

The Philosophy of Praxis – The Democratisation of Philosophy, Politics and Power

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The very notion of 'the philosophy of praxis' might be considered as something of a contradiction in terms, much as 'the practice of praxis' might be. For what distinguishes Marx's revolutionary-critical praxis is that it is both theory and practice at the same time. Marx overcame the passive, contemplative approach to knowledge which he associated with philosophy. Philosophy was separate from the world whereas true knowledge was a condition of being in the world, acting upon it as a force within it, changing it. Given separation, philosophy apprehends the world only retrospectively. For Marx, philosophy could only be realised by being abolished. Praxis incorporates philosophy but, in closing the gap between human agency and the social world, develops it into an activist conception of knowledge.

Praxis is the central category of the philosophy which is not merely an interpretation of the world, but is an integral part of its transformation. In transcending German Idealism, Marx's revolutionary-critical praxis represents the most developed consciousness as well as the strongest link with actual practice. Marx's conception of praxis does not imply replacing idealism with a return to metaphysical materialist philosophy, which was still tied to ordinary consciousness and which preceded the more developed expositions of Idealist philosophy (in Kant, Fichte and Hegel). Nor does praxis imply pragmatism or a prephilosophical attitude. Marx's conception of praxis is not a reversion to a past materialism but is the negation and assimilation in a dialectical manner of classical materialism and Idealism. This implies, of course, that the philosophy of praxis incorporated the essential features of both idealism and materialism, particularly idealism which affirmed human practical activity, albeit in an abstract and mystified form (Vazquez 1977:2). With this transcendence of the old materialism and idealism in mind, it may be acknowledged that the term the philosophy of praxis may be employed as a euphemism for marxism (Kitching 1988). Perhaps 'revolutionary-critical praxis' is the most appropriate term.

However, whichever term is preferred, the most important point to grasp is that praxis, in Marx's work, represented the closing of all the classic bourgeois dualisms and alienating separations. Theory and practice, subject and object, agency and structure, reality and the social world, philosophy/knowledge and reality, the 'is' and the 'ought', the state and civil society, the base and superstructure were all integrated in a dialectical synthesis (Meszaros 1995:337/8 737 951). This conception, of revolutionary-critical praxis is thus the fundamental 'philosophical' foundation of Marx's emancipatory project and continued to influence his perspectives in *Capital* and beyond. Thus, the critique of political economy, which characterises Marx's later 'scientific' work, came to introduce a greater socio-economic precision into Marx's work but the emancipatory goal remained that which was contained in the original conception of revolutionary-critical praxis. Indeed, *Capital* may be read as a critique of alienation in its precise form under the capital system.

In short, the conception of revolutionary-critical praxis provides the 'philosophical' underpinning of Marx's as an emancipatory project and the argument presented here will look to make this emancipatory thread throughout Marx's work more explicit, using it to challenge the fetish systems of production and politics imposed by the capital economy and representative political institutions. From the critique of Hegel's philosophy of the state through to the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, with *Capital* and the Paris Commune in between, it is to show how Marx's emancipatory commitment runs parallel with his political commitment to establish the fundamental continuity in and unity of his career as a revolutionary socialist (Kitching 1988:7 8).

In terms of the antithesis between scientific-rationalising marxism and critical-emancipatory marxism presented in this thesis, perhaps 'the philosophy of praxis' has been most associated with the latter and most criticised by the former. Certainly, in affirming that whatever 'theory' - if any - may be extracted from Marx is entirely subordinate to Marx's commitment to the achievement of the defetishised social world, in switching the emphasis from interpretation to transformation, critical-emancipatory marxists reacted with hostility towards the reduction of marxism to a sociological or social

scientific project. The inherent determinism of such a project (Bonefeld et al. 1992:ix) is incompatible with the emancipatory commitment that is fundamental to Marx's project.

Thus critical-emancipatory marxists - which would include the likes of Lukacs, Gramsci, Korsch, the Frankfurt theorists - have been alert to the determinism and economism inherent in 'scientific socialism', in the idea that socialism emerges as a result of the 'laws' of history. Thus Habermas recognises that Marx's original project was of a critical-emancipatory character but that marxism nevertheless came to reinforce positivist modes of thought by viewing history as the deterministic unfolding of 'laws' based upon the expansion of the productive forces. Thus marxism comes to conceive labour and production in purely instrumental terms (Kearney 1986:224).

But at least Habermas recognises that Marx's original project was not positivist in this sense. Habermas, correctly, argues that Marx's original project had the intention of synthesizing theory or critical reflection, the world of ideas, with practice, with changing the material world, thus resolving the traditional antithesis between philosophical idealism and philosophical materialism (Habermas 1987; Kearney 1985). Thus Marx's conception of praxis is designed to obtain knowledge of the processes of history not so as to be able to interpret them passively and objectively but to be both critical and practical about existing society and the possible future society, to be able to act in a transformative way so as to realise that immanent society which may be evaluated to be morally better and hence desirable. The point, then, is to be able to transform the propitious conditions to realise the socialist future. One appreciates here that Marx's overcoming of the dualism between the 'is' and the 'ought' means that Marx cannot be a positivist, cannot conceive the world as an objective datum appropriate to passive-contemplative 'scientific' study and must mean that values are constitutive of the dialectic. This means an emphasis upon the transformative potential of human agency.

To understand Marxism, therefore, we must be aware, of the nature and role of the concept of praxis, and this in turn will depend on, whether Marxism is regarded as just one more philosophy, an interpretation of the world which inverted idealism in order to set materialism upright, but preserving at the same time the concept of dialectic divested of the mystifications it had carried in Idealism; or whether it is acknowledged as a philosophy of revolutionary action whose objective is to transform the world, and in which the Idealist form of praxis was inverted in order that the practical, objective activity of men as concrete, socio-historical beings could come to occupy a central place. These two versions of Marxism lead to very different explanations of the radical change of direction in the history of philosophy which is represented by Marxism. In the first case, Marxism is merely a single step from one (Idealist) interpretation of the world to another (materialist) one; this would set Marxism itself within the frontiers of that philosophy which Marx had criticised in the first part of his Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach ("The philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways"). In the second case, there is movement from philosophy as interpretation to philosophy as a theory of the transformation of the real world, which justifies the second half of the Eleventh Thesis ("the point is to change it") (Vazquez 1977:31).

Reference is made here to the two versions of marxism. It is a distinction between the reversion to interpreting the world and changing the world which corresponds to Gouldner's notion of two marxisms, Scientific and Critical. Gramsci's opposition of marxism as a 'philosophy of praxis' to the mechanical materialism of marxist orthodoxy expresses this division within marxism as well as showing how Marx's revolutionary-critical praxis entails a breakthrough from merely interpreting the world to changing it. Gramsci used the term the 'philosophy of praxis' not merely to avoid the prison censor but to make clear what the marxism of Marx actually meant. This enabled Gramsci to distinguish Marxism both from mechanical materialism on the one hand, and from idealist philosophy, which was divorced from actual history and from practical human activity, particularly politics, on the other. Further, the 'philosophy of praxis' was a means of emphasising the role of the subjective

factor in the making of history, of the revolutionary consciousness and activity of the proletariat. In this respect, Gramsci was reacting against a prevalent 'passive radicalism' within Marxism which was using objective factors and the development of productive forces to justify a rejection or postponement of revolutionary activity (Vazquez 1977:32/3).

However, Gramsci's reaction against mechanical materialism comes with the risk of failing to take adequate account of the objective factor, as constraint and possibility rather than fetishised as absolute and external as with the mechanical materialists.

This explains why, well before he wrote the Prison Notebooks, he should have given one of his essays the incomprehensible (for a Marxist) title of 'The Revolution against Capital', with reference to the Russian Revolution. Although we would not wish to justify the title, it is understandable if we take into account Gramsci's purpose in underlining the role of practical revolutionary activity at a time when most of the Leaders of European social-democracy had dismissed it altogether. This legitimate preoccupation, however, led him to underestimate the determinant role of objective factors which the opportunists had converted into absolutes; on the other hand, his advocacy of the role of the subjective factor led him to convert theory into a simple expression of political praxis, or 'pure historicity', thus weakening its scientific character and rendering it as an ideological-historical expression.

Vazquez 1977:33

The reinstatement of the centrality of praxis, than, does not imply asserting critical to scientific marxism but, rather, encompasses both elements.

One has to be careful about opposing scientific-rationalising marxism to emancipatory-critical marxism, eastern versus western, orthodox/positivist versus Hegelian. It would be difficult, for instance, to place Lenin and the Bolsheviks in these oppositions. Arguably, at the level of theory, Lenin never really broke with the evolutionary perspectives of the Second International and its productive forces determinism (Corrigan, Ramsay and Sayer 1978). But he did, discovering Hegel, begin to appreciate the fallacies of Second International objectivism. And perhaps the greatest achievement of the Bolsheviks lies in their recovery of the specifically revolutionary dimension of Marx's politics against the fetishism of the economic under the Second International. The significance of Bolshevism lies in the recovery of the political dimension of marxism's commitment to change the world. This went some way towards emancipating marxism from the economic determinism which became a fundamental part of orthodoxy in the late nineteenth century. One can quibble with how far Bolshevism really did manage to break with the economism of Second International productive forces determinism. Nevertheless, the political impact of the Bolshevik Revolution was to overcome the fetishism of the economic that had passed, as marxism. Certainly this, at least, was a powerful stimulus to the recovery of the centrality of praxis, however it was understood, within twentieth century marxism (Jay 1984:83). Here it is intended to be a little clearer as to the importance of revolutionary-critical praxis in establishing Marx's project as emancipatory.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

The importance of theory and practice within marxism is well known. What is often overlooked is the importance of the relation between theory and practice. Theory is not one thing and practice another in Marx's marxism; Marxism is not a theory to be applied in practice, a theory created by intellectuals and then put into practice by the workers movement or the socialist party. Rather, Marx's marxism affirms the unity as against the dualism of theory and practice. Marx's 'humanist standpoint' exhibits a

dialectical relationship between theory and practice in what is a self-made, social world. Jakubowski thus argues in relation to consciousness and being.

The relation between consciousness and being can thus only be correctly understood if being is conceived of dynamically as process. It then loses its rigidly objective form ..When the great basic principle of the dialectic is applied, the world is not seen as a complex of achieved things but as a complex of processes. Social reality in its historical flux is shown to be human reality, i.e. the totality of human relations rather than a relation between things. Consciousness no longer stands outside being and is no longer separated from its object. It is a moving and moved part of the historical becoming, of reality. Consciousness is determined by the transformation of being; but, as the consciousness of acting men, it in turn transforms this being. Consciousness is no longer consciousness above an object, the duplicated 'reflection' of an individual object, but a constituent part of changing relations, which is what they are only in conjunction with the consciousness that corresponds to their material existence. Consciousness is the self-knowledge of reality, an expression and a part of the historical process of being, which knows itself at every stage of development.

Jakubowski 1990:60

Jakubowski spells out the implications as regards theory and practice, seeing 'consciousness as a factor in changing social reality' (Jakubowski 1990:61). Theory is reality's knowledge of itself. Whilst Hegel himself had appreciated this, for him 'reality' meant the Idea coming to know itself in the course of the historical process – the progress of reason to the consciousness of freedom. For Marx, however, reality is a self-made human reality, constituted practically and mentally; consciousness is a human consciousness. Therefore, the person who knows reality does not stand outside history like Hegel's 'Philosopher', but is an active factor in transforming social relations. In Marx's conception, theory no longer exists *post festum* as with Hegel but becomes a lever in the revolutionary process.

Marx's active materialism is both the expression and the means of a theoretical critique, in its essence, a critical and revolutionary method.

Jakubowski underlines the central importance of critique to Marx's project.

Theory is therefore essentially critique. It is no accident that Marx called his major work a 'critique of political economy'. Marxism is a critique of bourgeois economy and ideology from the standpoint of the proletariat. It does not replace it with a new, proletarian 'theory' or any other kind of theory: it theoretically criticises those bourgeois institutions and ideas which the proletariat, attacks and criticises in practice, in the class struggle.

Jakubowski 1990:61

What had once been considered to be purely theoretical questions concerning the nature of the knowledge of an external world, questions which only the theorists were competent to answer, are resolved by Marx at the level of practice.

The unity of theory and practice clearly occurs in the union between socialism and the workers' movement; marxist socialism is the theoretical expression of the working class movement. The union of marxist theoretical critique with the practical-critical activity of the proletariat has a dual form (Jakubowski 1990:61/2). 'Theory becomes material power as soon as it seizes, the masses', Marx wrote in the *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Law'*. Marxist socialism is thus a theory which is distilled out of and incorporated back into the practical activity of the workers. There is an interactive process between theory and practice: 'Theory .. is no mere textbook guide to practice; it is the expression of practice' (Jakubowski 1990:62). Unity is achieved as an historical reality through the struggle of the human subject to see its humanity in the self-made social reality, to appreciate the world as objectified subjectivity (Holloway in Bonefeld et al 1995:172).

This is the direction that Marx's thought had taken since making the breakthrough from philosophy and philosophising about the world to social reality and its transformation: 'All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice' (Marx thesis VIII on Feuerbach in Marx 1975:423). The notion that theoretical problems might be resolved in and through praxis show how Marx had critically appropriated the achievement of German idealism in developing the active side of subjectivity (Perkins 1993:27/3), coming to place this on a materialist foundation which prioritised the creative activity of the human subject.

Lukacs emphasised this point:

But this unity is activity. Kant had attempted in the Critique of Practical Reason .. to show that the barriers that could not be overcome by theory (contemplation) were amenable to practical solutions. Fichte went beyond this and put the practical action and activity in the centre of his unifying philosophical system.

Lukacs 1971:123

But German idealist philosophy could go no further than this, could not get beyond the limitations of the bourgeois standpoint.

The view that things as they appear can be accounted for by 'natural laws' of society is, according to Marx, both the highpoint and the 'insuperable barrier' of bourgeois thought. The notion of the laws of society undergoes changes in the course of history and this is due to the fact that it originally represented the principle of the overthrow of (feudal) reality. Later on, while preserving the same structure, it became the principle for conserving (bourgeois) reality..

For the proletariat, however, this ability to go beyond the immediate in search of the 'remoter' factors means the transformation of the objective nature of the objects of action. At first sight it appears as if the more immediate objects are no less subject to this transformation than the

remote ones. It soon becomes apparent, however, that in their case the transformation is even more visible and striking. For the change lies on the one hand in the practical interaction, of the awakening consciousness and the objects from which it is born and of which it is the consciousness. And, on the other hand, the change means that the objects that are viewed here as aspects of the development of society, i.e. of the dialectical totality become fluid: they become part of a process. And as the innermost kernel of this movement is praxis, its point of departure is of necessity that of action; it holds the immediate objects of action firmly and decisively in its grip so as to bring about their total, structural transformation and thus the movement of the whole gets under way.

Lukacs 1971:175

It was Marx who made the decisive step to social reality and its transformation by identifying the proletariat as the subject and agency of this praxis. It was at this point that classical philosophy turned back.

But, here, we find once again, quite concretely this time, the decisive problem of this line of thought: the problem of the subject of the action, the subject of the genesis. For the unity of subject and object, of thought and existence which the 'action' undertook to prove and to exhibit finds both its fulfilment and its substratum in the unity of the determinants of thought and of the history of the evolution of reality. But to comprehend this unity it is necessary both to discover the site from which to resolve all these problems and also to exhibit concretely the 'we' which is the subject of history, that 'we' whose action is in fact history.

However, at this point classical philosophy turned back and lost itself in the endless labyrinth of conceptual mythology... it was unable to discover this concrete subject of genesis, the methodologically indispensable subject-object.

Lukacs 1971:147/8

Classical philosophy took the crucial turn towards history, towards human society as the sphere in which human practice assumes its true significance, only to turn back at the vital moment. As a result, it was unable to appreciate the concrete character of the specific form of human praxis which alone could resolve the problems presented to philosophy. For it is the proletariat which is the subject of this historical praxis. Classical philosophy could not go beyond its own bourgeois standpoint to embrace the standpoint of the proletariat.

In his early *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx gave a lapidary account of the special position of the proletariat in society and in history, and the standpoint from which it can function as the identical subject-object of the social and historical processes of evolution. When the proletariat proclaims the dissolution of the previous world-order it does no more than reveal the secret of its own existence, for it represents the effective dissolution of that world order. The self-understanding of the proletariat is therefore simultaneously the objective understanding of the nature of society. When the proletariat furthers its own class aims it simultaneously achieves the conscious realisation of the objective aims of society, aims which would inevitably remain abstract possibilities and objective frontiers but for this conscious intervention.

Lukacs 1971:149

A marxism based upon the conception of revolutionary-critical praxis is innovative, open and democratic in resolving problems at the level of practice. Such a marxism possesses an inherent capacity for renewal through its becoming a force within the emancipatory struggles and practices of human agents as they attempt to make the world something more amenable to human purposes. Marx's marxism is within these struggles and practices but is not reduced to them. Resolving issues at the level of practice nevertheless also means that this practice is mediated through the categories of a critical-emancipatory marxism.

THE REVERSION TO THE CONTEMPLATIVE-PASSIVE APPROACH

It is in this sense that the unity of theory and practice is affirmed. This view is quite distinct from that 'scientific socialism' which made social is a 'correct theory' to be developed by intellectuals who, alone, were capable of grasping the laws and processes of an objectively conceived world. Such a marxism – Second International, orthodox, dialectical materialist, Leninist, structuralist - has indeed upheld the notion that theory is indeed something independent of practice and, most importantly of all, independent of the transformative praxis of specific human agents.

Thus 'scientific socialism' returns to a position akin to Hegel's philosopher standing outside of the world and reflecting, externally, upon the world (Marx and Engels *The Holy Family* *Collected Works* vol 4 1975:85/6; Jakubowski 1990:18/21).

Contemplative philosophy, in its sociological, analytical and model building forms, one-sidedly conceives of humanity and human action as the product of objective forces. Marx, of course, recognised these objective forces when he affirmed that human beings made their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing. This begs the question of the nature of these circumstances in relation to social being and consciousness. Materialism before Marx, from Montesquieu to Feuerbach, acknowledged that human beings were the product of the natural and social environment. Marx transcended the Enlightenment materialism which made human beings the passive products of their circumstances by insisting that the distinctive feature of humanity is the capacity to transform itself through its active intervention in the natural and social world, changing the world and themselves in the process. For Marx, 'human consciousness develops through human activity in the world; it is a factor in changing social reality' (Marx *Grundrisse* 1973 109).

The knowledge obtained by this passive-contemplative approach is obtained *post-festum* and, as such, presumes the givenness of the factual world. Such knowledge is retrospective and hence makes no pretence at changing the world. Such a perspective is impotent when faced with the alien character of social reality. It is restricted to interpreting this fetishised social world and hence, as theory, gives expression to this fetishism.

The relationship between theory and practice here can only be one that is dualistic and which reproduces the dualisms of the fetishised reality. Whatever forms they may take, objectivism and subjectivism are the dualistic, though inextricably connected, results of this approach to theory and practice. For it is the separation introduced between object and subject, the reopening of the gap between philosophy and the world, which invites the tendencies to objectivism and subjectivism. One thus reduces human agency to pure subjectivity, which is expressed as a voluntarism in politics, with the stress on consciousness and will, and a romantic attitude generally which fails to appreciate how human beings affirm themselves by objectifying their powers in the self-made social world.

It is not, then, a case of asserting the subject over the object but of affirming the unity between them so that human beings recognise themselves in the objective world. On the other side, objectivism results from the scientific stress upon abstract laws, objective relations and processes, and underlying structures, insofar as they are considered in abstraction from the transformative praxis of human agency.

THE DIALECTICAL CONCEPTION

The marxism based upon the conception of revolutionary-critical praxis consciously transcends this dualism and steers clear of the twin reefs of subjectivism and objectivism. This is achieved by a dynamic, dialectical conception in which theory is as practical as practice is theoretical. One may quote Adorno here:

If the theoretician and his specific object are seen as forming a dynamic unity with the oppressed class, so that the presentation of societal contradictions is not merely an expression of the concrete historical situation but also a force within it to stimulate change, then his real function emerges. The course of the conflict between the advanced sectors of the class and the individuals who speak out the truth concerning it, as well as the conflict between the most advanced sectors with their theoreticians and the rest of their class, is to be understood as a process of interactions in which awareness comes to flower along with its liberating but also its aggressive forces which incite while requiring discipline.

Adorno Critical Theory: Selected Essays 1972:215

One affirms human agency as both transformative and knowledgeable at the same time. This may nod in the direction of Giddens' theory of structuration. It is nevertheless true that Giddens himself acknowledged Marx's praxis as a major influence in this theory. Keeping the argument within a more explicitly marxist framework, theory is considered to be both distilled from and constitutive of practice whilst practice is considered to occur only through reflective human agency. Theory is thus as much a material practice as practice is capable of generating theoretical insight (Bonefeld et al 1992:xii/xiv).

What can be argued is that the relationship Marx postulated between theory and practice is one that establishes unity at the level of the practical transformation of the social world of human agents (Perkins 1993:26). Theory, in this sense, no longer possesses the task of deducing the truth into the world according to a priori principles of political and philosophical rationality. Marx initially held such a rationalist position when depicting philosophy as the head and the proletariat as the heart of the coming revolution. After 1848 and especially after his experiences of the struggles of the proletariat, Marx came to emphasise that such truth is generated out of the world and its practical transformation. The principles of the marxist political project, then, are not to be considered as a priori principles of

political rationality established from a position outside of the world. Rather, these principles are to be considered as latent, immanent, in the world and implicit in the existing practices and struggles of human agents.

One needs to stress, therefore, Marx's breakthrough from philosophy to reality through the notion of revolutionary-critical praxis as the transformation of the social world.

It was the political reality of the Prussian State whose concrete actions were finally to reveal how inoperable and ultimately how inactive was this theoretical activity. The contrasts between the presumed omnipotence of this activity and its actual ineffectiveness, posed as a matter of urgency the transition from theoretical activity (which never transcended its theoretical status and this could never become a genuine praxis) to practical activity. And it is against the background of the problems that presented themselves to the Young Hegelians for solution that the evolution of Marx's thought must be understood. Marx resolved the contradiction and elaborated a philosophy of praxis which was no longer theoretical praxis, but a real activity designed to transform the world. What was required was not a theory whose praxis was limited to a critique of a reality which would then transform itself, nor a philosophy of action which would restrict itself to elaborating the objectives of practical action, philosophies like those of Cieszkowski and Hess, which were little more than a new form of Utopianism.

The transition to a genuine philosophy of praxis which transcended these false conceptions was, therefore, a result of the necessity of changing the world in practice. At the same time, the restricted and impotent character of the Young Hegelians' notion of theoretical practice was clearly established. A genuine philosophy of praxis could only be developed on the basis of an intimate conjugation of theoretical and practical factors. The theoretical factors stemmed from the fact that such a philosophy had as its starting point German Idealism itself; although it had emerged from a radical break with speculative philosophy, it still had inherited its very basis from that philosophy which, albeit, in idealist form,

had given to man the consciousness of his creative power to change the world. The practical factors, on the other hand, stemmed from the productive and socio-political human activity which put to the test the value and application of the theory itself. In this respect, Marx's elaboration of the category of praxis, which began with the Theses on Feuerbach and which was to become the central category of his philosophy, is at once a theoretical and a-practical process.

Vazquez 1977:95

In converting philosophical problems into social problems and hence resolving contradictions at the level of practice, Marx had subverted the status of philosophy and the role of the philosophers in favour of the working class, the social agency capable of engaging in the practical transformation of social reality.

THE THEORETICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

This position leads to some interesting debates within the marxist tradition concerning the formulation of certain questions. Perhaps most interesting of all pertains to consciousness, being and where, if anywhere, theory fits in.

Take this passage from Henri Lefebvre:

People today are no longer ignorant of the society in which they live. They have an awareness of many of its detours and tricks, even when they do not see the exact mechanisms of exploitation, and the means of power. They have known for a long time that it is a case of them and us, and that 'them' are getting fatter all the time. This experience does not amount to a (theoretical) consciousness of surplus value. Yet little by little consciousness penetrates. The initial spontaneity will slacken off, but only because it is already assimilating the 'lived' proof of exploitation and political power. This does not mean that the concept as such has become useless. It simply means that the concept is no longer introduced into the 'lived' from the outside, as Lenin stipulated in a

somewhat well worn formula which has justified the worst kinds of extortion in the name of the political party.. The theoretical concept currently encounters an uncertain consciousness which both leaps ahead of and lags behind a situation which is itself uncertain.

Lefebvre 1976:20

Lefebvre thus writes of human beings as knowledgeable agents capable of becoming conscious through their practical expediencies. And he is no doubt faithful to Marx in arguing that the concept is not to be introduced into the 'lived' world from the outside, as in the rationalist model, but that the lived proof of exploitation and power, capital and the state, inform the consciousness. Yet Lefebvre distinguishes this from the notion of a theoretical consciousness. There is room for ambiguity here. Is Marx arguing that human beings, through their lived experience, gradually obtain the level of (theoretical) consciousness contained in the concept, in Marx's theoretical apparatus in *Capital* for instance? Or is he arguing that this, as a 'scientific' appreciation of the world, remains distinct from the practical consciousness of human beings?

Lenin's argument was that there could not have been Social Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. 'The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness ... The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals' (31/2). All of which amounts to a fairly forthright assertion of the superiority of the theoretical consciousness elaborated by the intellectuals over the practical consciousness developed by the proletariat. For Lenin 'there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement' (1937:39). Workers may have a part in creating this ideology but only as socialist theoreticians, not as workers (1987:39/40).

The Social Democratic consciousness to which Lenin refers, then, is clearly the theoretical consciousness of Lefebvre's argument. If it may be accepted that the proletariat will not spontaneously begin to speak the language of necessary and surplus value and will not necessarily identify the mechanisms of valorisation and accumulation that govern the capital system, it may nevertheless be considered quite consistent with Marx's argument to uphold that the proletariat is indeed capable of rationalising the lived proof of exploitation and power, capital and the state to achieve a practical consciousness that is both socialist and class based. This would appear to be Lefebvre's point and is certainly Marx's point in having abandoned the rationalist model that introduces truth into the world from outside of the world. The Lenin-Kautsky model, however, separates theory and practice, turns socialism into scientific theory which intellectuals alone can develop, and makes the practical consciousness of the proletariat a mere trade union consciousness characterised as 'ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie' (1987:40).

What is especially interesting is to consider the political implications of repudiating the Lenin—Kautsky thesis and recovering Marx's original conception of praxis. For if the theorising of the epistemological and material incapacity of the proletariat was institutionalised in the traditional political party, reformist and revolutionary, then the recovery of the sense of the proletariat as transformative and knowledgeable agents and the resolution of the relation between theory and practice lies in their being unified in the struggles and practices of the social world. With this unification, socialism as theory and practice can no longer be equated with the theoretico-elitist model of 'the party'. The socialist consciousness is then the class consciousness of the proletariat as its experience of the lived world educates it as to the realities of this world.

The conception of revolutionary-critical praxis, then, is to be presented as the democratisation of knowledge, politics and power as human agency comes to appreciate, consciously and practically, the social world, as its own creation. One of the most persistent themes uniting Marx's work is the attempt to unite the spheres of revolutionary intellectual activity and continuing political and social struggles. Thus Marx's marxism, in

overcoming the separation of philosophy from the object of knowledge, praxis represents the dissolution of the theoretical function through its democratisation, restoring the connection of human agency with the self-made social world.

In the Lenin-Kautsky thesis, 'orthodoxy', was quite explicit in divorcing socialism as scientific theory from the proletariat and its practical existence, introducing it into the proletariat 'from the outside' through the vehicle of the political party. Such a conception clearly invites political alienation, with the political party as a form of organisation possessing an independent existence raised above the class subject.

For Marx, praxis, as the uniting of theory and practice, the philosophical idea and the real world, subject and object, is no mere methodological principle sustaining an activist conception of knowledge. More than this it is the driving force of his emancipatory commitment to a defetishised social world that has been recovered by human beings and restored to their common conscious control.

THE TWO MARXISMS

Historically, there have been two versions of marxism, a split which has stemmed from the inability to sustain a genuine unity of theory and practice. To understand Marxism, therefore, there is a need to understand the nature and role of the concept of praxis. Marxism is not just another philosophy or theory, one more interpretation of the world alongside the others. Marxism is not an inverted idealism which sets materialism upright, preserving the concept of dialectic whilst divesting it of the mystifications it had carried in idealism. Instead, Marxism is a 'philosophy of praxis' which affirms the transformation of the social world as a self-transformation on the parts of creative human agents. This conception affirms the true practical, objective activity of humanity as concrete, socio-historical beings could come to occupy a central place.

Marx's 'philosophy of praxis' is not a materialist interpretation of world in opposition to an idealist interpretation. This view amounts to a reversion to a pre-marxist position, the view that Marx criticised in the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach: 'The philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways'. This is a conception of an active materialism which represents a movement from philosophy as interpretation to philosophy as the transformation of the social world, which justifies the second half of the Eleventh Thesis ('the point is to change it") (Vazquez 1977:31).

Gouldner believes that Marx upheld two conceptions of praxis, the one pertaining to alienation and the 'laws of motion' of the capitalist economy, the latter to human emancipation.

Marx had two tacitly different conceptions of praxis.. Praxis (1) is the unreflective labor on which capitalist rests, the wage labor imposed by necessity which operates within its confining property institutions and its stunting divisions of labor. While this labor inflicts an alienation upon workers, it also constitutes the foundation of that society, reproducing the very limits crippling workers. Mere workers are constrained to contribute to the very system that alienates them. This conception of praxis is congenial to Scientific Marxism. In the second, more heroic concept of practice. Praxis (2), more congenial to Critical Marxism emphasis is on a practice that is more freely chosen, most especially on political struggle. If Praxis (1) is the constrained labor that reproduces the status quo, Praxis (2) is the free labor-contributing toward emancipation from it.

In undertaking the first form of labor or practice, persons submit to necessity; in the second, however, they undertake a deliberate and Promethean struggle against it.

In one part, then, Marxism is a philosophy of praxis; in another it is a 'science' i.e. the political economy of the laws of capitalism. Marxism is thus a tensionful conjunction of science and politics, of theory and practice.

Marx claimed to offer a scientific conception of socialism, as distinct from utopian and moral and political conceptions. But did Marx really offer a political economy theorising the laws of motion of the capitalist economy? One insists, again, upon the *critique* of political economy, the *critique* of capitalism as a fetishistic system of production resting upon alienated labour. In which case, the challenge facing an emancipatory marxist politics is to oppose Praxis (2) to Praxis (1) so that conscious emancipatory activity on the part of the human subject comes to subvert and transform the rationalised, alienative. relations produced and reproduced by Praxis (1).

THE OPPOSITION OF THE LIFE WORLD TO THE ALIEN WORLD

Marx's marxism was inherently democratic in embracing an activist conception of philosophy as regards materialism and knowledge and of politics in terms of the suffrage and sovereignty. Just as Marx refused to equate knowledge with the passive-contemplative approach of the intellectuals interpreting a given factual world from a position abstracted from that world, so he refused to equate politics with the prevailing institutions and processes of the state. In both philosophy and politics Marx asserted the power of the demos against the institutionalised power of the alienated world. Stauth and Turner have theorised such a project from a Nietzschean perspective.

Sociology is literally, the study or knowledge of friendship and consequently the study of exchange within the life-world is fundamental to the whole sociological project. This reciprocal reality leads us into a consideration of the fundamental importance of fellowship, sympathy and empathy as basic social attitudes. We treat the larger institutional reality of society as parasitic upon this dense world of exchange.

Stauth and Turner 1988:13

The final level of the social world is the reality of regulating institutions which attempt to organise the inter-subjective world and the world of social embodiment. To treat these institutions as social bodies which, through an intellectual stratum the professional men of learning and taste seek legitimation over the world of communal reciprocity and individual embodiment ... This 'higher' social world can be conceptualised as a form of institutionalised resentment which, requires intellectuals, professional men and priest to smooth put its operation; they exist to render the world, either acceptable or efficient. This culture of resentment stands in opposition to the human world of sensualism, practice and feeling.

Stauth and Turner 1988:14

With one or two qualifications, this could stand as definitive of Marx's emancipatory project, opposing the life world of communal reciprocity to the alienated-institutionalised world staffed by intellectuals, professionals, 'priests' of all kinds claiming esoteric knowledge and monopolising power usurped from the social body. This is Marx's project of human emancipation as defined in *On the Jewish Question*.

DEMOCRATISATION OF POLITICS, PHILOSOPHY AND POWER

Marx's definition of the state as alienated social power opposing the social body as force is paralleled by his definition of capital as the alienated social power created by, but coming to dominate, labour. Marx thus departed from the elitism and authoritarianism associated with philosophical materialism and with the 'Jacobin' tradition of radical politics. If one had to choose a term by which to characterise Marx's emancipatory project then 'democratisation' perhaps is the most appropriate. The realisation/abolition of philosophy through its incorporation in revolutionary-critical praxis may thus be considered as the democratisation of theory in that it treats human agency as both transformative and knowledgeable. When Marx writes, in criticism of Hegel, that 'the state is an abstraction. Only the people is a concrete reality' (Marx CHDS 1975:85), he is making the point that in the

social world there exist only human beings and the social forms they create (Meikle 1985:46).

Everything that exists in the social world is the product of human beings and their practice. Any particular form, be it the state or capital, is, merely the 'objective' expression of 'socialised man': 'Each is only a moment of the demos as a whole .. democracy is the essence of all political constitutions, socialised man as a particular constitution' (CHDS 1975:87/8). Marx not only traced social forms back to their human roots but, and here he avoids an atomistic conception, he concentrated upon the character of social relations and how, under particular social relations, social forms escape the control of the demos.

Marx's emancipatory project of restitution entails these social forms being put under conscious common control. But more than this Marx develops an innovative framework whereby human beings, as transformative and knowledgeable agents, could act to reappropriate these social forms. And this, arguably, is the distinctiveness of praxis as well as its centrality in an authentic marxism. Marx, arguably, effected an original and novel synthesis of politics and philosophy, one that united *homo sapiens* and *homo faber*, the rational and practical human being.

Comprehended in this way, the conception of revolutionary-critical praxis possibly appears as more than just another attempt to resurrect marxism. It is already a reconstituted marxism in that the synthesis of politics and philosophy is situated on the level of practice. Marxism, in other words, is more than a theoretical consciousness or conceptual apparatus. Understood in terms of praxis, marxism is distinguished from the rationalist model which identifies 'truth' with a marxist theoretical consciousness imported into a lived reality from the outside. Rather, since the unity of theory and practice is established at the level of the social world, material practices and struggles, then any reconstituted marxism must possess a social as well as an emancipatory relevance as regards existing struggles and practices rather than being a representation of an abstracted set of concepts.

If theory is distilled from practice, and if human beings are transformative and knowledgeable agents, as Marx's praxis upholds, then any rejuvenation of marxism must amount to more than a reinterpretation from within Marx's concepts but has to indicate a capacity to intervene in the emancipatory struggles and practices of human agents in the social world. Such a marxism is necessarily beyond Marx but not for that reason beyond marxism. It recognises that the emancipatory project is necessarily ongoing and developing through human beings as subjects of their own emancipation. But it is Marx's synthesis of politics, philosophy and power (democratic versus alien) which enables the emancipatory project of marxism to be formulated thus.

Marx's notion of a democratisation of philosophy, represented a decisive shift from the old materialism, with its determinist epistemology and revolutionary politics, with their elitist-authoritarian character. Marx's revolutionary-critical praxis overthrows the old theoretico-elitist model which practised a clear division of labour separating intellectuals and politicians from the people, itself expressing the separation of the demos from their social forms. The commitment to an emancipated world entails overcoming this separation and, hence, with it the theoretico-elitist model. Marx's revolutionary-critical praxis radically revised philosophy and politics and established a new definition of the modern enterprise of knowledge and power. How Marx came to achieve this synthesis of politics, philosophy and power can be understood only if one understands how Marx passed from philosophy to reality and the proletariat.

PHILOSOPHY AND THE PROLETARIAT

Marx's demand that philosophy be abolished was simultaneously demand for its realisation. Marx's argument was that philosophy could only know the world *post-festum* and, given this retrospective nature, cannot change the world. Philosophy is always, therefore, abstracted from the world and in passive-contemplative relation to it. The philosophical idea, as such, is always in some sense cut off from and in contradiction with the reality which it studies. But despite being at odds with this reality, 'abstract' philosophy is

nevertheless powerless to change it. Thus philosophy is restricted to an impotent criticism of reality from a position outside of reality.

What spurred Marx to his conception of praxis was his understanding, drawn from Hegel's criticism of Kant, that the ideal is to be located in the real. The philosophical idea could only be actualised by the practical transformation of the world. By making the world philosophical through this transformation, philosophy is abolished. Or, put slightly differently, philosophy is self-abolishing in the sense that as it translates its ideal into actuality, hence realises itself, philosophy is reunified with the world, from which it had been severed (Perkins 1996:117; Callinicos 1985:3). Philosophy is transformed through its connection with the proletariat and the proletariat is transformed through its connection with philosophy. Philosophy ceases to be abstract through this material embodiment, and the proletariat ceases to be merely an empirical, objective fact on account of its association with philosophy. The proletariat is therefore the mediating concept between philosophy and the self-made social world, making true understanding and true freedom possible, through practical-critical activity, since its situation in this world is both actual and critical (Perkins 1993:26).

This unification is possible only by the world becoming a transformed, philosophical world. The realisation of philosophy thus constitutes its abolition (Callinicos 1985:30). The 'Rational' society, in this sense, is very much the end which Marx pursues, so long as one understands the rational as something embodied, sensuous and material as opposed to an abstracted rationalism existing in systems and institutions (Paul, Miller Paul 1991:30 32/3 34/6 39/41; Miller 1982:94; Gramsci 1971:161 167-252/3 257/9 263; Aronowitz 1981:4 6/7 14/5 32 132 134).

It needs to be understood, however, that the conception of revolutionary-critical praxis possesses a philosophical component which means that any practice undertaken in this project is constituted by values and is quite distinct from pragmatism. One can, therefore, affirm Gramsci's understanding of Marx's position as against Femia's interpretation of it.

Femia writes that Gramsci's:

stress on the qualitative side of revolution caused him to revive Marx's young Hegelian pronouncement that the 'realisation' of philosophy was the real aim of the proletariat. Marx himself later became more radical: philosophy could not be realised but only extirpated.. Gramsci, however refused to believe that Marx 'really' wished to replace philosophy with practical activity. Rather, Marx was only advancing a claim in the face of 'scholastic' philosophy, purely theoretical or contemplative, for a philosophy that produces an attendant.. Gramsci rejects not philosophy but the contemplative attitude. Politics will always have a philosophical dimension but philosophy should not take refuge in abstract universality outside of time and space in some city of mind.

Femia 1981:122/3

Femia's idea that Marx sought the extirpation of philosophy fails to appreciate that the practical activity which Marx saw as transforming the world actually incorporates the philosophical dimension, hence the notion that the philosophical idea is translated into actuality (Meszaros 1970:221 233; Tucker 1961:174/6; West 1991:35/7 39/42). Certainly Marx criticised the passive-contemplative approach to knowledge in which philosophy comes to the world after the fact. Marx is looking to overcome the theoretical and the contemplative approach to the world; the philosophical idea is to be located in the world and hence the idea ceases to be philosophical in the abstract sense. But it remains an idea. The practical activity upon which places emphasis remains principled. Thus Marx argues:

Nothing prevents us, therefore, from lining our criticism with a criticism of politics, from taking sides in politics, i.e. from entering into real struggles, and identifying ourselves with them. This does not mean that we shall confront the world with nay doctrinaire principles and proclaim: Here is the truth, on your knees before it. It means that we shall

develop for the world new principles from the existing principles of the world. We shall not say: 'Abandon your struggles, they are mere folly; let us provide you with the true campaign slogans.' Instead we shall simply show the world why it is struggling, and consciousness of this is a thing it must acquire whether it wishes or not.

The reform of consciousness consists entirely in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in arousing it from its dream of itself, in explaining its own actions to it.

Marx to Ruge, September 1843 in Marx 1975:208

Marx is thus removing the gap between philosophy and the world. Philosophy, therefore, loses its abstract character to the extent that the world is made philosophical. This is how philosophy is, in Femia's words, 'extirpated'. Philosophy retains an active role only in making explicit what is actually implicit in the struggles of the world (Easton in Mcquarrie 1978:61; Callinicos 1985:37; Jakubowski 1990:61 60). This is quite a different proposition to a philosophy that, in abstraction from the world, prescribes for the world according to *a priori* principles of an abstracted rationality. Marx broke firmly with this rationalist model without, however, needing to 'extirpate' philosophy. Thus

Reason has always existed, but not always in a rational form. Hence the critic can take his cue from every existing form of theoretical and practical consciousness and from this ideal and final goal implicit in the actual forms of existing reality.

Marx to Ruge September 1843 in EW 1975:208

It is from this awareness of the need to breakthrough from philosophy to reality that Marx came to embrace the cause of the proletariat. This, perhaps, places too great a stress upon Marx's philosophical activity, introducing the struggles of the proletariat only after Marx had come to espouse the proletarian cause as a matter of philosophical deduction. This

stress on the intellectual character of Marx's breakthrough to praxis needs to be corrected. As Callinicos writes, 'Marx's philosophical development arose as much from his experience of political and social struggles as it did from any intellectual evolution' (Callinicos 1985:8). Similarly, Thomas argues against Avineri (Thomas 1994:212).

This accepted, it nevertheless remains the case that when Marx embraced the cause of the proletariat, he did so with fairly precise philosophical intentions. Marx, after all, was not the first person to discover the proletariat; or to commit himself to the cause of the proletariat. Marx was well aware of radicals and socialists who had already adopted the proletarian cause. They did indeed assert the emancipation of the proletariat. But Marx did more. 'He affirmed the self-emancipation of the proletariat' (Miliband 1977:33/4; 119/20) and he did so for precise reasons. Those who had previously supported the proletariat had done so out of sympathy with the proletariat. They nevertheless continued to conceive, the proletariat as the object of the required social transformation. Marx, however, conceived the proletariat to be the subject of this transformation. Thus both revolutionary and gradualist wings stemming from the French Revolutionary tradition had considered social transformation to be the work of an elite acting on behalf of a 'corrupt' mass incapable of emancipating itself. This elitist political conception, indeed, derived from the determinist epistemology of the old materialism which made human beings the passive products of circumstances. In the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx conceives human beings to be the active producers of their circumstances, denying the need, therefore, to split society into two parts, one part ideal, escaping the general determinism by breaking the materialist premise, the other part passive and determined.

Neither the violent conquest of political power nor the peaceful moral persuasion of the bourgeoisie would suffice to realise socialism. Reformist or revolutionary, such a politics is based upon what may be called the theoretico-elitist model and, as such, reproduces a condition in which human beings were treated as objects rather than subjects.

The early Marx did on occasion express himself in terms of the elitist or rationalist model. In the 1843 *Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's, Philosophy of Right*, Marx's concern to develop the relation between theory and practice in the actual world led him to the proletariat for the first time. Marx comes to draw this conclusion concerning the relationship between philosophy and the proletariat:

Philosophy cannot realise itself without transcendence of the proletariat and the proletariat cannot transcend itself without the realisation of philosophy

Marx 1975:257

Neither *Aufhebung* (transcendence) nor *Verwirklichung* (realisation) mean anything like the 'extirpation' of philosophy suggested by Femia. Gramsci's meaning is far closer to Marx than Femia allows. The important point, however, is that at this early stage Marx refers to the proletariat as the 'heart' of the emancipatory project and philosophy as its 'head' (Marx 1975:257).

Marx possessed a left Hegelian perspective at this time, regarding the proletariat as the 'passive element' and the 'material basis' of the coming revolution. Only philosophy could supply the revolutionary spark (1975:252). In this sense, the emancipation of the human being is the work of an alliance between philosophy as the head and the proletariat as the heart. This dualism of 'head' and 'heart' derive from Feuerbach's 'Provisional Theses' where they apply to German idealism and French materialism. The contrast between the two, as Marx puts it, is the Hegelian one between spirit, on the one hand, as active, transformative, and universal and matter, on the other, as passive, atomistic and self-seeking (Callinicos 1985: 35/6). With this contrast, the relation between philosophy and the proletariat could only be elitist. Marx's left Hegelian colleagues like Bauer, came to denounce the masses as inert and reactionary and hence as the barrier to the progress of

spirit. This merely confirmed political impotence. Ruge came to condemn the revolt of the Silesian workers in 1844 for its lack of political understanding. In criticising these positions Marx makes explicit the decisive shift that had taken place in his conception: now it is the proletariat that supplies the dynamic, transformative principle. 'Only in socialism can a philosophical nation discover the praxis consonant with its nature and only in the proletariat can it discover the active agent of its emancipation' (Marx *Critical Notes* 1975:416).

Marx had thus come to acknowledge the proletariat as the active subject of the revolutionary-emancipatory process as opposed to being the passive, object as in the theoretico-elitist model.

Marx does not speak of philosophy in the abstract manner of the Hegelian tradition, and nor does he regard the proletariat as merely the social counterpart of this (abstract) philosophy. Rather, philosophy is moderated by its association with the proletariat and the proletariat moderated by its association with philosophy. The proletariat signifies the mediating concept between philosophy and the world, making possible true criticism, i.e. practical-critical activity, because its situation in the world is both actual and critical.

Perkins 1993:26

The conception of revolutionary-critical praxis, which Marx outlined in the *Theses on Feuerbach* and developed at length in *The German Ideology*, allowed Marx to thoroughly repudiate the theoretico-elitist model, subverting the position of the philosophers and the politicians in favour of the proletariat as the true subjects of social transformation and, indeed, of its own emancipation (Perkins 1993:20 27/8; Callinicos 1985:45/6).

Thus the experience of their material practices and struggles, deriving from their class location, leads the working class first to resist and then to take positive action against the exploitation and dehumanisation to which they are subject. 'Philosophy', to retain any relevance, has to abandon its abstract nature and participate in the struggles to abolish a class society.

Philosophy is thus incorporated into the class praxis of the proletariat. The experience of the reality of the class struggle, moreover, transforms the consciousness of the workers and makes clear the true nature of reality in a way that an abstract philosophy could not. It is this experience which leads to the formation of socialist ideas embodying the secularised philosophical idea. And this is a result of praxis.

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.

Thesis III on Feuerbach

Thus, the *Theses on Feuerbach* make clear that neither emancipation nor 'education' can be achieved by an elite raised above society as a "superior" force (Thesis III). Such an elitist notion rests upon a determinist philosophical materialism which can account for change only by introducing idealism and an ideal agency, "superior" to the determined society. This theoretico-elitist model treats human beings as the passive products of circumstances, as objects moulded by circumstances and, by extension, managed and manipulated by politicians and theoreticians claiming insight into these circumstances.

Marx subverted this model by making human beings the active producers of circumstances, creating an active materialism in which education and emancipation were to be achieved by the 'masses' themselves as subjects of a social transformation which would also be a self-transformation. Hence the principle of proletarian self-emancipation represented more than a revolutionary piety through which Marx boasted his socialist credentials. Behind it lay the need to unify philosophy and the world, the ideal and the real, theory and practice, agency and the self-made social universe.

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