

# Immutable Tablets of the Communist Theory of the Party

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## Fundamental Marxist text

At the concluding session of the La Spezia meeting<sup>1</sup> and, at greater length, in the corresponding report (for which see issues 15, 16, 17, and 18 of *Il Programma Comunista* from 1959), a reiteration of essential topics took place on the occasion of our examination of the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844" by Karl Marx.

It was noted that the various editions of this text and its translations into different languages are not in agreement with one another, and that this lack of agreement is especially pronounced when it comes to the order of the individual subjects and chapters, which is due to the difficulty of reconstructing the original text. The texts in German, English, French, and Italian that we have at our disposal not only do not agree on some particularly important passages, but they do not even all contain the same material.

When we made use of it – all of it, and all of great significance – we did not make it a point to reintroduce our theory, nor to insert footnotes; rather, we picked up a few points that are brought into focus in the questions which today – even and especially today – trouble the movement of the proletarian class. As always, we did so in support of the thesis that the party of this class would not have deviated and erred if, instead of embarking on the fruitless search for *new* truths, *new* directions, and *new* doctrinal and programmatic tenets, it had been brought back to the tablets of stone upon which it was founded. In contrast to the common wisdom, this work, in which the nascent communist party inscribed its principled antithesis to bourgeois critical philosophy and its great German incarnations of the first half of the 19th century, should be counted among such tablets of law, which together constitute a single coherent system, with no less importance than the Communist Manifesto and Capital. Between this first action of doctrinal assault on the ideology of the capitalist class and those that followed in the fields of critique of political economy and of contemporary history, there is

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<sup>1</sup> The interfederal meeting of the Internationalist Communist Party referred to here was held in La Spezia on April 25-26, 1959. The report mentioned by Bordiga was originally published under the title *La struttura economica e sociale della Russia e la tappa del trasformismo involutivo al XXI Congresso* [The social and economic structure of Russia and the period from reactionary [trasformismo](#) to the 21st Congress], which was shared by the reports from all three sessions of the meeting, despite the fact that not all of them dealt primarily with Russia. Today, the report is better known as *Commentary on the Manuscripts of 1844*, the title under which it was republished by Jacques Camatte first in the original Italian (*Testi sul comunismo*, Naples: La Vecchia Talpa, 1972) and later in French (*Bordiga et la passion du communisme*, Paris: Spartacus, 1974).

no disruption of continuity. It is a myth created by the distorters of Marxism that between these two stages there must be interposed Karl Marx's novel-like conversion from the Hegelian idealism that he professed in his youth to the doctrine of historical materialism, which he is said to have founded or discovered. Our examination aims to establish that this never happened, and that in Marx – that is to say, in the voice in which the birth of the new historical class doctrine found its expression – the learning, critique, and refutation of the Hegelian system were simultaneous processes. Such consistency and unity of structure were claimed by [our] great school throughout the whole life of Marx and Engels, as well as throughout that of Lenin and unadulterated Leninists; and for us, the last students of and obstinate believers in these same texts, which we defend at every step as true combat positions, that is exactly what they have been up to the present day and what they shall be until the communist revolution has conquered.

Because our demands and propaganda are indeed not those of scholastic lecturers, but of men of the party, and are not presented one after the other in programmatic theses of academic style, it may be useful to remind the reader of the outline of the report from La Spezia, which for these clear reasons lingered on points pertaining to [our] living polemic against today's disgusting traitors to Marxism – precisely against those who, even as they claim it as their own creed, shamefully blaspheme against it.

## **From property to communism**

Since it was an undisputed merit of Hegel, as well as of all modern criticism that constitutes the ideological reflection of the liberal bourgeois revolution, to break with the *immobility* of the metaphysical juxtapositions of opposites characteristic of the feudal *anciens régimes* (God and the Devil, Good and Evil) and to introduce into the life of the mind – and, almost unknowingly and unintentionally, also into the history of humanity – the vital light of *motion*, in the Battle that Marx launched against the master and his more or less degenerate pupils (the latter represented only by Feuerbach) he availed himself of the same machinery of war as the school that was to be refuted – as if using weapons captured from the enemy.

The classical way of conducting the maneuver, which had intuited the light of the dialectic but regrettably failed to leave the terrain of idealistic and mystical deception, consisted in an initial movement in which the subject, *consciousness*, stepped outside of itself.

Marx, precisely in order to annihilate the vagueness of the individual and subjectivist system that characterizes the essential parts of the Hegelian structure (Logic and Phenomenology), adopts for a moment the same schema of the double movement. But it is no longer a thinking and conscious timeless subject that devotes itself, on an abstract level, to the sport of stepping outside

of itself (alienation, exteriorization) in order to look at itself from afar, and *confirm*: I do exist! – and then returning to the same personal receptacle, the brain, to scale this step of the staircase of certainties, leading up to the summit of the mystical pyramid where there will be – who knows how or why – “Absolute” knowledge. It is instead a physical, tangible, and real being, the worker of the capitalist age, who carries out this tragic experiment of becoming estranged from himself. And Marx poses the problem of the second movement, the true *return*, seeking its goal.

Thus we showed that the Hegelian scheme, *seemingly* accepted and applied by Marx, was in fact radically *transposed* by him in a revolutionary manner, in order to destroy the use that Hegel had made of it. The metamorphosis which the man of the modern age, the wage-earning proletarian, undergoes in the economy of *private property*, is a separation from the human essence, to which the members of primitive societies were closer. Alienated by the wages for which he sold himself, his time and his work, the proletarian is estranged from man; he has become a pure commodity, a physical object without life. What follows is the *key* we give to the revolutionary unraveling, described by Marx in these pages for the first time. To regain from not himself, himself; from non-man, man, the estranged worker will not aim to win back his person, his *former* individuality, thus closing a useless and stupid cycle that would offer no prospect other than that of him selling himself into slavery for a second time and for all eternity; he will instead recapture – with his class and for the whole society and human species – the quality of being human *no longer in the sense of a single individual*, but as part of the new humanity, of communism. From this moment on, the framework of the new society is outlined, and this model will remain valid until the historical time of its future realization.

The whole cycle is described in its last part whose unsurpassed formula bears repeating. The victory over the estrangement suffered until then, which the infamy of private property imposed upon the living man, is formulated as follows:

*"Communism as the positive transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i. e., human) being — a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of previous development."*<sup>2</sup>

*"This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man — the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual*

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<sup>2</sup> English translation taken from MECW Vol. 3, p. 296. The German word *Aufhebung*, rendered here as “transcendence,” is alternatively translated into English as “supersession” or “sublation”; Bordiga himself used “abolition” (*abolizione*).

*and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.*<sup>3</sup>

We have given these passages in better translation because they originally contained errors, including even misprints. In their capacity for synthesis, they contain innumerable theses that are to be opposed to the infamies of various revisionisms; but it is not at this moment that we wish to develop these theses one by one.

The central thesis of **invariance**, opposed to the heresy of theoretical **enrichment** of Marxist communism, emerges triumphant. The leaps of human knowledge take the form of revolutionary *unravelings* of historical *riddles*. Any *problem* can be solved by successive attempts, in stages and degrees. But problems are the stuff of reformist imbecility. A *riddle*, on the other hand, unraveled once and for all when the light of revolution shines upon it, will never again become *shrouded* in mystery.

In this conception of the course of history, the past did not consist of wandering in darkness; it was the whole wealth of past revolutions that opened up the road to communism.

## **Against immediatism**

We can show that even in this text, immediatism – now pervasive even among anti-Stalinist groups – gets a good beating. The Stalinist presentation, or rather falsification, even of this text wanted to come out with Marx's condemnation of Proudhon as a defense of the obscene inequality of wages that currently exists in Russia. With decisive quotations, we showed that Marx reproached Proudhon not for basing his social program on *equalizing* wages, but rather for basing it on the *preservation* of wages, which will be eliminated in communism.

We refer the reader to those quotations which show the falsity both of the Russians' claim to live in socialism – and to be on their way toward communism! – while their most advanced economic form is still bogged down in money wages, and of those so-called Marxists who remained stuck at the level of the workerist demand to raise wages at the expense of the bosses' profit.

What interests us is demonstrating that our term *immediatism* – with which we give a beating to the Stalinists-Khrushchevists as well as fake left communists [*falsi sinistri comunisti*], all in one heap – is a hundred years old. It was introduced by Marx in his criticism of the first incomplete form of "crude communism," which we lingered on for a long time. In this first formulation of the program of the working class, the elimination of private property appeared

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 296-297. The translation used by Bordiga substitutes "objective reality" for "objectification" and "subjective consciousness" for "self-confirmation."

as its generalization and consummation. Marx's just critique intends to show that the formula 'no owner and no proletariat' makes its first appearance in the naïve form of 'everyone an owner, and everyone a proletariat'. This is precisely the error made by the Russians with their "property of the whole people" and also by the "ouvriéristes de gauche"<sup>4</sup> of the *Socialisme ou barbarie* kind, whose demand is: management of the factory by the workers and all the workers.

The text says:

*"For [crude communism] the sole purpose of life and existence is immediate, physical possession. The category of the worker is not done away with, but extended to all men. The relationship of private property persists as the relationship of the community to the world of things."<sup>5</sup>*

The refutation of the Russians and petty bourgeois leftoids is so clear here that one is led to think that their pacifist theses (for such they really are) already existed a hundred years ago, and that Marxism unraveled the riddle for their benefit once and for all. But the immediatists – both the ones and the others – claim to occupy themselves very seriously with constructing something better than classical Marxism, using the lessons that give them a head start of a century's worth of history on the young Karl, by whom we swear. Instead, they are still blinded by the hunger for *immediate possession*, which gave rise to the formulas of 'the land to the peasants' and 'the factories to the workers', and other such despicable parodies of the grandeur of the program of the revolutionary communist party.

## **The elimination of money**

The thesis of integral communism states that the form of private property, and thus of the dehumanization of man, prevails not only when the capitalist spends his profit or the landlord his rent, but also when the proletariat spends his wages. Only in this way is it possible to condemn all the spurious forms in which *immediate possession* emerges triumphant, and which are luridly extolled by fake communists.

Every economy based on money is an economy of the alienation of man and of contempt for his humanity. The pages of this text, which we reported on and which deals with the commentary and passages written by the greatest of poets, such as Shakespeare and Goethe, are nothing short of incendiary. Money degrades man to a status lower than that of a beast. But here, too, the Stalinist falsification has wreaked havoc. Money is the soldering together of impossibilities, wrote Marx in his commentary on the English playwright's

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<sup>4</sup> "Left workerists"; in French in the original text.

<sup>5</sup> MECW Vol. 3, p. 294, with the word "direct" replaced here with its synonym "immediate" in order to better illustrate Bordiga's point. The translation used by Bordiga also substitutes "human society" for "community."

statement that money *maketh the opposites kiss*. And it is none other than money, we add, that maketh Khrushchev and Eisenhower kiss.

In the Stalinist translation, the passage is instead given as follows: "*Money... exchanges the characteristics and objects with one another, even if they contradict each other.*" In this anodyne restatement, the pitiless condemnation of money is reduced to a vague repetition of the "*law of exchange value,*" claimed by the Stalinists to govern socialist economy, for it quite obviously governs the economy of Russia. But Marx rejects money precisely insofar as he rejects the law of value. The passage begins with the words: "*Since money, as the existing and active concept of value, confounds and confuses all things, it is the general confounding and confusing of all things — the world upside-down — the confounding and confusing of all natural and human qualities.*"<sup>6</sup> And it continues thus:

*"He who can buy bravery is brave, though he be a coward. As money is not exchanged for any one specific quality, for any one specific thing, or for any particular human essential power, but for the entire objective world of man and nature, from the standpoint of its possessor it therefore serves to exchange every quality (such as the abovementioned cowardice) for every other, even contradictory, quality and object (such as bravery, or the dagger of a hired assassin): it is the fraternisation of impossibilities. It makes contradictions embrace."*<sup>7</sup>

This quotation is followed by another passage, which reveals that in full communism, fidelity is exchanged only for fidelity, love for love, joy for joy. And this thesis is preceded by a series of ruthless antitheses: "*[Money] transforms fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, hate into love, virtue into vice, vice into virtue, servant into master, master into servant, idiocy into intelligence, and intelligence into idiocy.*"<sup>8</sup>

We drew the incontestable conclusion that where there is money, there is neither socialism nor communism, just as there is none – not by a long shot – in Russia.

## **Crude communism**

We dwelled for a long time on that excerpt from Marx which precedes the passage about integral communism and which instead deals with the preliminary form of "crude" communism. We are not going to develop here our observations on its relation to sociocultural activity, which could be misunderstood without the clarifications concerning the content of human and social knowledge in the course of historical revolutionary struggles that we provided previously, and

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 326. The translation used by Bordiga substitutes "swaps and exchanges" for "confounds and confuses."

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. The insertions are Bordiga's.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

which we will provide again. The basis of our critique consisted in reiterating that regardless of the intellectual pretensions of contemporary Russia, the fact remains that its ideology is still much worse than what Marx analyzed in his writing on crude communism. That writing was, over a century ago, one of the first effective steps taken against the alienation of man due to the capitalist form. In the Russia of today, in contrast, there is a return to and support for the conservation of the capitalist form.

## Elimination of the family

This excerpt about crude communism merits commenting on at length with regard to the condemnation made in it by Marx of the first affirmation of the community of women, understood incorrectly as the indiscriminate ownership of the female sex by the male. Marx establishes here that the same relation by which the working class man is *alienated* in the forms of property also finds its historical measure in the degree of abjection and sexual alienation of the woman.

It would require supreme audacity to try to deduce from this profound thesis, for the use of the Kremlin (it is time to retire the old phrase *ad usum delphini*<sup>9</sup>), a justification for the form of the monogamous and even hereditary family as a socialist form! If there were no immense wealth of other evidence for stripping modern Russia of any remaining socialist veneer, it would suffice to recall an episode of atrocious topicality: the play-acting of the *couples at the summit*<sup>10</sup>, through which the modern States that emerged from World War II with the pretense of renewing themselves are still represented for promotional purposes by the families... of sovereigns, with President, First Lady, and their offspring, and with much less decency than in the classical hereditary dynasties. The spectacle was already humiliating enough back then, in the case of the US-Russia duo, and has become all the more so recently, with strange undertones of an enjoyable parody, in the case of the Russia-Italy duo<sup>11</sup>.

Many are the passages in this text by Marx that serve to show that the program of communist society eliminates the institution of the family, just as it does those of the State and of religion – all of which are alive and well in Russia, with a veritable convulsion of justifications that ends up arriving back at the

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<sup>9</sup> "For the use of the Dauphin (crown prince)"; originally referring to editions of Greek and Roman classics prepared by order of Louis XIV for his heir apparent, Louis of France, in the 1670s, from which a number of passages judged to be unsuitable for the young crown prince were removed. Consequently, the phrase came to mean "bowdlerized," "expurgated," or watered down so as to be appropriate for children.

<sup>10</sup> A reference to Khrushchev's state visit to the United States on September 15-27, 1959, which included a two-day summit at Camp David and during which both statesmen were often accompanied by their wives, Nina Khrushchev and Mamie Eisenhower.

<sup>11</sup> A reference to President Giovanni Gronchi's state visit to the USSR on February 6-11, 1960.

Hegelian system. Marx's alleged but never existing Hegelianism took refuge in the Kremlin. The theoretical discussion is vast and suggestive on this point. We have the right to follow these hundred-year-old economical theses: no wages, no money, no exchange, no value; and the no less old and original social theses (very different from the bourgeois ones that seem to parrot them): no God, no State, no family.

## **Envy and competition**

Another point that serves to reaffirm our rebuke of the sinister structural regressions taking place in Russia is that about *envy*, with which Marx reproached the young and ingenuous crude communism. It is envy that makes the poor man crave the wealth of the rich and depicts the former's goal as simply a piece of the latter's property, obtained through a general levelling-down. Marx demonstrates such envy to be an expression of economic competition, the driving force of the bourgeois world. But where else, if not in this, lies the origin of the recent Soviet recognition of the incentive of personal gain, which can be transformed and accumulated into a small fortune belonging to the individual or the family – especially in the countryside? It is this driving force that ultimately underlies the international formula of a race between States, of peaceful competition; a formula that basely wrecked the last remnants of the communist conception of the overthrow of the contemporary world of brigandage. Class struggle, the revolutionary vision, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the programmatic description of a society so radically different from the present bourgeois one – all wrecked in the livid and miserable envy among the [world] powers, which are without exception built upon the alienation of man.

## **Marx and Hegel**

Marx's earliest published writing is a letter to his father from November 10, 1837. A student in Berlin barely 19 years old, the young man shows that he carries in his head a revolutionary volcano, and in his studies he drifts from one subject to the next: law, poetry, literature, philosophy. In the letter that runs to sixteen pages in its printed version, he bares his soul to his father, speaking of sleepless and excited nights, and only signs off when the eyes grow dim and the candle has burned down to the bottom.

It would be ridiculous to present Karl Marx as a child prodigy or an immensely precocious savant; that would mean yielding to the sensationalist style that is becoming ever more rampant today. The youth of his generation finds himself part of an agitated historical plotline, especially in Germany where the bourgeois revolution that unfolded so grandiosely in England and France meets with an exasperated resistance of the *ancien régime* and the impotence of the liberal bourgeoisie. In the mind of the young student, the son of a family of means that is still debating if he should become an administrative clerk or a



magistrate after graduation, there cross their paths waves set in motion by the substructure of a double revolution. It is not with banal phrases about being in the presence of a Genius who "*only comes along once every five hundred years*"<sup>12</sup>, nor about a mind of exceptional incisiveness and profound scholarly culture combined with a formidable critical faculty, that one responds to the impression that in stages during which history turns into a fetid pestilent swamp, such as the present one, young people of that age, even if their families furnish them with the financial means that put them in a position to study with all the best resources at their disposal, have in comparison barely learned how to swim in their own pee.

According to the doctrine that today bears Marx's name, and of which we are followers by virtue of the alignment of forces, which has slapped us in the face with the choice between one side or the other, we see in this tormented letter not a reflection of knowledge or a power of genius monumentally exceeding the average, but rather an *intuition* that – even without the benefit of cultural information and critical training, and at an almost subconscious level – expresses the determination of its environment.

From this thrilled letter – the last among the hundreds of notebooks that he confessed to have burned, and hundreds of other works that he in his youthful ardor intended for publication (he might have already imagined them being printed in order to be discussed one hundred twenty years later) – we present the following extract concerning Marx's relation to Hegel: "From the idealism which, by the way, I had compared and nourished with the idealism of Kant and Fichte, I arrived at the point *of seeking the idea in reality itself.*"<sup>13</sup> We can already observe that these two – Kant and Fichte, as well as Hegel who is about to make an appearance – had instead sought the key to reality in the idea. This subversive push of youthful vigor is immediately expressed using fiery rhetoric: "*If previously the gods had dwelt above the earth, now they became its centre.*"

*"I had read fragments of Hegel's philosophy, the grotesque craggy melody of which did not appeal to me. Once more I wanted to dive into the sea, but with the definite intention of establishing that the nature of the mind is just as necessary, concrete and firmly based as the nature of the body. My aim was no longer to practise tricks of swordsmanship, but to bring genuine pearls into the light of day."*<sup>14</sup>

Marx recounts how, after digesting Hegel's system and rewriting it on his own, "*rack[ing his] brains endlessly*" in the process, the work, which mattered to him immensely, "*like a false siren deliver[ed him] into the arms of the enemy*"<sup>15</sup>. A period of anger and irritation follows, as does the need to find a cure against

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<sup>12</sup> Said by Zinoviev about Lenin.

<sup>13</sup> MECW Vol. 1, p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

exhaustion. This is when Marx enters a "Doctors' Club" made up of disciples of the Hegelian school, where, as a result of violent and contradictory debates, he "became ever more firmly bound to the modern world philosophy from which [he] had thought to escape"... "but all rich chords were silenced and I was seized with a veritable fury of irony, as could easily happen after so much had been negated."<sup>16</sup>

## Determinism at work

The stupid and conventional explanation is that we are dealing here with a young scholar who was molded by the books he read. To throw oneself into books left and right is but a danger from which only men gifted with good physical health (which, as the adolescent Karl intuited, coincides with the vigor of the brain muscle) are sure to escape, and only when they are guided by external circumstances that they cannot notice. In the cenacle<sup>17</sup> of the Hegelian left, a battle was being fought out between the influences of the Prussian feudal dynastic power that wanted to make Hegel the knight<sup>18</sup> into one of its functionaries, even after his death, and the young bourgeoisie that was trying to turn this most copious cultural heritage into the revolutionary banner of German liberalism. Marx was determined, without yet being a party man, both to participate in the assault on the traditional Prussian state, and to savage and shame an impotent bourgeoisie in its attempt to imitate Cromwell or Robespierre. His mind was nourished on history no less than on philosophy and literature – it also found its sustenance in natural sciences, but Marx did not yet know that his journey would eventually lead him to "learn" *economy*, the living fruit of those bourgeoisies that had known how to win a revolution.

In contrast, our reconstruction of the events is simple, even ingenuous. Marx was born like his contemporary from next door could have been born: a materialist and *enemy* of the idealists. To accomplish the task into which he was thrown – to destroy bourgeois idealism – he first needed to familiarize himself with his enemy. On the other hand, the Prussian despotic right would every so often come to doubt their Hegel and treat him as a "dead dog." During these waves of reaction that would fill the decades of Marx's adulthood, the Doctors' left found itself struck by censorship and police persecution. After resoundingly breaking with it, Marx would not refrain from whipping it bloody. But not only would he use as his whip his most highly developed understanding of the obscure and mysterious master, acquired during the furious night of racking his brain; he would also refuse to join the Hegel-demolishers, against which the old

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>17</sup> The site of the Last Supper, with the derived meaning of a clique or a small circle of initiates, particularly writers.

<sup>18</sup> A reference to Hegel's own figure of the "knight of virtue," set up in *Phenomenology of Spirit* to caricature a concept of the good so abstract and universalist as to be meaningless.

inspirer of bourgeois Germany and the left wing of his disciples formed – at least until 1848 – a united front.

This was not a personal position, much less an intellectual one, but rather a clear political line of the proletarian party which had in the meantime come into being and which in the Communist Manifesto demanded the fall of the Prussian-German feudal and dynastic regime while it was already preparing for the anticapitalist class battle waged by the young German proletariat, as young as Marx himself and no less tormented by the combined front of its natural enemies, whose siren's embrace would still, even after more than a century, prove to be so difficult to escape from.

Our formulation (disagreeable to many) that Marx did not make his mental effort all by himself, but rather as a result of social factors, we find confirmed in the very same text of the manuscripts toward the end of the chapter on "private property and communism." Let the truth reveal itself:

*"But also when I am active scientifically, etc. — an activity which I can seldom perform in direct community with others — then my activity is social, because I perform it as a man. Not only is the material of my activity given to me as a social product (as is even the language in which the thinker is active): my own existence is social activity, and therefore that which I make of myself, I make of myself for society and with the consciousness of myself as a social being."<sup>19</sup>*

## Philosophy and economy

Various publishers preface the text from 1844 with a passage that can serve as a historical presentation. Marx explains that before immersing himself in the study of political economy, which he in these pages openly counterposes to any purely philosophical activity, of which the proletarian and communist revolution is the definitive overcoming, he had already drafted (though not published) two works critical of Hegel's system, known to have been written in 1841-42<sup>20</sup>, on the Philosophy of the State and the Philosophy of Right. The content of these writings, which we cannot quote here at length, is openly destructive of these essential parts of the philosopher's work. For example, it is in them that the illusion of the eternity and immanence of the State and of Right, characteristic of modern bourgeois thought, is refuted – as is, above all, the identification of the State as the universal *absolute* foregrounded over the particular and contingent forms of civil society, the church, or the family. Here Marx lays the groundwork for his historical system, which will culminate in the theory of proletarian dictatorship and the death of the State in classless society,

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<sup>19</sup> MECW Vol. 3, p. 298

<sup>20</sup> In fact, the preface refers to a single then-unpublished text, Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, which Marx did not start working on until late 1843. However, his correspondence with Ruge does indicate that he intended to subject Hegel's philosophy to critique as early as 1842.

insofar as he destroys the colossal Hegelian error and demonstrates that the State is a secondary, derived, and transient historical form.

Marx postponed the publication of these works of his, considering it more urgent to establish a dialogue between economists and philosophers. On the other hand, he set aside the works critical of the Hegelian left that would see the light of day later, such as the monumental one on the "German Ideology," written together with Engels and Hess and destined, as is well known, to the criticism of the mice.

This introduction of Marx's is in the state of an almost formless note, and it has to be read with sagacity. He uses the following phrase: he does not want to *intermingle* criticism directed against speculation with criticism of the various subjects themselves. With this second category, he is evidently alluding to expositions of social and historical economic facts that will continue to constitute the work of his nascent school; whereas with the first, he is referring to the fiery reproaches directed at Bauer, Stirner, Vogt, and their ilk for the presumptuous jeers against which he defended the only serious successor of Hegel, which for him was Feuerbach – who took the step from idealism to materialism, thus doing alone more than Hegel did, and doing it better than him, albeit in a still incomplete form.

To clarify this historico-theoretical passage, let us turn to a comparison with the polemic between Galileo and the Peripatetics, which we recently cited in another context<sup>21</sup>. As innovative as Marx, and as much of a formidable polemicist, Galileo holds a dual position in the face of his opponents. On the one hand, he strives to clear the way for them toward new *subjects* of which he knows them not to have the faintest idea, such as astronomy, kinematics, and dynamics. In the dialogue (it is unfortunate that Marx burned his Cleanthes<sup>22</sup>, in which he claims to have dealt with the science of nature and thought) the author appears as Salviati, a quick learner of the new sciences as Sagredo, and a timid rehasher of Aristotelian thought as Simplicio. When Salviati addresses Sagredo, he opens the way to the new experimental method for him. But when he addresses Simplicio, who only knows how to speculate, that is to endlessly ponder sacred texts, he gives just that kind of speech and knocks him down with it. You don't know how to subject the sensory observation of the external world to critique, and you think you can get there first with the *logos* you believe to have inside your head? Very well, I agree to deal not with experience but with

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<sup>21</sup> A reference to the article *Elementi della questione spaziale* [Aspects of the space question] from the immediately preceding issue of *Il Programma Comunista* (No. 4, February 27, 1960), in which Bordiga used the developing space race between the US and the USSR as a starting point for discussion of the history of scientific knowledge, contrasting Aristotle's physics with that of Galileo.

<sup>22</sup> A reference to a dialogue that Marx mentions in his 1837 letter to his father as a work he wrote during his attempts to grapple with Hegel's philosophy. The namesake of the dialogue, Cleanthes of Assos (c. 331-c. 232 BC), was an early Stoic philosopher whose conception of physics contained notable materialist elements.

the mental gymnastics of your *logos*, and I'll show you what you read in Aristotle – who was no dummy – for what it is: a pyramid of stupidity.

Marx, that boxer of the brain muscle, affords himself the same amusement, but he does not want to intermingle the two planes of argumentation. When he addresses us, his proletarian and communist followers, he deals with the subjects of the real physical, natural, and human world, having forever laid to rest all idealist mysticism. When he addresses the Simplicii who were to Aristotle what Bauer is to Hegel, he adopts their own weapon. That weapon is “speculation”: the work performed inside the learned head, the blindness to physical truth, and introspection taking place in the tenebrous depths of the cogitating brain. Very well, says the brawny Karl, I accept the challenge with the weapon of your choice, and – on the terrain of speculation, of Hegel’s method and even of Hegelian phraseology – it won’t be hard for me to reduce you to torn puppets. But this exercise in which, out of polemical necessity, satirical joking will be frequent and acerbic, I want to keep distinct from the doctrinal work of the party, to which it matters precious little if you keep indulging in speculative onanism.

Just one quote, from *The German Ideology*, Part III, against Sancho (Max Stirner): “*Philosophy and the study of the actual world have the same relation to one another as onanism and sexual love*”<sup>23</sup>. Even when it comes to swear words, we are not *enrichers* of the doctrine!

Nevertheless, the economic and philosophic manuscripts end with the chapter “Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic.” When read cautiously, as it has to be, it will be found that underneath its own particular type of intelligent employment of Hegel’s formulas, it contains the definitive and irrevocable condemnation of his system.

## **The eternal riddles**

However, even in the social-economic part of the text, after the description of full communism and before the end of the chapter on “Private property and communism,” there are passages that refer to the philosophical problem – or rather, to the escape from what has been the traditional subject of philosophizing.

The passages we have in mind follow after that about science which is not personal but rather social. And with them, we are already witness to a total demolition of Hegelianism. Hegel claims that after a tortuous deduction from the self-consciousness of the individual, one arrives at “*general consciousness*.” Marx’s whole final chapter will be directed at dismantling this summit of the

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<sup>23</sup> MECW Vol. 5, p. 236.

iridescent idealist pyramid, and will end with two quotes from the Encyclopedia<sup>24</sup> so as to bring out their absurdity, up to and including the famous aphorism: "*The absolute is mind. This is the highest definition of the absolute.*"<sup>25</sup> What does 'absolute' mean? It means '*detached* from'<sup>26</sup>, and this nominalized adjective therefore says that the purported supreme achievement is *detached* from any physical or natural basis. A brilliant intuition made Hegel, in his capacity as a revolutionary of thought, say that everything that is rational is real and everything that is real is rational, but the conformist Prussian professor ended up bogged down in a most mystical and unreal spiritualism. Instead of grasping that man does not seek the *absolute* because it is not findable, it is not 'attachable', he insists that in his own professional person he found it once and for all, and that the search is over!

Here Marx counterposes to *general consciousness* in Hegel's sense, which "*at the present day [...] is an abstraction from real life and as such confronts it with hostility*"<sup>27</sup>, the appropriation that man makes with his return to social man, which delivers it from the wretched alienation due to private property. "*My general consciousness is only the theoretical shape of that of which the living shape is the real community, the social fabric*"<sup>28</sup>. There is no longer anything mystical and metaphysical about the word 'theoretical'. The reality and life of nature and of the human species are physical facts, and their *imprint*, also made physical, onto the brain that is no longer individual but rather social, is theory.

The idea claims to have come before the fact. In actuality, the theory is given after the facts, as a superstructure of them. That is historical materialism.

In the text, there follows the thesis that there will no longer be any reason to distinguish between man's individual life and his generic life, or rather that of the species. The consciousness of the individual, that ancient philosopheme<sup>29</sup>, has been gotten rid of.

*"In his consciousness of species (this is how one must translate Gattungsbewusstsein, and not as consciousness of the kind, which is... another Stalinization of the kind) man confirms his real social life and simply repeats his real existence in thought, just as conversely the being of the species confirms*

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<sup>24</sup> Hegel's Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse [Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline].

<sup>25</sup> English translation of Hegel's text quoted by Marx is taken from: Inwood, M., ed. 2007. Hegel: Philosophy of Mind: Translated with Introduction and Commentary. Oxford University Press, New York, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> Classical Latin: *ab* (from) + *solūtus* (unbound, detached, unrestrained).

<sup>27</sup> MECW Vol. 3, p. 298.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. The translation used by Bordiga substitutes "social being" for "the social fabric," both being alternative renditions of the German *gesellschaftliche Wesen*.

<sup>29</sup> A philosophical axiom.

*itself in species consciousness and in its generality, as a thinking being, has a real existence (thus we translate für sich ist).*<sup>30</sup>

What takes place here is the complete abolition of the individual person, especially as a subject of thinking activity. "Man, much as he may therefore be a particular individual [...], is just as much the totality — the ideal totality — the subjective existence of imagined and experienced society for itself."<sup>31</sup>

We are on the brink of the fall of the eternal riddles and opposites. "Thinking and being are thus certainly distinct, but at the same time they are in Unity with each other" (in *Einheit* is much stronger than *united*, as in the version a.u.K.<sup>32</sup>).

A thousand-year-old contradiction is unraveled. Is it necessary to first presuppose reality, being – or does thought come first? If there were a reality without thought, who would be aware of it? That old trick which led to the dethronement of man and the introduction of His Holiness God Almighty, or the professor Absolute Spirit – what remains of it now?

Today, a remedy is found in postulating populations of beings from other stars, who would have thought before our humanity and whose radio messages we perhaps simply haven't received yet...<sup>33</sup>

The time seems to have come to get rid of another dualist muddle, one that tormented the good Simplicio: that between the Greek *nous* and *aistesis*, the mind and the senses. Remember? The eye tells me that the stick partly immersed in water is broken, yet I say it is not, because the mind makes clear to me as much. The senses deceive; thought finds the truth. But was it thought – or was it the senses of another person looking into the water, or a different sense of my own, touch? Now we will see that after establishing that reason is not a personal faculty but rather a social one, we will do the same also for the senses and for experience.

That the senses were individual was a stupid illusion determined by the historical relationship of private property. Here it is economy and history that help us escape from the old philosophical tricks!

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<sup>30</sup> Modified from MECW Vol. 3, p. 299 in accordance with Bordiga's parenthetical remarks. The only notable change concerns the phrase *für sich ist*, which is translated more literally in MECW as "exists for itself."

<sup>31</sup> MECW Vol. 3, p. 299.

<sup>32</sup> *Ad usum Kremlinj*; see note 9. Note that the MECW translation correctly preserves "in unity," and did not have to be modified.

<sup>33</sup> At the time when Bordiga was writing, only a few months had passed since the publication of Giuseppe Cocconi and Philip Morrison's seminal article proposing a search for interstellar signals near the 21 cm wavelength of neutral hydrogen, and preparations were underway for the first practical experiment of this kind, Project Ozma (initiated in April 1960).

*"Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it (not when we sense it) — when it exists for us as capital, or when it is immediately (O unfortunate immediatists) possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc., — in short, when it is used by us [...] In the place of all physical and mental senses there has therefore come the sheer estrangement of all these senses, the sense of having."<sup>34</sup>*

Marx could retrieve his sexual measuring device and say that for bourgeois psychology, joy is not when you love a woman, but when you *have* her!

But after the elimination of private property, in communism:

*"Man appropriates his comprehensive essence in a comprehensive manner, that is to say, as a whole man. Each of his human relations to the world-seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, observing, experiencing, wanting, acting, loving-in short, all the organs of his individual being, like those organs which are directly social in their form, are in their objective orientation, or in their orientation to the object, the appropriation of the object, the appropriation of human reality. Their orientation to the object is the manifestation of the human reality. This manifestation is just as highly varied as the determinations of human essence and activities, human activity and human suffering (another classic contrast), for suffering, humanly considered, is a kind of self-enjoyment of man."<sup>35</sup>*

## **Down with personality: that is the key**

All these wonderful results, which will be brought about by the communist revolution and which are anticipated in the doctrine of communism that has been complete ever since 1844; all these unravelings of riddles 'unfolded in history once and for all' have been rendered possible in their marvelous effects by abandoning the thousand-year-old illusion of the sole individual facing the natural world, stupidly called 'external' by philosophers. External to what? External to the supremely deficient 'I', yes, but external to the human species – that can no longer be said, for Species-man is internal to that same nature; forms part of the physical world.

In the splendid expression above that an utmost manifestation of man – the highest one – is *suffering*, because if he did not suffer, he would not know of

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<sup>34</sup> MECW Vol. 3, p. 300; the insertions are Bordiga's. As before, the word "directly" has been replaced by "immediately."

<sup>35</sup> Modified from MECW Vol. 3, pp. 299-300. The insertions are Bordiga's. Marx's footnote about the manifestations of human reality being as varied as the determinations of human essence was apparently pasted directly into the corresponding paragraph in the edition consulted by Bordiga; this is followed here but not in MECW. Note also that in the Italian translation, "human activity and human suffering" is rendered as *l'agire ed il patire*, which are nominalized verbs meaning "to act" and "to endure, to suffer," respectively. The words "active" and "passive" are derived from the participles of the Latin ancestors of these two verbs – hence Bordiga noting "another classic contrast."



the joy to which he is inclined in life and in history, the very basis of all "grammars" has been gotten rid of: that is, the active and the passive, the subject and the direct object. Elsewhere Marx says that philosophers went so far as to make subjects out of all predicates.<sup>36</sup> Philosophy, for thousands of years grammatically incorrect, has been blinded by the folly of relating everything to the silly phantasma of the *Ego*.

In this potent text, the object and the subject become, just like man and nature, the same thing. Indeed, everything is nature, everything is an object: man the subject, man "against nature" disappears, along with the illusion of the individual 'I'.

That is what we can read in these pages, all the greater because of how obviously they bear the marks of the revelatory hastiness (for us, there would be no *creation* if not for *passion*) with which a determining force compelled [the author] to write them down.

We have seen that when the individual becomes the species, the spirit, that impoverished *absolute*, dissolves itself into objective nature. For individual brains, those pitiful passive little machines, we have substituted the *social brain*. Moreover, Marx has overcome the individual, bodily *senses* within the form of collective, human *perception*.

*"The abolition of private property is therefore the complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities, but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become, subjectively and objectively, human. The eye has become a human eye, just as its object has become a social, human object — an object made by man for man."*<sup>37</sup>

It does not have to be pointed out any longer that this grammatically singular *man* stands for the unitary plurality of men, humanity, the social species (when it frees itself from the scourge of property). Even the singular and the plural of grammarians are swept away by the wave of revolution.

*"The senses have therefore become directly in their practice theoreticians."* The word 'therefore' is used because we are no longer speaking of the subjective, individual senses. O Peripatetic Simplicio, here is your bridge to span the Aristotelian abyss between the senses and the mind!

*"Need or enjoyment has consequently lost its egotistical (Marx's italics, which every so often override ours) nature, and nature has lost its mere utility by use (use by that ugly mug, the private individual) becoming human use."*

*"In the same way, the senses and enjoyment of other men (in the text: of the other man) have become my own appropriation. Besides these immediate*

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<sup>36</sup> A reference to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right (cf. MECW Vol. 3, p. 23).

<sup>37</sup> MECW Vol. 3, p. 300.

*(immediate means individual, which is why immediatism means anticommunism) organs, therefore, social organs develop in the form of society[.]*<sup>38</sup>

For 'social', read 'impersonal'.

*"It is obvious that the (collective) human eye enjoys things in a way different from the crude, non-human eye; the human ear different from the crude ear, etc."*<sup>39</sup>

How can the subjective eye of the worker, which only sees small change being slapped in his hand, enjoy things in the same way as the human eye? Or his ear, which only hears the sound of enslavement? Wages and money nail the eye and the ear, and thus also the spirit, to *inhuman crudeness*, which continues unabated in Russia. The text with its *et cetera* has flown to other heights; we have reached the end in a way determined by the present day.

## Other bridges over abysses

*"We see how subjectivity and objectivity, spirituality and materiality, activity and suffering, lose their antithetical character, and thus their existence as such antitheses only within the framework of society (communism: program of communist society); we see how the resolution of the theoretical antitheses is only possible in a practical way, by virtue of the practical energy of man (only by revolution). Their resolution is therefore by no means merely a problem of understanding, but a real problem of life, which philosophy could not solve precisely because it conceived this problem as merely a theoretical one."*<sup>40</sup>

The miracle does not take place each time a subjective individual, whose isolated sterility is beyond doubt (even if his name were Marx, Karl), devotes himself to the practice of making his buttocks vibrate (*sus valientes posaderas*<sup>41</sup> of Sancho Max Stirner, the Unique). The thesis can be written as follows: *only one human practice is immediately its own theory: the revolution*. Human knowledge advances by revolution. Human knowledge advances by social revolutions. The rest is silence.

It is, in the end, a matter of getting rid of God, but not in order to light the pillar candles that were placed on his altars inside the ignoble receptacle of the thinker's braincase. The unitary welding together of man and nature has abolished every dualism, every *unreality* between man and nature, between spirit and world. But as a result of the tradition passed down from the *property-owning* past, it is not easy to free oneself from the question: since

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. The insertions are Bordiga's. As before, the word "direct" has been replaced by "immediate."

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 301. The insertions are Bordiga's.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 302. The insertions are Bordiga's.

<sup>41</sup> "His ample buttocks"; misspelled as "*sus valientes pasadoras*" in the original text. A reference to The German Ideology (cf. MECW Vol. 5, p. 424).

nature had followed its trajectory since before man, its origin cannot be explained without a Creator.

Our atheism has nothing in common with that which the immanentist bourgeois idealists arrived at, and which we reduce to transcendent voids.

*"Since the real existence of man and nature has become evident in practice, through sense experience (by overcoming the dualist illusion of two non-comparable essences, that of the spirit and of the material world), because man has thus become evident for man as the being of nature, and nature for man as the being of man, the question about an alien being, about a being above nature and man — a question which implies the admission of the unreality of nature and of man — has become impossible in practice."<sup>42</sup>*

With private property, it was necessary to call oneself an atheist to accept the existence of man as something different from natural matter. Man having been restored to nature as an integral part of it, both religion, which affirms the existence of God, and atheism, which denies it, have become equally useless to us. God and his Negation, time for retirement!

Along with the two, since 1844 it's been time for retirement also for Hegel.

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<sup>42</sup> MECW Vol. 3, pp. 305-306. The insertions are Bordiga's. The translation used by Bordiga substitutes "visible and perceptible in practice" for "evident," a second "since" for "because," "essentiality" for "real existence," and "inessentiality" for "unreality."