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## Facing a New Crisis: Notes on *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism*, by Ian H. Angus (2021)

Francesco Tava 

School of Social Sciences, UWE Bristol, Bristol, UK

### ABSTRACT

This review article analyses the topic of phenomenological Marxism, examining its historical formulations, critical contributions, and contemporary re-enactments. It begins with an overview of the works of Enzo Paci and the Milan school of phenomenology, as well as Jan Patočka and Karel Kosík. In addition, it explores the recent work by Ian H. Angus, whose book, *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism* (2021), presents an innovative perspective on the relationship between phenomenology and Marxism. Angus's work emphasizes the intersection of Husserl and Marx's ontologies of the lifeworld and labour, offering a fresh perspective on the discourse surrounding the relationship between nature, labour, and culture. Drawing on both phenomenological and Marxist categories, Angus argues for the need for an ethics of responsibility in response to the ecological crisis currently facing humanity. Angus posits that an ethics of responsibility grounded in phenomenological Marxism offers a promising avenue for addressing this pressing global issue.

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## 1. "A Much Broader Philosophical Horizon"

Throughout the twentieth century, attempts to establish a link between phenomenology and Marxism were numerous. In them, the need to weave threads between two "critical" orientations of thought, respectively with regard to the formation of our structures of consciousness and the social and economic conditions to which they apply, often overlapped with political as well as philosophical motivations. In Giovanni Piana's recollections, evoked by reading Roberta De Monticelli's recent *Il Dono dei vincoli* [The Gift of Constraints], "the lack of politics, which I felt in phenomenological thought, I found in the great lesson of Karl Marx, in which I instead felt the need for a much broader philosophical horizon".<sup>1</sup> In spite of the need to establish contact in order to remedy these shortcomings, Piana had no doubts about the profound diversity between these philosophies, which should inevitably dissuade interpreters from risking imprudent contaminations.

**CONTACT** Francesco Tava  francesco.tava@uwe.ac.uk  UWE Bristol, Frenchay Campus, BS16 1QY Bristol, UK

<sup>1</sup> Piana, "Roberta De Monticelli and 'The gift of constraints' ". Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are of the author.

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Piana's master (and that of many other Italian phenomenologists), Enzo Paci, thought differently. In his best-known and most widely translated work, *The Function of the Sciences and the Meaning of Man* (1972 [1963]), he moved firmly towards a phenomenological Marxism.<sup>2</sup> Paci's attempt took shape not only in *The Function of the Sciences*, but also in various earlier writings, including the lecture he gave at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in 1962 and which appeared in the journal *aut aut* the following year under the title *Il significato dell'uomo in Marx e Husserl* [The Meaning of Man in Marx and Husserl].<sup>3</sup> In this work, philosophy and politics are again inexorably intertwined and it would be incorrect to investigate Paci's theses without considering the historical context in which they were elaborated. In particular, the era of political liberalization and the dream of a socialism with a human face, which would characterize the Czechoslovak situation until the summer of 1968, gave rise, on a theoretical level, to increasingly ambitious (perhaps daring) explorations of a "humanist" Marxism, open to the contributions of Western philosophy: from hermeneutics to existentialism, Critical Theory and phenomenology. It is of some significance that listening to Paci in Prague were, among others, Jan Patočka and Karel Kosík. The former, a direct pupil of Husserl and Heidegger, the main exponent of phenomenological philosophy in his country and future spokesman of Charta 77 and, the latter, a young protagonist of critical and heterodox Marxism who would contribute to laying the philosophical foundations of the Prague Spring.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Between Praxis and History

In the Prague lecture, Paci does not hesitate to establish a direct link between Husserlian phenomenology and Marx's thought. In both cases, the philosopher recognizes the effort to move from a plane of the abstract, represented, on the one hand, by the mathematization of the scientific method and, on the other, by the central role exerted in the capitalist economy by exchange value, to a plane of concrete human action, rooted in history and society and oriented towards the continuous dialectical renewal of the reality in which we live. This rediscovery of the concrete and creative nature of human action is, according to Paci, at the heart of the Husserlian conception whereby the real subject cannot disregard the world around them [*Umwelt*], whose experience constantly accompanies the evolution of their processes of consciousness.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Marx conceives the labour-power not as an externally directed mechanical exercise, but always in conjunction with "the constitution [*Anlage*] of the living individual".<sup>6</sup> For both Husserl and Marx, at the centre of the analysis is the human being, conceived as a free creature, capable of elaborating a creative praxis that, far from repeating predefined patterns, shapes the world, leaving a definite imprint on its institutions and contributing to creating what we call, in the broadest sense of the term, culture. This human subject – concrete, historical,

<sup>2</sup> See Paci, *The Function of the Sciences*.

<sup>3</sup> See Paci, "Il significato dell'uomo in Marx e Husserl".

<sup>4</sup> I discuss the relationship between Patočka, Kosík and Paci at greater length in Tava, *The Risk of Freedom*, Chapter 3. On Patočka's reception of Marxist thought, see also Tava, "The Heresy of History".

<sup>5</sup> Husserl speaks of *Umwelt* mainly in his later writings and, in particular, in the second volume of *Ideas* and other posthumous writings. See Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology: Volume 2*, §50; *Die Lebenswelt: Auslegungen der vorgegebenen*.

<sup>6</sup> Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 274. Quoted in Paci, "Il significato dell'uomo in Marx e Husserl", 16. Interestingly, in the Italian edition by Delio Cantimori, to which Paci referred in his lecture, "*Anlage*" is translated (very phenomenologically) as "capacità o attitudine naturale" [capacity or natural attitude]. See Marx, *Capital*, I, 187.

dialectical – that Paci syncretically takes from Husserl and Marx, is presented as the protagonist of both a new philosophy and a new politics. A philosophy “in the flesh”, far from the “mythological” Kantian transcendental subject (in Paci’s reading, the true critical target of Husserlian phenomenology) and open to the existential themes offered by contemporary thought: the temporality of individual experience, the limits of the corporeal, and the struggle for the meaning of the human. A struggle that is concretized, in parallel, in the political sphere, where Marx’s thought, freed from any ideological rigidity, offers new lymph for a radical reconfiguration of the real, starting from labour understood as the free expression of the active life of the human being; as the pivotal activity from which both human identity and the historical process in which it is employed originate.

Paci’s philosophy, whose role in the “second wave” of phenomenological studies in Italy between the 1950s and 1960s was decisive,<sup>7</sup> reflects the intellectual orientation of numerous exponents of critical Marxism who, in Central and Eastern Europe in those years, were fighting to disengage their philosophy from the categories of real socialism. For example, in an essay that appeared in the 1966 international edition of *Praxis*, the journal of the Yugoslavian Marxist-humanist group of the same name, Leszek Kołakowski expressed himself in similar tones to those used by Paci to define the nature and historical function of human praxis. According to Kołakowski, Marx and Husserl share the Hegelian conviction that humanity realizes its essence by actualizing itself in historical evolution. This conception overturns the idea that human beings are inexorably defined by the historical, social, and economic conditions in which they live. On the contrary, “[s]ince history is a consequent realization of the essence of humanity, if its progress is to lead to the coincidence of essence and existence, then this essence cannot be the product of history; it is history, on the contrary, that becomes intelligible and indistinguishable by reference to it”.<sup>8</sup> In other words, here too, at the centre is firmly placed the human being and their free creative capacity, of which history is not mere theatre, but a teleological result.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. The Contribution of Phenomenology

The contribution of phenomenology to this current of thought is essential and Paci, perhaps more than anyone else, is adept at grasping this connection. Already in *Tempo e verità nella fenomenologia di Husserl* [Time and Truth in Husserl’s Phenomenology] (1961), the Husserlian concept of “reduction” takes on a new character. It is no longer a methodological tool, but a practical exercise and ethical duty, through which one can trace back to an Ego that is no longer absolute and disembodied, but understood as a complex structure of internal and external relations that develop and renew themselves temporally:

The *relation* (I-other, I-you and intentionality) is always linked, in Husserl, not only to space, but also to time, insofar as the past is the first form of the other than me that is in

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of this issue, see Buongiorno, Costa, and Lanfredini, *Phenomenology in Italy*. See, in particular, Vigorelli, “A New Phenomenological Beginning”, 57–70. On the same theme, see also Neri, “La fenomenologia”.

<sup>8</sup> Kołakowski, “La compréhension historique”, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, also building on these ideas, speaks of culture as an “artificial” environment that results from the collective historical action of humanity. See, for instance, Bauman, *Culture as Praxis*. For a detailed analysis of the various trajectories of Marxist humanism in Central and Eastern Europe, see Satterwhite, *Varieties of Marxist Humanism*.

me. Phenomenology is the exercise of restarting – *in time*, according to truth – intentionality. It is in this *Stimmung* that one must take up, *immer wieder*, the Husserlian exercise of returning to the Cogito.<sup>10</sup>

The Husserlian idea of *Lebenswelt* also undergoes a reinterpretation in a historical and relational key in *Funzione delle scienze*, where the lifeworld transpires through the category of “need”. The continual emergence of natural needs, such as the need for nourishment and protection, is for Paci a defining characteristic of human life in the world. It sanctions the irreversible temporality of our existence because the emergence of ever new needs conditions our future inevitably. Each need that arises sets us on a path that leads to new requirements and desires, shaping our lives in ways that we cannot always anticipate or control. The component of need that characterizes our lifeworld is also what constitutes its inherent intersubjectivity. As “needy” entities, not sufficient for themselves, human beings have historically woven relationships of rescue and dependence. The complex socio-cultural web that regulates human relations, the rules and conventions that structure our public space, are the result of this continuous weaving. This complex weave constitutes, according to Paci, the lifeworld: something that precedes the existence of each individual, being the fruit of past relationships, but which each person is in some way responsible for preserving and nurturing, through his or her actions.

This vision of a phenomenology of need – practical, historical, relational – would soon develop into a real research programme, shared by Paci’s numerous collaborators and students in Milan.<sup>11</sup> The collected volume *Ommaggio a Husserl* [Homage to Husserl] (1960), edited by Paci, and the first translation, edited by Enrico Filippini, of Husserl’s *Crisis of the European Sciences*, with Paci’s famous (and often criticized) preface, well testify to the collective effort around this project. The link with more recent developments in Marxist thought was, at that point, evident and close at hand.<sup>12</sup> The Marxian idea of the primacy of the economy, understood precisely as the structure of human productive relations, is in a certain sense confirmed, but at the same time mediated by the conviction that human praxis is not structured by economic factors in a deterministic sense, but rather contributes to their continuous formation and transformation. On this basis, one can trace the trajectory of phenomenological Marxism developed by Paci and his school.

#### 4. Critical Notes: Patočka and Kosík

Since the years of its elaboration, the attempt to develop a Marxist humanism through the contribution of phenomenology has been subject to criticism that has highlighted some of its limitations. It is precisely Patočka and Kosík, present at Paci’s conference in Prague, who develop two lines of criticism that, while starting from distinct premises, both seem

<sup>10</sup> Paci, *Tempo e verità nella fenomenologia di Husserl*, 60. For an in-depth analysis of this work, see again Vigorelli, “A New Phenomenological Beginning”.

<sup>11</sup> On the Milan school, see in particular Paci, *Vita e filosofia. La scuola di Milano*. On Paci’s contribution to the development of the philosophical themes that would innervate the School’s activities, see Vigorelli, *L’esistenzialismo positivo di Enzo Paci*.

<sup>12</sup> On the subject of need, within the framework of Marxist thought, Ágnes Heller’s reflections on radical needs are of particular relevance, which fruitfully intertwine with Paci’s phenomenology. See, in particular, Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx*.

to oppose this philosophical project. Patočka, while recognizing on several occasions the philosophical value of Marxism, defined since the 1940s as an authentic “idea” and not merely an “ideology”,<sup>13</sup> identifies the fundamental limit of the materialistic dialectic elaborated by the German philosopher in the fact that it resolves itself exclusively in a form of flat “social production”.<sup>14</sup> Human action in history unravels, in Marx’s vision, along a horizontal axis allowing for a gradual emancipation of humanity from all forms of alienation and dependency, the culmination of which is the class struggle and the consequent elimination of the inequalities caused by the unequal distribution of labour. The Marxian ontology of labour, as it emerges in the early *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1848*, from which the representatives of humanist Marxism drew extensive inspiration, is configured in this sense. Along this dialectical path, human beings rediscover the authentic creative nature of their work, rejecting the conviction dictated by the capitalist system whereby labour activity would be aimed at nothing other than mere survival. Commenting on this dynamic, Patočka speaks of a “horizontal transcendence” to distinguish it from another type of “transcendence”, of a “vertical” orientation, which, in his opinion, Marxian categories do not allow us to decipher.<sup>15</sup> In Patočka’s language, the term transcendence retains its metaphysical meaning, in the sense of a fundamental departure from the plane of mere worldly materiality, while at the same time assuming a more properly practical-dialectical meaning that brings it closer to the Marxian conception: transcendence in the sense of a process that allows human beings to force the ideological, social, and political structures that dominate them and progress towards a condition of greater freedom and emancipation. The figures of the intellectual and the dissident, central to Patočka’s reflection and political practice, represent the effective embodiment of these two movements.<sup>16</sup> Marx’s problem is that, by conceiving of this process solely in terms of the evolution of the economic structures of society (from capitalism to socialism; from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat), he could not avoid a flattening of the human subject to the historical-objective plane within which this evolution takes place. In this sense, Patočka speaks of “horizontality”: history becomes a linear process in which individual subjectivity is lost, becoming a mere object of this mechanism. In this way, paradoxically, the same historical process that should have allowed for the emancipation of humanity from all forms of domination runs the risk of establishing an even more rigid one, dictated by its own dialectical structure. Since nothing seems to be able to transcend this scheme, directing it from an “a-historical” position, everything, including human subjectivity, is compressed onto this plane of absolute immanence. With respect to this approach, phenomenology is configured as a philosophical project of a radically opposite sign. The rediscovery of an independent and autonomous subjectivity, constructed from the fundamental experience of the lifeworld and capable of diverging from and opposing any objective structure (be it ideological or political) is at the heart of this conception. Precisely for this reason, the Marxian ontology of labour must be rejected, or rather, radically expanded to encompass the other existential movements that characterize the being-in-the-world of the human being. There is not only the

<sup>13</sup> Patočka, “Ideology and Life in the Idea”.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> This terminology appears, in particular, in Patočka, “Intellectuals and the Opposition”.

<sup>16</sup> In addition to the aforementioned “Intellectuals and Opposition”, see on this also Patočka, “The Spiritual Person and the Intellectual”.

productive effort, which (as Hannah Arendt had already pointed out in her critique of Marx)<sup>17</sup> risks being reduced to a mere reproductive cycle. Other dynamics characterize life: from the primordial rootedness in the natural and familiar environment that welcomes us to attempts to introduce a practical reason into the world, in the form of intellectual, resistant and liberating efforts, which human beings choose to exercise despite the risks that such action may sometimes entail.<sup>18</sup> These further dynamics, which describe the various sedimentations of humanity's active life, indicate that "vertical" plane, or "depth", to which Patočka often alludes in his writings.<sup>19</sup> Since such a plane is precluded by Marxian categories, it would be wrong to attempt a reconciliation with phenomenology which of such a plane allows fruition.

Although starting from different premises, Karel Kosík also goes so far as to develop a critique of Marxist humanism that, in some respects, echoes some of the insights of Patočka's analysis. Unlike Patočka, Kosík himself is often counted among the promoters of a humanistic conception of Marxism.<sup>20</sup> Certainly, the subtitle of his best-known work, as well as one of its most theoretically significant chapters, recalls the human and existential element underlying the structure of reality.<sup>21</sup> From this point of view, Kosík fuels the conception, widespread among Marxist humanists, that human consciousness cannot be reduced to mere class consciousness and that the free action of the individual plays an essential role in shaping historical-political dynamics (and not vice versa). To support this conception, Kosík does not hesitate to refer to Western philosophy and, particularly, phenomenology, read above all through the mediation of Heidegger. Nevertheless, in the *Dialectics of the Concrete* as in other writings of the same period, Kosík excludes a naïve and affected recourse to the "human" to correct the dogmatism of Marxism-Leninism, as if it were a miraculous "supplement" or "complement":

The basic design and matrix of this philosophy has either *left out* man entirely, or has included him only after transforming him into a non-man, i.e. after reducing him to a mathematical-physical magnitude. Now, under the impression of *outside* necessity, this philosophy feels the need to be supplemented with whatever it lacks – namely with man. A philosophy of reality without man is thus complemented with none other than a philosophy of man.<sup>22</sup>

This process risks giving rise to a new dogmatism, reducing the entirety of reality to a human and social category, relegating non-human nature to material ready to be moulded and exploited to the point of extreme exhaustion.<sup>23</sup> While valorizing the human-existential element within Marxist dialectics, Kosík is aware of this risk and consequently rejects any banal syncretism with Western philosophy. This includes any

<sup>17</sup> See Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

<sup>18</sup> On the various phases of the existential movement, see in particular Patočka, "The 'Natural World' and Phenomenology". On the dynamism of human existence, understood as existential movement, see Barbaras, *Le mouvement de l'existence*.

<sup>19</sup> I have analysed this topic in Tava, *The Risk of Freedom*, 22–26.

<sup>20</sup> Giuseppe Vacca, for example, in his preface to the Italian edition of Kosík's "Our Current Crisis" (1968), counts him among the Marxist humanists, emphasising the limits of this orientation. As Guido Davide Neri points out, this criticism misses its target, given the fact that Kosík distances himself from Marxist humanism in *Dialectics of the Concrete*. See Vacca, Preface to Kosík, *La nostra crisi attuale*, 10; Neri, *Aporie della realizzazione*, 129.

<sup>21</sup> "Man", in Kosík, *Dialectics of the Concrete*, 147–53. It is worth noting that the Czech word "člověk" is devoid of any gender connotations and would be better translated as "human being" or "person" rather than "man".

<sup>22</sup> Kosík, *Dialectics of the Concrete*, 150–51.

<sup>23</sup> On this point, see Neri, *Aporie della realizzazione*, 129 ff.



superficial resort to phenomenological and existentialist insights in order to correct the shortcomings of historical materialism and give it that “much broader philosophical horizon” which Piana referred to. This operation is risky because it tends to burnish a philosophical conception without critically questioning its internal dynamics and contradictions. In this sense, Kosík’s *Dialectics of the Concrete* goes exactly in the opposite direction in that it tackles directly the most problematic junctions of Marxist theory in order to restart its flooded engine. Although this does not exclude a dialogue with phenomenology, Kosík seems to reject, for the reasons we discuss, the possibility of an actual phenomenological Marxism.

## 5. New Foundations for a Phenomenological Marxism

The doubts raised by Patočka and Kosík seem to dissuade interpreters from taking the path of a phenomenological Marxism, as Paci and other exponents of his school did. And yet, despite the difficulties discussed so far, an innovative revival of this philosophical project has been taking place in recent years, which, precisely in light of the criticisms just mentioned, attempts to replant it on firmer ground. Among the latest examples of this new trend, the recent work by Ian H. Angus, *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism: Crisis, Body, World*, around which our considerations will focus from here on, is of particular relevance.<sup>24</sup>

Angus’ work unfolds through a sophisticated argumentation that includes, in sequence, a substantial re-reading of Husserl’s *Crisis of the European Sciences* and what Angus deems are its main philosophical innovations (Parts I and II). This is followed by a close analysis of Marx’s ontology of labour, which takes into account both his early writings and the contents of the first volume of *Capital*, along with their intertwining with various contemporary philosophies of technique (Part III). Subsequently, Angus investigates the historical and cultural status of the concepts of Europe and America (Part IV). Finally, in Part V, the phenomenological project is reformulated in terms of an ethics of responsibility towards oneself and humanity as a whole. The ambitious goal of the book is explicitly anti-exegetical. The author takes the “crisis” outlined by Husserl as a starting point, not to provide a straightforward interpretation of it, but to bring it to fruition beyond and, if necessary, against the master’s formulations.

Instead of summarizing the overall argumentative structure of *Groundwork*, I believe it is useful to focus on one of its fundamental conceptual junctures, which readers can find halfway through the work. Angus is aware of the historical attempts, which we briefly mentioned earlier, to establish a phenomenological Marxism and the criticism they have attracted. In the above, we particularly focused on the positions of Patočka and Kosík because Angus himself understands and shares their critical insights, and it is precisely on their basis that he intends to establish a new phenomenological Marxism. Let us return briefly to Marx’s ontology of labour and the criticism of it by, among others, Jan Patočka. Delving into the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1848*, it becomes clear why so many interpreters have attempted to find in them a line of thought tending towards Husserlian phenomenology. Labour is presented here not

<sup>24</sup> Angus, *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism*. Also on the topic of the relationship between phenomenology and Marxism, of great interest is the equally recent Smyth and Westerman (eds.), *Marxism and Phenomenology*.



simply as an economic relationship, but as a fundamental activity that enables for the foundation of both humanity and history. It is through labour, understood in these terms, that human beings root themselves in the world around them, freely establishing the structures of meaning that regulate the existence of themselves and others. In this sense, it is possible to establish a connection with what Husserl would have argued in the *Crisis of the European Sciences*, regarding the character of bodily motility typical of the lifeworld.

While the living body is the fundamental mode in which the lifeworld is experienced as the presupposition of all human activity, the living body is always a body among others and also things. This “we-subjectivity” is “constantly functioning in wakeful life ... in the manifold ways of considering, together, objects pregiven to us in common, thinking together, valuing, planning, acting together”.<sup>25</sup>

“Living labor”, discussed by Marx in the *Manuscripts*, is the institution that enables this process to be concretized and stabilized and, in so doing, to regulate the relations between humanity, understood as a “species” and not simply as a sum of individuals, and the natural and artificial world in which it operates. By virtue of this, as Angus shows, labour is configured in Marx as a fundamental feature of human history. The social process of production that it is able to set in motion shapes the social relations in which we live and, consequently, allows for a periodization of human history. In other words, Marx’s concept of labour allows for an extension of Husserl’s intuition of the lifeworld as bodily motility, reconnecting the experience of the subject with the production of a historical community, founded on this fundamental assumption of social collaboration.

This production is [man’s] active species-life. By means of it nature appears as *his* work and his reality. The object of labor is, therefore, the *objectification of man’s species-life*; for he no longer reproduces himself merely intellectually, as in consciousness, but actively and in a real sense, and he sees his own reflection in a world which he has constructed.<sup>26</sup>

As we have seen, it is precisely regarding the idea of “production” that Patočka’s critique, which Angus shares, intervenes. The dialectical character of the labour process, which Marx draws upon the Hegelian tradition, inexorably ends up subjugating the subjective moment to the objective process within which it develops. In other words, the Marxian dialectic “transfers the entire process of the Idea outside human interiority to things themselves”.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, human subjectivity undergoes a process of immanentization that prevents it from any opening to levels of transcendence; what we referred to earlier when speaking of “verticality”. This limitation, already evident in Marx’s early works, is at the root of the progressive degeneration of Marxism from an attempt to achieve the emancipation of humanity to an increasingly aberrant manipulation of the subjects engaged in this path. To this limitation, Patočka responds by developing a “concept of technical civilization as immanentization” – particularly in his work on the idea of “super-civilization” and the dangers of

<sup>25</sup> Angus, *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism*, 157. Angus refers here to Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, 109.

<sup>26</sup> Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts”, 128. Quoted in Angus, *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism*, 162.

<sup>27</sup> Patočka, “Ideology and Life in the Idea”, 95. Quoted in Angus, *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism*, 165.

“technicization”<sup>28</sup> – “and a correlative concept of transcendence as the difficult emergence of subjectivity within a confining logic of history”.<sup>29</sup> As mentioned earlier, self-sacrifice, political dissent, and even the “care for the soul”, which Patočka derives from the Platonic tradition, are attempts to bring this lost transcendence back into view, within the unstoppable historical progress. “Left alone, as it were, history tends toward a self-enclosed dialectical logic, whereas, punctuated by the manifestation of transcendence to subjectivity, it becomes unpredictable”.<sup>30</sup> Angus is keen to emphasize how Patočka’s critique took root in the thought of Karel Kosík, who was himself committed to broadening the horizons of Marxism through a critical dialogue with Western philosophy. Although not quoting him directly, Kosík’s reference in the *Dialectics of the Concrete* to the need to think dialectics not only “horizontally”, but to rediscover its “genetic-dynamic” and “vertical” character seems to recall Patočka’s reflections.<sup>31</sup>

The vertical dimension in question here is Patočka’s terminology for the transcendental-phenomenological reduction, so that Kosík’s statement amounts to a declaration that Marxism depends upon phenomenology (and not just the rediscovery of Hegel) to recover subjectivity in a manner that does not ultimately subsume it within an objectivist philosophy of history.<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly, while distinctly grasping the tension between the two thinkers, Angus in turn does not seem to acknowledge Kosík’s skepticism towards Marxist humanism, which was considered at the time to be one of the main ways to reunite Marx’s thought with phenomenological and existentialist philosophy, as seen above in reference to other authors. Nonetheless, Angus shares the view that Kosík’s attempt goes far beyond mere “complementary humanism”. To correct and re-found Marxism on a phenomenological basis, a superficial intervention would not suffice. If anything, it is necessary to modify its foundations from a reinterpretation of the idea of labour through phenomenological categories. This also implies recognizing, as Angus does, that Patočka’s critique is essentially correct. There is no doubt that there is a convergence between the phenomenological conception of the lifeworld in terms of intersubjectivity and bodily motility and Marx’s idea of living labour as the origin of society and culture. However, “Marx’s early ontology of labor fails to make good on this convergence, as Jan Patočka and Ludwig Landgrebe demonstrate, due to the Hegelian assumption that re-embeds subjectivity within immanent history by objectivizing it within a dialectical determinism”.<sup>33</sup>

Having reached this point, we find perhaps one of *Groundwork*’s most profound insights. According to Angus’s interpretation, in fact, the aforementioned limit is, yes, valid, but only with regard to the ontology of labour as expressed in Marx’s early works. The discourse changes when one delves into its later formulations. In particular, the ontology of labour developed by Marx in the first volume of *Capital* is immune to

<sup>28</sup> See, in particular, Patočka, “Nadcivilizace a její vnitřní konflikt”; “The Dangers of Technicization in Science”; *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*.

<sup>29</sup> Angus, *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism*, 166.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Kosík, *Dialectics of the Concrete*, 31–32. Other implicit connections between the two thinkers are moreover easily found around their analyses of “sacrifice” as a political-existential practice. I have dealt with this topic in Tava, *The Risk of Freedom*, 73–76.

<sup>32</sup> Angus, *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism*, 167.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

earlier criticism and, as such, is capable of realizing that “ontology of the lifeworld” to which Husserl refers in paragraph 51 of the *Crisis of the European Sciences*, without properly developing it:

Even without any transcendental interest – that is, within the “natural attitude” (in the language of transcendental phenomenology the naïve attitude, prior to the epochē) – the life-world could have become the subject matter of a science of its own, an ontology of the life-world purely as an experiential world (i.e. as the world which is coherently, consistently, harmoniously intuitable in actual and possible experiencing intuition).<sup>34</sup>

Being a reflection conducted within the lifeworld, this project does not allow for the foundation of a science of this world in the phenomenological sense. It, however, “takes note of the regular structures of the lifeworld and instigates a universal reflection into the nature of the being of those structures”.<sup>35</sup> In other words, Angus’s thesis is that the more mature Marxian ontology of labour can develop an unexplored area of phenomenology, which is precisely this ontology of the lifeworld. The rethinking of a phenomenological Marxism rests on the fundamental junction between these two ontologies.

But how does this ontology of labour differ from that present in Marx’s early writings? Whereas in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, labour was still subsumed in an entirely objectified process, according to the canons of the dialectic of history, in *Capital* an ontology of labour emerges that takes the form of a “phenomenology of the role of human activity in nature”.<sup>36</sup> The instruments of labour provide a technical mediation between humanity and nature from which the process of history emerges. It is therefore no longer the case that labour, in its various conformations, is materialistically defined by the historical-economic conditions in which it is exercised. If anything, it is itself, operating directly on the plane of the lifeworld, that contributes to the constitution of this process. “Whereas history was previously added-into the labor process as an extrinsic factor, Marx’s later ontology explains the genesis of history from labor through the development of technology”.<sup>37</sup> By technology, Marx means something particularly wide-ranging that encompasses not only the technical means of science, but the natural and built environment in which we live, understood as an environment constructed and modified by previous natural and human interventions over the course of centuries. This construction completely loses, in *Capital*, that deterministic character aimed at continuous progress that still emerges in Marx’s earlier writings. History, from being the outcome of human self-production, becomes a more dynamic entity, which encompasses both the product of the technical intentionality typical of human progress and a baggage of non-intentional products that equally contribute to shaping the environment in which we live. In other words, the technological progressivism typical of orthodox Marxism (so much criticized by Patočka) seems to be outdated. Moreover, in this framework, labour activity is no longer aimed at simple and immediate production. The ontogenetic character of labour is clarified by Marx, who argues that the fruit of labour is destined to settle

<sup>34</sup> Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, 173. Quoted in Angus, *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism*, 170.

<sup>35</sup> Angus, *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism*, 171.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

in the lifeworld and generate the cultural substratum on which future generations will build their existence:

Immediate producers must work beyond the time necessary for the reproduction of their own labor power, that is, of themselves. They must generally perform surplus labor. This is the subjective condition. But the objective one is that they can also perform surplus labor; that is, that the natural conditions are such that part of their available labor-time is sufficient for their reproduction and self-preservation as producers; that the production of their necessary means of subsistence does not consume all their labor-power. The fertility of nature constitutes here a boundary, a starting point, a basis. In turn, the development of the social productive force constitutes the other.<sup>38</sup>

In this more advanced understanding of labour, Marx clarifies how while working humans do not simply attain self-preservation, but rather build something that is meant to last and to enrich their own lifeworld as well as that of future generations. By acknowledging this, Marx paves the way to a new conceptual framework that encompasses nature, labour, and culture. According to this conception, labour, far from being materialistically determined, consists of the manifold activities which allows us to form ever new cultural artefacts amid our natural dwellings.

This ontological feature of labor is based, in the final analysis, on a simple fact about nature: that nature supplies not only sufficiently, but plentifully, that labor do not exhaust itself in its own simple reproduction but can build up an excess that is passed on to future generations in the form of culture.<sup>39</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Angus is skeptical about the possibility of extrapolating these themes from the logic of *Capital* within which they were developed. Certainly, Marx, in speaking of the fecundity of nature in reference to labour surplus, did not intend to create an ontology of labour capable of dialoguing with the phenomenology of the lifeworld. Nevertheless, it is possible to trace a new path, going beyond Marx himself, to rethink the foundations of a phenomenological Marxism built on precisely these assumptions. Why this is so is explained by Angus in the introduction to his book. The reflections of Marx and Husserl present, if nothing else, a basic analogy. Both respond to certain crises of their time. The crisis Marx addresses in the nineteenth century is that of political economy due to the development of capitalist society. The one Husserl has in mind in the twentieth century is the crisis of scientific rationality on which European thought is based. The crisis of the twenty-first century, for Angus, is the ecological crisis. A crisis that, in a sense, encapsulates its predecessors, since it concerns both the economic organization of the planet and our ability to interpret its meaning in order to avert its extinction. This being the case, rethinking phenomenological Marxism at the crossroads between the ontologies of human labour and lifeworld may be one way of analysing and combating this crisis. Understanding contemporary technological labour in a broad sense, as world-building and essentially intertwined with our natural environment, beyond the immediate products of our actions,

<sup>38</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, 634. Quoted in Angus, *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism*, 185.

<sup>39</sup> Angus, *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism*, 185.

means taking full responsibility for this activity. In an era characterized by hyper-objects, nuclear waste, and growing artificial surplus that is destined to survive hundreds of generations, rethinking our being in the world, our lifeworld experience, as a responsible mediation between humanity and nature, between body and earth, means preparing ourselves to face this new crisis.

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## ORCID

Francesco Tava  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5273-1169>

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