

Marxism, Communism, and the 20th Century

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Preface

The below is from Kondylis (1994). Kondylis uses “mass democracy” to refer to the society characterized by overcoming the scarcity of goods, mass consumption and attendant mass production with broad participation.

Marxism, Communism, and the 20th Century

The historical evaluation of Marxism and the communist movement hinges on the judgment of the whole course of planetary history in the 20th century. A satisfactory finding from this particular area of research requires a concrete idea of what took place in this world-historical century; that is, both at the level of the social and that of (inter)national and political history. This ceases to be a trivial methodological requirement once we realize how controversial such an undertaking can be, given that the ideological self-legitimization of today’s “West” leaning on victory in the cold war would be called into question. This rests on specific assumptions of historical continuity and on explicit or implicit periodization of the course of history and relies on the presumption of historically evolving social entities whose substance remains intact through all changes in accidentia. The most expansive of these constructed entities is the “West” as the embodiment of classical, christian, and liberal traditions, i.e. as the crystallization of a nearly three-thousand year history. Conceiving the “West” broadly, one finds next to nothing in Marxist theory or communist practice that does not correspond to at least one aspect of the “West”—from historical eschatology and various mixtures of humanism and collectivism, to rough handling of dissidents, intellectual prohibitions and mass murder; on the other hand, this wide conception of the “West” would not clarify whether the capitalist and parliamentary Japan should be counted as the “Western international community” rather than communist ruled Eastern Europe.

The historical picture becomes clearer when Marxism and communism are conceived as the great foe of bourgeois liberalism, formed in European modernity especially after the French revolution. From this perspective, it would seem as if the attack on bourgeois liberal society were decisively repelled by the collapse of

the communist camp, and this, enriched by a welfare state and cemented by prosperity across the board, would now unfurl worldwide, bestowing upon humanity peace among nations. The historical run spans back to the time of industrial revolution, including in its first phase the dismantling of feudal-aristocratic vestiges and in its second the defense against the revolutionary assault from the left by the integration of the lower layers in a reformed and open but still fundamentally bourgeois-liberal society. If this were so, Marxism and communism would be at most a growing pain or a mere blemish on the royal road to Western liberalism—framed as a rerun of “oriental despotism” that had no pivotal role.

On the contrary, my thesis is that the West, over the course of the 20th century, underwent a deep social and intellectual transformation, wherein oligarchic and hierarchical bourgeois liberalism was replaced by mass democratic relations; that many paths converged in this transformation—a drastic reorganization of the planetary landscape—reaching a never before seen social and political homogeneity, and that Marxism and communism, from the beginning and throughout, by two-pronged but unidirectional action, grew side-by-side and fostered it rather than abdicating to it. In Hegelian terms, its “historical reality” was objectively realized (i.e. independently of the subjective desires and expectations of its advocates): not a tumor that was surgically removed in the 20th century but constituting an integral part of the end of a phase of world history gone forever, which now stands before its real planetary epoch.

First in the proper record of the aforementioned two-pronged events, let us come to terms conceptually with the dramatic difference between the fundamental questions in 1900 and 2000. The socio-political battlefield in 1900 was dominated by what was then referred to as the “social question,” in the nations of that time, following inevitably the oligarchic nature of bourgeois liberalism. The disputes and conflicts post-2000 will arise on the basis of higher collective consumption and higher production, simultaneously intensifying the interconnection and competition between national economies, all playing out under ever narrowing demographic and ecological constraints. To the extent that the “social question” persists—to be sure, in an essentially different form—it will center *these* factors. Accomplishing this is not a matter of dismantling class hierarchies but rather—since the principle of meritocracy has nominally been established—the piecemeal reorganization of a functional whole. The fundamental dissolution of class hierarchies in favor of functional, of course, will not defuse social conflict. The opposite may be the case, if the expectations that develop parallel to such dissolution, justified by mass democratic consumer hedonism, elicit demand on a global scale. Certainly, the 5 billion people outside the West, or more precisely, the highly industrialized West, will want what the West enjoys today, not what it had in 1900. Incidentally, the ways expectations are established mirrors the social and planetary factors that mark large-scale industrialized mass democratic societies.

(Western) mass democracy emerged from the bourgeois liberalism gradually, though also relatively quickly. Yet the caesura is more important than the con-

tinuity, as the aforementioned problems that will dominate the horizon of 2000 and thereafter revolve around social phenomena resulting from the caesura. This can be grasped fully by ideal-typical extrapolation of its character and scope; in this case, as in many others, it is an elementary methodological precept to give priority to the qualitative considerations of events over the quantitative. Even if the elements of bourgeois liberalism as well as bourgeois civilization and culture were still quantitatively predominant, it would mean little for a dynamic understanding of things, if, in that time, other types of social phenomena were established as locomotives of development. Between the 13th and 17th centuries, the ways of life and mindsets of most people in Europe did not change radically; that is, *societas civilis* maintained relevant hierarchies and theology dominated the ideological terrain uncontested. Nevertheless we distinguish between “middle ages” and “modernity” within this period, rightly directing our attention to the qualitative novelty, knowing full well that it was still quantitatively inferior. The novel and seminal are historically and sociologically interesting all the same, whether it is preliminary or appears for a long time to be an appendage or variation of the old. Supposing our contemporary Western mass democracy is in reality nothing other and nothing more than a continuation of bourgeois liberalism, the question must be addressed: whether factors came into play during this development that then assumed the role of social motors. I believe, in fact, I can show that the transition from the bourgeois liberalism of the 19th century to modern mass democracy is much more evident. Around 1900 a radical paradigm shift on the level of intellectual and artistic production took place, encompassing the scientific worldview, philosophy and sociology, and literature and fine arts, almost simultaneously usurping all forms of bourgeois culture that had developed since the Renaissance. By and from this sweeping polemic a *Denkfigur* emerges, corresponding to the picture and reality of a highly mobile mass society in which goods, social positions, and values are constantly exchanged, which posits the primacy of the functional point of view, the atomization of all wholes, and the arbitrary combinability of anything with any other thing. The full importance and reality of this ideal and social paradigm shift has as yet hardly been recognized (as it is not simply a matter of bourgeois liberalism, but the whole of European modernity). One gets the impression that program directors at indie movie theaters or guests at a discotheque understand what sort of society they live in better than sociologists and historians—to say nothing of scholars of Latin and Greek. This would certainly not be the first time in history such a thing has happened. Sophisticated (and other) pagans had still not noticed the long occurring paradigm shift and spoke of the vitality and potential for renewal of their beliefs, like many today gush about the “unfinished project of modernity.”

The West’s anticommunist campaign was fought not least in the name of liberalism, cementing the illusion that the collapse of antiquated communism amounted to a victory for evergreen liberalism. But this deals in a vague and normatively laden definition of liberalism, not unambiguous social or ideological evidence. The only social evidence that can be considered in the propaganda war

is the added commentary that western liberalism means not class privilege, but fundamental openness of society, equal opportunities for all, and social safety for all. This implicit denial of the bourgeois roots of liberalism (from restrictions on the right to vote to the rejection of the welfare state) signaled both the turn to mass democracy—that was thought of as the answer to the communist criticism of capitalism—and the influence of the threat of a red revolution on that turn. At least as consequential as this threat was the gradual permeation of the collective consciousness or unconscious with the idea of material equality, demanded by all currents of socialist thought from the beginning, though most insistently by the Marxists, opposing the bourgeois-liberal insistence on purely formal-legal equality as guarantee of freedom. Significantly, the spokespersons for this ideal, in various presentations and intensities, did not care at all for communism as it was practiced in Russia: social democrats of vaguely Marxist inspiration, wanting to prove themselves to be the better, i.e. more “realistic” and “free-spirited” friend of the people than their sibling communist adversaries; Christians now keen to carry on charitable traditions and connect them to approaches to the welfare state, as, following the demise of theological metaphysics, they saw it as the best chance to preserve the influence of their religion by endorsing “social” welfare; and not least the “social liberals” who undertook a reinterpretation of classical liberalism, going beyond formal equality and deriving an individual right to social protection by the state from the old individualist principle. The dissemination and entrenchment of such views coincides with the construction of the welfare state and the gradual replacement of the bourgeoisie as the dominant class by economic and political elites, open to all at least in principle. It would be a mistake to deem all this an automatic result of the second and third industrial revolutions, though the increased productivity and mass consumption enabled thereby were objectively indispensable. Socioeconomic processes are imprinted with what the participants want, how they perceive their social world and their own activities. Historically speaking, the modern conviction that it is neither God-willed nor natural that some have while others have little or none has been one of the greatest revolutions in the “realm of imagination”—and its consequences may be incalculable when militantly defended by 5, 8, or 10 billion people. Our contemporary “neoliberals” are mistaken in the assumption that broad privatization of industry could bring about a corresponding privatization of expectations, modest contentedness arising from the comprehension of individual incapacity and economic logic. Irrespective of the State’s essential contributions to the prosperity of private industry in the West, the latter receives its social legitimation from the certainty that it is the best means to achieve universal prosperity and plenitude, permitting significant redistribution and the dismantling of the most glaring material inequalities. Should such mass democratic expectations no longer be able to be fulfilled, it and the “system” will plunge into a crisis of legitimacy. In other words, the performance of private industry now forms an open and highly political matter—and it has come to be so under pressure from the antiliberal demand for a material interpretation of the principle of equality. The full consideration of social aspects illuminates the faulty conclusions that arise from the tendency to disregard the historical effects

of Marxism and communism, and indeed a misjudgment of the qualitative features of the turn to mass democracy. The level-headed observer can learn the same lesson from the analysis of a second aspect, namely, the planetary. Enlightenment philosophy of history, particularly in its Hegelian version, unified world history, stipulating a unified normative end towards which the whole was bound to steer. Marx certainly held this normative-eschatological unified view of world history; much more importantly, however, he explained the uniform character of planetary events by social and economic factors and from there drew political conclusions. He understood, like no other before him, that capitalist industry brought about a deep caesura in the course of history, creating a world network, shoehorning in all nations by gentler or harsher methods. In this sense, the industrial bourgeoisie achieved a world revolution; therefore it could only be toppled by a world revolution. And this new and final world revolution—the proletarian—had to realize a unified social plan on the whole Earth. The planetary and the social dimensions were conceived together and linked to real forces of historical development. Nations’ struggles against one another as well as the struggles within nations gained new meaning in their dealings on the world stage; they came to be part trigger, part concretion of universal trends. And the trend would seem to be uniform and irreversible: ever tighter interdependence and ever more uniform methods of industry following the end of the agrarian-patriarchal prehistory of humanity.

If we wish to grasp the *historical* consequence of these concepts, we must consider and evaluate it by laying out its driving forces and the correlated socio-economic dimensions, not the utopian-eschatological aspect. Liberal “realists” celebrate a minor triumph in emphasizing the failed attempt to realize the original utopian model without compromise. But can one, on such grounds, deny the tremendous historical influence of Christianity, as neither the eschatological promise bore out nor did the commandment of love noticeably influence social practice? Moreover: can there be any doubt that its real historical effects were made possible exactly by appeal to the impossible and even ahistorical? Such paradoxes dissipate only when one breaks with the habit, rooted in moral necessity, of taking normative ideas at their nominal value and judging them by their realization or realizability, rather than tracing their functions and transformations corresponding to the social peripeteias of their advocates. A rationalist prejudice impedes understanding the historical effect of utopian models. It is based on a notion of action wherein means and ends correspond with one another, and remain controllable at all times due to this symmetry, so that no gap forms between subjective aims and the objective outcome of events. Evidently, this applies only to actions that occur over relatively short time spans, carried out by relatively few actors. The utopia of a planetary, classless society, however, worked as a historical force for nearly a century and a half under quite different circumstances and by the actions of millions upon millions, who each associated it with concrete contents. It operated under conditions in which the long waves of historical action engulf the short and the heterogeneity of ends submerged the symmetry between means and ends, design and realization. The

quest for the absolute utopian goal was divided and disseminated into diverging streams, where it was made to serve relative sociopolitical efforts. However far they may deviate from the original absolute goal, their character is not left to chance. For every utopian model contains, outside the uncompromising dream of surmounting all conflicts and sorrows, a critique of the status quo, namely, those aspects which are felt to hinder the path to utopia. If private property, for example, is deemed to be such a hindrance, not only is the final utopian state envisioned, the corresponding *Realpolitik*, which acts in its name, is also shaped. The abolition of private property by the state and ownership of the state by the utopian preachers can thus be seen as the realization of the latter in principle. Even in countries where such a thing did not occur, the “progressive” *realpolitischen* goals focus on dismantling the privileges of owners by the establishment of collective forms of property or at least as tight a correspondence between consumption and achievement as possible.

In such cases, the inner relationships cannot escape the keen observer: how the utopian model, as an instrument of concrete politics and power by its social-critical aspect, produces a shift in social stratification and in particular in the relative positions of power of the elites. Because of the degree of interconnection that planetary politics in the era of European imperialism reached, the power-political aspect of utopia must assume world-political dimensions, in which the utopia came to be the banner of a large nation, striving to be a great power world power and on top of that, global dominance. This point is crucial for understanding the history of the 20th century and the place of communism within it. Accompanying the two aforementioned fundamental aspects of this history, namely the planetary and the social, is a third: the national, not as a weakening nor separating the first two, but rather further tangling their web and binding their additive effects to concrete bearers. That is: the history of the 20th century since 1917 was marked by the emergence of large nations that wanted to implement social models on the world stage and increase the degree of interconnection in planetary politics precisely by the tightly bound social and planetary. Nations that were potentially suitable for such a role came to be bearers of universal values and social models with claims of universal application, as they would otherwise have no chance to rule the planetary stage—and because of the increasing interconnection of world networks at the time, modest goals did not afford absolute security. Bearers of universal or world-historical ideas were thus particular nations, not the whole world. Despite this, the difference between this new and intensive phase of planetary politics and the era of European imperialism cannot be ignored. The imperialist powers had particular ideas about the arrangement or rather partitioning of the globe; they spoke of their self-imposed mission to civilize the world, which, as is known, turned out to mean clear divisions between “Europeans” and “Asians” or “Negros” in regards to social needs and social or political possibilities. That the same social model can and should be applied to the whole planet arose imperiously on the world horizon in the moment that two large nations stepped onto the world stage: communist Russia and the capitalist United States. As large nations as-

piring to be world powers, both represented and implemented the fundamental connection between social and planetary, albeit under conflicting banners. The conflict between two large nations, from the beginning, was a matter of which banner would be flown going forward, not the inherent “merits of the system” considered *in abstracto*. The communists’ planetary social model collapsed not because of its moral or economic inferiority but because the national power of Russia was struck down by the superior national power of the United States. (The same could be said of Nazi Germany’s grab at world power.) Had capitalism sprung out of Belgium and Switzerland and planned industry out of Russia and China, world history’s preferences would have turned out quite differently than 1989. This insight is of peak historical and methodological importance; it shows how tightly political and social history are entwined. The same thought could be formulated inversely: the world-historical potency of communism and its ability to champion a social model on a planetary scale would have been nil if it were confined within the borders of Albania. But it took hold in Russia and China—and *that* gave it momentum and gravity; planetary, social, and national now could and had to meet. In fact the Soviet Union’s ambitions for world power were closely connected to processes that redrew the world map and brought about a never before seen degree of connectivity in planetary politics. It is easy to forget today the powerful influence the October revolution had on the colonized peoples of Asia and Africa. Its contribution to the collapse of colonial systems consisted not only of political and military support provided to anticolonial movements and elites but also extended to ideologically and psychologically crucial historical-philosophical legitimation. The proletarian peoples, by their struggle against the colonial masters would accompany or even anticipate the proletarian revolution in developed capitalist countries. Stalin’s five-stage schema of historical development envisioned the convergence of all nations just before the end of history, so that now debasing racist doctrine could be refuted by historical praxis. In any case, the (former) colonial masters, under pressure from geopolitical competition with the Soviet Union, set about discovering the equal dignity and equal rights of all men. The emergence of countless subjects equally qualified under international law through the decolonization process expanded the arena of global politics, making every corner of the world an actual or potential contested site. The cold war thus marked a high point in the formal organization of planetary politics, in which the tight interdependence of all regions of the world and all aspects of world politics proceeded relentlessly and made itself apparent every day. The effect of Marxism and the communist movement in the industrialized West was, above all, spreading the material interpretation of the liberal idea of equality and to douse the social atmosphere of capitalism with increasing hostility towards the “capitalist” figure; in economically underdeveloped nations where they seized power, they helped the planetary path to mass democracy reach a breakthrough. Here the existing pre- or half-capitalist patriarchal social structures were shattered violently, atomization and concomitant loss of individuality were fostered not only by the dissolution of the extended family and individual membership in professional and political organizations but also spying and terror. The charac-

ter of rule was fundamentally altered; its growing intensity went along with a break from the sociological type of class rule and the establishment of pure elite rule; anyone could in principle attain a ruling position (and in fact members of the bureaucratic Nomenklatura almost all started at the bottom), solely conditioned on mastering the art of survival in a dictatorship and being able to take full advantage of the path to promotion (foremost the mechanisms of the party). This could be called democratic in the sense that those concerned were directed according to intellectual and political aptitude rather than social qualifications. Neither legally guaranteed nor hereditary property were present to a meaningful extent, and the considerable differences in living standards between “equal” and “more equal” animals (recalling Orwell) lay primarily in the Nomenklatura’s privileged access to enjoy consumer goods, real estate, and services.

The dictatorship of the party was carried out in the name of utopia, i.e. with the express goal of realizing the utopian social model. It was legitimated by the argument that political action with regard to the establishment of utopia required extraordinary measures, since the establishment of this utopia would be impossible *hic et nunc*. The party’s authority was felt not least in their jurisdiction over giving a binding definition for when the conditions for the realization of utopia seemed ripe, and indeed to postpone the realization of utopia in the name of that same realization. It is obvious that the aforementioned argument was ideological, that is, it gave the party the ability to do something other than what they should based on a narrow interpretation of arguments regarding utopian objectives. “Something other” meaning actions that were in fact anything but utopian, namely, dictated by political calculation and serving partly to solidify new hierarchies and partly to achieve national goals. The critics of utopia commit a serious logical and historical error when they offhandedly infer the violence of communist rule from the drive to establish utopia; this amounts to confusing the utopian ideology and legitimation of communist rule with its political realities. Violence, however, always arises when the gap between existing and desired circumstances seems so large that it can only be bridged by cutting the Gordian knot; in other words, violence originates not only from utopian intentions, i.e. those that foresee the establishment of a perfect society, but also large-scale undertakings that face significant hindrances and countervailing powers and therefore could be unrealizable from the beginning. Utopian, in the sociological sense of the word, and unrealizable are not synonyms, except when one holds utopia to be unrealizable. One need not search long for historical confirmation: political actions in the name of utopia have brought no new, distinctive forms of violence into the world that were not already employed in the pursuit of religious, nationalist, social, racist, etc. goals. The largest collective acts of violence in this century, namely the two world wars, had nothing to do with utopian ambitions, despite the fact that they coincided with the communist movement unfolding on a planetary scale. And inversely: it can be proven that the most harrowing paroxysms of communist violence trace back to *Realpolitik*-al justifications. The collectivization and forcible industrialization of the Soviet Union was set in motion based on the expectation of a large

war, wherein the isolated Russia would have had to once again suffer the bitter fate of 1853, 1904, and 1917—or perhaps even worse, had it taken the path of long tranquil development of industry and society. The five-year plan was what situated the Soviet Union among modern technologically advanced armies of industrial powers, just in time for the arms race, or, more precisely, winning the war against Germany. This literally changed the course of history in the 20th century. People do not want to admit this out of anticommunist sentiment, but the taboo around this statement is ideology and propaganda, not historical science. The Stalinist Soviet Union, not liberal France or parliamentary England, defeated the Nazis. The seeds for the successful US military intervention in Western Europe were planted in Stalingrad.

While today’s “right-wing” critics of utopia try to prove that Marxism and soviet communism went together with utopia and violence from the outset, on the “left” end of the intellectual spectrum, many influential intellectuals set out to prove the opposite—that Marx’s work contains an inextinguishable humanist kernel and a view of human nature which would not square with “mechanical” schemas of historical development and should be released from its monopolization by soviet economic Marxism-Leninism in order to provide the theoretical basis of a new sort of social critique and an accompanying renewal of the socialist movement. In view of their ethical bias and roots in Western European culture these intellectuals can hardly appreciate the national and planetary exigencies that guided the Soviet Union’s and China’s political actions; hence they vacillated constantly between the naïveté of followers that overlook, euphemize, or simply swallow, and the outcry of those let down, grasping at outright demonology as a means of explanation. They had the impression that the Soviet Union and China were obligated to realize the political program of Western intellectuals on the grounds that they made use of the red flag and the associated rhetoric. As intellectuals, whose claim to power must consist of implementing particular (their own) ideas and values as binding social praxis; they cannot and do not want to accept that ideas and values generally only have wide-ranging effect when they are flat-out “twisted” and “falsified” as they are wrought by interested parties. Indeed, the new humanist interpretation of Marxism fared no better. The theory of alienation attained wide popularity in the 60s and 70s in this way, as it was understood in light of a buzzword befitting the fundamentally hedonistic orientation of mass producing and mass consuming, anti-authoritarian and permissive mass democracy: by which we mean, of course, the downright electrifying buzzword of individual self-actualization. The mass democratic reinterpretation of Marxist humanism, which was consistent with the aforementioned material interpretation of equal rights was indispensable in one respect that may be surprising on the surface. The essential features of Marx’s human ideal were rooted in the bourgeois educational ideal, wherein the classical idea of harmony blended with the anthropological utopia of *homo universalis*; the classless society, in which each person’s faculties could develop unconstrained; it would be teeming with little Shakespeares and Goethes rather than pop stars setting the tone, tourists on vacation, and jet set professors.

Marxism's deep cultural roots in the bourgeois educational ideal and in general in bourgeois literary and artistic forms shows up during the 20th century in its fundamental rejection of the literary-artistic avant-garde and modernism, despite sporadic and unfortunate attempts at reconciliation. In the West this rejection was felt to be an indication of philistine narrow-mindedness and provincial attitudes; this attitude could only emerge as the West had itself turned its back on bourgeois culture during the paradigm shift circa 1900. The Marxists could now call upon the great realist traditions of bourgeois art, continued in socialist realism, in order to cast the modernist and avant-garde turn as an ideological expression of bourgeois decadence; thus they considered themselves the only imaginable historical heirs of bourgeois society. They were hardly capable of seeing that in the West, after the bourgeois era, something other than communism was possible, something whose ideological projection was represented by precisely the *anti-bourgeois* modern and avant-garde. The Marxists were also the last to hold up the banner of bourgeois traditions and conceptions in history, where they persisted in the hypostatization of history and the idea of step-by-step progress. The universal man and the procession of history were essences or substances, by which the bourgeois-liberal worldview replaced the theological. As 20th century mass democratic culture dissolved these substances into interchangeable and freely combinable functions, the bourgeois *Gedankenwelt* was mortally wounded. The collapse of anthropologically and historically-philosophically aligned Marxism sealed the fate of bourgeois culture. From the perspective of the ideologically conditioned interpretations and periodizations of 20th century history this must seem the greatest paradox of all.

In brief, Marxism had to be ideologized—whether under the banner of “dialectical and historical materialism” or anthropological postulates—to be able to have historical effect. In this sense Marxism is absorbed entirely into the communist or “left” movements of the East and West, that is, it does not exist in any pure form. Still, given that Marx was a great scientist, it would be unfair and a considerable loss for social science itself, if one does not add that certain fundamental ideas of his hold lasting value and by themselves are immune to ideological utilization; indeed, they can provide the key to exposing ideological tricks. I believe that certain fundamental principles of Marx's history have never been so relevant and so true as the phase of planetary history beginning now: that the level and character of the relationship between man as a creature of nature and the rest of nature has significant influence on the character of forms of association, that the human relations that crystallize within these forms of association are understood and consolidated or modified by actors using ideology, distilling into a “false consciousness” that fulfills normative and polemical ends, that the discrepancy between false consciousness and real events does not bring historical growth to a standstill but rather pushes it ahead, and that the heterogeneity of ends carries out processes of “*longue durée*.” Setting aside dogma, these theses hold irrespective of sociological preferences with respect to the priority of whatever material or ideal factors, and they can be tied in with methodological, anthropological, and sociological hypotheses in fruitful ways, diverging or con-

verging with Marx. It is precisely this that attests that Marx's scholarly work, even if taken as merely an inventory of fundamental questions, is undeniably part and parcel of modern social science. No other modern figure demonstrated with such clarity and such depth that history, economics, politics, philosophy, and anthropology are ultimately a single subject and a single discipline—no matter how he himself tried to achieve this grand unification. When the mass of self-sufficient “specialists” that populate the mass democratic intellectual sphere are no longer up to these feats and can only mock them or belatedly celebrate anemic, second- or third-hand constructs cobbled together by committee, that is clearly not the fault of this great thinker.

But when one assesses Marx's scholarly achievements, one must recall that the logic of the intellectual sphere and the logic of social developments and social struggles are two different things. The key to understanding the latter cannot be the self-understanding of the actors—that is only one of the factors in effect. The self-understanding of the defeated, namely the communist movement, acting in the name of realizing utopia, cannot explain why the utopia could not be realized. And the self-understanding of the victorious West can neither grasp the historical influence of the communist enemy on the formation of today's world nor can they reckon with the prospects of this world, which is hardly just the sum of the merits of the West minus the evils of communism. Whatever may be fashionable today, and no matter how many intellectuals succumb to trends and conformity: Marxism and communism cannot be historically assessed by taking the ideology of the Western camp as if it were the exact expression and one true interpretation of the historical movement. If this were indeed the case, this correspondence between being and consciousness would be a world first, thus, the West would have realized what the mythological Marxist dialectic of the proletariat anticipated: that its own self-knowledge aligned with knowledge of the objective course of history. The victors, as always, feel justified in the assumption that their victory is hard proof that their self-understanding is aligned with the sense of history. The West wants to make its victory out to be the victory of freedom writ large, but it is a matter of something more concrete: now it must bring the interconnection of planetary and social, which 20th century history put on the agenda, to its logical conclusion, under its aegis and under its banner; it must also implement its own social model on a planetary scale. The discrepancy between its self-understanding and the objective course of history will make itself known in the protests and the conflicts that these endeavors bring out. In and of itself, that interconnection, that has reached its greatest degree driven by the motors of mass producing and mass consuming mass democracies, attests that modernity has come to an end, that it was a specifically European phenomenon; with it, bourgeois-liberal culture, which made its mark over a period beginning in the Renaissance through the 20th century, has come to an end. Despite propagandistic whitewashing and ideological self-deception, the West today did not flood the world with this culture, but rather with mass democratic attitudes toward technology and economics on the one hand and the hedonistic mass culture of kitsch on the other. And even if

we ignore the grave concerns that threaten the West's social model precisely by its increasing global influence—ecological and demographic factors, worldwide anomie, intensifying conflicts of partition between large nations and even within the Western nations, precisely as a result of growing competition from the outside, annulment of the deal between free enterprise and parliamentarianism—it is hard to dismiss the possibility that the economic and political principles that the West champions today could soon turn against it. Free trade will be seen in a different light, when the top exporter is no longer the United States or Germany, but China; freedom of movement will provoke hysterical and barbaric reactions, should hundreds of millions hit the road. While the victory of Western principles in liberal and imperialist times meant eo ipso the victory of the West, the victory of today's mass democratic West on a planetary level could bring about the demise of the West. This could occur slowly, but it could also be fast. The rapid collapse of the communist empire does not simply show that communism was a giant with feet of clay, as the dominant opinion in the West would have it. The lesson is much more general, and it is this: states and regimes, no matter their names, are by their nature fragile entities, and can disintegrate in no time.

Glossary

- ideal type
- accidentia
- heterogony of ends - goal-directed actions have (multiple, unintentional) consequences that reconfigure the original motivations

Kondylis, Panajotis. 1994. "Marxismums, Communismus, Und Die Geschichte Des 20. Jahrhunderts." In *Der Marxismus in Seinem Zeitalter*.