

PETER, PAUL, AND OBJECTIVITY

Evald Ilyenkov and Marek Siemek
on the Conditions of Human Subjectivity

Monika Woźniak

Abstract: The article aims to compare the models of human subjectivity developed by Marek Siemek (in his post-Marxist period) and Evald Ilyenkov. Both authors define human subjectivity as a self-reflective relation between the “I” and the self. This self-referentiality is possible only in relation to the other, mediated through a non-subjective element. Subjectivity, therefore, is something essentially intersubjective for both philosophers. But even though these two perspectives share the same basic scheme, they are developed in very different ways. As I argue, the main difference between them can be seen in the conceptualisation of the third, objective element. Whereas Ilyenkov describes this element as a thing involved in human activity (for example, a tool) and therefore meaningful (a view strongly connected with his theory of the ideal), Siemek emphasises the role of the civil society and its institutions. Exploring this difference is especially important as it reflects an inherent political dimension in Ilyenkov’s and Siemek’s thought. I evaluate this political dimension, pointing to the originality of Siemek’s defence of capitalism and the Schillerian traces in both concepts.

Key words: Evald Ilyenkov, Marek Siemek, intersubjectivity, subjectivity, ideal, civil society

In the 1970s, Marek Siemek and Evald Ilyenkov were both independent thinkers living in the Eastern Bloc. Siemek, twenty years younger than his Soviet colleague, shared the same interest regarding the Hegelian legacy. They both stressed the philosophical

dimension of Marxism and the central role of dialectics, understood as the theory of social praxis. In doing so, they shared in a struggle against the official Soviet dichotomy of dialectical and historical materialism and the understanding of the former as general knowledge of the objective laws of nature.

As far as we know, they never met in person, and the only direct link between their work is Siemek's flattering review of *Dialectical Logic* from 1975.¹ Ilyenkov died in 1979, more than a decade before the collapse of the USSR. Siemek continued his scientific career, and while German classical philosophy remained at the centre of his interests, his attitude towards Marx cooled.² In his texts from the 1990s, mainly in works on Fichte and Hegel, he began to focus on intersubjectivity as a founding element of human subjectivity – a theme only marginally present in his thought earlier.

The main aim of my article is to reconstruct and evaluate the concepts of the conditions of human subjectivity in Ilyenkov and the late Siemek. Despite Siemek's departure from Marxism in the 1990s, his ideas generally resemble the model developed by Ilyenkov twenty years earlier: subjectivity is seen as something which originates from and within the network of intersubjective relations mediated by something external, something objective. But even though these two perspectives share the same basic scheme, they are developed in very different ways. As I will argue, the main difference between them can be seen in their conceptualisation of objectivity. Exploring this difference is especially important, as it reflects an inherent political dimension in Siemek's and Ilyenkov's thought: the belief in civil society as the fundamental basis of human subjectivity in the case of the former, and the demand for social change towards a more universal development of human individuals in the case of the latter. Moreover, seeing each thinker against the background of the other allows us to better recognize the possible aporiae contained in their models. The last part of the text therefore deals with the ideological element in the model proposed by Siemek and the utopian character of Ilyenkov's concept.

The basic scheme of the concept of subjectivity or personhood – I treat these two notions interchangeably as they are associated with different theoretical traditions but

¹ Marek Siemek, "Logika i dialektyka," in *W kręgu filozofów* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1984), pp. 323–332.

² This change took place in the 1990s, when Hegel took over the role of Siemek's main point of philosophical reference and Siemek started to write extensively on the modern form of socialization. Although Siemek's attitude toward Marx was never one-sided, in the nineties he became a sharp critic of communism, and he philosophically undermined many premises of Marxism, while praising capitalism as the modern form of socialization. In the last decade of his life, however, his attitude towards Marx started to warm again. This was evidenced most clearly in a 2003 interview called "Who's afraid of Karl M.?" where Siemek defends the continued theoretical and political relevance of Marx's legacy: Przemysław Wielgosz and Marek Siemek, "Kto się boi Karola M.," online: <http://www.lewica.pl/index.php?id=9555&tytul=Kto-si%EA-boi-Karola-M.> [accessed Nov. 6, 2019]. See also: Jakub Nikodem, "Siemek i jego Marks," *Przegląd Filozoficzny – Nowa Seria* 23 (2014), no. 1 (89), pp. 279–293, here 279–280.

have the same meaning³ – is the same both in the works of Ilyenkov and in those of Siemek. The common structure goes as follows. Subjectivity, defined as self-referentiality, a self-reflective relation between the “I” and the self, is possible only through the relation to the other. A person cannot be an isolated individual; on the contrary, the relation with a certain “You” is necessary for any kind of subjectivity to emerge. Ilyenkov quotes here a famous passage from Marx, stating that “Peter only relates to himself as a man through his relation to another man, Paul, in whom he recognizes his likeness.”⁴ Siemek, on the other hand, describes the reciprocity of human communication as a foundation “not only of all the interpersonal interactions and relations but also of that self-reflective relation ‘of me to myself’ that creates the identity of an individual man as a subject.”⁵ A human being can be a subject only as a result of interactions with others. Only another person can function as a “mirror” in which a person can relate to themselves as the other and achieve self-reflection. Personality or subjectivity is not something “natural” or “psychophysiological.” It is essentially social. The philosophy of the human subject for both Ilyenkov and Siemek turns out to be a theory of intersubjectivity.⁶

Moreover, for both Ilyenkov and Siemek intersubjectivity has a triadic character. The relation between two subjects requires a third mediating non-subjective element. This requirement distinguishes their concepts from the philosophy of dialogue inspired by Buber, which can be seen as the most prominent alternative theory of human intersubjectivity. The relation between two individuals is not a direct I-Thou relation between

³ Ilyenkov creates his theory in relation to psychological and pedagogical theories. He uses the term *ličnost'* (usually translated as “person” or “personhood”), commonly used by the Soviet cultural-historical psychologists. Siemek, on the other hand, develops the theme of human intersubjectivity in his commentaries on the history of German classical philosophy. Therefore, he uses the notions of the subject and subjectivity, natural in this context. Nevertheless, both authors define their main notions in the same way. Moreover, the term *ličnost'* is often used in Russian to describe an individual self as the subject of their properties and their activity in contexts where a Polish person would rather use the words *podmiot* and *podmiotowość* (subject, subjectivity). The Polish equivalent for *ličnost'* would be clearly associated with the personalist tradition.

⁴ See Èvald Ilyenkov, *Filosofiã i kultura* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Političeskoj Literatury, 1991), p. 396. Marx's quotation from Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy, vol. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 144.

⁵ Marek Siemek, *Hegel i filozofia* (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 1998), p. 173.

⁶ I treat this notion, following Siemek, as very close to “relationality.” Although it might seem that in the case of Ilyenkov it is better to speak of the primacy of society, I have followed Ilyenkov's texts on personhood by proposing a threefold scheme, which allows us to describe personhood in a more detailed manner. However, one should remember that for Ilyenkov we can speak of the subjectivity of a particular human being only inasmuch as this being is part of the totality of social relations; the individual is not something concrete, but only abstracted from this social whole. Siemek's concept of intersubjectivity, on the other hand, seems to imply a certain form of proto-subjects existing prior to intersubjectivity. Nevertheless, Siemek insists (at least on the level of declarations, as will be discussed further below) on the primacy of this intersubjectivity over the subject.

one person and another; to exist, it needs mediation with objectivity. Ilyenkov claims that the reflective relation between the “I” and the self is always mediated through something external – a material artefact, something created by a man for a man and demanding a certain way of acting. Interaction between subjects and self-reflection can happen only in the system “composed of three bodies.”⁷ In Siemek’s writings one can find a parallel triadic scheme: “I” and “You” in dialogical exchange and the non-subjective element mediating between them. In a remark concerning the Hegelian concept of subjectivity, he notes that the true subjectivity of a free spirit is “in many ways mediated by reference to the various areas of some essential non-subjective being to whom it gives – and therefore recognizes in it – its own, subjective form.”⁸

In Siemek’s works, this objectivity appears under many different names, including objectivity, universality, and objectuality. In Hegel, he finds different versions of it – for instance, corporeal needs, the external physical world, language, culture, and law.⁹ In each of them, subjectivity encounters something universal, thus abolishing “spurious” subjectivity and overcoming its one-sidedness, particularity, and accidental character. Although objectivity might seem external or even hostile to the subject, it in fact plays a fundamental role in its constitution.

The categories used by Siemek, such as objectivity or universality, refer to the broad range of phenomena and cover various areas of non-subjective reality. Nevertheless, even though he names the material and corporeal world as being among the other examples of non-subjective reality, nature and the human body play hardly any role in his thought. Siemek is mainly preoccupied with the juridical sphere. Beyond any doubt, he considers the world of the institutions of civil society to be the most important form of subjectivity-founding mediation between individuals. This can be clearly seen in the following passage from the *Hegelian Notion of Subjectivity*:

the special emphasis is put on the *second, mediating sphere*. According to Hegel, only this specifically *social* sphere determining the native space of intersubjective rationality [...], which is characteristic for “civil society,” is the very essence of “ethical life” in its specifically *modern* form. Modern means exactly: internally split. But it is exactly this split [...] that determines the fundamental structure of true subjectivity.¹⁰

This mention of a “specifically modern” form of *Sittlichkeit* alludes to the distinction between two different notions of ethical life which, according to Siemek, can be found

⁷ Ilyenkov, *Filosofia i kultura*, p. 396.

⁸ Siemek, *Hegel i filozofia*, p. 45.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

in Hegel's writings. Siemek argues that the first notion, connected with the image of the ethical life of classical Greece, refers to the unity between an individual and the social substance, where individuals are absorbed by the whole and dissolved in the totality of ethical life of the community. This meaning of ethical life was abandoned in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* where Hegel develops the concept of "specifically modern socialization," that is, socialization through individualization. This new concept of ethical life is based on the mutual mediation of individuals necessarily produced by the system of needs. Because of the division and specialization of labour, an individual cannot realize her own egoistic interest without recognizing other subjects and their interests. Mutual recognition of individual subjects takes place in the form of contract and private property, Siemek claims.¹¹ It would not be an exaggeration to say that the system of needs and the institutions it produces are the third, necessary element for the emergence of subjectivity in the proper sense of the word – which is to say, the modern form of subjectivity.¹²

Let us notice that this emphasis on mutual recognition brings Siemek close to a type of contractualism. In spite of the stress put on the intersubjective character of human subjectivity, the focus on the moment of individuation in the modern world leads him to an atomistic vision of society. He describes it as the community of individuals mutually recognizing one another. The sphere of universality and normativity is created out of the necessary mediation of their egoistic interests. As Janusz Ostrowski well observed, in the case of Siemek we can speak of reading Hegel through the prism of Hobbes.¹³ It is worth pointing out that Hegel himself explicitly rejects such an image of society.¹⁴ Although some elements of social contract theory are indeed included in the Hegelian project, the substantial unity of the state as a proper sphere of universality is also strongly emphasized.¹⁵ Aiming at preserving the subjective moment of the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

¹² Siemek seems to find confirmation in Hegel of the belief that real subjectivity requires both individualisation and intersubjectivity and, in this sense, is not something "essential" but historical: it can be achieved only in the modern world. See Marek Siemek, *Hegel i filozofia* (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 1998), pp. 48–49.

¹³ In addition to contractualism, Siemek shares with Hobbes the belief in the egoistic origin of socialization and the divisive character of symbolic interests, see Janusz Ostrowski, "Law, Recognition and Labor. Some Remarks on Marek Siemek's Theory of Modernity," *Dialogue and Universalism* 19 (2009), no. 3–5, pp. 237–244, here 238–239.

¹⁴ See, e. g., Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 275–279 (§258).

¹⁵ It was frequently emphasised by various scholars, see, for example, Christopher Berry, "From Hume to Hegel: The Case of the Social Contract," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38 (1977), no. 4, pp. 691–703, here 692ff.; Alan Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 104ff.; Abel Garza, "Hegel's Critique of Liberalism and Natural Law: Reconstructing Ethical Life," *Law and Philosophy*, 9 (1990–1991), no. 4, pp. 371–398, here 384ff.

individual will in the whole, Hegel nevertheless proclaims the primary character of the whole over the individual. Hegelian understanding of the concrete whole, a motif extremely important for both Marx and Ilyenkov,¹⁶ therefore seems to disappear in the interpretation developed by Siemek.

Ilyenkov's understanding of the third mediatory element is very different from the interpretation suggested by Siemek. The mediating role is played here by an artefact that is a material thing included in human activity either as a tool or a product of the activity. This mediating element could be any socially produced object, such as a tea-spoon. Working with Soviet psychologist Alexander Meshcheryakov, Ilyenkov observed the development of deaf-blind children in Zagorsk and concluded that participation in the world of human praxis is the necessary condition for the emergence of higher cognitive functions (or, in other words, of personhood).¹⁷

In Zagorsk, Ilyenkov found confirmation of the primacy of social praxis over language per se in the constitution of human subjectivity or personhood. He agrees with Meshcheryakov that in the process of mental development the crucial moment is not acquisition of linguistic ability, but being able to satisfy one's needs in accordance with socially evolved modes of activity. If a child is involved in specifically human ways of acting that require specific tools (first with the help of the adult, then actively, on its own), it learns to recognise the socially important properties of a thing and to use it in the proper way.¹⁸ In doing so, the child assimilates the objectified "reason," the human modes of activity objectified in things. Only on this foundation can language appear; to use Leontyev's words, language is the bearer of meanings, not their "demiurge."¹⁹ Ilyenkov summarizes the core of this approach as follows:

The specifically human psyche with all its unique features emerges (and does not "awaken") only as a function of specifically human life-activity, i.e. activity that creates the world of culture, the world of things that were and are created by a human for a human.²⁰

¹⁶ See, especially, Evald Ilyenkov, *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982).

¹⁷ See, e.g., Evald Ilyenkov, "A Contribution to a Conversation about Meshcheryakov," *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology* 45 (2007), no. 4, pp. 85–94.

¹⁸ Alexander Meshcheryakov, *Awakening to life*, online: <http://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/meshcheryakov/awakening/conclusion.htm> [accessed Oct. 30, 2019].

¹⁹ Aleksej Leontev, *Dejatel'nost', soznanie, lichnost'* (Moskva: Politizdat, 1975), p. 134. As cited in: Evald Ilyenkov, "Dialectics of the Ideal," trans. Alex Levant, in Alex Levant, Vesa Oittinen (eds.), *Dialectics of the Ideal: Evald Ilyenkov and Creative Soviet Marxism* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 25–80, here 55.

²⁰ Ilyenkov, *Filosofia i kultura*, p. 36.

Once this participation is achieved, the biological needs, such as eating, are humanised: the child eats to feed its hunger, as does any other animal, but it does this with tools (forks, plates, a table, etc.), according to socially constructed methods, and it understands the function of those tools, their essence, the meaning given to them by social praxis. This employment of things as bearers of social meaning and schemes of activity also provides the foundation for new, specifically social needs.

To understand how things convey meaning for humans, we have to take a closer look at Ilyenkov's theory of the ideal. In polemics with authors who reduce ideal phenomena to neurological ones, he speaks about the ideal as something that has "a special kind of objectivity that is obviously independent of the individual with his body and 'soul.'"²¹ The objectivity of the ideal is different than the objectivity of material things. Everything that is normative, "universal," and binding (at least in a given historical moment and in a certain culture) – various schemes of human activity and thinking, the law, moral norms, linguistic rules such as syntax – is ideal in its nature. All of the above create a historically changing culture, that is, the collective consciousness of humanity (existing, however, only in the activity of concrete human beings). One can clearly see the Hegelian traces in such a concept.

At the same time, Ilyenkov wants to remain a strict and consequent materialist. The only possible way to do it seems to be to interpret the ideal as a relation between two material objects. Indeed, Ilyenkov makes this move and claims that the ideal is in fact the relation linking two material objects in such a way that one becomes a representation of the other or, more precisely, of its essence:

Under "ideality" or the "ideal," materialism must have in mind that very peculiar and strictly established relationship between at least two material objects (things, processes, events, states), within which one material object, while remaining itself, performs the role of a *representative of another object*, or more precisely the *universal nature of this other object*, the universal forms and laws of this other object, while remaining invariant in all its variations, in all its empirically evident variations.²²

An object can represent a different object only when it becomes a tool for or a product of human activity. In their social praxis, people reproduce and objectify the forms of reality. Consequently, Ilyenkov can assert that:

The ideal form is the form of a thing created by social-human labour, reproducing forms of the objective material world, which exist independently of man. Or,

²¹ Evald Ilyenkov, "Dialectics of the Ideal," p. 29.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

conversely, the form of labour realised in the substance of nature, “embodied” in it, “alienated” in it, “realised” in it and, therefore, presenting itself to man, the creator, as the form of a thing or as a special relationship between things, a relationship in which one thing realises, reflects another, in which man has placed these things, his labour, and which would never arise on its own.²³

In their social praxis, one uses a certain object and makes it a part of their activity, giving it a purpose and significance. Then, their activity is objectified again – for example, in the verbal form. A thing can represent a different object only because it is a tool for or a product of human praxis. The ideal exists only in the dialectical cycle of idealisation and objectification. It is this cycle that gives things their meaning. To use David Bakhurst’s example, we distinguish tables from lumps of wood not because of their physical, “natural” properties, but because we can grasp their “ideal form”²⁴ that is the meaning given them by social activity.

Only in the light of this formulation of the ideal can we understand why Ilyenkov insists that a thing is a necessary mediating element between individuals. Even a teaspoon is a product of human work and a bearer of a certain scheme of social activity – and therefore of the ideal. It mediates between individuals in their social praxis and introduces them to the human, meaningful world.

*

Both Siemek and Ilyenkov highlight the importance of freedom in the formation of subjectivity. For Siemek, freedom is connected primarily with the principle of mutual recognition, “according to which all subjects are free, but only because (and inasmuch as) they acknowledge and respect the freedom of all the others.”²⁵ Ilyenkov asserts that freedom – interpreted as the capacity for introducing variations into the sphere of the ideal, for creatively using and expanding human knowledge²⁶ – is a necessary condition of personality. For him, a person not only assimilates universal schemes in the process of socialization, but also creates them.²⁷

Nevertheless, both philosophers acknowledge that this third, non-subjective element can appear as something compulsory to the individual. Although it is necessary and in-

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁴ See David Bakhurst, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 181-183.

²⁵ Marek Siemek, *Filozofia spełnionej nowoczesności – Hegel* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK, 1995), p. 30.

²⁶ Ilyenkov, *Filosofia i kultura*, p. 357.

²⁷ Elena Mareeva, “Čelovečeskaâ individualnost i dialektika osobennogo,” in *Ė. V. Ilenkov: dialektika i kultura (k 90-letnemu ũbileŭ): Materialy XVI Meždunarodnoj naučnoj konferencii: Ilenkovskie čtenia* (Moskva, Izdatelstvo SGU, 2014), pp. 281-290, here 290.

herent in the process of the formation of human individuality, at least initially it appears as external to the individual or even as something imposed upon them. In Ilyenkov this thread is connected to the supra-individual, “transcendental” character of the ideal. The ideal compels individuals and possesses the power to limit individual choices. This power comes from the peculiar objectivity of the ideal and is connected to its social character. Ilyenkov, however, speaks in this context rather of limiting individual “whims.” This is connected to his belief that we can speak of will only when an individual acts in accordance with universal schemes of activity, in accordance with the ideal and not with the immediacy of biological needs.²⁸ The will as a specifically human phenomenon is therefore not limited by, but rather is made possible and guided by the ideal.

Siemek goes still further, attempting to describe conflict and the compulsory character of authority as an immanent part of rationality in its very essence. Let us take a look at *Two Models of Intersubjectivity*, one of Siemek’s most important texts about human intersubjectivity.²⁹ The text offers a comparison between Fichte and Hegel as two of the earliest authors elaborating on this matter. Siemek shows that for Fichte the necessary condition for the subject is intersubjectivity based on the mutual recognition of individuals as rational and free. This mutual recognition is possible only in a dialogical exchange of requests and responses: one free “I” calls the Other to free action and behaves according to that call, that is, limiting its freedom because of the expected freedom of the Other. A different model is to be found in Hegel, where the original form of socialization is a struggle for recognition that is a situation of conflict. These two models, Siemek continues, are only seemingly antagonistic; in fact, they are essentially complementary. For Hegel, the master-slave dialectic is only a starting point; the aim of the development of consciousness is mutual recognition. Fichtean proposition presupposes the diversity of particular needs and interests and consequently the possibility of their conflict: because of this possibility, Fichte stresses the importance of coercive right (*Zwangsrecht*) as a guarantor of freedom as well as the role of power (*Macht*) protecting this right.

What Siemek finds in Fichte and Hegel is confirmation that antagonism is a constitutive element for human intersubjectivity both in the genetic order, in the early period of formation of human subjectivity, and in its mature, rational form. An emphasis on this point is found in his view on the nature of socialization. In the process of socialization Siemek stresses not the moment of internalization of the universal norms or schemes, but rather the moment of the so-called specifically modern mediation between individuals, taking place in civil society and, above all, in the system of needs. There, in the economic exchange between individuals, Siemek sees the sphere of “equivalent, that is

²⁸ Ilyenkov expresses this very clearly in his text on free will in Fichte and Spinoza, see: Ilyenkov, *Filosofia i kultura*, p. 111–112.

²⁹ Siemek, *Hegel i filozofia*, p. 172–202.

fair exchange of entitlements, obligations and self-limitations.”³⁰ The possibility of antagonism is immanent to it and cannot be completely annihilated. Only in “fair exchange” can an inevitable split appear, making space for the modern, individuated subject.

The motif of conflict and antagonism as constitutive elements of intersubjectivity is practically absent from Ilyenkov’s writings. He does not refer to the struggle for recognition, which might seem surprising considering the popular (although false³¹) opinion that Marx was the one who drew attention to this theme. The model proposed by Ilyenkov does not make antagonisms impossible, of course, but neither does it treat them as essential for human subjectivity.

*

Whereas Ilyenkov’s philosophy describes very general conditions of human subjectivity, Siemek explicitly expresses his interest in a specifically modern form of socialization. This might seem surprising as Siemek was widely regarded as a transcendental philosopher. However, his transcendental philosophy is not a Kantian-like deduction of timeless, a priori categories. It is a social ontology of knowledge, aiming to reveal the concrete historical conditions of the possibility of human rationality.³² Nevertheless, he not only focuses on the modern form of subjectivity, but insists on its superiority above other forms.

From the Marxist point of view, Siemek’s apology for civil society appears as merely ideological in the sense that it serves as an expression of the dominant material relationships and aims to legitimize the domination of the ruling class. Nevertheless, Siemek does not follow the traditional path of the ideologists. Instead of obfuscating the material conditions and the antagonism created by them, he makes it the very core of his concept. Instead of naturalising or essentializing social relations, he reveals their historical genealogy. As Florian Nowicki describes, Siemek in fact deconstructs the main self-narrative of modernity, for example, the political discourse of free and equal members of democratic community. Simultaneously, however, he “legitimizes (with different means) the same (modern) social whole.”³³ Siemek reveals the economic origin of the supposedly purely political community, but at the same time insists that capitalism creates the only possible sphere of rationality and equality.

³⁰ Siemek, *Hegel i filozofia*, p. 199.

³¹ See Christopher J. Arthur, “Hegel’s Master-Slave Dialectic and a Myth of Marxology,” *New Left Review* 142 (1983), pp. 67–75.

³² For Siemek’s transcendentalism, see Jakub Kloc-Konkołowicz, “Historicity of Rationality. The Notion of History in Marek Siemek’s Thought,” *Dialogue and Universalism* 19 (2009), no. 3–5, pp. 227–236; Marcin Milkowski, “Siemek, dialektyka, rzeczywistość. O transcendentalnej filozofii społecznej,” *Przegląd Filozoficzno-literacki* 16 (2007), no. 1, pp. 99–113.

³³ Florian Nowicki, “Marek Siemek a ideologia świata nowoczesnego,” *Przegląd Filozoficzny – Nowa Seria* 23 (2014), no. 1, pp. 263–278, here 267.

In doing the former, he is a diligent student of Hegel and Marx. The explicit source of Siemek's concept is the passage on the system of needs from Hegel's *Elements of Philosophy of Right*. However, for Hegel the game of particular interests and the division of labour is only one among many sources of universality and is definitely not the highest one. The economic genesis of the modern subject can be found much more easily in Marx: for example, at the beginning of *Grundrisse*, where Marx argues that capitalism produces the individual as separated from the social substance and at the same time necessarily mediated through others (of course, this similarity between Marx and Siemek should not be overestimated – Marx accentuates production, whereas Siemek emphasises the role of exchange).³⁴

While revealing this economic origin of modern subjectivity, Siemek legitimizes it again with the thesis that economic interests are essentially dialogical in nature. Non-material interests, connected with human beliefs and convictions, generate conflicts because of their empty claim to universality. By contrast, the necessary condition for capitalism is the dialogical, fair exchange of economic interests. As a result of specialisation and the division of labour, one's own interest cannot be fulfilled without cooperation with others. Economic interests produce the rational public sphere out of necessity and serve as the only possible guarantee of its existence. Characteristically, for Siemek the real sphere of socialization is not production, as for Marx, but circulation. Only there, in exchange, can mediation between individuals appear and create the modern form of intersubjectivity (that is, civil society with its institutions).

Siemek's conception evades some of the criticism that has been levelled by Marxists at commodity fetishism, because what Siemek presents is not an essentialist account of "things" that appear asocial. He does not obscure the social relations behind the seemingly objective commodity relations but emphasizes their social moment. Commodity relations appear here not as a phantasmagorical or distorted form of social relations, but rather as their foundations, because circulation enforces the necessity of mutual recognition among participants in economical exchange. The intersubjective relations characteristic of the modern subject can appear only because of the need for economic exchange between individuals.

The concept of commodity fetishism is therefore, to some extent, deprived of its critical edge here, as it can be understood properly only within the Marxian model of socialization. Instead, critical dialogue with Siemek requires one to challenge the narrative of capitalist exchange as the sphere of mutual recognition of equal (even if sometimes antagonistic) individuals. The best means to accomplish this is to remember that capitalist exchange is in fact founded on the coercive divorce between workers and the means of production, which makes possible the fundamentally unequal exchange between the worker and the capitalist in the first place. Violence and coercion, as ar-

³⁴ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1973), pp. 83–84.

gued by Marxist scholars, were not only present at the historical origins of capitalism, but are also the hidden and constantly reproduced foundation of it.³⁵

As I mentioned before, Siemek could be a challenging interlocutor in such a dialogue, because he does not essentialise capitalism as such. Because of that, his concept offers a very powerful and philosophically sophisticated vision of the modern subject as something rooted in concrete social history. Ilyenkov's model of personality can, by contrast, appear at first to be very general or even abstract. Indeed, Ilyenkov describes the very general conditions required for higher cognitive functions – “personality” or “subjectivity” – to appear in any historic formation. Having in mind Marx's accusation that “the so-called *general preconditions* of all production are nothing more than these abstract moments with which no real historical stage of production can be grasped,”³⁶ Ilyenkov's emphasis on such general conditions, and his giving up on the analysis of specific relations of production can seem suspicious. However, Ilyenkov argued for the fundamentally social character of human “nature” and defended it from the reductionist empiricism which was gaining more and more sympathisers in the Soviet Union at the time. This specific context in which his views were developed should not be forgotten. However, even if Ilyenkov insists on such a general description of the conditions of subjectivity, he is clearly aware of its practical consequences.

As I mentioned before, for Ilyenkov personhood is something gradable. The more a person participates in the body of human culture, the more she becomes a person. If so, the aim of human emancipation is to “take care of building such a system of relationships between people (real, social relationships) that will turn every living human being into a person,”³⁷ to create “such conditions of direct labour and education, within which each individual – and not only some – would reach the truly modern heights of the spiritual, theoretical, technical and moral culture.”³⁸ Beyond any doubt Ilyenkov shared Schiller's and Marx's ideal of harmonious, all-round development. In

³⁵ I have in mind, above all, analyses that aim to extend the notion of primitive accumulation. In the works of scholars such as Tomba, Bonefeld, and De Angelis (to name just a few), this classical Marxian term comes to refer not only to the historical origins of capitalism, but also to the ongoing process of separating the producers from the means of production; it is used to describe all the means that enable and support this separation, especially the extra-economical means, including state regulations and various forms of direct violence. See e.g.: Massimiliano Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities*, trans. Peter D. Thomas and Sara R. Farris (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013), especially p. 165; Werner Bonefeld, “Primitive Accumulation and Capitalist Accumulation: Notes on Social Constitution and Expropriation,” *Science and Society* 75 (2011), no. 3, pp. 379–399; Massimo De Angelis, “Marx and Primitive Accumulation: The Continuous Character of Capital's ‘Enclosures,’” *The Commoner* 2001, no. 2, pp. 1–22.

³⁶ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 88.

³⁷ Ilyenkov, *Filosofia i kultura*, p. 414.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 151. On Ilyenkov's concept of education, see also David Bakhurst, “Ilyenkov on Education,” *Studies in East European Thought* 57 (2005), pp. 261–275.

this quote, “reaching the heights” does not, of course, mean an actual appropriation of the whole body of human culture and knowledge. What Ilyenkov has in mind is not a passive acknowledgment of the ideal, but rather the ability to actively and creatively participate in it.

Whereas Siyaves Azeri praises Ilyenkov’s anti-innatism as an “expression of the desirability, possibility and necessity of re-appropriation of socially accumulated knowledge,”³⁹ Andrey Maidansky interprets his texts on the emergence of personality as an escape into pedagogical utopia, “more powerful and dangerous than the technocratic one, as it uses the energy of the humanistic ideal.”⁴⁰ Maidansky accuses Ilyenkov of overlooking the role of technological progress and instead treating education as a mean towards resolving the problem of the existence of state and ruling elites. This is utopian, he argues, as those problems are connected to the division of labour and can be resolved only thanks to the individualisation of creative labour and the automation of material production. However, as Azeri aptly observes, “since the valorisation process depends on the expenditure of immediate labour time, a total replacement of human labour by social knowledge and skills is not sought by capital.”⁴¹ As Massimiliano Tomba has shown, relative surplus value is dependent on absolute surplus value – an increase in the productivity of labour thanks to technological progress in one place is inherently connected with an increase in the direct forms of exploitation in others.⁴² The persistent existence of sweatshops and the exploitation of miners of minerals necessary for technological progress should definitely make one less optimistic about Maidansky’s hope for a programming machine “driven by the tame forces of nature and excluding any material labour” that might “bring humanity into the orbit of communism”⁴³ and replace the market and the state.

In my opinion, instead of reading Ilyenkov’s pedagogical texts as a suggested solution to the problem of the alienating power of the socialist state, as Maidansky does, it is more fruitful to see in it a critique of ideology. What is primarily at stake in Ilyenkov’s stance is the establishment, first, of a Marxist concept of the social nature of man and, second, of the possibility for all people to equally develop their talents, against the theories that can serve to legitimize inequality and social hierarchy by essentializing them. Moreover, the problem of the alienating power of the socialist state was connected

³⁹ Siyaves Azeri, “The Historical Possibility and Necessity of (Ilyenkov’s) Anti-Innatism”, *Theory & Psychology* 27 (2017), no. 5, pp. 683–702 (online at <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354317714339> [accessed Feb. 7, 2018]).

⁴⁰ Andrej Majdanskij, “*Ne otomrët, s-sobaka!*: Ilenkov o gosudarstve”, *Svobodnaâ mysl* 4 (2013), pp. 171–182, here 178.

⁴¹ Azeri, “The Historical Possibility and Necessity of (Ilyenkov’s) Anti-Innatism,” p. 697.

⁴² Massimiliano Tomba, “Differentials of Surplus-Value in The Contemporary Forms of Exploitation,” *The Commoner* 12 (2007), pp. 23–37, here 28.

⁴³ Majdanskij, “*Ne otomrët, s-sobaka!*: Ilenkov o gosudarstve,” p. 181.

for Ilyenkov not with the deficiencies in the system of education, but with the lack of a real socialization of property.

However, even if Ilyenkov is not a preacher of pedagogical utopia in the sense of treating education as a path to a better future,⁴⁴ the absoluteness of the idea of universal all-round development indeed has something utopian in it. I want to argue that this is not necessarily a bad thing. Ilyenkov's dream of all-round development can lay claim to the status of what Ernst Bloch famously called a concrete utopia: not a hollow desire, but the active anticipation of a better social order that reaches towards a really possible future. Azeri has argued for the real possibility of this utopia by pointing to the contradiction between socially accumulated knowledge and value-producing labour in capitalist society. He claims that the possibility of re-appropriating knowledge in post-capitalist society can be expressed briefly as "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!" What Azeri has in mind is a more humanistic division of labour (enabled through increased productive forces) – a division of labour based on the employment of fully developed individual gifts and talents, one that is adjusted to the educational process rather than adjusting the educational process to the requirements of the present division of labour.

Reading Bloch reminds us of one more thing: for utopia to be concrete, there has to be a subject behind it. The anticipation of a better future must be rooted not only in the possibility of such a better future hidden within the concrete material conditions, but also in the collective subject organized around this dream and aiming at realization of this possibility. The objective and subjective factors are dialectically related to each other.⁴⁵ Without it, the utopia remains a hollow dreaming, deprived of the link to praxis. In order to cleanse Ilyenkov's concept of abstractness, it is necessary to link it to the self-organising "solid subject"⁴⁶ and its emancipatory praxis.

*

The main difference between Siemek and Ilyenkov can be explained very succinctly. The former was a brilliant defender of the *status quo*. His concept of the conditions of subjectivity expresses the belief in the superiority of the existing social model – a model that may require corrections (with time Siemek started to emphasise more clearly the social-democratic aspect of Hegel's thought), but not demolition. The latter, by contrast,

⁴⁴ It must be noted that Ilyenkov does speak of knowledge as the means of de-alienation of labour (which reminds of the concept of polytechnic education, so important for Lenin and Krupskaya) which seems to contradict my interpretation. Ilyenkov, however, makes clear that the spiritual and theoretical development of the individual is possible only *after* (real) socialization of private property. See: Ilyenkov, *Filosofia i kultura*, pp. 150–151.

⁴⁵ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, vol. 1, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 148.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

was critical of the existing reality of both capitalist society and real socialism, and he demanded social change. His concept of human personality was a call for social conditions enabling the universal development of every individual. It exposed him to the accusation of being utopian, but, contrary to common opinion, the owl of Minerva does not go blind at dawn.

It might seem ironic that the theme of both Siemek's doctoral thesis and his first book was Friedrich Schiller, the founding father of the idea of universal development. At the end of his life, Siemek returned to these ideas, devoting his *Doctor honoris causa* lecture at Goethe University, Frankfurt, to them. His last philosophical project, unfortunately unfinished, was to prepare a new edition of that doctoral thesis.⁴⁷ The choice of Schiller might seem symbolic in this regard: Siemek chose him over Marx, against his own declared plans to write about the latter. In Schiller, he found a much safer critique of modernity, a critique he praised for understanding the strict limits of utopian thinking. His turn to Schiller did not open him up to the possibility of emancipatory praxis, but kept him in the sphere of appearance.

⁴⁷ On the analysis of this reedition and Siemek's attitude towards Schiller, see Bartosz Działoszyński, "Przekroczyć Oświecenie" in Marek Siemek, *Wolność i utopia w myśli filozoficznej Schillera* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2017), pp. 7-26.