

Introduction

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1. In an article published in 1802 in the “Critical Journal of Philosophy”, in which he elaborates his understanding of the essence of philosophical critique, G.W.F. Hegel claimed that the enterprise of critique is easily threatened, more precisely it is completely at a loss if it lacks an idea - Hegel here thinks of *the* idea of philosophy.¹ Critique is at a loss, since it becomes unable to propose any measure or reference-frame within which it could ensure its operation and thereby it ultimately regresses into being nothing but the articulation of an opinion. As much as every philosophy that does not entail an idea (of philosophy) turns out to be no philosophy any more, as much is any critique without idea not only empty, it rather is no real critique any longer.

Today it does not seem completely useless to recall Hegel’s claim 112 years after it was published. For a lot of contemporary philosophical projects either sought to overcome the idea of critique, the conception of critique linked to an idea or the idea of the idea tout court and thereby regressed to different forms of subjectivism: to apologies of the present state of things in the guise of historical relativism, to a liberal idealization of the idea that slight modifications could make the contemporary world into a world with a human face, to blind optimism with regard to so called new social movements, or to a radical blindness with regard to the symptoms of contemporary political contradictions, etc.

Yet, there are also still certain self-proclaimed partisans that contend to endorse a renewed version of the Marxist idea of a critique of political economy and intend to defend its contemporary validity by showing how precisely through slight modifications it can be turned into a powerful tool to analyze the present political situation. If contemporary subjectivists seek to get rid of the idea of idea-critique, these proponents of an embellished version of classical Marxism, precisely because their primary reference is historical specificity, (implicitly or explicitly) assume that it is always already clear what the idea of critique is oriented by, namely by the analysis of specific historical contexts and their historically particular structures within the global movement of history. Critique in this understanding is motivated by the incessant movement of history that manifests in local practices and historically specific laboring conditions. One seems today to be thus also dealing with something like an automatism of critique (history cannot but

1 G.W.F. Hegel, *Einleitung. Über das Wesen der philosophischen Kritik überhaupt und ihr Verhältnis zum gegenwärtigen Zustand der Philosophie insbesondere*, in: Hegel, *Jenaer Schriften 1801-1807, Werke*, Vol.2, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 173.

demonstrate that one needs to be critical of one's former beliefs), with a thesis about the completely new conditions of labor forces that overcome old conception of exploitation or production-processes and thereby engender at the same time new good reasons to be optimistic about the virtual (technological, practical, etc.) capacities of revolutionizing the system or much more profane: of being together. Already Arnold Ruge, who is clearly no Marxist's favorite thinker, argued against Hegel that one should always resist the move from a phenomenology of historically embedded, concrete existences to the unfolding of a transtemporal logic, in which universally valid categories are articulated. This is due to the fact, for Ruge, that any logic, even the logic (articulating something) of the idea is part of the waves that the ocean of history generates and hence can and has to be criticized, simply because there is and cannot be any universal, one might even say eternal, articulation of what an idea is that might orient critique. But the complete embracing of the absoluteness of historical specificity without remainder led to the effect that one absolutely has to affirm that there is no transhistorical absolute, in short: no idea. The sound demand of historical specificity of critique ended up endorsing historical relativism, a relativism that at the same time can only be upheld because one is led to believe in the stable and unalterable law of historical change. The peculiar effect of getting rid of the idea, of repudiating all universals whilst still seeking to endorse a critical endeavor is striking: one seeks to withdraw from any reference to the absolute or universal that would be able to guide the practice of critique, yet one either takes oneself or external objective processes of realization as absolute.

The present issue of "Crisis and Critique" firstly seeks to overcome such absolute rejection of anything absolute and gathers voices of thinkers who, writing solely in their own name, at the same time do not stand for the absoluteness of subjective opinion. Rather what the present issue undertakes is to fundamentally recast and investigate anew the idea of critique with an idea, the idea of idea-critique.

2. But how are we to locate the critique in our contemporary situation? In Greek, to criticize (*krinein*) has a multitude of meanings: it means for example to evaluate, to judge, to decide but it also means to demarcate, that is to say, to draw lines of separation. The word *crisis* is obviously related to *krinein* - that is to say, it is an effect of a decision, of a demarcation and differentiation. But this does not make critique a mere personal matter. Rather one can only, as already Plato argued, posit a difference, if one has the idea (not of difference but)

that one the two sides of the distinction entails a relation to the true and one side to the wrong. Critique thereby is fundamentally and in the last instance against all forms of subjectivism, against theoretical (or, philosophical) deviations. And it describes one the fundamental operations of philosophy: Philosophy is the site that thinks and draws lines of demarcations that do not simply originate in philosophy, but are also drawn elsewhere. Lines between science and ideology, between knowledge and opinion, between truth and opinion and even between truth and knowledge. it thereby registers the effects of the political struggle (its successes and failures), of scientific interventions, of artistic practices, and so forth. In this regard, one has to be critical of too swiftly aligning the Greek meaning of the term critique and Kant's understanding of it: since *krinein*, critique implies demarcation, the Kantian conception of critique, which obviously also entailed lines of demarcation endorsed the idea that there are conditions of possibility for drawing any kind of distinction and these lie beyond any critique, precisely because they ground it. Yet by asking on what grounds one can realize a critical enterprise, Kant in some sense explicated the idea of idea-critique. And he felt pressured to do so by the emerging tension between Modernism and religion, and also by the never ending struggles within the domain of philosophy. In this sense, it can be argued that the Kantian project rethought the entire philosophical tradition, it revamped it when it it seemed to have entered into a period of crisis. Kant wrote his magnum opus in what can be called the transition of period between Enlightenment and Romanticism. He writes that "our age is the age of criticism, to which everything should be submitted." In a very similar manner, later Karl Marx called for a "ruthless criticism of everything existing." May one not assume that also today a revamping of precisely critique is what is urgently needed, in the Greek or Kantian sense? Are we not also in a time of transition, in transitory times, after the (Soviet, Chinese, Cuban, etc.) revolutions have failed and the idea of revolution makes no, but nostalgic, sense to anyone any longer?

3. In today's situation, one, as we contend, should insist on the reinvention of the process of "critique". We thereby do not simply propagate a simple return to previous forms of criticism, or a simple return to Kant. To the contrary, critique needs to be resurrected, even against all the forms of critique that previously existed. Its means have to be re-shaped. Hence we propagate a meta-critical stance. But, one does thereby not need to give up what Marx claimed, namely that critique operates via an exposé, via a peculiar form of presentation [*Darstellung*]

that *is by specific very means of presentation*. Thereby the presentation of a system is at the same time the critique of this very system and allows to draw lines of demarcation. We thus maintain that to criticize implies the emphasize of a choice that would not have existed without the critique - without the critical exposition the choice between what seems to be unchangeably given and 'something' else would not exist. And we add to this, that such a critical exposition can be linked to the very operation of philosophy. Contending that there is a contemporary relevance of critique thereby also implies to re-assert the contemporary significance of philosophy. Does present issue thus investigates what can, could or should be conceived of as critique? *Crisis and Critique* will affirm (but does not limit itself to) three forms of criticism: 1) critique of ideology, 2) criticism of religion and 3) critique of political economy.

4. The reinvention and resuscitation of both the notion of ideology as well as the procedure of its critique is of great importance. Affirming the ideology-critique does not mean to go back to standard Marxist conception of it, but it demands that we need to rethink the entire conceptual and analytic framework, within which it can be exercised. Unlike a few decades ago, our era is characterised by a lack of any radical alternative to global capitalism. It is not only the popular imagination, but also it is most of academics and political movements are caught up in inventing many political and economic programmes that function *under* the name of capitalism and therefore are inherent to its dynamics. The strangeness of our situation consists in the fact that what appears to us as a radical proposition is in fact a vehicle which always-already makes the system run smoothly. Radical theorists often display their radicality by shying away from any direct involvement with regard to either concrete political forms of action (as it might ruin the comfortable purity of their theory), over-identify with certain political movements (that thereby are turned into unfalsifiable paradigms of the theory itself) or simply return to previous theoretical stance. All this avoids the what Hegel once called the strenuous effort of the concept. The response of the most of Marxists to the on-going crisis of capitalism is the exemplary case of ideological mystification: the displacement from the structural problem of the totality of capitalism, to its phases of development or even worse to individual moral deprivations. However, ideology cannot be reduced only to the act of mystification of the social reality. Ideology is also that something by which people legitimise their political power based on false ideas, i.e. the rise of the right-wing nationalism in Europe. Ideology always appears as neutral presentation of the facts of a given situation, which makes a

specific form of engagement necessary for it to be criticized.

5. The critique of religion can be read as being correlative to ideology-critique. Philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, and others have argued that the rise of both ethnic and religious passions is strictly related to the lack of the idea of emancipation. However, what is striking is not so much the rise of religious "fundamentalism", but its practical impotence that often leads to violent or nihilist passages-à-l'actes. Its impotence relies on the fact that although the three big monotheistic religions implied great emancipatory potential (the creation of the new collectivities, etc), the contemporary manifestation of their doxa is the ultimate violation of that very potential. Žižek argues that in today's situation, great public causes can no longer serve as the causes of great mass mobilisation - it is in the wake of this lack that a regres to religion emerged as means of compensation, it took over as sole heir to these ideals. Our era is characterised by a lack of any proper affirmative ideological (collective) project, although many ideological tendencies seek to implant and strengthen themselves in the social field as such. One of these tendencies clearly manifests in religious "fundamentalisms" and it can be argued that it is today fundamentally of reactionary nature: far from being able to provide a new vision of universality, or even of universal principles, the religious discourses have regressed to forms of life that even include specific dietaries and fashion. It is in this relation that we should understand the rise of religious passion as form of compensating the lack of any Idea of emancipation.

5. In addition to the critique of ideology and that of religion, and in agreement with Žižek, we argue that the critique of political economy is a *sine qua non* for any politics of emancipation. The current approaches to Marx and his *Capital* are usually partial: most of Marxist scholars, at least in the English-speaking world, mostly concentrate either on the analysis of the first chapter of his *Das Kapital*, or on the concept of the reproduction. However, the importance of the critique of political economy does not rely only on its function on critically analysing the capitalist mode of production and its nature, construction, forms and its functioning, as well as the transition from one mode of production to the other - its crucial importance relies exactly on the affirmation of the class struggle, on the reconceptualisation of phenomenas such as exploitation, domination, et cetera. The question that has to be rearticulated here has often been posed à propos Marx: Is Marx's analysis of capitalism, as developed in his *Das Kapital* enough? Does

it provide the conceptual and analytical framework within which we can carry on our analysis, or do we need to rethink Marx's *oeuvre* as such? Marx's work and his analysis remain with us, they are of crucial importance, but nonetheless his limits are clearly discernible. In this regard, Marx cannot stand alone; while we need to maintain our fidelity to his concepts, the necessary dialectical reversal with which his work has to be supplemented is the opposite of what Marxists maintained during the previous century: one today needs to move from Marx to Hegel. It is only through Hegelian framework that we can reconceptualise and rethink Marxists concepts of exploitation, domination, class struggle and so forth. In other words, the thesis we propose is that the basis of contemporary critique of political economy should be ground on a renewed assessment of Hegelian dialectics and its framework.

6. Why Hegel then? Historically, because Hegel also unfolded and shaped his thought in a time of transition. The French Revolution had failed and Hegel, a life-long critical defender even of its violent and most radical aspects, clearly saw the need for philosophy to systematically grasp not only its internally grounded shortcomings and deadlocks but also the conceptual paths it opened and the consequences that have to be drawn from it. So, Hegel is our contemporary precisely due to this historical correlation. Yet, there is also a systematic reason: in the history of philosophy one will maybe find no other thinker who so radically unfolded all the implications and consequence of the affirmation of the thought of the absolute, of the idea. This is not to say that Hegel simply reframed from the world and its concrete existences into the ivory tower of a pure transhistorical logic, it rather means that for example Hegel's whole *Phenomenology of Spirit* depicts all the resistances that emerge when it comes to the question of how to think the absolute. Hegel depicted them in a - as often claimed: inconsistent - series of figures [Gestalten] of spirit. Yet, what all these figures share is that they in one way or the other resist thinking (the absolute). Hegel thereby provides a concrete catalogue of all those stances, figures, tendencies that one has to overcome when one seeks to affirm thought as such. Hegel thus provides a theory against the resistances against theory. This does not only make it possible to link Hegel to psychoanalysis, as many have argued already, but also shows Hegel's fundamental significance for today's situation: today nothing is more important than to return to the idea of an idea and therefore one needs the fundamental affirmation of thought. At the same time, this does not simply imply a return to Hegel comparable to the one that became predominant in academia and

academic philosophy, where liberal and Habermasian analytic Hegelians seem to reign autocratically nowadays. Rather the task that needs to be undertaken is to return to Hegel to re-shape Hegel such that he becomes intelligible as our contemporary - a task recently formulated and realized with regard to Plato by Alain Badiou - as contemporary of our transitory times, as contemporary of a times in which emancipatory projects have to be not only renewed but fundamentally reformulated. Although the obvious objection might be that this then could also imply to even endorse what is often called Hegel's own reactionary 'political philosophy' - if there is such a thing - which entails a conception of the state and even of republican monarchy. Is this not something that forever should be left in the trashbin of history? One might argue - and this work still needs to be done - that it is on the one hand of high importance for any emancipatory political project to entail a theory of the state - and Hegel is explicit about it, as the infamous owl of Minerva image at the end of the preface of the *Philosophy of Right* shows: the state Hegel conceptualizes is one that is declining, otherwise it could not be conceptualized. On the other hand, maybe - as Badiou and also Žižek have contended recently- the time has come for emancipatory thinkers to not shy away from the idea of political leadership and start a meta-critical rethinking of the very idea of the political leader (which in itself has nothing substantially fascist as is often argued: it rather plays an important role in many emancipatory movements within history).

7. The present issue of *Crisis and Critique* does not answer all of question, neither does it provide a handbook in which the solutions to all the tasks are mapped out. But it gathers thinkers that point towards important, maybe the most important, elements of the renewal of the thought of emancipation and one of its most fundamental categories, namely the category of critique. The question from which they all depart is: where do we stand today with regard to critique? The answers the subsequent articles offer, as should be clear, could therefore not have a greater relevance.