

WHY PROTEST? A REFLECTION ON INDIVIDUALITY

Labor produces marvels for the rich but it produces deprivation for the worker. It produces palaces, but hovels for the worker. It produces beauty, but deformity for the worker. It replaces labor by machines, but it throws one section of the workers back to barbaric labor, and it turns the remainder into machines.

Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844)*

INTRODUCTION

The so-called “labor metaphysics” has been in a state of turbulence for the last decades in many leftist environments of the world. The state of undecidedness and suspicion that the word “metaphysics” conjures up today seems to be connected to a more general distress around any form of transcendence in the philosophical and sociological realms. It is definitely one of the *leitmotifs* of our time. Some scholars ascribe it to an “excess of post-modernism,” while others include this tendency into a more general trend of rethinking the relationship between transcendence and immanence. It should be useful to remember that the “labor metaphysics,” as envisioned by C. Wright Mills and others has always been, at the same time, one of the main components of the struggle for historical change, felt as a glue for the working class unity towards a communal goal, but also involuntarily created confusion around the dichotomy of work/labor and how should humanity get rid of toil, wage labor and its reifications under capitalism, to arrive to the “joyful” life, made of creative work and contemplation as a shared experience (Aronowitz, 1985). I wish to analyze how a re-evaluation of the dichotomy work/labor, both as a critique of values and capitalist structures, can inform future struggles.

I will discuss Marx’s ideas in regard to labor in conjunction alongside an analysis of Nietzsche’s critiques of bourgeois values. In proceeding to what seems to be already a doomed task (many will read this attempt as tainted by the usual problems caused by irreconcilable differences, rational vs. irrational, aristocratic vs. proletariat, etc.), I would like to reconsider and re-evaluate critically the common dichotomy that many authors use to characterize the relationship of these two thinkers, namely that of the *aristocratic rebel* against

the *democratic revolutionary*. In doing this, I don't want to forget or undermine the important role that this narrative has had historically and politically but I would like to propose a new reading for the current philosophical landscape.

It is thus unavoidable to re-read Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche with a new set of eyes when the neoliberal order has reached such a hegemonic state. With this intervention, I am certainly not seeking to be exhaustive by any means, but rather attempt an approach to these thinkers in an epoch characterized by many "posts." We are witnessing the rise of the post-bourgeois, post-proletariat and maybe at this point, the "post-cultural." I will analyze the historical reasons for their counter-positions and contextualize both Nietzscheanism and Marxism. Also, I wish to retrace the intellectual "success" of the postmodern Nietzsche, the fierce enemy of the "great narrations," while I seek to reclaim its validity under a new reading for a genuine critique of capitalist modes of thinking connected to labor/work.

THE DEATH OF TRANSCENDENCE?

Before proceeding into more substantive issues, it's important to briefly discuss the question around metaphysics that has happened in conjunction with the struggles, more in the background for what concerns Marxism and clearly more evident for scholars of Nietzsche, which were more in touch with the so-called "disquieting guest," nihilism. The issue of idealism and metaphysics was already an important one when Nietzsche and Marx were writing. Their works were trying to deal with these issues. On this point, Henri Lefebvre provides an important insight in his *Critique of Everyday Life* where he remarks that both of them still considered pure appearance as something vulgar and tried to question motives and values at their core and beyond materiality of lived experiences.

He states:

"The life that lies beneath each value had to be rediscovered [by them], a life opposed to this value (H. Lefebvre, 2014)."

Nietzsche's oeuvre is a fierce critique of Western morality, and in the era in which he was writing, the path of nihilism as a moment was already fashionable among "prominent atheists" of his day. A similar and less discussed tendency can be found in Marx albeit with different nuances and terms. Both, in fact, posited that life can be affirmed through negations

and questioned the present conditions without the acceptance of the pure immanence of reality or the cold fact checking of the positivist tradition.¹

While it is commonly stressed that Nietzsche and Marx both criticized the foundations of traditional philosophy for different reasons² (Ricoeur, 1970), scholars tend to overlook the importance of these critiques when analyzed together against capitalism. By saying this, I don't mean to casually create theoretical connections, but rather establish the degree which "unmasking the 'lies and illusions of consciousness'"³ is useful in understanding capitalist dynamics.

By employing a historical materialist approach, Marx tried to distance himself from the idealist tradition while Nietzsche attempted to denounce idealism by sharply critiquing metaphysics. The debate around the historical materialist approach vis-à-vis the idealist one has been discussed at length by different authors, but I wish to focus more on the vision that these authors advance explicitly or implicitly and possibly find differences and commonalities. To accomplish this, I will begin with the explanation of a common misconception around the notion of Socialism.

MARX'S VISION OF A COMMUNIST SOCIETY

Paradoxically, Marx did not use the word socialism the way many later Marxists did. The term was created around the 1820s to denote the doctrine of Saint-Simon. In the 1830s and 1840s the terms "socialism" and "communism" were not used to indicate a "post-capitalist" social formation (Preve, 1993) that can be "built" before another one, before Communism, but rather to denote a political alternative. Socialism generally meant a utopian project of any kind, but almost always reform-based, while the term "Communism" indicated a call for action, for the class struggle against utopian non-violent gradual projects. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx orients himself toward a theory of a direct passage from capitalism to communism, of a communist transcendence

¹ In Book II, aphorism 57 of the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche heavily criticizes the so-called "realists" for pretending to be "sober" and not understanding how subjectivity plays a role in observing this "reality." "There is that mountain! There is that cloud! What is "real" in them? Remove the phantasm and the whole human element therefrom, ye sober ones!" see Nietzsche F. (1974) *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Toronto: Random House.

² Ricoeur, P. (1970) *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Ricoeur said about them: "'All three clear the horizon for a more authentic word, for a new

³ Ibid.

of the development of the capitalist mode of production, brought about by a progressive end of the labor-value law (Marx, 1993). It is in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in 1875, that he discusses the possibility of an “inferior stage” (Preve, 1993, Fusaro, 2014) of the communist society. Consequently, throughout the 1900s, it was commonplace to call this stage “socialism,” intended as a “society of labor,” even though Marx never directly calls for or advocates for a “socialist society.” In the *Gotha Programme* Marx contrasts the society of labor built on the fiction of a “free state” devoid of class connections to a society built in the name of the rights of nature for the formation of wealth (Marx, 1993). In it, I suggest that he proposed a non-economistic critique of capitalism and state which is, arguably, similar to what Nietzsche tried to do with a rejection of traditional Western values and reevaluation of *spontaneity*. As Marx argues, in the capitalist mode of production, nature is just as much a source of use-value as is labor. In this sense, a redistribution of income based on a different organization of working hours did not represent for him the final communist stage. He never calls for the reorganization of labor, or for the so-called “society of labor.” Conversely, the principle of the socialism of his time consisted generally in a moderately unequal distributive justice, in which *labor*, differentiated for quantity, quality and competence, should have been regulated moderately in terms of stipends. It became the only ethico-political and economic relevant criteria. Thus, the notion of a “society of labor” belonged to the socialist notion of the time, rather than Marx’s own project. It was, for the most part, a theoretical construct derived by Saint-Simon, together with his idea of a society connected to the *producers*, against the society of “lazy members” (Saint-Simon, 1964), and largely based on concepts borrowed from the Ricardian socialism, with its implications of abolition of income (Ricardo, 2004).

The inequality which Marx discusses did not simply consist only in the unequal income distribution among different “qualities” of jobs, but also in the fact that for an equal job, equal retributions would have been given to individuals with different needs. However, he urged to constantly analyze historically how this distribution changed and how to possibly arrive at a communist society. Therefore, I argue that from the 1900s to today, we witnessed a confusion around the notion of socialism and Marx’s own notion of communism, a similar confusion which already led Marx to famously say: “All I know is that I am not a Marxist.”⁴ Concurrently, this complexity made more difficult an elaboration of the difference between the “progressive

⁴ For some biographers this sentence was a remark that Marx gave in a letter to Paul Lafargue.

socialization of productive forces” and that of the “organization of subaltern classes on the basis of solidarity.” The socialization term went so to indicate two different realities, the progressive capitalist production and the passage to a socialized economic system known, as already mentioned, as the inferior stage of communism, “socialism.” Although Marx in the first volume of *Das Kapital* expresses more than once how capital socializes itself by producing an antagonistic social tie, which reproduces and feeds on itself constantly, worsening the separation between the rulers and the ruled (Marx, 1992). My thesis is that this idea informed Marx’s own conception of a true anti-capitalist struggle, and it’s an important dialectical tool to remind ourselves that there is no such thing as the working class or *as general intellect* automatically “socialized” towards Communism. Thus, connected to this “mistake,” it was easy for many authors to conclude that Nietzsche was the greatest voice of “irrationalism in the imperialist period” (Lukacs, 2016), because he was considered a counterhegemonic force of capital, instead of a sharp observer of the bourgeois society.

Furthermore, I think it’s important to remember that Marx, like Nietzsche, never equated *leisure* with *labor*. They were writing within the Greek tradition (Roberts, 2017), for which the conception of idleness was a crucial value for all human beings, the so-called *vita contemplativa*.

On this point, Hannah Arendt remarks that Marx eventually contradicted himself. On the one hand, he maintains that labor is the nexus through which nature and humans are in a constant opposing position, which allows them to constantly “become” human as they are *naturalized* while nature is *humanized* (see Aronowitz and DiFazio, 1994). On the other hand, she points at what also Costanzo Preve paradoxically called the “final stage of historical materialism” in Marx’s Communism. In other words, after capitalism, human beings are emancipated from labor itself, not only from exploitation. This emancipation from labor is a point which many later Marxists forgot to emphasize.

This consideration was brought about by the notion that the life dedicated to the appreciation of thought and knowledge was one of the keys to approach a life worth living, a step towards a dis-alienated one in the case of Marx and towards the *Übermensch* in the case of Nietzsche. As a matter of fact, Nietzsche was not so distant from Marx on this point. In trying to dismantle what he thought was a nihilist tendency in Europe of his day, he tried to reaffirm positively *life* through the refusal of human *ressentiment*, which he saw as the quintessential mode of life created by Christianity, a “morality of the weak,” “*a morality of the victim*.” It’s a subjectivity that in place of actively proposing new

values tend to emphasize personal suffering, employing reactionary strategies leaning towards an automatic defense of weakness. (Nietzsche, 2012).

His critique of the “morality of the weak” was not to be read the way fascist parties of the 1900s did, namely as a reactionary political mode dictating the rule of the strong against the exploitable weak, but rather as a human disposition towards life itself.

Such a disposition echoes also somebody like Antonio Gramsci, who talked about a “positive” and a “negative attitude” towards society, which is to be found implicitly in his felicitous phrase: “Optimism of the will, pessimism of the intellect (Gramsci, 1971).” He also commented that there were two possible critiques against the ideals of the French Revolution, namely a “positive and progressive sarcasm” and a “right-wing sarcasm,” who was negative towards the human content of established beliefs and dogmas. In other words, there is always an indirect confrontation with Nietzsche’s “disquieting guest,” with nihilism. I argue that Nietzsche read in Marxism a form of sarcasm who was merely laughing at every transformation of the society.⁵ Hence, the misunderstanding between these two great philosophical thoughts.

Keeping in mind how these two projects differed on the nihilist issue, I argue that Nietzsche’s sharp critique of the *morality of the weak* is to be read in that sense. It was not a hatred towards the weak and the oppressed, as it was stressed by right-wing political parties or by Nietzsche’s detractors during the World War II, but rather as a position of re-evaluation of life’s beauty in the face of sorrow and tragedy.

THE UNHAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS

The philosophical times that Marx inaugurated can be seen as internal to the Hegelian *unhappy consciousness*,⁶ other later writers and philosophers followed him on this “path.” In the words of Hegel, the unhappy consciousness is “the Alienated Soul which is the consciousness of self as a divided nature, a doubled and merely contradictory being.” In other words, the historical period after Marx wrote was ripe of bourgeois thinkers at the height of a restless consciousness, the crisis was either in the subtext or evident and judged as such.

⁵ He remarked that Marxism was like Christianity without a God.

⁶ Hegel, G. W.F. (2016) *The Phenomenology of Spirit (The Phenomenology of Mind)*. London: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

As Galvano Della Volpe noticed:

"In concrete terms, I am thinking of Proust's *Recherche*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Castle* as well as his short stories, and the quality of the poetic testimony to the crisis of the bourgeoisie represented by these works. Unlike Mayakovsky or Brecht, who judge the crisis to overcome it, these writers suffer it, and it is precisely because they only suffer the crisis of a civilization that they can be called decadent⁷ (Della Volpe, 1971)"

On the contrary, our philosophical times are marked by a bourgeoisie that knows no crisis, making a critique of values even more urgent.

The alienation that Marx discussed was itself a product of the last stage of *Romanticism*, which is noticeable in the idea that *Man* and *Nature* will finally reunite. It presupposes the concept that a separation has happened somewhere and somehow. Alienation is a detachment from *something*, it's a condition of restlessness. It is in this sense that alienation represents a general condition or a state of human society and its developments. Indeed, the degree of alienation to which human beings are subjected to in the capitalist society is very high and there can be no return to pre-capitalist solutions (feudalism, the ancient Greek society, etc..). It's in this impossibility of returning to any previous stage that we should read Marx's communism as a projection of a future whose details cannot be predicted yet. Human beings are alienated, divided, but their "wholeness" is not a return, in this axiom there is a wonderful paradox. The Marxian future society is a community of individuals defined only a posteriori, through the common struggle against the reified reality that alienation produces.

From this dialectic, it is possible to grasp what really is the *Entfremdung* in Marx, the becoming others from themselves, "alien" in a capitalist society. There is a generic human essence in Marx's individual, very similar to the ancient Greeks' *psykhe*, the soul as *truth*, which Marx links to the relations of production under capitalism. To this extent, Marx avoids relativism or the so fashionable "weak thought," since human essence is understood as ontologically connected to capitalism, whose basic relations are reduced to production and exchange of commodities, by which reification occurs and by which work becomes an indiscernible nexus. Thus, human beings' multi-dimensional general essence is reduced to a specific one-dimensional reality,

⁷ Della Volpe, G. (1991) *Critique of Taste*. New York: Verso.

to say it in the words of Marcuse.⁸ This is Marx's insistence on the how the individual represses his or her potentiality.⁹

The argument around the progressive forces of destruction with which capitalism abolished previous societies makes their comeback both impossible and undesirable. The difference is in the way alienation is "articulated," it finds new forms under capitalism, given the different nature of social relations and forces of production.

WHICH EQUALITY?

Many scholars have stressed that Nietzsche was a thinker of "inequality," it's undeniable that he wrote about it in different sections of his oeuvre. However, fewer observers noted that is important to stress how this issue can be put in relation with the presumption of "equality" within the neoliberal system.

Talks of equality under the capitalist system focus around two broad issues usually. Scholars distinguish between a formal equality as guaranteed by the law system in a liberal democracy (this is particularly true in the US where liberal "victories" are generally established under recognition of new acquired legal rights) and a substantial equality based on calculation of income, salary, cost of living. Most of the time, equality is connected to the idea of consumption.

On the other hand, inequality under capitalism doesn't have any religious or "traditional" base, all the contrary, it needs a homogenizing need to consume. This is the starting point on which then inequality can be predicated on capitalist grounds. Nietzsche is not addressing this inequality. He famously argued that:

⁸ See Marcuse, H. (1991) *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press.

⁹ Also, in the "German Ideology" Marx famously discussed how "specified" an activity has to be under capitalism: "He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic. This fixation of social activity, this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations, is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now." See Marx, K, Engels, F. (2016) *German Ideology*. New York: Intl Pub.

Whoever does not have two-thirds of his day for himself, is a slave, whatever he may be: a statesman, a businessman, an official, or a scholar (Nietzsche, 2011)“

Thus, there is no discussion of alienation of human beings, and yet, there is a similarity of intents in terms of how life should be lived. Even Marx in discussing communism was aware that individuals can differ on the bases of skills and needs, and as such, “unequal” on these grounds, nonetheless, it’s clear that Nietzsche articulates this issue differently. His theories on the death of God and nihilism don’t address skills and needs because he is fundamentally foreign to the theory of accumulation of wealth. In this sense, he still remains a thinker of inequality, but he doesn’t justify it in the pre-capitalist era or the capitalist one.

The debate around different solutions to the crises of modernity was always configured around the dichotomy of the Marxian democratic revolutionary vis-à-vis the Nietzschean aristocratic rebel. The new developments of neoliberal capital and the so-called nihilist tendencies of the *death of values* makes it possible to redefine this axiom and ask the question again, if it is possible today to compare Marx’s dis-alienated free individuality with Nietzsche’s Übermensch, without the politically charged assumptions existing in the 1900s.

Nietzsche’s death of God is definitely the underlying structure to understand his anthropological project that rests on the analyses of different topological figures, such as the Man, the hermit, the superior man, the last man and the creator.¹⁰

A point of contact in Marx and Nietzsche is indirectly the latter’s topological figures to the disappearance of religiosity and metaphysics. He tries to diagnose the condition of humanity and its foundational values by linking it to the passage from pre-capitalist societies to the capitalist one.

The first figure is Man, born after the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The second one is the Hermit, unable to hear the news about the death of God, he still lives according to traditional morality. The superior man is, as Karl Jaspers argues, a “sufficient consummation”¹¹ for Nietzsche. He understands the death of God and can free himself from “those grave and significant misconceptions

¹⁰ Preve, C. (2004) *Marx e Nietzsche*. Pistoia: Petit Plaisance

¹¹ Jaspers, K. (1997) *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

in religion, morality and metaphysics” but he is made to suffer and cannot convince himself of his beliefs, he is alone.

Then the last man, the most “despicable one.” I argue that this topological figure could be used as a description of today’s post-bourgeoisie and neoliberals. He is a nihilist who is able to take notice of the end of all traditional values and welcomes their overcoming but can’t look inside “his own miserable existence.” He wishes to thrive in it. The last figure is the Creator, a final “negative” chapter of the journey leading to the messianic coming of the *Übermensch*.

Through this description of typologies, Nietzsche criticizes the status quo by affirming the possibility of a new and better form of individuality against the perils of the “old morality,” which for him, remains decadent. For Marx, a full individuality can express itself fully only through *disalienation*. However, what can be said to better understand how Nietzsche and Marx can “work” together to discuss today’s individuals? In his recent remarkable work *Nietzsche, il ribelle aristocratico*, Domenico Losurdo builds a good case to advance the idea that Nietzsche is incompatible for any defense of capitalism¹² and its ramifications of humanitarianism with a good capitalist face. Losurdo, in discussing Marx as the *democratic revolutionary* and Nietzsche as the *aristocratic rebel*, thinks that this dichotomy still retains some power as a valuable distinction. The way in which he discusses this common separation is useful because it gives an idea of their attitude towards the forms of the struggles for the new individuality to come forward. In a sense, they are both harsh critiques of the present system of values although in different ways. Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* remains opposed to any narrative connected to a providential destiny of an empire because he seeks to destroy with a *hammer*. In other words, the death of God also means the end of any bourgeois or proletarian ethics. In Marx’s oeuvre, the means to obtain freedom for individuals is clearly based on a different ontology and on a project which puts at the center of history the proletarian subject.

MARX AND INDIVIDUALITY

In the introduction to his *Reason and Revolution*, Herbert Marcuse lays out the dialectics connected to the individual in Karl Marx’s originality, which rests

¹² Losurdo, D. (2015) *Nietzsche, il ribelle aristocratico*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.

on the Hegelian premises that “to think” means to essentially negate, the negation of “which is immediately before us.”¹³ But to negate something that is immediate, means also to find a transcendence in the non-immediacy of life.

The original negation constitutes the basis of Marx’s critique to ideology. There is no liberation from alienation via a simple fusion of individuals into a unified group.¹⁴ In Marx there is also an anthropological project of free individuality which he lays out particularly in the *Grundrisse*.

He claims that:

As the Natural Individual appropriate to their notion of human nature, not arising historically, but posited by nature. This illusion has been common to each new epoch to this day [...]The more deeply we go back into history, the more does the individual, and hence also the producing individual, appear as dependent, as belonging to a greater whole: in a still quite natural way in the family and in the family expanded into the clan; then later in the various forms of communal society arising out of the antitheses and fusions of the clan. Only in the eighteenth century, in ‘civil society’, do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity. (Marx, 1993)”

The relationship is a dialectical one, in so far as human beings interact with nature, they constantly create their own nature. Also, he argues that:

“[But] the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed social (from this standpoint, general) relations. The human being is in the most literal sense a *zoon politikon*, not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society. (Marx, 1993)”

And, more importantly, the individual exists as part of the society. Without society there is no individual:

Production by an isolated individual outside society— a rare exception which may well occur when a civilized person in whom the social forces are already dynamically present is cast by

¹³ Marcuse, H. (1960) *Reason and Revolution*. Boston: Beacon Press

¹⁴ Marx famously argued in the 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte that individuals belonging to a certain class but with no social consciousness are simply part of a mathematical addition: “A small holding, the peasant and his family; beside it another small holding, another peasant and another family. A few score of these constitute a village, and a few score villages constitute a department. Thus the great mass of the French nation is formed by the simple addition of homonymous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes.” See Marx, K. (1994) *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. London: International Publishers Co.

accident into the wilderness— is as much of an absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living together and talking to each other¹⁵ (Marx, 1993).”

This passage is of crucial importance, here Marx is using Aristotle’s example of human being as social animal, as a *zoon politikon*. Human beings have a social nature by which they can frame themselves and make sense of themselves. Paradoxically, individuals become “whole” only if they are “individuated” in a society where relationships are outside of the reifications that work entail.¹⁶

In this and later points of the *Grundrisse*, Marx hints at a history of philosophical liberation based on the individual as part of a group, but never as a group with homogenizing characteristics. It’s also in the *Grundrisse* that Marx traces the history of the “really” free individual, which goes through different moments of “personal dependence,” of “personal independence” and then of “free individuality.”

This anthropological project reminds us of Nietzsche’s topological figures, but in a different way.¹⁷ Marx discusses it in clear terms in the chapter on money. Particularly, *social power* is treated as a “thing,” whose individuals are stripped and robbed of, “each individual possesses social power in the form of a thing. Rob the thing of this social power and you must give it to persons to exercise over persons (Marx, 1993).”

And in terms of the forms under which dependence and interdependence have shown themselves in history, he argues that:

“Relations of personal dependence (entirely spontaneous at the outset) are the *first social forms*, in which human productive capacity develops only to a slight extent and at isolated points. Personal independence founded on objective [sachlicher] dependence is the second great form, in which a system of general social metabolism, of universal relations, of all-round needs and universal capacities is formed for the first time. Free individuality, based on the universal development of individuals

¹⁵ Marx, K. (1993) *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. Penguin Classics: New York.

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze’s work is interesting on this point, as he sees that individuals in late capitalism are better described as individuals: “The numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to information, or reject it. [...] Individuals have become ‘dividuals’ and masses [have become] samples, data, markets, or ‘banks.’” See Deleuze, G. (1995). *Postscript on Control Societies*, in Deleuze, G., *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, tr. M. Joughin, Columbia University Press, New York.

¹⁷ I argue that Marx’s own understanding of the human being as a social and political being, a *zoon politikon* is a key point of difference between him and Nietzsche.

and on their subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth, is the third stage. The second stage creates the conditions for the third (Marx, 1993)."

Personal dependence is a social condition existing in pre-capitalist times and epochs, in which rulers and ruled are intertwined by relationships of dependence that are clear and direct, even on legal grounds. The personal independence, on the other hand, is the social condition of today's capitalist society, the individual is "legally" and formally free but more and more alienated and subjected to other types of slavery.¹⁸

Free individuality is Marx's future communist project while *Übermensch* is Nietzsche's free human being. The former represents, at the same time, a liberation from alienated work and it's connected to the development of productive forces under the capitalist mode of production. It's the full realization of the general human essence which is no longer tied to a one-dimensional nature. Marx's human being is at the same time free but only in connection to a community (there is basically no freedom without a community in which the individual can exercise it).

Today's notion of freedom in sociology and philosophy are usually connected to the calculation of the degree of obtainable freedom under the capitalist system, and this is generally tied to a higher number of rights. Fewer times, it is articulated as freedom from the obligations of work. Should we simply accept alienation as a given from which to proceed in the struggle? In a Nietzschean sense, there is a profound lack of understanding as to how one should come to terms with the contemporary decadence that bourgeois values entail.¹⁹

On the contrary, many scholars fail to stress the role that capitalist reproduction takes in Marx, which is a growing atomistic disintegration of society. The more disintegrated human beings are, the more alienated they become. They are one-dimensional atoms swimming in a sea of indifference and lack of real solidarity. The critique that many raise against Marx is

¹⁸ Besides wage slavery, which is more "evident" throughout Marx's entire oeuvre, it's also interesting, on this point, to direct our attention to Marx's understudied discussion of credit in the *Notes on James Mill*, originally part of the so-called "Paris Notebooks," where *credit* acts as a "constraint" on the individual even on moral grounds. See Marx, K., Engels, F. (1988) *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*. New York: Prometheus Books

¹⁹ Which, as we have seen, Nietzsche identifies broadly with the despicable *Last Man*, who excels only in his mediocrity.

that he didn't define what the future society will look like, but in this he remains connected to Hegel, the new individual will have to be born out of the struggle for a new consciousness and cannot be defined a priori.²⁰ This critique is still connected to remnants of positivist sociology, looking for prediction and strict relations of causality.

MARX'S AND NIETZSCHE'S VIEWS ON SCIENCE AND IDEOLOGY

Nietzsche's commitment to the golden age of the Greek tragedy, the pre-Socratic one, was one of the ways he chose to embody the tension of the Classical/Romantic debate²¹ (Del Caro, 1989). The paradox being that he who supposedly fought against the decadence of romanticism couldn't refrain from using some of its categories to establish an optimistic acceptance of the beautiful spontaneity of life. And did so, as Lefebvre suggests, by focusing on life rather than death, as Marx himself did:

"For Marx, the beings of nature struggle and die; but nature is justified, since women and men are born and with them the human being, by way of history. Marxist rationality thus links up with Nietzschean thought in the justification of becoming. [...] Marx rejects in advance an anthropology that would be concerned merely with defining men, women and the human. Besides knowledge of man does not set itself up above man but is born from him, in him, in praxis.

Thus Marx didn't develop the notion of *nature* so as to confront it with that of *physis*. He drew it from French materialism, and not without criticizing the tendency of this philosophy to mechanistic systematization. He drew it also from German romanticism, not without rejecting its irrationalism. (Lefebvre, 2016)"

As already mentioned, the idea of a liberation is not simply meant as freedom from economic misery. It is not a shallow redistribution of wealth as it happens in social democracies, as many scholars have argued, but also from what he calls "spiritual chains." Connected to this point, Erich Fromm reminds us in his *Marx's Concept of Man* that *real* liberation is not just connected to having more welfare and a better relation to one's job:

²⁰ The same can be said about the *Übermensch*, the *Übermensch* is a projection that doesn't yet exist.

²¹ Del Caro argues that Nietzsche accepted Goethe's proposition that "the fate of Romantics is 'to choke on the rumination of religious and moral absurdities..'" and included both Wagner and Schopenhauer in what he called Romantic Pessimism.

“Marx, the man who every year read all the works of Aeschylus and Shakespeare, who brought to life in himself the greatest works of human thought, would never have dreamt that his idea of socialism could be interpreted as having as its aim the well-fed and well-clad “welfare” or “workers” state. Man, in Marx’s view, has created in the course of history a culture which he will be free to make his own when he is freed from the chains, not only of economic poverty, but of the spiritual poverty created by alienation.”

Marx’s post-romantic vision is in Fromm’s words “based on his faith in man, in the inherent and real potentialities of the essence of man which have developed in history (Fromm, 2004).” Another shared element, existing both in Marx and Nietzsche, which provides us with an understanding of the breadth of their ideological critique, is their attacks on the “official sciences” as a main trait of our times, and a clear obstacle to liberation. Marx sees them as a by-product, an infiltration by the capitalist structure into the possibility of a precision of “natural sciences” (Segundo, 2006). Nietzsche, on the other hand, sees positivism and empiricism as part of the Last man’s defense and values. Even though he partially praises the novelty of science for being free from old conceptions coming from the “old world”²² (Nietzsche, 2011), he reminds us that it can easily lead to the adoration of the illusion of objective truth. Once again, he sees in metaphysics one of Last man’s refuges:

“We see that science, too, rests on a faith; there is simply no ‘presupposition-less’ science. The question whether truth is necessary must get an answer in advance, the answer ‘yes’, and moreover this answer must be so firm that it takes the form of the statement, the belief, the conviction: ‘Nothing is more necessary than truth; and in relation to it, everything else has only secondary value.’ (Nietzsche, 1974, p.200)”

The positivist notion of science is still part of the capitalist world as a form of transcendence, connected to the acceptance of work ethic to find the final “liberating truth.” He continues:

“But you will have gathered what I am getting at, namely, that it is still a metaphysical faith upon which our faith in science rests—that even we knowers of today, we godless antimetaphysicians, still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by the thousand-year old faith, the Christian faith which was also Plato’s faith, that God is truth; that truth is divine... But what if this were to become more and more difficult to believe, if nothing more were to turn out to be divine except error, blindness, the lie—if God himself were to turn out to be our longest lie? (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 201).”

²² Nietzsche, F. (2011). *Human, Too Human*. Wildside Press: London.

God as lie and science as lie. Lie as in the belief of something outside the materiality of one's life. Last man's creed is, on the one hand, connected to the belief that science²³ can constitute the final truth and on the other hand on his abandonment of the idea of a God, which is a mask that he uses only to turn to other metaphysical notions of the same entity, the "truth in science." A beautiful anti-positivist sentence reflects Nietzsche's view against positivism in general: "What must first be proved is worth little (Nietzsche, 1990)."

He denounces the rigid mechanics of scientists which hold modern science at the level of an ascetic ideal, as the highest possible value. Nietzsche contrasts to it the idea of the Gay Science, which is the abandoning of morality, of seriousness of work, to acquire the condition of lightness, a state of "dancing." (Nietzsche, 1974)

THE REFUSAL TO WORK

As Stanley Aronowitz argues: "We must "work" to create, quite intentionally, new forms of social life in order to reinvent a politics in which individuals are truly empowered (Aronowitz, 1985)." The notion of work, in the transformative, should be associated with *creation* rather than with *wage slavery* and different forms of exploitation, in the postindustrial society. Marx's great insights into the alienated life are all the more relevant in a societal structure that is disintegrating the last remnants of solidarity. The last crisis is to be judged as an affirmative sense of life and a transformative sense of work. A combination of two characters that prevents could prevent accelerationist and nihilist tendencies. Even though the Nietzschean lifetime is a different sort of affirmation, it becomes indispensable to rethink work and life *against domestication*. In a 1981 pamphlet Jacques Camatte already envisioned how the final stage of the alienation process comes in disguise, as a soft revolution. "Domestication of humanity... comes about when capital constitutes itself as a human community (Camatte, 1981: 2)." For him, the destruction of human beings is a constitutive part of their reconstruction as anthropomorphized capital. Camatte warns of the dangers of human beings as one and the same with capitalism. He argues that in the absence of a new theoretical framework able to produce a real counter to capitalist

²³ With the word "science," I argue that Nietzsche is not simply addressing and criticizing positivism as one possible approach in the academic world, but rather that whole ensemble of disciplines connected to the establishment of final "truths," such as economics, social sciences and the so-called "hard sciences."

transformations society could turn into a full capitalist machine without oppositions. Camatte combines a Marxian and Nietzschean critique in a rather peculiar modality:

“But having been presented with the fact that God is dead, we now hear the proclamation of the death of the human being. Both God and humans yield in turn to science, which is at once the goddess and servant of capital: science presents itself in today's world as the study of mechanisms of adaptation which will assimilate human beings and nature into the structure of capital's productive activity (Camatte, 6).”

This quote should be turned around with a new affirmation of life and work as possibility. Interestingly, there is a passage in the *Grundrisse* in which Marx describes a similar event: “the saving of labour time [is] equal to an increase of free time, i.e. time for the full development of the individual, which in turn reacts back upon the productive power of labour as itself the greatest productive power (Marx, 1993: 711).” He then adds that the production of fixed capital from the point of view of direct production is eventually “man himself.” In this sense, labor time for Marx is not in opposition to the “free time” that appears from the viewpoint of classical economics. “Free time— which is both idle time and time for higher activity— has naturally transformed its possessor into a different subject, and he then enters into the direct production process as this different subject. (Marx, 1993: 712)” While Camatte echoes this process of finalization of capital transformations, this passage reunites Marx with Nietzsche. It is then crucial to reconsider values from the standpoint of a new affirmation, rather than from within the existing conditions. This is more difficult to obtain since, as Marx reminds us in the *Grundrisse*, “money (as returned to itself from circulation) as capital, has lost its rigidity, and from a tangible thing has become a process (Marx, 1993: 263).” Fluidity of life appears as objectified and fixed reality in the image of an impossible escape from capitalism.

In this political and philosophical climate, there is an urgent need to re-engage with Marx and Nietzsche with novel eyes to re-discover what life is in the face of new challenges posed by the capitalist system which has never been as “totalizing” as it is today. New types of struggles based on new radical values against capitalist structures need to be waged, in order to be able to even understand how to a full life.

As Roberts suggests, “Marx's empirical studies of the history of the working day demonstrate how advances in laborsaving technology exist in inverse

relation to the successful fight for less work. As working hours decrease, advances in labor-saving technologies increase.”²⁴

“Life-time” in Marx is separated from “work-time,” the fight for shorter hours of work per day becomes a necessary step to re-evaluate values and solidarity, to reconsider Marx’s position on the multidimensional aspects of human beings.

Aronowitz’s work on the role of technology is now even more pressing. If we want to understand how technology can be used to free human beings from wage slavery instead of witnessing the constant devaluation of human life in the name of capitalist improvement, we should be able to radically rethink the very foundational values on which we reflect and rethink freedom. A re-reading of Marx and Nietzsche from this point of view is very much needed in the contemporary world. In other words, it becomes essential to reconsider what utopia we should choose and have in mind when we protest the present conditions of life, and what should our efforts look like if we want to, one day, move towards and arrive at that “better place” for the human society.

²⁴ Roberts, M.J. (2016) *Twilight of Work: The Labor Question in Nietzsche and Marx* in *Critical Sociology*.

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