Negativity in Communism: Ontology and Politics

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The article attacks the notion of communism with a special angle of factuality and negativity, and not in the usual sense of a futurist utopia. After considering the main contemporary theories of communism in left-leaning political thought, the author turns to the Soviet experience of an “actually existing communism.” Apart from and against the bureaucratic state, a social reality existed organized around res nullius, that is, an unappropriated world that was not a collective property, as opposed to a res publica. The alienation from things and from the state resulted not only in the sense of oppression, but in a new culture of a paradoxical “communality” (A. Zinoviev), where the “Other” be it a thing or a person, appears rather as ground, not figure. This culture of a non-thematic gaze led to a formation of a communality as a given, and not as a utopian desideratum. I claim that this is a major difference between the current Western society and a post-Communist society. The former is more solid and collectivist, but only consciously and deliberately so, operating from an individualist ontology, while the latter is individualist, but with an assumption of the “Other” as a pre-given fact. In this chiasmus, both “communisms” are problematic, so than an alternative model of individuation (Virno), rather than the atomization of an assumed collectivity, would be a preferable model.

Keywords: communism, negativity, res nullius, late Soviet society, alienation.

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Street Politics and Ballot Box Politics

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The “Arab Spring” uprisings have unexpectedly led to a strikingly fast and worldwide movement of opposition to governments and economic powers. This sudden and unpredictable outbreak of protest has given birth to a new form of political action, which may be called “gatherings”, i.e. people taking to the streets and occupying squares to claim a radical change of the political order through demands for a better or renewed democracy. Gatherings are innovative as they arise outside traditional ways of expressing political grievances (i.e. through parties, trade unions, NGOs and associations), have neither leader nor program, advocate non violence and disavow the system of representative government. This new way to practice street politics opposes ballot box politics as it claims direct democracy (general assemblies, open meetings, no decision by a majority, equally shared responsibilities, transparency, etc.) while ardently endorsing non violence. This commitment is contentious: how can one pretend toppling the rule of the rich and the powerful who benefit from an entrenched system of domination without making use of violence to oust them from their privileged position? This article aims at clarifying the terms of this question by exploring the way resorting to violence has been debated in many of these gatherings.

Keywords: democracy, direct democracy, critique of representative government, gatherings, street politics, non-violence.

References

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The “Arab Spring” uprisings have unexpectedly led to a strikingly fast and worldwide movement of opposition to governments and economic powers. This sudden and unpredictable outbreak of protest has given birth to a new form of political action, which may be called “gatherings”, i.e. people taking to the streets and occupying squares to claim a radical change of the political order through demands for a better or renewed democracy. Gatherings are innovative as they arise outside traditional ways of expressing political grievances (i.e. through parties, trade unions, NGOs and associations), have neither leader nor program, advocate non violence and disavow the system of representative government. This new way to practice street politics opposes ballot box politics as it claims direct democracy (general assemblies, open meetings, no decision by a majority, equally shared responsibilities, transparency, etc.) while ardently endorsing non violence. This commitment is contentious: how can one pretend toppling the rule of the rich and the powerful who benefit from an entrenched system of domination without making use of violence to oust them from their privileged position? This article aims at clarifying the terms of this question by exploring the way resorting to violence has been debated in many of these gatherings.

Keywords: democracy, direct democracy, critique of representative government, gatherings, street politics, non-violence.

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The Police Order at the Era of Absolutism in Russia, and the Causes of Its Collapse during the February Revolution of 1917

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In the article, an attempt is made to characterize the police order in Russia as a coercion regime during the era of absolutism from the end of the 17th to the beginning of the 20th centuries. It is claimed that absolutism had a chronic deficiency of resources for legitimation. During the Peter I and Catherine II eras, this deficiency was compensated by the periodic building of a repressive police force under the ideological cover of cameralism that was borrowed from concurrent European states. Due to a political crisis of the coercion regime in the first third of the 19th century, there was a replacement of the ideological decor of cameralism with a reactionary formula of “orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality”. At the end of the 19th century, the last ideological transformation caused by the political crisis of the 1870s was carried out when religious authorization of unlimited autocracy was put in the forefront. The theoretical conception was developed according to which the main threat of stability to the coercion regime was generated by the processes of power deflation, by the forced structural changes of society as a result of military mobilizations and by the situational forms of politicization on the basis of the aggravated perception of power as evil which can no longer be tolerated. Using the historical example of the February revolution of 1917, it is shown that the temporal coincidence of these three processes, having reached their highest intensity during the First World War, led to the collapse of the Russian absolutism and its police order.

Keywords: power deflation, historical sociology, politicization, police order, coercion, revolution, structural changes.

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The Idea of Revolution

Alain Touraine

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Alain Touraine’s theory of revolution is so-called theory of the “end of revolution”. According to the author, while revolution was “the common trunk of the modern world”, universalism of reason (inherited from Enlightenment philosophy) and the understanding of modernity as a change are displaced with the particularism of identity-searching and the understanding of modernity as conflict, as a sustainable equilibrium transforming revolution into “anti-revolution”. The singularity of A. Touraine’s approach consists of the fact that he refuses to define revolution and social movements reciprocally, one through another, or to consider them as closely related, as does European tradition. “Sociology of action” offers the opposite vision. Where social movements do not appear (or in the absence of an “anti-movement”, as Touraine calls it), revolution is possible; conversely, where there are social movements, revolution cannot occur (although “anti-revolution” could take place). Revolution opposed social movements in the same way as the universalism of evolution opposed the particularism of history. Touraine defends the view of modernity as something in between these two oppositions. Modernity as a complex and conflict-filled “alloy” of the universalism of reason and technologies, and the particularism of cultural, national and class identities. The “end of the revolution” does not imply the end of history, the end of social change, the end of the politics, or the end of the non-institutional power struggle. Anti-revolution, of course, has revolutionary aspects, but the struggle of social movements with the pervasive influence of the large centralized State machinery is primarily defensive, not offensive in character, as it is in the case of the revolution Anti-revolution is not a struggle “for” power, or for reducing the distance between rulers and the ruled; it is “against” universalizing “programming”, and a struggle for “happiness” as an individualized (and often “populist”) vision of a society that corresponds to the group identity.

Keywords: Alain Touraine, revolution, anti-revolution, end of revolution, social movements, modern.
“The Slavic Question” in Pogodin’s Publicism (1830s — 1850s)

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In the period of the 1830s to the 1850s, Mikhail Pogodin (1800–1875) was one of the creators and spokesmen of the doctrine of “official nationality. Detailed analysis of his views on the “Slavic question” reveals not only his thoughts of the Russian policy, but also reconstructs his understanding of “nationality” and the processes of nation building in the southern and western Slavic nations, including Great and Little Russia. Pogodin’s intellectual formation occurred from the end of the 1810s to the beginning of the 1820s. The understanding of “people” and of the entire course of history that he developed during these years will remain a stable and characteristic feature of Pogodin’s later works. In two letters submitted to the Minister of Education S. Uvarov in 1839 and 1842, and then in a series of letters and notes written during the Crimean War, Pogodin offers a program of active support for the national movement among the Slavic peoples. Pogodin suggested that the Russian empire should adopt a nationalist policy with the key solution being the solution of the “Polish question”, the fundamental obstacle preventing the winning over of other Slavic nations. As the decisive criterion of national identity, Pogodin explicitly suggests a linguistic one, that is, the adoption of a language of the “common people”. The analysis of Pogodin’s views shows that he was far from supporting existing public policy, leading to his proposition of a fundamentally different program.

Keywords: nation, nationality, public opinion, Pan-Slavism, Mikhail Pogodin.

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An Afterword to the German Edition of The Invisible Religion

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In the afterword to the third edition published more than twenty years after the initial publication of The Invisible Religion, Thomas Luckmann seeks to summarize and to clarify his position as described in his book. He argues against the idea of the decreasing importance of religion in modern society, and proposes a renewed understanding of religion that would not be confined to the intuitions of the Western world. Luckmann’s definition of religion is based on the notion of “transcendences”, which he divides into “small”, “middle”, and “great” categories. It is the experience of the “great” transcendence which leads everyday life away to another reality that plays a key role in the emergence of what is meant by religion. There is a certain order of signs that corresponds to the order of transcendences, and makes it possible to transfer the content of subjective experience of transcendence into intersubjective reality. Symbols appear to be a way of “great” transcendence appresentation, and ritual is considered as its implementation in a social action. By way of a specific set of communicative actions and with the use of symbolic and linguistic resources, subjective experience of transcendence is converted into an objective social structure, so that transcendence experiences become intersubjective and can now serve as a subject of discussion, modification and interpretation. In conclusion, Luckmann turns to the modern situation of religion, and characterizes it as the “privatization” of religion.

Keywords: invisible religion, secularization, privatization of religion, appresentation, typology of transcendence, social construction of reality.

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Five Basic Concepts of the Sociology of Religion

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The article combines short texts which were prepared for the dictionary of the sociology of religion, and from the author’s point of view, focus on five critical concepts of the discipline. This series of concepts discussed in the paper begins with the term “religious conversion”, where the history of the concept, the specific social context, and the functions of relevant events and processes are considered. The second critical concept reviewed is that of the notion of “charisma”, with particular attention paid to the evolution of corresponding mythologems and the scenarios for their adaptation to specific contexts of sociology, political science, and business management. The third concept is the analysis of “sacred”, which is regarded as an integral definition of the objects of religious experience. Then, the notion of “civil religion” is discussed; the corresponding range of phenomena is viewed as a structure that mediates the relationships between society’s political culture and religion. The fifth concept analysed is the term “religious identity”, which is treated as designating invariant structures of individual’s everyday religious experience and derived from the identification both with transcendent “matters of faith” and with corresponding cult “community of the faithful”. In order to make the study of the materials easier, the concepts are arranged in order of the conversion of the “natural person”, as we are all born, and form a quite adequate introduction to the subject of the sociology of religion.

Keywords: civil religion, identity, conversion, borderline situation, sacred, sociology of religion, charisma.
What Is the “Orthodox Theory and History of Ideas”?:
A Disciplinary Story in a Critical and Ironic Vein

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The article contains a critique of the current condition of the theory and history of ideas discipline. Orthodox research in the theory and history of ideas are contrasted to the modern social studies of relations between rationality and sociality. The article suggests the necessity of changes in the research practices of the discipline. The changes have to help prevent two typical conceptual traps — epiphenomenalism and reductionism. Special attention is paid to the sources and agents of orthodox influence on research practices in the modern theory and history of ideas. In particular, the article focuses on research practices of German classical philology (Klassische Philologie) in the 19th century, which have been widely recognized due to academic activities of such influential schools as Gottfried Hermann's philology of words (Wortphilologie), and August Böckh's philology of things (Sachphilologie). These research practices became a tool for 19th century philology expansion into the territory of related disciplines, particularly history. Both the active borrowing of these practices and the creation of philology-dependent research associations in cross-border disciplinary areas influenced the formation of the orthodox research canon in the theory and history of ideas. This influence was so strong and extensive that its traces can be found in research practices of many modern disciplinary programs in the theory and history of ideas. In conclusion, the article provides a brief overview of some promising directions for the development of an unorthodox and more socially-oriented approach to the theory and history of ideas.

Keywords: theory and history of ideas, rationality, intellectuals, social studies, causal explanations, epiphenomenalism, reductionism.

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Empirical Phenomenology

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The Narrativity of the Visual; or, On the Uses of Non-sociological Reading

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The Possibilities of the Ethnographic Study of Urban Prostitution
Review of *Prostitution: Herstellungsweisen einer anderen Welt* by Martina Löw and Renate Ruhne (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011)

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