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Economic Objectivity and Its Discontents: Reflections on Marx, Adorno and Utopia

Abstract. *This article seeks to interpret the meaning of communism as a negative utopian possibility; one that continually negates the present on the basis of that which ought to be different yet, despite its injustice, is proclaimed as truth. In the first section, through the prism of Adorno's negative dialectics, Marx's materialism is explored and criticised on the basis of the epistemological certainty that it assumes. In the process, the concept of class in particular will be scrutinised. Next, I draw on economic objectivity theory in order to formulate a conception of class that avoids the assigning of ontological value, and instead appears as a negative consequence of the false society. In the final section, I outline my understanding of communism as negative utopia, and explore how this may translate into a theory of praxis.*

Keywords: *historical materialism, critical theory, negative dialectics, utopianism, Karl Marx, Theodor W. Adorno.*

Raktažodžiai: *istorinis materializmas, kritinė teorija, negatyvioji dialektika, utopizmas, Karl Marx, Theodor W. Adorno.*

The potential of freedom calls for criticizing what an inevitable formalization has made of the potential.

THEODOR W. ADORNO (1973: 151)

The spectre of communism, having long ceased to be a fear of the European elites, persists only in haunting the left's exhausted longing for utopia; itself seemingly banished to the realm of dreams. What Theodor W. Adorno calls the potential of freedom, vouchsafed by the scientific surety of the materialist conception of history, collapsed under the weight of its own supposed certainty. On this view, the seizing of the political apparatus by the proletariat that was to come provided full justification

that history was moving towards its resolution, whilst little thought had been given as to just how this utopian goal would be reached and how it ought to be approached. The coming of ultimate freedom from contradiction and domination furnished the present with something it did not have. Of course the danger of thinking in this way lies not directly in its utopianism, but in its deprioritisation of the present on the basis of its inevitable realisation. Thought's unavoidable and perilous insufficiency is reflected in its inability to conceptualise with absolute certainty what it is surrounded by, making any calculated step into the future a risk-laden endeavour. However, as Adorno (1973) makes

clear the inevitable formalisation of what is the case, of *objectivity*, can neither be avoided nor taken for granted; rather, it must be criticised. Utopia must live on, but thought can never construct a path to it; only away from its own insufficiencies.

On Historical Materialism

As is vividly expressed at the start of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, where Marx famously asserted that ‘men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past’ (Marx 2008 [1869]; 15), the traditional Marxist approach to history laid stress on the construction of ideas and human consciousness according to the objective processes of production dominant at the historical moment in question. This stood contrary to the approach of historians at the time, who, in seeking to ‘detach the ideas’ (Marx and Engels 1974; 65) from the conditions of production that produce them, performed a tacit acquittal of social responsibility for the comfort or misery of the individual’s lived experience. Marx’s analysis of the transformation of the concrete economic conditions of production behind history thus represented a significant step forward in the examination of social order for this very reason; it did not abdicate responsibility. By turning Hegel on his head, Marx subordinated the idea to objectivity. The idea could no longer be proclaimed as ‘the demiurgos of the real world’. Instead, it would be seen as ‘nothing else than the material world reflected by the human

mind, and translated into forms of thought’ (Marx 2007 [1873]; 25).

By rejecting the seamless idealism before him, Marx left the plausibility of Hegel’s claim to absolute truth diminished. Although for Marx a ‘hidden and mystifying criticism’ (Marx 1970; 175–176) was inherent to the Hegelian method, his aim was to uncover the objective contradictions between the dominant modes of production and the forms of intercourse that propel history forward (Marx and Engels 1974; 88–89). Hegel’s dialectical method was stripped of its idealism and concretised, but remained committed to an absolute resolution of contradiction at the end of history. Marx’s proclamation of communism as the final stage in human development, permanently overcoming contradiction and allowing mankind, no longer estranged from itself, to realise its potential, stands as testament to this. Communism presents itself as an inevitable conclusion to which mankind cannot merely aspire but must expect.

In his rejection of the affirmative nature of the Hegelian method, Adorno challenges the epistemological grounds on which Marx applied the dialectical method. For Adorno, identity is achieved through the negative process of the subject obscuring and ignoring the diversity and difference that exists within the object being conceptualised. This presents a challenge to the very promise of a utopia clean of contradiction. Dialectics begins, for Adorno, with the assertion that ‘objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder’ (Adorno 1973; 5), and that contradiction is the expression of the heterogeneous colliding with the limit forced

upon it by the necessary identification inherent to thinking. Dialectics is, therefore, 'the consistent sense of nonidentity' to which 'thought is driven [...] by its own inevitable insufficiency' (ibid.). When seen in this light, the Hegelian system shows itself to be insufficient and untrue. No matter how much each concept proceeds, upon its *Aufhebung* or synthesis into a higher unity, to have its claim to truth falsified by that which does not fit under it, it nevertheless finds its truth in the identity of Absolute Spirit. The construction of a seamless system within which full reconciliation of contradiction is achieved obscures the fact that 'the unity of the system derives from unreconcilable violence' (Adorno 1993; 27). If a system is to be deemed complete according to the standard of its internal unity, then the fact that it excludes what it cannot know becomes secondary to its proclamation of legitimacy. The chicanery underlying its unity, however, cannot be shaken off by thinking through nonidentity. Rather, through further identification, thought can reconceptualise the heterogeneity of the object and encompass more contradictions, but this process of incremental reconciliation still holds no promise of a conclusive unity. The result is not a sign of thought's ambiguity, but of its humility.

Some of the implications of proceeding without such humility are evident in Marx's attempt to theorise from an Archimedean point, as demonstrated in Georg Lukács's claim that orthodox Marxism 'refers exclusively to a method' in which 'dialectical materialism is the road to truth and that its methods can be developed, expanded and deepened only along the lines laid down by its founders' (Lukács 1971;

1). By grounding the Hegelian dialectic in social processes *qua* material reality, Marx had inadvertently formulated a revolutionary method that would come to claim universal scientific validity. As a result, for Marxists in the 20th century in particular, the dialectical method became a process of rigidly reapplying Marxian concepts to the moment in question. The core of Marx's thought was expelled but its facade was left standing as a tribute to that which was once critical. This impulse to take Marx's analyses of the objective conditions of production as fact, and to abide by his proclamations for future modes of human organisation as if they were inevitable, stems directly from the epistemological certainty of Marx's approach.

The complications arising from this certainty can be identified within Marx's materialist conception of history. Since the truth of his macro-theory relies heavily on its foundational assumptions, his certainty must be identified within his own explanation. Thus a slightly pedagogical approach to the theory is necessary; it must be made to, in Adorno's words, 'dance to its own tune' (1973; 182). For Marx the first premise of history is that humans must be in a position to make it, and therefore the first historical act is the production of the means required to meet the needs of 'the production of material life itself' (Marx 1974; 48–49). As a corollary of the successful reproduction of life, mankind proceeds to reproduce *itself*, in turn constructing an increasingly complex web of relationships and needs which are on the one hand natural, and on the other social. These dual-faceted social relations are inseparable from the particular mode of production dominant

in the historical moment being analysed, and are themselves 'productive force[s]' that are determinative of the nature of society (ibid.; 50). We see immediately that the mode of production is from the outset conceptualised with certainty. The vast heterogeneity of the activities that constitute it are necessarily generalised for the sake of an identifiable term. While not diminishing the importance or need for a general concept to refer to the multitudinous processes that occur according to the specific needs of a community – according to its size, level of economic development, geographical placement and so on – the subsuming of these conditions and activities under the concept of 'mode of production' must not be undertaken without caution and awareness of its necessary inaccuracy. Such a treatment, whereby the concept is treated as identical with that which it claims to represent, would leave the 'mode of production' as the unquestionable driver of history. If treated without suspicion, future inevitabilities are justified on the basis of the apparent scientific validity of the concept itself.

In proceeding to articulate his theory of history, Marx argues that, upon becoming aware of society, mankind develops consciousness and constructs a division of labour. This creates the capacity for consciousness to 'emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of "pure" theory' (ibid.; 51–52). While consciousness has the ability to operate on a wholly immaterial terrain, it is not the capacity of the human mind to think that drives history forward; rather, the division of labour implies that 'the forces of production, the state of society and consciousness can and must

come into contradiction with one another', and that the only possibility of avoiding this contradiction 'lies in the negation [...] of the division of labour' itself (ibid.; 52). By being able to think *about* society, as a macro-entity, mankind is able to structure society in order for it to be able to reproduce itself in radically more efficient ways than it had done previously. As modes of organisation are constructed and endured, the lived experience of those individuals subordinated to society comes into conflict with the division of labour and its very justification as a necessary condition in ensuring society's efficient reproduction.

This permanent conflict forms the basis for the constitution of classes. Since it is the projection of an atomistic society, the division of labour has within its powers the distribution both of labour and its products, and consequently condemns mankind to 'a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape' (ibid.; 52–54). The social activities that individuals must undertake in order to reproduce themselves are determined by the division of labour that is dominant in society: to make a living individuals must participate and compete in the wage market and fit themselves into society's efficient reproduction of itself. Classes are formed as an effect of this necessity. Marx, famously, goes on to assert that the historical development of social formations relies on the postulation of the abolition of the old form of society *in its entirety* by the dominated class, and the seizure of political power as a means of representing its own interest as the general interest (see ibid.; 53). From this Marx is able

to assert that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles' (Marx and Engels 2016 [1848]; 3).

Marx's explication of the concept of class clearly shows how it has as its origin the categorisation of individuals according to their means of subsistence, the heterogeneity of which, while variable according to its historical context, cannot be doubted. The conceptualisation of a particular class is based entirely on how it embodies contradiction within a historically specific division of labour. The importance of the dominated class in overcoming the division of labour, that *a priori* defines its limits, lies in its role in negating the current, wrong, state of things. Classes are relative to each other and to the division of labour. They hold no ontological value *qua* themselves. The traditional proletarian's value comes not from her class position and identity, but rather from her realisation and rejection of the gap that lies between what she must do to subsist and what she *should* be able to do to subsist. The very constitution of this *should* lie in the constant act of negating historically specific divisions of labour, and in the constant refreshing of the possibilities of how society can organise itself.

If for Marx the total abolition of the old form of society is to be effected through the seizing of political power by the dominated class, and by the enforcement of their class interests (cf. Marx 1974; 53), then the first casualty is the very certainty that the old society has ceased to be at all. The epistemological certainty that allowed Marx to assign an ontological significance to a wholly relative conceptualisation must be rejected. Abolishing the old form of society in its

entirety must include the abolition of the very conditions that constituted those particular class interests themselves. A true overcoming of the existing division of labour would not see an end to the struggle between classes; rather the form of the struggling classes would be necessarily different from that which had preceded it. Upon its occurrence, the proletarian revolution must cease to be proletarian if it is to be a revolution at all. Class struggle remains central to history's progression, yet it is not a matter of the dominated rising up, changing the state of things, and being overthrown by the class that it comes to dominate. Class struggle is the incremental negation of the false society beginning first and foremost at the level of the individual's lived experience and how it comes into conflict with that society's mode of reproducing itself.

Class and the Critique of Economic Objectivity

Marxian concepts' apparent scientific validity, justified by the privileged position of political economy *vis-à-vis* Enlightenment philosophy, lies behind the tendency among many of Marx's interpreters to expound a positivistic interpretation of concepts such as class. It was held that the Marxian critique of political economy was a science of society that recognised the true material forces of human progress, unlike the bourgeois theories it competed with. It was on the basis of Marx's normative commitment to revolutionary human emancipation that the Leninists could justify the 'science' of orthodox Marxism's economic categories as being anything other than bourgeois

themselves. Their attempts to do this managed at once to dispel the critical intent of Marx's work and retain the traditional understanding of economic categories and society as distinctly separate to the individual.

While bourgeois thought is 'essentially abstract', its principle being 'an individuality which inflatedly believes itself to be the ground of the world' (Horkheimer 1972; 210), the orthodox interpretation of Marx reflects the inverse attitude. For its ideologues, the individual is 'the unproblematic expression of an already constituted society' (ibid.). The society of individuals, upheld by the inalienable autonomy of the Kantian subject, must limit its insecurity by restricting the freedom of its subjects according to a general authority of coercion (Marcuse 2008 [1936]; 39). In a society constituted by the economic base and organised according to the interests of the dominant class, however, its determinate nature compensates for the full servility of the individual to the laws of historical progress. The epistemological certainty of traditional theory undergirds both approaches. Economic forms are taken either as expressions formed according to the division of labour specific to the epoch in question, or as aggregations of the free acts of individuals, coordinated into a smooth process by the rationality that is functionalised by and in national law and the operation of the market.

The Marxian critique of political economy is opposed to bourgeois economics and dogmatic Marxism alike. It cannot be content simply with providing a scientifically valid conceptualisation of society's reproduction of itself, one able to be analysed exhaustively on its

own grounds. Rather, Marx's work stands as a *critique* of the seemingly autonomous existence of economic categories. It seeks to illuminate the real social processes that are obscured and ignored by classical political economy. For this reason, Max Horkheimer clarified the methodological status of the Marxian critique of political economy as being situated 'between' philosophy and science (Backhaus 1992; 55). The disciplines of economics and sociology observe, analyse and classify the relationships between economic things and between people, but do not ask why it is that society organises its reproduction in the form of independent economic categories – such as those of price, profit, cash and product (Bonefeld 2016; 61). For Marx, these categories are in no sense *sui generis*; instead they contain within themselves something more than an economic concept – something philosophical (Backhaus 1992; 55). For example, the category of profit, taken at face value, appears to be an innocent reward for innovation. Marx's critique was conducted from 'beyond the standpoint of economics'; it was a critical theory concerned with proving the impotence of the concepts of political economy (ibid.; 76–77). The replacement of traditional economic categories with Marxian ones, such as the replacement of profit with surplus value, exposed those categories' quiet untruth, and allowed for the explication of their geneeses, their relatively recent and quite specific historical development. The Marxian concepts did not represent a new science, constructed with the aim of challenging bourgeois economists for the position of hegemonic truth-bearer. Instead, the concepts created had an inseparable critical

element within them, one that illuminated the insufficiencies of mainstream economics, and outlined the occurrence of previously uncomprehended processes which should be moved away from.

In incorporating into its own concepts the sensuous origins of economic categories, which had until then feigned supersensuousness, Marx's critical theory endeavoured to highlight the numerous social activities that preceded their objectivity as reified categories. Adorno continues this work when he claims that: 'society as subject and society as object are the same and yet not the same' (Adorno 1972; 559, cited in Backhaus 1992; 56). Under the term social 'objectivity', Adorno includes all the relations through which humans interact and necessarily presuppose; even in the most irrational of conditions (Backhaus 1992; 57). The 'supraindividual totality of work' that all individuals in society actively shape through their activities is hidden from the individual as such. What the individual experiences, and what proceed to shape her life after their own image, are the reified categories of economics, which present themselves as the unified science of the exchange society (*ibid.*). The individual confronts society as an object that rigidly enforces the social roles available for them to fit into and rations the resources available for them to reproduce themselves.

The fatality of society's apparent choice over the possible life of the individual is exemplified in the fact that under the conditions of the exchange society 'exemption from work... also means disablement' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997 [1944]; 35). The irrationality of such a

mode of organisation does not render false or irrelevant its justification in economic theory, however; if it did, then masking the potential in the present for a fairer reproduction of society would be merely the product of a conspiracy. Rather, our social objectivity is reified, appearing as something separate to the individual processes that constitute it, which in no way makes it less real to its inhabitants. In fact, its very ability to impose itself over individuals in society owes precisely to the fact that 'it prevails in and through them' (Bonfeld 2016; 63). Society is therefore subjective in the sense 'that it refers back to the human beings which form it'; its existence is entirely dependent upon them (Adorno 1972; 317, cited in Backhaus 1992; 57). Without the intended actions of the individuals taking place, the economic base could not itself be realised (Backhaus 1992; 57–58). It is only through the individual's participation in the objective form of society that society's form itself can continue to be altered and remain able to reassert itself.

That society presents itself at one and the same time as subject and object indicates the deficiency of economic theory's traditional approach to the question of social organisation and reproduction. By placing a subject-object dialectic at the centre of the analysis of economic process, economic categories can be viewed as being entirely constructed by the activities of individuals, yet no less firm in their coercive capacity to determine and make arduous the lives of those whose very actions constitute it. Such an approach is incompatible with the economism of orthodox Marxist thought which, as exhibited by the base-superstructure model,

stresses the objectification of subjects according to the determination of the socio-economic 'laws' and 'forces' with rather too much bias (ibid.; 60). By focusing entirely upon the subjugation of the subject to economic categories, the economic approach fails to probe the genesis of those categories themselves; which of course turn out to be subjective without ceasing to be objective at the same time.

The implications of giving exclusive priority to the objectivity of economic categories and their coercive function can be clearly observed in the centrality of class struggle, as traditionally interpreted, to the Marxian conception of history. If economic objectivity is approached as *sui generis*, its domination over humanity appears inescapable and the potential for praxis becomes one of attaining the ability to wield economic power in order to make the reproduction of society work in the interests of the liberated class. The need for the dominated class to abandon its shackles and seize power becomes fate. The role of the proletariat in capitalist society, to sell her labour at less than its fair price, does not equate to her 'essence' as a proletarian, as a member of a one-day victorious class which will push history forwards towards communism. When situated in the context of the long march of history, it is as if there is something more to the proletariat than the function to which it is necessitated by the incumbent division of labour. This ought not to be seen as so. The purpose of critical theory's exploration of the geneses of economic categories is to challenge their appearance as reified objects that mysteriously subsume multitudinous sensuous processes, without denying their real power. The necessary function of the

proletariat *is* its essence. It exists as an entirely negative category reacting to, yet totally belonging to, the conditions of the false society.

To be a worker is to have one's ability to subsist limited to the options afforded to you by the relentless pursuit of profit employed by the exchange society as the primary means of its reproduction. The working class is united only in its perpetual instability and continual placement at the edge of destitution. As a class, it is not ideas that serve as a unifying force, not a common cultural bond, not a shared ideological commitment. Fundamentally, 'proletarian language is dictated by hunger. The poor chew words to fill their bellies' (Adorno 2005; 102, cited in Bonefeld 2016; 70). In selling her labour power, the labourer is continually bound to an existence in which her ability to subsist relies on her ability to turn a profit for her employer. Her ability to flourish is strangled by insecurity. Yet this is normality. Marx's investigations into the genesis of surplus value may have illuminated the coercion and exploitation which lies beneath the ostensibly innocent process of valorisation, yet society's reproduction remains hinged upon profitability. The fatality of destitution lies dormant in the mind of the worker, a spectre discouraging resistance to the exchange society, and reinforcing the apotheosis of the profit principle. Thus, 'society stays alive, not despite its antagonism, but by means of it' (Adorno 1990; 320, cited in Bonefeld 2016; 69).

Workers are not only subservient to the economic categories of the exchange society but are actively objectified in their own image. Werner Bonefeld notes that under late capitalism everything is reduced to the time

of value, and that the labour expended by the worker is no different (Bonefeld 2016; 68). Its existence as socially necessary labour time, which Marx defined as the labour-time required for the production of any use-value under the normal conditions of production (cf. Marx 2007 [1873]; 46), occurs within the time of value (Bonefeld 2016; 68). In labouring, the worker reaffirms the exchange society in its domination over the world of sensuousness to the same degree as she does while performing her role as a consumer. The worker has no choice but to participate in and help perpetuate the objective conditions that reinforce the apparent facticity of the claim that the exchange society is imperfect but nonetheless stands as the best possible system. The leisure time of the worker is time that could be spent making money, the possessions of the worker a potential source of money to keep them afloat in case destitution comes knocking. While being to a great extent subjective, the exchange society proves inescapable, and in large part for that very reason.

That the 'truth' of the objectivity of the exchange society proves inescapable for the working class does damage to the claim that the working class holds ontological value and can mould society in the image of their interests *as a class*. Yet the necessary position it holds as the negative condition of the false society remains untarnished. That the life of the worker retains its precariousness for the sake of the pursuit of profit sheds light upon the untruth of the false society. The coerced submission of the worker to the exchange society's economic categories holds back the demand that society ought to reproduce itself in a manner that recognises the

value of life as more than just economic. Instead, in the supersensible world of economic things, sensuous activity reappears as the 'struggle to avoid the risk of bankruptcy and being cut off from subsistence' (ibid.; 69). The worker belongs to the negative category of the working class because of his toil, not because of his role as a proletarian predestined to usher in a new era of history. There is no progression innate to history, only the continual rejection of that which stands as untrue, yet proclaims infallibility. The role of class struggle in negating the false state of things is necessitated by the very falsity of its context according to 'the coarsest demand: that no-one should go hungry any more' (Adorno 2005; 156, cited in Bonefeld 2016; 61).

Communism as Negative Utopia

Negative dialectics does not restrict itself to epistemological critique. At its core it is a political desire for a utopia in which difference and individuality are no longer suppressed but are instead constitutive of a unity free from the bounds of conceptual identification (Baumann 2011; 81–82). Within the concrete universal, nonidentity would be liberated and able to be represented on its own terms. The unique qualities of the individual would allow themselves to be understood *qua* themselves alone, without being held to the standards of conceptualisation on the grounds of status, affluence, gender, race, ability or nationhood. Such abstractions, which have hitherto held decisive sway over individuals' life chances, would have been exposed for their generality, berated for their hubris and discarded for their deception. With regard to the 'concrete utopian possibility' of reconciliation

between subject and object, dialectics stands as 'the ontology of the wrong state of things' (Adorno 1973; 11). It enables us to expose 'the prevailing circumstances of production' (ibid.) in all their mendacity, and thus provides us with the most urgent tool required for the realisation of a mankind that is genuinely reconciled with nature. In such a state of reconciliation, social utopia would be 'neither a system nor a contradiction'; rather, emerging out of dialectical thinking, 'the right state of things would be free' (ibid.). Upon nonidentity's emancipation, the need for immanent critique of dishonest identification would cease to exist, and the need for dialectical thought would itself be voided.

This binding of a possible utopia to the cessation of dialectics shows how in Adorno's philosophy the hope that things *can* be better may become inherent to communist thought. Here, however, unlike the formalism of orthodox Marxist approaches, a teleological justification of the concrete inevitability of communism is nowhere to be found. And here the unified life promised in communist utopianism resists being proclaimed as fate. Adorno's final aphorism from *Minima Moralia*, famously, is that 'the only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption' (Adorno 2005; 247). Utopia is the standard against which the present is continually tested and incessantly found wanting. The synonymy of thought with identification condemns any attempt to envisage a utopia in which nonidentity would be free from obscurity as tautology. To deny its importance on these grounds, however,

would be to advocate defeatism in the face of despair. Utopia, when imagined, can never be a positive, articulated or definite formulation. An abstraction which proclaims the possibility of a liberated nonidentity cannot be envisaged through identification. There is no way around this apparent problematic, and nor should there be. The humility of utopian thinking lies in its status as an imagined formulation that can never be planned nor realised, and yet can continually negate the present.

The lesson of Leninism showed how a philosophy that promises and views utopia as the logical end point of history's unfolding can have no chance of realising its goal. Here thought places faith in a positive conception of communism, while revolution becomes a means of disguising the reactionism within the 'revolutionary' vanguard on the basis of a quasi-divine purpose: epistemological naivety is dangerously revealed as it is translated into praxis. The approach of philosophy to utopia ought to be one driven by negativity. Thought must interrogate that which is taken as truth and confront it with a standard of truth consistent with a human social formation in which, regardless of its likelihood, difference exists *sans* obscurity. Such thought should 'condemn society for falling short of being what the concept rightly states it could and should be' (Benzer 2011; 581). That the concept of freedom, in current circumstances, is justified by the right to free speech, protest and contested elections hardly satisfies the fullest sense of its meaning: systematically excluded are various other necessary conditions for freedom, such as access to food, shelter, healthcare and the right to self-

expression. Cultural considerations can stand as justification for different standards of freedom in different territories, while still being considered as forms of freedom in their own right. For example, European welfarism, which guarantees greater freedoms than are permitted in the United States, does not disprove this point but rather demonstrates how concessions situated closer to the utopian ideal of freedom are effected through reaction against the unpleasant realisation that, in the fissure between that which masquerades as freedom and that which is necessarily excluded as a result, something festers that needs discarding. Culturally tailored varieties of freedom exist as a pretext, and the fact that freedom appears to take different forms in different places and at different times is not a sign of the strength and organic nature of social rules, but is rather a signal that freedom is moulded with the motivations of governance and domination in mind. In some places the state can get away with curtailing liberties on the basis of tradition, but there is nothing natural or acceptable about this. In seeing through and rejecting the reasons given for proscribing their freedoms, the individual forces things to move closer to the utopian ideal.

The rejection of futile categorisation in favour of sensuousness must always be conducted initially at the level of the individual, for it is only on the basis of multiple dissenting individuals that a social change can be effected in the first place. As individuals live their lives, and feel that they are not accurately or adequately represented by the categories which are proclaimed as truth, their very experience undermines those categories'

supposed legitimacy. It is through this very realisation that the non-identical finds its footing. The non-identical is not something able to speak for itself, but nevertheless the feeling that it *isn't identical* is impossible to ignore. As individuals debate the way in which dominant categorisation does not do justice to their own experiences, the feeling of dissatisfaction becomes social, and real change can be effected. The concept is wrenched open, inflated more and more with the lived experiences of those who do not comfortably fit into its confines, until it bursts. Individuals will seek to identify themselves in new ways that challenge the hallowed, privileged status of existing concepts. While the bursting open and disappearance of categorisation itself remains utopian and perhaps unrealisable, the process of continually expanding the concepts until they cover all that is not identical to them operates in the service of that very utopia. It is a process of incremental negativity, driven by the heterogeneous sensing its oppression and confinement by existing concepts, and pushing away from them.

The centrality of negativity to praxis is exemplified in Walter Benjamin's well known comments, in his essay *On the Concept of History*, on Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*. In the piece, an angel appears to be moving away from something that is within its gaze. Benjamin notes that this is how the angel of history must look: 'his face is turned toward the past' and, as the moments of history pile up as one single catastrophe before his very eyes, a storm 'drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned' (Benjamin 2003; 392). This is how progression should be seen: as the storm which forces subjects backwards,

too late to remedy events, even as they make sense of the tragedy occurring before their eyes. As with Hegel's owl of Minerva, all tendencies, patterns and ironies can only be formulated in retrospect. Just as for Klee's angel, for whom historical catastrophe is fixed before his gaze even as the storm drives him towards the future which he cannot see, so for us the negativity inherent in rejecting the injustice continuously reaffirming itself before our eyes leaves us no choice but to push towards the darkness and towards what cannot be known in advance. There can be no calculated steps, only the knowledge that what will come will be different from what has gone before. No historical law underlies universal freedom from domination; the potential for utopia lies rather in thought's ability to categorically reject that which stands as truth here and now, but which is demonstrably unfaithful to that which it promises (cf. Benzer 2011; 583–584). Crucially, 'communism is the struggle for communism within the present and against the present' (Bonefeld 2014; 137–161). Communism is a negative utopia, a state of things towards which we push but which we can never know for certain.

A reformulation of communism, freeing Marxist theory from the limitations arising from epistemological uncertainty, does not diminish its urgency, nor does it render the theory irrelevant. Rather, Marx's thought is purged of the kind of determinism that, at the expense of those who need it the most, speaks of the construction of a better world but actually amounts to an endless, suspended time of waiting for something better. Marx's reluctance to describe communistic society in

any detail, came out of his refusal to conclude his theory of history in a Hegelian-style final synthesis. For him 'communism is [...] not a "state of affairs" which is to be established' or 'an "ideal" to which reality [will] have to readjust itself' (Marx and Engels 1974; 56–57). Such a sentiment does not exonerate Marx from the problems associated with claims to scientific validity, or from the subsequent prophetism that his later work was easily interpreted as propounding. The epistemological certainty of his approach was, I would argue, a betrayal of his own critical intentions. Beyond this, Marxian thought has within itself all the contrarian and critical elements needed to support a negative conception of utopia and an understanding of history that does not apotheosise any particular factor as its overriding driving force. Communism is not a ready-made blueprint to be acted upon, and nor is it a modernist projection of the most efficient social organisation founded on humanity's supposed needs. Rather it is itself negative, being the daily rejection of arbitrary classification in defence of sensuousness. It is 'the "real" movement which abolishes the present state of things' (ibid.).

Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars.

WALTER BENJAMIN (1998; 34)

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SANTRAUKA

EKONOMINIS OBJEKTYVUMAS IR NEPASITENKINIMAS: MARXAS, ADORNO IR UTOPIJA

Straipsnyje svarstoma komunizmo, kaip negatyvios utopinės galimybės, prasmė. Siekiantieji paneigti dabartį priešpriešindami jai kitokį privalomą būvį, kad ir ne visada teisingą, dažniausiai deklaruoja siekią tiesos. Pirmoji straipsnio dalis skirta Marxo materializmo koncepcijai ir jos implikuojamai epistemologinio tikrumo idėjai. Šiai koncepcijai kritikuoti pasitelkiama Adorno negatyvioji dialektika ir ypatingas dėmesys skiriamas klasės sąvokai. Vėliau siekiama parodyti, kaip, pritaikius ekonominio objektyvumo teoriją, galima suformuluoti naują *klasės* sąvoką, kuriai nesuteikiamas ontologinis statusas ir kuri gali būti interpretuojama kaip negatyvus neteisingos visuomenės padarinys. Straipsnio pabaigoje pateikiami svarstymai apie komunizmo kaip negatyvios utopijos sampratą ir kaip ji gali būti integruota į *praxis* teoriją.

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