

## Introduction

The way I understand the philosopher, as a terrible explosive that is a danger to everything ...

— Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*<sup>1</sup>

I am speaking of a ruthless criticism of everything existing, ruthless in two senses: The criticism must not be afraid of its own conclusions, nor of conflict with the powers that be.

— Marx, Letter to Arnold Ruge<sup>2</sup>

### 1

Last year, at a DMV office in Florida, among several license plates displayed on a wall, one in particular stood out to me: it was an image of Martin Luther King Jr. along with text that read, “living the dream.” The implication was that, what was once for King Jr. just a dream, had now been realized, and no longer had to be fought for — an illustrative example of how a rebellious thinker and activist (who during his life was seen as a great danger to the state and was violently smeared and hunted down) is neutralized, made servile, turned into a legitimator of the present state of things\* (and not just to the extent that he was turned

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\* “During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes relentlessly persecute them, and treat their teachings with malicious hostility, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaign of lies and slanders. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to

into decoration for a commodity). This is accomplished by suggesting that the state of affairs the rebel was struggling for has now been realized, and to the extent that this rebel is still relevant, it is not as a revolutionary but as a friend of the status quo. This is what has been done to Marx by both social democratic parties, who proclaimed that now that they're in power, all that is needed is a gradual reformist path to "the dream," and large bureaucratic states flying red flags, for whom the arrival of communism was posited not as a process to be actively approached through continuous praxis, but as a far-off state of affairs which will be established at some unspecified future date. In both cases, what was asserted, under Marxist pretences, was the lack of a need for any further revolutionary agency. This degradation of Marx for the sake of political utility led to grotesque contradictions like the USSR, a "workers' state" suppressing workers' strikes, or the German Social Democratic Party, a supposed "workers' party" siding with proto-fascists to massacre workers in revolt.<sup>3</sup> All of these statist manifestations of Marx had rivals who tried to preserve Marx's revolutionary potential, to wield him as a hammer against these regimes, but, over time, they were marginalized and conquered, and sometimes, to add insult to injury, portrayed as Marx's enemies, both by the open anti-Marxists and those who used Marx to defend existing capitalist regimes. This same vulgarization was committed against Nietzsche by those Nazis who proclaimed the

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canonize them, so to say, and to surround their names with a certain halo for the 'consolation' of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping them, while at the same time emasculating the revolutionary doctrine of its content, vulgarizing it and blunting its revolutionary edge." — Lenin, *State and Revolution*, Ch. I, #1.

arrival of the *Übermensch*\* in the Third Reich, even when this *Übermensch* was characterized by two of Nietzsche's most hated things — a German and an anti-Semite!

## 2

In the popular imagination, reading Marx alongside Nietzsche might seem bizarre: aren't they so diametrically opposed to one another that reading them in each other's light would only lead to contradiction and confusion? The extent to which their irreconcilability has been exaggerated is only one of the many reasons to unite them, because it is to a large extent the grotesque deformations mentioned above that have created this exaggeration. Fans of Nietzsche have tended to be averse to Marx, and to a large extent, this is the fault of self-proclaimed Marxists themselves, so many of whom have presented versions of Marxism that are cold and inhuman, deterministic and vulgarly mechanistic, or statist and bureaucratic — all characteristics which *Marx himself* violently opposed. History has been made into an independent force, as if ruling over people from the outside, when Marx emphasized that history is nothing *but* individuals pursuing their goals. Historical analysis has been made into a matter of prophecy, a deterministic metanarrative, something naïve which people can no longer

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\* This Nietzschean concept is often translated as “overman” or the cartoonish “superman,” but I prefer using the original German. First of all because the original German “*Mensch*” is gender-neutral, unlike the English “man” (and if the *Übermensch* would be beyond good and evil, it is fair to expect them to be beyond gender too). Furthermore, the English translations risk losing the significant associations with other *Über*-words frequently used by Nietzsche, most importantly *Überwindung* (“overcoming”).

believe in. Marxist action has been made into the activity of bureaucrats and party politicians, when it is always the working class itself that is the author of its revolutionary activity. Marxist philosophy has been made into a closed system, a rigid framework to force onto the world; and socialism has been made into a static blueprint, rather than the *process* by which the world is transformed.

But if we use Nietzsche to excavate Marxism, we can uncover all the Nietzschean aspects of Marx that have been purposefully denounced, overlooked, or ignored throughout the failures and deformations of Marxism in the twentieth century. I propose a Nietzschean Marxism, which, paradoxically, comes to be *more* Marxist than many forms of Marxism claiming to be Marx's direct heirs. What must be restored is the *human* element — active human beings, their lived experience and their most personal concerns — and there is no modern philosopher who provides this element more fiercely than Nietzsche. Our philosophy not only centres the concerns of everyday, living, suffering human beings; it exists and develops *through* them.

It's not an accident that when nominally Marxist institutions wanted to make Marx more pliable, it was often precisely the elements that tied Marx to Nietzsche that they violently opposed. One of the most notable features of Nietzsche's philosophy is its emphatic aversion to *servitude*, to being made servile, and it is precisely this that was targeted by so many enemies of Marx disguised as his disciples. Poor Marx, even more so than Nietzsche, has been made to suffer through many horrific surgeries and mutations. Through theoretical distortions and practical misapplications, he has been transformed from a thinker who wants to *transcend* modernity's categories altogether, into a thinker who merely wants to reform some given sphere of modernity: a social democrat, a moralist, a

historical determinist, even a nationalist. So many people have dedicated their careers to digging up Marx's corpse and making use of one limb or another, *not* to emphasize what is most powerful in him, but precisely to *neutralize* what is most powerful, thereby allowing him to become servile. He has been made into a legitimator of parliamentary parties and states, a prophet with a metanarrative, a preacher of justice, equality, and fairness, and an ideologue. In light of Nietzsche's rebellious spirit and aversion to servitude, it is unsurprising that he was so popular among Russian revolutionaries leading up to and during the Russian Revolution, but was then denounced and expunged the more that the USSR exhausted its capacity for political transformation — in the process of making Marx servile it is very useful to prevent Nietzsche from interfering.

In 2020, when the Philippine government held a hearing on a new proposed bill amendment, whose supposed purpose was counterterrorism, it listed Marx alongside Nietzsche as a threat to the state — this wasn't an ignorant move. A critic of the bill from Quezon City said that, given its ambiguity, it could mean that “[a]ny member, a student who wants to join a political organization, who wants to discuss Marxism, Leninism, Friedrich Nietzsche, and his concept of *Übermensch*, or the superman, is suspect.”<sup>4</sup> Very well! The humour of such a bill does not preclude its reasonableness. Marx and Nietzsche are, after all, the two great giants of modern emancipation. They wouldn't really be Marx and Nietzsche if they were not considered suspect by most states. In the subtitle to his work *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche characterized his thinking as a “philosophizing with a hammer.” So let us use Marx as a hammer, not as a legitimator, because genuine revolutionaries do not need to be granted legitimation. Value-creators of the future, they legitimize themselves.

When one observes all the ways in which the thought of Marx has been distorted and disfigured by some of his own followers, it becomes clear that it's as important to distinguish between Marx and Marxism as it is to distinguish between Jesus and Christianity, or Socrates and Plato(nism). In becoming formalized, codified, institutionalized, ideologized (as happened in many strands of the aforementioned movements), any thinker risks becoming a carcass. Every movement, as it is contaminated by opportunism, comes to be threatened by such mummification and vulgarization, which must be actively resisted, as this book attempts to do. Both Marx and Nietzsche developed philosophies that are by nature transformative, always in motion, philosophies capable of endlessly exceeding their own potential. But whenever they were utilized for the purposes of institutional legitimation, this transformative potential had to be stripped away. A document of legitimation cannot be transformative — it must be as formal and static as the regime it is legitimating. Thus, many branches of radical thought are kept from growing, others are cut off, some bent and broken, and still others isolated. Through the formalizing processes of the German Social Democratic Party, the Second International, and finally the Soviet Union, Marx was transformed from a source of infinite self-transformation into a monument — static in form and content. The turning of a thinker into a monument is equivalent to their death — as it is in death that one's potentiality is cut off and it is finally said what one "was" — reduced to bones, to the rigid and the inanimate. The thinker becomes a statue, and statues, as Lenin once reportedly said, are "for the pigeons to shit on."<sup>5</sup> If the statue is successfully established, its weight grows in accordance with its influence; and then, one must heed

Zarathustra's warning to "[b]e careful lest a statue fall and kill you!"<sup>6</sup>

A thinker must always be something beyond your control — nothing pays them more dishonour than making them servile. It's the same with living persons. There is nothing wrong with finding a person useful for some end or other, but their dignity requires that we do not reduce them to that usefulness, which is, of course, precisely what the capitalist division of labour does. We'll give Marx a hammer, but not thereby make him a carpenter. We'll give Marx a hammer to smash through all the historical rubble weighing him down.

## 4

This book is not so much an attempt at synthesizing Marx and Nietzsche. It is not, as has been done before, primarily a matter of supplementing what is lacking in Marx with Nietzsche, or supplementing what is lacking in Nietzsche with Marx (for example, combining Marx's critique of political economy with Nietzsche's critique of the ascetic ideal). Such a synthesis would risk overlooking all the ways in which what is being added as a supplement is *already present* in the thinker who's supposed to be lacking or deficient. Namely, in Marx, however scattered or limited, there is already a critique of the ascetic ideal, and in Nietzsche, there is already a critique of capitalism. It is not, therefore, a matter of synthesizing or supplementing, and more a matter of using each thinker to bring out what is already present in the other, but perhaps overlooked, hidden, or placed in the background. In analyzing one thinker, the other serves as a reference point for the production of a more detailed analysis. The goal is to bring out, by means of a cross-examination, the immense critical

power already present in each thinker — this requires only a little push.

## 5

Marx is often presented, especially to people who fear him, in the following way: there is Marx the socialist revolutionary, but then, on the other hand, there is Marx the economic analyst, in principle separable from the former; in other words, one can separate Marx's analysis of capitalism from his revolutionary politics. Perhaps this presentation could be defended on pedagogic grounds, but it prevents one from ever truly understanding Marx. In general, rigid binaries and oppositions tend to obscure Marx's dialectical mode of thought, which does not begin from strict oppositions such as those between the descriptive and the normative, fact and value, analysis and politics. Marx's theoretical critique *is* simultaneously revolutionary practice, and his revolutionary practice *is* simultaneously theoretical critique, and the one does not exist without the other. Not only does theory become revolutionary praxis when it grips the masses, but revolutionary praxis becomes a theoretical contribution when it tackles and transforms social relations. The theory and the practice are a continuous whole, and either one in isolation is necessarily incomplete. This is one of the most basic underlying characteristics of Marx's way of thinking: one cannot evaluate practical effects without theory, but one also cannot judge the validity of a theory independently of its practical effects.

*Theory and practice.* — Fateful distinction, as if there were an actual *drive for knowledge* that, without regard to questions of usefulness and harm, went blindly for the truth; and then, separate from this, the whole world of *practical* interests—



... The conflict between different systems, including that between epistemological scruples, is a conflict between quite definite instincts ...

— Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (Note from March-June 1888)<sup>7</sup>

All social life is essentially practical. All the mysteries which lead theory towards mysticism find their rational solution in human praxis and the comprehension of this praxis.

— Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*<sup>8</sup>

When Marxism is reduced to theoretical propositions, no wonder the common individual finds it irrelevant to their lives. But Marxism is nothing if not *lived*. It can only be made active by the individuals for whom it is not a theoretical question, but a matter of their most personal concerns. Marx rejected all “purely *scholastic*” questions. Insofar as Marxist theory matters, the active, suffering, struggling individual is its lifeblood.

This is something both Marx and Nietzsche agree on: one cannot separate philosophy from its practical context and effects, from its uses, its functions, and its goals. Marx’s philosophy is an immanent one — even when Marx looks back to the most distant reaches of primitive history, he does so while being firmly grounded in the present, with one eye to the future, never steering away from it. To abstract from future development would be to abandon philosophy, because its completion is yet to come. Nietzsche is no different. His philosophy would be nothing if abstracted from his goals of creating new values and affirming life, his anticipation of the *Übermensch*, or his impatience to give meaning to the Earth. For Nietzsche, a philosopher who completely distances themselves from all practical goals and aims is essentially a life-denying one, because they use philosophy as a means to escape life, to temporarily lift

themselves out of the stream of events and contemplate some ahistorical problem from a de-individualized perspective. Such a philosopher is a descendant of the old religious ascetics, who sedate themselves through thought and reach out to the eternal heavenly realm, where worldly concerns are absent.

Even if a thinker intends to develop a “purely descriptive” theory, to do so independently of all normative concerns, evaluations, social ends and interests, is impossible. Any analysis of a complex phenomenon requires what is called, in dialectical language, a “process of abstraction.” If one seeks to understand modern society, for instance, one’s analysis will be constituted by a number of analytical categories (e.g., “individual,” “class,” “product,” “production,” etc.). The development of these categories constitutes one’s “process of abstraction” — that is, the way one cleaves the world into distinct parts. Because there is, in principle, an infinite number of ways in which one could sub-divide and categorize the world, the way this is done is by no means self-explanatory. The categories we use are *always*, in part, determined by our practical aims and interests, according to the aspects of an object we want to emphasize, and not infrequently by the prejudices we were socialized into. There’s no escape from the process of abstraction, whether one is aware of it or not. The difference is between those who *acknowledge* it and deliberate on the best way to do it in a given context, and those who ignore it to fall back on whatever abstractions they find most comfortable and familiar.

## 6

There is no God’s eye point of view through which to look at the world, no perspective beyond all perspectives, and every single perspective is to some extent necessarily

finite and limited. This is an inescapable part of human experience. A perspective entails a particular point of view, a particular “eye” with which one perceives things. An *absolute* perspective, one of unconditioned objectivity, would, as Nietzsche says, have us “think an eye which cannot be thought at all, an eye turned in no direction at all, an eye where the active and interpretative powers are to be suppressed, absent, but through which seeing still becomes a seeing-something, so it is an absurdity and non-concept of eye that is demanded.”<sup>9</sup>

However, the denial of an absolute perspective does not mean that an approximation to something we would conventionally call “reality,” “truth,” or “objectivity” is impossible. In the *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche proposes his own conception of objectivity, the gist of which has become increasingly common in contemporary academic philosophy — “the *more* affects we are able to put into words about a thing, the *more* eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our ‘concept’ of the thing, our ‘objectivity.’” Objectivity, in other words, is not the *abandonment* of all particular perspectives, but the *accumulation and amalgamation* of perspectives, through which we exercise our “active and interpretative powers.” For Nietzsche, the standards of objectivity are set in the battle between perspectives, in the relations between them, and as objectivity grows, certain perspectives are subsumed by the more powerful ones.

If Nietzsche’s analysis of slave morality is correct, then it is able to explain, on the basis of one complete and coherent conceptualization, the nature and perspectives of *both* the masters and the slaves; it is able to incorporate a wider range of perspectives within its field of explanation, and is thus more “objective,” whereas the explanation given by the slaves can only make sense of their *own* perspective, leaving master morality to remain either a mystery, an aberration,

or requiring an entirely separate field of explanation to be made sense of.

Marx, in his analysis of capitalism, proceeds from a number of varying levels of abstraction, but in a way that allows them to build atop one another and cohere, forming a tower from which one attains heightened understanding. Bourgeois economists can only explain production from their own point of view, emphasizing in it all that confirms their needs and interests. As soon as it comes to the facts of economic crises, scarcity in the face of overproduction, or the mass revolt of workers, these must be dismissed by these economists either as aberrations, or as caused by external influences that otherwise have nothing to do with the “pure” functioning of the capitalist system. Marx’s analysis, on the other hand, can explain not only economic crises, scarcity and overproduction, the immiseration of workers, capital’s historical origins and likely developments, but *within* all of this, *also* the reasons behind the perspective of the bourgeoisie. In other words, Marx’s analysis can explain not only everything within the capitalist mode of production that bourgeois economists overlook and ignore, but also *why* the bourgeois economists overlook and ignore it in the first place, and in this sense, Marx’s analysis exhibits superior objectivity. It accounts for *multiple perspectives*.

## 7

This sort of “increase” in objectivity, the combining of perspectives, once it reaches a certain level of development, is also characterized by the overcoming of petty moralizing, the overcoming of the instinct for blame and revenge. For the ascetic priest and the bourgeois economist, the need for punishment and the need for a comforting worldview mutually reinforce one another. On the one hand, their

worldview justifies the punishment that they already seek to carry out against their enemies. On the other hand, their worldview demands, in order to make sense, the disbursement of blame and punishment. For the ascetic with the slavish worldview, everything that cannot be incorporated into that worldview, everything that threatens to undermine it, must be something evil — the very difficulty of explaining the existence of the aberration (why would God allow for such evil?) is seen as proof of its moral debasement. For the slavish person, one of the most terrifying things about the alien is its inner density, lack of transparency, the difficulty of understanding things from its perspective.

Likewise, the bourgeois ideologue, who does not have the tools to explain the fundamental problems that have accompanied capitalism since its inception, nor the fact that the majority of people living under it are miserable or dissatisfied, must have recourse to the identification of an alien element obstructing the normal (which also means “morally good”) functioning of the system. The bureaucrat, the communist, the immigrant, the Jew, the spy, the saboteur, the agitator, the decadent, and whoever else can most conveniently be turned into a scapegoat at a given time, a target of both fear and hatred, becomes the missing piece in explaining why such a wonderful system is so wretched. In this way, *defects* of their understanding and indications of the *incompleteness* of their worldviews are transformed by the priest and the ideologist into *proof* that everything alien to their worldview must be suppressed, indoctrinated, or eradicated, and that their worldview must be all the more protected.

In order to exempt the system one is defending from all blame, it is very helpful to posit the intruder, the enemy of the system, as one of two things: either as 1) an animal, a sub-human, a creature incapable of moral deliberation,

or as 2) a transcendently free, but evil, moral agent. Portraying one's enemies as the former allows one to explain why the enemy would attack or threaten something so wonderful: because they lack all reason, all moral sense, because they cannot even comprehend their own actions! The added bonus is that one can then use this classification to justify the wholesale extermination of the intruding element with no moral qualms. The second option makes the status quo exempt from its own failures, because the intruding element has made a *moral choice* — it is useless to look for the causes of their behaviour in the existing society because their acts of evil were decided in the realm of absolute freedom! (When you bring up the enormous death count of nominally capitalist countries, defenders of capitalism will say that those deaths are due to individual choices, not capitalism itself. In other words, they have recourse to the fiction of the transcendently free moral agent. Of course, when it comes to nominally communist countries, the causes of death are suddenly systemic.) While the first classification allows one to punish the alien element without even requiring a moral justification, the second classification allows one to punish the alien element on account of their *blameworthiness*, i.e., their *choice* to do evil.

## 8

It is crucial to acknowledge the link between theory and practice, not just for the sake of methodology, but for the sake of one of Nietzsche's most highly valued virtues: honesty. I would hate to mislead or disappoint my readers, I would *disdain to conceal my views and aims*, and would rather make clear, from the beginning, the all-too-human aspects of my thought that many philosophers tend to hide in shame, even from themselves. This is not a

“disinterested” book, its contents are neither universal nor eternal, it doesn’t lay claim to an absolute perspective, and its interpretations are by no means final — indeed, I hope that one day this book will be obsolete. Like all philosophy books, to a greater or lesser extent, it is historically situated and personally inflected, driven by particular passions and convictions, and expressing a set of tastes, wishes and hopes.

Nietzsche wrote in *Beyond Good and Evil* that *all* philosophy is a “confession of faith on the part of its author, and a type of involuntary and unself-conscious memoir.”<sup>10</sup> This is an observation of an unavoidable fact about philosophy, and it is just as true of Nietzsche as of anyone else. It is therefore not a condemnation of philosophy as such, but only a condemnation of philosophy that dishonestly *lies* and tries to disguise its own nature. The best that a good Nietzschean can do is exhibit the virtue of *honesty*, and openly *admit* the fact.

So, let me make it clear: the following work is an *interpretation* of Nietzsche, and specifically a *socialist* one (and, indeed, one could add that it entails a particular interpretation of *socialism* as well). That it is an interpretation should go without saying — after all, Nietzsche himself proclaimed that “facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations.”<sup>11</sup> This should not be confused with the absurd claim that *any* interpretation is as good as any other — a claim that is very popular to attack even if no one holds it, and Nietzsche himself would oppose it as a complete degradation of thought and culture. The point is, rather, that an interpretation can only come from a specific, limited, i.e., *human* perspective; and the standards by which its quality and value are judged must themselves be embedded in a perspective.

To put it in a Nietzschean way, interpretation is a form of domination, and to dominate an object, one first

requires a level of understanding and familiarity with it. This alone means that interpretation cannot be arbitrary. To make use of Nietzsche without a certain fidelity to his works and personage would be as fruitless as trying to catch a fish without knowing what to put on the hook. This is because an interpretation is only successful if it grips others and spreads, and for that it must stand on a non-arbitrary, shared background. That being said, an effective interpretation must have a dose of the arbitrary too — without it, the best thing it could do would be to merely replicate its object of interpretation, defeating the very purpose of the whole activity.

Any interpretation must also be, to some extent, *selective*. Here too, an interpretation without selection, one which leaves nothing out, could be nothing but a pure reproduction of the text which one intends to interpret. If someone claims that my work is not genuinely Nietzschean on account of its selectiveness, they will have to dismiss Nietzsche on the same grounds too, as *Ecce Homo*, the last book he ever wrote, was an exercise in being selective towards his own life and works. All active power needs to be selective, to know what is worthy of being preserved and what can be let go; one can only affirm if one is capable of negating as well.

## 9

The subject of this book can be reduced to five components: Nietzsche, Marx, philosophy, modernity, and human emancipation. The book consists of fragments, which, to whatever extent they form a continuity, all concern the interrelations between these elements. I have tried to write accessibly, and introduce the subjects at hand, but I do not claim to have produced an indisputable introduction to these topics, far from it. Rather, like all



works of philosophy, it is grounded in a particular time and place, and driven by specific concerns. Throughout the work, I not only introduce concepts, but interpret them and utilize them — three acts which are inseparable. What hopefully emerges throughout is a particular way of doing philosophy, a particular way of understanding modernity, a particular way of reading Marx and Nietzsche, and, finally, a particular route towards human emancipation.