Dialectics of the Ideal

Evald Ilyenkov and Creative Soviet Marxism

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BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2014

 ISBN 978-90-04-23097-2

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Reality of the Ideal

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Marxism started with a revolt against its nurse – Hegel's philosophy. In 1845 in Brussels, as Marx remembered, he and Engels decided to 'settle accounts with our erstwhile philosophical conscience (*Gewissen*)'.[1] The radical error of Hegelianism consists in the belief that ideas rule over the world, and the whole history of mankind is some 'other-being' of pure ideas. So Marx and Engels intended to turn philosophy upside down – to drive away philosophy, with its 'drunken speculation', from the 'science of history' (*Wissenschaft der Geschichte*), and to depict reality as it is, materialistically.

The subject of philosophy had been narrowed down to the 'realm of pure thoughts'. *Das Reich des reinen Gedankens* is the only thing that falls to the share of philosophy after the expulsion of it from nature and history by 'positive sciences', Engels declares.[2] To study the laws of the thought process – formal logic and the dialectical method – is all that philosophers could do with profit to the cause. All the other 'philosophical chattels' became useless for a scientific understanding of reality.

Very soon after, however, Georgy Plekhanov and his pupils resurrected philosophy as a science about all and everything: 'the general synthetic view on nature and life'.[3] Later, the drawing of a philosophical picture of the world, à la Comte or Eugen Dühring, becomes the favourite business of Soviet Diamat.

1. Marx 1961b, p. 10.
2. See Engels 1962, p. 306.
3. Plekhanov 1928, p. 324. 'Philosophy is a *synthesis* of cognised being of the given epoch'; Plekhanov 1928, p. 325.

Young Evald Ilyenkov attempted to return Marxist philosophy to its roots, having restricted its subject to the sphere of 'pure thought'. Theses on the subject of philosophy, written by Ilyenkov and Valentin Korovikov, caused a juicy scandal at Moscow University, after which both philosophers were removed from teaching philosophy. For all that, Ilyenkov remained constant in understanding philosophy as the science of ideas, the 'dialectics of the ideal'.

I

It is generally believed that ideas can exist only in the head, in the mind, and not in reality. In ordinary language the word 'ideal' turned into a synonym of 'mental', in contrast to the 'real' as tangible, sensuously perceptible reality. Meanwhile, having examined the contents of the human mind, Plato discovered two different kinds of phenomena: alongside the sensual images of things, which are leaky like a pot with holes, or a runny nose,[4] there is something persistent and universal. Ilyenkov interprets Plato's *eidê* as:

> the *universal norms of that culture* within which an individual awakens to conscious life, as well as requirements that he must internalise as a necessary law of his own life-activity.[5]

Mathematical truths and logical categories, moral imperatives and laws of state, artistic styles and the grammatical order of language – all these phenomena are strictly ideal. They form a peculiar world into which human beings are plunged head over heels since the moment of their birth. It is the world of *social relations*, embodied in various objective forms, from children's toys to temples and pyramids. The very person, the thinking subject or 'self' is ideal. In its essence it is, as Marx notes, an 'ensemble of social relations',[6] represented in an individual natural body and psyche.

Ilyenkov, following Marx, looks for clues to the nature of the ideal in the structure of social relations. His *Dialectics of the Ideal* openly aligns itself with Marx's *Capital*, especially with the analysis of the value-form in the process of commodity exchange given in the first chapter. In Ilyenkov's opinion, the value-form is 'a typical and characteristic case of ideality in general'.[7]

A commodity can express its value in no other way than in the corporeal 'mirror' of another commodity.[8] This reflective expression of value is called in Marx

4. See Plato's 'Cratylus'; Plato 1903, 440cd.
5. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 11.
6. 'Das ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse'; Marx 1961a, p. 6.
7. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 46.
8. 'Jeder andre Warenkörper wird zum Spiegel des Leinwandwerts'; Marx 1962, p. 77.

the 'ideal or represented form' – in contrast to the 'sensuously perceived real corporeal form' of commodities.[9]

In the canonical Russian edition of *Capital*, the expression *vorgestellte Form* is translated as 'form, existing only in notion (*forma, sushchestvujushchaja lish' v predstavlenii*)'. The translator, I.I. Skvortsov-Stepanov, clearly regarded the ideal as a purely subjective, imaginary phenomenon. In the next sentence Marx writes that the relation of commodities to gold (the money form, price), 'exists only in their heads' (*in ihren Köpfen spukt*), so to speak. Notice that this is said about the 'heads' of *things* – the very commodities, and not of their owners, men.

Correcting the 'unfortunate inadequacy' of translation, Ilyenkov specifies that we face an economical and not psychological phenomenon. Marx writes about the very real relationship between commodities, and not the subjective perception of their values by the human head. Commodity exchange, of course, cannot happen without the participation of the human head. However,

> value is *represented* not in the head, but in gold . . . The available translation effaces, actually, the *objective dialectics* that Marx reveals in the relation between value and its money expression, i.e. price. The German word *vorgestellte* figures here not in its subjectively-psychological meaning, but in that meaning which is associated, both in Russian and German languages, with the word *representative, representation*.[10]

Other examples of the objective ideal representation are given in *Dialectics of the Ideal*. In this way a diplomat represents his own country, a word symbolically represents a thing, and ballerinas in white vestures represent little swans. All these are representations of the real world in forms of people's collective and social consciousness. But it would be a mistake to think that the ideal as such is a form of social consciousness.[11] Quite the opposite: social consciousness is a form of being of the ideal. It is the highest form of ideal reality, the ideal as it is, *in puris naturalibus*.

The ideal, by its nature, is infinite and eternal ('Plato's theorem'), and therefore it cannot be an attribute of a finite creature – neither a particular person, nor the whole of humankind. For Ilyenkov, the ideal is an attribute of the very Nature, or Matter, like Spinoza's *Cogitatio* – Thought with a capital T.

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9. 'Der Preis oder die Geldform der Waren ist, wie ihre Wertform überhaupt, eine von ihrer handgreiflich reellen Körperform unterschiedne, also nur ideelle oder vorgestellte Form'; Marx 1962, p. 110.

10. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 195.

11. Ilyenkov was interpreted in such a way by his elder friend Mikhail Lifshits. See Lifshits 1984, p. 123.

> Matter is constantly possessed of thought, it is constantly thinking of itself… As there is no thought without matter, considered to be substance, as also no matter without thought, considered to be its attribute.[12]

Man himself, with all his deeds and thoughts, the whole history of human society is a moment and fragment of the eternal being of Nature, 'one of the necessary links, closing the universal circle of the world's matter'.[13]

Ilyenkov demonstrated this statement in his very first work, *Cosmology of Mind*. He sees the mission of thinking beings in resisting entropy. Sacrificing themselves, they have to return the freezing cosmos to its initial fire-like state. The death of the 'thinking mind' becomes a creative act as the birth of the new Universe and of some new other intelligent life in it. The term 'ideal' does not feature in *Cosmology*, and it plays no important role in Ilyenkov's first book *The Dialectics of Abstract and Concrete in Marx's 'Capital'*. Only at the beginning of the 1960s does the philosopher come closer to creating his conception of the ideal. Still, during Ilyenkov's lifetime a geographer Igor Zabelin recalled:

> In the course of private conversations I managed to persuade my friend philosopher E.V. Ilyenkov to undertake a broad world-viewing elaboration of the problem of the ideal. He performed this task with depth and originality peculiar to him. As a result, for the first time in Soviet literature, a big article *The Ideal* appeared in the second volume of *Philosophical Encyclopaedia* (1962), having put an end to the 'encyclopaedic conspiracy of silence' in this field.[14]

Indeed, until this moment the category of the ideal remained practically unexplored in Marxist philosophy, though it may be met in every manual of Diamat – already in the first chapter, narrating the great battle between materialism and idealism. Defining the nature of the ideal, Diamaticians contented themselves with the ritual of quoting the Afterword to the second edition of *Capital*:

> The ideal is nothing else than the material, transplanted into the human head and translated there.[15]

The definition, speaking frankly, is not all that profound. It might easily have been formulated by some sensualist like La Mettrie or Cabanis. In this formula there is not a trace of the specifically Marxist historicism or the 'practical materialism' along the lines of the *Theses on Feuerbach*. Metaphors 'transplanted' and 'translated' do not promote clarity.

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12. Ilyenkov 1991, pp. 415–16.
13. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 419.
14. Zabelin 1970, p. 223.
15. '… Das Ideelle nichts andres als das im Menschenkopf umgesetzte und übersetzte Materielle'; Marx 1962, p. 27.

Commenting on this definition, Ilyenkov states that one should not interpret the 'human head' naturalistically, and that Marx's definition of the ideal 'loses its concrete meaning' outside the context of his polemic against Hegel.[16] Ilyenkov well understood that the verbatim reading of Marx's definition of the ideal plays into the hands of the 'naturalists' of Pavlov's school and adjoins to them Diamaticians. Once, conversing with friends, Ilyenkov projected this definition onto one of the ideal phenomena: 'Love is a sexual appetite, transplanted into the human head and translated there'. The joke was appreciated and became popular.

A good definition, as Ilyenkov used to say referring to Spinoza, must express the efficient cause (*causa efficiens*) of the thing defined. But the 'human head' can hardly be the cause of the ideal, no matter how one interprets that head – either in the naturalistic or in the cultural-historical sense. The concrete Marxist definition of the ideal must 'conceive the act of birth of the ideal from the process of man's objective-practical activity'.[17] The head is not a subject, but merely a servant and tool in this process of 'transplanting of the material'. The real subject is *human labour*. All things, having been involved by man into the circle of his labour activity, receive a 'seal of ideality' (Ilyenkov's expression). With this seal of ideality the concealed essence of things, the causes and laws of their being, are revealed.

In order for the expression of essence of a thing to be ideally pure, the natural body of some *other* thing must become the material for this expression. The thing commends its 'soul' to another thing, and the latter appears as a *symbol*. The ideal is the very material, only inverted by its essence.

The ideal does not admix anything to the essence of things; that is why it is so easy to take up the ideal for this very essence (idealism). The absolute 'transparency' of expressing the nature (efficient causes) of things is a characteristic form of thought. It is certainly not allowed to include in the category of the ideal just any subjective perceptions, conceiving only external features of things or the 'fleeting mental states of an individual, completely personal, not possessing any universal meaning for another individual', as Ilyenkov insists. In classical philosophy, since Socrates and Plato, it is the *adequate and universally valid* forms of thought that are called 'ideas'.

> However, later (and exactly in line with one-sided empiricism – Locke, Berkeley, Hume and their successors) the word 'idea' and its derivative, the adjective 'ideal', once again became a simple collective term for any mental phenomena, for even a fleeting, mental state of an individual 'self', and this

16. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 19.
17. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 197.

> usage also obtained enough power to maintain quite a stable tradition, which has survived, as we can see, to this day.[18]

Destroying the watershed between ideas and sensual images, empiricists lose the ability not only to solve but even to pose correctly the problem of the ideal. In his day, Hegel spoke ironically that Englishmen 'call a simple image – of a dog, for example – an *idea*'.[19] By doing so, they could hardly deny the presence of ideas in the head of this very dog. The order and connection of 'ideas' like that certainly have nothing in common with the order and connection of things, including that real social tie which Plato called 'politeia'. The former tie is an associative relationship, the 'passive order of perceptions' (Hegel); while the latter one is a logical, active, cause-effect relationship.

The duality of the contents of our mind is due to the fact that the human mind is a servant of two masters. It handles both the vital activity of the organic body of man and the cultural life of society. The body pays to the psyche for its work by *sensations* (light, acoustic, muscular, and so on), and the society pays by *ideas*. The ideal is a reality entirely social, cultural and historical through and through.

> The ideal is present only where there is an individual performing his activity in forms given to him by the preceding development of humanity. Man is distinguished from animals by the existence of an ideal plane of activity . . .[20]
>
> The ideal is therefore nothing else than the form of things, but existing outside things, namely in man, in the form of his living activity, *the socially determined form of the human being's activity.*[21]

The logical structure of ideal representation, in Ilyenkov, appears this way: the essence of thing *A* is mirrored in the natural form of thing *B*, and in such a way that the nature of the thing-mirror *B* by no means mingles with the nature of the thing *A* which it represents.

This analogy with the mirror reflection is rather conventional. The mirror reflects objects from their outer side and passively, whereas the ideal reflection grasps *the gist* of an object and is a *form of activity* with this object. In this sense Ilyenkov defines the ideal as a 'subjective being of an object', or 'the determinate being[22] of the external thing in the phase of its becoming in the activity of the subject'.[23] There is nothing ideal beyond human activity.

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18. Ilyenkov 2009, pp. 11–12.
19. Hegel 1987, p. 173.
20. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 202.
21. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 189.
22. *Nalichnoe bytie* is a Russian translation for Hegel's *Dasein*.
23. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 193.

Only at this 'absolutely highest' stage of its development as thought[24] can Matter achieve its ideal self-expression. In the physical world, eternal and infinite laws of Nature are realised indirectly, over the infinite series of things (bodies) mutually determining each other in motion. And in the world of ideas, the same laws are realised directly and immediately by one particular finite thing which acts according to the nature of all the other things, *ex analogia universi*, to use Spinoza's words. This universal form of activity is a distinctive feature of a 'thinking thing' (*res cogitans*).

> In nature itself one cannot see directly the 'pure form' of the thing, i.e. its own structure, organisation and form of movement, peculiar to it. In 'not humanised' (*neochelovechennoy*) nature the proper form and measure of a thing is always 'obstructed', 'complicated' and 'distorted' by the more or less accidental interaction with other similar things. Man in his practice extracts the proper form and measure of a thing, and orientates himself in his activity right at this form.[25]

In the physical world, the essence of every thing can realise itself only in part. The character and amount of its realisation depend on circumstances and countless external factors, some of which help to disclose the essence of the thing, while others impede and hinder the thing in realising its potential. That is the reason why ideally pure lines and forms are not observed here. The particular thing can only approximate to its ideal state, but never reaches it in actuality.

As in the market, sooner or later, there appears an ideal commodity-equivalent which is able to adequately express values of all other commodities, as in nature there emerges with necessity a certain thing whose form of movement – labour – allows one to express adequately the essence of any thing. Labouring man dissects the flesh of determinate being, exposing the essence of the thing and representing it in ideally pure form, separately from that very thing to which this essence belongs. Man cleanses and assumes the essences of all other things, turning them into the forms of his own activity. Where the essence of thing *A* receives such a peculiar *other-being*[26] within the field of activity of thing *B*, we meet with the phenomenon of the ideal.

After ceasing the activity process, the ideal materialises, having hardened in various objective forms. It can be revived and caught only by new, 'deobjectifying' action with the object of culture.

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24. 'All systems of philosophy equally recognise that thought is the absolutely highest form of development of the universe', Ilyenkov asserts, perhaps somewhat hastily; Ilyenkov 1991, p. 419.
25. Ilyenkov 1968, p. 261.
26. The Hegelian term *Anderssein*.

> The definition of the ideal is thus strictly dialectical. It is that which is not, and at the same that which is; that which does not exist in the form of an external, sensuously perceived thing but at the same time does exist *as an active faculty of man*. It is being, which is, however, equal to not-being, or the determinate being of the external thing in the phase of its becoming in the activity of the subject, in the form of its inner image, requirement, urge, and aim. That is why the *ideal being* of the thing is distinguished from its *real being*. . . . The ideal is therefore the subjective being of the object, or its 'other-being', i.e. the being of one object in and through another, as Hegel expressed this situation.[27]

By themselves, these objects are *material*. There cannot be anything in the world besides matter in motion; Ilyenkov repeats this sacramental formula by Lenin. The ideal is only *the peculiar nexus* of material things, the special form of movement of bodies in the process of labour and within culture (created by labour). This is the mode of active representation (reflection) of the nature of things by means of other things.

There is not a thing in the world in whose natural body the ideal could not 'settle down', and equally the nature of anything can be expressed in the ideal form. Our thoughts and ideas are as various as Nature itself. Man is an ideal 'mirror of the world', *speculum mundi*. All of the infinite Universe, from elementary particles to stars and galaxies, is turned into his 'inorganic body'. The artefacts, made by human labour, are, as it were, the 'money' of Nature. The essence of each thing and the laws of Nature are exchanged for artefacts, acquiring herewith their ideal expression.

The sense of beauty is considered by Ilyenkov as an index of the ideality of a representation. Advanced aesthetic feeling (creative imagination, fantasy, and so forth) makes it possible to discover intuitively – prior to especially logical analysis – the root of the matter, hidden from the ordinary senses.

> Under the form of beauty the 'natural' measure of the thing is seized. In its 'natural' form, i.e. in nature as it is, this measure never appears in its pure expression, in all its 'transparency', as it occurs due to human activity, in the retort of civilisation, i.e. in the 'artificially created' nature.[28]

The natural organs of sense scan the external contours of things. And imagination enables us to look under this 'shell of the universe' to see the internal nexus of things. Beauty is a measure of concordance of the exterior appearance of a thing to its genotype, or *Gattungswesen* (generic essence), as the young Marx would say.

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27. Ilyenkov 1974, pp. 192–3.
28. Ilyenkov 1968, pp. 261–2.

An animal sees in outward things only that which conforms to its organic need. Aesthetically developed man perceives things as they are, from the viewpoint of their own substance, casting aside all that is attendant and worthless. 'Wipe off the accidental lines – And you will see: the world is fine'.[29]

The highest refined forms of sensory perception are created and developed by *art*. Ilyenkov devoted a lengthy article, *On the Aesthetic Nature of Fantasy*, to the analysis of interrelations between two ideal forms of human activity – artistic and scientific-theoretical.[30] Ilyenkov studied the function of creative imagination in the process of scientific cognition. He challenges Hegel's opinion that art and artistic imagination is a lower form of activity in comparison to science. However, another opinion (proposed by Schelling and the German Romantics), affirming the priority of artistic feeling over discursive thought, seems equally unacceptable to Ilyenkov. These spheres of the ideal reality, alongside the third one – the sphere of morality – are equal in rights and equally derived in respect to the substance of human life, which is *labour*, the process of the practical transformation of the external world and of man himself in his social relations.

II

Ilyenkov's 1962 article 'The Ideal' gave rise to strident debates. The approval of the objectivity of ideal forms was regarded by many as Hegelianism, as sheer idealism. The first critical article against Ilyenkov's conception of the ideal appeared only at the end of the 1960s though. The attack was launched by a little-known philosopher David Dubrovsky. To his mind, each sensation or an image of a thing in the brain, or any 'impression' (*perezhivanie*) at all, is ideal. For instance, upon seeing a tree, in my brain is being formed

> some neurodynamical system, caused by the impact of the tree and responsible for the image of the tree I experience; the latter is not a material, but strictly *ideal reflection* of the object. This ideal reflection is a subjective reality, information, appearing to me in a pure form, in its seeming separation from its material substratum, viz. that neurodynamical system which is activated at the present moment in my brain by the external impact.[31]

Since the ideal is a special kind of information, Dubrovsky places responsibility for the final solution to the problem of the ideal upon cybernetics. Relying on the data of neurophysiology and mathematical logic, cybernetics will decrypt the

29. From the poem 'Requital' by Alexandr Blok, 1911.
30. See Ilyenkov 1964.
31. Dubrovsky 1968, p. 126.

'neurodynamical code of subjective phenomena' and simulate thinking, communication and other ideal processes.

From such a perspective, the ideal entirely loses any objectivity, turning into the full synonym of the 'subjective', into its dumb shadow. The ideal is a property of the 'brain neurodynamical structures', which are the objective reality.

Dubrovsky's reasonings are replete with references to the contemporary achievements of the natural sciences. He is prudent to avoid political economy, and does not try to follow Ilyenkov into the labyrinths of *Capital* and still hope to examine Marx's concept of the ideal. If Dubrovsky announces, for example, that *price*, as an 'ideal being of a commodity' (*ideale Dasein der Ware*), is a *subjective reality*, then it becomes hardly possible to distinguish Marx from Keynes. And anyone who suggests to cyberneticians that they venture to decrypt the neurodynamical code of price or other ideal forms of value would be considered simply a cretin.

An old materialistic notion – that the soul is a property of the body (in particular, the brain) – is concealed under the new-fangled neurocybernetic suit. Such a materialism may be called *somatic*, in order to distinguish it from *practical* materialism, which considers the objective activity of man, social labour, to be the substance of all ideal phenomena.

Three months later, *Voprosy Filosofii* published Ilyenkov's answer to Dubrovsky.[32] Oddly enough, the term 'ideal' does not figure there, while the matter concerns such purely ideal subjects as *personality* and *talent*. Ilyenkov agrees readily that the mental functions, one and all, are realised by the brain, and naturally have their correlates in the 'neurodynamical architectonics'. And these brain structures in turn are determined partially by genetics and partially by the living circumstances of each individual.

The question is whether these structures can be regarded as *the first origin, 'substance'* of the ideal form of human activity. Ilyenkov gives a negative answer to this question, referring to the simple 'scientifically certified fact' that in the course of the evolution of living creatures, the number of 'degrees of freedom' of their activity is growing. And to an equal degree, the dependence of their behaviour from the structure of nerve knots is diminishing. The higher the level of the development of an individual, the less its behaviour is determined by genetically assigned stereotypes (instincts), and the more diverse are those schemata of behaviour which are formed during its lifetime, that is, the *psychic* in the proper sense of the word.

In human beings this freedom reaches its maximum, acquiring *complete* independence from the genetically inherited structure of the brain. The highest ideal

32. See Ilyenkov 1968.

psychical functions are formed only on condition that the schemata of brain activity are dictated *utterly and completely* by the nature of things, represented in artefacts. And these functions are inherited, propagated not via chromosomes, but via cultural forms of things created by labour.

> Only on this soil, on the soil of culture, genuine originality blossoms, the genuine, i.e. specifically human, individuality which is called, in the language of science, the *personality*.[33]

Earlier, in the middle of the 1960s, Ilyenkov started to participate in the Zagorsk experiment with deaf-blind children, under the direction of A.I. Meshcheryakov. Here, the process of forming the personality is extended in time, giving the opportunity to witness, as if in slow motion, *the moment of birth of the ideal* – the emergence of the human self.

In the eyes of Ilyenkov, the all-round harmonious development of personality is the final aim and sense of world history. In his book *On Idols and Ideals*, metamorphoses of the ideal of perfect personality are traced over the course of human history. The author's intention reminds one of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*: travelling through minds and countries, the 'beautiful ideal' proves itself and improves itself after every new clash with reality.

The second round of polemics between Ilyenkov and Dubrovsky may have occurred seven to eight years later, but *Dialectics of the Ideal* never saw the light of day during Ilyenkov's lifetime.[34] After the author's death, the manuscript appeared at last, but almost all the criticism at Dubrovsky's expense was for some reason excised by the editors of *Voprosy Filosofii*.

The affair took a different turn after the publishing of the manuscript by M.A. Lifshits *On the Ideal and the Real*. This publication was also posthumous and abridged.[35] Mikhail Aleksandrovich belonged to the first Soviet generation of philosophers. By some miracle Lifshits survived the 'discussions' of Stalin's times when, in Lifshits's own words, 'argumentation resembled the sound of a falling mine – hello from hell'. Ilyenkov was acquainted with Lifshits since the beginning of the 1950s, and they communicated in a friendly way until the end of Ilyenkov's life. It is not easy to understand why Lifshits commenced the 'dialogue' concerning the ideal only after the death of his friend.

He treated the ideal as some 'limit' of sensuously perceived things – the 'real abstractions' to which things can approach, having no prospect of success. Actually, such is the most widespread meaning of the word 'ideal' in ordinary

33. Ilyenkov 1968, p. 152.
34. Only a fragment was published in English; see Ilyenkov 1977.
35. See Lifshits 1984. The full version came to the light only in our century; see Lifshits 2003.

language and the language of science: the imaginary pattern, the acme of perfection in some work or a class of things. Lifshits had little interest in that phenomenon of representation (the active *quid pro quo*, the 'ideal positing' of itself as the other, and vice versa), which was called the ideal by Marx and, after him, Ilyenkov.

Any dialogue or polemic has a sense only on the condition that both parties speak about the same subject. Every disagreement presupposes the tacit consent, at least consent concerning the meaning of the words. But Lifshits starts his 'dialogue' by changing the *meaning of the term*. His 'ideal' has as little in common with 'ideal' in Ilyenkov as the constellation of the Dog has in common with 'man's best friend'. Ilyenkov looks for ideal forms in the world of human activity, in real objectively-practical relationships among people, while Lifshits's thought hovers in the world of abstractions, such as 'ideal gas', 'ideal crystal', and so on.

Unlike Dubrovsky, Lifshits tries to appeal to Marx's works where he finds the distinction of *Ideal* and *Ideelle*. Lifshits complains that the Russian language does not have two terms for rendering the difference (moreover, 'the contrast') of these two categories.

> *Ideelle* means mental, existing in head, immaterial. . . . Marx's *Ideelle* is translated as 'ideal', but it means the ideas in our heads, something mental, belonging to consciousness. All the excellent quotations Ilyenkov gives to vindicate his thesis, refer not to ideal, but to contents of human thought, which can be as ideal or as not ideal at all. Everywhere in such quotations Marx uses not *Ideale*, but *Ideelle*.[36]

In this instance, Lifshits is wrong. Actually, he simply did not even trouble himself to check these 'excellent quotations'. For example, take this one from the *Grundrisse*:

> Indem die Konsumtion das Bedürfnis *neuer* Produktion schafft, also den idealen, innerlich treibenden Grund der Produktion, der ihre Voraussetzung ist. . . . [D]ie Konsumtion den Gegenstand der Produktion ideal *setzt*, als innerliches Bild, als Bedürfnis, als Trieb und als Zweck.[37]

As we can see, the adjective *ideale* figures here twice, and precisely in the very meaning Lifshits ascribes to the term *ideelle*: as 'anticipation' of something not yet real; as 'existent in idea', still not materialised; and above all, as 'inner image' and 'purpose' of human activity. Marx's *objectively-practical* concept of *ideale*, carried on by Ilyenkov, absolutely does not accord with the *contemplatively-aesthetic* concept of the ideal in Lifshits.

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36. Lifshits 1984, p. 130.
37. Marx 1953, p. 13.

The typical Hegelian term 'ideal positing' is italicised by Marx. It seems strange that Lifshits could have missed this, reading the famous Introduction (*Einleitung*) to the original version of *Capital*. Ilyenkov cites this passage both in *Philosophical Encyclopaedia* (the article *Ideal*) and in *Dialectical Logic*. Consumption of the product of labour is an internal, ideal moment of production itself. In the process of consumption, man not only *really* reproduces his labour power, but also *ideally* produces

> the form itself of man's living activity, or the faculty of creating an object of a certain form and using it for its purpose, i.e. according to its role and function in the social organism. In the form of a living, active faculty of man as the agent of social production, the object, as an outcome of production, exists ideally, i.e. as an inner image, requirement, and an urge and aim of human activity.[38]

If the activity-oriented concept of the ideal in Ilyenkov *de facto* arises from the logical analysis of the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, among the dozen of quotations with which Lifshits decorated his work on the ideal there is *not a single instance* in which the term *Ideale* should be used. If, while reading Marx's writings, he happened upon just one piece of *direct textual evidence* for his interpretation of the ideal as 'some standard or pattern which can be achieved only through infinite approximation',[39] then Lifshits would hardly have lost such opportunity to cite the testimony of the 'church father'.

It seems to me that Lifshits was quite right in considering that Ilyenkov paid too little attention to the difference between the terms *Ideale* and *Ideelle*. Another matter is that the terms are not at all *directly opposite* or 'contrary', as Lifshits argued with reference to Schelling (obviously, for lack of a better witness). In fact, Marx opposes both 'idealities' to *reality*. At the same time, *Ideale* and *Ideelle* are drawn together, expressing two different aspects of one and the same social relationship (for example, the relation of consumption to production, or commodities to money).

Aside from that, Lifshits's attack on Ilyenkov rests upon sheer misunderstanding. For some obscure reason, he thought that Ilyenkov limited the ideal to the sphere of social consciousness. But the latter said nothing of the kind. It is Lifshits himself who has drawn such a conclusion 'by means of the algebraic conversion of quotations'.[40] And then he devotes the main part of his 'dialogue' to a refutation of this misreading.

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38. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 189.
39. Lifshits 1984, p. 123.
40. 'So, by means of the algebraic conversion of quotations we have made it clear that "the form of activity of social man", which is called the ideal, is a form of social consciousness'; Lifshits 1984, p. 123.

Many times Ilyenkov repeated that the ideal is a *form of objectively-practical activity*, that it is a special *relation of things* in which they are placed by human labour.[41] The objective ideal relationship between things is *only reflected* by social consciousness, and most often it is reflected inadequately, in a mystically 'inverted form', religious or economical (fetishism of the commodity). The ideal is not a form of consciousness; on the contrary, consciousness is a form of expression of that ideal relationship of representation, which emerges between material things in the process of labour. Lifshits interpreted it in reverse.

If Dubrovsky considered the ideal as a *purely subjective* phenomenon, and Lifshits affirms the *absolute objectivity* of the ideal, not at all depending on human subjectivity (neither on consciousness, nor on the material-practical activity of men), then Ilyenkov sees in the ideal a '*subjective image of objective reality*'.[42] The mutual conversion of object and subject, the dialectical transition of the form of activity into the form of thing, and vice versa, is nothing other than *human labour*. That is why, in the eyes of Ilyenkov, labour is a living source of the ideal.

III

Soon after the debates on the ideal had started, Karl Popper presented his report at the Third International Congress for logic, methodology and philosophy of science in 1967, in which he spoke of the 'world of *objective contents of thought*', which he called 'the third world'.[43] As Popper confesses, he invented this term 'for want of a better name'. For some reason he did not like the classical term 'the ideal'.

Since that time, in the philosophical literature not once did there flicker a comparison of Ilyenkov's concept of the ideal with the 'third world'. Opening the symposium on Ilyenkov, the current Chancellor of Helsinki University, Ilkka Niiniluoto, shared a memory:

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41. 'The ideal form is *the form of a thing created by social human labour*, reproducing forms of the objective material world, which exist independently of man. Or, conversely, *the form of labour realised in the substance of nature* . . . and, therefore, presenting itself to man, the creator, as *the form of a thing* or as a special *relationship between things*, a relationship in which one thing realises, reflects another, [a relationship] in whose things have been placed by man, by his labour, and which would never arise on its own'; Ilyenkov 2009, p. 60, my italics.

42. This definition of the ideal is formulated in *Philosophical Encyclopaedia* and is repeated in *Dialectical Logic*; see Ilyenkov 1962, p. 219, and Ilyenkov 1974, p. 165, respectively.

43. The term ascends to the *drittes Reich* of pure thought, as Gottlob Frege described it; see Frege 2003, p. 50.

> In the late 1970s I read an English translation of Ilyenkov's article *The Concept of the Ideal*, which I found strikingly similar to Karl Popper's conception of the World 3 of human social constructions.[44]

Apparently, Niiniluoto believed that he was paying a compliment to Ilyenkov. But the latter should be certainly grieved if he had heard about this 'striking similarity'. Ilyenkov himself spoke of Popper in an extremely disparaging manner, even with a jeer sometimes. The concept of the third world was familiar to Ilyenkov, and he regarded it as 'a belated type of archaic objective idealism, closely resembling traditional Platonism'.[45]

This appraisal is hardly accurate. Popper's third world is still further from Plato's over-heavenly world of ideas than from Ilyenkov's 'dialectics of the ideal'. Firstly, the third world is open to changes. Secondly, errors dwell here alongside truths. Thirdly, it is being created by people, and does not last from the beginning of time. So, there is almost nothing of Platonism in the concept of third world. And how could it be otherwise? Popper expended a good half of his life to shatter 'the spell of Plato'. It is mainly the recognition of the autonomy of the ideal that makes Popper related to the Greek idealist.[46]

And therein lies Ilyenkov's objection. For Marxists, there exists only one real world – the world of 'matter in motion'. It is the world matter, ideally representing itself in itself and by means of itself, baring its innermost essence – the laws of nature – in the process of the labour activity of its higher creatures, namely thinking beings. The dialectical circuit of matter within itself disturbs the equilibrium of discursive reason (*rassudok, Verstand*) with its formal logic. The world begins to trifurcate in the 'mind's eye' and, as a consequence, the insoluble problem of correlating knowledge and reality emerges.

> To know an object – and be unable to correlate this knowledge (knowledge of the *object*!) with the object?! In actual fact, this paradoxical situation arises where a person does not really know an object, but knows something else. What? Phrases about the object. Words, terms, formulas, signs, symbols, and stable combinations thereof deposited in science, mastered (memorized) *in place of* knowledge of the object – as a special object that exists above and outside reality, as a special world of ideal, abstract, phantom 'objects'. It is here that an illusion of knowledge arises, followed by the insoluble task of relating this illusory knowledge to reality, to life…[47]

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44. Niiniluoto 2000, p. 8.
45. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 51.
46. First of all, Popper strives to prove 'the (more or less) *independent existence of the third world*'; see Popper 1968, p. 334. 'The idea of *autonomy* is central to my theory of the third world'; Popper 1968, p. 343.
47. Ilyenkov 2002, p. 86.

Ilyenkov most probably bears in mind here the 'third world' by Popper, populated by 'linguistic entities'.[48]

The problem of the correlation of knowledge with a thing arises only if they are treated as two primordially different 'worlds'. Reality ('world' number one) seems to be transcendent or 'the beyond' with respect to knowledge ('world' number three), while the individual consciousness ('world' number two) is allotted a part of a medium, correlating ideas with things. All the while truth is being sheltered *between* the 'worlds' like Epicurean gods. Little wonder, then, that Popper considered truth to be a purely relative concept and altogether rejected the existence of absolute truths. However, as Ilyenkov's disciple S.N. Mareyev noticed, relative truth without the absolute truth is as the North Pole without the South – namely nonsense.

The very concept of truth is different in dialectics and formal logic. The latter demands to eliminate subjectivity – this ideal is clearly pronounced in the title of the report by Popper: 'Epistemology without a knowing subject'. By contrast, in dialectics truth is understood as a *process of transformation* of the subjective into the objective, and vice versa. And the ideal is an objective form of a subject's activity.

It is precisely *form*, not substance.[49] The ideal is not possessed of any autonomy in respect to its material substance (labour). There is no *interaction* whatsoever between the ideal and the material, body and mind, as Ilyenkov believes. The ideal is a form (image, function) of representing the wholly material – or *practical*, to speak more concretely – activity of man. The social labour runs 'parallel' in the attributes of extension and thought, presenting by itself simultaneously mental and corporeal action.

> Labour, the process of changing nature by the action of social man, is that 'subject' to which thought belongs as 'predicate'. And nature, the universal matter of nature, is its substance. Sub-stance, having become, in the person of man, the subject of all its changes, the cause of itself (*causa sui*).[50]

Ilyenkov, following his favourite philosopher Spinoza, considers the phenomenon of the interaction of mind and body as *an objective appearance*, that is, the practically determined illusion, like the rotation of the Sun in heaven as it is observed from the Earth, or the phenomenon described by Marx, namely the 'reification' of social relations in the market economy. Meanwhile, Popper

48. '*Theories, or propositions, or statements are the most important third-world linguistic entities*'; Popper 1972, p. 157.

49. Allusion to the famous thesis by Ferdinand de Saussure: '*la langue est une forme et non une substance*'; see Saussure 1916, p. 169.

50. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 54.

applied much of his efforts toward defending an interaction of the first and the second worlds.[51]

According to Ilyenkov, consciousness is a 'mode' of the ideal reality, and not a separate world. With this view, not each and every psychical phenomenon is included into the concept of consciousness, but only higher functions which are responsible for the orientation of individuum in society, in the historically formed realm of culture. Ilyenkov excludes from the concept of consciousness any lower biological functions that constitute the material layer of psyche.

Both Popper's 'second world' and Dubrovsky's 'subjective reality' are a combination of natural and cultural psychical functions. In the course of life, our natural inclinations entangle with ideas so tightly and sophisticatedly that it becomes extremely difficult to separate this or that function into a pure form. In any natural psychical (as well as a neurophysiological and cerebral) function may well be 'ideally represented' this or that cultural-historical reality.

The easiest solution to the problem is proposed by somatic materialism. It ascribes social functions, represented in brain structures, to the nerve tissue as its natural properties, or innate faculties of a person.

> Who would not call to mind here the good Dogberry teaching the night-watchman Seacoal: 'To be a well-favoured man is the gift of fortune; but reading and writing comes by nature'.[52]

The somatic solution to the problem of the ideal fetishises the body, endowing it with the ideal qualities alien to its biological nature.

Ilyenkov conducted a peculiar mental experiment. On behalf of Spinoza, he developed, so to say, the *ennobled* version of somatic materialism. Having been inherited by Spinoza from Descartes, the concept of the 'thinking *thing*' (*res cogitans*) was interpreted by Ilyenkov in a materialist way as the 'thinking *body*'. In so doing, thought becomes treated as a faculty of the body to move along the contours of any other bodies. Having realised the form of its own motion, the thinking body creates an 'adequate idea' about the contours of the external thing. Such is, in Ilyenkov's opinion, the principle of 'intuitive cognition' in Spinoza.[53]

While reading the second essay of *Dialectical Logic*, it may seem that this Spinoza is an alter-ego of Ilyenkov. Such is the approval and outright sympathy with which the conception of the 'thinking body' is presented. Meanwhile, it entirely lacks an understanding of the social, cultural-historical nature of thought. Ilyenkov himself (as the real Spinoza thought) never considered thought to be a

51. See Popper 1994.
52. Marx 1962, p. 98.
53. See Ilyenkov 1974, p. 44.

'property, predicate, attribute of body'.[54] This view of thought was shared by the antagonists of Ilyenkov – the vulgar Diamaticians and Dubrovsky – as well as the antagonists of the rationalist Spinoza – empiricists like Thomas Hobbes.

Body and mind are tied not with the formal-logical 'subject-predicate' relationship, but with the dialectical relationship of identity of the diverse, as a twofold expression of one and the same substance. And adequate ideas seize not the external, spatial contours, but the very essence of things. To Spinoza, this is the difference between the ideas of intellect and imagination (confused, inadequate cognition).

At the very end of the essay, Ilyenkov sets straight his Spinoza on behalf of Marx, saying that the subject of thought is not the body but 'social man' whose labour changes both external nature and himself. Nevertheless, a good many of Ilyenkov's pupils took the conception of the 'thinking body' at face value. By now, a mighty somatic wing has formed in the Ilyenkov school. A.V. Surmava, in the manner of Popper's evolutionary epistemology, extends the notion of the ideal to the activities of animals. L.K. Naumenko goes further still, turning the ideal into the property of 'negentropicity', inherent in each physical body – from crystal in a solution to prince Hamlet. With this, the ideal is identified with the 'reasonable, purposeful', and is obeyed as the 'law of improbability'.

For Ilyenkov, he denied in the most insistent tone the existence of the ideal beyond the circle of man's objectively-practical activity.

> In nature itself, including the nature of man as a biological creature, the ideal does not exist. As regards the natural, material organisation of the human body it has the same 'external' character as it does in regard to the material in which it is realised. . . . The *material* being of the ideal is not itself ideal but only *the form of its expression in the organic body of the individual*. In itself the ideal is the socially determined form of man's life activity corresponding to the form of its object and product.[55]
>
> For a correctly understood category of the 'ideal' includes precisely those – and only those – forms of reflection that specifically distinguish humans, and are completely alien and unknown to any animal, even one with a highly developed higher nervous system, activity and psychology. Precisely these – and only these – specific forms of reflection of the external world by the *human* head have always been investigated by the science of philosophy under the designation: 'ideal' forms of mental activity; it retained this term precisely for the sake of their delimitation from all others.[56]

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54. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 23.
55. Ilyenkov 1962, p. 221. This argument is repeated verbatim in *Dialectical Logic*; see Ilyenkov 1977, pp. 189–90.
56. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 20.

The assertion of the *socially-practical nature of the ideal* is the most significant distinction and feature of Ilyenkov's theory as presented in *Dialectical Logic*, and stands in contrast to the theories of Lifshits and Popper, Dubrovsky and Naumenko, as well as those of Spinoza-materialists.[57]

All living and non-living creatures – excepting the human being – act according to their own species, 'selfishly'. It is man alone who can act universally, like Nature itself, who is able to make himself the 'measure of all things', the ideal 'mirror of the world'. This universal form of human activity, which, as Marx said, 'makes all nature his *inorganic body*', is noting other than the *ideal* in Ilyenkov: the active form of expressing or representing the general within the singular, the infinite within the finite – 'all nature' within man, and vice versa.

57. 'The actions of animals, especially of the higher animals, are also subsumed, though to a limited degree, under Spinoza's definition of thinking'; Ilyenkov 1974, pp. 34–5). But under Ilyenkov's definition of the *ideal*, the actions of animals are not at all subsumed. The real Spinoza also pointed out the principle difference of a 'thinking thing' from the 'most stupid ass' (*asinus turpissimus*). He applies the term *res cogitans* only to the human mind and its mother-substance.