

Karl Marx: Rousseau's powerful ally

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In his excellent paper on the Catholic wisdom and the recovery of the person in elementary education, Curtis Hancock makes many astute observations about a destructive influence of the philosophical thought of Jean Jacques Rousseau, which has been exercised over Western societies for over the last two centuries. Following the route of exposing threats, which waylay the Catholic understanding of human being and education, I would like to point out that Rousseau's educational utopianism is actually neither alone, nor prevailing. For the contemporary culture seems to be under the dramatic impact of many idealistic thinkers which actually are captained by nobody else but Karl Marx.

While tracing the successors of Rousseau's philosophy, Curtis Hancock counts Marx into the bunch of disciples of *Emile's* author. However, even if there is some analogy between proposals of these two thinkers, as they both are not realist philosophers and do project the reality instead of knowing it, their aims and objectives are rather different. Considering his own attitude to human nature, Marx can be clearly recognized as an original intellectual. Marx's claim, that human nature is to be constructed, does not quite match with Rousseau's position, that human nature is to be observed blindly. If these two approaches be compared, one can easily meet the constructivism of Marx and the naturalism of Rousseau —*tertium non datur*.¹

¹ If the relation between nature and culture is regarded, one can distinguish six positions: human nature is completed by culture entirely (e.g. Aristotle); human nature is completed by culture in part, as it needs also grace to reach its fullness (e.g. Thomas Aquinas); human nature is corrupted totally and unchangeably (e.g. Martin Luter); human nature is perfect (e.g. Jean Jacques Rousseau); human nature is produced individually (e.g. Jean Paul Sartre) or collectively (e.g. Karl Marx). See P. JAROSZYNSKI (2005). Filozoficzne koncepcje kultury. In A. MARYNIARCYK (ED.) (2005). *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*, vol. 6, Lublin, 138-140.

I. Marxism gains *pole position*

Marxism is a complex phenomenon. Though its name etymologically comes from the surname of Karl Marx, it does not denote views of this thinker only. Marxism embraces a collection of beliefs, which takes into account —beside opinions of the author of *Capital*— also views of his assistants, continuators, and even opponents and critics. Though some interpretations want to see in it only a method of economic and social transformation, or a dialectical view of history, or a secular ethos of common life, but Marxism claims to be a specific project of the culture. For Marxism clearly aims at subordinating all human theoretical, moral, artistic, and religious dynamism to its own ideological models.² Anyway, are Marxist ideals still actual?

The bankruptcy of many socialist regimes in the last two decades of the XX century was an evident downfall of Marxism. Some mark of the collapse of Marxism was confirmed, for example, by Pope John Paul II in his famous encyclical *Centesimus annus*, where he noticed an overcoming of the ideology of class war in the social scale. The Pope formulated there a condition of any efficient struggle with Marxist power. It was to be a transformation of human society based on the constant disposition to resolving all social problems in the perspective of mutual understanding, the respect for truth, and referring to the voice of conscience, and to the sense of common dignity.³ However, in its dynamism the social life is not always assisted with dialogue, truth, conscience, or dignity. As long as these four values are present in human minds and actions, any Marxist suggestions are condemned to banishment and oblivion. But in the moments of social amnesia they come back, and again undertake their central task of building *new world* and *new man* following the Machiavellian rule which says that ends justify means.⁴

² P. TARASIEWICZ (2009). Marksistowska koncepcja sprawiedliwosci. In P. JAROSZYNSKI and others (ED.) (2009). *Sprawiedliwosc – idee a rzeczywistosc*, Lublin, 108.

³ See JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus annus*, nr 23: «Also worthy of emphasis is the fact that the fall of this kind of *bloc* or empire was accomplished almost everywhere by means of peaceful protest, using only the weapons of truth and justice. While Marxism held that only by exacerbating social conflicts was it possible to resolve them through violent confrontation, the protests which led to the collapse of Marxism tenaciously insisted on trying every avenue of negotiation, dialogue, and witness to the truth, appealing to the conscience of the adversary and seeking to reawaken in him a sense of shared human dignity».

⁴ P. TARASIEWICZ (2009). Marksistowska koncepcja sprawiedliwosci, 108-109.

Many facts can confirm that the shameful defeat of the Soviet-bloc countries was only a bitter lesson, which made Marxism to draw some practical conclusions. And many signals can be read which distinctly prove that for last few years Marxism has even strengthened its position in the world. There are some of them:

(a) *A sociological signal*

In 2005 on BBC Radio 4's website there was organized a special plebiscite which aimed at appointing the greatest philosopher of all time. All the enterprise was arranged according to professional standards. All pretenders to the title had their presentations prepared by academics. Thanks to them the British voters, about 35 000 in number, found an excellent possibility to get acquainted with particular thinkers, compare their doctrines, and express their own preferences in voting. Plurality and variety of the nominees turned into a division of votes. Only six philosophers managed to cross the five-percent threshold: Immanuel Kant – 6%; Plato – 6%; Friedrich Nietzsche – 7%; Ludwig Wittgenstein – 7%; David Hume – 13%; and the winner who achieved 28% support. And the palm of victory was gained not by Aristotle, not by Rousseau, but by Karl Marx.⁵

(b) *An academic signal*

The Marxism's presence in the theoretical domain is visible especially in an area of the cultural studies. It can be justified, for example, with a content of a renowned academic handbook: *Introducing Cultural Studies*.⁶ This book reckons Marxism, together with functionalism/structuralism and postmodernism, to the exclusive group of three optional currents, which are referred to by contemporary theories of culture. One can read there that functionalism/structuralism and postmodernism are the positions of diametrically different character. The first seems to be an approach with an inclination to oversimplify the human world, as it proposes clear and unflexible apprehension of all cultural relations. The second

⁵ See BBC Radio 4 (2005): www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/greatest_philosopher_vote_result.shtml —access: July 5, 2011.

⁶ See E. BALDWIN, B. LONGHURST, S. MCCrackEN, M. OGBORN, G. SMITH (2007). *Wstęp do kulturoznawstwa*, transl. by M. KACZYNSKI, J. LOZINSKI, T. ROSINSKI, Poznan.

is rather a position with a tendency to overcomplicate the human life, as its interpretations are flexible and multi-layered. Wittingly or not, Marxism occurs to be not only taken into consideration, but also distinguished, as against the background of two others it makes an impression to be most reasonable and balanced approach.⁷

(c) *A political signal*

The presence of Marxism in the political domain becomes visible in the context of global transformations. It is significant that the collapse of socialist regimes converge with the intensification of activity in the interest of globalization. Many leaders of Marxism, which previously promoted the ideological values of socialism, actually do promote the globalization process that is based on apparently non-socialist fundamentals such as postmodernism, ecological fundamentalism, and even ideological liberalism. The engagement of Marxist powers into creating structure of *new world* seems to justify attempts which trace an ideological correspondence between Marxism and globalization. Such correlation can be found especially in according preferences for the social structure over the individual, in alienating human person from the natural sources of culture, and in a tendency to deprive human relations of their profound and lasting consequences. Globalization seems to compensate for all costs the Marxism had to bear after the end of the epoch of socialist nations. It also warrants Marxism broad possibilities of realizing its principal purpose, i.e. creating an ideal (perfect, classless, communist) world and its ideal inhabitant.⁸

• (c) *A papal signal*

In his encyclical *Spe salvi* Pope Benedictus XIV underlines significant fact that these days *the promise* of Marx does not become void at all, but is still living and fascinating the world, as it did in the past: «His promise, owing to the acuteness of his analysis and his clear indication of the means for radical change, was and still remains an endless source of fascination»⁹.

⁷ *Ibidem*, 45 i 121.

⁸ See P. TARASIEWICZ (2009). *Marksistowska koncepcja sprawiedliwosci*, 110-111.

⁹ BENEDYKT XVI, *Spe salvi*, nr 20.

II. The specificity of Marxism

While elucidating Aristotle's concept of teaching and learning, Curtis Hancock emphasizes that: «A fundamental task of education is to give moral direction to the youth. Crucial to the aims of education is character-formation, so that the child can become eventually a responsible adult and productive citizen». The position of Marxism toward moral questions depends on its attitude toward ideology. Though there is a prevailing consent that all interpretations of morality pertain to ideology, the acceptance of ideology as such is not self-evident, and divides Marxists into its opponents and proponents.¹⁰

(a) *The anti-ideological Marxism*

Ideology wins no praise from these Marxists who refer to views of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. In their opinion, ideology is an expression of collective mystification procured by pseudo-thinkers, i.e. people who do not understand the motives of their activity. Ideology can not be justified even by its pro-Marxist character: if the human activity is not joined with a consciousness of real motives, it loses its identity and gets in want of repair. In consequence, while negating ideology, morality is negated too.¹¹

For Marx, even a term *morality* is an abusive word, which should be erased from the vocabulary of the post-bourgeoisie humanity.¹² He believes that the classless society will be constituted not only on the ruins of individual property, but also on the graveyard of human morality. Marx explicitly demonstrates his anti-moral attitude by rejecting the good in the interest of the evil, and claiming that „the bad side always triumphs in the end over the good side. The bad side produces the movement which makes history by providing a struggle»¹³.

The negation of morality is to be a warrant of human freedom. The liberation of man is to make its contribution to constituting the

¹⁰ Cf. P. JAROSZYNSKI (2003). Ideologia. In *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*, vol. 4, ed. by A. MARYNIARCZYK, Lublin, 732.

¹¹ A. WOOD (2002). Marks przeciw moralności?. In P. SINGER (ED), *Przewodnik po etyce*, transl. by J. GORNICKA, Warszawa, 565.

¹² *Ibidem*, 558.

¹³ K. MARX (1997). The Poverty and Philosophy. In L.D. EASTON- K.H. GUDDAT (ED). *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, Indianapolis, 490.

perfect society. It seems that, according to the anti-ideological Marxism, to constitute the new community there is not need of waiting. As ideology is a fundament of the class society, then destroying ideology is tantamount to constituting the ideal social order. In such a perspective the Marxist ideal of social life is always being realized where the rational consciousness of human activity prevails, and where rational means free from moral mystification and other form of ideology.¹⁴

(b) *The ideological Marxism*

It finds its inspiration in the thought of Vladimir Lenin. The leader of the October Revolution does not reject ideology, he recognizes it as a positive expression of class interests. In this way he grants a right of having its own ideology to the working class, but also transforms the struggle of class —conducted in economical or military way so far— into an ideological struggle.

Marxism, which has at its disposal its own ideology, does not need to avoid morality any more, nor struggle with moral issues —as it was discussed by Marx. It undertakes moral challenges and resolves them. In such a way there is established the Marxist ethics, which is —following the words of Lenin— a contribution to destroying old society that was based on the exploitation, and which unifies all the proletariat that constitutes the new society of communists. Naturally, this ethics embraces moral norms, which are closely connected with Marxist ideology, politics, and its ideal of future.

In the Marxist ethics there can be distinguished norms of formal and meritorious character. The first are entirely ahistorical and universal. One of them is a principle of self-realization, which is an obligation of rising in revolt against existing world, and realizing creative possibilities of man. The second are featured by variability and relativism. Though they all respect a common purpose of constituting the ideal future, they differ from each other with regard to their roots and functions. That is why the contents of individual norms entirely depend on a given historical, political, or social situation. Every change of such a situation generates a need of creating new norms, a need which springs up with rejecting a

¹⁴ A. WOOD (2002). *Marks przeciw moralności?*, 563.

prevailing social system. An increasing dissent against existing principles transforms itself into striving for destroying them and exchanging them with other rules. Consequently, the content of new moral norms is opposite to the meritorious content of norms prevailing so far.

Every society is subject to continuous modifications, transformations, and changes. Nothing is given here once for ever: everything comes to life, matures, falls into disuse, and dies under a dictation of historical progress. The progressive character of social changes results directly from such phenomena as alienation and negation. All starts with a given social structure which emanates from itself certain cultural forms. Afterwards, while functioning, these forms work out new qualities that first belong to them, then become independent, and finally —alien. Alienated qualities strive for negating the old cultural form, and exchanging it by a new one. From the new some other arise, from the other some next etc. The end of such process is to come with overcoming class divisions and class inequality, with constituting the perfect society of *new people*, where eventually a morality of all the human race will reign. Citizens of the perfect society are to be featured with a perfect morality, which essence unfortunately remains unknown to the present men.¹⁵

III. Final remark

Marx seems to be a powerful ally of Rousseau. The latter grants man a right of pursuing his personal happiness by following the mysterious call of nature, which can be blindly traced with feelings or occasionally identified with national referendum.¹⁶ Marx is much more radical. He grants man a right of being a revolutionist whose duty is to negate the present world, regardless of its quality. The man of Marx is gutsy, unruly, and always ready to make against. Such is also his student and all the people engaged in the world of education. It seems then that striving to recover the Catholic vision of person in education needs to be aware that Rousseau's educational utopianism is not all by itself in the contemporary culture.

¹⁵ P. TARASIEWICZ (2009). Marksistowska koncepcja sprawiedliwosci, 114-118.

¹⁶ See J. MARITAIN (2005). *Trzej reformatorzy*, transl. by K. MICHALSKI, Warszawa-Zabki, 142f.