

Phenomenology and Marxism

Edited by Bernhard Waldenfels,
Jan M. Broekman, and Ante Pažanin

Translated from the German by
J. Claude Evans, Jr

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PREFACE

The essays collected here under the title *Phenomenology and Marxism* were originally presented at a workshop which took place annually between 1975 and 1978 at the Inter-University Centre in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia. The course was organized by a Belgian, a Yugoslav and a German, and participants were teachers, assistants and students from a whole series of countries. The setting of the workshop in an old sea-faring and merchant city on the Dalmatian coast is indicative of the interest in phenomenology which one encounters in Eastern European countries, which are now very much under the influence of Marxism. We set ourselves the task of making this interest fruitful.

The title 'Phenomenology and Marxism' should serve the function of marking out a field within which there is room for various attempts at entering into a dialogue. Of course, such dialogues are nothing new; indeed, there is already a very colourful and chequered history with its privileged points of encounter and major protagonists. Let us begin with *Germany*, the country which gave birth to both phenomenology and Marxism. Aside from the early Marcuse, the Marxist-inspired critical theory of the Frankfurt School tended to take a very negative stance toward phenomenology. On the other hand, repeated references to phenomenology by Adorno, Horkheimer and today by Habermas demonstrate a critical interest in this new manner of viewing and thinking about the world.¹ In *France*, debates between Marxism and phenomenology have played a central role. Concerning the post-war period, it suffices to mention names such as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Hyppolite or the Vietnamese Tran-Duc-Thao. Under the influence of Kojève's famous lectures, Husserl, Heidegger, Hegel and Marx entered the French philosophical consciousness together. A great deal of this influence continues in the political thought of C. Lefort and C. Castoriadis,

both of whom were stimulated by Merleau-Ponty's *Adventures of the Dialectic*. The same holds true of the thought of P. Ricoeur and M. Henry. Even the work of Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Althusser or Desanti would have been impossible in the absence of a continual critical reference to phenomenology and Marxism.² In *Italy*, the group centred around E. Paci and the journal *Aut-Aut* has been pursuing a synthesis of Husserlian and Marxist ideas since the 1950s. Here, in addition to the specifically Italian phenomenological tradition, Gramsci's philosophy of praxis plays a central role. Traces of these Continental attempts can also be found in Anglo-Saxon countries. Here one can mention the authors in the journal *Telos*. But also ethno-methodologists such as Garfinkel can count on generating a certain amount of interest within Marxist circles when they methodically put social rules out to play in order to make visible the all-too-obvious and engrained, yet unspoken, structures of everyday life.

Turning to the Eastern European scene, phenomenology has been able to partially retain and partially recover a certain role in the discussions of an intellectual public deeply impregnated by Marxism. This is especially the case in *Poland*, where Ingarden's work still influences younger philosophers, and where, especially in recent years, in the course of attempts at social renewal, one could observe an increasing interest in phenomenological ideas and methods. The journal *Dialectics and Humanism* (Warsaw) became the major source of information for Western readers. One can only hope that these new beginnings will not be pulverized in the wheels of politics. In *Czechoslovakia*, Prague at one time had a close contact with Husserl via its philosophical and linguistic circle. This contact was continued by Patočka, a student of Husserl's, and by Kosík, a phenomenologically inspired Marxist. With regard to *Hungary*, there have been intensive discussions with phenomenology in the Lukács-inspired 'Budapest School', for example in the work of M. Vajda. Here the participants are no longer quite so quick to speak of a 'destruction of reason' (Lukács). Aside from many other developments which must remain unmentioned here, or which have escaped our attention, we must mention *Yugoslavia*, the setting for our own discussions. Both within and outside of the 'Praxis' group we find the influence of Husserl and Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty giving Marxism a very special tone. From the German perspective, it is perhaps not too immodest to recall the efforts of Landgrebe, Fink and Volkmann-Schluck in opening up a dialogue. Finally, in recent years we find a new, more than merely historically oriented

interest in Husserl in the *Soviet Union*. Here too there were individuals who prepared the way, such as the philosopher G. Špet, who introduced phenomenology in Russia at a very early date, and there are very early connections in R. Jakobson's linguistics and in Bachtin's dialogical theory of literature, which offers a variety of perspectives for a phenomenology of language and dialogue. In light of this renewed interest in phenomenological, ethnomethodological and interactionist approaches in the social sciences,³ we might recall the 1920s and scientists such as L. S. Vygotski and A. R. Luria, in whose work phenomenology and Gestalt theory played a central role in a psychology oriented toward social and cultural phenomena:

This survey of the contemporary state of the discussion⁴ is not meant to give rise to euphoria, which would be even more out of place today than during the period of our meetings in Dubrovnik. But it cannot be denied that the various attempts which have been mentioned here are evidence of the fact that unbiased motives and interests are at work here, and that they are successful in creating a common ground which is not totally dependent on specific political developments. In the work of the late Husserl and increasingly in the work of the post-Husserlians, phenomenology has become more and more aware of its social, historical and linguistic implications, thus tending to anchor the subject in the life-world. On the other hand, a Marxism which did not take up the aspirations of everyday praxis, and which failed to continually take seriously the critique of the fetishism of categories and institutions, would remain piecework even in the eyes of its founder and of many of his disciples. This is reason enough to think that the one has something to say to the other, even if it cannot be expected to be the last word.

There is a whole series of points of contact, be it the relation of history and life-world, of the interpretation and critique of everyday life, of corporeal behaviour and praxis, of the constitution of meaning in communication and co-operation, of tradition and ideology or of teleology and dialectics. The field of discussion which is opened up here provides room for the investigation of historical contexts, for common research programmes and methodological reflections. On the assumption that neither phenomenology nor Marxism takes the stage as completed doctrines, we are no longer confronted with a fenced-off realm, nor with a defined field of battle, but rather with historically developed points of departure, points of emphasis and points of view for a continuing reflection and investigation. In this sense, the

Preface

contributions to this volume are a mirror of the variety of perspectives, of intellectual attempts which are deserving of attention even when their limitations are apparent. The contemporary state of the discussion is such that related questions from recent hermeneutics, critical theory, so-called structuralism or analytic philosophy make their appearance. The fact that, as this volume demonstrates, we do not find closed ranks of phenomenologists squaring off against closed ranks of Marxists can only serve the project of turning to 'the things themselves'.

The liveliness and fruitfulness of an intellectual tradition is essentially dependent upon the degree to which it is ready and able to expose itself to questions, even when they are posed from other points of view. Where this is not the case, we find the danger of petrification into a scholasticism in which the phenomenological reduction or the dialectic are reduced to methodological tricks or verbal exercises. Were I to be asked about the point at which the genuine impulses of phenomenology and Marxism might encounter one another, I would mention, for example, *a vision which transforms the seen*. Such a vision would not be a mere mirroring, but rather a kind of activity, and this activity would be anything but a mere routine, since it would allow for a continual shift of vision. The good and the bad look, the correct and the false word – ethics and logic do not begin with the tablet of commandments, but already with the fascination and snares of everyday life.

I would like to thank Claude Evans for making these texts available to a non-German-speaking audience. It is to be hoped that Anglo-Saxon phenomenologists and Marxists, and their followers and heretics, will pick up the possibilities which are offered here and carry on the discussion in their own fashion and in their own direction.

Bochum, October 1983

Bernhard Waldenfels

Notes

- 1 Cf. Ulf Matthiesen, *Das Dickicht der Lebenswelt und die Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Munich, Fink Verlag, 1983.
- 2 Cf. Bernhard Waldenfels, *Phänomenologie in Frankreich*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983.
- 3 Cf. I. Lonin, 'Sozialphänomenologische Themen in der sowjetischen Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie', in R. Grathoff and B. Waldenfels (eds), *Sozialität und Intersubjektivität*, Munich, Fink Verlag, 1983.

- 4 For a more complete survey, cf. B. Waldenfels, 'Sozialphilosophie im Spannungsfeld von Phänomenologie und Marxismus', in *Contemporary Philosophy: A New Survey*, ed. G. Fløistad, Vol. 3, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1982.

CONTENTS

Preface	vii
I Concepts and methods	
1 Fred Dallmayr (Notre Dame, Indiana) Phenomenology and Marxism in historical perspective	3
2 Marek J. Siemek (Warsaw) Marxism and the hermeneutic tradition	31
3 Ludwig Landgrebe (Cologne) The problem of teleology and corporeality in phenomenology and Marxism	53
4 Ante Pažanin (Zagreb) Overcoming the opposition between idealism and materialism in Husserl and Marx	82
5 Bernhard Waldenfels (Bochum) Towards an open dialectic	102
6 Jan M. Broekman (Leuven) The unity of theory and praxis as a problem for Marxism, phenomenology and structuralism	117
7 Paul Ricoeur (Chicago) Ideology and ideology critique	134

II Practical philosophy

8	Ludwig Landgrebe (Cologne)	
	Life-world and the historicity of human existence	167
9	Ivan Urbančič (Ljubljana)	
	Marx's critique of morality as an introduction to the problem of his philosophy as a whole	205
10	Bernhard Waldenfels (Bochum)	
	Behavioural norm and behavioural context	237
11	Jan M. Broekman (Leuven)	
	'Meaning in the use' OR On the irrelevance of the theory of meaning for practical philosophy	258
12	John O'Neill (Toronto)	
	Merleau-Ponty's critique of Marxist scientism	276
	Biographical information	305
	Index	309

PART I

Concepts and methods

CHAPTER 1

Phenomenology and Marxism in historical perspective

Fred Dallmayr (Notre Dame, Indiana)

The topic of phenomenology and Marxism immediately confronts us with a whole series of problems. To begin with, there are terminological problems. Both 'phenomenology' and 'Marxism' are very broad and ambiguous concepts, and there is no general consensus concerning their precise usage. In order to guard against the charge of a rash orthodoxy, I shall tend to draw the lines very broadly. With reference to 'phenomenology', the following discussion exhibits at most a temporal restriction in that the accent lies on fairly recent lines of thought which flow from Brentano and Husserl. Aside from this restriction, the term is understood in a very general manner according to which it includes (to mention only a few high points) Husserl's 'pure' theory of knowledge, Heidegger's ontology of *Dasein*, French existential phenomenology as well as the hermeneutics which has developed largely under Heidegger's influence. When viewed in this very broad manner, phenomenology includes a variation (and occasionally a dramatic controversy) on the theme of human self-consciousness: whereas in Husserl knowledge is grounded in the constitutive power of a purified ego-consciousness, and whereas the French school, at least initially, merged intentionality with the Hegelian dialectic of consciousness and nature, Heidegger transformed *Existenz* into a permeable structure open to Being — with the result that hermeneutics can decipher subjective intentions and ego-consciousness only via tortuous detours through the interpretation of historical texts and communicative experiences.¹ I use the term 'Marxism' in an equally tolerant, non-restrictive sense; without regard to the terminological rules proposed by one ideological party or the other, I shall grant the term to all of those who join the struggle against existing forms of economic and political exploitation, working to bring about a free and less conflict-laden ('classless') society.

In addition to such terminological questions, the topic also presents us with difficult theoretical problems. What about the relationship between the two concepts? Doesn't the effortless conjunction attempt to cover over a deep and perhaps unbridgeable chasm between the two in all too simple a manner? At first glance there does indeed seem to be a sharp opposition between the two concepts. Phenomenology is generally understood to be concerned with the analysis of consciousness and with the investigation of subjectively intended sense; Marxism, on the other hand, is generally identified with economic determinism or with a materialism which reduces the striving for sense to an epiphenomenon according to the maxim that (economic) being determines human consciousness. At this point I would like to briefly indicate my own standpoint. It seems to me that there is indeed a tension between the two concepts of our topic, a tension which should not be played down. But if the concepts are forced into the dichotomy of idealism and materialism, of material being and consciousness, there is no room for further discussion; in this case the conjunction would be at most the sign of a cheap compromise or of an opportunistic attempt to make room for a 'third way'. The terminological decisions above were partially the result of a concern to moderate the abrupt nature of the confrontation. But even when we adopt such liberal conventions, the relation between the terms remains complex and full of tension; even if we succeed in avoiding the dangers of a rigid orthodoxy, the historical development shows that the scale of relations ranges from reciprocal hostility through an uneasy cease-fire to a (cautious) fraternization. A genuine reconciliation seems to me to depend upon this presupposition: that both phenomenology and Marxism be interpreted in a critical sense, where a 'critical' attitude indicates not merely the readiness to lecture to the opponent, but also the capacity of self-criticism and continued learning in the interest of truth. When viewed in this critical-Socratic manner, phenomenology and Marxism are not merely superficially compatible, they complement one another in important ways: as a result of its engagement in a contradictory reality, Marxism can protect phenomenology against a superficial descriptivism and a superficial transfiguration of reality, whereas phenomenology can warn Marxism against both a narrow objectivism and a Young Hegelian know-it-all attitude — as well as against the ecstasy of apparently unlimited material progress and technological domination.

The following discussion attempts to follow the reciprocal relations between the two positions in historical perspective. It by no means

aims at producing an exhaustive treatment. In this context I would like to concentrate on only two conspicuous and (I think) especially instructive episodes in the philosophical struggle: the early writings of Georg Lukács and some of the works of leading representatives of existential and radical phenomenology in France and Italy. In a sense, the two episodes can be viewed as stages on the path of political disillusionment. Whereas the high point of Lukács's early work coincides with the triumph of the Russian Revolution, the movement of existential and radical phenomenology arose in the context of the rise of Fascist expansion and later under the auspices of the political-economic restoration in Western Europe. Of course, from a philosophical point of view a political disillusionment need not be a bad thing; the dampening of eschatological expectations might encourage self-criticism and dialogue between antagonistic positions – in our case between phenomenology and Marxism.

1 The intuition of essences and dialectics: Georg Lukács

Embryonic forms of contacts or at least affinities between the two positions can be traced back to the period prior to the First World War. This was the period in which Husserl published his *Logical Investigations* and the first volume of the *Ideas*. These were also the years in which Marxism – after a period of philosophical shallowness and lethargy – began to win new impulses, especially in connection with the renewal of its Hegelian heritage. The historical point of departure for both positions was the same or at least roughly comparable. Both arose against the background of a rather common positivism which set out to reduce individual and social life to physical or biological elements. Both lines of thought fought against the cynicism which resulted from positivism and against the relativistic disintegration of philosophical categories which impregnated the intellectual life of the *fin-de-siècle* and the ebbing liberal-bourgeois epoch. Both Husserl as well as Neo-Hegelianism and neo-Hegelian Marxism were influenced to some extent by Dilthey's 'life-philosophy' (*Lebensphilosophie*), although both schools considered the concept of 'life' to be too vague for purposes of philosophical or social theory. Both positions had roots in contemporary Neo-Kantianism, especially in the 'Southwest German School' founded by Windelband and Rickert; but both lines of thought attempted to overcome the harsh neo-Kantian antinomies (between

inner and outer, knowledge and action) or at least to moderate them — phenomenology by emphasizing the intuition of essences and Hegelian Marxism by attempting to produce a view of the totality of social tendencies.

This very complex intertwining of intellectual relations appears most clearly and forcefully in Lukács's early writings. Lukács grew up and studied in Budapest, Berlin and Heidelberg, where he came into contact with the most important streams of thought and with leading thinkers of the age. His relation to Marxism goes back to his school days.

My first acquaintance with Marx (with the *Communist Manifesto*) [writes Lukács in an autobiographical note (from 1933)] came at the end of my studies at the *Gymnasium*. The impression was extraordinarily great, and as a university student I read a number of works by Marx and Engels (such as *The 18th Brumaire* and *The Origin of the Family*) and studied especially the first volume of *Capital*.

Although his reading convinced him of the 'correctness of some of the basic points of Marxism', he by no means considered himself to be a Marxist at that time. He held the materialist point of departure to be 'completely antiquated epistemologically' (he drew 'no distinction between dialectical and non-dialectical materialism'). With regard to epistemological, aesthetic and moral-practical questions he was much more strongly indebted to the philosophy of consciousness in the form of Dilthey's *Lebensphilosophie* and in more rigorous form in Neo-Kantianism with its various derivative forms. As he himself admits, 'the neo-Kantian theory of the "immanence of consciousness"' fitted his 'class position and world view', perfectly.² In Berlin he was intimately connected with Georg Simmel and attempted to integrate his partial knowledge of Marx as well as possible into Simmel's neo-Kantian sociology. In Heidelberg he came under the influence of Windelband and Rickert, and met Emil Lask and Max Weber.

The most important philosophical contribution of the Heidelberg or Southwest German variety of Neo-Kantianism was the sharp distinction between the scientific 'explanation' of empirical processes and the interpretative 'understanding' of significant contents — a distinction which Dilthey's attention to concrete historical processes moderated to some extent. The interpretative access to significant contents is, according to Windelband and Rickert, by no means a matter of

empirical-psychological empathy; sense and culture belong to a realm of hyper-empirical values to which only a hyper-empirical or transcendental consciousness has access. In the rejection of 'psychologism', Windelband and Rickert were obviously sympathetic to Husserl's attempts to provide a non-empirical foundation of logical structures and to uncover the 'pure' forms of consciousness with the aid of the *epoché* or 'bracketing' of empirical reality. At this point it should be noted that Emil Lask was engaged in an at least partial reconciliation between phenomenology and Neo-Kantianism at a very early date, and his writings provide a connection not only between Rickert and Husserl, but also between Rickert and the early Heidegger. And with regard to this last bridge, one should note that from the neo-Kantian point of view the relation between the realm of sense and reality — or, in the language of phenomenology, between essence and appearance — does not imply some sort of theory of strata or a pre-established harmony, but potentially exhibits a very tension- and conflict-laden character; when transferred to the practical-moral level, the epistemological distinction could easily lead to a tragic view of life. At this point the work of Kierkegaard, up to that time largely neglected, would become increasingly important, especially the conflict between a longed-for purity and absoluteness of experience and a meaningless reality which Kierkegaard's work documents. As Lukács himself reports, Kierkegaard played an 'important role' during his youth.³

Lukács's position during his student years can be clearly seen in *The Soul and the Forms* which appeared in 1911. The 'forms' of the title are hyper-empirical, literary-aesthetic senses and essences, which are available to the human 'soul' via a non-psychological, intuitive understanding. Lucien Goldmann has interpreted this work in its historical context in a very pregnant and instructive manner. Goldmann points out that Lukács 'performed the service — or had the luck — of finding himself at the meeting point of three major streams of German university philosophy: Heidelberg Neo-Kantianism, Dilthey's elaboration of the concepts of "sense" and "understanding", and Husserlian phenomenology'; this meeting point was a great moment which 'perhaps partially allowed [Lukács] to rediscover the tradition of classical idealism by defining *sense* in terms of the relation between the *soul* and the *absolute*'. According to Goldmann, Lukács's book was by no means a 'sudden new creation' without predecessors; 'the encounter between phenomenology and the Heidelberg neo-Kantian school' had already announced itself in a number of attempts before finding