

# Being Praxis: The Structure of Praxis Philosophy - Outlined by the Refutation of Contemporary Criticism

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*Luka Perusic*

## Being Praxis: The Structure of Praxis Philosophy – Outlined by the Refutation of Contemporary Criticism

"When evil meets thee, search thine own heart" –  
Confucius.

### *Context*

*Praxis movement*<sup>1</sup> was recently thematised anew in a series of publications,<sup>2</sup> and several projects were initiated with the purpose of preserving its cultural value.<sup>3</sup> However, the new discourse on *Praxists* produced a series of assessments that were atypical in comparison to virtually all previous reviews. Gajo Petrović and Milan Kangrga – *spirituum movens* of praxis philosophy – were dominantly criticized, unlike previously, when they were often glorified. Assessments concluded that theories developed by Praxists were logically inconsistent and that their errors were "covered up" by too abstract, confusing concepts that lacked proper articulation in respect to social reality. More so, that their philosophical investigations neither had nor will have any useful application in our society.<sup>4</sup>

In 2015, Lino Veljak proposed that comments on *praxis philosophy* belong to any of the two major categories: (1) criticism (misses the point of source material), and (2) critique (builds upon the source material). Veljak then arranged commentaries into three distinct categories: (1) *civil-conservative type*

<sup>1</sup> In research papers written by Praxists, the term "praxis" is often implied as being related to Aristotle's term. This often creates confusion, especially in Slavic languages. Kangrga explained that Aristotle's term, denoting a moral relation to other individuals in the polis, the "code of conduct", differs from the notion of praxis as used in a more contemporary way, but not entirely (cf. Kangrga 2008: 24, 42, 53-54; cf. Arist. NE. 1104a-1107a; cf. Ackrill 1978: 595). Also, in relation to Aristotle's concept from *Nicomachean Ethics*, we should not confuse it with similar, but clearly different notion of *praxis* as it is used in Aristotle's *Poetics* (cf. Belfiore 1983: 110-111).

<sup>2</sup> For example: Labus 2017; Lunić 2017; Mikulić/Žitko 2015; Kalebić 2014; Veljak 2014; Olujčić/Stojaković 2012; Jakšić 2012.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the development of *Praxis* online archive. Available at: <https://praxis.memoryoftheworld.org/> (accessed on June 20, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. e.g. Žitko 2015; Sućeska 2012.

criticism/critique that argues against any socially/politically involved philosophical endeavours; (2) *diamat-abandonment* type criticism/critique that argues (i) against a departure from "authentic" Stalinist-Leninist conception of dialectic materialism; (ii) against replacement with *abstract humanism*; and (3) *economistic type* criticism/critique that argues against praxis philosophy as a sway-away from political economy (cf. Veljak 2015: 50-54). In comparison to the recently published comments on praxis philosophy, the proposed typology can be applied only to a certain extent (e.g. *they criticized abstract humanism*, but *did not endorse diamat*) because their arguments, I propose, belong to *cringe type criticism*, oriented towards a complete disvaluation of object under inspection.

Upon the examination of these arguments, I concluded that contemporary *criticists* either misunderstood or misrepresented Praxists. Thus, I offer counterarguments in favour of praxis philosophy as a well thought out philosophical endeavour.<sup>5</sup> In the following chapters, I analyse the misways of cringe type criticism "embodied" by the recent discussions regarding praxis philosophy, and I simultaneously offer a critical outline of the internal structure of praxis philosophy, thus far absent from studies.

### 1. (Un)groundlessness: Contorted views on metaphysics

With materialism as the governing principle, dialectics as the governing mechanism of change, and the revolution as a teleological finality,<sup>6</sup> Marx's "new thought" does not really differ from many traditional metaphysical systems (cf. Löwith 1983: 53-55), which was something that Praxists were quick to notice. However, most contemporary criticists asserted that Praxists deteriorated Marx's theory by interpreting his later work through philosophical (metaphysical) lenses of early Marx. Marx's abandonment of philosophy motivated the proposal of this argument in his development from *Die Deutsche Ideologie* to *Das Kapital*.<sup>7</sup> Be that as it may, for Praxists the only significant thing that

<sup>5</sup> I developed my arguments following Milan Kangrga's and Gajo Petrović's research because (1) they were the key figures in praxis philosophy, and (2) they were the most cited philosophers in the papers criticizing Praxists.

<sup>6</sup> Either in a broader sense as the change in social formation or a narrow sense as the event of a violent shift, thus both (cf. Schaff 1973: 264).

<sup>7</sup> Marx's conclusions from that particular period echo as symptomatic criticism of praxis philosophy which claims that Petrović and Kangrga had their thinking framework

happened in Marx's disciplinary shift was that he merely switched from one metaphysical system to another. It was because they found Marx's lack of awareness regarding this occurrence troublesome. Thus Praxists were accused of reverting to metaphysics which Marx abandoned, yet it was precisely that which motivated Praxists to rethink Marx's theory. The case is that Praxists abhorred traditional metaphysics, especially Kangrga, because in their interpretation such systems signified the *unchangeable world*, and thus they argued that even though Marx may have abandoned philosophy, fundamentally speaking, metaphysics did not leave him. From Praxists' perspective, Marx's thought perpetuated an enclosed system with particularly rigid metaphysics producing mono-perspective societies and was thus meant to be altered.<sup>8</sup> I believe that critics did not grasp that fact. Consider what Alen Sućeska wrote in objection to Praxists' claim that *Das Kapital* was written to provide a critique regarding (our) historical world that needs to be changed radically:

"[...] the essence of Marxism is not only in signifying positive possibilities of existing reality that it already contains within itself, but foremost in understanding and in conceptual grasping of the structural mechanism of reality, that which prevents the fulfilment of these possibilities, that is, which prevents a revolution and a realization of classless society" (Sućeska 2012: 142-143).

Sućeska claims that this was the primary reason why Marx wrote *Das Kapital*. Praxis philosophers would say that precisely such a reason prevents the happening of revolution. If the possibilities are already within the reality, then they are *void*. Praxists would argue that already, these possibilities are governed by an enclosed Is-System (*Sein-System*) with clear mechanisms of content control and pre-generated limits to possibilities. The reality Sućeska speaks of – *this* reality – is a world in which, in fact, a proper revolution did not occur before Marx, and it did not happen even 170 years after Marx, and the problem is that it will never happen unless the approach to reality is radically going to be chal-

bounded by the specific production of the academic field. More precisely that their ignorant disposition toward political economy caused them to lose proper tools for the envisioned emancipation (cf. for example Jurak 2015).

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Marx and Marxists exposed the problem of alienation – and dealienation did not happen; they explained class struggle – and it did not cease to be; they revealed the mechanism of commodity fetishism – and embraced it as a principle; they set into motion socialist revolutionary movements, establishing capitalism and nationalism.

lenged. "Radically" does not mean methodically revealing all of the mechanisms operating on the fundamental level of reality. Instead, it means aborting the reality altogether, including the method and its governing principles.

Praxists reinterpreted Marx to *save* his project from utter failure conceptually, to keep it from turning into a massive production of endless analyses of What-is, typed down onto paper without ever provoking the act of change.<sup>9</sup> Sućeska attempted to nullify this argument by claiming that Praxists faithfully used concepts from German idealism, and thus somehow retrograded Marx's theory by obscuring the problem. Quite the opposite, Praxists intentionally returned to former ideas because they concluded that it is the only way to advance Marx's project. What Praxists aimed for was to sew classical German idealism back into Marx's method and theory, because otherwise – for them – it would be impossible to understand (1) how to conceptualize a way of "breaking out" of the state of alienation, and (2) why the world revolution did not yet occur. Idealism, which Marx characterized to be a sort of isolated thought, safe from or unaware of reality, was used by Praxists to subvert Marx by pointing out that such thought is only isolated because it is *free*. They "opened the door" which Marx "sealed" with his metaphysics, and they did so by integrating arguments from Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Heidegger.

Firstly, they concluded that Heideggerian *Dasein* is the one "who" creates and seizes possibilities (Petrović). Secondly, and not less importantly, they exposed the pointlessness of "ground", of "base". They nullified the concept of a base that defined the outcomes, and thus they annihilated Marx's underlying causal system along with it (Kangrga). More specifically, they used Kant's concept of *a priori*, and Fichte's concept of *tathandlung* to reconceptualize practical reason operating in the revolution, and then they used Schelling's and Hegel's idea of *grounding* governed by the groundless first principle to conceptualize a framework that allows *Dasein* to fulfill itself. Most notably drawing from Böhme, Schelling argued in *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* for the objective *Ungrund*,<sup>10</sup> while Hegel

<sup>9</sup> For example, praxis philosophers use Fichte's *Lehre* instead of *Wissenschaft* to prevent scientific reductionism that they correlate and sometimes identify with metaphysical systems. Critics confused this intentional swap for Praxists' lack of understanding of Marx, landing comments that make no sense. An example of such mislead critics is Nikola Cerovac (cf. Cerovac 2015: 134).

<sup>10</sup> "We have already explained what we assume in the first respect: there must be a being before all ground and before all that exists, thus generally before any duality – how can we call it anything other than the original ground or the *non-ground* [*Ungrund*]?" (cf. Schelling 2006: 68, OA 497-499).

"erased" the subjective boundaries imposed upon such a concept with the famous "pure Being and pure Nothing are, therefore, the same" in his *Wissenschaft der Logik*. For example: (Hegel 2004: 88, § 134). Thus Kangrga explicitly wrote:

"Contrary to the traditional metaphysical position which begins with a kind of ground, here it is about groundlessness of a modern human, and his world, which means that it always starts over from itself on his own, as a possibility and openness for everything" (Kangrga 1984: 86).<sup>11</sup>

It is a painful irony that many of the critics negate metaphysics only to use metaphysically-founded propositions against Praxists who were, in fact, critical of metaphysics altogether.<sup>12</sup> They claim that Praxists "swamped into Marx's early works", and "ended on the diametrically opposite side of vulgar materialists" (Sućeska 2012: 143), or that they "in reading *Thesen* accentuate their speculative nature by ignoring inherently present materialistic presuppositions within them" (Cerovac 2015: 128), or that they were somehow "enclosing into disciplinary boundaries" (Žitko 2015: 153), while they, in fact, wanted to offer a framework of thinking that does exactly the opposite. They did not "ignore" anything; they modified it to make a break with metaphysical systems. The goal was to overcome Marx's metaphysical errors to propose a more plausible theory of *de-alienation*.

In the following chapter, I will address the problem of alienation which constitutes the second structural point in the movement of Praxis thought.

## 2. Alienation: The Is (*Sein*) – Ought (*Sollen*) Lemma

The concept of (materialistic) grounding forced Praxists to consider that the *alienation* phenomenon is rooted deep within the world – in the "ground" of whatever does constitute the world. Where there is such thing as "ground",

<sup>11</sup> This problem is explored in a "dialogue" with Schelling (cf. Schelling 2006: 9-10, SW 336–337/OA 401–403).

<sup>12</sup> An example of Petrović and Kangrga's awareness of this entire problem is Petrović's remark that Engels should be blamed for popularizing the interpretation of Marx as a political economist, rather than a philosopher (see Petrović 1986a: 295). For a clear articulation of the necessity to transcend Marx cf. Petrović, 1986a: 303-304.

there is a seed of alienation. The "alienation", as understood by Praxis philosophers, in its essence refers to the humankind's departure from the possibility of coming to be with oneself, with its humane essence – that of *being free*.

"Alienation comes from the very human's way of producing and reproducing its own life, and it encloses the totality of its relations to the world already produced in" (Kangrga 1989a: 18-19).

This, however, is majorly not comprehended by the recent critics. For example, Cerovac built an entire idea of "Kangrgian aporia" upon this misinterpretation. While asking (with Kangrga) "if German philosophers uncovered the identity of theory and practice, how can the human being be incapable of changing the world?", Cerovac wonders how "for some reason, history, reality, society (...) caused to alienate man from himself" (Cerovac 2015: 130), only to succumb to the critique of philosophy as being unable to change the world. However, Kangrga already offered an answer: When human beings behave in accordance to the *Sein*, they alienate. The schism is developed as a difference between *nature* (corresponding to *Sein*), and *world* (corresponding to *Sollen*), with the former being "given" or "rendered", further described as a "self-growth of life conditions" (Kangrga 1984: 12), while the latter being "produced" (Kangrga 2010: 353) by human beings. Contrary to Cerovac's superficial analysis, the world continually does change in degrees because of the human being's internal drive explained through the phenomenon of *Sollen*.

"Not a single individual human life is satisfied and can be satisfied by knowing that the life as such is that which is, rather it wants to, in any possible way, realizes itself as a concrete, meaningful life" (Kangrga 1989a: 160).<sup>13</sup>

But what is *yet* to happen is the radical change, and Praxists, much like Plato, believed that philosophers ought to play a significant role in it (cf. Plat. Rep. 5.473d). Praxists argued that any world with any predefined ground necessarily "seals away" the essence of humankind, and turns the world into the extension of nature, rather than into its opposition.<sup>14</sup> As Bloch stated: that

<sup>13</sup> Let us immediately define how Kangrga understands *meaning*: "actively open human possibility, an open process of self-articulation through work" (Kangrga 1989a: 161).

<sup>14</sup> "For evil is surely nothing other than the primal ground [*Urgrund*] of existence to the extent this ground strives toward actuality in created beings and therefore is in fact only the higher potency of the ground active in nature" (Schelling 2006: 44, OA 457-460).

which is, cannot be true. Praxis philosophers had to return to the point from which Marx departed, even though they said that "he too" thought of it.<sup>15</sup> Precisely because of that, Kangrga concluded that "human being and its world are possible as a shift (*Schub*) from being" (Kangrga 1989a: 16). The problem, as they proposed it, is the following: how to transcend the fissure between *Sein* (*Is*) and *Sollen* (*Ought*)?

To Praxists it did not seem logical that human beings are entirely dependent on material conditions, and that they produce the world on the simple basis of economic reality (or given life conditions). Such existential situation would describe the general situation of the world Praxists lived in (or: were in), but it would not account for the totality of world as a human extension. The case motivated Kangrga and Petrović to study Kant and Fichte who, as Praxists claim, realized the real potency of a human mind.<sup>16</sup> Finally, this brings us to the crucial anchor of praxis philosophy: the 'I' of the human being, the self of human being as being a human. Praxists concluded that the only way humanity might reach the point of revolution is if the revolution occurs *in* the human being as such and not through a political economy, or scientific studies, or by guns and torches. First and foremost, it would happen by stopping the galloping world in its course, and returning to *freedom* of the self, the freedom to seek the defining power human being possesses: creation by seizing the (im)possibility.<sup>17</sup> According to Petrović and Kangrga's interpretation of Marx, it shows by itself that the essence of human being is, in fact, the (Historical) (im)possibility (Petrović 1986a: 99). In contrast, alienation

"[...] invades in the very possibility of a human being becoming the human being and human world becoming human world, which means that it occurs in the very 'ground' of that world, and is not some outer emersion, an empirical fact, sociological category or even psychological state, that is, plain 'anomaly'" (Kangrga 1989a: 18).

<sup>15</sup> "Marx's understanding of human being can never remain just an understanding. To understand a human being would mean to understand what human being already was. A human being is not only what it was, before everything, but it is also what it ought to be" (Petrović 1986a: 95).

<sup>16</sup> "And isn't the revolution thinking thought closer to the great philosophies of the past, rather than to pseudo-neutral scholar disciplines that in highly specialized manner deal with the apology of the existing?" (Petrović 1986a: 262).

<sup>17</sup> Kangrga defined *freedom* as the possibility of change rooted in "the ground" (see Kangrga 1989b: 199-200).



The quote most clearly exposes the problem with continuous analytical "conceptual grasping of the structural mechanism of reality", as Sućeska tried to explain. In other words, for whichever (irrelevant) reason once in the past alienation began,<sup>18</sup> the solution is not in the structural analysis of society since society is already alienated at its core, fundamentally, as being qua being. The solution to the problem of alienation lies in human being's ability to act by reshaping *Sein* in accordance with her outmost (im)possibility. It is the reinterpretation/expansion of the initial Kantian-Fichteian "creation of object". The drive for *Sollen* alters human being's view regarding the world, and by it enables human beings to "pour out" the world anew. Petrović and Kangrga discussed the conditions for such endeavour. Consider Petrović's detection of Kant's distinction between theoretical and practical consideration:

"And so in 'De mundi sensibilis' [...] Kant discerned between theoretical research [...] focused on 'what belongs to being' [...] and practical consideration focused on 'what should be inherent to it by freedom'. [...] in Critique of Pure Reason discerns between [...] 'theoretische Erkenntnis' [...] Was da ist [...] and [...] 'praktische Erkenntnis' [...] Was da sein soll [...]" (Petrović 1986a: 287-288).

In this context, Kantian theoretical research aims to identify the structure and content of what-is, however, drawing out a specific category of freedom either suggests that there is the part of being which is different, independent from what belongs to it, or that something such as freedom extends into the possible, a certain phenomenon of creation which *is* by *becoming* or, perhaps, *yet to become*. Consider how Kangrga draws the creation of world out from Kant's discussion:

"When Kant in his 'transcendental deduction' speaks about a link, that is about tying [...] he claims that with such *subject's agency*, which is already

<sup>18</sup> Petrović has examined this in respect to Marx and Heidegger. One of the reasons why he studied Heidegger was to figure out whether alienation occurs on a daily basis, how authenticity plays a role in the history of alienation, is alienation present in a certain epoch or was a human being alienated since the very beginning. Cf. Petrović 1986a: 99-102. Žitko, for example, misses this crucial aspect when he proclaims that "embedding alienation into inter history of philosophy creates a tendency to occasionally use the term in transhistorical sense without paying attention to the concrete socio-economic conditions under which alienation as a phenomenon occurs" (Žitko 2015: 152). It foremostly misses in the sense that Petrović's theory of alienation intentionally rejects this reductionist view of alienation.

thought as a practical act, not only does he create through creative imagination an object of experience and the experience itself, but with this he produces and renders possible a *whole new world* that, via this agency, *yet comes to be* for the first time" (Kangrga 1984: 21).

Whether this implication is purely speculative or not when it comes to Kant, it is Kangrga who adopts the position to revealed the way in which non-being constitutes what-is. Non-being is important for the understanding of freedom and creation because something such as non-being provides the answer to the question how it is possible that we are what we are yet to become. Epistemologically elusive nature of the existence of that which yet isn't but nonetheless it can be deconstructed via non-being. Kangrga does not speak of non-being directly, but it is fittingly describable by the following:

"That 'Ought to' therefore points to that which still isn't in the very 'Is', it wakes it from the stillness, draws out from the darkness of staleness and inertia, and pulls it into process of History, which means that it opens a dimension of its own possibility according to which the factual 'Is' realizes itself as something real, that is, gains a certain 'meaning' in the whole of this process" (Kangrga 1970: 34).

However, the critical point is that it has to happen within human beings as beings. If one is free, then the possibility is not predefined. Then, the possibility is outside the Being. Čović pinpointed this change of perspective:

"In the unity of Sein and Sollen, Kangrga found Archimedean point from which it is possible to move Sein from the ground of alienation and incorporate it into an authentic human world. Such point is not possible to fix into the sphere of Sein, nor into the sphere of Sollen, but it must by necessity find itself in the extended line of moral oughtness – in the transcendable field [...] overgrowing into a dimension of future, the Historical time" (Čović 2004: 676).

Non-being is the form of negation of Being, however it is not Nothing, rather, the notion encompasses all the possible manifestable that, unless eternalism is true, is a part of the fabric of reality precisely in the sense of appearing as if it isn't. In comparison, consider Kangrga's explanation of the radical notion of human historical creation:

"It is this nail and this wheel that is the human future already, for it comes out of negating that which is simply rendered, executed from the outlook of what isn't or wasn't yet, because in the abstract being or nature no such thing as a nail or a wheel exists, only in active-critical-meaningful negation of nature as a purposeful-human opening, grounding and discovering the eminent facts of the world" (Kangrga 1989a: 87).

*Sein* is the source of alienation in the world, and human beings became the alienators themselves. Much like Marx or Heidegger, Praxists assumed that, rather than just being a condition of some (current) epoch to come to an end, alienation might have occurred since the early beginning of humankind or, perhaps, it is possible that alienation is what fundamentally grounds a human being-in-becoming until, through *Sollen*, arises from within to fulfil its essence.<sup>19</sup> Kangrga wrote that humankind is

"by its essence an ever progressive and revolutionary because it aims at changing the world, and because it transforms into action a specific human ferment of dissatisfaction with itself and others" (Kangrga 1989a: 160).

However, a human being is never ever merely rendered (given, provided by *Sein*) (Kangrga 1989a: 85) because in human beings *Sein* comes into conflict with specifically human aspect we understand as *Sollen*.<sup>20</sup> We cannot merely be. "In as much as what it is [human being], it is the being of History, it does not 'have' History [...] it is History itself or Historical happening" (Petrović 1986a: 17), yet from alienated human beings pours out the alienated world (Kangrga 1989a: 17-19). "Somewhere here", in being chained to alienation until an unbearable dissatisfaction, occurs the Historical thinking, the formation of crucial (im)possibility that then need to be seized in order to create an authentic human world.

<sup>19</sup> Petrović wrote, quoting Marx: "By 'allowing' discussion regarding general human nature, Marx in *Das Kapital* critiques bourgeois society precisely because in it this general human nature cannot express itself, because in it 'a general and a banker play a great role, and human being as a human being, on the contrary, only very bland.'"

<sup>20</sup> *Sein* is governed by deterministic mechanism, while *Sollen* is governed by indeterministic mechanism governs *Sollen*. It will be explicated in the fourth chapter of this paper, "Willing the question". Cf. Petrović, 1986a: 83-85, to see how our words for human beings represent a being that rises free from the ground, signifying the struggle between *Sein* and *Sollen*.

"The onlook of possibility is the onlook of future, the onlook of freedom. Namely, only that which can be different than it is, and was, 'has' the future, finds itself in it, and can be free, and out of all the creatures that are human" (Kangrga 1970: 15).<sup>21</sup>

Given the fact that the book was published nearly half a century ago, new findings, of course, may object to the idea that only human beings have such a power. But that is far from being important and we should not hang onto it. The important piece of Kangrga's argument is the existence of freedom in the region of non-being, especially because it is where freedom and alienation meet – the following is the crucial moment of this struggle:

"Namely, alienation cannot even be noticed in the horizon of alienation, rather, only when one comes out from it, and therefore, primarily alienation is not even an empirical fact or a datum, but it is an engaged and meaningful overstepping of empiric as a factual alienated renderness or existing positivity" (Kangrga 1970: 16).<sup>22</sup>

What Praxists had to account for was the problem of how – with what – does a human being puncture the thick mass of alienated world? How does one rise to revolution? Praxis philosophers proposed the phenomenon of *willing* as a probable solution to the problem. Explaining how *thinking* is another demonstration of the willing (Kangrga 1989a: 27), Kangrga defines life as:

"Nothing other than the will to overstep the boundaries of human possibilities, which means acting from stimuli coming from the origin of the human world and true human nature, therefore means knowing to be oriented towards the future as a criterion for the present" (Kangrga, 1989a: 88; cf. Petrović 1986b: 87).

Yet neither thinking itself nor willing itself initiates a change. It is merely a medium for human emancipation. Thus, Kant: The phenomenon which begins transcendence is the phenomenon of *spontaneity*.

<sup>21</sup> Note that in this discussion, Kangrga mentions a single assumption under which all this could even be possible. It derives from the indeterministic principle: "If in the ground of the human world a possibility that it is what it lacks presence, then the new world of today and tomorrow has no chance to be."

<sup>22</sup> See also p. 15, where Kangrga concluded that the essence of entire History is *Aufhebung*.

"Under spontaneity, Kant understands the possibility to initiate a new order, a series of actions or events in the world of the I, which means a creative practical act which – in absolute break from the so-called causality of nature – opens the area of possibility of one eminently human happening, now in the world of freedom, or in Kant's terms – by the principle causality of freedom" (Kangrga 1989b: 20).<sup>23</sup>

This factually existing phenomenon now provides us with the answer about how and why it becomes possible to make a shift from *Sein*. We will find the answer a page later in Kangrga's enquiry:

"That Being (the 'Is') is present in everything, before any statement is made, and here begins, historically speaking, not some 'blunder', but the true scene of the *drama of human being and his world*, somehow never getting to the right source, to the authentic origin, Historical root of ourselves, therefore: to our self, to self-agency and self-creation, to that Kantian-Fichtean 'I think' as self-consciousness and self-operation, to the absolute creational beginning of everything that is, or on that Hegelian Historical Nothing which destroys every metaphysics as onto-theo-logy" (Kangrga, 1989b: 21).<sup>24</sup>

On the one hand, "in the human mind the question is ever implied", more precisely the question "why the existing is such as it is, rather than being different?" (Kangrga 1989a: 35). On the other hand, Kangrga already sees the answer, and we too can observe it in a child's act of wanting to grab the moon, a spontaneous act that signifies willing the question,<sup>25</sup> opening and revealing of the human world in which something relevant for the human being will occur (Kangrga 1989a: 29). This micro-manifestation is, in an analogy, a seed of revolution, and the image of a child reaching for the moon indeed strikes us significantly, but it requires not just any type of freedom or creative drive. Instead, within it lies a strong will to guide others:

"Free is only that self-defining action in which a human being works as a whole, multiple personality, in which it is not a slave to any particular

<sup>23</sup> The ascension from Plato's cave should be the prime analogy that helps us to understand this process.

<sup>24</sup> See also p. 210 for Fichte.

<sup>25</sup> "Being is cancelled the moment I posed a question regarding the meaning of being because that question alone already pulls being into the History" (Kangrga, 1989b: 22).

thought, or a feeling, or aspiration. [...] a human being is free only when that which is creative within it defines its work, which is, when with its work it expands the boundaries of humanity" (Petrović 1986a: 147).

The process reveals an ontological structure of relations between being and being-yet/non-yet-being/being-to-be, between what is (being) and what can be (the part of non-being). Its crowning moment is the *practical act of deciding*, possible only because *Sein* does not govern the spontaneity (cf. Kangrga 1989b: 63).

The transition from theoretical to practical is in a decision, a "postulate for establishing the world", since the world "never really exists by default, the world isn't, the world yet needs to be in order to be!" (Kangrga, 1989b:57, 58), which presupposes the ever-utopian projection, the power to be on a standpoint of nothing, and nowhere, from which the false structures arise evidently on the back of alienated human being, and human beings undertake the revolutionary action through radical *critique*. Contrary to critics, who superficially thought of Praxists' use of utopia as an empty wailing for the phantasmal idea, the concept of utopia has a very concrete technical purpose in Praxists' theory. Thus, the mapping completes and we identify the essence of human being as praxis:

"In the notion of praxis, human social reality reveals itself as an opposition to givenness/renderness, that is, as a formation, and at the same time the specific human form of being (Sein) [...] praxis is revealing secrets of human being as an onto-creational being, as a being which is creating a (human social) reality, and thus understands (human and outer) reality (reality in its totality). Praxis is the unity of human being and the world of subjects and objects, spirit and matter, products and productivity, a unity that reduces historically [...] praxis as a creation of human reality is at the same time a process in which earth and cosmos reveal themselves as being" (Petrović 1986b: 305-306)

Such a conclusion is strongly influenced by Heidegger's investigations. Regardless, it is my belief that Petrović further explored it enough for the possibility to conclude that his contribution to the problem of praxis is authentic. Elsewhere, Petrović overlaps with Kangrga:

"As a being of praxis, the human being is a free and creative being, and as such it is a being of revolution. Revolution is not some special occurrence

in history, but the most concrete form of collective human creativity" (Petrović 1965: 87).

From this, *thinking (the) revolution*<sup>26</sup> occurs as a necessity (Petrović), while Kangrga introduces us to the "pinnacle of the human being" – *speculative thought* – meant in the tradition of German idealism.<sup>27</sup> It is the moment in praxis philosophy which can be understood as the beginning of the revolutionary praxis, a battle that, before anything happens, must occur in the human being as ontological being, the penultimate creation as the core aligning of the human being and its essence (Petrović 1986b: 261). Nonetheless, critics will still insist that Praxists' concept of revolution is confusing, mysterious, tautological, dubious or strange. In the following chapter, I provided arguments against that claim.

### 3. *Being Praxis*

Most recent critics claim that Praxists' ideas may serve as a guiding signpost, but nothing more. For example, Bogdanić wrote that "in it there is nothing, or very little, about how to organize a campaign for such society in capitalist conditions" (Bogdanić 2015: 43); Jurak wrote "it's critique remained abstract and speculative", sort of "useful, but insufficient", a "positivity as plain negativity" (Jurak 2015: 72); Cerovac wrote "but in order not to remain at thinking the utopia, one must show that a more just society is possible, otherwise we remain at the ground of normative ethics limited to a political praxis" (Cerovac 2015: 137); Sućeska thought that Praxists criticized only an idea of the structure they were living in, and wrote that "their philosophical-speculative thrownness into the future is severely disappointing", and that they were not aware of the perpetuation in production, which Marx realized, ultimately turning into a "wanting demand" with no real strength (Sućeska 2012: 136, cf. 139-142), which is something that made Sućeska wonder "just what kind of revolution would this 'praxis' revolution be?" (Sućeska 2012: 144). The question motivated Sućeska to conclude that praxis philosophy was "barely anything more than hypertrophic speculative humanism with Marxist harbringing";

<sup>26</sup> The meaning is intentionally threefold: (1) "thinking about the revolution"; (2) "revolutionary thinking"; and (3) "revolution that thinks".

<sup>27</sup> More precisely, in the tradition of Fichte, by his understanding of Ego as not being a pure act, but being a pure action, a spontaneous act of creativity. Cf. Drews 1897: 62; Fischer 2017: 430.

while Žitko writes that Petrović's "synthetic work" failed miserably (Žitko 2015: 143, 144), that Petrović's authentic revolution is, in fact, a "circle of pseudo-argumentation" (Žitko 2015: 149-150), that praxis philosophy split with reality, and, ultimately, that it didn't work neither on theoretical level nor in practical reality where it doesn't offer any "research plan", and has, along with the rest of Marxism, declined by the 1990's (Žitko 2015: 157-159). It comes down to Marx's critical conclusion in *Die Deutsche Ideologie* – being praxis was a fantasy that succumbed to reality, and turned into a footnote in the history of philosophy. This, however, is cringe criticism at its best, manifested as an egregious lack of knowledge regarding praxis philosophy.

The major objection to Praxists was that they, unlike Marx, failed to address the actual reality and the structural co-existence of individuals and society. Such evaluation, however, signifies critics' floundering about in praxis philosophy which results in constructing *contra* arguments on completely misplaced grounds. Praxists did not develop "a research plan", "a program" or "a campaign" because they considered such approach to be utterly pointless. It does not matter what kind of program, plan or campaign one might devise because such an approach to solving social discrepancies remain in the domain of an alienated world. In other words, you cannot possibly have a meaningful "research plan", "a program" or "a campaign" if you do not understand how the situation fundamentally came to be. To be most exact: you cannot possibly have a meaningful strategy because you are yet the original creation of the world, the History. In order to do that, one has to understand the ontological and phenomenal structure prior to the formation of any historical, social, political etc. situation. This is the reason why Praxists are not economical politicians or sociologists or any other positive disciplinarians, that is, the reason why they are first and foremost philosophers – because only in the domain of philosophical re-articulation of the most fundamental structure of reality can we find guiding answers to creating a framework of being within which then something such as "a campaign" might make sense. Claiming that Praxists were terrible thinkers on revolution because they had no concrete plan about carrying it out is analogous to claiming that Ernest Rutherford was a lousy physicist because he did not devise a social strategy program on carrying out the theory of atomic disintegration. Before such a thing can be applied, we need to understand the fundamentals that allow for such a thing to be used. The difference between Praxists and Rutherford is that Praxists dealt with the essence of human beings, and thus with adequately understanding what *might* provoke the radical change. They concluded that there would be no revolution unless we rethink the concept, and they returned to German idealism and early



Marx to re-study a fundamental theory of revolution in an attempt to understand why it will not begin. As far as Praxists' are concerned, the answers these recent critics are looking for, and the way in which they are looking for it, only confirm the alienated reality they are never going to overcome.

"A new society is created with revolution, and a new society cultivates a new human being. The later then appears as a passive product of a new society, and at the end, a product of revolution. However, who creates the revolution? If the real human being is the old one, how can revolution bring us a new human being?" (Petrović 1986a: 83).

Žitko argued that praxis philosophy lacks (concrete) critique of capitalism (cf. Žitko 2015: 153), while Sućeska concluded that it is simply (too) abstract (cf. Sućeska 2012: 139). From a wider angle, the conclusions imply that dealing with the analysis of structures requires the development of programs that can either lead to a revolution or, once the revolution occurs, will establish the 'proper order' of free humanity. In both cases, that is, in all of them, Petrović is the one who asks: *Who creates the program?*

If we want it to succeed, *the creator has to be a new type of human being*. Otherwise we will fail – just like we already failed many times before. No individuals, groups or entire nations will ever step into the revolutionary process before they change their own ways on the level of human being as human being. The society cannot perform a change because it is not a hive mind, and because it is not free. Only a human being as such, an individual, in a tangible epoch of dynamic events in which aligns with other human beings can do that, and it is by no means articulated with outside conditions or societal changes, it is, to its full extent, dependent on what Kangrga called "human fact" – unpredictable and groundless phenomenon from which may, or may not, spontaneously come to a difference by acting free – acting outside "a program", "a campaign", "a plan". Consider:

"Radical change of society, which cancels all forms of exploitation, cannot be carried out solely by changing social structures. Changing social structures is not possible without changing a human being" (Petrović 1986b: 76).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Cf. 88, where Petrović mentions Stalinism as an example for the idea of the general rule of society.

However, the most important aspect of the only way for the human world to truly change, that is, to truly achieve its authenticity from freedom, is by *not* being violent. This condition, terribly overlooked far too often, is what many of the followers of revolution or the praxis movement either suppress or fail to learn. It is absolutely impossible to achieve a meaningful world with methods that never brought a substantial change to the world, that never but temporarily established conditions of fulfilled life of human species. On this matter, Petrović is exact:

"The essence of revolution is not in bloodshed and cruelty, but in creative work with which one births and develops a new human being and a new society" (Petrović 1986b: 87).

The entire idea of Praxis philosophy was to go precisely against what these critics claim that they should have done instead of what they did. For example, it is not true that Petrović and Kangrga didn't know what to do with the critique they developed, as critics claim. They knew very well what to do with it, and have extensively written about it in detail. Among many such indications is the following:

"In order to avoid confusion, I accentuate: the critique most certainly aims at changing the world, and showing a direction or path of this change. But it would be wrong to think that essential critique in any sphere must end in concrete suggestions" (Petrović 1986a: 386).

The case is not that they don't know what to suggest. The case is that they don't think it bears any necessity. It carries no such thing because valid critique – if it is true – is already by default altering the *Sein* of the alienated world (or will be altering), and it will have its place in the revolutionary process when the critique of the world aligns to a change. Precisely because of that, Praxists realized that philosophy too has to advance to a higher degree, that is, that it has to transcend into a tool of revolution.

"What does not mean that it vanishes into oblivion. "A definite reconciliation of thought with reality is possible only as a final capitulation of revolutionary thought before reactionary reality. A definitive abolition of philosophy is imaginable only as a definitive victory of blind economic forces or political violence. Thus it is unimaginable" (Petrović 1966: 327).

The worst thing that can happen to philosophy is never to cease existing in its endless re-interpretation. Yet Praxists were heavily attacked for not referring to the real world and economics, in a sense that neither had they discussed capitalism to a certain extent, nor have they analysed changes in the structure, and most certainly, that they did not suggest anything practical. Again, the truth is of entirely different nature. Firstly, consider Kangrga:

"[...] it is not our intention to, in an attempt of enlightening accentuated question, think about it solely in horizon of the political, as it often and much often happens, but we want to remain primarily on the foothold of questioning, therefore in the dimension of philosophical since 'we already had enough of this politics in philosophy'" (Kangrga 1970: 29).

They were fully aware of the problems they are being accused for, but they intentionally insisted on not dealing with them because they did not believe that it by any means helps to understand the true cause of the problem, and the truly right way to deal with it. It is similar to the bioethical problem of the various models of deciding whom to treat or not with limited finances and equipment at disposal, without addressing the fundamental problem, which is why the framework of health care is such that it is not free and available to all, and what causes the framework to operate dysfunctional. Petrović expands on the problem:

"Can revolution win? Is it not that 'victory' means the end of the revolution, and therefore its defeat? What can follow after the revolution, if not contra-revolution? Isn't it so that the only real victory of revolution is if it carries on? But can a revolution continue forever? Isn't revolution the exact opposite of that which continues to last and keeps on repeating?" (Petrović, 1986b: 261).

The "revolution that carries on", and is "the exact opposite of continuation", is the *Aufhebung* that cannot occur in the structure, via programmatic work. It cannot be carried out by plans and programs and campaigns because they are pure manifestations of the Is-System, a system which prevents any revolution in the first place.

"Marx knew that the new society could not be created simply apart from the existing class society, and he also knew that an attempt to know this society without the help of Hegelian heritage must remain under the level of Hegel. But he also thought that the future society could not be deduced

logically from the existing one, that it can be created only through a jump, a break, a revolution" (Petrović 1968: 337).

But only in a human being can a revolution genuinely occur, by spontaneity, because then it becomes *substantial*. Žitko, for example, objected Petrović for promoting "authentic socialism" while the true Yugoslavian socialism disintegrated into a free market (Žitko 2015: 153). The factum gives us the opposite: in a state of decay, what you truly need is an authentically free human being able to propose a radical suggestion. The fact that socialism disintegrated into the free market is precisely the reason why Petrović had to promote authentic socialism. Had it been any other way, it would only *confirm* the failure.

"One free personality (or several of them) cannot transform an unfree society into a free one. In a transformative striving, a free personality has a success as much as manages to convince, thrill, and move potentially revolutionary social groups to work" (Petrović 1986b: 150-151).

Praxists understood that the whole problem was summed in "Soyons réalistes, demandons l'impossible!". It was an outcry against realism, against "programs" and "campaigns" and "plans". The revolution that occurs with the idea of un-grounding, however, posits the self into the u-topos, beyond the real and probable, in order to create the truth that is yet to become. It is the possibility that in the act of free choice a human being seizes in accordance with her essence which is understood as possible through the observation of spontaneity.<sup>29</sup> Kangrga understood well that such critique must always be "frantic", for it aspires to the existence in accordance to not-yet-true (cf. Kangrga 1970: 42; also 31, 32). Whoever believes that revolution, as a concept, can be socially grounded in the current state of human affairs will ultimately face a personal disappointment, which is why praxis philosophy introduced a more concrete idea. Concreteness does not lie in writing revolutionary programs, it lies in challenging the truth of the self as being an alienated human, subdued freedom.

In such situation, there are no instructions and no rules. We are left with nothing but the speculative thought. *Speculative thought* as Praxists understood it is not a phantasmagorical imagination or a funny picturing, it is the

<sup>29</sup> Spontaneity is the key to starting the revolution. "The real revolutionary media during May were the walls and their speech, the silk-screen posters and the hand-painted notices, the street where speech began and was exchanged – everything that was an *immediate* inscription, given and returned, spoken and answered, mobile in the same space and time, reciprocal and antagonistic" (Baudrillard 2007).

humane radical critical apparatus which initiates with *Sollen*, it is the power of human mind to create out of nothing, to boldly seek horizons yet investigated. It originates and grows within history, but it confronts history in repulsion to alienation and enslavement by turning us into Historical happening. It is coming from a single human being, but it is considering the totality of existence. As such, speculative thought opens a path to utopian endeavours, their point being not to live an eternity, but to achieve meaningful orientation.

### 6. Concluding thought

The legacy of praxis philosophy is the legacy of speculative thought transcending history since Ancient Greece, echoing over generations as an untameable blare of defiance which finds individuals who boldly walk against their fate, who refuse to be "officers of the state". Precisely because we are History, what was revealed in praxis philosophy is always an actuality – for an individual, for a group, or for a nation, in one form or the other – as long as it is infused with the bravery of speculative thought, one will find praxis philosophy roaring to motivate to *being praxis* of the world.

Praxists were not merely a historical footnote, and that is visible from the subtle ways in which they constructed their theory of revolution. They were a temporality which opened to possibilities clutching beyond the historical context in which they emerged. In a severely alienated world going towards its final confirmation of its predefined state,<sup>30</sup> they rode the wave of such a possibility, honestly tried to understand it, and in doing so they pointed towards the only thing that can save us – towards a human being, the purity of its form: here you are, the shaper of worlds, the utopian messiah: do not forget that! Thus, the proponents of praxis thought should not allow sterile criticism to appear as if it can make a good point. Without a response, their superficial, contorted reading of praxis philosophy may have devastating effects on the long run, and then the praxis philosophy may genuinely be degraded to the level of a footnote in the history of philosophy.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. "The world has lost its capacity to 'form a world' [*faire monde*]: it seems only to have gained that capacity of proliferating, to the extent of its means, the 'unworld' [*im-monde*], which, until now, and whatever one may think of retrospective illusions, has never in history impacted the totality of the orb to such an extent. In the end, everything takes place as if the world affected and permeated itself with a death drive that soon would have nothing else to destroy than the world itself" (Nancy 2007: 34).

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