Hommage to Adam Schaff
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Adam Schaff: from Semantics to Political Semiotics

1. *Adam Schaff, philosopher and semiotician*

Adam Schaff, a renown Polish and Jewish philosopher, was born on 10 March 1913 in Lwów (part of Austria until 1918, after then it went to Poland) to a lawyer's family. He died just recently on 12 October 2006 in Warsaw. Of his numerous books, several treat problems of semantics, philosophy of language, logic, theory of knowledge, ideology, and the social sciences. Schaff should be remembered for his important contribution to the problem of understanding and to the critique of misunderstanding in the domains of philosophy of language, semiotics, the social sciences, politics, interpretation of Marxism and actualization of socialism.

He completed his secondary and university studies (in Law and Economics, two diplomas) in Lwów, and then continued at the Ecole des Sciences Politiques et Economiques in Paris. His interest in methodological issues led him to study philosophy (in Poland and in the Soviet Union). In 1941 he took his degree as candidate of philosophy (equivalent to a doctors degree in Western Europe) and his doctors degree (equivalent to a habilitation in Central Europe) from the Institute of Philosophy at the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow.

In fact, during the German occupation of Poland Schaff had emigrated to the Soviet Union.

After liberation he returned to Poland where he taught at various Universities from 1945 onwards (he acted as Assistant Professor of Philosophy in Lódz until 1948 and subsequently as Full Professor at the University of Warsaw). He was elected Member of the Polish Academy of Sciences in 1952 and became Director of the Institute of Philosophy and

Sociology at the same Academy. In 1969 he shifted to Vienna where he became President of the Board of Directors of the European Center of Comparative Research in Social Sciences [UNESCO], which he headed for 20 years, acting at the same time as Honorary Professor of Philosophy at the University of Vienna.

His social activities during those years were concentrated on his participation in the work of The International Institute of Philosophy, The International Federation of Philosophical Associations (in both as a member of their Executive Committees) and The Club of Rome (he was member of the Executive Committee until 1990).

From 1931 until its dissolution in 1989 he was member of the Polish Communist Party (then transformed into the United Workers Party); from 1955 until 1968 he was a member of its Central Committee.

During his lifetime Schaff published about 20 books and pamphlets, as well as about 300 articles in philosophy and sociology. Many of these books were translated into several foreign languages.

Adam Schaff received an honorary degree from the University of Ann Arbor, USA, [1967]; the Sorbonne (Paris, 1975) and the University of Nancy (France, 1982).

He became Member of the Polish Academy of Sciences, of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (1952) and of the Royal Spanish Academy of Political and Moral Sciences (Madrid, 1987).

As a philosopher Adam Schaff specialized in epistemology, logic and philosophy of language. His main works in this domain are: *Concept and Word*, 1946; *Problems of the Marxist Theory of Truth*, 1951; *Introduction to Semantics*, 1961; *Language and Cognition*, 1964; *Essays in the Philosophy of Language*, 1967.

According to Schaff, language is both a social product and a genetic phenomenon, and is functional to human praxis. Language is the basis of the "active role" carried out by the human subject in terms both of cognitive processes and practical action. Language is not only an instrument for the expression of meaning, but also the material which forms meaning without which meaning cannot exist. Consequently, Schaff criticizes the reductive innatist and biologistic interpretation of language as proposed by linguist Noam Chomsky and biologist Eric H. Lenneberg.

According to Schaff, we must get free of what he calls the 'fetishism of signs' echoing Marx's 'fetishism of commodities'. Sign fetishim is reflected in the reified conception of the relation among signs and between signifier and signified. Sign relations must be considered as relations among human beings who use and produce signs in specific social conditions.

In Schaff's opinion, we must recognize the superiority of language theories that stress the active function of language in the cognitive process and the connection between language and *Weltanschauung*, between language and the "image of reality", by contrast with naive materialism. The human being is described as the result of social relations, and language as inseparable from social praxis.

In studies of human signs and language, this approach leads to a new way of looking at issues related to signs and language: the problem of the connection between language and knowledge, language and consciousness, language, ideology and stereotypes. Consequently, theory of knowledge appears as a theory in need of support from studies on language. Moreover, the connection between language studies and theory of knowledge contributes to a better understanding of the concepts of "choice", "responsibility", "individual freedom", and of such issues as the "tyranny of words", "linguistics alienation", etc., in the field of the humanities.

Another direction in Schaff's research concerns methodological issues in the social sciences in relation to Marxist theory. His most important publications in this domain are: *Introduction to the Theory of Marxism*, 1947; *The Rise and Growth of Marxist Philosophy*, 1949; *The Objective Nature of the Laws of History*, 1954; *History and Truth*, 1970, *Humanism, Philosophy of Langage and Theory of Knowledge*, 1975.

A third aspect focuses on problems relating to the human individual, society and social movements. Schaff's principle publications in this domain are: *The Philosophy of Man,* 1961; *Marxism and the Human Individual*, 1965; *Alienation as a Social Phenomenon*, 1977; *Structuralism and Marxism*, 1974 (published in the same year in French and in German); *The Communist Movement on the Crossroads*, 1982; *Perspectives of Modern Socialism*, 1988.

We will refer to Schaff's philosophical interests in political semiotics further on, in particular his interest in the "symptomatology" or "semeiotics" of economic, political and international social relations in the current production system. His works from the beginning of the 1990s to his last years (he died on 12 October 2006) focus specifically on the symptoms of individual and social unease of our time.

From 24 to 29 January 2000 Adam Schaff was in Bari to work with Augusto Ponzio on the draft of his book *Individuo umano, linguaggio e globalizzazione nella filosofia di Adam Schaff* (2002). In fact this book includes two conversations with Schaff: one took place in October 1976, the other in 2000. The last was in French during which Schaff answered the following questions:

Quelles sont les phases de ta recherche?

Quelle sont les relations entre le periods de ta recherche et les événements historiques du siècle XX?

Comme peut tu appeller la phase actuelle de ta recherche? Je crois qu'elle remonte à les premières annés '80. Quelles sont les événements personnels (événements personnels pubbliques et non personelles-privés, selon ta distinction) et les événement historiques qui l'ont déterminée?

Nous pouvons certainement établir une relation entre tes livres des annes '60 (*Humanisme et existentialisme*, *Le marxisme et l'individu humaine*, *L'alienation comme phénomène social*) et tes livres de la phase actuelle. Mais quelles sont-elles les différences d'engagement interpretatives et de perspectives?

Pouvons nous dire que l'entier parcours de ta recherche se déroule sous la bannière du socialisme? Pouvons nous dire que l'entière ton œuvre est marxiste?

Les changements à l'intérieur de ta recherche ne sont pas des "changement de peau", je crois, mais des changements substantiels dûs à des exigences d'ordre scientifique et à la transformations des objets analisés. Peux tu être d'accord avec cette interpretation?

Schaff's answers are reported in Chapter VII of *Individuo umano, linguaggio e globalizazione nella filosofia di Adam Schaff.* The table of contents of this book is now available on Ponzio's website, see *www.augustoponzio.com.* The present paper develops some of the problems relating to these questions.

2. *Political semiotics and semeiotics of social symptoms*

As President of the European Co-ordination Centre for Research and Documentation in Social Sciences (Vienna), Adam Schaff during the 1980s promoted a series of meetings in different countries throughout Europe to analyze the *Helsinki Final Act* (1975) from a semiotic point of view: Budapest, January 1985; Prague, November 1985; Trieste, May 1986; Moscow, November 1986; Pécs, May 1987; Dubrovnik, October 1987; Leipzig, May 1988; Sofia, November 1988, Rotterdam, January 1989.

The title of the project was established during a meeting in Dubrovnik 1984: *La sémiotique dans la recherche comparative. Le vocabulaire des relations internationales: l'acte Final de la Conférence d'Helsinki.* Participants from twelve different countries included: Adam Schaff, Honorary President of the European Co-ordination Centre, Christiane Villain-Gandossi, Adjunct Director of the European Co-ordination Centre, Ferruccio Rossi-

Landi, Paolo Facchi, Klaus Bochman, Momir Milojevic, János Kelemen, Christina Schäffner and Augusto Ponzio.

The results of the project included: a new edition of the *Helsinki Final Act* (published in Wilhelmsfeld, Germany, by Gottfried Egert Verlag, 1990), by the European Co-ordination Centre for Research and Documentation in Social Sciences, enlarged with the addition of the results of a scientific analysis from a semiotic perspective of the concepts and notions proposed in it: *L'Acte final d'Helsinki. Texte et Analyse* (European Co-ordination Centre); and the volume *The Concept of Europe* (Villain-Gandossi *et alii* 1990).

Schaff developed his analysis in political semiotics in his most recent books (1992-2001) which are dedicated to such issues as structural unemployment, migration, and the end of work understood as work-merchandise. These books include:

Ökumenischer Humanismus, German ed., 1992; *Humanismo ecumenical*, Spanish ed. 1991;

Umanesimo ecumenico, Italian ed. (by A. Ponzio) 1994;

Mi siglo Veinte. Cartas escritas a mí mismo, Spanish ed. 1993; *Mein Jahrhundert*, German ed.

1997; *Il mio ventesimo secolo. Lettere a me stesso,* Italian ed. 1995.

Notatnik kloptnika, Polish ed. 1995; *Noticias de un hombre con problemas*, Spanish ed. 1997;

Medytacje, Polish ed. Warsava, 1997; *Meditacione sobre el socialismo*, Spanish ed. 1998;

Meditazioni, Italian ed. (by A. Ponzio) 2001.

"Structurelle Arbeitslosigkeit – das soziale Grundproblem unserer Epoche", 1999 (unpublished); "La disoccupazione strutturale e la grande trasformazione", Italian ed. (by A. Ponzio) 2000; now in Ponzio, *Individuo umano, linguaggio e globalizzazione nella filosofia di Adam Schaff*, 2002, pp. 253-266;

Ksiazka dla mojej zony. Autobiografia problemowa, Polish ed. 2001.

In *Mi siglo Veinte. Cartas escritas a mí mismo* (131-145)*,* Schaff says:

Hay síntomas de un possible colapso y, algunos de ellos nos hablan de la possibilidad de una catástrofe total para la vida en la Tierra. Se trata – y recogemos aquí visions de la Revelació de San Juan – de images proppias del Apocalipsis. El Evangelio habla de sus cuatro Jinetes, y hoy, nosostros, ya podemos dicernirlos con claridad.
El primiero es el peligro de una *guerra nuclear* y de la destruction, como consecuencia, de la vida en la Tierra. […] (italics inserted)

El Segundo Jinete del Apocalipsis es la *amenaza ecólogica* que cienne sobre el mundo. […] (italics inserted)

Human "contamination" does not only concern the planet, the atmosphere, river water, seas and oceans, but the whole cosmos:

> El hombre ya ha llegado con su contaminación hasta el cosmos. En su zona más próxima a la Tirrra ya hay un auténtico "cementerio" de artefactos y elementos de cohetes inservibles.

The third rider symbolizes the *demographic explosion*. With regard to this topical problem Schaff stresses that

> Al terminar el siglo XX la popolación de los países industrializados ascenderá apenas al 15 por ciento del total de la población del pianeta. El restante (85% por ciento de la especie humana estará condenada a la pobreza o a la miseria. Esa desproporción entre los dos grupos de la población, si sus causas actuales no cabian, registrará un agravamiento y el grupo de los pobres sera cada vez mayor.

On this topic we find previsions in Schaff's book of 1993 concerning scenarios such as new forms of terrorism, attacks to big metropolis, as in the case of the destruction of the twin towers in New York, and war on terrorism.

The fourth Apocalypse rider is the rider of *structural unemployment*, therefore the end of work as a consequence of today's Industrial Revolution, the decline of global labour force, and the dawn of post-capitalist issues also examined by such authors as André Gorz, Jeremy Rifkin, etc.

Schaff transforms the image of the four riders of the Apocalypse:

> En cualquier caso hay que tener presente – y ésta es mi contribución personal a la vision dada por San Juan – que los Jinetes del Apocalipsis jamás cabalgan en solitario, que siempre van acompañados de un ombre que simboliza las relaciones interhumanes que generan el Apocalipsis. En el sentido de que lo crean, dirigen y regulan su ritmo.

Analysis of the end of commodified work announced by today's structural unemployment recurs in all Schaff's recent texts, and especially in the above mentioned essay "Structurelle Arbeitslosigkeit –das soziale Grundproblem unserer Epoche".

Present-day unemployment is structural to the global system of production, and not a momentaneous, transitory phase in a cycle. Unemployment represents a decisive turning-point in the social relations of production. Structural unemployment is the beginning of the end of "free-labour", the end of exchange between labour and salary. Automation operates to the detriment of *human* labour, producing human excesses and systemic unemployment. This is

not simply a question of treating the relation between worker and machine in isolation from other factors. The relation between worker and machine must be viewed in the broader context of social relations in general, especially economic relations. The maximization of profits has of course always been the motor of capitalism, but capitalist production nowadays more than ever before with communication operating as an integral part in the *production* process itself, reveals its insatiable drive for maximal profitability. Live, variable capital must be sacrificed for fixed capital — all for the sake of capitalist development. In other words, the quantity of personnel working in a company must be reduced by continually renewing and updating machines which gradually replace human beings, even when a question of operations of the intellectual order.

Development of the interactive relation with the intelligent machine is accompanied by a reduction in the number of people necessary to make the machine function. The competencies and services required from the worker are complex. But complexity on a qualitative level calls for simplification on a quantitative level, which is expressed in terms of a reduction in the number of people necessary to the production process. Like the automation of physical work the automation of intellectual work also leads to reduction, even elimination, of human labour for vast numbers of human beings.

> Eine soziale Folge des Prozesses [of structural unemployment] ist die Notwendigkeit, sich um neue Arbeitsformen für alle "überflüssigen Menschen" zu bemühen […], indem man für sie eine entsprechende "Beschäftigung" findet, die von der Gesellschaft organisiert und finanziert wird. (p. 16)

> Una delle conseguenze sociali del processo, di cui si parlava sopra, è la necessità di impegnarsi per nuove forme di lavoro per tutti gli "uomini superflui", gli "esuberi"[…]trovando per loro una relativa "occupazione" organizzata e finalizzata dalla società.

> One of the social consequences of the process, discussed above, is the need to commit to new forms of work for all the "superfluous human beings", the "excesses" […] finding a relative "employment" for them organized and finalized by society.

Whoever promises employment in the tradition sense, a return to employment based on traditional work, says Schaff, either does not understand the economic-social situation or is consciously lying basing his/her political career on deception.

> […] Die soziale Situation diktiert uns heute die Notwendigkeit einer weltweiten *Grossen Transformation.* Wir machen eine neue industrialen Revolution durch, und

infolge der Automatisierung und Robotisierung wird die Arbeit (im Ttraditionellen Sinne des Wortes) absterben, als weitere Folge wird nicht nur die heutige Arbeitklasse, sondern auch die Kapitalistenklasse absterben (Strukturelle Arbeitslosigkeit ("Structurelle Arbeitslosigkeit" (p.17).

La situazione sociale ci impone oggi la necessità di una *grande trasformazione* che coinvolge tutto il mondo. Infatti attraversiamo una nuova rivoluzione industriale, e come conseguenza dell'automazione e della robotizzazione morirà il lavoro (nel senso tradizionale della parola), e come ulteriore conseguenza non scomparirà soltanto la classe operaia, ma anche la classe dei capitalisti.

The social situation today imposes the need for a great transformation involving the whole world. In fact we are experiencing a new industrial revolution. As a consequence of automation and robotization, work (in the tradition sense of the term) will come to an end, and as a further consequence not only will the working class disappear but also the capitalists.

As theoreticians who are not left-wing (for example, Rifkin) also admit, post-capitalism has already appeared and with it market post-economy.

Paradoxically, the development of capital produces the conditions of liberation from commodified labour, alienated labour, but today in the negative form of unemployment – in the context of the capitalist system of social relations extended to a global level. So it then becomes a question of imagining new forms of social relations and new occupations where social wealth does not identify with labour-time, with development in productivity functional to profit, but with freetime, with development of the single individual's personality, with development of the human person.

Ich möchte […] eine Beschäftigung ankündigen, die […] in der Zukunft sicherlich eine enorme Rolle spielen wird – es geht mir die *kontinuierliche und permanente Witterbildung* (p. 26).

Vorrei indicare […] un'occupazione che […] avrà in futuro sicuramente un ruolo enorme: intendo la formazione continua e permanente.

I wish to indicate […] an occupation that […] will no doubt play an enormous role in the future: I am referring to continuous and permanent education.

Only a *cognitive dissonance* (L. Festinger 1957) or a *closed mind* (M. Rockeach) prevents us from seeing the present metamorphosis of work as a result of the new Industrial Revolution and job-killer machines. Our world needs a bit of sound human reason that can guide the transition from the civilization of work to the civilization of occupations. New occupations include individual permanent education independent from job marketing, which is finishing, and functional to personal development.

3. *Human essence or human being? Problems of translation*

Connected with the publication of *Marxism and the Human Individual*, 1965, is the discussion concerning the translation of "Theses on Feuerbach" by Karl Marx.

This debate took place between Adam Schaff and Lucien Sève in the French journal *L'homme et la Société* in 1971 and 1972 (It. trans by A. Ponzio, in *Marxismo e umanesimo*, 1975). It evidences the relation between ideology and translation. This debate concerns the official translation in French of the theses and involved numerous French intellectuals (in addition to Schaff and Sève, other scholars either directly or indirectly involved were Louis Althusser, Auguste Cornu, Roger Garaudy). However, the debate also referred to official translations in Polish, Russian, Italian and English, and in addition to the scholars mentioned the international community at large interested in Marxist theory was also involved.

In German, Marx's text reads as follows:

> Feuerbach löst das religiöse Wesen in das menschliche Wesen auf. Aber das menschliche Wesen ist kein dem einzelnen Individuum innenwolnendes Abstraktum. In seiner Wirklichkeit ist das Ensemble des gesellschaftlichen Verhältinisse.

Even though this issue may seem rather specialized and restricted, it is in fact of central importance considering its determining role in the global interpretation of Marxist theory—many scholars believe that the "Theses on Feuerbach" are the key to Marx's thought, even though they often give rise to different interpretations, even misinterpretations, given their elliptical nature and at times metaphorical nature. Furthermore, and for what concerns us more specifically here, discussion of this particular issue is important because it signals the existence of a close relation between translation and ideology: to translate in one way rather than in another, as in the case of this text by Marx, is full of ideological and political implications. In fact, the solution to this particular controversy is significant at the philological, philosophical and political levels. For the case under discussion, it is crucial in establishing the validity of Sève's overall interpretation of Marxism and of his criticism of existentialism, structuralism, of Althusser's theoretical anti-humanism, etc.

Sève considers Schaff's translation of Marx's sixth thesis to be wrong, the result of his misinterpretation of marxism, of his reading of Marx in a humanistic-speculative key, involving consequences at the political level also. The whole debate ultimately concerned the relation between Marxism and humanism: interpretation of thesis VI may be viewed as a reflection of the general attitude towards the relations between Marxism and humanism, ideology and science, scientific socialism and Marxist humanism, Marx's youthful writings

and his mature works. All this concerns the meaning and value of Marxism generally. As Schaff observes, the debate (though centred upon the translation and interpretation of just a few expressions in the Theses) extends beyond "words" and can only be fully understood by looking "behind the screen," by inquiring into the history of left-wing political movements, and by relating the consequences of this debate to controversy on the humanist contents of socialism, on the means of overcoming the effects and consequences of Stalinism in the Communist movement, etc.

The immediate object of discussion and controversy concerns the correct translation of certain propositions in "Theses on Feuerbach", all of which contain the German word *Wesen* as in the key expression *das menschliche Wesen* in thesis VI.

Schaff contends that recurrent translation of this expression with "the essence of man," generally consolidated by tradition, is wrong. The German word Wesen is ambiguous: it counts up to eleven distinct groups of meanings, each with numerous semantic nuances. Two of these meanings are relevant in relation to the debate in question and correspond, respectively, to the Latin "ens" and "essentia," English "being" and "essence," French "être" and "essence," Italian "essere" and "essenza," intended as "living being" on the one hand, and "essence of things," "that which is essential" as opposed to incidental, on the other. These languages then do not dispose of a single and ambiguous term corresponding to the German "Wesen," though this word does have an equivalent for polysemantism and plurivocality in the Russian "suchtchestwo" (sucestvo) and in the Polish "istota". Consequently, as opposed to such languages as Russian and Polish which have just as ambiguous an equivalent to the German "Wesen," in French, English or Italian translations, a decision must be made: the meaning of the word "Wesen" must be decided each time it occurs in a given context, its sense determined for it to be appropriately rendered in the target language.

 Most official translations of "Theses on Feuerbach" in different languages derive from the original Russian translation. Strangely enough, in 1892 the Russian translator Plechanov chose to render the German "Wesen" with the unambiguous Russian word "suschtschnost" (that is, "essence," "Wesenheit"), instead of "suschtschestwo". Similarly to the Polish "istota" the latter has multiple meanings and consequently is analogous to the German original in terms of polysemy. Having made this particular lexical choice, the Russian translator — an authority in the field, observes Schaff—was in fact to condition this text's future philosophical and political interpretations.

In French, as in Italian and English, the same word cannot be used indifferently as in the case of "Wesen," "istota," "suschtschestwo." Influenced by the original Russian translation, "Wesen" is translated prevalently with the equivalents of "essentia." This solution was refused by Schaff in favour of the equivalents of "ens." He made the decision by combining the results of a grammatical analysis with analysis of the philosophical context. In

the face of such an ambiguous word as "Wesen," Schaff solves the interpretive and translative problem by appealing to the rules of German syntax.

If the expression "das Wesen" is followed by a noun in the genitive, it means "essence." Therefore, "das Wesen des Christentums," which is also the title of a work by Feuerbach, means "the essence of Christianity." Correspondingly "das Wesen des Religion" means "the essence of religion," "das Wesen des Menschen," "the essence of man." "Wesen" followed by "of something" or "of somebody" functions in the sense of "essence." Instead, if "Wesen" is preceded by a qualifying adjective, it means "being." Therefore, "das christliche Wesen" means "the christian being," "das religiose Wesen" means "the religious being," "das menschliche Wesen," "the human being." In all these cases, as syntax reveals, we are dealing with "being" that is respectively Christian, religious, human.

4. *Human individual, language and knowledge*

In his philosophical research Adam Schaff concentrates on three main areas: a) philosophy of language, b) philosophy of the human individual, c) theory of knowledge. In his most recent books, he unifies his research and critiques the tendency to dividing these three fields, on the one hand, and suppression of their autonomy, on the other. In his own works problems concerning "language", the "human individual", and "knowledge" constitute an organic whole. This is a reflection of the *real* and *objective relation* connecting these three topics: we will now explore this interrelation, even if they are often not only separated in certain disciplinary domains, but even further fragmented on the basis of special interests.

During the above mentioned interviews with Schaff of 1977 and 2002, to the question asking to identify the unifying element of his research, he replied that it was the human individual, an issue concerning philosophy of language, theory of knowledge and philosophy of the human person, that is, all the human sciences in general. This does not imply that this topic is ordinarily dealt with in these domains: on the contrary, in spite of its utmost importance in historical, social, linguistic, cognitive and economic processes, such issues are often neglected. This explains the abstract nature of so many theories. In Schaff's opinion, the problem of the human individual is of fundamental importance for the scientific foundation of theory, and consequently for the capacity of theory of analyzing and explaining any particular phenomenon. Research in philosophical anthropology and philosophy of the human individual remains isolated if it is not applied to the various human sciences: instead, results reached in these various domains can in fact act as feedback for each other and reciprocally enrich each

other – provided that researchers do not limit themselves to mere speculation and metaphysics.

The fact that Schaff places so much importance on the problem of the human individual is particularly relevant for the question of "what it means to be a Marxist today". In fact, Schaff believes that the problem of the human individual is particularly relevant from a Marxist perspective, not only because of what the Classics of Marxism have said about it, but also because of what certain Marxists have tended not to say, thus denying the legitimacy of such an issue. Furthermore, certain philosophers reject this problem in the name of "true Marxism", and of the "true Marx" (that is, the later as compared to the early Marx), which they consider a bourgeois ideological residue. The concept of human individual and related issues (alienation, Marxist ethics and so forth) are used to discriminate between "orthodoxy" and "revisionism" and negative judgements are formulated *a priori* of such concepts as "alienation", "human individual", "humanism", and "marxist ethics".

An example of this is the discussion reported above between Schaff and Lucien Sève on the translation-interpretation of Marx's *Thesen über Feuerbach*, published in the journal *L'homme et la société* (1971-72). This discussion clearly demonstrates the superficiality of those who consider "Marxist humanism" in extremely vague terms, regarding it as evidence of revisionism and thus proposing an even vaguer "anti-humanism," as a token of true Marxism and "guarantee" of its scientific character.

The expression "Marxist humanism" can be referred to the theories of both Schaff and Sève. In fact, both philosophers support interpretation of Marxism as scientific humanism and refuse Althusser's theoretical "anti-humanism". However, they take up completely different points of view: as emerges from the debate, they diverge in their interpretation of the Marxist classics and, therefore, in their ideological and political stances, despite their common defence of Marxist humanism and maintaining such concepts as "man" and "human individual" in Marxism.

The human individual and related issues of alienation, socialist humanism, and Marxist ethics should be studied from a Marxist perspective and not underrated or considered alien to Marxism itself. As Schaff evidenced, Marxism is an "open system", a scientific system subject to continual transformation, discussion and modification, and not a set of fixed principles demanding absolute loyalty, dogmatic and orthodox acceptance. Marxism should not be viewed as a set of principles established once and for all, free of the risk of confutation: instead, such a "risk" is vitally important to a system that aims to be scientific.

Some of Marx's earlier works, therefore certain issues concerning the human individual such as the problem of alienation have often been labelled as revisionist and anticommunist. This has led to refusing these very issues by certain Marxists, and to accepting the division between "the early and the later Marx": the former is considered as an ideologist and humanist, the latter a scientist and anti-humanist. To accuse a Marxist position referring to Marx's juvenile production of "revisionism" is absurd, just as it is absurd to distinguish between "ideology" and "science". This is a reflection of the tendency of attributing exorcizing functions and magical powers to such words as "ideology", "humanism", "revisionism", and "science".

No doubt the word "humanism" can be ambiguous considering all the different meanings traditionally attached to it: when applied to Marxism it has often given rise to revisionist and speculative interpretations. However, it is just as true that misunderstandings and ideological errors have arisen because Marxism has often been interpreted in terms of generic anti-humanism, instead of clearly critiquing certain interpretations.

Sève shows that the problem of humanism relatedly to Marxism can be dealt with in the same terms as "materialism", "dialectics", "philosophy", "socialism", that is, all those concepts considered to oppose Marxism. Despite pre-Marxist interpretations of materialism, Marxism asserts itself as materialism, historical-dialectic materialism, scientific materialism. Marx and Engels aimed to develop a "highly-developed materialism", criticizing a certain type of materialism. However, such critique does not imply absolute refusal of materialism, as demonstrated by Lenin who critiqued the Russian Machists, idealistic and subjectivistic stances, of "low idealism". Though vitiated by Hegelian idealism, the term "dialectics" is maintained by Marxian theory and invested with a new meaning. Moreover, Marxism ends traditional philosophy, but not to recognize that Marxism itself is philosophy on the belief that philosophy can be eliminated once and for all, is the worst kind of philosophy; this attitude implies acting as "slaves to the worst vulgar residues of the worst philosophies", as Engels put it. Similarly, to conclude that Marxism is a form of "theoretic antisocialism simply because Marx and Engels criticized utopian forms of socialism is also arbitrary. Just as Marxism transforms utopian socialism into scientific socialism, metaphysical materialism into scientific materialism, it also transforms speculative humanism into scientific humanism.

As Schaff observes, to deny Marxism the character of humanism (as did certain Polish Marxists, even before Althusser, during a debate held in Poland in 1947 on the relation between Marxism and humanism) leads to reinforcing opposition between Marxism and communism and dividing the proletariat using humanism as the discriminating factor. We

now understand why Schaff attaches so much importance to the problem of the human individual placing it at the very centre of his theories of language and knowledge. In an interview with Schaff he claimed that:

> neglect of the problem of the human individual leads to impoverishing Marxism at the theoretical level and to distorting it at the practical level. In this mistake lies the deep secret of Stalinism. This is why the protagonists of "true" Marxism — where the individual is absent—are so dangerous. I am referring not only to those who put Stalinism into practice, but also to its theorists, whose various political lucubrations and theoretical mistakes have resulted in the thesis that Marxism is anti-humanism. If this were the case, we would have to fight it. But it is a pure lie: Marxism is humanism, and it is the concern of Marxists to fight in the name of such humanism. This has always been my firm belief, as a Marxist and as a Communist. And this fact explains the choice of the lietmotif of my philosophical works (Schaff in "Conversation with Ponzio", 1967, in Ponzio 2002).

Schaff has dealt with issues relating to the human individual and socialist humanism since 1947. His writings from this period prove that the thesis of an existentialist influence on his Marxism is false. On the contrary they testify to the presence of anthropological issues among Polish Marxists even before the spread of existentialism. In fact, as early as 1947 we already have a discussion of two main tendencies which, though seemingly opposed, are both based upon the division be tween Marxism and "humanism". On the basis of the assumption that such a separation exists, the first tendency proposes to "integrate" Marxism and humanism; the second tendency maintains that Marxism contradicts "humanism". By contrast to these two main tendencies, *Schaff believes that Marxism is the humanism of our time*. In fact, differently to other forms of humanism, insofar as it is scientific socialism Marxism shows the way to a profound transformation of current relations of inequality and exploitation.

Since his essays of 1947, Schaff formulated the problem of Marxist humanism with the same methodological procedure applied in *Strukturalismus und Marxismus* (1974) which deals with the same issue, only twenty-seven years later. In the latter, Schaff criticizes Althusser's anti-humanism and demonstrates how it is misleading to speak of "humanism" (and of "anti-humanism"), without specifying the meaning of such terms in relation to particular historical and social conditions. Words like "freedom", "democracy", "justice", "equality", "property", receive an appropriate meaning only when related to particular historical and social conditions. Similarly, the word "humanism" also requires historical specification. Only on this condition can we avoid moralistic overtones that render it ineffective in the project for transforming the capitalist system. By specifying the term "humanism" historically, we can eliminate any semantic ambiguity and stereotypic

component in it exploited by those who wish to preserve the current order and to spread anticommunist propaganda. In his 1947 essay Schaff wrote:

> Humanism does not exist in itself, just as man taken in himself and for himself does not exist. Only concrete man exists, man set in a particular age, living in a particular country, belonging to a particular social class, representing a particular tradition and particular personal ideals.

In his criticism of Althusser in *Strukturalismus und Marxismus*, Schaff demonstrates how the semantic ambiguity of the word "humanism" is in part responsible for separation and opposition between Marxism and humanism. Althusser uses this word as though its meaning were univocal and, therefore, in no need of specification. Here too Schaff demonstrates that the alternative is not between Marxism and humanism, but rather between Marxism and anti-Marxism. Anti-humanism is a form of anti-Marxism. Schaff evidences the mystifying character of Althusser's structuralist anti-humanism: in Althusser "humanism" implies an idealistic and speculative conception of the essence of man; on the contrary, his "anti-humanism" is not symmetrical to "humanism". Instead, Althusser's anti-humanism states that production relations are not relations among human individuals and that the human individual has no role in history. Althusser attributes this last statement to Marx (the later as opposed to the early Marx) (cf. 2.6.1).

In *Entfremdung als soziales Phanomen* (*Alienation as a Social Phenomenon* 1977), Schaff analyses such concepts as alienation, fetishism, revolution, reformism, Marxism, revisionism, and socialism. He deals with problems related to Marxist humanism and the human individual concentrating on two main aspects: a) the demand for "historical specifications, which is intimately connected to the historical materialist approach; b) the demand for linguistic analysis which is considered to be of major importance, and not only when strictly dealing with language problems (in fact his book is full of "semantic digressions").

Particularly relevant is the last chapter of *Entfremdung als soziales Phanomen* written especially for the Italian edition of this volume, where he deals with the particular approach to Socialism adopted by the Italian, French, and Spanish communist parties. Schaff refuses to acknowledge violence as a means of achieving the socialist revolution: he specifies that the Marxist concept of the "social revolution" is one thing, and how it can be carried out is another.

The expression "social revolution" implies a qualitative transformation of social foundations and superstructures. Such transformation can be achieved either violently or pacifically by means of reform. The choice cannot be decided on the basis of abstract theory but rather is determined by the specific historical and social conditions of a country. There are no fixed formulas for building socialism, even though some scholars are convinced of the

contrary and search the classics of Marxism for a way of overthrowing the capitalist system. In reality, the solution changes with different situations, and accordingly may take place in juridical, constitutional, or trade-union terms. By rendering Marxism static, we betray one of its most essential characteristics, that of "historical specification". Recourse to reforms does not necessarily imply giving up class struggle or building socialist society with the acquisition of power by the working class. The word "reformism" is appropriate in relation to the enacting of reforms when the aim is to preserve and reproduce the social relations of capitalist production instead of revolutionizing and transforming them. The peaceful way to socialism (with particular reference to Western European Communist Parties), when historical conditions allow this, does not imply a "disavowal of Marxism". Rather it is the refusal of dogmatic Marxism, of "orthodoxy," of Marxism isolated from the dialectic relation to social praxis and concrete historical circumstance.

Between the second half of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, existentialism — especially in Sartre's version, deeply influenced certain Polish Marxist intellectuals: a phenomenon related to the "crisis of Stalinism" and the events of the Polish and Hungarian October. At that time Schaff evidenced the profound "incompatibility" between Existentialism and Marxism. Historical materialism explains human behaviour in terms of social conditioning, the human being is viewed as the result of social relations (Marx's IV thesis on Feuerbach). On the other hand, existentialism explains social phenomena in terms of individual freedom considered as an absolute, natural and non-historical fact. In his criticism of existentialism, Schaff places great importance on semantic definitions: In fact, he underlines the ambiguous nature of the notions and arguments employed by Sartre. This is one of the most recurrent aspects highlighted in his analysis of *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1960).

However, the same reasoning which led Schaff to contrast Marxism with Existentialism, and to polemicize against certain Marxists (e.g. Leszek, Kolakowski) for having accepted the existentialist conception of the human individual, induced him to reject the oversimplified criticism of existentialism by other Marxists. These in fact concluded their discussion of the matter by simply taxing existentialism with "bourgeois ideology", "revisionism", and "idealism". This kind of criticism did nothing but confuse the problems examined by existentialism with the approach adopted towards such problems. Schaff supported the Marxist rather than the Existentialist approach, but shared interest in the same problems concerning the human individual. Though mostly been neglected by Marxism, Schaff believed these problems were not alien to Marxism on a theoretical level. In fact, they belong to the same sphere of interest which actually generated Marxism giving a more profound meaning to Marxian analysis of social relations of production. Certain superficial critics have confused an open and constructive criticism of Existentialism with a form of

Existentialist Marxism. The German title of Schaff's 1961 book *Marx oder Sartre*?, in fact indicates the relation he established between Existentialism and Marxism.

In *Marksizm a jednostka ludzka* [*Marxism and the Human Individual*] (1965)—considered by Schaff as a full-length political and philosophical study (the same can be said of *Entfremd ung als soziales Phanomen*) — the human being is the direct object of analysis. In his Beitrag, part of a debate organized by the Polish review *Studia Filoficzne*, which took Schaff's book as the starting point for discussion, Schaff declared that anthropological issues must not be neglected in the ideological struggle. From such a perspective, the importance of assuming the human individual as the focal point of Marxism at the theoretical level is determined by two main factors: the first is that anti-Marxism has taken advantage of the fact that Marxism has ignored these problems, and as a consequence insists upon the relation between the individual and society giving particular attention to such issues as freedom, individual happiness and so forth; the second is that these problems are particularly evident — unless we are blind or in bad faith—in socialist countries.

Alienation is a major issue at both the theoretical and the pratical levels in building a socialist society. To acknowledge that such a phenomenon exists is of primary importance to the development of socialism. Some people believe it is contradictory to take great pains to eliminate alienation while stating at once that alienation cannot be permanently eliminated given that it constantly occurs in different forms. During a debate organized by *Nowe Drogi* for the discussion of Schaff's book *Marxism and the Human Individual* (1965), Schaff insisted that this contradiction could be explained in terms of Marxist dialectics. Particularly convincing is the comparison he established between the theory of alienation and the Marxist theory of truth. Although the cognitive process is endless, it does not exclude the objectivity and truth of knowledge, nor does it exonerate us from the search for truth. Similarly, the unending struggle against alienation does not exclude the possibility of overcoming such alienation by means of the transformation of specific social relations, nor can the fact that the struggle is unending be used as a pretext for leaving things unchanged.

In his *Marxism and the Human Individual*, Schaff analyses the different aspects of alienation as they appear in socialist countries. He examines the issue even more closely in his *Entfremdung als soziales Phanomen*, especially in the chapters entitled "Sozialismus und Entfremdung" and "Sull'alienazione nella rivoluzione" (a newchapter included in Italian ed.). We could ask those who pose themselves the problem of alienation in socialism the insinuating question, to whose benefit does all this go? This question was asked in relation to Schaff's book *Marxism and the Human Individual*, in the above mentioned debate in *Nowe Drogi*. Schaff answered that to evidence and analyze the contradictions and different forms of alienation inherent in building socialism, in the long run meant to favour the communist movement and Marxism rather than favour anti-communist propaganda. In fact, the critical capacity of Marxism is broadened so that it is able to deal with problems which have been

generally monopolized by anti-communist propaganda. In this way we contribute to the development of a socialist society and to the shaping of the human person in such a society.

Despite attempts by certain Marxists at "exorcizing" the problem of alienation by considering it a "non-scientific" and "non-Marxist" notion, "alienation" is an adequate label for certain social phenomena for which solutions have been attempted through practice based on Marxist theory. Such attempts at exorcism become increasingly frequent when analysis of the various forms of alienation is extended to the different socialist countries, and when it is considered that the struggle against alienation is endless given that it cannot be eliminated once and for all.

Marxism involves a struggle against the different historical forms of social alienation whereby the individual is prevented from being a conscious protagonist of his own history. Furthermore, in Schaff's opinion, it is also a *radical, positive and materialist humanism*. It is a combatant humanism, that is, it is committed to a historical social reality where it is desired that the history of men be a very human history. Marxism takes an interest in the human individual historically specified by the relations of production of the particular country he lives in, and because of this it opposes the interpretation of alienation in the abstract terms of "human essence" and "human nature".

5. *Theory of language and theory of knowledge*

Linguistic analysis is particularly useful in the study of the historical social structure of the human individual, given that it is especially through language that the historical and social conditioning inherent in the shaping of the individual is made possible. Language is a social fact and constitutes the social background to consciousness, thought and speech. Language is a social product as well as being a genetic phenomenon and is functional to human praxis. This is at the basis of the historical-materialistic and dialectic character of the "active role" of the subject both at the level of cognitive processes as well as of practical action. The individual is able to act upon the historical social situation which is pre-existent to him conditioning him from the outset, through his use of language (it too a social product). Language is not only an instrument for the expression of meanings, but it is also the material which goes to form meaning and without which meaning could not exist. Consequently, what we call the "subjective", does not at all mean the abstractly individual or absolutely autonomous, but rather it is the concretely individual and that which is conditioned, that is, a social product with a social function: the "subjective has an objective and social-historical character".

The linguistic sciences are able to grasp the socio-historical nature of language thus ridding themselves of both biologistic, innatistic, conventional prejudices on the one hand, and of related mechanistic and idealistic conceptions on the other, merely by reconsidering

the human individual in the perspective of historical-dialectic materialism. It follows that language is neither wholly natural nor wholly unnatural and conventional. Like any human fact, it is first of all a socio-historical phenomenon resulting from historically determined needs, mediating between needs and the satisfaction of such needs.

An innatistic and biologistic interpretation of language, as that formulated by Chomsky and Lenneberg, can only be maintained by reducing the human person to the status of mere product of natural evolution, as if her/his biological history was not influenced by her/his social history. From such a perspective, s/he is viewed as "the human being in general", as the abstract human being, rather than as a historical and social being conceived in her/his concreteness, in her/his special historical specification according to the social system, the specific division of labour, class and level of productive forces to which s/he belongs.

Furthermore, many authors agree that what is innate in language is only the *capacity of learning how to speak* (which undoubtedly depends upon the hereditary structure of the brain, the vocal apparatus, and so forth), while the concrete realization of language is determined by *social relations*. Though true, this explanation is insufficient for it does not eliminate the dangers of a biological interpretation of language: in Lenneberg's work, for instance, social relations and the relations among individuals of the same species are placed at the same level. They are considered to be the same as relations existing in the animal kingdom at large.

It is absolutely necessary to found the theory of language on interpretations of mankind and of interhuman relations which are free of any tendency towards naturalistic positions with respect to the scientific achievements of historical-dialectic materialism. From a Marxian perspective, social relations are characterized by relations of production; they represent a particular form of production, they are historical, nonnatural relations.

If we wish to free ourselves of what Schaff called the "fetishism of the sign" referring to the Marxist notion of the "fetishism of goods", we must view the analogy and typology of signs in connection with the issue of the human individual and social relations. In fact, to give up a reified conception of the relations between signs as well as between signifier and signified, it is necessary to take the social process of communication as the starting point of our analysis, and to consider the sign relation as a relation among human beings who use and produce signs in specific social conditions. All analyses should start from the "social condition of the individual" and from the notion of the individual as a social product. This would prevent us from considering communication as a set of relations among originally separate and abstract subjects, while removing idealistic and materialistic mechanistic explanations of the communication process.

The question of the relation of language to reality is closely connected to both the theory of knowledge and to the conception of the human individual. Does language create our image of reality? Or does language reflect and reproduce reality? Does language have an

active, creative function in the cognitive process? To answer these questions implies taking a definite stance as regards the three fundamental models of the theory of cognition: idealism, mechanistic materialism, dialectic materialism. The latter two refer the problem of the relation between language and reality to the theory of reflection. All three concern the role of the subject in the cognitive process and consequently the problems related to the human individual.

The subjective-idealistic and materialistic-dialectic models differ from each other in their interpretation of the active role which both, in contrast to mechanistic materialism, assign to the subject and consequently to language in the cognitive process. In Schaff's opinion, in comparison to naive materialism, materialistic-dialectic theory recognizes the superiority of language theories which stress the active function of language in the cognitive process (even if from an idealistic point of view) and the connection between language and *Weltanschauung*, between language and the "image of reality" (think of Humboldt, Sapir, and Whorf). However, in the perspective of a Marxian interpretation, the human being should be considered as the result of social relations, and language as the product of social praxis. This interpretation recognizes the active function of the cognitive subject and, at the same time, maintains that far from being the starting point of the cognitive process, the subjective element is the result—and a complex one at that—of specific social influences. In a certain sense, the subject may be considered as the resultant construction of cognitive processes. The concept of "reflection" is closely related to the concept of the "human individual", and it is precisely on the basis of interpretation of such notions that we mark the difference between dialectic and mechanistic materialism in connection with the theory of knowledge. As Schaff writes:

> the specific interpretation of the theory of reflection in the Marxian system is directly related to the interpretation of the concept of the human individual (*Language and Cognition*, 1964).

The connection between the theory of language and the theory of knowledge is evident if we acknowledge interaction between language and thought, as well as the indivisibility of meaning and concept. Schaff recalls Lenin's "On Dialectics", which outlines the programme for Marxist epistemology with reference to the history of language, maintaining that:

> […] when in accordance with the materialistic analysis of the cognitive process we consider thought and human consciousness as linguistic thought, as thought made of language (Marx maintained that language is "my consciousness and that of others"), it is evident that any analysis of the cognitive process must also be the analysis of the linguistic process, without which thought is simply impossible (*Essays in the Philosophy of Language*, 1967).

Unity of thought and language highlights the active function of language in the reflection upon reality, as well as the social character of individual thought, its status as a social product.

On defining the sign in general (that is, at the semiotic level), and on dealing with semantics, it is impossible to leave the theory of knowledge out of consideration. For example, to consider the problem of the referent, or the material object, as irrelevant to a semiotic point of view does not mean separating semiotics from the theory of knowledge and, therefore, allowing semiotics to remain neutral as regards such a theory, as certain authors believe. On the contrary, it means assuming a specific standpoint in relation to the theory of knowledge, which would be described as conventional-idealistic for the insistence upon the autonomy of the code and of the message with respect to material reality.

Semantics and the theory of knowledge are both implied whenever we ask the following questions: "what is meaning?"; "what is the relation between meaning and the sign-vehicle?"; "what is the relation between meaning and object?"; "what kind of existence do we refer to when we say that meaning exists?"; and so forth.

On the other hand, all problems dealt with by theory of knowledge imply semantics, insofar as they are problems concerning language. This does not mean that the theory of cognition should be exclusively a semantic analysis or that language should be the sole object of any philosophical research, as maintained by Semantic Philosophy. The Marxist theory of reflection clearly demonstrates all the implications existing between semantics and the theory of knowledge, rejecting any schematic attitude typical of conventional and idealistic relativistic standpoints. Certain philosophical trends such as Cassirer's neo-kantism, neo-positivism, Russell's logical atomism, the linguistic philosophy of the school of Oxford connected to Wittgenstein's later production, the semantic analysis of the school of Warsaw and so forth, deserve recognition for having maintained and demonstrated that language is not merely the instrument, but also the object of philosophical research.

The theory of knowledge is not the only theory in need of support from studies on language. The philosophy of the human individual to the extent that it deals with the function of the individual in social relations and with problems of traditional ethics (which does not imply moralism) — must inevitably consider that individual behaviour is conditioned by society mainly through the influence of language. This leads us to a new vision of issues related to language: the problem of the connection between language and ideology, concept and stereotype, language and social praxis. On considering the concepts of "choice", "responsibility", "individual freedom", we need to take account of the "tyranny of words", of the problem of "linguistic alienation". We should reject the idealistic and conservative point of view which refers contradictions and individual alienation to a semantic origin and maintain, similarly to the young Hegelians, that the human being can be "set free" by simply clarifying the meaning of words and by substituting false ideas with true ones.

6. *The concept of contradiction in formal logic and dialectic*

The relation between Marxist dialectic and formal logic demonstrates the connection between the theory of knowledge and the analysis of language. Schaff shows how the word "contradiction" has two different meanings depending on whether it is considered from a Marxist dialectical, or formal logical point of view; this implies that Marxist dialectic does not exclude the logical principle of non contradiction. From the point of view of formal logic, the term "con tradiction" signifies a relation between two sentences, or utterances, one of which maintains that something is in a given relation with an object at a given moment, while the other denies this. On the contrary, from the point of view of Marxist dialectic "contradiction" means "unity of antithesis", that is, unity of contrasting tendencies, aspects and forces; in this way, dialectics is the constitutive element of every phenomenon.

When Marx maintains that at a certain level of their development the productive material forces of society are in contradiction with the existing relations of production, the word "contradiction" does not express the relation between a positive and negative judgement (as in formal logic), but rather the juxtaposition between opposed and yet complementary tendencies which form the unity of a certain system, and which are, at the same time, the mainspring of its transfor mation. In this case, the word "contradiction"—notwithstanding the misunderstandings it can give rise to—when intended as an objective rejection of the logical principle of non-contradiction, has a specific meaningfulness which justifies its use. In this particular case, the word "contradiction" stresses a contrast characterized by inadequacy and discordance such as to interfere with the functioning of the social mechanism to the point of causing its collapse.

A central point in Schaff's analysis of the relation between dialectics and the principle of non-contradiction is his demonstration that consideration of movement as a confutation of the logical principle of non-contradiction, is unfounded. Engels too fell into this trap. In Plechanov's opinion we must face the following dilemma: either we acknowledge the existence of the fundamental laws of formal logic and we deny movement, or, on the contrary, we acknowledge movement and deny these laws. Schaff observes that this is a false dilemma. It arises from the interpretation of movement as an objective confutation of the logical principle of non-contradiction, as something which is and is not at the same time in the same place. This interpretation which the Marxist classics derive from Hegel, in reality originates from the ancient Eleatic philosophers:

> Die Eleaten bejahten den Satz vom Widerspruch und negierten folglich die Objektivität der Bewegung; Hegel stand umgekehrt auf dem Standpunkt der

Objektivität der Bewegung und verwarf infolgedessen die Gultigkeit des Satzes vom Widerspruch in der Beschreibung der Bewegung (Schaff 1975: 26).

Gli Eleati affermavano il principio di contraddizione e negavano di conseguenza l'oggettività del movimento. Hegel si poneva al contrario dal punto di vista del movimento e rigettava, di conseguenza, la validità del principio di contraddizione nella descrizione del movimento.

The Eleats asserted the principle of contradiction and consequently denied the objectivity of movement. On the contrary Hegel took the point of view of movement and consequently rejected the validity of the principle of contradiction in the description of movement.

Hegelian interpretation of movement (as something which both is and is not in the same place at the same time) and the level of development of the mathematics of the time, in particular of differential calculus, Newton and Leibniz's conception of the infinitesimal entity, considered to be a quantity equal to and different from zero, strengthened the influence on Marx and Engels, of the Eleatic Hegelian principles concerning movement.

As far as the relations between Marx and the mathematics of his time are concerned, the situation today is different from Schaff's description of 1955. Thanks to the publication of Marx's *Mathematical Manuscripts* (Moscow 1968, It. trans. from German by A. Ponzio 2005), we are now familiar with Marx's critical analyses of Newton's and Leibniz's "mystical" differential calculus, of D'Alembert's and Euler's ration alistic method, and of Lagrange's purely algebraic method. In criticising Newton's and Leibniz's differential calculus, Marx highlighted the presence, in their theory, of metaphysical notions and of the use of procedures which contradict the laws of mathematics. Though making use of Lagrange's work, through such criticism Marx in dependently reached positions attained by such XIX century mathematicians as Cauchy and Weierstrass, who accomplish the transition from a simpler to a more profound and scientific stage of calculus. Schaff's considerations can certainly be referred to Engels but not to Marx. What Engels wrote in his *Anti-Duhring* about the differential relation gives the impression that he accepted exactly that kind of interpretation of differential calculus which Marx defined as "mystical". Marx maintained that differential calculus is mystical in character; in fact it attains exact results by means of algebraically inexact procedures, as Marx says, it makes use of exceptional laws, that is, it confers contrasting properties to the terms employed; it resorts to devices devoid of any mathematical rigour, it resorts, that is, to "conjuring tricks". In Marx's opinion, calculus is to be dealt with in strictly mathematical terms, and in this sense he kept account of Lagrange's contribution for the attempt of founding calculus on pure algebraic grounds. If procedures not founded upon demonstration were employed in differential calculus, this was not due to the

dialectic character of such procedures, as Engels seemed to believe when he explained that the lack of understanding, on the part of contemporary mathematicians, of Leibniz's differential calculus was caused by the impossibility of understanding the principles of calculus on the basis of formal logic. On the contrary, it was due to the fact that differential calculus was based on metaphysical and non-dialectical definitions.

7. *Semiotic structuralism in the Marxist approach*

An important semiotic structuralist approach which should be mentioned is Karl Marx's "protostructuralist" analysis of capitalist economic relations. We shall not refer to French Marxist structuralism (Louis Althusser, Lucien Godelier – the Marxist structuralism of Lucien Sebag, follower of Lévi-Strauss, is a "discours à part"), but directly to Marx given that his approach is typically semiotic, even if we must connote it as "criptosemiotic".

The study of communication is pivotal in the Marxian critique of political economy. In fact, Marx analyzes commodities as messages and concentrates on explaining the "language of commodities" and the "commodity's arcanum" (Marx, *Capital*, I). As a result of this approach, his critique of political economy overcomes the fetishistic view of things according to which the relation among commodities appears as a natural relation among things and not for what it really is, that is, a specific type of relation among people. As such Marxian critique is effectively a semiotic analysis which studies the structure of goods as messages not only at the level of exchange but also of production.

A commodity is a commodity not when a product is produced and consumed in its use-value but when it is produced and consumed as an exchange-value, that is, as a message. All this makes economics a sector of semiotics.

The structure of the market emerges as a structure of human relations, precisely the humans relations of social production. From this point of view, the Marxian approach to structure is exemplary for semiotics. It indicates that what Marx achieved in his analysis of commodities and capital we must achieve in anthroposemiotics: structures of relations among human individuals must be identified in the place of mere relations among things and individual reduced to things.

Viceversa, the semiotic appoach permits an appropriate use of the notions of structure and superstructure in a marxist framework. In fact, recurrent difficulties in the study of the relations between structure and superstructure derive from the lack of a mediating element. This mediating element is provided by the totality of sign systems, verbal and non-verbal, operative in all human communities. The pieces in the game are not two, but three: to the

modes of production and to the ideological elaboration of the superstructure must be added *sign systems*.

From a semiotic perspective, the structures of non-verbal communication, i.e. the circulation of commodities, and the structures of verbal communication, i.e. the circulation of messages, appear as different structures of the same social process, i.e. the communication process.

This means that all cultural phenomena may be viewed as a communicative phenomena based on sign structures and systems, and that human non-verbal communication must be placed alongside verbal communication. Therefore, a general theory of society coincides with general semiotics.

This becomes clearer when we consider that in the case both of verbal and non-verbal messages semiotics addresses the same problems – the work that produces them and that makes exchange and communication possible. For example, Claude Lévi-Strauss (cf. 1958) used the categories of linguistics in his studies on the rules of matrimony and kinship systems, offering a truly formidable example of the application of conceptual frameworks elaborated in relation to verbal communication to non-verbal communication.

Lévi-Strauss's reasoning is questionable when he justifies his application of categories proper to language to his studies on non-verbal communication in terms of 'recurrent hymns to the *esprit humain*'. This implies reference to a universal unconscious activity and universal structures of the *esprit humain.*

Schaff criticized the ontological character of structures: instead, structuralism is a interpretive approach, inseparable from human understanding.

Any scientific approach considers the world, reality, as being in constant movement and transformation and in view of this formulates its hypotheses and laws. The formulation of laws is possible because movements and transformations present constants, states of balance, systematic and essential aspects, which belong to "reality", to the "world". This balance or stability in phenomena and in relations among the elements of reality (in organic or inorganic nature and in culture) together with relatively autonomous and isolated systems of elements have an objective existence and consequently constitute the potential objects of our knowledge.

Therefore, we must discover and determine not only the laws of the dynamics of movement and development in reality, but also the structural laws of relatively isolated systems in relative balance. We must study the structures of dynamics and the dynamics of structures. Not only is the study of both types of law founded, but such a complementary

study contributes to a global image of reality. If we wish to study the (genetic, causal) laws of something's development, we must establish what this "something" is; and, therefore, it becomes necessary to know the laws of its structure (coexistent, morphologic structure). This gradual knowledge of structure is just as essential as knowledge of the genesis and development of the objects under study.

This is why knowledge of coexistential, morphologic laws is among the most ancient in human history: it dates backs to when human beings learnt to differentiate between a plant and another, an animal and another, that is, when they learnt to articulate reality on the basis of the capacity to recognize signs, to identify coexistent features which differentiate things. In this sense, as a semiotic animal the human being is also, as maintains Schaff (conversation with A. Ponzio, 1976, in Ponzio 2002), a *structuralist animal*. Structuralism not only indicates a trend among semioticians, but also among humans as humans.

Schaff stresses the complementary relation between structure and history, synchronic approach and diachronic approach:

> Il suffit d'écouter le simple bon sens pour comprendre que les méthodes syncronique et diachronique son complementaires. Seule la connaissance de la structure de l'objet, grâce à la découverte des lois coexistentielles (strucurelles) permet de pratiquer avec succèss les études génétiques et vice versa – la connaissance de la genèse et de l'histoire d'un systeme permet de progresser dans l'étude de la structure (*Structuralisme et marxisme*, 1974, 30).

Man is a *structuralist animal*. Schaff critiques ontological structuralism, and the opposition between structure and history, synchrony and diachrony.

8. *Critique of Chomskyian biologism*

The Marxist conception of the individual is founded, from its very origin, upon criticism of naturalistic, innatistic, and biological interpretations of human behaviour. With reference to Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach", Schaff shows how naturalism is materialism, though in a limited form. Man is reduced to the mere status of biological specimen and human relations are simply viewed as relations among individuals of the same species. The human being is certainly biological, a specimen of the species homo sapiens, but in his specific reality as man, he is the product of historically determined social relations. The description of man as a mere biological specimen is not enough to characterize him, given that he is determined not only by biological conditions but also by social conditions, he is fundamentally a historical

and social being. His "natural" delimitations are the result of an evolutionary development conditioned by social and historical situations.

Biologistic interpretations of man are formulated on the basis of molecular biology, especially in research pertaining to the genetic code. These, however, cannot be proven in the present state of scientific research. Despite this, however, a biologistic interpretation goes as far as expecting to explain something which is intrinsically socioanthropological, that is, language — which together with material work constitutes the basis of the human and cultural world. The success of molecular biology explains Chomsky's belief in innate ideas and the translation of the latter into biological terms by Lenneberg.

In his *Marxism and structuralism (*1974), Schaff analyses Chomsky's conception of language and deals with the possibilities of either accepting or rejecting the existence of innate and universal grammatical structures. Schaff makes a specific contribution to the debate on new innatism: he is aware that this problem can be settled by neither philosophers nor linguists, but only by the specialists of natural sciences, particularly molecular biology. In Schaff's opinion, given that scientific research in its current state cannot givean answer of any kind, neither the innatistic nor the non-innatistic point of view can be scientifically proven. Schaff's purpose is not to solve the problem but to prospect it in the right terms; he aims at uncovering implicit assumptions and the logic of the arguments put forward by the parties involved.

In his analysis of generative transformational grammar, not only does Schaff emphasize the links with so called "Cartesian Linguistics" (that is, the philosophical tradition from Descartes to Humboldt), but also with contemporary mathematical logic, and particularly the school of the logical analysis of language (above all the Circle of Vienna and the school of Lvov-Warsaw). From this point of view, we have two main forerunners of generative transformational grammar: Carnap and Ajdukiewicz. For an understanding of the "filiation of ideas" underlying generative transformational grammar we need to consult Carnap's The Logical Syntax of Language, and Ajdukiewicz's works published by "Erkenntins" in 1930. Rules for a theory of language (rules of meaning and of syntax), absent, as Chomsky points out, in traditional structuralism, while on the contrary fundamental to the conceptual apparatus of generative grammar, were particulary developed by neopositivism with Ajdukiewicz as one of its major~ representatives. Thus the semantic component of transformational grammar (the others being the syntactic and the phonological), gives deep structures semantic meaning and behaves in the same way as Ajdukiewicz's *rules of meaning.*

The theory of generative grammar aims at being a universal model capable of explaining the creativity of language also, that is, it presents itself as a model capable of generating and understanding an infinite number of sentences on the basis of a finite number of elements and a limited experience of language. The conception of innate structures underlying linguistic behaviour and the linguistic apparatus is, there fore, fundamental to

generative grammar. It is on the basis of this thesis that the universality of grammar and of deep structures is asserted. In Schaff's opinion, the thesis of "linguistic universals" is essential to generative grammar in the same way that the thesis of "linguistic differentials" is essential to the theory of linguistic relativity as conceived by Sapir and Whorf.

In Chomsky's work, the assumption that innate and universal structures exist constitutes a preliminary axiom of generative grammar which therefore appears as a hypothetical-deductive model. Such an assumption not only takes on the value of a thesis to be verified, that is, a hypothesis, but also appears as an empirical thesis which has already been demonstrated, though this is not the case.

Schaff stressed the fact that Chomsky's conception of innate structures — which in his 1957 review of Skinner's *Verbal Behaviour* was simply put forward as a hypothesis and a prudently formulated postulate — was presented more emphatically in his later works. This is particularly true of *Recent Contributions to the Theory of Innate Ideas* (1967) and of *Language and Mind* (1968). What Schaff wishes to stress is that such a development is not the result of scientific research but of reference back to a certain philosophical tradition. In fact, Chomsky presents Generative Grammar as a return to rationalism and to the tradition of "Cartesian Linguistics".

One of Schaff's main criticisms of the innatistic theory of language is that Chomsky, Katz and Lenneberg claim an empirical character for their theses when, in fact, the natural sciences (and particularly molecular biology which should be the eventual source for the solution to such issues), are not, as we have seen, in a position to give a satisfactory answer at the present moment. This does not mean, however, that the problem is empirically insoluble. Schaff demonstrates this with his analysis of two of the most important representatives of modern biology: Francois Jacob and Jacques Monod.

Jacob observes that the more the nervous system of animals is developed, the less rigid is their hereditary nature. In the genetic code we may distinguish between a fixed component and an open one, which assures a certain amount of differentiation between one individual and another in ontogentic development. In Jacob's opinion, speech is determined genetically but at the same time, it is related to the second and open component, in other words, the capacity of learning any language is a possibility, a potential. This is very different from maintaining that every man possesses an innate generative grammar, as Chomsky asserts. Moreover, Jacob believes that human behaviour is characterized by the lack of any rigid conditioning on the part of a genetic code, so that symbolic systems mediate and act as a filter in the interaction between any organism and his environ ment. Culture is viewed as a second genetic system which overlaps biological heritage; therefore, the human world — historical and social reality — cannot be explained solely in biological terms. Jacob does not take a clear stance concerning the concept of innate structures, but he does agree that science is not yet ready to give an answer.

On the contrary, Jacques Monod agrees with Chomsky's conception. As Schaff points out, however, Monod has no scientific proof to support this conception which appears more as a hypothesis for which he propends than as a scientific theory.

If, on the one hand, the conception of innate ideas is legitimate and cannot be rejected as such, on the other, it cannot be given scientific status as it has not yet been empirically proven. Consequently, in Shaff's opinion, given the impossibility of arriving at a solution to the problem, any remarks concerning Chomsky's innatism should be restricted to the formulation of the problem and to the criteria employed to deal with it.

As regards this aspect, Schaff points out that we cannot accept the hypothesis of innate linguistic structures simply because there are no available alternative scientific theories with which to confute it. Moreover, Sapir and Whorf offer an opposite hypothesis — that of linguistic relativism — which in its turn has never been empirically confuted. To verify Chomsky's thesis, not only would we have to prove the existence of innate learning mechanisms, but we would also have to prove that such a mechanism is universal, that is, that linguistic structures are the same for the whole of the homo sapiens species.

One of the weakest aspects of Chomsky's theory of language is that while he insists on innatism, the language sciences, and especially sociolinguistics and ethnolinguistics, insist on stressing the historical and social character of language. Rather than being considered in the terms of something which is either natural or non-natural, language should be considered as a social and historical phenomenon. Chomsky and Lenneberg could not deny that the learning and the use of language are conditioned by society, but they reduce social relations to relations among individuals of the same species. The social environment is viewed in the terms of any natural environment necessary to the development of attitudes peculiar to the species. The social factor is nothing more than input formed from sentences pronounced by people living in the same environment, it sets off the innate mechanism of language learning and creates the linguistic competence inherent in the particular language to which the subject is exposed. Concerning such an interpretation of social conditioning: first of all, for Schaff the statement that the quantity of input (that is, the quantity of sentences to which we are exposed in childhood) does not affect the output (that is, the production of spoken language), is false. In fact, if a child is exposed to incorrect language, s/he too will speak incorrectly as compared to official grammar; secondly, thesocial factor does not merely consist of sentences listened to by the speaker, it is also the relation between language and social praxis where language develops according to particular social and historical structures. Language itself is the product of social praxis, it is the means by which the individual receives his historical heritage. The individual belongs to a specific social system, s/he speaks, thinks and behaves according to specific social values and causes which, as part of a society divided into classes, have a class character.

9. *Language, ideology and stereotypes*

Linguistic analysis and the sociology of knowledge together with Marxism, contribute to demonstrating the social character of thought and consequently its social and ideological nature. Concept and meaning are two faces of the same phenomenon: this phenomenon is thought-language. Meaning does not subsist outside natural language or independently of linguistic signs. However, the verbal sign is not only closely connected to concept, but also to what Schaff calls the stereotype. It is related to beliefs, established opinion, emotional tendencies, group and class interests, and so forth. The stereotype is a specific reflection of reality related to specific linguistic signs; but since it involves emotional, volitive, and evaluational elements, not only does it play a particular role in relation to cognitive processes, but also in relation to praxis. The stereotype is not simply a category of logical thought, it is also a pragmatic category. From language we receive concepts as the product of a certain society in the course of history, in the same way we receive stereotypes which carry with them specific tendencies, behaviour patterns and reactions.

This means that speech is always more or less ideological since it is connected to social praxis.

Schaff maintains that reflection upon the stereotype is characterized by a high degree of "intrusion of the subjective factor" in the form of emotional, volitive and evaluational elements. This "subjective factor", however, is social and not individual in nature, it is linked to interests of social groups (social classes, ethnic groups which speak the same language and so forth). Seen in these terms the "subjective factor" is present in any form of reflection upon reality as well asin scientific knowledge. Schaff says:

> Science and ideology are closely connected to each other, in spite of those pedants who would like to separate them. In any case, since social praxis, which produces and promotes the develópment of language, is the common basis for both the relatively objective knowledge of the world, and for attitudes of evaluation, a genetic link exists (*Essays in the Philosophy of Language*, 1967; It. trans., 1969: 127).

Schaff singles out the following relation between stereotype and ideology: "it is not possible to directly identify the stereotype with ideology but the latter could not subsist without the stereotype".

We may also deal with problems concerning ideology and the "subjective factor" of human knowledge — where the subject, as we have seen, is viewed as a social rather than individual product from the viewpoint of the sociology of knowledge. This discipline, in fact, acknowledges the subject as a socially produced and conditioned individual. As Schaff frequently stresses, the sociology of knowledge derives from Marxism and particularly from

the structure and superstructure theory, it is also directly related to epistemology and to the theory of knowledge.

Schaff divides the definition of the concept of ideology into three groups so as to avoid any ambiguity and misunderstandings: a) the genetic definition which examines the conditions of development of ideology; b) the structural definition, which attempts to define the specific character of ideology, and therefore to establish the differences, from the logical point of view, between the structure of ideological discourse and the structure of scientific discourse; c) the functional definition, which underlines the functions fulfilled by ideology in relation to social, group, and class interests, etc.

Furthermore, Schaff believes in the necessity of distinguishing between the problem of the definition of ideology, on the one hand, and the problem of the value of ideology in relation to objective truth, on the other. Though related, these problems are different and should not be confused: the definition of ideology is one thing, while its value in relation to the question of objective knowledge is another. Therefore, though apparently a definition, the statement "ideology is false consciousness", is not, in fact, a definition, but is rather an answer to the question of the value of ideology. The main error made by Mannheim in his theory of ideology and in his criticism of Marxism, lies in his having mistaken the statement "ideology is false conscious ness" for a definition of ideology.

We also need to distinguish between the meaning Marx and Engels gave to the word "ideology", and the meaning it was given in the Marxist tradition (especially from Lenin onwards). Such expressions as "bourgeois ideology", and "ideological science", are very much in use. They characterize ideology on the basis of its function. In Schaff's opinion, therefore, we may give the following functional definition of ideology: by ideology we mean a system of opinions related to the aims of social development which are founded upon a system of values; these opinions are at the basis of specific attitudes and behavioural patterns in the different objective situations.

Marx and Engels employed the word "ideology" in a narrow sense, that is, in reference to the "ideology" of the bourgeois c1ass. Leading class ideology aims at the preservation of a society divided into classes. Consequently it airns at concealing those contradictions which reveal the necessity of transformation in the current structures of productive relations. Bourgeois ideology was thus characterized by Marx and Engels as false consciousness with respect to objective consciousness. Marx and Engels considered ideology as false consciousness because they use the word in a narrow sense, that is, in reference to the ideology of the bourgeoisie, and not in the broad sense where the reference is to the "ideology of the proletariat", to "scientific ideology", and so forth. When Mannheim stated that if ideology is generally false consciousness, then Marxist ideology is also false, he made a mistake for he identified ideology in the narrow sense with ideology in the broad sense (cf. Schaff 1970: *Historia i prawda* [*History and Truth*]).

We may summarize what we have said with the following points: I) the statement "ideology is false consciousness" is not a definition; 2) when we speak of ideology as false consciousness we are referring to bourgeois ideology which aims at the reproduction of class society and of social inequalities; 3) use of such expressions as "ideology of the proletariat", and "bourgeois ideology", is now frequent. In Schaff's opinion, by considering these points we become aware of the necessity of defining the word ideology in such a way as to explain its different meanings, on the one hand, and so that it suits the Marxian perspective, on the other. In this sense, ideology may be defined as either all those opinions formed under the-influence of the interests of a specific class (genetic definition), or, as those opinions useful to the defence of the interests of a specific class (functional definition). It is by considering ideology in relation to its genesis and to its function that we are able to more properly face the problem of the value of ideology as related to the objective and scientific knowledge of reality.

It must immediately be said that according to Schaff this problem cannot be dealt with on the basis of a linguistic-structural definition. Ideological discourse does not have a specific structure which distinguishes it from scientific discourse. It is an error to maintain that the difference between science and ideology lies in the structure of their propositions. According to such an opinion, ideological discourse would mainly consist in evaluative and normative propositions, whereas scientific discourse would consist of descriptive propositions. Schaff severely criticizes the neopositivistic dichotomy between judgements of facts and judgements of value. This dichotomy appears in Marxism in the forms of the division between science and ideology.

The difference between science and ideology does not consist in the fact that the "subjective factor" (which, as we have seen, is social and not individual), is present in science and absent in ideology. It consists, rather, in the diversity of the role of the "subjective factor" which is present in both science and ideology.

Scientific analysis and the sociology of knowledge have made an important contribution to destruction of the myth of the *pure objectivity* of scientific propositions. Given that both science and ideology are conditioned by society, both are in a certain sense subjective (at least because language without which human thought is impossible, introduces subjective elements in every form of human knowledge). Therefore, in Schaff's words

> By contrast to the thesis which sets science against ideology, another thesis is represented here. It maintains that not only are the propositions of science and ideology linked to each other, but in some cases they are identical.

to the point of being able to speak of "ideological science" and of "scientific ideologies".

Schaff stresses that to recognize that any discourse is more or less ideological because of social and historical conditioning, does not imply that all ideologies are distorted and to be

placed, therefore, at the same level. We need to distinguish between true ideologies and ideologies as distortions of reality; between scientific ideologies and forms of false consciousness. This distinction is determined by the different genesis and the different function of ideologies.

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