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**About the Annihilation of Morality
in Communist Theory and Practice**

Ján Pavlík

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1. Theory

In the ideological justification of its political programme, Communist theorists defined Communism (and especially □ Real □ Socialism as the first phase of mankind □ s necessary evolution to Communism) as a kind of return to the ethics of distributive justice.

The best definition of distributive justice can be found in Aristotle □ s work *Nicomachean Ethics*: in which justice is defined as a state of affairs when the proportion between the unequal merits of various persons is in correspondence with the proportion between unequal quantities of things (goods, money, honours, military distinctions or even social status) which those persons gain as rewards for their meritorious activities in favour of the society as a whole; similarly the proportion between punishments of various persons must correspond to the proportion between their crimes concerning the degree of their detrimental influence on the society as a whole.¹⁾

Distributive justice in this meaning, however, is originally applied to small social group performing collective or conjoint actions and publicly distributing the (commonly owned) goods resulting from a joint effort. The principle of distributive justice presupposes that the contribution of each individual to the common benefit (his merit) can be immediately seen and compared with the contribution of other individuals; the immediate visibility here means that in principle each individual can see and compare the merits of his neighbours. This in turn presupposes that all acting individuals share the same aim because the comparison of various individuals □ contributions is possible only in relation to that common aim: these contributions are evaluated as more or less effective means for fulfilling the aim. On the other hand, the inequality of individual contributions presupposes a kind of division of labour, but

this division concerns only the inevitably various character of various individuals □ activities as oriented to the same aim; division of labour exists here only in the frame of conjoint action. The visible basis for the comparison of various contributions of individual persons is here the various degree of physical effort as applied by various persons. (Marx's labour theory of economic value reflects precisely this primitive stage of division of labour.)

The public distribution of goods (e.g., the catch as the result of a conjoint action of fishing) is usually performed by a chief or judge, but his decisions must be in harmony with all other individuals □ evaluations of the merits of each single individual. The inequalities in individuals □ having or owning material goods are considered to be just when they correspond to the inequalities in their personal merits. Here is evident that the ethics of distributive justice can function only if each member of group is personally acquainted with the others. The personal character of mutual relations among individuals becomes even more explicit when the distributive justice is applied to moral merits and rewards as related to conjoint military actions. A reward for a higher degree of bravery and courage is a higher position in social hierarchy (usually symbolised with distinctions, medals, etc.) and this position becomes a constant characteristic of that individual person. The ethics of distributive justice admits also an important kind of competition □ individuals compete for rendering a better (visible) service for their community. This kind of competition is still preserved even in modern democracy when the political parties □ at least theoretically □ compete for the same.

Communist theorists made a fatal mistake when believing that the principle of distributive justice (which can be applied to family, to single enterprise, to military units and even to politics) could be applied also to modern economies which resulted from developed forms of division of labour as based on private property and market relations. They did not take into account that under the absence of common aim (as applied in conjoint actions of small groups) in an extended society, the necessary condition for the development of division of labour is private property. Instead of having in mind this evident idea they tried to justify their programme with the aid of dialectic speculations about the □law of the negation of negation□ according to which at each stage of historical development there proceeds a negation of the essential characteristics of the previous stage which, in turn, included in itself a negation of an older stage which preceded it; the negation of negation is affirmation, and this means that each stage revives the essential characteristics of the stage which preceded its immediate predecessor. Thus, Communism as the negation of capitalism must revive the principles of distributive justice and of collective ownership, which were negated by capitalism, and synthesise them with the positive contribution of capitalism, i. e., with the developed form of the division of labour. This perverted form of Hegelianism enabled them to formulate the main parole of □Real□ Socialism in the manner of distributive justice: □Everybody works in accordance with his capabilities, everybody gains in accordance with his work.□

Defending the principles of distributive justice, Communist theorists attacked especially those aspects of catallactic rules,²⁾ which were at variance with the former. This concerned especially the principle of abstract (formal) equality as applied face-to-face law and in voluntary exchange. With the aid of Aristotle, Marx argued that the application of abstract equality to unequal subjects results in factual inequality and, accordingly, that the principle of abstract equality is only a camouflage or a □false consciousness□ which should have only preserved the □concrete□ inequalities in property.

Morality (in the form of moral treatment of catallactic rules protecting private property), in the Communist view, is also a form of □false consciousness;□ Marx argued that when the bourgeois class started its progressive fight against feudalism, which helped the progress of mankind as a whole, some capitalists may have sincerely believed that the moral justification of private property had a universally human (or even transcendent) validity and that it was not

related to their partial class interests. But, according to Marx, the universally human character of the catallactic rules is in fact only a false appearance because these allegedly universal principles express only the interests of the owners of means of production.

In Marx, the same is true about the theory of natural rights – in this theory, the bourgeoisie interprets the legal instruments which ensure the exclusive character of its property as something eternal and universal, and therefore inviolable; contrary to this false interpretation, says Marx, the theory of natural rights is only a good ideological instrument to prevent proletarians from making a revolutionary expropriation. Marx justifies proletarians' right to expropriate violently the bourgeois property in his theory of "original accumulation," one of the most dangerous Communist doctrines.³)

This theory – which is the one of the main ideological weapons of Communism – states that capital investments needed for the start of capitalist production were collected in a non-capitalist way, i. e., with the aid of political coercion and direct military violence. Being very close to Proudhon's "property is thievery," the "original accumulation" theory develops the idea that originally all people were owners of means of production, but later a part of society violently expropriated the others who became proletarians through this act. It should mean that the capitalist system in which the owners of means of production exploit the non-owners of those means is based upon an original act of violent extra-economic expropriation while the arising of rules determining property rights is treated as a secondary, "superstructural" phenomenon which should only preserve the results of that expropriation with the aid of such forms of "false consciousness" as the "bourgeois" morality and religion which gives that morality a transcendent sanction. (Religion is treated by Communist theory as an especially injurious kind of "false consciousness"; it is an "opium for masses" which makes them content with their miserable position.)

It can be easily seen that Marx's theory of the origin of capitalism exaggerates the importance of some historical events which really proceeded in the 15th-17th century – such as the violent expropriation of American Indians by Spanish conquerors who were in turn promptly expropriated by English pirates, the practices of violent inclosures of commons in England, etc. Being led by his method of historical materialism, denying any independence of morality and religion on material interests, Marx neglects the fact that the prevalence of unrestrained immorality and club-law, typical for the Renaissance period (Machiavelli), evoked in European mankind a spiritual counter-action which included not only the Protestant ethics but also the Baroque revival of truly Christian devotion in Catholicism. Instead of being – as Marx believed – a mere expression of the interests of expropriators, the new "bourgeois" morality, nurtured by religious revival and justifying property rights, acted against those interests. The Marxist conception stating that the violent expropriators misused the religious feelings of the expropriated and produced a moral justification of capitalist ownership based upon Christianity (i. e., the "false consciousness" in the form of the "opium for masses") is fully mistaken because all varieties of Christianity forbade violence (at least within the pertinent society) and provided no explicit argument in favour of violators.

Accordingly, if we even admit that the violently expropriated property helped somewhat in the rise of early capitalism, then it must be added that it was possible only on condition that continuation in performing violent expropriation became morally untenable. Otherwise, that expropriated property would have only increased the non-productive consumption of violators and feudal aristocracy as a whole.

Marxist theory prescribes that all the above forms of "false consciousness" (which, according to Marx, help to reproduce the results of "original" violent expropriation) ought to be totally destroyed. "False consciousness" should have been replaced with Communist

morality expressing the interests of working class. Communist morality is regarded by Marxists as truly and genuinely universal; namely, they argue that the interests of working class are identical with the interests of mankind as a whole – the basic argument is that proletarians do not need to exploit any other class. This should imply that proletarians (and Communists as their representatives) do not need to produce their own form of –false consciousness– as a spiritual instrument for political domination and, therefore, that they are the only people able to see the truth. (This led to the interpretation that the Communist doctrine is absolutely true.)

From the standpoint of Communist morality, everything which helps the Communist revolution or, later, the building-up and defence of the –Real– Socialism is correct. The fact that Christian religion (including the Ten Commandments) was regarded as an instrument of the enemies of Communism, implies that Communist morality is nothing but a kind of Machiavellism because it allowed to do everything (killing people in their masses, stealing, pilfering, breaking promises, etc.) which was regarded as useful for reaching the ultimate goal of the Communist programme. In other words, the absolutely correct aim justifies absolutely immoral means.

Accordingly, the Communist or –Real– Socialist law was defined as the will of victorious working class incorporated in the system of legal norms, which is nothing but a version of the –might is right.–

In the Communist countries, all these theories were disseminated in an unbelievably systematic manner. All the citizens were obliged to participate in various forms of schooling and training where they were indoctrinated again and again. Communist immoralism and perverted interpretation of law were included into the well-coherent system of the Marxist-Leninist ideology and presented as absolute truths, or as the highest scientific achievements. The devastating impacts of those forms of massive indoctrination are still present in the thinking of older generations of people in the post-Communist countries.

2. Practice

The inadequacy of the Communist programme of applying the principles of distributive justice to economies based before on well-developed form of division of labour and on private property was reflected in the fact that there worked neither economies were effective nor distributive justice was fulfilled. The role of chief or judge who performed the acts of just distribution in small groups and, in doing so, he was controlled by all of their members, was played by the Communist Party; however, the Party was fully uncontrolled in this position and instead of rewards for visible merits it decided about rewards for directly invisible and non-measurable merits or contributions of various industries and enterprises to the benefit of the society as a whole. The entire impossibility to correctly fulfil this task resulted in converting the distributive practices into an instrument of political domination. Being performed through arbitrary wage policies and through a political determination of prices by the Central Planning Committee, the distribution of incomes was in fact a kind of bribery: some privileged groups of workers (e. g., miners) were in this way massively rewarded for their lasting support of the Communist Party; on the other hand, some social groups who were considered by the Party as its potential opponents (e.g., artists) were given high incomes, too, in order to be prevented from criticising the Communist system. As a result, some people were rewarded even if their work satisfied nobody's needs, whereas other people, working very hard (e. g., women in Czech textile industries) and producing goods of high demand, were paid very poorly.

This had nothing to do with the proclaimed installation of distributive justice and this fact was experienced also by the people who originally believed in the Communist ideals. Therefrom

follows that Communism in practice (as □Real□ Socialism) was a system in which no moral norms were actually applied □ neither the proclaimed norms of distributive justice nor the rejected catallactic rules.

This complete absence of the application of any moral principle in economic and political life (which was the same because under Communism, economy is subordinated to political command) was reflected in an almost total collapse of working morals and work standards. Being coerced to work by the state plan which was defined and sanctioned as a law, and having stable wages, they maximised their utility by exerting the minimum degree of work effort as possible. In addition, the public immorality and especially the fact that nobody could connect his self-interest with the protection of the commonly owned property, stimulated the rise of citizens□ thievish practices as oriented towards that property. People even tried to □justify□ their thievery by the parole □who does not steal, preys his own family,□ which was taken seriously and literally by most of them.

It was, of course, an economy of shortage, which resulted from these immoral attitudes (there existed also a bonmot, that the Communist economy would function when people would be replaced by angels). In an economy of shortage, the sphere of everyday concerns is enormously extended: hunting and seeking for commodities in short supply takes up a lot of time and energy. Homo assecurans, fully preoccupied with hunting, is not only a typical product of the Communist system but also a reproducer of this system □ he is too busy to be able to think of revolt.

The practices of hunting which were a kind of substitution for the missing possibility to buy goods on the market show that some elements of the market system which were officially admitted in Communist economy (under the terrible Russian abbreviation □khozrashtchot□ which means □economic budget□) existed only formally but not factually. People had money but could not change it for goods in short supply. Instead of this impersonal form of market interactions they had to use their personal acquaintances with the traders and producers in order to acquire the desired goods, i. e., they needed some persons to pull the strings for them. Of course, in return for such string pulling, they, too, had to show their particular favour to their friends who helped them before. This kind of mutual favouritism was applied also to the relations among enterprises, among citizens□ relations to the nomenklaturists, etc. Taking into account that favouritism means privilege, we may say that in the Communist system, the impersonal monetary exchange among mutually equal market agents was replaced by the extra-market system of the exchanges of privileges as based upon personal relations; it means that formal rules, typical for capitalism, were replaced with the informal ones. Nevertheless, under the influence of Communist immoralism these informal rules were treated prevalently in purely utilitarian manner. Due to this, Communist society was close rather to mafia than to feudalism where the personal relations were justified by religion.

Nevertheless, there existed a large number of people who were content with their existence under Communism. Paraphrasing the motto of Paul Lafargue (Marx's son-in-law), permanent shortage was compensated for by a □right to laziness.□ In this way, Communist bureaucrats enter into an implicit agreement with the rest of the population; the contents of this remarkable contrat social can be described as follows: if you will respect our leading role in politics, we (the Communist bureaucrats) will tolerate your laziness and thievery as well as your private activities of hunting and opinions as presented in your families. This peculiar social contract (which was shameful for both parties involved) shows that the legal system under Communism was not taken seriously and that it played the role of mere □legal façade.□ This form of disrespect for law, supported by Marxist theory of the □superstructural□ character of legal norms, has been deeply rooted into the consciousness of people and influences their behaviour until now.

Facing such a monstrous reality, the Communist ideology claiming that "Real Socialism is an incorporation of distributive justice and of a higher degree of economic efficiency than capitalism starts to be perceived as a lie even by the majority of people, living under Communism.⁴⁾ Nevertheless, even after the Communist ideology is brought in discredit, people in Communist countries continued in their behaving in conformity with it. This fact can be explained in the following way: In the Communist system, all spheres of social activity are totally politicised; hence it follows that the sphere of everyday economic and social interests of the people is also subjected to the political and ideological control of the Party/State. The fact that all the social activities of the people are interpenetrated and mediated by hierarchical structures of political control implies that people can pursue their self-interests (get on in the world) without problems only under the condition that they participate in the system of political control, i.e., under the condition that they coerce other people to manifest publicly their consent with the shamefacedly untrue ideology and to act in conformity with it. But, to act in conformity with the Communist ideology is the same as to build-up or preserve the institutions of Communist society.

Herefrom, the truly infernal character of Communism is especially explicit: People know that the Communist ideology is false, they know that the really existing institutions as having been built-up in accordance with this ideology, are "objectivised" or "institutionalised" forms of lie, but they are set into such a system of interrelations that their self-interests motivate them unequivocally to coerce their neighbours to pretend the conformity to untrue ideology and to put it into practical realisation; in fact they even compete for manifesting publicly a higher degree of conformity with the untrue ideology than their neighbours; for them, winning such a competition means for them acquiring a better social and economic position. This is an absolutely perverted abuse of the principle of competition because its being amalgamated with conformity to lie "as it occurs in Communist society" leads to the results which are an absolute antithesis to the results it has in capitalism: it helps to produce and reproduce a system in which, as Franz Kafka said, "lie becomes the order of the world."

The fact that life under the Communist system was equal to "living a lie" (this term has become popular after Vaclav Havel introduced it in his *Power of the Powerless*) led to a kind of schizophrenic split in personality by almost all citizens: in discussions with close friends or in families they could express their true opinions whereas in public sphere (including such groups which are considered as informal in a free society) they had to assert the opposite in order to be in conformity with false ideology. This schizophrenic state of human mind was characterised by the term *homo duplex*; among others, this term described the decline of people's moral attitudes as reflected in the fact that they ceased to regard a lie as a strictly prohibited form of behaviour and, on the contrary, started to treat it in a utilitarian manner as a necessary instrument for the pursuit of their self-interests.

It must be stressed that forty or even seventy years of living under Communism has had very deep and long-lasting impacts upon the thought and attitudes of people who now live in the post-Communist countries. At the same time there must be resolutely refuted theories, according to which the "differences in behaviour between the Communist and capitalist systems may result not so much from attitudinal factors (based on tastes and preferences) but from situational factors, based on individual's perception of their economic situation."⁵⁾ These theories state that the Communist immorality consisted in simply situational reactions of individuals to perceived constraints under which they operated under a Communist economic system.

A conception with similar consequences was formulated by Vaclav Havel, according to whom people under Communism are reduced to mere functions in the "self-movement" of the

impersonal and anonymous system; living under the dictate of omnipresent political and ideological rituals, all people are both subjects and objects of political control, i.e. both victims and pillars of the Communist system. This can be understood (and the Czech philosopher Vaclav Belohradsky, who is in some respects close to Havel, really does it) that the source of evil are impersonal systems whereas individual are innocent, which implies that after the change of system people will behave in a different way and the previous system will have no impact on them.

What both Belohradsky (as a structuralist post-modernist) and the previous theorists (as behaviourists) have in common, is the well-known deterministic tendency to deny human freedom as a kind of the independence of human mind on the external factors. This tendency was made explicit in the French Enlightenment and can be formulated very simply: bad laws produce immoral individuals; a change of that bad legal framework will lead to the positive changes in human behaviour. It is sufficient to state that this kind of determinism continued in Marx who said that "man's essence is the complex of social relations" and also in Lenin who believed that a violent revolutionary change of mere legal framework of society would produce the "Communist man" with new moral qualities. The same approach can be found in structuralism and post-modernism as propagated especially by French leftist intellectuals, inspired by Marxism and Maoism; these philosophies regard human subject as an intersection of external structural relations, which is not so different from behaviourist reduction of man's psyche to an aggregate of functional relations between inputs and outputs.

Moreover, Belohradsky and Havel are fully mistaken in thinking of the Communist system as being impersonal;⁶⁾ on the contrary, it was too much personal and lacked the desirable impersonality of the market system.

Notes and References

- 1) Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea, ed. O. Apelt, Leipzig 1912, 1131a.
- 2) Catallactic rules (the term refers to Hayek's famous "catallaxy") consist of the rules guaranteeing private property, the rule of promise and contract-keeping, and the finder-keeper rule (the rule of homesteading). These rules correspond to the system of division of labour as based on private property and therefore differ in some essential aspects from the norms of distributive justice which presuppose conjoint action, i. e. a form of production where the labour forces of acting people are not "divided" (oriented to various goals) but unified by a commonly shared goal.
- 3) See Karl Marx, Das Kapital I., chapter 24.
- 4) It is necessary to stress that this qualification concerns only some elements of it, whereas some others, unfortunately, are still tacitly surviving in the thought of people in post-Communist countries.
- 5) Jan Winiecki, Formal and Informal Rules in Post-Communist Transition, chapter 2.2. (to be published in: Domenico da Empoli, ed., Economia delle scelte pubbliche, Roma).
- 6) It was precisely a basic feature of totalitarian regimes (e.g. of Mussolini's, Hitler's and Stalin's dictatorships) that people identified themselves with the person of the charismatic dictator. The motto L'état, c'est moi, expressing the identification of the state with a person, was pronounced by (or is ascribed to) the absolutist monarch Louis XIV. Havel's and Belohradsky's belief that the Communist system was an impersonal self-movement was caused by the fact that after Stalin's death, there existed no charismatic personality in the position of the secretary general of the Party; accordingly, they believed that in that "post-

totalitarian period (as Havel called it), people ceased be (or pretended to be) conforming to the person of a dictator and instead of this they were related in a similar way to the impersonal Communist ideology. The role of ideology in this system, argues Havel, makes people subordinated to the "dictate of rituals," rituals which preclude the exercise of free will in all spheres of social activity. Not even leading politicians can exercise their individual will. They, too, act only in accordance with the ideology; they are reduced to mere functions in the "self-movement" of the system. Political power in the "post-totalitarian" system thus becomes anonymous. Living under the dictate of omnipresent political and ideological rituals, all people are both subjects and objects of political control, i.e. both victims and pillars of the post-totalitarian system. Havel sees the post-totalitarian system as a combination of dictatorship and the consumer society. He argues that the fact that people accept the system of mutual political control arises from their being addicted to a certain style of living resting on the availability of (limited supplies of) consumer goods. No particular social group can be regarded as responsible for the form of such a society, for everybody who lives in the post-totalitarian system is more or less responsible for its preservation and reproduction. [Cf. Václav Havel, *Moc bezmocných* (The Power of the Powerless - in Czech), in: V.H., *O lidskou identitu*, Rozmluvy, Prague 1990, pp. 55-71 (Chapters I-VI). Havel's essay "The Power of the Powerless" was published in London (Hutchinson) in 1985. Cf. also Václav Belohradský, *Krise eschatologie neosobnosti* (Personality Crisis in Secular Eschatology - in Czech), Rozmluvy, London 1982, pp. 4-12. The English version of this work of Belohradský was published in Genoa in 1982.] Generally speaking, Havel's and Belohradsky's belief that that Communism was an incorporation of impersonality is mistaken because they omitted the fact that almost all social, political and economic interactions under Communism were performed in the form of the "exchange of privileges."