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LIFE IN THE RETORT* AND SOON THEREAFTER

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In Lithuania and in some other countries of East Europe today the entire perspective of social thought is undergoing profound change from a retrospective to a prospective view. Social projects for the future are urgently needed and actively discussed in all these countries. But before a project for the future can be proposed responsibly we must first analyze the context of actual thought about society, because this context influences the content of the social project and determines the nature of the social planning itself.

One of the most fundamental factors forming the consciousness of post-totalitarian society is Marxist-Leninist philosophy whose influence is felt on two levels: as a monopolistic ideology of the state and as a constitutive principle of the society itself.

Salto Vitale — Salto Mortale

In considering any social phenomena and social life as a whole, we find two different kinds of connections. On the one hand the thinking and acting of a people is determined by their *interests*. As man cannot live without food, clothes and home these elementary needs form something that might be called social physics. This is the level of social reality linked by causal connections of the interests. On the other hand, most human acts are directed by *purposes*; they are directly or indirectly linked with some ideals, i.e. they are value oriented. This brings to light another level of social reality which transcends the limits of the material, physical being of the society and in this sense can be called social metaphysics. Social life takes place on both planes at once: the level of social physics formed by the causal connections of interests, and the level of social metaphysics formed by the teleological connections of ideals.

Marxist social theory appears as a kind of antimetaphysical program. Classically, Marxism considered its main theoretical aim to be the creation of a materialistic view of history which makes it possible to see the development of the society as an objective process determined by reason without dependence on the human will. Engels wrote: "As Darwin discovered the law of the development of the organic world, so Marx discovered the law of the development of human history: the simple fact, covered till now by ideological layers, that the people first of all have to eat, to drink, to have a home and clothes and only after this will they be able to deal with politics, science, art, religion, and so on". This materialistic theory of history qualifies all other conceptions of society as ideologies, consciously or unconsciously, naively or cynically presenting a distorted view of social reality.

According to Marxists, these ideologies search out the fundamentals of human actions (or conceal them — the two opposites coincide) in the field of moral, religious, political and other ideals. The materialistic or scientific theory of the society considers the real ground of human actions to be not "ideal motivational forces", but "the moving causes of these ideal motivational forces" (Engels). This conception aspires "to trace behind any moral, religious, political or social phrases, declarations or promises the interests of one or another class" (Lenin), and usually it succeeded. In other words, in dealing with concepts or ideals it immediately searches behind the interests, asking the question: "whom does it profit?"

Generally speaking, the question *cui bono* is not at all new or unusual; it belongs to the storehouse of traditional European concepts. But until now techniques of suspicion were applied locally and empirically as a means of searching out criminals. The work of the courts was based upon a presumption of innocence of the accused. Here the technique becomes universal and *a priori*. The theorist judges all social reality, not only tracing, but even punishing criminals and indeed each person, group or class who thinks about or acts in society. This technique of suspicion allows one to explain and evaluate every socially significant truth or value in a very special way — as a function of interest. The small merchant's mistrust of the words of his clients becomes the example for the theorist in researching social reality: "although in everyday life even each *shopkeeper* can perfectly distinguish what a man feigns and what he really is, our historiography does not reach this trivial knowledge. It believes the words of each epoch, believes all that is said or imagined about itself" (Marx and Engels).

What happens when suspicion is universalized and ideas and values are reduced to interests? The answer seems clear. Interests as elements of social physics can be discovered and fixed in objective terms much more easily than ideals which are disclosed in the space of social metaphysics. Social theory, based on an analysis of interests, becomes more definitive and concrete; it approaches the criteria of rationality of the natural sciences, and in the estimation of the present authors it becomes the first non-metaphysical, scientific theory of society.

But this is not the most important point. Marxists adhere to the Baconian orientation of knowledge: to know an object means to master it. Knowledge of the laws ruling social reality becomes a force for the active reconstruction of this reality. Equating the materialistic theory of history with the natural sciences, the authors of this theory were convinced, that if we could have knowledge of the laws which rule society, we could construct a corresponding social technology and shape society in a desirable fashion. Lenin wrote: "Engels obviously applies the 'saltovital' method in philosophy, that is, he makes a jump from theory to practice." Materialistic social theory is "saltovital", which means that it permits us to pass from theory to practice. Knowing the regularity of the interests hidden "behind all the phrases", that is, behind every discourse on values and formed in the process of production, one can control, regulate and coordinate these interests and so improve society.

This trick of theoretical-practical acrobatics determined the actual situation of our society. Marxist social theory was applied practically: an experiment on an unprecedented scale was carried out according to a reductive antimetaphysical social theory; thereby society was created.

In Vitro

In a society based on these reductive principles there would be no social metaphysics generally speaking. In classical society, ideals have a regulative function: they permit the realization of the aims of human actions and guarantee the stability of social life. Based on their ideals, for example, confidence between people becomes possible. When social metaphysics is qualified as ideology, unmasked as illusion and perfidy, we cross over to a "reality", in which stability is guaranteed by physical means alone. In a concentration camp there is no need to explain or to argue the correctness of this or that command: the order is based on pure force and fear.

Whereas the ideals or elements of a social metaphysics are essentially universal, the interests or elements of a social physics are essentially particular. In the scientifically organized society, the particular interests of its members must be coordinated by social technologists who through permissions and prohibitions guarantee the stable and unified structure of society. There is no need for confidence in such a society; it is quite enough that social technologists on the base of a social theory disposing of correspondingly constructed means guarantee the balance of particular interests (these interests are not "declared" by their subjects, but are "real", that is, scientifically ascertained).

For the functioning of this society there is not only no need of a metaphysics conceptualizing and constituting systems of values, but, as we will see later, metaphysics is dangerous for this society. Nevertheless, it is impossible to destroy metaphysics completely. As Kant said, metaphysics always exists "if not as a science [or systematic whole, —T.S., A.S.] still as a natural inclination." Man is a metaphysical being searching for ideals that cannot be contained on the physical level of interest. The seeds of human solidarity and the search for freedom, heroism and sacrifice lie hidden in the nature of man. But there must be a kind of metaphysical space in social life for these seeds to open and to become regulative or constitutive elements of social reality. Mutual confidence between people is born in their hearts, but it can be realized definitively only on condition that people confess publicly the ideals which unite them.

Let us take as an example the ideal of love of our neighbor. The very word indicates the origin of this ideal: *neighbor* is a man who is *near by*. But neighborhood is not only physical or psychological nearness, for people crowded in a bus or metro are not neighbors, although they are very near one to another. We can speak about the love of our neighbor only if by means of a corresponding metaphysics the direct feeling of nearness is transferred to the level of universal principles. In this case the notion of neighbor has not a physical, but a metaphysical sense. The very important and very complicated task of metaphysics is to connect the universality of the principle and the particularity of our actual feeling. If we read in the paper, news about a catastrophe experienced anywhere by an immense number of people, we can understand and feel

this as part of our common human destiny only if we have metaphysics. By developing and grounding values, metaphysics enables us to go beyond feelings of physical nearness and psychological attachment to the love of neighbor as a principle which grounds the confidence and solidarity between a people.

Metaphysics as a natural inclination of man is manifest also in the case where we have to live in a retort or artificially constituted social life space. When the social experimenter pours in the broth and adds culture (the human material), the development of both the physical and metaphysical possibilities of human nature begin. The artificial circumstances of human life cannot change this nature, just as the artificial pseudo-Renaissance or pseudo-Baroque styles of the Moscow metro cannot change its nature as architecture or organization of human space. But this artificiality can deform and degrade human life. The walls of a retort limit the cultural and mental horizon of the inhabitants. Metaphysical possibilities can be realized within only in "demetaphysized", reduced forms. Growing children can only become either "pioneers" (members of the super-ideologized Soviet youth organization) or hooligans; either they squeeze themselves in to the given forms or they become antisocial.

If metaphysical energy (conscience, sense aspiration, etc.) turns against these inadequate forms, it can become only pure negative protest — self-destruction (as with the Lithuanian teenager, Romas Kalanta, who immolated himself some years ago). The heroes of the very popular earlier novel *Timur and His Detachment* by the Russian children's writer, Arkadij Gajdar, cared for old people and protected the weak. Human solidarity was realized within the framework of Pioneer ideology, but the deeper Christian roots of this ideology remain quite unknown to the reader.

Much more important is the fact that the solidarity and confidence proclaimed here remains within the framework of the local group (in our case, in some age group). In the retort these principles cannot articulate public life. It is impossible to universalize them; they remain hidden within the personal privacy or the particularity of the group. Public life is both technologically and ideologically articulated by another kind of law, namely, the scientifically fixed laws of class interests. In this sense society lives not in just one retort, but in a system of retorts. The supposed real, that is physical life of this society, freed from metaphysical illusions is not developed, and interests do not exercise their mutual influence. In the many retorts and test-tubes of the social laboratory, life "bubbles up". Glass walls divide one process from another; only the laboratory assistant can change anything, and then simply by moving retorts from one place to another, transfusing or pouring out their contents. Life, restricted within the glass, can fill almost the whole laboratory, but it is impossible to say that the laboratory is a live organism.

The Square Circle

In the scientifically organized society, though metaphysics is proclaimed to be a dying remnant, it constantly threatens this society. Danger is rooted in the metaphysical nature of each man enclosed in the retort, in the seeds of ideals which can not be effectively scientifically controlled and which at any moment can begin to open. There always remains the danger that values, reduced to interests, might begin to regenerate and destroy the mosaic of the retorts. In order to prevent this, it is not enough to reject metaphysics and proclaim that values are only a cover for interests. Nor is it enough to construct and launch a dynamics based on the principles of social physics. Something else, a quasi-metaphysics, is needed to occupy the place of metaphysics. The role of that quasi-metaphysics is played by so-called scientific ideology.

The concept of scientific ideology is self-contradictory. Were the ideals theoretically reduced to interests, there would be nothing for the ideologist to do except to criticize other ideologies beyond the glass. Actually, Marxist ideologists live like Vikings on prey, for almost the entire positive content of their statements is stolen from their ideological opponents. This militant production only obscures the paradox of reductive, de-ideologizing ideology, but does not destroy its paradox.

In spite of this paradox, next to the social theorist and technologist, we always discover an ideologist. It is by his efforts that a special kind of ideology, namely deideologizing ideology or so-called common Marxism, functions in social consciousness. Social theory, adopting the trivial knowledge of the shopkeeper, asking "whom does it profit?", has lost the character of an open question and becomes a rhetorical figure. Asking this question, one does not aspire to learn something new, because all was clear and known long ago: the suspicious stare discerns interests everywhere. Every idea, every ideal, every action is received in terms of this question, which points out behind the mind, word or act, one who thinks, speaks or acts this way because he is interested, because it is profitable for him. Where classical ideology introduces and protects social values, reductive ideology destroys them introducing a nihilistic view of values.

On the other hand, this reductive ideology is not at all critical: nihilism is not criticism. Official ideologists give birth to positive ideological substance which is a quasi-metaphysics because its purpose is to occupy the place of authentic social metaphysics. The task of the ideologist is to occupy space in the social consciousness and so to preserve reductive thinking about the society and acting in the society. The content and the quality of the produced ideology is not important.

The real political structure of this society, the real mechanism of power, is not reflected in this ideology and remains hidden. Ideology reproduces another picture: seeming democracy, seeming elections, seeming common approval of the

system, and so on. No one believes in these surreal things, but no one doubts them either. How is it possible to doubt the slogan: "The party leads us to communism!?" What can we contrast to this statement? Perhaps: "The party doesn't lead us (that means someone else) to communism!?" Or: "Some non-party (that means someone else) leads us to communism!?" Or: "The party doesn't lead us to communism!" (which means that it holds us in the same place or leads us elsewhere)? Amateurs in logical permutations could compose more alternative slogans ("Not us, not party..." etc.), but all these variations, in spite of their logical radicality (negation), nevertheless remain on the same plane, where we find: "we", "party", "communism" and "leading", no matter how we combine these things. The space of these possible permutations is the space of reformism and revisionism of this ideology. But all such attempts at reformation cannot achieve what is most important, namely, to discover the fictitious character of all these realities.

On the other hand, for a long time only a very small number of people were deceived by these fictions. Slogans usually were perceived not as texts, but as ornaments. Everyone knew also that it was nonsense to try to utilize the mechanism of elections, because the way governmental institutions were really formed was quite different. Thus, consciousness of the unreality of the most important mechanisms of social life became the last refuge for reason, conscience and taste.

Nevertheless, this consciousness participated in the life of this society and even supported it. Under conditions of ideological monopoly this consciousness of unreality of the fundamental mechanisms of democratic society fed the same mechanism of reduction of values, nihilism and the view that each ideological text is absurd. The genuine task of ideology was not to show that this picture of social reality was true, but to paralyze real thinking and action. The people did not protest the fictitious realities not because they consented to them, but because they were resigned to think on and act in a society. In the social consciousness, ideology preempted the space where socially significant ideas, ideals and acts can spread.

Vitality of the Remnants and the End of Mechanism

There are things whose significance is apprehended completely only when they are lost. This is true of the revolutionary idea of improving man by performing an appendectomy on a newborn children in order to prevent this illness in its adult years; it had to be rejected when it turned out that the appendix is necessary for the normal development and functioning of the organism. The same thing happens with the attempts to eliminate the remnants of ideals. It may seem that the society itself does not change in accordance with the concepts used to describe it; that it would not matter if we considered the ultimate explanation of social life to be ideals and values, or the interests which are hidden behind them — in any case, the social reality would be the same and its features do not depend upon the perspective of the subject.

But society is a very particular thing — not only are there direct relations, but there is also play-back between the object and subject. *Perestroika* would hardly have begun except for something that cannot be explained scientifically, namely, in the society where all illusions about the origin of "ideal motivational forces" supposedly had been dissipated and the significance of interests to the life of the society had been made clear those interests themselves began to disappear. For the man who had been liberated from illusions and scientifically enlightened it began to cease to matter what and how he worked and even how much he gained from his work. It became clear that even material interests transplanted into the retort had atrophied, for it began to be supposed that it was better to work less and get less than to work more and get more. Of course, it would be wrong to ignore the fact that interest in earning depends upon the possibility of buying, so that if the shops are empty it makes no sense to work. But we should not omit what can be called the metaphysical dimension of work. It appears that if work is perceived on the level of social physics alone and is treated as an activity directed to production only, it loses its intrinsic sense and value.

It would seem that after performing a social appendectomy, eliminating the seat of illusory images about social life and explaining the real mechanisms of social processes, and after using this knowledge for the ordering of society, society would move rapidly forward. But that does not happen. On the contrary, social processes slowed down and social structures began to disintegrate. This paradox appeared even on the level of economics where, it seems, only objective processes take place. It became clear that it was possible to destroy even the elementary structures of social life just by treating them physically, as if the material were the most real or even the only real thing.

We would seem to be going in the direction of consistent rationalization, but quite the reverse takes place: society becomes an unconscious element. It would seem that if we know the laws ruling society we can create and use effectively a social technology, but quite the contrary takes place: technological knowledge in practice destroys the very thing it treats as fundamental, namely, interest. In the same way that reflection paralyzes the physiological processes of man (eating or sex), so reflection on anatomy and physiology paralyze social life. Where it would seem that if we know reality, we could use our own discretion in seeking the maximum of happiness, the contrary takes place — when illusions are dissipated we see that the things treated as illusions really are a form of play-back. Objective explanations do not reveal the reality, but break off the play-back channel.

The crisis of a scientifically ordered society makes manifest the insufficiency of social physics. What appears is that for the normal life of society ideals and values which are hidden in the heart of every man are required. These are the indestructible metaphysical inclinations which give men confidence in one another. The fundamental principle of every social system, the free association of people, proclaims: *pacta sunt servanda*. But it is impossible to create or even expect that deception should become physically impossible and suspicion could not arise. Universal human ideals cannot ignore the particular interests of individuals, groups and classes, which always exist, but they must overcome them by creating common interest, as it is problematically called, in the political philosophy of the Enlightenment. Harmony, solidarity and confidence on the part of the people are possible only due to the credulous who do not suspect anything or anybody. For this we need conscious, metaphysical "naïveté".

Reverse Salto and what then

This collision determined the past of our social consciousness. Must we worry about it today when the retort, if not completely broken, is slightly cracked at least? With the fall of its monopoly, Marxist ideology collapsed at once. The main principles of Marxist-Leninist philosophy were pro-claimed openly and without much explanation as out-of-date dogmas. However, in speaking about renewal, we must not forget that in the life of society nothing dies once and for all. The structures of consciousness have especially great vitality. Seen from this specific perspective, the radical novelty of our present promises to be the next episode of the collision already discussed.

Soviet ideology has been revised and a new version created, which could be characterized first of all as an attempt to find a substitute for universal ideals in the context of a reductionist social theory and the ideology based upon it. For example, the so-called acknowledgement of the priority of universal human values is an attempt to formulate the supposedly new but certainly classical or prereductionist type of ideological program, using reductionist theory as a means. "The world is a boat and we cannot steer it as we are inside" (Gorbachev). This "boat of the world" is exactly the pre-image of the common interest, seemingly coinciding with a universal ideal. The form of the statement is universal ("what I must do to protect the existence of the human race") as concerning a value-oriented imperative, but its content is particular as an interest-oriented maxim ("what I have to do in order not to drown with all the others"). But to acknowledge universal human values means the same as to acknowledge a universal interest, which was considered to be the greatest illusion and lie of an ideology. Holding to the logic of Marxist conception, we would come to the conclusion that when common interest springs up, class struggle and history itself must cease. Not only is the building of communism impossible, but it is even dangerous to change anything — or using the metaphor of the boat, it is dangerous to move at all — for this may be fatal to the equilibrium of world forces.

Recently Marxist-Leninist historiography, as essentially turned to the future and providing for world wide social changes, reveals a great contrast. The ideological program of *perestroika* is not situated within the context of world history, but is designed only as an episode in the "development" of local socialism, fitting all in the present. Indeed we can call it a program only conditionally, because now the long text of socialist ideology has been reduced to a name or label placed on the other's product: "socialist" market, "socialist" pluralism, national communist party. Today the ideological project of socialism seems to be minimalized — the future perspective of humanity is not considered, the construction of communism is shyly passed over in silence. Only concrete daily tasks, most of all economic ones, are spoken of. The project vanishes; only a daily pragmatism remains.

It seems that the ballast occupying the space of social consciousness has now been removed and that this empty space must somehow be filled. The former, Marxist ideologists try to perform a rare trick — reverse saltation. As if having forgotten the scientificity of their ideology, they look for eternal values and spirituality. They feel no repugnance even for religion, which up to now was considered the paradigmatic illusion, the illusion *par excellence*. Now they are going to cooperate with the Church in sustaining and restoring a ruined morality.

The longing for universal human ideals and values flows from the metaphysical nature of man. However, the long time spent in the retort cannot pass without its traces. It is not easy to get rid of the reductionism implanted by the materialistic interpretation of social reality. It endures in the creation of new social projects introduced as the opposite of the materialistic treatment of society.

In attempting to rebuild a reduced level of social metaphysics, ideals and values become the means for seeking other aims. One says: if we want to have the good life, we must work honestly, we must have honesty. But is conscience a means for the good life? Must man be honest in order to reach the good life? Is not conscience that for which we have to sacrifice, if necessary, not only prosperity but much more as well? Or it is said: since our political situation now is so difficult, do not become liberals now; temporarily, until gaining independence, let us be nationalists in order to save our unity. But liberalism or nationalism are matters of fundamental choice. Those who think we can change these things according to the present moment are treating them simply as means.

Reductionist thinking makes a jumble of values and neglects their hierarchy. In this way, truth, goodness and beauty become the means used to protect society against anti-social behavior. The ideal of self-sacrifice becomes the means for solving problems of medical care; the attachment of the farmer to the land becomes the means for supplying food; maternal love is the means for ensuring a favorable demographics. Social consciousness must be stocked with ideals and values in the same manner that shops must be stocked with goods. Man must become spiritual so that the goods can be of perfect quality.

After all the destructive heritage of our social thinking, the vacuum left by reductive ideology influences also the theoretical interpretation of the present situation. Here and now in attempting to think over the ideals and values and their function in social consciousness, our mind inevitably slips on the plain surfaces of pragmatism and vain desire. One of the effects of the longtime influence of reductive ideology on society is that everyone who aspires to think over the present situation of ideals finds himself in a reflective position. Certainly we can ask: is not the ambivalence of reflection a characteristic feature of any philosophical work, does not philosophical work always take place at the boundary of nihilism? This is true, but our present situation is particular because not only the professional philosopher, but everyone finds himself in such a situation. That is why philosophy becomes for us an almost daily necessity.

What can a philosopher tell people today, when the life of society is coming out of the retort? One thing is clear enough — in sketching the future we must not reduce ideals to interests and social metaphysics to social physics. It does not matter whether these reductions are carried as they were in the past by a theoretical and technological reordering of society, or in "today's" manner by trying to bring back values in order to motivate the desired thinking and behavior of citizens.

The positive aim is metaphysical reflection: thinking over ideals and values in such a way that questions about their benefits do not arise. The human person, truth, freedom, conscience and other things must be perceived as self-evident values. If questions about their utility nevertheless arise, it is clear that we have not yet perceived the ideal as ideal; we have not reached the level of metaphysics yet: all our considerations remain, then, on the level of social physics and social technology.

Also we cannot design ideals according to given parameters. The philosopher cannot set for himself the task of "making" and presenting for social use one ideal or another. His task is more modest and more difficult: using the critical intellect to unmask all quasi-metaphysics and quasi-ideals, the philosopher must keep such a distance that the ideal can be seen clearly. The philosopher has to control his reflection and keep ideals in focus in order to clarify them.

Nothing more can be said responsibly here. Even the task of creating metaphysics cannot be advanced. Meta-physics can arise only by itself, in a free creative act; to foresee this is impossible. What is possible is to perceive only reflectively what metaphysics is meant to be. A "foreseeing reflection" is a contradiction in terms; what is foreseen therein could only be empty and infected by pragmatism. It is possible to give only minimal and negative indications, to outline the limits of positive philosophical work. Metaphysics must be or exist. If it does not, it is impossible to indicate its traits. Nevertheless, an authentic consciousness of values, solidarity and confidence by the people can be supported only on the basis of an existing metaphysics.

* Chem. A vessel, commonly a glass bulb with a long neck bent downward, used for distilling or decomposing substances by heat (Random House Dictionary).