



Giornale di filosofia

## ***Marx scientist or prophet? Recent studies on Marx***

di Francesco Saverio Trincia

**Abstract:** Three books, published over the last five years, represent the starting point for a new way to approach the thought of Karl Marx. For the first time in the history of marxology, the scientific aspect of the thought is revealed by these books. The issue concerning the fact that only now, after almost a century and a half after Marx's death, scholars are beginning to discover the importance for a serious analysis of the great thinker's work, may, at first glance, appear to be a simple one, when in fact it opens up for discussion on a deeper issue regarding the fact that a kind of systematic deformation, distortion, simplification, rough practical utilization of the thought of Karl Marx took place in a way that had never before occurred in the history of philosophy. There is no simple way to explain this phenomenon. Nobody has ever had the goal to destroy Marx or treat his thought in a superficial manner. There is a specific reason for what happened and for what makes the publication of certain books the first serious effort to study Marx *sine ira et studio*, "without anger and without positive or negative prejudice". What these books have in common is not a specific interpretation of Marx (that they in fact interpret in different ways). The question discussed here concerns the meaning of the matter of fact that these books are published "after marxism", that is after the end of the soviet communism and of the marxist official ideology of almost all the communists movements in the world.

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Three books, published over the last five years, represent the starting point for a new way to approach the thought of Karl Marx. For the first time in the history of marxology, the scientific aspect of the thought is revealed by these books. The issue concerning the fact that only now, after almost a century and a half after Marx's death, scholars are beginning to discover the importance for a serious analysis of the great thinker's work, may, at first glance, appear to be a simple one, when in fact it opens up for discussion on a deeper issue regarding the fact that a kind of systematic deformation, distortion, simplification, rough practical utilization of the thought of Karl Marx took place in a way that had never before occurred in the history of philosophy. There is no simple way to explain this phenomenon. Nobody has ever had the goal to destroy Marx or treat his thought in a superficial manner. There is a specific reason for what happened and for what makes the publication of certain books the first serious effort to study Marx *sine ira et studio*, "without anger and without positive or negative prejudice". What these books have in common is not a specific interpretation of Marx (that they in fact interpret in different ways). The question discussed here concerns the meaning of the matter of fact that these books are published "after marxism", that is after the end of the soviet communism and of the marxist official ideology of almost all the communists movements in the world. What is meant by "marxism", if we do not consider the simple history of the philosophical and cultural tradition that starts with the publication of Marx's *Capital* in the second half of the nineteenth century? It is important to understand which have been the effects of "marxism" on Marx's thought all along his history, and furthermore whether Marx himself was the original cause of what have been called the "practical disasters" deriving from the 'great father' of socialism and communism (see Trincia 1992, 301-375; Wood 1972, 1981).

It should not be forgotten that many times and with very different aims from those developed by the starting "new era" of marxology, marxists have rebuked other marxists for betraying the supposed authentic words of the master. Like in the history of a religion, many times and not rarely with tragic

consequences, marxism has been the battlefield of different and conflicting interpretation of Karl Marx and of different ways to organize the struggle for the emancipation of the working class. It should not be forgotten that the terrible accusation of “revisionism” brought forward by the supposed controllers of the purity of the doctrine belonging to marxism’s tragic history of the last century, becomes a religious dogma against those who decide to “interpret” Marx as freely as possible. Marxism is a story of writings and of blood, of the writings shot from the weapon of the totalitarian power born in its name, and of the writings dripping with blood of the victims sharing different interpretations of the same doctrine.

In my book I have shown how the tragic history of marxism, the doctrine of the radical emancipation of human beings that has produced the worst forms of totalitarianism, starts as a development of the thought of Marx himself, where the initial normative inspiration of his youth is “repressed” , forgotten but not completely lost, in the Freudian sense of the word as Sheila Benhabib has clearly seen (see Benhabib 1986 , 90-98; Trincia 2000, 125-126), in favour of the historicism derived from Hegel’s idealism where history becomes in itself normative, but where, at the same time, normativism is lost as a criterion for moral judgement of history’s events.

The first important point I want to underline is that the end of marxism is in itself a liberating event, which returns the power of accomplishing the growth of the degree and of the quality of human beings’ liberty to Marx’s theory.

It should be said, without assigning an impossible personality to something like “history”, that *in the history*, as a consequence of human beings’ moral choices, it has happened that Marxism has become a practical instrument for slavery, and has just recently recovered its potentiality to offer wider and deeper freedom. It should be stressed, against any historically objective and deterministic interpretation Marx’s thought, that what has brought the communist states to their end and what has helped the radical transformation of the communist parties in the West, has been a normative instance, and a moral and political decision based on the growing feeling of the absence of freedom and spread in the *Gewissen*, that is, in the moral consciousness of the individual. A normative decision, an action of moral and ethical rebellion in the real social and political life, has restored the normative , and in this sense liberal and liberating, reforming potentiality of Marx’s thought.

Today, therefore, something essential has changed and the idea that the interpretation of Marx happens “after marxism” means that the history itself of a certain kind of marxism is over. Nobody wants to discover the real Marx against his supposed traitors. The new scholars want to discover what is left of Marx’s criticism of capitalism, which we can still use. They may not even know and love Jacques Derrida, but they are the heirs of Derrida’s 1993 announcement in *Spectres de Marx* that phantoms are always “with” us,

because they always come back like the real “revenants” that they are (Derrida 1993, 13-18). Derrida’s book announces the end of marxism, also because it has become clear that the *spectre* coming back to us after the death of communism is that of Marx himself *and not* that of communism. This distinction is crucial for any political, that is liberal, interpretation of Marx. Justice is, according to Derrida, what is present and absent in the phantom of Marx. Without Derrida, there would never have been a new era of marxology.

My second theoretical point is the one that I just outlined. My third theoretical point, and the second major question, will be the idea that the marxist theory of equality is the real item which marks the difference between the marxian thought and the enlightenment and contractual tradition, and which clearly depicts Marx “not only as beginning to think within, but also as later remaining within the German philosophical tradition” (Rockmore 2002, X).

I suggest that a specific hegelian heritage can be identified as operating in Marx’s theory (and praxis) of equality: it is the notion of *Sittlichkeit*, the sphere of objective and realized ethics where individual liberties and preferences are covered, but not dissolved, by the identical laws of the associated life. What is more important is that the normative inspiration of Marx’s thought is clearly present and active in his notion of equality, that is, it is the ethical drive on which he based his criticism of the capitalistic society. Marx’s inspiration must be seen as “ethical” and not as moral because Marx respects and gives further value to the hegelian distinction between what is good in the social relationship between individuals, and the “abstract” good willed by the singular individual themselves. Finally, I suggest that if Marx’s equality is taken beyond its becoming institutional communism, and leave it in its original form as a criticism of capitalistic material injustice, it is possible to see that its philosophical origin is the Marxian theory of value. It actually contains the difference (thought as normative, but at the same time embodied in the real functioning of the social relationships between the subjects involved in the production and reproduction of the material conditions of society) between the “equivalence” of values embodied in the produced goods, and the non economically equalizing equality of human beings freed by the “equivalence” that generates exploitation and material injustice. In this aspect of Marx’s thought it is possible to find a suggestions that correct, not abolish, societies based on capital, while keeping alive his ethical and critical inspiration. *The capital*, it should not be forgotten, is a *Critique of political economy*, as Marx points out at the very beginning of the 1867 Introduction (see Marx 1974, 11).

The figure of the reformist Marx that comes out is perfectly compatible with the framework of liberal and democratic western societies. As these are the result of the French Enlightenment tradition, and of the correction of it made

by the German idealistic philosophy, the critique of Karl Marx remains today the ideal point where the two “concepts of liberty” of Isaiah Berlin (see 2002) meet. The “negative liberty”, that is, the normative idea of each individual’s liberty— the idea met by Karl Marx in his early student years while reading Spinoza and Rousseau in addition to the great Epicure and Lucrece, the materialist thinker and poets that no longer feared the gods, therefore morally emancipated as individuals and preachers of that original liberty – remains the basis of any “emancipation” of the social individual, and this means that it must be extended to the critique of the material (not juridical ) slavery of the producers. Karl Marx’s economic-normative project of equality is the main tool for all those who want to defend and improve, *via* intervention of “political economy” reforms, our liberal democracies based on capitalistic way of production, and realize a possible more solid equilibrium and a lasting peace in our world now globally capitalistic.

### 1. The three books and the problem of ideology.

In presenting the three books mentioned above as all coming “after marxism”, I will have to rapidly repeat some of the points that I have already sketched out. But first of all I have to focus some attention on the very different cultural, philosophical and even political contest of the books’ common post-Marxism background. While Tom Rockmore’s *Marx after marxism. The philosophy of Karl Marx*, must be referred to as the “after marxism” of the American and more generally Anglophone tradition of studies, Guido Carandini’s *Un altro Marx. Lo scienziato liberato dall’utopia*, and Francesco S. Trincia’s *Normatività e storia. Marx in discussion* refer to the very different, more complicated and more ideologically conditioned european and italian marxism, within which they represent what has come “afterwards”. It becomes therefore necessary to speak of the problem of ideology and to try to explain why this is the right term to be used especially when the question at stake is “marxism” itself.

I have already remarked that what the three books have in common is the *critical* discovery of Marx’s critique of *capital societies*. Carandini is right to stress the fact that Marx is not a critic of “capitalism” as a whole, that is, of what has been the object of the historical descriptions, for example, of Ferdinand Braudel and of Immanuel Wallerstein , who have sketched the way in which a complete social system based on the production of the good *via* privately owned capital functions. According to Carandini, what is of interest to Marx is the working of the capital, and in particular the way in which capital grows over itself, based on the juridical and moral rightness of labour exploitations laws, which produces exchangeable goods in the market at their value, and

which are not produced to satisfy concrete needs. They embody exchangeable value, because they are substantively the products of labour, of equal, “abstract” labour. The quantity of time of abstract labour which is necessary to produce each single good, is not only – like Guido Carandini seems to believe – the measure of the value of all the goods exchangeable in the market, and depending on the law of demand and offer. Rather, each good as the original cell of the capital productive organization, has its “substance of value” in the time of labour occurred in its production, like Marx himself points out. It is no coincidence that Marx uses a notion like “substance”, that derives from the metaphysical, aristotelian, spinozistic and hegelian traditions. This reminds us that Marx’s *critique* of capital has a philosophical basis, and is not therefore “scientific” in the strictly accademic sense of the science of economy, a fact that Carandini seems to forget while Rockmore, on the other hand underlines. Were it so, we would not have had anything of what is still today important to us. More relevant is the circumstance that the real intention of Marx is understood only if the idea that the exchangeable “equivalence” of goods on the one side, and the idea of equality amongst human beings freed from the weight of the exploitation on the other, are both to be thought as substantive and qualitative conditions, radically different from one another and where the first condition does not progressively transform into second one.

The difference between “equivalence” of exchangeable goods that produce real inequality, and the “human”, non-economic equality of human beings is not a quantitative one, because it does not hold its solution within the limits of political economy. It cannot be managed *via* economic categories and economic decision. It becomes very clear that the difficulty of the enterprise of sketching a non-revolutionary, reformist Marx consists in the necessity of maintaining the idea of a qualitative change in the capitalistic production of goods, based on equivalence and inequality, but at the same time, in the necessity to interpret the change as a correction brought about by politics, and not realized by a social revolution that overthrows the capital system as a whole.

In order to be critical heirs of Marx the scientists must assign the task to react to the disharmony and inequalities produced by the capital production to politics, basing themselves on the belief that something essential or substantial must be corrected, and that, given the danger for the civil and political liberty as such, coming from the communist project to restrict the freedom of enterprise and investment, it is something as a world politics, accompanied by the moral *engagement* of world citizens that can try to globalize with justice the capital system as such. I wish to repeat my point: any possible reform of this system should never forget that Marx was right in underlining its essential antagonistic feature. And if we accept “antagonism”

(*Ungeselligkeit*) as an anthropological mood not to be cancelled, we accept also that it is structurally accompanied by the “sociability” (*Geselligkeit*), that makes the first useful for the progress of mankind. This is the normative project of Immanuel Kant, from which we can derive that politics reforming the capital system keeps sociability alive without destroying the liberty of conflict as the free competition that also binds human beings to one another. The normative project of correcting inequality is the main source of Marx’s thought, but Marx believed that it could not be faced and solved by political economy itself. Meeting Kant means therefore meeting the normative and the political, reformist Marx: that is, our Marx

To say that the three books mentioned above (specifically Carandini’s) critically analyse Marx’s critique of the capital production mechanism, means that what is at stake is the *scientific* demonstration of the theoretical exactness of the Marxian analysis which should not be trusted as a matter of faith: it must be proved, and it is in fact proved, that Marx is correct in his depiction of *the core* of the capital mechanism. Marx alone has discovered the “laws of movement” of capital. That the discovery is a *critique* of this mechanism does not mean that it is judged by a moral criterion external to it as a bad or unfair way of production, but that its way of functioning brings it to an always possible crisis, because disorder and wild antagonism are its laws: the laws that make it stronger and stronger and wider and wider and that extend its economic power over the entire world, are the same laws that make of it a crisis producing mechanism. Capital is in itself the crisis of itself, even if its destiny *is not* to come to an end. It is clear that only in a critical way it can be demonstrated, after Marx’s analysis, that capital societies are built on the continuous danger to fall in mortal crisis. But crisis means disorder, and disorder means injustice, suffering, starvation and death of the “worst off”, besides the exploitation of the workers. These severe defects can be, and already have been, object of corrective, reforming (according to European vocabulary) intervention and it is thanks to these interventions that capital societies survive. This correction is not different from the reduction of the degree of injustice and in some way of the anarchy itself of the capitalistic production that is going to destroy any local, moral, juridical, or material obstacle on its way.

I have briefly mentioned the paradox by which the notion of communism, as a theoretical goal of the young and of the mature Marx, even if never clarified in its concrete features going behind the simple end of private property and the realization of a society rationally ruled by the producers, in which governmental, political and juridical institutions have disappeared as they become superfluous, contains in itself the radical impossibility and therefore the end of any critically appreciated critique of capital. And, as communism contains the most deep refusal of the “formal” liberty of the

individuals, supposedly surpassed in the material emancipation of the society of the free producers, we understand why the historical end of the socialist “experiments” (as Sigmund Freud considered them: see for example Freud 1929, 112) is the cultural and more generally spiritual passport to the recovery of Marx’s thought as a means to defend liberty for the many, or for the most, especially for the unluckiest, and to abandon the illusory and dangerous project to put “emancipation” in the place of “liberty”. Not so many years ago Steven Lukes in *Marx and morality* has definitely clarified that the two notions are different, that marxism knows “emancipation” as superior to “liberty”, and that “emancipation” may be the result of a moral decision or rebellion, but is not in itself a moral value (Lukes 1987, 71-99). This is what I have clearly identified, following Benhabib, as the “repression” of the normative original inspiration of Marx’s thought. There must be something like a higher social order beyond the so called “bourgeois” society. Human beings should finally arrive to it through the process of surpassing the so called “formal” liberty and the abstract human rights. History has shown that beyond formal liberty what is going to be found is the totalitarianism of a society where each one is slave of the powers of a unique party administrating the marxist religion. This matter of fact, more than a philosophical reflexion, brings to the understanding of the absolute value of liberty as such.

The end of marxism allows for the growth of liberty within the capital societies, because the political movements acting before in favour of the communist that would enslave them, can now act in favour of a reformed, constantly politically monitored capitalism. This is the main point of Carandini’s book, whose interpretation of both the distinction of Marx as a supposed “prophet” and of Marx as a “scientist” (see Carandini 2005, 41-63) cannot remain free from criticism. Two major critiques can be forwarded to Carandini. The first one concerns refusal of the thesis by which Marx has been similar to a utopian thinker. Even without considering the radical difference between utopia and prophetism, the prophetic traces coming from the supposition of his thinking as the Jew that he was are totally deprived of importance. He was in fact an assimilated Jew, and his attitude toward Judaism was not exempt from signs and traces of anti-semitic hatred, as I have pointed out in the chapter on *Judenfrage* of my book (see Trincia 2000, 72-105). And, as Rockmore has emphasized, Marx was an hegelian. Communism appeared to him therefore as the outcome of the necessary development of history, not as a prophetically announced goal. Marx, had, for the same reason of his being hegelian, in same way forgotten his roots in the enlightenment. But the “repression of the normative” worked in him also as the way of reinterpreting Hegel’s idea of *Sittlichkeit* in the direction of the theory of equality before outlined. The recovery of the hegelianism of Marx is



therefore another important result of the “after marxism” era and goes in the same direction of the other two studies.

It is important to mention the different ways of being “after Marxism” in the Italian and in the Anglophone tradition of studies on Marx. It is very well known, and Rockmore points out, that there is a “non-political” tradition of Marxist studies in the anglophone area – the self baptized “analytical Marxism” mostly from the eighties - that dates back to the very well known works of Jon Elster , the author that significantly tried to “make sense of Marx” by freeing him from the dialectical jail in which he was imprisoned by his being Hegel’s main heir: a jail that has, according to Elster, literally no rational sense (see Elster 1985) , of John Roemer , perhaps the theoretically deepest one of the analytical Marxists (see Roemer 1981, 1982, 1986), of G. A. Cohen , whose *K. Marx’s theory of history. A defence* (see 1978) is a not completely acceptable attempt to totally cancel Hegel from that theory, and of Allen Wood. It is therefore clear that “as distinguished from a political approach (to Marx) , which is now moribund , [...] as an intellectual approach marxism is still very interesting” (Rockmore 2002, XVII) analytic marxism gives full demonstrations of this assumption.

“Intellectual”, in Rockmore’s theory, signifies something similar to what I mean by “critical”. It is also true that “it is paradoxically the philosophical dimension of Marx’s position that is now perhaps most significant but least recognized, above all by his marxist followers as well as by even the most acute non-marxist and anti-marxist critics”. And it is finally true that “since its inception, Marxism has routinely asserted an adamant link between Marx and marxism. For historical reasons, political marxism, which spread throughout the world after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, seemed for so many the best hope for a better life, for some the promise of a radiant future” (Rockmore 2002, XII). But if it also true that political marxism came to an abrupt end in 1989 with the break up of the Soviet bloc and that therefore the non-political analytical Marxism has not been disturbed by the historical interruption of communism, the questions of the meaning of analytical marxism still remains open. Is that really an “after marxism”? If one decides to go in the direction of Tom Rockmore by not attributing too much importance to the suspicion that, as I said, marxism is ideological in a very special way, there is no doubt that analytical Marxism is not ideological and is in the full sense of the word something that comes “after Marxism” – despite the fact that it considers itself to be a kind of “marxism”. But if the ideological attitude is understood as a way of transforming the rational scientific demonstration in a matter of religious faith – like it was for soviet marxism when reality was lost in favour of the false representation of it and of a kind of sacred liturgy – or even in the support given to the marxist faith by a supposedly stronger scientific demonstration of the truth of marxist

assumptions, then one is justified to assert that analytical Marxism, in itself ideological, is not completely an “after marxism”. If you take in the sense that something happened that obliges anyone to not declare himself a marxist without admitting that it would now sound like saying “I am catholic” or “I am protestant”, or “I believe in God”, analytic marxism is largely an ideological form of marxism – and it is also destined to be criticized by a critical science without ideological support.

As I have pointed out (see Trincia 1992, 303-314) which is a severe discussion mostly with Jon Elster’s “making sense of Marx”) the principal aim of Marx’s analytic scholars is to defend their marxist faith by introducing a method and a philosophical prospective that are supposed to do the job in the study of Marx; something that the blindly hegelian Marx could not do himself. It is clear that the result of such an attitude is that – independently from the scientific value of the interpretation of Marx given by them, there something that *is not* in any case controlled by the scientific attitude, and this is just the ‘decision by faith’ to be marxist. All therefore seems to work in analytic marxism, except the fact that faith remains out of the scientific deduction. Dialectic disappears in Marx, and this is certainly a way to build a new, different stage in the history of Marxism, but the faithful decision to be Marxist does not, and this maintains the feature of traditional Marxism to this Marxism. Ideology is not overthrown while it should be overthrown if the old “political” use of Marx’s thought has to arrive to an end. From this point of view, Rockmore’s book really opens a new perspective that goes beyond analytic marxism.

Things are very different for the Italian marxist tradition. A tradition which only for a small part is similar to the French one (Italy has not had a “marxist” like Jean-Paul Sartre), and in larger part is similar to the German marxist tradition (but Italy has not had a “marxist” like Theodor W. Adorno), and is very different from the English marxist tradition, where, nevertheless, some kind of relationship has been established between the anti-dialectical tradition of the empirical reading of Marx (if one thinks of the “New Left Review”, and the anti-hegelian marxism of Lucio Colletti – before he had become an anti-marxist *a tout prix*.) Italian Marxism is in itself ideological from beginning to end. A very useful comparison can be done between the main authors of the Italian and the French marxist tradition – the two that in Europe are the closest to each other, even for reasons of language

I have mentioned that Italian marxism has not had a Jean-Paul Sartre. But I could add that even a personality like Louis Althusser is missing from Italy’s history in with the thought of Karl Marx. Sartre and Althusser are in fact – given the difference between the great existentialist and the anxious lacanian - principally philosophers and only secondly, marxist philosophers. The case of Sartre is very clear: only in the fifties did Sartre try to put together what he

called “marxism” “existentialism” and “humanism”. And everybody knows that the *Critique de la raison dialectique* is of marxist inspiration, but the main categories are, as it is known, “totalisation” and “group en fusion”, not certainly “exchange value”. A little different is the case for Althusser, where his notion of “coupure épistémologique” is “applied” to marxism, but is derived from the althusserian epistemology that goes beyond marxism. The “coupure”, the “break”, the interruption of the continuity within the development of Marx’s thought which made Marx himself a marxist, is a radical change in the categories of marxian science. Marxism itself therefore begins with an epistemological choice, no historical continuity is in some way relevant, the category of history and concrete history in itself means nothing to the scientific value of Marx’s thought. If science is “pour Marx”, science should be the only acceptable reason of the crisis of marxism, of the coming of an afterwards.

Not one of these elements is present in the Italian marxist tradition. Even today, when marxism no longer occupies the centre of the cultural stage, and a wild process of “repression” of the past cultural and political choices has brought the former marxists to radically cancel Marx’s name from the intellectual pantheon, the only Italian Marxist scholar known in the world, translated in other languages and still studied by very few scholars although almost completely cut out from university syllabuses, is Antonio Gramsci. A long analysis should be made of the internal, essential ideological feature of the attitude of the Italian intellectuals since the Risorgimento – that is of their original openness to be ‘useful’ for a political or cultural project, and therefore of their connection with power. This is expressed in the sociological gramscian notion of “organic intellectuals “ : one of the main themes of the Antonio Gramsci’s *Quaderni del carcere* (see 1975) . But it should also be observed in the first place (see Trincia 1998, 5-32) that the eagerness to abandon their former Marxist choice on behalf of many Italian intellectual and scholars, is the direct result of the ideologically and historically conditioned acceptance of Marx’s thought. A rational acceptance of a thought or of a theory can come to an end only through an internal critical analysis of what now seems wrong, but this is not the case of an acceptance that is destined to end when a certain historical era is over.

Two major figures dominate Italian marxism’s panorama– if we exclude the writings of the two neo-idealists philosophers Benedetto Croce e Giovanni Gentile, who wrote at the beginning of the last century providing Italy with its best studies on Marx, even though the writers were not Marxists). From this point of view, Italian marxism started as a “critical study of Marx”, which ended after the Russian Revolution and the rising, in Italy like elsewhere in Europe, of the socialist labour movement whose aim was “to do like in Russia”. I have already mentioned Lucio Colletti. The fact that he abandoned

marxism after being a radical, anti-idealistic and anti-historicist, revolutionary marxist (see Bedeschi, 1983, 129-138; Colletti, 1980)) goes to show how even for those scholars who did not share the mainstream of Italian Marxism connected to the political and intellectual history of the Italian communist party, the marxist choice was an ideological choice – that is a choice made by what Max Weber would call an “ethic of conviction” decision. It is for this reason that, when the non-rational, in every sense political ground of the choice was over, when in particular the first fires of marxist political extremism started burning and the connection was made between marxist theory and a revolution based on violence and not, like the institutional communists thought, on the evolutionary process of democracy, Lucio Colletti discovered a mistake in Marxist theory. And this was no longer the simple fact of Marx’s hegelian heritage, but the fact that the theory of social contradiction, that should explain the development from capitalism to communism, had to be correctly interpreted (according to Colletti: see 1975) in a not dialectical way, that is in the sense of kantian “real opposition”. Colletti’s critique was wrong: Marx was a dialectic thinker, as Tom Rockmore often repeats, and to him communism was the result of a dialectical, historical contradiction between forces of production and capitalistic organization of production. Communism was, therefore, a necessary result of the historical dialectic movement. “The main insight which separates Hegel from the earlier philosophers, and which Marx adopts in opposition to bourgeois political economy, is the insight that the world in which we live is not static but historical. Marx’s criticism of political economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo rests on his acceptance and elaboration of the Hegelian view that economic relations are not fixed categories but historically mutable relations” (Rockmore 2002, 109). From their being economic and social categories of the historical movement derives, as I said, that communism was in some way the ‘goal’ of capitalism. History (not epistemology, but also the many philosophical critiques of Marxism spread during the entire twentieth century) demonstrated Marx’s error, both from the point of view of “necessity”, and from the point of view of the ethical and political value of communism. This should have required the question : “What is left of Marx’s thought?”. But, as Marxism was communism’s faith, and faith appeared a false and dangerous thing to defend, all ‘religion’ had to be declared false, and, what’s more, had to be forgotten, damned and made object of perpetual denial. The discovery of the supposed dialectical mistake in Marx’s thought was the instrument used to offer a rational reason to the essentially non rational decision to declare the Marxist faith finished.

## 2. Some observations on Italian marxism

This long description of Lucio Colletti's anti-Marxist position not only has an historical The motivation, but also a theoretical one because it has to be found in one of the ways for the Italian way to be ideologically Marxist, but also ideologically anti-Marxist. In both cases the scientific and philosophical truth of a theory is not the main concern, and should not be judged by a critical analysis. This finally brings us to the mainstream of Italian Marxism as an ideology, the one which refers to the writings of Antonio Gramsci, the founder and the chief of the Italian communist party, who died in jail in 1937, because of his opposition to the fascist dictatorship. He wrote his *Quaderni* in jail, which were later discovered and published by Palmiro Togliatti, the controversial figure connected with the chief of the communist international association lead by the Stalinist Soviet Union. It is not difficult to understand that, while in most cases Karl Mannheim and Karl Marx himself in *German Ideology* of 1848, attribute to the term "ideology" the negative meaning of a manipulation of truth and reality for political and practical goals, in Gramsci the notion of "ideology" is strictly connected with what is considered his main discovery, the notion of "hegemony" of a social class or group over the entire society in a determined moment of history. "Hegemony" is the cultural dominion carried out by a social group (bourgeoisie in capitalism, proletarians in communism) thanks to the fact that its "ideology" of becomes accepted, and not by violence but by consensus, on behalf of the majority of society. The revolution itself, which leads society out of capitalism, cannot be devastatingly violent but has to be somewhat of a democratic process if it wants to avoid that anyone is obliged to accept a cultural choice that not is actually become also his choice.

This kind of Marxist sociology creates two major consequences. The first is that, very paradoxically, leninism was used as a cultural instrument to think that marxist revolution is possible while maintaining consent and democracy majority. This appeared as the way to accomplish a sort of "non revolutionary revolution" within Europe's complex conditions in respect to Russia. For this reason the communist party operating in Italy discovered this strange, essentially ideological "marxism without *The Capital*", as it has been justly called. Italian marxism is actually the product of the importance of the social and political role given to "intellectuals" and to their cultural production, to their political ideology, by the intellectuals themselves (mostly Hegelian philosophers, literature critics, historians and poets) who interpreted Italian history, from Giovambattista Vico, to the writer of the national Risorgimento, to Antonio Gramsci.

The second consequence is that ideology has obtained the positive meaning by which all cultural activity is history and is politically related. This is like

saying that its influence comes from history (in the sense of the radicalisation and hyper-politicisation of the famous hegelian thesis that philosophy is its own historical time apprehended by the reason ) and is for the sake of history, or is history itself. If one keeps in mind that also for this kind of Marxism history is the battlefield of different classes, each with their own ideology, that is, their specific way of interpreting the world to act in, and, moreover if it is not forgotten that the class conflict which opposes, according to Gramsci's Marxism, in the first place, culture and philosophies and only secondarily, interests, is in itself the conflict of progress against reaction, of a more free against a private property defensive idea of society, and that proletarian marxist represent (this was an idea of Marx himself in the *Communist Manifesto*, 1848) universal cultural values, which go beyond the class conditioned culture like the bourgeois one, then a consequence must be drawn. Ideologies may be progressive or regressive. The progressive one, just as related to the historical conflict for a free society (called "communism") is in itself true , because it has no other criterion to be controlled by as its historical efficacy. It is therefore even in its most abstract expressions positively historical and politically true.

There is no truth other than that of philosophy which is in any case 'history related', in both senses: it 'expresses' the internal meaning of history , of its evolution and of its present stage, and also in the sense that it shows in any case what in the historical present should be done to maintain against its antagonist the progressive direction of history itself. Marxism is the contemporary theory and practice of progress and , again, its criterion must be recognized in its capacity to correspond to its essence of being the only intellectual and practical , political, instrument through which one obtains progress for the society as a whole, acting against the forces that operate to keep society at an inferior stage of civilization. Intellectuals are for this reason the bearers of this commitment which is in itself positively ideological .

The thought of Antonio Gramsci, which grows in a strict and severe theoretical confrontation with the "absolute historicism" of the Italian famous neo-idealist thinker Benedetto Croce, was the result of a radical interpretation of Marxism itself as a form of politically oriented historicism. But it is in Marx himself that one finds the premises of Marxism as an ideology, that is, as a politically oriented form of historicism. The part of the marxist theory that Guido Carandini's book refuses with the claim of its being "prophetical", and of its prophetical announcement of the era of communism, is to be rejected not as prophetical, or utopian, but as containing the source of the attitude that we find in Gramsci. According to this attitude, marxism is not a simple theory of history of the necessary development of its capitalistic stage on the road to communism caused by his intrinsic contradictory feature. Most importantly, for the same reason, marxism (what Marx himself in some way authorized to

call “marxism”, which had to be simplified for reasons concerning its being the powerful weapon of the class struggle in the hands of proletarians) could not be conceived as a theory of history ending in after-capitalist communism, and containing the same truth value as other theories competing with it. Marxism was, for Marx himself, the theory in which proletarians could acquire the consciousness of their role in contemporary capitalism. At the same time they were supposed to be exploited victims, and the virtual buriers of the system. This condition was not conceived as a mere political possibility, but as something that was going to happen, as soon as the material conditions of the capitalist economy would become mature, and as soon as they had been lighted by the truthful content of Marxism that this showed how this was the historical situation, pregnant of communism, and they had to prepare to help its necessary birth.

If ideology is the belief that truth is essentially historically and politically related, that only one theory can express history’s truth and that it can be denied only by those who in this way discover themselves as class enemies, the marxism that has its roots in Marx himself is virtually ideological, that is, not compatible with the critical analysis, and with the control of its presumed truths which compares them to the interpreted reality and to other competitive theories. This “Marxism born with Marx and not after Marx” is in itself ideological, and as such, totalitarian and has to take on the guilt of the “practical disaster” carried out in its name. If a theory that is originally critical converts itself in a thought that speaks the truth of history’s happenings, and interpreted as not controversial, and the social, political, and even organizational aspects (the communist parties and organized movements) as being the bearer of both the scientific truth and of the material and moral progress of humanity, then you not only have the most severe fashion of intrinsic ideological Marxism, but also the not casual relationship between the ideological attitude of Marx’s thought and the totalitarian organization of the still existing communist societies.

For this reason the attempt made by Carandini to interpret Marx’s thought in the “reformist” way earlier outlined is really an attempt to free Marx from his ideological influence. Nobody could deny that the system of capital is internally unsteady, conflictual, classist and anarchical, as Marx perfectly saw. The capital system therefore is not eternal. It is not a social organization that cannot be changed. It is not the “natural” form of the organization of the production. It is very well known that Marx has firmly and rightly rejected what I called the “apologetic” view that looks onto capitalism as a natural and eternal phenomenon. Marx’s main discovery is that capitalism as a historical and flexible owing to its historical disharmony. This becomes the premise for that “reformist” attitude that does not want to cancel capitalism’s reality of capitalism, while denying both the ideological ‘necessity’ and

revolutionary will to abolish it . In this way the structural disharmonies of capitalism can be corrected: Marx himself shows that they are not “natural”. Again, we are faced with a major result of the end of marxism as an ideology. It remains difficult and problematic having to do with capitalism. Science, realism and reformist attitude introduce complications, not simplifications. In fact: how is it possible to be reformist and radical in showing capitalistic anarchy and antagonism and moving from this statement? How is it possible to live in a system and to critically control and rule it, if this system has both the apparently infinite power of expansion and also of liberation from any tie, but also is menaced by virtual crisis which are the result of its capacity to expand, of its becoming global as Marx had foreseen in his *Manifesto*? The “great illusion” of the communist revolution is forbidden and those questions are not going to abandon those human beings living in the capitalist societies who love justice. (See the review of Carandini’s book : Trincia 2005 ).

### 3. Equality and value theory

What is communism in itself? We have seen that it is the final end of history. In the language of Marx , it is not only the teleological scope of human history, but also the point in which history deeply changes its meaning, because it finally becomes clear that the history until now developed is pre-history and that authentic human history ( according to the axiological sense of the word “human”) begins only with communism. If we try to fix the essential feature of communism, we must say that it conceived is a condition of equality between human beings that cannot be compared with any other theory or organization of equal society that have appeared in history. The fact that for the anti-utopian Marx this condition of equality cannot be considered the mental project of a perfect society opposed to the actual society, does not diminish the uniqueness of communist equality. It is just for this reason that, far from being outside and ‘against’ history, communism is the beginning of a new history. I have already mentioned that a negative relationship can be found between “equivalence” of the commodity values that embody different quantities of human abstract labour, and the notion of equality, which expresses the condition in which equivalence ceases to work in a way in which “alienated” human beings stay in reciprocal relation and connection through the equal value of the commodities produced by their labour and exchanged at their value – that is at the value that they have in common as being all products of different quantities of the same abstract human labour , given its total absence of difference: for this reason producing exchangeable commodities. If this is true , it also true that a strict connection exists between the theory of labour based value of the commodities, and the theoretical-



practical project of a society of equal persons, that takes on the name “communism”. In more radical terms: the theory of the labour based value is the basis of the communist project conceived as the opposition of real *equality* between human beings, to the *equivalence* of value of the commodities produced in capital society, an equivalence and an exchange which are the way of the not human but totally things-relationship of the producers in the capital society. Here in fact they are materially not equal, because they are atomistic isolated and connected only through the exchange of their products on the market. If this is true, finally, the theory of labour based value has been the essential notion for Marx to build a completely new theory of equality. This theory *is not* based on the abstractly moral opposition of authentic equality to a condition of things-equivalence that hides in itself the most radical and dangerous inequality (as based on a condition of perfect juridical equality).

This means that the marxian theory and project of equality *is not* the result of the *moral* preference of a moral value against a non-value, because it is rather based on the *ethical* (in the hegelian sense of the notion) belief that authentic equality between human beings is the result of the final crisis of capitalism and gives birth to communism, is the equality between members of a community, that is, between people that no longer base their relationships on the exchange of commodities made by singular, isolated producers. Morality is, according to Hegel, but also to Marx, who for this reason always repeated that his thought had nothing to do with a form of morality, based on the opposition of good and evil, the rational choice of the best, made by any singular individual who acts to obtain the favoured good. Ethics, on the contrary, is not a project of individual and is not the result of individual actions, given that it concerns a condition of the relationship between persons who find in their common relationship the realization of a form of goodness which is not *moral*, because it implies that “the good” for each singular individual is in common with others.

From this point of view, communism is an *ethical* project and not a moral preference and it implies a social connection between human beings starting from the initial, common struggle to reach it. In the community of those who strive towards communism, the community itself is an anticipation of community that they finally obtain in the development of their material history. History is for Marx, as history of production and of reproduction of the material conditions of existence of the human beings, a *social* history, because human beings are social in their original essence like Marx’s quote and traduction of Aristotle’s “zoon politikon” in the *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Marx 1974a, 6). Capitalism is the real paradox of history (Marx would say: it is the deepest contradiction of social history with itself), because the intrinsic sociality of human beings seems overthrown by a

condition of complete isolation that finds its most powerful expression in the all pervading presence of *private* property. Human beings, according to Marx again in his *Grundrisse*, are able to “isolate themselves” (*sich vereinzeln* : Marx 1974, 6) only within the most developed society. Capitalism *is not*, therefore, the end of society, but society’s self-hiding under the apparent condition of all pervading privacy. It is a paradox, but this paradox must and can be revealed. Communism is the new appearance of society as a society of equals , after the era of capitalism where human beings have become equal only as producers and exchangers , that is as workers and juridical persons.

We can wonder if this project is going to be useful to us, just for the reason of its substantive radicality. The problem is: until when is it possible to correct the unfairness of capital society with a theory of equality, which so deeply differentiates itself from the moral project of thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau or John Rawls. As I have pointed out, Marx’s project is not a moral one, that is, not a political one. It is directed and inspired by a moral, normative conviction, that is, by the normativism that was repressed but not suppressed in the development of his thought. But it concerns – as a “critique of political economy” – an anticipation of economy’s destiny, of the material conditions of reproduction of the material social life.

The problem of whether a project which is in itself revolutionary, as implying the radical substitution , or at least substantial integration, of the economic exchange equivalence and juridical equality with a social equality, can be used in a reformist political context, still remains open.

We cannot consider ourselves critics or reformers of capitalism without taking this problem into careful consideration. But we cannot fully resolve it either, because we are that Hegel’s theory of “ethics” ’s superiority to “morality” cannot be accepted without a proper discussion. If it is true that Marx is an hegelian, it is also true that his ethical project, which takes the name of communism, cannot remain without a discussion. After all, this the main reason why Marx’s repressed normativism remains a hidden source of his ethical project. Normativism and morality are repressed, but they do not cease to continue working silently in Marx’s thought. This is the point to which our reformist attitude could be connected. Even for Marx, the ethical project of authentic equality could not even be conceived without a moral will. After Hegel and Marx , therefore, we should meet Kant’s moral philosophy again, because in Marx we find an ethical project that we do not find in Hegel, who considers ethics to be a rational and present condition of the system of the *Recht* , or the rational atmosphere of human coexistence, as Tom Rockmore points out (see Rockmore 2002, 20-21). Ethics is in Hegel a rational structure and not a goal. There is no *Sollen* in it. The state comes out of ethics, assumed as its rational precondition. The most radical negation of the rational notion of State consists in presuming that a state could be the

object of a foundation, that a state is only the historical product of human creativity – like in the modern and contemporary contractual theories of the state. For this reason an ethical project is, according to Hegel, radically contradictory. But in Marx, the same idea that something new must come out from the old conditions and that there is a reason that leads to revolution and to communism, opens the space again for the intervention of normativism.

We have to change the way in which we think the *necessary* transformation of capitalism and as the inevitability of a project of reform and is no longer the expression of the inevitability of the communist revolution. We have to think of this necessity like a moral necessity, a necessity of fairness and of justice, which however remains connected to an historical, material necessity that can be expressed in the “laws of movement” of capital society. If we assume this attitude, we stay ‘with Marx’, but also ‘beyond Marx, with Kant’. We have in fact discovered that the hegelian equation rationality-reality is broken in Marx, because something could still happen during history; history is not over. A difference enters in the compact hegelian notion of reason and this is connected with the idea of the project, even if historically justified. Reason maintains almost in part its function of *Zukunftvernunft*, of reason of the future. This reason that is not accomplished and satisfied, that wants to reform the present conditions, which is guided by the idea of justice (we have seen: the idea of a different equality) and which is the instrument of a moral and political judgment, is not absent in Marx, and this maintains his thought as one of our intellectual partners. For us, like for *this* Marx, Hegel is not saying truth by speaking of the “judgement of the world” like being the same as the “history of the world”. Moral judgement remains, for us users of Marx’s critique of capitalism, different from history. We know that there is an echo of this in Marx. Were not so, Marx had already died with marxism and we were all morally and intellectually poorer.

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