criticizing itself, realizes that its generalization was a provisional generalization, it means that it will realize that it has not yet achieved adequate knowledge of the thing; that its therefore is not a true law, but a provisional stage of its inductive research. And Marx, conscious as he was of the absolute equation between thought and reality, could only conceive of his dialectics metaphysically (whether he knew it or not), that is, as the internal law of things, the immanent in reality. The finding of the so-called laws of tendency is proper to the inductive logic, not to the one that only Marx knew and studied, the Hegelian logic, essentially metaphysical logic.

Now we can accept, if we wish, the rhythm of Marx's economic dialectics as a result of observation, a provisional generalization, a law of tendency; but this much is certain: that he, though he arrived at it by observation — the presupposition of all knowledge — did not understand it and could not understand it, because of the discipline inherent in his mind, except as an absolute law, a necessary rhythm of the intimate substance of reality. He determined it, certainly, a posteriori; and how could he otherwise, if this substance of which he claimed to discover the dialectic, was the economic fact, which has, like every other fact, its own history? But he conceived it instead a priori; and this is what matters. And in this mixture of a priori and a posteriori, as I have already believed I have shown, consists the radical vice of his historical conception.

He conceived it a priori; that is to say, he believed to discover in contingent reality the absolute reality, which by its own constitution has a real and rational rhythm of development, which revives with the dialectic of the Hegelian Idea.

You must think of the individual essence, Feuerbach had said, as the sum of the material needs of the individual. But this individual, Marx observes, is a social individual, not an isolated one; and his needs, therefore, as material needs, are economic needs. Now this individual, the material subject of the praxis which must satisfy these needs, has an object intimately connected with itself.

And this connection consists in the original praxis which, in producing the object, forms society and history, whereby it is overthrown, and takes place by negation of negation. This procedure of his ends up being an a posteriori, and yet it is a true a priori. Because there is no history without this praxis; and on the other hand this praxis cannot be rationally understood without that rhythm

⁶A very close German friend told me that this translates "to the great sprout/seed for the new world views' or something similar"

of development. The dialectic of history cannot therefore but be an a priori scheme in Marx's thought. And yet in the author's understanding it not only explains the past and the present; but it must also serve to explain the whole of history, as well as the whole of praxis; and therefore also the future; of which it is not given to mortal man to say anything scientific which is not precisely a priori.

And we come to an example. History is a class struggle, according to historical materialism. But "I should be inclined to say", writes Croce, "that history is a class war 1) when there are classes, 2) when they have antagonistic interests, (3) when they are aware of this antagonism, which would give us, in the main, the humourous equivalence that history is a class war only when it is a class war."⁷ Here, too, I am of the opinion that Marx would protest against such an interpretation of his doctrine: 1) because there is no history, according to him, without classes; 2) because the division into classes brings with it antagonistic interests; 3) because the consciousness of antagonism cannot be lacking where there is antagonism.

Indeed, what is the concept of class struggle in Marx? And the negation of the primitive identity; the non-being of being, in the Hegelian triad. The life of being is in non-being; thus the life of the individual is in society, negation of individuality; and the life of society (social individual, all social individuals) is in its negation: in the class struggle. The social man produces; and what does he produce? Capital. Here is the subject on the one hand, and the object on the other: the productive forces on the one hand and the products, the capital on the other; therefore, the juridical forms. The praxis is reversed; and the productive forces are modified and grow; and in growing they are in contradiction with the legal forms already fixed with respect to another praxis. But since in praxis lies the indefectible, the necessary reality, development cannot stop; and the class struggle is immediately determined by the conflict between the productive forces and the forms of production, or the law, whatever you want to call it. Hence the class struggle; which, therefore, is the historical aspect of a fundamental and constant fact of life: praxis.

Praxis imports subject and object; therefore, contradiction and conciliation that returns to an ever greater contradiction as a result of the unfolding of the subject. Which by its nature cannot live except in society, and therefore in history. Now the class struggle is bitter; now it is barely felt; now it will not be felt at all; according to the various moments of the dialectical rhythm. In the negation it is barely felt at first and is felt more and more, until it reaches the most serious conflict, when the negation of the negation becomes necessary; for which it begins to diminish until it is no longer felt, to begin again with the previous rhythm, as soon as the conciliation is accomplished. The untiring praxis is the perpetual spring of this descent and ascent of history through the parabola of its development; while social individuals are born and perish, society, the great subject of praxis in history, remains immortal.

The educating society, according to the example of Marx in the fragments on Feuerbach, educates itself; but the educating society and the educated society come into contradiction with each other; and thus the *laudatores temporis acti*;⁸ thus the disciples who are rebellious to the masters; the old who do not understand the young; these who turn their backs on them, in order to look to the future. Here is the perpetual contradiction of life. And finally, what happens? The young are always (in general, of course) right over the old; the disciples surpass the masters; and the educating society of the new generation is no longer the same. The practice has remained the same: education; but the new society educates in a different way; it has other principles of education which do not negate those of the previous society, or do not simply negate them; on the contrary, they negate

⁷ibid p. 85

⁸The Latin here means "celebrators of the past" or "celebrators of times past". This is in reference Horace's *Ars Poetica*, line 173. There it says "laudator temporis acti se puero" meaning "a praiser of times past when he was a boy"

them by surpassing them, by perfecting them. Society, as educator, is *concrecent*.

Apply the rhythm of the derived praxis of education to the fundamental praxis of economic life; and it will be understood that, just as the annoying or melancholic praisers of the good old days were never lacking before Horace, nor will they ever be lacking afterwards, so, more or less, the exploiters and the exploited and the consequent class struggle have never been lacking, nor will they ever be lacking — unless a profound revolution of social life takes place.

Therefore, history, i.e. the progressive development of praxis, cannot but produce the division of society into classes, and a correlative antagonism of interests. The exploited are the subject of praxis, the exploiters the object. The exploiters multiply the exploited by the overthrow of praxis. How can one renounce the duality of subject and object? The old abstract materialism, which in fact represented the point of view of bourgeois society, renounced it, or could have done so, because it conceived of the object as a separate entity, independent of the subject; already beautiful and formed, not produced degree by degree by a continuous praxis; so that the subject was reduced to pure passivity, to doing nothing, to being useless at all. This is precisely the concept that the bourgeois has of the proletarian. Everything is in capital, in money; money is money; nor is it understood that capital is the production of the proletarian; that is, that the object is praxis, the continuous work of the subject.

That is why I say that Marx, the opponent and severe critic of intuitionist materialism (*anschauende Materialismus*) or objectivist materialism, would have protested against Croce's interpretation or limitation of his concept of the class struggle, reduced to a simple accidental fact. This interpretation, in fact, can only be founded in the denial or false intelligence of its immanent praxis, the necessary generator of society, history and its eternal contradictions.

Except that, Croce finally objects, if these classes with antagonistic interests are not aware of this antagonism, the struggle cannot possibly break out, and the classes with their opposing interests are not in struggle. But whoever accepts one of the first propositions of historical materialism: "it is not man's consciousness that determines his being, but it is his social being that determines his consciousness", cannot see in this objection any difficulty. Because, in truth, if this is so, there cannot but be a perfect adjustment between a social class and its conscience: each having its economic needs, to satisfy which it develops that praxis which is doing and knowing together. The way in which each class provides for its own needs is determined in practice, and by so determining itself is determined in thought. So that in the very fact of the division of society into classes of opposing interests lies the reason for the consciousness in which each of them must enter of its own purpose, or, let us say, of its own interests.

Intimately connected with these observations is another subject treated by Croce with his usual acumen in a paragraph entitled: *Scientific knowledge in the face of social programs*, the conclusion of which would be purely skeptical: "In face of the future of society, in face of the path to be pursued, we have occasion to say with Faust — Who can say I believe? Who can say I do not believe?"⁹ This may be an anguish of men of thought, but the great historical personalities have always distinguished themselves for their great daring, not for an anticipated and scientifically certain vision of the results. In short, it is not possible to deduce a practical program from propositions of pure science; nor therefore from historical materialism.

This could coincide with the reported statement of Marx, that not the consciousness of man determines his social being, but this one; since the perfect consciousness of the modern proletariat is determined precisely in science (in historical materialism). But the consequence which Croce deduces from this contradicts the materialistic intuition of Marx. The program is not imposed by doctrine; scientific conviction is not enough: it takes historical daring. Thus the first would no

⁹ibid p. 105

longer be the sense, but the intellect, if a strictly scientific proposition were the first operating cause of a practical historical movement. And this would evidently be the most flagrant contradiction into which historical materialism could fall. How? This doctrine, which presumes to explain by the sensible fact (praxis) of the satisfaction of needs, and therefore by the real economic relations which the individual enters into by living socially, all of history, even in its highest and noblest ideologies, must not also explain to us by the same principle this fact in general of our time, which is the theoretical and ethical consciousness of socialism, and singularly the special political movements in which this consciousness develops? Science will be a reflection, an effect, not the cause of practice. Substantial reality lies in praxis, to which then corresponds in the minds of men a special form of consciousness and science; which can, at most, operate on reality by a process of reversed praxis. But the first principle will always be in life, in economic reality.

Now is Croce's skepticism perhaps reconcilable with such an intuition? Absolutely considered, skepticism cannot be grafted onto a metaphysical system; on the contrary, it always presupposes a critique of metaphysical systems. And it has already been demonstrated that Marx's intuition is of a metaphysical nature, as it points to the immanent reality of the various phenomena that history presents to us in its course. In this particular case, then, it is clear that Marx would certainly not have uttered the anxious words of Faust. Belief and non-belief presuppose that absolute opposition between subject and object, which is rightly criticized and rejected by the Trier thinker. When, on the other hand, the object is the work of the subject, doing coincides with knowing; and therefore it can no longer be a question of belief. And if this subject by dialectical necessity of his praxis, — in which lies his real life, — *must* produce a given object, and is already in on producing it, skepticism is impossible.

According to Marx, the present society has within itself a contradiction, which is the necessary and sufficient reason for the reconciliation of the communistic set-up. Can one remain in this contradiction? No, because the development of praxis is dialectical; nor can praxis stop, because it is the true and only substance of historical reality: the substance that is not and never will be to lack. Nor can there be a shadow of doubt about the course and fact of this praxis, because *we* are its subject: we ourselves who make history. Science cannot be separated from fact; and now it is not we, opposed to the things *that are done*, who speak, but it is, so to speak, the things themselves in their making.

We agree with Croce in believing that the abuse of this name of *Science* is enormous. But we must agree that, if there is an unconscious reality, a dialectical practice, of which only a reflection reaches consciousness, it is never possible that a reflection of consciousness — opinion and science — is not the exact correspondent and the translation into intellectual or ideological language of what in fact, in society, is by the very force of things *in fieri*. This seems to me irrefutable, admitted as principle. Nor, if the principle is admitted to be scientifically exact, can the title and degree of science be refused to this socialism which, by virtue of this apodictic affirmation of the future, presumes to oppose all previous communist intuitions, which it defines as utopian.

Not one of Croce's observations therefore seems to me to invalidate my historical interpretation of historical materialism as a philosophy of history.

More briefly, I will be able to deal with a recent writing by Sorel, who, accepting the ideas already discussed by Croce, wanted to research on his own behalf "whether or not the concept of a necessary evolution and a fatal future results from what Marx wrote".

For Sorel, too, Charles Marx was a "man of action", moved, especially at the beginning, by *revolutionary* instinct more than by *intelligence*; one of those men who feel "always great repugnance to analyze their own ideas" and are unable to "clearly establish the distinction between the hypotheses capable of convincing with (sic) what is capable of demonstrating".

But, according to Sorel, Marx is mind far from being disciplined with philosophical rigor. "More

than once he had to let himself go to chimerical hopes"; and this is often the case when Marx affirms in a scientific form some social transformation, as if this should follow a necessary law. Sorel agrees with Vandervelde, who in a conference held in Paris for the fiftieth anniversary of the Manifesto, said that the three great laws proclaimed by Marx in 1847 had been disproved by experience: the law of bronze wages, the law of capitalist concentration and the law of correlation between political power and economic power. Indeed, he is of the opinion that these statements did not have an absolute value even for Marx, when the words are understood *cum grano salis*.¹⁰ The same can be said of the other law for which in '50 Marx announced that a new economic and general crisis would trigger a new revolution.

But in the meantime, even Sorel thinks that "Marxists are victims of dialectical illusion and have reasoned like idealists without realizing it". Whereas one should instead reflect on the profound difference that distinguishes the abstract method of the physicist from that of the sociologist. The laws reached by the physicist are objective, independent of our will, of absolute value. The general principles, the dominant characters which are fixed by the sociologist, are instead schemes, reductions of purely subjective value and of simply regulative purpose; because they are useful to the sociologist in his further research, in his applications to particular questions. Woe betide, however, to take these abstractions and reductions of sociology for "necessary laws of the historical order." Therefore, from time to time it would be necessary to define the purpose for which we make these abstractions and resort to schemes, which are no more and no less than "imaginary correlations" of *sociological reality* "inaccessible to understanding".

These schemes have a purely symbolic value, and are to be understood with a great deal of discretion; formulas of common sense, "indispensable, because science is too abstract to be able to guide action." Such are also the Marxist laws, fixed in a rigorous and systematic way for a pedagogical purpose, to aid the psychological automatism of memory, which always needs these *umbræ idearum*, — as Giordano Bruno said, who knew about it, — these formulas deprived of a true scientific value, but very appropriate for the practical use, to which they are addressed.

It has often been observed that unintelligible dogmas easily provoke heroic acts. It is useless to discuss with people accustomed to lead everything back to great principles, which do not evoke any real image [. . .] It would be puerile to condemn processes that have their root in the laws of our mind; but criticism should never confuse the processes of common sense with those of science.

These considerations must be kept in mind to understand in a genuine way the thought of Marx, whose statements are always subjective reductions, made for pedagogical or propaganda purposes, therefore of relative value and approximate accuracy. Marx's schemes cannot be expected to express "the action of an unknown law that governs the course of history"; where they are "summary descriptions, made with processes of common sense, in view of certain practical conclusions, without any claim to scientific rigidity".

And Sorel then examines some particular points and some formulas of Marxism, in order to prove that we cannot deal, in any case, with necessary determination in the process of historical events.

There is no point in discussing every single interpretation that Sorel, from his own point of view, proposes of the passages he quotes and of the concepts he recalls of Marx. The error of his own point of view is demonstrated by all that has been said above about the speculative tendencies of Marx's mind and his whole philosophy. He, for example, does not want to recognize, with Prof. Carlo Andler, in that incisive phrase of the *Misère de la philosophie* — "the mill moved to arms will give

¹⁰Latin meaning "grain of salt" or "pinch of salt"

you the society to feudal regime, the mill to vapor will give you instead the industrial capitalism" — a proof of Marx's historical determinism. This is, he says, an approximate observation. It is evident from the context, that Marx had the simple purpose of showing, thus, wholesale, how to a great transformation of the productive forces corresponds a great transformation in the whole society. Instead, "one wanted to find in this simple statement the expression of profound principles, one detached the sentence from the context and wanted to consider it separately as the abstract statement of a great historical law; one said that, in Marx's opinion, the productive forces determine social relations by virtue of a law still unknown, but which science will find later".

The exegetical prudence of Sorel is worthy of the highest praise; but applied as it is to Marx, it only shows that Sorel has remained outside the philosophical spirit of the master. How? Did not Marx write, that "the mode of production of material life determines first and foremost the social, political and intellectual process of life," in that famous place in the preface to the Critique of Political Economy, which is quoted by all? And is not this the animating spirit and the intimate essence of the vaunted materialistic conception of history? And is not this general statement exemplified by Marx in the words now quoted from his *Misère*? Where immediately before he had said: "Social relations are intimately linked with the productive forces. By acquiring new productive forces, men change their mode of production, and, by changing their mode of production, their mode of earning their living, they change all their social relations."

But "he would have chosen the example very badly", observes Sorel; "the mill moved by arms exists in countries governed by the most diverse systems, and it is very far from being true that it is characteristic of the feudal regime or of any other determined form of civilization". This observation only proves how difficult it is to move from empirical observations to philosophical considerations on history. What does it matter, for respect to the philosophy of history, that in the nineteenth century, back in time, Thomism flourishes again? Not that Scholasticism is a philosophy of modern times, after Bacon and Descartes; but only that there are people who do not understand their own time, deny history, and live in the Middle Ages, even in the tenth century. History cannot be said to be at a standstill for this reason; only there are people who leave the main road, turn back and return to start again on that stretch of road which they did not realize they had taken. In the midst of the capitalist society of the bourgeois century, there is not only the feudal regime, but also the regime — more or less vague — of slavery. What does this mean? That in some countries, by some men, the great path of history has not been kept up. It is said (and who can deny it?) that the French Revolution changed the face of the civilized world. But is it any wonder that in certain regions and in the heads of certain people, after more than a hundred years, none of the great ideas that the Eighty-Nine proclaimed and wished to realize have penetrated the consciousness of modern peoples? The philosophy of history can only look at the progress of what Hegel called the Spirit of the world, — now put into satire, perhaps without being understood, — of what Marx would have said the *practical* matter of the world. What does it matter to him that, e.g., in a large part of Sicily a kind of feudal economic regime is still in force? This does not detract from the fact that in the history of Europe, in which the direct consequences of the French Revolution are evident, the present is the bourgeois and capitalist era.

Nor does it seem to me that Andler was wrong to see in that sentence from the *Misère de la philosophie* proof of Marx's historical determinism. One must, on the other hand, understand this necessity, according to Sorel's expression, or *fatalism* of history in Marxism. Usually one conceives of necessity (fatality) as a hypostasis. Usually one conceives of necessity (fatality) as a hypostasis with respect to the succession of phenomena; a superior and external law that regulates the course of things *ab extra*. This is certainly not the thinking of Marx, who, as we have seen, had already passed from transcendence to immanence at the age of 19; nor did he go back, indeed he passed from Hegel to Feuerbach precisely in order to replace the abstract with the concrete (according to

his way of seeing). Now the necessity of things themselves, the immanent necessity in history, is no longer fatalism, just as it is not really determinism anymore either. Fatalism supposes fate to be superior to men; whereas it is men themselves (not abstract men, but concrete, social men) who make history; nor is there any other energy besides the praxis that is their doing. Society, yes, presses on their doing and gives it a direction; but society itself is a product of their doing.

The question of fatalism in Marx's historical conception had been acutely treated by Stammler in his well-known book, *Economy and Law according to the Materialistic Conception of History*, which Sorel should have known. As early as 1896 this author noted that historical materialism, — which he regarded as a philosophy of history, — is not point a fatalist system. "The Homeric belief," he wrote;

whereby the goal of life is predetermined for each man, in a fixed and absolute way, without it being possible to lift the veil that covers the inevitable course of events, because it corresponds to the infancy of the intellect, is found at this time among people of the most diverse times and under the most varied circumstances, as well as among Mohammedans devoted to Allah as among men of lower culture in the western countries of Europe. But it has nothing to do with the philosophy of materialism. This philosophy starts from the common principle of causality; it accepts the proposition *non datur fatum*, and is based on the principle that there is no blind natural necessity, but rather conditioned and therefore *intelligible* necessity [...] It wants to grasp the regular necessity of economic phenomena according to the law of causality and in that to found the universal law of social life [...] Moreover, the materialistic conception of history does not want to be fatalistic in the sense that it wants to accept the law scientifically discovered in the unfolding of economic phenomena as an ineluctable destiny for every single human society, and that it is necessary to undergo without ever breaking down, and against which above all one is not able to give oneself the slightest help.

On the contrary

the materialistic conception of history generally admits that man is able to make the scientifically discovered natural laws useful *to his own ends*. And it appeals to the vulgar experience of everyday life; and this possibility of using law *for one's own ends* is held to be so decided that Engels even speaks of a scientifically recognized direction of economic phenomena as a means to a socialistic ordering of society: 'It is the leap of mankind from the realm of necessity into that of freedom'; a phrase of excellent external sound, as well as of clear positive content.

Therefore, no fatalism, but the necessary connection of cause and effect, or rather logical necessity, rational, since the cause to which one thinks is rather the final cause, for that teleologism, which, we observed, is immanent in Marx's dialectics.

Determinism, too, would presuppose an opposition between subject and reality, which Marx does not admit. The principle of all doing, of all history is in man, as matter (the body has to satisfy its physical needs to live); as for Hegel it was in man as thought, in the Idea. Necessity, therefore, in Marx is reconciled, as in Hegel, with freedom, since it comes from the spontaneous development of the original activity, *according to its own nature*. So I would always speak of a necessary dialectic, not of a fatalism of history, according to Marx's conception.

After all, with a Marxist who writes: "If science is to accept what is scientific in Marx's work, it is *necessary to remove from it the contradictions*, the false interpretations: it is also *necessary to complete and improve it*"; we who are here trying to understand and define the genuine thought of

Marx, have little to discuss. It is useful, however, to point out where this Marxist does not fully grasp the meaning of the doctrine, which he wants to complete and improve; because then it is a matter of interpretation and not of criticism. And in general it may be opportune to observe, for the socialists who toil around the exposition and critical elaboration of Marxism, that Marx's thought is essentially philosophical, and that in order to understand it exactly it is necessary to refer carefully to that Hegelism which they mock in order to ape the master, often without knowing anything but the caricatures made by him.

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Chapter 12

Theoretical Marxism and Practical Marxism

Here the question arises: what is, according to Marxism, the position of socialism as political practice in the face of socialism as philosophical conception?

Many socialists, especially in France and Italy, believe themselves obliged to take a stand towards historical materialism, because they belong to the socialist party; induced, perhaps, in this opinion by the fact that Marx was the coryphaeus of the party, and the author together of that doctrine.

But Marx was not a revolutionary, who had recourse to philosophy, only to justify philosophically his own revolutionary theories; but he was also a real philosopher, who by particular studies and by the conditions of the times became a revolutionary. He had been a philosopher before he had been a revolutionary; whereas all ordinary militant socialists are revolutionaries long before they are philosophers, when they take care, when they can, to attain and appropriate this other quality of the master, which is much more difficult to acquire than the first. Now a philosophical doctrine cannot be criticized except philosophically; empirical observations do not touch it.

As to the above duty, we must still briefly return to the concept of praxis as it forms society and history. Historical materialism stands to this praxis as a reflex criticism; as effective as botany which explains how from the flower comes the fruit, it can affect the development of this fruit from the flower. Men make a history, which leads to communism; having reached a certain point, they realize the path that this history is following and the goal towards which, on this path, it is directed. But, whether they realized it or not, this was perfectly useless for the course of this history in itself determined materialistically. That is to say: since the principle of making is not the spirit but matter, which has in itself the law of its development, the progressive implementation of this development is absolutely independent of the determinations of the spirit, even if it is determined by the materialistic conception of history.

But if this is so for one respect, for another, since doing is at the same time knowing, it was necessary that at a certain point of historical praxis correspond the materialistic conception of history; which in fact is, or wants to be, the doctrine of a historical fact that is maturing in the bosom of this capitalist society, in the midst of which it has germinated. And so it is evident that this doctrine, once formulated, which is also a product of praxis, reacts on the subject of praxis, on society, which develops through the process described above of praxis being overturned. Here is therefore the necessity to study and understand exactly historical materialism on the part of socialists, who represent the most energetic and operative part — the most *radical* part — of society, which must move towards communism, in order to solve the contradictions that torment it. Otherwise, the perfect reversal of praxis will not take place, for which it is only possible for its subject

to reach a higher degree of development. Society will inevitably change, because contradiction does not allow it to remain in its present state. Meanwhile, we have seen that the class struggle, the spring of change, presupposes the consciousness of the antagonism of interests, and we can also say, the consciousness of historical materialism. And since the class struggle is as necessary as the change in society, the consciousness of historical materialism, that is, the penetration of this doctrine into the active part of society, is inevitable. This doctrine may be misunderstood by one socialist or another; but since it has been formulated, it is impossible that it should not end up dominating minds, enlightening them and holding them up in the great struggle. The sun has appeared on the horizon; and only the barn owls can go and hide in the darkness of the attics: for the others, for everyone, it is light. And historical materialism, by spreading among the proletarians its most vital and elementary principles, — such as, for example, that of the class struggle, — also necessarily contributes to the fatal course of history.

Here is the meaning of Marx's phrase, that the proletarian is the ultimate heir of classical German philosophy. It is always about the overthrow of praxis on the subject; and we know that the new social revolution should be accomplished by the proletariat, which is therefore the subject of praxis.

But, note well, it is only these elementary principles that can react on the proletariat and therefore on history, not the doctrine as such. That reversal of praxis amounts to the negation of negation. That is to say, the object does not return as an object to the subject, but by taking a new form, that is, by becoming subjective; by adapting itself, to put it more plainly, to the minds of the proletariat. So that socialism as propaganda is a mediation between the object and the subject (whence the negation of the negation); it is a quid medium between Marx and the proletariat; in short, it is the disseminator of Marx's thought among the proletariat, adapted to the minds of the proletariat. And yet it is legitimate that socialists, who speak of historical materialism, do not understand it all as Marx understood it; as long as they understand or accept that part of it which they must make penetrate the consciousness of the proletariat, and in it make it powerfully suggestive and operative.

Such is the position of practical socialism towards historical materialism, understood according to the very principles of this.

In the meantime, an objection could be drawn from what has been said above. If praxis is reversed, and ideas operate over history, this materialistic explanation of history itself is not very rigorous. But I have already made this objection on another occasion, when I wrote:

It can be observed that this rigorousness is taken away from the materialistic conception by the conscious agitations of propaganda which seek to hasten the advent of the communist order, and by the moral ideals which true socialist ideas must conform to; ideals which are basically the cause and motive of all propaganda.

And already, if I am not mistaken, I think I have shown that Marx and Engels could have replied: — Precisely because of the rigorous law that we have found in the overall progress of history, we have enthusiasm of faith, high moral ideals, and we feel strong impulses to work, to prepare or hasten the solution of the social antitheses; and all our moral being, all the ideologies in which we participate, are a result of the present economic conditions of society. — All this receives new and greater light from what has now been observed about the process of praxis. Ideas operate on history; but ideas are themselves a product of the material (economic) reality of history; they are its negation, which must itself be negated and overcome; and the authors of propaganda are but the necessary instruments of such a negation; not unconscious, because the negation of praxis is still praxis; and praxis always means doing and knowing.

And I would like to add that of the two Marxists, Labriola and Sorel, one, in my opinion, an exact expositor of Marx's thought, the other inexact for being a less philosophical mind than his author, but more practical, I believe, and more open to the individual and determined needs of socialist propaganda, neither is more Marxist than the other, and neither is in error, from Marx's point of view. For why does Sorel feel that he must improve and complete, as he says, the doctrine of Marx? Because of practical needs, to which there is no doubt that Marx intended to direct all his work. Now it is certain that a philosophical thought, however true, does not represent the content of life and reality, if not in its own form, which is the speculative form of dialectical schemes and categories. Sorel, on the other hand, remaining below philosophy, in the midst of real life, feels, like Croce, that this real life escapes in every way from the net with large meshes in which speculative research has wanted to expel it; and it is therefore natural that he also feels the need to *improve*, modify the theory, in order to derive from it a group of directive ideas truly useful to life; that is to say, to return from the philosophical form to the popular form of the content which Marx took to study, to detach himself from philosophy in order to return to life, to break the chain, in order to make some link serve real needs, in everyday politics and in truly effective propaganda. This modification of the doctrine is not against Marx's thought; for if praxis is to overthrow itself, the doctrine must descend to the proletariat, and lose by the way (by the way that writers like Sorel make it go) all its form and philosophical rigor.

But since the negation of the negation is as real as the negation itself in the life of praxis, indeed the reality of the former depends on the reality of the latter, it is clear that Labriola himself is right, with regard to Marx, in always sticking to the philosophical form of historical materialism, striving to expound Marx's thought with historical fidelity. On the contrary, since this form did not have clarity and lucidity in the work of Marx, who, solicitous also of action, did not have the patience or the time necessary to elaborate the theory completely, it is good and beneficial to the reversal of praxis, that is, to historical materialism as it must then conform in the minds of socialists, that Labriola waits to complete this philosophical form, to finish that essential part of Marx's work, which he could not finish. If the inheritance of the proletariat is a philosophy — which will descend to it by denying itself — let this philosophy mature, so that your proletariat will not find itself with a handful of flies in its hand, instead of with the patrimony which is being extolled!

Chapter 13

Recent Interpretation of The Philosophy of Praxis

And now let us see how, in his last book, Labriola hints at the development of this philosophy.

It seems that he finds the safest and clearest statements in the *Antidühring* of Engels, of which he even translates in the appendix the chapter on the *negation of negation*, in order to explain "in which consists that dialectic which is so often invoked to clarify the intrinsic nature of historical materialism", and by which he intends only to "formulate a rhythm of thought, which reproduces the rhythm of reality that becomes". He frankly recognizes that Engels, in writing this book, "showed excessive disregard for contemporary philosophy, that is, for the *neo-criticism* of his fellow countrymen"; but he judges, however, that "in socialist literature this remains the unsurpassed book"; a book that can serve as a sort of *medicina mentis* for young people who are approaching socialism.

Now it seems to me that in the general outline of this philosophy of Marx's, he looks more to Engels, and especially to the book now cited, than to the more genuine sources of Marx's thought. Nor do I believe, on the other hand, that Engels ever deeply penetrated the philosophical part of the theories of his companion and master.

Thinking, says Labriola, is a continuous effort. The empirical matter must offer the means and the external and objective incentives to our thought; but then the mental construction is needed, which from the elementary psychic states rises to the form of the concept and judgment. Thought itself is therefore a work. "There is no doubt that the work done, that is, the thought produced, facilitates new efforts directed to the production of new thought"; and we have already noted this above. But the Ego, the subject of this knowledge, is not real if not in a given *society*, therefore having as its own material and incentive to its construction "the means of social coexistence, which are, on the one hand the conditions and the instruments, and on the other hand the products of collaboration variously specified". The Ego, therefore, is real as part of a "We", of a society, as the term of social relations, which make it gradually grow and become more and more concrete.

This philosophy of praxis (which is *the marrow of historical materialism*) "is", says Labriola, in his drastic language, "philosophy immanent to the things it philosophizes about." Hence "the secret of an assertion of Marx's, which has been for many a puzzle, that he had, that is, reversed Hegel's dialectics: which means, that the rhythmic movement of a thought in itself is replaced by the movement of things, from which the thought is ultimately produced."

Now, I ask, first of all, what does a philosophy immanent to the things *on which* it philosophizes mean? Philosophy, if it philosophizes *about* things, cannot actually be *in* things or of things. And to say it is immanent, precisely, to things cannot be said except by metaphor. And so, in the area

of metaphor, it does not seem to me that any other philosophy can dispute the same right to say it is immanent in things; at least, no philosophy has ever renounced this claim. And since when one tries to define the special characteristics of historical materialism there is always a tacit and explicit comparison of it to Hegelianism, what philosophy has ever aimed more than this at grasping the intimate essence of reality? The idea, which through nature reaches the spirit and finds its highest form in philosophy, is it not the most substantial reality, indeed the only reality, being therefore nature, things and philosophy together in an inseparable identity? And did not Hegel therefore say in his *Philosophy of Right* that what is rational is real, and what is real is rational?¹ What more intimate interpenetration can be made between things, or reality, and philosophy, than that proclaimed in this proposition, which expresses one of the fundamental principles of Hegelianism? If things are rational, it is clear that a philosophy is immanent in them; that is, that the foundations of their philosophy are in them. And it is strange indeed that this puzzle, even by Labriola, should be understood in the way in which Engels understood or misunderstood it with that very inaccurate knowledge of Hegelian philosophy which I pointed out in his *Antidüehring*. I already noted how the Hegelian idea immanent in things was mistaken by Engels for the Platonic idea of its transcendent nature.

And here we hear Labriola speak of a dialectic of Hegel that would be almost "the rhythmic movement of a thought in its own right". But I find that Hegel defined the essential reality, to which the dialectical rhythm belonged, as "the immediate unity of essence and existence, or of the interior and the exterior"; and that he wrote as a comment on this definition:

One is in the habit of opposing in a crude manner, one to the other, reality to the idea, or to thought; and yet one often hears it said that there are certain ideas against the exactness and truth of which one can object nothing; only that they are ideas which one does not meet with point in reality, or which one cannot realize point. Those who speak in this way show that they have not adequately understood either the nature of thought or that of reality. On the one hand, they understand thought as if it were synonymous with representation, plan, subjective design, and, on the other hand, reality as if it were synonymous with external and perceptible existence. In ordinary life, where one does not look so closely at categories and their designation, it may well be that this takes place. It may be, for example, that the plan, or as we say the idea of a financial plan, is in itself perfectly good and useful, but in the meantime it is not encountered in reality, as we say, and that in given circumstances it is not realizable. But when the abstract intellect takes these determinations or pushes their difference to the point of establishing an insurmountable opposition between them, and to claim that in this real world it is necessary to erase the ideas of the brain, such a doctrine must be rejected in the most resolute way, in the name of science and sound reason. For, on the one hand, ideas are not exclusively planted in our brains, and the idea in general is not something impotent and such that its realization may or may not be accomplished at our convenience; on the contrary, it is the absolutely active and real principle. And, on the other hand, reality is not as bad and irrational as the superficial practical man who has fooled himself with thought imagines. The essential reality, unlike the simple phenomenon, is so little extraneous to reason, that indeed it is what is most rational about it; so that what is not rational must for that very reason be considered devoid of reality. And this is proved, moreover, by language itself.

¹Also see §6 of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia*. Hegel when he talks about what is actual he is talking about the "reconciliation of the self-conscious reason with the reason which is in the world". Actuality is the synthesis of our subjective experience and the reality in the absolute.

Thus, for example, we refuse to recognize a true poet or a true statesman in a poet, or in a statesman who does not know how to produce anything solid and rational.

Pardon the long quote. Perhaps it will help to show that Marx, a good connoisseur of Hegelianism, could not attribute to Hegel a concept of reality, and of its dialectical rhythm, as Engels and Labriola would like. Marx could not ignore the fact that Hegel's rational process was immanent in reality, natural or historical; and the reversal of the dialectic, of which he speaks, must be understood otherwise.

Nor should it be said that the reality that Hegel deals with is the essential reality, whereas the reality of which Marx discovers the immanent philosophy is phenomenal. Let us not charge such a huge blunder to a speculative mind like that of the great revolutionary. He was not so naive as to believe that he could discover or construct an immanent — and therefore essential — philosophy of phenomena as such, just as today we believe we can construct a philosophy of nature by *describing* the phases of its probable evolution. Marx too — it would be good if all communists understood this — was referring to an essential reality, to a reality which is beyond the phenomena; and the things, whose dialectics he said he had found, were not all the things, necessary or accidental, whose infinite phenomenal array history shows us before us; but they were the things in their intimate and, let it be said, metaphysical substance, determined materialistically in economic life. Of course, a great deal of phenomenal reality escapes from the wide net of this metaphysical reality; but that which escapes is not rational, and therefore not true reality, Hegel would have said; it is not economic, and therefore not real reality, Marx would have observed. Therefore he could say that history is essentially materialistic; and what in history is not material, say *ideology* and not *fact*. The reversal that Marx had in mind could be nothing other than the reversal that Feuerbach had made of Hegel's reality; reality, from motionless as it was in Feuerbach, became active, practical in Marx.

We have seen that for Feuerbach and for Marx, the principle of reality is not the idea, as it was for Hegel, but the sensible object. But Feuerbach did not apply to this sensible object the dialectic which had been applied to the Hegelian idea; Marx applied it instead. Whose dialectic therefore stands in relation to that of Hegel in the relationship Feuerbach has with Hegel. Therefore, not abstract thought but concrete things, but Marx substitutes an idealistic metaphysics with a materialistic metaphysics, which must, however, appropriate all the goodness of the latter, the concept of praxis, of the continuous making of reality.

This, however, does not mean that we cannot say with Labriola that this historical materialism;

is the end of naturalistic materialism, in the traditional sense of the word until a few years ago. The intellectual revolution, which has led to consider the processes of human history as absolutely objective, is contemporary with and corresponds to that other intellectual revolution which has succeeded in historicizing physical nature. This is no longer, for any thinking man, a fact, which was never *in fieri*, a *happening* that has never become, an eternal being that does not proceed, and much less the creation of a single time, which is not the *creation* of continuously in action.

This new philosophy, according to Labriola, also arrives, in the end, at the conclusion of contemporary agnosticism, — as much as "the socialists would have every reason to believe, that that symptomatic fact (*agnosticism*) is one of the clues of the decadence of the bourgeoisie that it is not given to us to know the thing in itself, the neo-materialists", in their realistic intuition, without asking for help from the imagination, state with certainty "that we cannot think if not on what we can experience ourselves." — This would mean, if I am not mistaken, that the unknowable is a phantom of the imagination, a true *caput mortuum*, as Hegel said of Kant's *thing in itself*;

that where there is reality, there it is knowable; that in short, unknowability is always relative to individuals, but there is no absolute unknowability. That was also Hegel's conclusion. But I don't know if Labriola would be willing to accept Hegel's conclusion; since he writes that agnostics "by another way, that is in their own way, [...] come to the same result we come to". Certainly he would not be a faithful interpreter of Marx's thought, if in the quoted sentence he had intended to use the word experiment in the sense of the empiricists; which Marx, I repeat, was and wanted to be metaphysical.

Nor is it worth recalling Marx's fragment 11 on Feuerbach. "Philosophers have only variously interpreted the world; but it is a question of changing it." — "Pour Marx," writes the Andler;

il est vain de se demander si la pensée nous instruit de ce que sont les choses en elles-mêmes. Si nous pouvons démontrer la vérité de notre pensée *en faisant naître* les phénomènes que nous avons pensés, l'inconnaissable, qui on dit cache derrière eux, n'importe plus. Il ne s'agit pas d'interpréter la nature, mais de la changer.²

This is evidently the very thought of Labriola, which he wanted to justify with the concept of praxis. Except that in this justification two questions are confused, which one does not have the right to believe were confused by Marx: the question of the certainty of our knowing, — a question, as we saw, hinted at by Marx in the 2nd fragment, and resolved in the way hinted at here by Andler, — and the question of the limits of cognition; which are two very different questions. We make things; therefore we know them; because to make is to know and vice versa. But *faisons naître les phénomènes or les choses en elles-mêmes?* This distinction between phenomena and things in themselves presupposes precisely that agnosticism, as the solution of the problem of the limits of knowledge, which remains to be proven to have been or should have been Marx's solution. The distinction is foreign to the thought of the Hegelian Marx, who opposes Hegel only to replace the idea, as a principle, with matter, not to change the properties and energy of the principle; indeed, he reproaches Feuerbach and all past materialists for having neglected it. At the meeting, praxis imports an ultra-phenomenal, metaphysical reality, which necessarily transcends those limits of cognition presupposed by Labriola and Andler.

Nor in truth should Labriola come to any other conclusion, who recognizes in historical materialism, if I understand well the long circumlocutions and the cautious if not always precise distinctions, a true and proper *metaphysics*. This metaphysics, at any rate, he insistently contrasts with the *sensu deteriori* metaphysics, against which Engels also polemicized in the *Antidühring*; and which would be marked by these two characters;

in the first place by fixing, as standing alone and entirely independent of each other, those terms of thought, which in truth are terms only in so far as they represent the points of correlation and transition of a process; and, in the second place, by considering those very terms of thought as a presupposition, an anticipation, or indeed a type or prototype of the poor and semblance of empirical reality

A kind of mythological formation, concludes Labriola; fixation and hypostasis of what is a simple moment of the real continuous becoming.

²Forgive the google translation

it is futile to ask whether thought teaches us what things are in themselves. If we can demonstrate the truth of our thought *by giving birth* the phenomena that we have thought, the unknowable, which we say hides behind them, it does not matter anymore. It is not a question of interpreting nature, but of changing it.

But why look for this criticism in Engels, if it is already found in Hegel, or rather, much earlier, in Heraclitus, as Engels himself notes? For it is based on the doctrine of the continuous becoming of the real; whereby every moment is both positive and negative. And Engels, in truth, does no more than repeat, in the footsteps of Marx, the thought of Hegel; from whom, as we noted, Marx borrowed the critique of the abstract intellect proper to vulgar cognition and the particular sciences; an intellect that does not grasp things in their intrinsic nexus, but things in their immediate particularity, difference and opposition. "In order to know particulars," writes Engels, "we must isolate them from their natural and historical whole, and study each one for itself, in its own nature, in its causes and special effects, etc. And this is primarily the office of natural science and historical research." Here is his own definition of the abstract intellect, of the *trennenden Verstand*, to which Hegel contrasts the *denkende Geist*, or speculative thought. "And when," Engels himself notes, "this way of seeing things (*Anschauungsweise*) by the work of Bacon and Locke from the natural sciences passed into philosophy, it produced the limitedness of thought proper to the last centuries, metaphysical thought." In short, the metaphysics fought by Engels is the metaphysics fought by Hegel too, the metaphysics of the empiricists; that is, of those who want the method of historical and natural sciences to be carried into philosophy. Metaphysics, therefore, also of modern positivists. And the metaphysics denied by dialectics; that is, the pre-Hegelian metaphysics. It is therefore understood that philosophy, which must remain, is also a metaphysics, in the manner of Hegel.

And this is a point to clarify well. The metaphysician, says Engels, "thinks by purely immediate antitheses: his discourse is *yes, yes, no, no*; what is more, he does not like. For him the thing exists or does not exist: and much less can a thing be at once itself and something else. The positive and the negative absolutely exclude each other; cause and effect are likewise in strict antithesis with each other." This, at first glance, seems very exact, Engels notes; and indeed he agrees with so-called common sense (*sogenannten gesunden Menschenverstand*). But this common sense, a respectable companion in the home, makes us slip at the first step outside, and drags us into the precipices when we go into the great world of speculative research; it, legitimate in the consideration of isolated facts, as is proper to vulgar or scientific knowledge, beyond these limits becomes "one-sided, narrow, *abstract* and gets lost in insoluble contradictions" because the particulars prevent us from grasping the whole, the universal in which the particulars live.

The trees, Engels says with a beautiful image, prevent one from seeing the forest.

Engels then shows with some apt examples how, everything being a continuous process, these opposites, which common thought conceives to be absolutely opposed, basically unify; and how dialectics is therefore the appropriate mental instrument for grasping reality; the dialectics that opposes the old metaphysics. Everything is both itself and something else. The continuous processes of integration and disintegration of the organism, make the organism at all times itself and other. The cause, in fact, is the effect of another cause, and only by abstraction of common or scientific thought, one thing is a cause, and another effect. Thus, after all, the opposites are as much inseparable as they are opposed; and with all their opposition they interpenetrate each other.

And Hegel had already said:

It is believed that between the positive and the negative there is an absolute difference. But these two determinations are both in themselves one and the same thing, and the positive could also be called negative, and the negative, positive. Thus having and giving are not two species of particular properties which exist independently of each other. What for the one, the debtor, is the negative, for the other, the creditor, is the positive. The same is true of the way that goes to the east and goes at the same time to the west [...]

The principle *exclusi tertii*, which is the principle proper to the abstract intellect, should

be replaced by the principle; *All things are contradictory*. For there is nothing, either in heaven or on earth, either in the world of spirit or in the world of nature, to which the 'this or that' of the intellect as such can be applied. Everything that is, is a concrete being, and therefore contains difference and opposition. The finiteness of finite things consists in this, that their immediate existence does not correspond to what they are in themselves. E.g., the inorganic nature of the acid in itself is at the same time the base, i.e., the acid is in absolute relation to its opposite. This is the reason why it does not remain immobile in the opposition, but strives to actualize what it is in itself. What moves the world in general is contradiction, and it is ridiculous to say that contradiction cannot be thought. What is true about this view is that one cannot remain in contradiction and that contradiction suppresses itself. But the suppressed contradiction is certainly not abstract identity, because this is but one side of the contradiction. The immediate result of the opposition posed as a contradiction is the *raison d'être* (*Grund*), which contains both difference and identity, insofar as they are superseded, and insofar as they are mere ideal moments.³

So, in truth, it does not seem to me that this critique of Engels against the old metaphysics is the great novelty: nor does it therefore have all the value that one seems to want to attribute to it. What is noteworthy, however, is an observation by Engels, later repeated by Labriola, regarding the little awareness of their dialectics that today's supporters of evolutionism have. From Kant, who first argued that Newton's motionless planetary system should be resolved in a process of formation, to Darwin, who gave the coup de grace to the conception of the natural fixed species, there is a whole direction that applies the dialectic to the natural sciences, in parallel with what was mainly affirmed in philosophy by Hegel. Evolution revives, according to Engels, with Hegelian dialectical development. Everything is in perpetual movement; and the reason for the movement lies in the *coincidentia oppositorum*, which is found in the whole scale of life. But since one can count on one's fingers the naturalists who are experts in dialectical thinking, it is understood that between evolutionary intuition and the method of the abstract intellect with which the results of experience are considered, an insoluble conflict must arise, because of the confusion that reigns in the scientific theories of nature. And is Labriola right to exclaim that "metaphysics, in the sense of what would be the opposite of scientific correctness, is not already a fact precisely so prehistoric as to be on a par with tattooing and anthropophagy!" Just look around us!

Strange, however, is the conclusion that Engels and Labriola claim to draw from all this criticism. "That would be the conclusion of historical materialism; which, thinking philosophically of reality as history, — this being provided only for the individual particular sciences, — "no longer knows what to do" according to Labriola "with a philosophy above the individual particular sciences". "The perfect immedesimation of philosophy, i.e., of critically conscious thought, with the matter of the known, i.e., the complete elimination of the traditional gap between science and philosophy, is a tendency of our time: a tendency, which most often remains a mere *desideratum*." An admirable example of this identification would be in the mind and writings of Marx, for whom philosophy is precisely in the thing itself; and it is a bad thing that "some vulgarizers of Marxism, who have stripped this doctrine of the philosophy that is immanent to it, to reduce it to a simple *aperçu* of the variation of historical conditions by the variation of economic conditions."

Strange conclusion, I say, because it is drawn precisely from a criticism that had led Hegel to the very opposite conclusion. The defect of the inference derives, in my opinion, from not having sufficiently understood the concept of immanence taken by Hegel. In the quoted passage Hegel says that the result of conciliation is not abstract identity, which is rather one of the two sides of the

³This is from §119 of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia*.

reconciled contradiction; rather the reason for being, of which identity and difference are necessary moments. This means that being differentiates itself in order to reconcile itself; this is the end of its movement, and it must implement this end, which is its reason for being. Thus the finality of being itself. But if being is final by its nature, it does not, however, carry out the end immediately; that immediacy is the negation of every end. Finality means mediation. Take away mediation, and you have taken away the end.

The tendency, says Labriola, is to overcome the traditional gap between science and philosophy, in the form of a philosophical science, or a scientific philosophy. Very well; but the tendency, the end brings with it mediation (which in dialectics, of course, is not to be taken in its simple chronological meaning); and philosophy therefore can never cease to exist; otherwise, Hegel would say, we would have abstract identity, not reason for being, or rational reality. Contradiction, in short, is not suppressed purely and simply; but is overcome by reaching the identity that is in the very bosom of difference. The difference remains; hence philosophy on the one hand, and science on the other. True identity, full and concrete identity can only live in difference. This dialectical thought unifies giving and having; but not because of this does the debtor become a creditor. It unifies being and non-being; but this does not mean that individual things are and are not, according to what we like. Immanence yes, but at the same time transcendence. Pure immanence (understood as simple identity) is a moment of life, of reality, not life and reality. True energy is drawing opposites from the one, finding the point of union, as Giordano Bruno warned three centuries ago. Therefore, the one, yes, but also the opposites.

In fact, if we look at the history of nature, where, according to Engels, dialectics had its proof with Darwin, the human species surpasses and dialectically cancels all the lower species on the biological scale. But what therefore? Is it perhaps that only the human species remained in effect? And the same can be said of each other species with respect to the inferior ones. Thus in history the family is the first nucleus of the State. This is not without it; which, in the State, is not annulled purely and simply, but rather is preserved and is renewed, acquiring its own ethical value, carrying out, that is, its own purpose. The State, says Hegel, is the truth of the family. Thus philosophy is the truth of the particular sciences, and of the products of the abstract intellect in general; just as a science, in which philosophy is immanent, if there ever was one, would be the truth of philosophy.

Rather, I would say that the solution of the contradiction between the particular sciences and philosophy does not lie in a science in which philosophy is immanent, but in a form of philosophy in which the results of the individual sciences are reversed; that is, in a philosophy of nature, in the broadest sense of the term, or rather in what Hegel called a *philosophical encyclopaedia*; which does not have to contain the complete exposition of the special sciences and enter into their particulars; but it is enough to indicate their starting point and their fundamental principles; in order to grasp among all of them that intimate connection which escapes the consideration of the abstract intellect, of which the individual sciences are products. — This seems to me the only legitimate consequence of dialectics applied to the productions of the human spirit.

And, setting dialectics aside, it is obvious that the relation of philosophy to the sciences is, for example, that of logic to actual knowledge in general, whether vulgar or scientific. Logic must be immanent in knowledge, in the thought of all; and its origin as an isolated science in its own right necessarily presupposes its immanence in human thought. Now the refinement of this science cannot tend, evidently, to its absorption into the most logically constructed and concatenated knowledge that is possible; but to an ever more rigorous refinement and discipline of scientific methods, preserving, moreover, logic's always independent existence.

Engels himself declares that "what of philosophy, which has taken place up to now, still remains for itself, is the doctrine of thought and its laws — formal logic and dialectics. All the rest is resolved in the positive science of nature and history."

Now, apart from formal logic, which I don't know how it can be reconciled with dialectics, while for formal logic contradiction is death, for this one it is the life of thought — what else is dialectics, in the Hegelian way, as Engels understands it, if not that real logic, which according to Hegel contains the whole of philosophy? And in truth, if dialectics is opposed to formal logic, insofar as the latter is the science of the abstract functions of thought, and it is instead the science of things considered in their intrinsic rationality, I do not know how the whole of philosophy and its most substantial part, metaphysics, is not saved from this demolishing criticism. Logic *stricto iure*, and the *general theory of knowledge*, Labriola would say. But whoever looks at the bottom of this general theory of knowledge, must also find in it a general theory of being, if he is a good Marxist and wants to escape the accusation of *scholasticism*, which Marx inflicts on researchers of the way thought reaches being, on those who conceive thought in opposition to being (cf. fr. 2 on Feuerbach). And I fear that in this way Engels and Labriola only want to fight the philosophy above things and sciences, — *hyperphilosophy*, as Labriola says, — understood in the sense of ancient metaphysics. In truth, this philosophy had kicked the bucket a long time ago, long before Marx and the Marxists opened their eyes to the light. Now it is fighting, it is true, with Hartmann's Unconscious and Spencer's *Unknowable*; but, look it squarely in the face: it, like the wonderful warrior of the poet, is dead.

"Formal tendency to monism" would be, according to Labriola, the characteristic of this philosophy of praxis; and it would not already be a question of returning to the theosophical intuitions of the totality of the world. "The word tendency expresses precisely the resting of the mind in the persuasion that everything is thinkable as genesis, that the thinkable, indeed, is but genesis, and that genesis has the characteristics of continuity." But this tendency is purely formal; and this implies critical discernment, so that from time to time one feels the need to specify the research, to deny the apriorism of the monistic view, drawing closer to empiricism, and renouncing the "claim to hold in one's hand the universal scheme of all things"; and all this because of the fundamental principle of praxis, for which to know is to do, and without doing there is no knowing. The form gives rise, therefore, to a monistic intuition a priori; but the content of the world, of being, can be drawn only through experience. Therefore of form and empiricism of content. But does this empiricism of the content limit the monistic view, which one wishes to represent as a simple tendency?

Here, too, we risk confusing a metaphysical question with a question of the critique of knowledge. Is it possible to know what can be experienced without experience? The answer does not come into metaphysics, but into the critique of knowledge; and in fact Kant offers it to us in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: where he says that the category without intuition is empty. Nor have those same metaphysicians to whom you want to oppose you any other way to respond. The same Schelling whom Labriola cites as one of those monists who did not feel the empiricist requirement, for which the philosophy of praxis would be distinguished from any other monistic intuition, Schelling himself wrote in 1799 in these precise terms:

When it is said: the science of nature must deduce a priori all its propositions, this requirement has been understood in part as follows: the science of nature must do without experience absolutely and without it spin and weave from itself its propositions. The requirement, thus understood, is so absurd that the very objections against it make one sympathetic. The truth is, that *by experience and through experience we know not only this or that, but originally and generally everything; we know nothing without it*; and so all our knowledge consists of empirical propositions. These then become a priori only when they are known to be necessary; and thus every proposition, whatever else it may contain, can be elevated to this dignity; for the difference between a priori and a posteriori propositions is not, as some may have imagined, a difference originally inherent in the propositions themselves, but arises from the consideration of our knowledge and

of the way in which we know these propositions; so that every proposition which for me is only historical, empirical, becomes an a priori proposition when I directly or indirectly come to understand its internal necessity. Now it must be possible in general to know as necessary every original natural phenomenon; for if in general there is no chance in nature (*and this is what the philosophy of praxis says*), here cannot be an original phenomenon of nature which is chance; if nature is a system, there must be for everything that happens and takes place in it a necessary link in some principle which maintains it and unites everything. — This internal necessity of all natural phenomena is better understood if we reflect that there is no true system which is not an organic whole. And if in every organic whole each part mutually supports and sustains the other, the organization must, as a whole, pre-exist the parts; and therefore not the whole from the parts, but the parts must spring from the whole. Hence we say, that we do not know nature a priori, but nature is a priori; and it is as good as saying, that every individual in it is predetermined by the whole, that is, by the idea of nature in general. But if nature is a priori, it must still be possible to know it as something that is a priori, and this is precisely the sense of our requirement.⁴

Now, I do not see which of these propositions in which the doctrine of Schellingian apriorism is formulated, can or should be rejected by the supporters of the philosophy of praxis. And this passage quoted one of the most subtle connoisseurs of Hegel, our Bertrando Spaventa, in order to explain to the perpetual and annoying critics of idealistic apriorism, what was the true meaning of a priori, on which idealistic philosophy insists, and how for the affirmation of its rights, those of experience were not to be harmed in the least.

Of Hegel it is now said by many that he entirely disclaimed the rights of experience; and they recall the proud judgments he pronounced, in his lectures on the history of philosophy, against the experimental sciences, which, following the example of Newton, *did not make any progress*; and they give him a voice by observing that "Experimentalism, in the footsteps of Galileo and Newton, not only made the already existing sciences advance more and more, but created new ones". If not that also here a lot of passages of the works of Hegel could be used in proof of the right value, attributed by this philosopher to the experience; that as proper of the scientific reflection cannot be denied by him if not dialectically, that is preserved and reversed in the philosophical reflection; it would be easy to show how the reproach that Hegel moved to experimentalism was reduced to the reproach that Engels himself moves to it, inasmuch as the purely empirical sciences grasp the single and isolated parts of reality, and not that intimate connection, in which and for which the parts are concrete, and which is revealed to us, as Bruno says, by the *divine art of opposites*, by dialectics.

But I like to stop with the words of the same Spaventa the frank Hegelian thought around the relationship of philosophy with experience. "It cannot be denied," writes Spaventa;

that in recent times the a priori activity has been much abused, and certain constructions of the universe, made almost with closed eyes, with few concepts, or as Hegel would say, with only two colors of the palette, are still famous. But abuse is not a reason to forbid its use; nor has one always seen the activity of speculative thought proceeding in a vacuum, without taking into account facts, history, real life, nature and spirit; and someone has given us back the image of Aristotle, whose sharp and sure eye penetrated into reality and discovered its innermost essence in thought. The cause of the same abuse was the novelty of the concept, so essential to modern philosophy, of the infinite power of knowing; which filled and moved the spirits and gave them immense and almost youthful

⁴this is from §4 of Schelling's *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*

boldness. Certainly without experience one cannot have any knowledge of things. But what experience does not give, nor can it give, is the nexus, the relation or the system of all things. This system, in which true reality consists — since no thing is real except in the universal system of things — is [...] the object of philosophy. The data of experience are multiple, loose, isolated, disconnected, and receive unity — and therefore true meaning — only from speculative thought. And in this — in this relation with experience — consists the *originality* (priority) of thought; since nothing but thought is and can be that unity in which alone all things are real. Therefore, experience is not the reason for thought, as it seems at first sight and is commonly judged, but rather it is the reason for thought. Experience is only the temporary basis — the negative starting point — of thought; which therefore presupposes it, but does not draw from it its authority, its light or evidence, but from itself alone: from its own relations and terminations. And in fact, since thought is essentially unity, relation, connection, and since this connection is not given by experience, light and evidence can only arise from thought: it is thought itself.

Another time Labriola wrote: "It is to be hoped that philosophers like Krug, who deduced dialectically from the pen with which he wrote, will remain perpetually buried in the notes of Hegel's logic." But Guglielmo Krug was no less an enemy of a priori constructions than Labriola; because he was a Kantian; and he did not deduce from the pen, rather he challenged Schelling to the arduous task; thus demonstrating that he had not understood in what sense Schelling supported the apriority of nature. And allow me just one more quotation from Spaventa himself — whose books I do not know why people do not want to read anymore in Italy.

This fear, this horror against the proof of creation (*that is, the a priori construction of nature*), is nothing but a misunderstanding. To prove creation is not to prove the contingent as contingent, this or that contingent; for example, that such or such a stone, such or such a plant, etc., must be there. Krug demanded this from Schelling. Schelling said: I must construct nature a priori; and Krug: construct for me the pen, this pen with which I write. Schelling meant to say: Nature, true Nature, the idea of nature is a priori, and precisely because it is a priori, it can be constructed a priori

According to what is shown in the passage of Schelling himself just referred to.

But, apart from this and some other *telum sine ictu*, it is certain, if the documents adduced suffice, that the historical materialists do not succeed in a monism which differs in anything from the monism of the idealists, whom they believe they have overcome forever, because of the experimental requirement which they affirm; and their intuition is monistic not only as a *tendency*, but also *essentially*. And monism is not only for form, but also for substance. Since there are two kinds of monisms: monism is that of Leibniz, with its infinite monads, because all these monads are metaphysical points and centers of force: and one is therefore the form of the universal reality. And monism is on the other hand that of Spinoza, because the *substance*, despite the non-surmountable duality of the attributes (*form*), is metaphysically unique. Here is an example of pluralism which is at the same time monism; and an example of monism which is at the same time dualism; according to whether in order to define the system one looks at the way in which the substance itself is conceived, or at the way in which the form of the substance is conceived. Absolute idealism and historical materialism are all two monisms both for form and substance. Everything is in continuous becoming: monism of form. Everything is essentially an idea, or everything is essentially sensible reality, matter; monism of substance.

On the other hand, Labriola does not say: tendency to formal monism, but "tendency (formal) to monism"; even though the monistic character of the philosophy of praxis only consists in the notion of becoming, that is in the *form*, not in the substance of metaphysical reality.

Formalism applied to *tendency* is not really said what it means; but it seems to hint at that necessary immanence of philosophy in science, of which historical materialism is deeply aware. Only because of the formal character of our scientific progress do we tend toward a monistic conception of everything as continuous praxis and perpetual becoming. We must allow ourselves to be led by this common thread, by this fundamental norm in individual and specific scientific research: by the concept that everything becomes. But this concept must not itself become the object of special consideration or research, thus becoming, itself, the object and content of thought; for in that case our tendency to monism would no longer be formal, that is, it would no longer touch only the form of our scientific knowledge, but also its content, and would give rise once again to that philosophy per se, or hyperphilosophy, which historical materialism has the merit of denying, affirming the "realistic need to consider the terms of thought, not as fixed things and entities, but as *functions*."

But this point has been made quite clear by now. And that the categories of thought are not to be considered as fixed entities, preformations, but as functions, is also a truth acquired for a while for philosophy, since the *Critique of Pure Reason*, although still then for a long time misunderstood by many philosophers and critics of Kant. Nor had this understanding of the categories as functions in act of knowledge, and in themselves quite empty, escaped the builders of the new metaphysics. But empty of what? asked Hegel. Of empirical content; and this is precisely the requirement of speculative thought, which must not linger in difference (in the concrete determinations of experience), but ascend to the universal, to identity. It is not a defect for philosophy, Hegel noted, to deal with these abstractions, which are the categories themselves empty of empirical content; indeed it is its merit, its perfection.

And ordinary consciousness itself recognizes this, when, for example, it says of a book and of a discourse that its content is the richer, the more it encloses of general thoughts and results, etc., etc., the more it does not give the impression that it is a book. And conversely, it does not give any value to a book, say a novel, in which individual situations and events and other similar things are accumulated. With this the ordinary consciousness also recognizes that the nature of the content requires something more than the sensitive matter.

And yet I have once again distinguished, in order to agree Kant with Kant, and Rosmini with Rosmini, the category as such from the category as concept; a very useful distinction to understand the rights and the legitimacy of the new metaphysics, which is *logical* by its nature. Thinking means judging, and judgment is the necessary synthesis of category and empirical content. Outside this synthesis there is no thought. How is it, then, that in the *Analitica dei concetti* e speaks of these *reine Begriffe*, these pure categories, empty of all content? Or how can one speak and deal scientifically with what is by its nature unthinkable?

Certainly, the category as a function of thinking is not thinkable except as a function, that is, together with the content, with the sensible datum, which it serves to *form*. But insofar as we say that it is thinkable only as a function, together with the sensible content, do we not *ipso facto* construct the (abstract) *concept* of this function? Now it is precisely the concept-category, not the category as such, the category that logic deals with, which in a philosophy that identifies being with thought (or as *idea*, or as sensible praxis), assumes the dignity of metaphysics or philosophy properly so called.

The category as such is in the *fact*; the category-concept is in *science*. The fact is the object and the logical presupposition of science; it is not science. Thus the category is a function which is

implemented (therefore nothing independent and per se) in the fact of concrete knowledge; but if we want to subsume this category in science, if we want to know and study it, it is not possible for it not to become concept, and therefore not to be fixed as per se.

Woe to science, if it were forbidden this perpetual abstracting process! And in what else, in fact, does that *Socratic moment* of every form of knowledge consist, of which Labriola so rightly points out the importance? To form concepts or to elaborate them (Herbart) is to transcend the particular, the concrete, and to rise to the universal, to the abstract. In the anxieties of the empirical individual there is no concept whatsoever. And we cannot depart from individuals except by abstraction. Nor, on the other hand, is there science without the elaboration of concepts, without Socratism. Science therefore inescapably wants, as its own *raison d'être*, the abstraction and hypostasis of the abstract, not as concrete, however, but as abstract; abstraction and hypostasis, which is equivalent to what is more commonly called the formation of concepts. Thus the new logic cannot treat the categories as functions of thought otherwise than as terms, as objects of thought itself, that is, as concepts. And yet I conclude, that there can be no merely formal tendency to monism, if this tendency is to mean a philosophical habit, a reflection, and therefore a knowledge however initial. Nor, on the other hand, is it to be believed that, coming out of the specified research, and constructing a true and proper philosophy, we must at all costs deny or forget that the categories, on which it will work, will not be, in the real fact of our knowing, if not pure functions of this knowing itself.

The ideal of this new philosophy of Labriola would be *Capital*. where philosophical thought and positive knowledge of economics, history and law make an inseparable unity; scientific thought in the most perfect philosophical awareness. Certainly the scholars, the researchers of themes by profession, as they have collected Dante's geology and Shakespeare's entomology, "so *a fortiori*, and more rightly, they could write about the *logic of Capital*, indeed build a whole of Marx's philosophy etc." But *Capital* lives in its *elusive* integrity.

If not that, only this work represents a group of knowledge, which make an organic whole, not analyzable, without ceasing to be what it is; or is this proper to all knowledge in general, and to every part of life? When one recognizes the *raison d'être* of logic, does one not already admit that the scientific spirit can analyze every synthesis of life? Logic is immanent in the common knowledge of man; but it is not born as a science, except when it begins the analysis of what is in fact inseparable.

Or go, pray, to anatomy, without destroying with your knife the whole of the corporeal organism. It is enough for logic to be aware of its abstract or transcendental character; it is enough for anatomy to conceive that inert arm detached from the trunk as part of a living organism, so that science respects the rights of reality, always organic by nature. And Marx knew that in his capital work he continued, as Croce clarified, an abstract research.

As for the philosophy of *Capital*, the right to look for it within comes from recognizing its immanence. And Marx was perfectly convinced of this, too, as he gave himself the thought of coming to terms with the philosophy of his time; of philosophically justifying his own revolutionary historical-economic theory; of seeing a little, in short, what philosophy was immanent, precisely, in his thought.

"It is a matter of taste", finally exclaims Labriola. No; a materialist like Marx cannot reduce the facts of history of this importance, such as the great analytical manifestations of the human spirit, to a question of taste; for Marx's materialism sees nothing accidental in history. And if the human spirit is so made that it always transcends organic reality by the power of its analysis, no one will be able to dictate to it laws that are not in keeping with its nature.

On the other hand, it is so little possible that Labriola, in the meantime, is writing about philosophy transcending any specific research; and he is waiting to clarify this philosophy of praxis. It is indeed true that philosophy is *form* not mental *content*, and if it has its own content — as it

certainly does — this is the transcendental hypostasis of form; but with this is formulated what is true in the whole critique; and this concept seems to us of capital importance.

Finally, since historical materialism is also a metaphysics, is it optimistic or pessimistic? This too is a question often debated, and Labriola does not let it slip. As was to be expected, his solution does not differ from the Hegelian one.

Optimism and pessimism, in the sum, consist in generalizing the affections resulting from a certain experience or social situation, and in prolonging them so much outside the sphere of our life, as to make them the axis, the fulcrum, or the purpose of the Universe.

So that the categories of good and evil, purely relative in their nature, become absolute principles of life, and its teleological causes; where in reality they are nothing but simple ideologies. Now "historical materialism, as the *philosophy of life*, and not of its ideological appearances, surpasses the antithesis of optimism and pessimism; because it surpasses their terms by understanding them." This painful path of history, which can be called the *tragedy of work*, — a tragedy that was not avoidable, because it does not derive from caprice or sin, but from a necessity intrinsic to the very mechanism of social living — leads itself to "the means necessary for *its perfection*, first of a very few, then of a few, then of more than a few; — and now it seems to prepare some for everyone." Once the evil of the slaves was the good of the masters; then the evil of the vassals was the good of the lords; then the evil of the proletarians was the good of the capitalists; time will come when this contradiction of the evil that is good, and of the good that is evil, will be resolved. . . into the good of all; which, however, not opposing evil, will no longer be truly good, but the unity of good and evil. But the triumph of communism will not already be the work of *eternal justice*. "That beneficent lady will not move a single one of the stones of the capitalist edifice." In the present evil the materialists find precisely the springs of the future; and this they expect from the rebellion of the oppressed, not from the goodness of the oppressors. What does all this mean? That what is, must be; the real is essentially rational, just as Hegel said. The opposition of good and evil will remain a contradiction of the abstract intellect, which speculative thought resolves, overcoming it, like any other contradiction. Good and evil do not exist in essential reality; but, as Marx says, they are ideologies. Historical materialism and Hegelianism in the same way, therefore, surpass in theory the pessimistic and the optimistic point of view. But in fact they are both purely optimistic systems. What is must be; reality is rational. But in the meantime, this reality, as history, represents the fatal journey of the World Spirit towards the freedom of all, in Hegel; or the ascension of man "from the immediacy of living (animal) to perfect freedom (which is communism)", in Marx. In history there is therefore a finality; since every step is aimed at a goal; and this finality is essentially optimal. And since finality is immanent in the historical process from its first beginning, like Hegelian intuition, Marxist intuition is in fact optimistic, contemplating a history that walks towards an end, which is the good of all, the absolute good.

Chapter 14

Critique of The Philosophy of Praxis

From critics and interpreters, returning now to Marx, from whom, moreover, we have never strayed even in apparent digressions, and summing up, we can define the philosophy of praxis outlined by Marx in the fragments of 1845, as a materialistic monism, which is distinguished from any other similar system by the concept of praxis applied to matter.

But how does Marx understand his matter? As praxis, one replies; whence historical materialism. That is to say, a system which does not conceive of matter as fixed and stable, but as continually becoming. But where is the principle of activity? In Marx, praxis is synonymous with *human sensory activity* (*menschliche sinnliche Tätigkeit*). Therefore, the activity of matter resides in man. Sensibility is precisely the practical activity; human-sensitive activity. Hegel said that the idea, the spirit is industrious; and that its dialectical development is the reason for the becoming of reality. Marx does nothing more than substitute the body for the spirit, the idea for the sense: and to the products of the spirit, in which for Hegel true reality consisted (and which for Marx became ideologies), the economic facts, which are the products of human sensory activity, in the search for the satisfaction of all those material needs, to which Feuerbach had reduced the essence of man: but he preserves all the rest of the Hegelian conception. And the substitution of the body for the spirit, of the sense for the idea, was natural and necessary: Feuerbach himself had done it. Since the first degree of phenomenology is the sensitive consciousness, or sense as it may be called, and from it all the higher degrees then develop, it is the true activity of man. To it must be attributed the rights usurped by abstract thought.

So others might say that since man derives from the child, it is not man who works and wars and does science etc., but the child, in the last instance. If he were invited to point out to us the miraculous child, he would perhaps find himself in a great embarrassment; no greater, moreover, than that in which Marx finds himself in proving that sense is truly the principle of reality, understood as he understands it.

Who can deny any more that our sensory activity is the true demiurge of sensible reality? To the eyes does not appear the vibration of the ether; but the color; and the color is therefore the *sensible* reality. Now it is clear that this reality is not *given* to the sense, — because outside of us there is nothing but ethereal vibration; it is produced by the sense. Except that, just as the Platonic demiurge does not create *ex nihilo*, but has before him and opposite him matter, which he molds into the various sensible forms in imitation of the eternal ideas, so sense does not create color; but the external datum (ethereal vibration) it transforms into visual sensation. The datum alone is anything but sensation; but sensation is impossible without the datum. Now then: who provides this datum? Psychology answers: the external world; and this answer is sufficient for psychology. But when Marx opposes his sense, his body, his matter, to the idea, to the spirit of Hegel, it is no

longer a question of psychology or phenomenology, but of something else: it is a question of logic, according to Hegel's wording; that is, of metaphysics. And so also psychologically it can be said that the sense creates the sensation; because psychologically beyond the color there is nothing; and the ethereal vibrations are a purely physical fact. But when from the particular consideration of psychic phenomena we pass to the general consideration of reality, we see immediately that beyond and before color, there is the vibration of the ether. And who makes the vibrations? — God, replies the spiritualist; matter, the materialist. But it is evident that this matter is beyond the scope of human sensory activity, which should, according to Marx, shape and construct it in its own way. A scholastic question, Marx would say: the etheric vibrations, as such, are a pure abstract, something that does not exist (with respect to man). Ethereal vibrations do not exist except as color. — Except that this answer makes us fall once again in phenomenology, while it is the Hegelian Logic that the author intends to oppose, and it is the metaphysical materialism that he believes to correct with his dynamic concept of matter. And in this field the *relative* must give way to the absolute, as the *a posteriori* becomes *a priori*.

In idealism this process of the *a posteriori* to the *a priori*, with respect to the universal reality and the absolute, is understood. Knowledge, said Kant, is made up of synthetic judgments *a priori*; that is, experience (synthesis) that is posed, fixed and recognized as *a priori*. The category, the original function of my intellect, must be offered the datum of sensitive experience, so that the concept is formed. The genesis of every concept is necessarily empirical, *a posteriori*. But, once formed a universal concept, a law, this concept, this law are *a priori*, and dominate, as such, reality. Now, if one does not arrive at the universality of the law, of the concept, and remains in the particular of sensitive intuition, it is evident that one does not leave the *a posteriori*, that is, the field in which one finds only what is given by experience: and sensitive experience always supposes the stimulus, as its indefectible antecedent, and, for it, matter. Matter therefore escapes the creative activity of the sense, nor can it receive a norm from it; on the contrary, it influences it and dictates to it in some way (the varying speed, for example, of ethereal vibrations produces the diversity of colors).

Idealism observes that concepts and rational laws dominate reality; and thus there are no chemical bodies which are not subject to the mathematical relations of their formulas, nor is there a wolf or a horse which is not a quadruped or a mammal, according to the necessary notes fixed by zoology, nor is there any water which does not freeze when it descends to a certain temperature, according to a law known by experience. Therefore reality itself is as if constructed by reason, which appears immanent in it; and reality, therefore, is essentially rational. Certainly the reason to which reality is adapted cannot be that of Hegel, and even less so my own, or that of Titius or Caius. But this is important to note: that all of nature is written in mathematical characters, and that the mind can read these characters; or rather that these characters, insofar as they are mathematical, are by their nature mental or intelligible, mathematics being nothing but constructions of the intellect. The mathematics of nature is precisely its rationality; or the reason or idea, as it were, that is immanent in it and in reality in general.

The passage, therefore, from *a posteriori* to *a priori*, as the reason for reality, is understood in idealism; but in Marx's materialism it is inconceivable.

The only way out would be for it to deny everything that transcends sensory reality; and this would be the genuine character of materialism. But the very affirmation of this sensory reality as pure and simple matter immediately transcends sense.

And, on the other hand, if nothing is real which is not sensible and material, all that criticism which Marx makes of the earlier materialistic conceptions of society, undoubtedly ruins. He is opposed, as we have seen, to the nominalistic intuition which sees in society nothing but individuals, who may agree with each other, but who are always essentially independent of each other and on their own; and he rightly observes that this is an abstraction, because society is original, and individuals,

therefore, are nothing but organically connected parts of a single whole. Now then, what is there of perceptible reality in society apart from individuals as such? Their organism, society, is an ethical bond, it is mind, rationality; and not for nothing, therefore, did the subsequent materialists, such as Epicurus, Hobbes, and the French materialists of the last century, deny society as a necessary and original fact. Organism and society imply relation: and relation is not touched, nor seen, nor heard: only its terms are sensitive. If you conceive the terms with their relation, you ascend from the sense to the intellect, not by denying the sense, but by making an a priori, or necessary, synthesis of it and the intellect.

Meanwhile Marx had a reason for not isolating individuals, abstracting them from their relationships. This reason, as we have made clear, was in the concept of praxis, immanent in sensible reality. Praxis means the relationship between subject and object. So neither individual-subject nor individual-object, as such *sic et simpliciter*; but the one in necessary relation to the other, and vice versa. So again, the identity of opposites. Not educators on one side, as we have said, and educated on the other: but educators who are educated, and educated who educate.

Thus we have seen Marx drawn from the very concept of praxis to deny naturalism. And Labriola says well in the spirit of his master, that "all men who now live on the surface of the earth, and all those who lived in the past formed the object of some appreciable observation, found themselves a long way from the moment when purely animal life had ceased". This denial of naturalism is another blow to the materialistic doctrine, that there is nothing but sensible reality; because *purely animal life* is the living precisely of sense and among sensible things; and it does not cease, if not with the affirmation of something more than pure sense. The moment, in fact, in which it ceases, the moment to which Labriola himself refers, is the moment of the origin of society, and, as we have already said, the affirmation of mentality (for which sense is already overcome).

Materialism cannot see in man anything other than the animal (naturalism); but Marx, by virtue of his concept of praxis, is forced to see in man something more than the pure animal, to see in him man, that is to say, the animal, but the animal by its political nature, according to the old Aristotelian expression.

But what kind of materialism is this? Like all materialism, it does not want to recognize as real anything but what is perceptible; but this perceptible, which is static for all other materialism, is dynamic for it, it's in perpetual *feri*; hence its appellation of historical materialism. And here is that this materialism, to be historical, is forced to deny in its speculative construction its own foundation: that there is no other reality apart from the sensible; and thus to reject the essential characteristics of every materialistic intuition: such as, for example, the atomistic conception of society, and naturalism itself. This, in short, is a materialism that to be historical is no longer materialism. An intrinsic, profound and irremediable contradiction troubles it.

And in truth, had not Hegel said that the spirit is history? The spirit, not matter. Can history, as Marx claimed, be transported from spirit to matter? The materialism of the last century, which was in fact the sincere expression of the anti-historical century part excellence, did not believe so, and it had its good reasons. Because that materialism understood matter as such; and matter as such is always identical with itself, it never changes. Its forms differ, and these change and vary indefinitely; but it remains constantly the same in all its forms. So from a piece of clay, first make a jar; then, after reshuffling it, you can make a ask out of it; but, jar or ask, clay is always clay; and as such, it cannot be said to change. And where there is no change, there is no history. If you then want to look at its different forms, you no longer have before you clay pure and simple: but clay and the shaping hand, clay and praxis. And so, if you want to look at matter not in itself, but in its ever-varying forms, that is, in its history, you will have matter and praxis which makes it be in all its forms. But if you admit praxis, you transcend, as we have seen, sensible reality. Nor did the materialists of the last century want to transcend it; they were therefore content with matter as

such, always identical with itself, without history. Hence their conviction that the world has been and always will be the same, and that in order to know any being intimately, one must not study it in its history, but in its natural state. Hence also that return to nature, which is the character of every production of the thought of the last century; even of political economy, with the Physiocrats.

And transported to the law, one can understand how the intuition of the philosophers of the 18th century could lend itself to revolutionary doctrines that would prepare the outbreak of the great revolution. Because, in fact, a revolution is a denial of history, a denial of the value of what history has consecrated as the natural movement and development of human society; treating historical facts as accidental modifications, — and therefore changeable at will, — of nature, eternally identical with itself. In historical materialism, on the other hand, the aim is to proclaim that *history* is the only real mistress of us all, and that we are as it were *lived* by history! as Labriola says; and then it is affirmed as the canon of the new philosophy, that, if philosophers have so far only tried to interpret the world, now it is a matter of *changing it* (*verändern*); that is, of changing history, in which, for the new materialists, every reality consists. That is to say, that this unique reality, which is history, whose essence is determined by dialectically necessary development, suddenly becomes unreal, by the very fact that its development must stop, or change course. And in what way, or why? By the speculations of philosophers! — More than historical materialism! Those much derided ideologies would suddenly become the spring of history! Because, in truth, the philosophers have no other means than philosophy, at their disposal, to change the world.

And do we not thus return to the Platonic view of the ideas as the motive and creative forces of the universal reality?

The root of the contradiction, which crops up in every way in Marx's materialism, is in the absolute defect of any criticism of the concept of praxis applied to sensible reality, or to matter, which are equivalent for him. Marx does not seem to have taken the slightest care to see how praxis could be coupled with matter, as the only reality; while the whole of the preceding history of philosophy must have warned him of the irreconcilability of the two principles: of that form (praxis) with that content (matter).

Matter itself is inert, therefore always equal to itself. Whence derives its industriousness, which makes it become incessantly? It can also be said that a force is immanent in it; but this force, which gradually transforms matter according to a dialectical and finalistic development, is a rational force: it is reason, it is spirit. And so the spirit always presents itself as original, beyond matter; and, as well as concluding with a materialistic monism, one succeeds in a more or less Platonic dualism. To the party of admitting as original force and matter the outspoken materialists contemporary with Marx himself, such as Büchner, clung, but they took care to keep away from force every finalistic view; on the contrary they worked on an inexorable criticism of every teleologism, as of one of the fundamental theories (now vigorously reaffirmed by the idealistic, or telistic, as they call it, English and American) of idealism.

Karl Marx, a born idealist, and who had been so familiar, in the formative period of his mind, with the philosophies of Fichte first and then of Hegel, did not approach the materialism of Feuerbach forgetting all that he had learned, and that was ingrained in his thought. He was not able to forget that there is no object without a subject that constructs it; nor was he able to forget that everything is in perpetual *fieri*, everything is history. He learned that this *subject* is not spirit, ideal activity, but sense, material activity, and this *all* (which always becomes) is not the spirit, the idea, but the matter. In this way he believed he was proceeding along that path along which he had set out, passing from Kant and Fichte to Hegel, almost from an idealistic transcendence to an immanence; in this way he presumed to move further and further away from the abstract by approaching the concrete. But in the question of abstract and concrete, how can we not take into account the stupendous Hegelian critique of the abstract intellect? So matter yes; but matter and praxis (that

is, subjective object); matter yes; but matter in continuous becoming. In this way he came to grasp "the most beautiful flower" of idealism and materialism; the flower of concrete reality and of concrete conceptions always substituted for abstractions, and of Hegel and Feuerbach. Materialism yes, but historical. Except that the irony of logic responded to the excellent realist intentions with a result that was a gross contradiction, now clear to the attentive readers of these pages: a contradiction between content and form, — analogous to that which we have already noted in the critique of historical materialism as a simple philosophy of history.

We will say, therefore, in conclusion, that an eclecticism of contradictory elements is the general character of this philosophy of Marx's; of which some of his disciples today are perhaps not greatly wrong in not knowing what to do. There are many fruitful ideas at its foundation, which taken separately are worthy of meditation: but isolated they do not belong, as has been proved, to Marx, nor can they therefore justify that word "Marxism," which is sought to be synonymous with a purely realistic philosophy.

It is true that the interest of science does not lie in names; and if some of the most important ideas of Hegelianism can penetrate into the mind by the allure of the name of Marx, good luck to "Marxism" too!