



# Fighting for philosophy in the Marxian sense: introduction to Evald Ilyenkov's "On the state of philosophy [letter to the Central Committee of the Party]"

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## Abstract

The text introduces a translation of Ilyenkov's famous text "On the State of Philosophy," which was meant as a letter to the Central Committee of the CPSU and expressed his exasperation with the development of Soviet philosophy. In our introduction, we describe the historical context of the emergence of the letter, including the main changes in Soviet philosophy in the 1960s (esp. rise in popularity of cybernetics), and the institutional details of Ilyenkov's biography. We point to the contemporary relevance of the letter by emphasizing how Ilyenkov's dialectical account of science can enrich contemporary discussions in the sociology of science and STS.

**Keywords** Evald Ilyenkov · Dialectics · Marxism · Soviet philosophy · Cybernetics · Science

## Historical context of the letter

"On the State of Philosophy" is one of several texts in Ilyenkov's oeuvre meant to influence the development of philosophy in the Soviet Union. Its exact history is not entirely clear, but the letter must have been written in the second half of the 1960s, no earlier than 1964 (when Ilyenkov resigned from the editorship of the *Philosophical Encyclopaedia*) and no later than 1968 (when Molodtsov stopped being the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy), with late 1967 being the most probable date. For years, the letter was preserved by Ilyenkov's disciple Sergey Mareev; nevertheless, it was unfortunately lost at some point, and we now possess only a transcription of the text, not the original document itself. Moreover, it is unclear whether the letter was actually

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sent. It was first published in German translation in 2006 (Iljenkow 2006), followed by publication in Russian three years later (Iljenkow 2014, Ilyenkov 2009); the Polish translation appeared in 2014. This is the first time the text has been published in English.

Ilyenkov's intellectual biography was marked from the very beginning by clashes with philosophical "officials" on the question of understanding philosophy. In 1955, after tumultuous discussions and the condemnation of a text defining philosophy as a science of thought co-authored with his friend Valentin Korovikov, he was removed from teaching at Moscow State University. A few years later, he was nearly expelled from the party over a translation of his book *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Scientific-Theoretical Thought* [*Dialektika abstraktnogo i konkretnogo v naucho-teoreticheskogo myshleniia*], which was to be published by the Feltrinelli publishing house (the same publisher of *Doctor Zhivago*; this automatically made the publishing plans, especially without the Institute's approval, suspicious). The early 1960s, however, went fairly quietly. In 1965, Ilyenkov was even awarded (with Kedrov) Chernyshevsky's Award. A year before, however, he resigned from the position of editor of the *Philosophical Encyclopaedia*, frustrated by the predominance of formal over dialectical logic in the volume, which was certainly a major catalyst for writing the letter.

Around the same time that "On the State of Philosophy" was likely written, Ilyenkov once again encountered institutional difficulties regarding the question of understanding philosophy. In 1967, he participated in a round table discussion on the social importance of philosophy, organized and reported by *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. This theme can be treated as a sign of the fading social role of philosophy, whose status, especially in connection to technological development, including military technology, had begun to be challenged by "naturalists," especially physicists. During the discussion, Ilyenkov reiterated his understanding of philosophy from a decade before:

Philosophy is the science of thinking. Engels already emphasized this. I do not want to separate philosophy from other sciences. But a philosopher should not turn into such an "expert" who can easily make small talk about quantum mechanics or genetics. (Klâmkin and Cipko 1967, p. 2)

This statement immediately provoked protests. As *Komsomolskaya Pravda* noted, "Scholars passionately object to the one-sided, applied, purely professional use of philosophy. Against the narrow specialization of philosophers themselves" (Klâmkin and Cipko 1967, p. 2). In January 1968, in a letter to a friend, Ilyenkov complained about the entire institutional campaign against him (1999, p. 258). Although in the end, it did not bring any serious consequences – that same year, he was able to defend his doctoral dissertation and publish important articles, including a polemic with David Dubrovsky on the brain and consciousness in the country's leading philosophical journal, *Voprosy filosofii* (Ilyenkov 1968). Nevertheless, it exhausted him psychologically. His depression was soon worsened by the invasion of Czechoslovakia—according to many commentators, the biggest source of Ilyenkov's crisis, which in

1979, after a practical cut-off from the possibility of publication in the last few years of his life, resulted in suicide.<sup>1</sup>

The understanding of philosophy as *logic*, the science of thought, inspired by some statements of Engels and by Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, accompanied Ilyenkov throughout his life: we find it in the 1954 Ilyenkov–Korovikov “Theses,” the documents from the 1960s, and the 1974 *Dialectical Logic*. Let us linger for a moment on the relationship between the letter to the Central Committee and the “Theses.” In many ways, “On the State of Philosophy” can be seen as a continuation of Ilyenkov and Korovikov’s text. Many of its claims, starting with the belief that philosophy should have a clearly defined subject, can already be found in the 1954 text. By then, Ilyenkov was diagnosing a crisis of the prestige and legitimacy of philosophy among scientists. He criticized the understanding of philosophy as the “abstract restatement of science” and instead pointed to Lenin’s understanding of dialectics as the logic and theory of the cognition of Marxism.

At the same time, however, the central focus of his criticism had somewhat shifted. In 1954, Ilyenkov and Korovikov mainly criticized the ontological understanding of dialectics as science directly dealing with the “laws of the development of reality.” While the main polemical blade at the time was aimed against philosophy as a “science of sciences,” a synthetic and generalized view of the world, in the 1960s it was no longer the dilettantish synthesizing tendency of philosophy that worried him as the main wrong tendency, but rather philosophy’s equally dilettantish fragmentation. Not only we cannot see any improvement—philosophy, as Ilyenkov sneeringly comments, generally stagnates at the level of Chapter 4 of “A Short Course”—but the situation has actually worsened because of the rising importance of formal logic and the popularity of cybernetics, which are increasingly displacing dialectics.

Formal logic, criticized as “bourgeois” in the 1930s, began to make a resurgence as early as the 1940s, with the support of Stalin himself (Korsakov 2015). Of course, the status of the relationship between formal and dialectical logic was the subject of much debate in the following decade; however, the general trend of the “official” position was clear and consisted of a gradual, albeit slow, strengthening of formal logic. Dialectical logic—the study of thinking in its dialectical development—was gradually proving to be a losing project. In the mid-1950s, the planned launch of the Department of Dialectical Logic at Moscow State University was successfully blocked by formal logicians and abandoned. It should be noted here that Ilyenkov criticized not only formal logicians (see, for example, his critique of famous mathematician and philosopher of mathematics Sofya Yanovskaya, whom he accused of neo-Kantian tendencies) but also many representatives of dialectical logic, particularly those employed by MSU (see Men’shikova 2019, pp. 293–295). People who wanted to develop “dialectical logic” were not a homogenous group, and their understanding of what “dialectical logic” is differed greatly.

<sup>1</sup> On Ilyenkov’s biography and institutional difficulties, see archival information edited and commented on by Ilyenkov’s daughter, Elena Illesh (Ilyenkov 2017, 2018; Ilyenkov and Korovikov 2016). The context of the letter is described in Andrey Maidansky’s introduction to the German translation of the text. For Ilyenkov’s biography in English, see e.g., Bakhurst (2021). Our introduction has benefited greatly from all of these texts. I am also grateful to Andrey Maidansky for additional explanations of the history of the document.

Cybernetics experienced a trajectory similar to that of formal logic—from initial irreverent criticism to a growing career. In 1961, the Party officially endorsed cybernetics as an important tool for furthering the construction of socialism. As Loren R. Graham notes, “In the sixties and early seventies cybernetics enjoyed far more prestige in the Soviet Union than in any other country in the world” (Graham 1987, p. 266). Slava Gerovitch portrays the stages of that path in detail (including its tumultuous relationship with philosophy), showing how with time the language of cybernetics became a part of the new official idiom (2004). Ilyenkov was undoubtedly not an opponent of computing machines or algorithmic information theory. However, the meteoric rise of cybernetics worried him because of its propensity to portray itself as a universal science, which led to the blurring of the boundaries between social and lower-order systems. He was also critical of its technocratic character, which he considered incompatible with the Marxist ideal of the all-round development of human personality, as expressed in the pamphlet “The Mystery of the Black Box” (this criticism stemmed from his first-hand experiences as a member of the Council of Cybernetics) (Ilyenkov 2018, pp. 310–311; see also Chukhrov 2020).

This opposition to various forms of reducing specifically human capabilities and historically formed social totality to simple systems (including neuro-reductionism) in some regards aligns Ilyenkov with Marxist humanism. Nevertheless, he was highly critical of “humanist” Marxism, which he considered to be based on detaching the scientific and humanist aspects of Marxist theory from one another (1975, see also Piedra Arencibia 2021). In “On the State of Philosophy,” he explains the rise of anthropological interests as an understandable reaction to “pure,” “formal” science, based on formal logic and quantitative descriptions, as a turn to “unscientific” reflections supplementing “inhuman” science. This connection between anthropology and neo-positivism is most developed in his review of Adam Schaff’s *Marxism and the Human Individual* (1991), in which he posits that the emphasis on the human individual in Schaff’s work stems directly from empiricist views of the individual as concrete. In contrast, Ilyenkov counterposes this with a claim that the individual is not concrete but is always isolated from the totality of social relations. Therefore, the way to their full development is not to simply complement the existing social and economic conditions with socialist-humanist values, but to actually abolish the division of labor with its narrow specialization of individuals.

Finally, the people Ilyenkov mentions are worth noting. The main antagonist of the letter is Vasily Molodtsov, the Dean of the Faculty of Moscow State University from 1952–1968. He was an enemy of Ilyenkov already in the 1950s, after the condemnation of the Theses. In another, earlier letter, meant as an attempt to de-Stalinize Soviet philosophy during the Thaw period, Ilyenkov characterized Molodtsov as follows:

The dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, V.S. Molodtsov, for example, is known as “a narrow specialist in the second feature of dialectics”. All his “scientific activity” for many years was reduced to a search for newer and newer examples illustrating the statement “everything in nature and society develops”. Evil tongues claim that in the case of the “first feature” or the “third feature”, he is unable to say a single intelligible word. (2017, p. 30)

For Ilyenkov, Molodtsov’s figure symbolized the perseverance of Stalinist cadres and their way of thinking, unchanged by the Thaw. He was convinced that Molodtsov’s

philosophical views remained principally the same between his commentaries on Stalin's writings and books on the philosophy of science, and could be described as the reduction of dialectics to the sum of examples, only now decorated with fashionable terminology. Instead of developing dialectical materialism, Molodtsov dogmatically proclaimed that it was already complete and perfect and called for its application to "life," and to "natural sciences."

Certainly, Molodtsov, as the Dean of the Philosophical Faculty, strengthened the philosophy of the natural sciences. As Sergey Korsakov notes, this theme must have been close to him owing to his background in mathematics and physics, which he studied for a few years before choosing philosophy (2011, p. 116). One must also remember, however, that in the 17 years that Molodtsov was a dean, the power dynamics within the academy changed significantly. The proponents of the natural and exact sciences became far more powerful, and in many cases (including that of mathematician Ivan Petrovsky, the Rector of Moscow State University 1951–1973 (Korsakov 2011, pp. 117–118)), their attitude toward philosophical education was openly critical. Philosophers were pressured to justify their existence within the system of education and the practical applicability of their research (the discussion in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* can be treated as an example of such pressure). The turn to the methodology of science and philosophizing about "practical questions" might have seemed like a necessary step for many. Ilyenkov, however, saw in it rather a slick (possibly also politically and opportunistically motivated) avoidance of becoming more deeply philosophically literate.

Though Molodtsov certainly played a role in weakening the dialectical logic in the 1950s,<sup>2</sup> the end of his career as a dean in 1968 was hardly the beginning of a better time for Ilyenkov, who was soon to battle far more dangerous enemies within his own institute. The letter, nevertheless, also names those who "did philosophy in the Marxian-Leninist" sense. First, Evgenij Sitkovsky (1900–1989) and Mark Rosenthal (1906–1975). Both of them developed dialectical logic and worked on several questions related to dialectics. Sitkovsky, who was arrested in 1943 but was later rehabilitated, worked in the Academy of Social Sciences under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He was a specialist in the history of philosophy and editor of Hegel's works. Mark Rosenthal is the author of *The Principles of Dialectical Logic* and *The Dialectics of Marx's "Capital."* Between 1966 and 1969, he headed the department of dialectical materialism at the Institute of Philosophy. Bonifaty Kedrov can be considered a surprising addition to those two, considering both his Stalinist activities (he participated in the infamous Stalinist campaign in chemistry)<sup>3</sup> and his interest in the question of special sciences. Nevertheless, he was known as a fine philosopher sympathetic to Ilyenkov's views (despite his participation in the

<sup>2</sup>Despite his role in condemning Ilyenkov and Korovikov, he is also said to be responsible for V. Mezhuiev's problems with becoming a PhD student after his publication of Hegel's critique of formal logic (Mezhuiev 2014). Sergey Korsakov sees Molodtsov's role as more nuanced, claiming, among other things, that he was "convinced in the necessity of introducing the course of dialectical logic into the teaching programme" (2011, p. 117). Nevertheless, even if Molodtsov was trying to balance the conflict between formal and dialectical logicians, there is no doubt that he was not only unsuccessful in that, but at least partially responsible for many dialectical logicians leaving the Faculty.

<sup>3</sup>Nevertheless, similar to Rosenthal, he also suffered during the antisemitic "anti-cosmopolitan" campaign (Korsakov 2012).

critique of Ilyenkov during the 1950s discussions). It is also worth mentioning that in 1963, Kedrov published a book devoted to the unity of logic, dialectics, and the theory of knowledge. A few years later, he briefly became the director of the Institute of Philosophy. His resignation in the face of an approaching special audit of the Institute in 1974 and his replacement by Boris Ukraintsev (tasked with cleansing the Institute of revisionism in the sectors of dialectical and historical materialism (Ilyenkov 2018, p. 440)) crushed any hopes for a change in the Institute.

Finally, among people “doing Marxian-Leninist philosophy,” Ilyenkov mentions a group of “young people.” It is unclear who exactly he had in mind. Among employees of the sector who were not much younger than Ilyenkov (“between 30 and 45 years old”), and close to him, were people who were very significant in the history of Soviet philosophy, such as Vladislav Lektorsky (1932–), Genrikh Batishev (1932–1990), and Nelly Motroshilova (1934–2021). The sector of dialectical materialism was an important intellectual environment for Ilyenkov; his contemporaries often describe the atmosphere of dialogue and serious philosophical work there (Gudrun 2019; Pruzhinin 2018). Nevertheless, it was certainly not immune to the tendencies Ilyenkov describes: many of the employees of the sector gravitated toward anthropology and gradually left Marxism behind. However, though Ilyenkov’s plea—the urgency of which is best conveyed in his exasperated use of capital letters—was certainly in opposition to the main tendencies of the development of Soviet philosophy, it would be wrong to treat it simply as a voice crying in the wilderness. Although marginalized, “Marxian and Leninist philosophy” survived at the Institute of Philosophy in the following years (supported by Ilyenkov’s disciples, such as Sergey Mareev). Recent years have shown that Ilyenkov’s ideas are of interest not only to historians of the period but are widely discussed and developed, both in Russia and abroad.

## The relevance of Ilyenkov’s “On the state of philosophy” today

The significance of “On the State of Philosophy” is quite paradoxical. The letter is now a proposition that is even more peculiar and elusive than it was during the time and context of its writing, yet it remains relevant today. To understand its enduring significance, it is necessary to examine the diagnosis of Soviet philosophy (see above) and determine if these criticisms can be applied to philosophy practiced today in other countries as well.

Soviet philosophy, viewed critically by Ilyenkov, transforms from a socially historical praxis practiced within the framework of communist goals to a contributory activity practiced by multiple schools of thought. It is reduced merely to a methodology of science and acts as an “appendage” to the sciences, leading philosophers to become mere dilettante commentators on specific sciences, as Ilyenkov bluntly puts it.

Ilyenkov’s criticism stems from the neo-positivization and “cybernetization” of Soviet philosophy, which resulted in its practice being constrained to a single tradition of rationality and science. This sentiment aligns with Lenin’s critique of empirio-criticism. Defining rationality, the adoption of neopositivist science and its successors led to a form of “scholasticism” among philosophers in the Soviet Union and Eastern

Bloc (Tittenbrun 1986).<sup>4</sup> They were influenced by the Western, epistemocentric analytical and neopositivist Anglo-Saxon tradition (Kuszyk-Bytniewska 2012, 2023). It can be argued that a convergence of Western and Eastern Philosophy of Science has taken place (Sarlemijn 1985), with significant political and philosophical implications.

In recent decades, an important tradition has emerged in the study of science and technology, shedding light on how scientific practice operates. We now understand that several fields, including the sociology of science, science and technology studies, and social epistemology, offer valuable perspectives on science beyond neopositivist and Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy. Though some philosophers within the analytical post-positivist tradition may still attempt to claim a monopoly on discussing science, their limitations are even more obvious than they were in Ilyenkov's era. The constraint that existed in Ilyenkov's time, which implied that deviating from neopositivist and analytical orthodoxy would make one unscientific, no longer applies. After reading the works of I. Hacking, K. Knorr Cetina, B. Latour, S. Shapin, and other authors, it is clear that the specific and natural sciences are a socially and historically determined phenomenon (Fuller 2006b; Moreno and Vinck 2021).

However, it remains uncertain whether Ilyenkov's proposal, which is dialectically rooted and references Lenin and Engels, can find support within these currents. Regrettably, these movements have disconnected themselves from their Marxist origins and have become enmeshed in a love affair with postmodern relativism. Science and technology studies (STS) and related movements have often critiqued a highly positivistic conception of science. However, they sometimes fall into positions that are overtly anti-science and even reactionary (Hess 2013; Hoffman 2018; Lynch 2017). Thus, as in Ilyenkov's time, the problem of the anti-dialectical Anglo-American neopositivization of philosophy due to hegemonic influence remains.

Moreover, sociological trends and historicist approaches to science seem to be reaching their limits. This is largely because the widespread presence of Marxism among scientists in the 1930s has been overlooked in contemporary science studies and STS (Bernal 2010; Haldane 2016; Sheehan 2018; Steiner and Bernal 1989). In fact, the prominent group of communist naturalists, known as the "visible college," held significant sway and influence (Werskey 1978). Scientists like J. D. Bernal, J. Needham, and Joliot Curie had an impact not just on science, but also on global politics through the founding of the United Nations. However, this first wave of science studies was flawed in that it was excessively bound to the state apparatus and to political power and was mired in ad hoc political solutions. In the United States,

<sup>4</sup>This accusation of scholasticism meant an adherence to a certain schematic Stalinist scheme (*diamat*), which was reified and legitimized by reference to formal methods. This has led to interesting consequences in Poland. In the 1980s, a critique of Marx called non-Marxian historical materialism—published in *samizdat*, formulated by Leszek Nowak, a Marxist who began to support the Solidarity movement—gained particular popularity. And this is where the paradox comes in. Leszek Nowak criticized academic "zombie" Marxism, i.e., the constricted Stalinist version of the "diamat." Meanwhile, he himself was accused of scholasticism (Tittenbrun 1986). Tittenbrun, a Polish Marxist and sociologist, politically adhered to the official party line of the time (Norkus 2012). However, he was philosophically a non-obvious voice defending "dialectics." Despite being politically opposed, Leszek Nowak did not free himself from the schematism of the *diamat*, offering a counter-proposal for it. Paradoxically, then, the influence of "scholastic" formalism was so great that it was shared by both party loyalists and dissidents. And at the same time, "dialecticians" remained in the philosophical minority.



a generation of physicists, New Deal supporters, often with communist sympathies, became involved in the Manhattan Project, which led to a Cold War entanglement of science. Bernal became embroiled in the Lysenko affair as his supporter. Marxist scientists on both sides of the Iron Curtain became hostages of the Cold War and, due to openly referring to Marx, the first wave of science studies lost its relevance. Consequently, it allowed the analytical philosophy of science and positivism to take a hegemonic position. This is interesting, because, as McCumber shows, it was part of the US-backed anti-communist political campaign during the Cold War (McCumber 2017). The promotion of formal logic as a counter to “obscure” dialectics was used as a means of depoliticizing and sidelining philosophy as part of a broader communist movement for social transformation.

The countercultural movement of the 1960s offered another critique of the marriage between Marxist scientists and power/politics. Stemming partly from the anti-atomic movement, this critique rightly condemned the elitism, militarism, and other problematic aspects of this alliance (Haraway 1975). Unfortunately, this criticism has hastily descended into anti-scientific mysticism. For example, Marcuse’s critique of analytic philosophy seems to be similar to Ilyenkov’s accusations, but the results are already quite different (Lyas 1982). Marcuse inspires the existentialist and sentimental reaction to which Ilyenkov is opposed. Unwittingly, the counterculture, inadvertently supporting irrationalism, contributed to the rise of the neoliberal era (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018).

Let’s focus on the actuality of Ilyenkov’s critique of cybernetics, leaving aside for a moment the issue of neo-positivism. In both the West and the East, cybernetics underwent a period of growth and success until approximately the 1970s, when Allende’s ambitious project of cybernetic socialism (Medina 2011) was executed by tanks during Pinochet’s coup d’état, and cybernetic projects were transformed and became a component of reactionary Californian ideology, namely a set of beliefs that emerged from the fusion of cybernetics, free market economics, and counter-culture libertarianism in Silicon Valley (Barbrook 2007). Cybernetics, alongside systems theory, certain interpretations of Neo-Darwinism,<sup>5</sup> and the misuse of the ecosystem metaphor (as seen in Adam Curtis’s hypnotic documentary *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*)—combined with the “Californian ideology”—led to the legitimization of neoliberalism in the 1990s, as well as the belief that reality would “organize itself” through the “free market.” Consequently, a re-enchantment of reality has replaced modernity’s endeavor to stabilize and rationalize reality. Today, in a world of advancing AI and Silicon Valley hegemony, Ilyenkov’s warnings against the “cybernetization” (Gerovitch 2004) of human nature ring true (Bigger and Rossi 2012). What appeared to be a new form of the Enlightenment, both in the aforementioned Chilean cybernetic socialism project and the proposals formulated in Eastern Bloc countries, such as in the Czech Republic by Radovan Richta (Krivý 2019; Likavčan and Peters 2020; Sommer 2016), soon turned out to be an ally of the counter-Enlightenment. Moreover, Ilyenkov’s fervent defense of dialectics against cybernetics can serve as a cautionary tale for those who view the rediscovery of old cybernetic concepts as a

<sup>5</sup>Neo-Darwinism is about the interpretation that took the form of the concept of “selfish gene” (Dawkins), which has become more popular than the alternative that is closer to dialectic interpretations, as represented by J. Gould and R. Lewontin.



chance for the future, and invest political hopes accordingly (Phillips and Rozworski 2019; Bastani 2019).<sup>6</sup> Both scientistic neo-positivism and the hegemony of cybernetics are currently the face of neoliberalism. This has led to unfortunate outcomes for the state of philosophy. And that is the present state—the era in which neoliberalism left our imagination in ruins.

In his book, *The New Sociological Imagination*, Steve Fuller, the post-Marxist sociologist of science, provides a thought-provoking analysis that echoes some of Ilyenkov's observations (Fuller 2006a). What concerns Fuller the most is a phenomenon he refers to as “the mysterious disappearance of the category of society.” This process has taken place on various levels: society has vanished not only as an explanatory category in the social sciences, but also as a reference in everyday life. Thinking of oneself as part of something larger is no longer a natural reflex of individuals, and according to Fuller, this signals a crisis for both the social sciences and the academic field as a whole. Sociology, at the core of the social sciences, is the discipline that continued the Enlightenment legacy and had the ambition to create “heaven on earth.” This promise is fully realized through the concept of the sociological imagination:

The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise. To recognize this task and this promise is the mark of the classic social analyst. (Mills (1959), p. 6)

Fuller, looking for remnants of these dreams today, states obtusely:

By now the tenor of my response to the claim that social scientists are the Academic Undead should be clear: Our opponents are trying to turn back the clock, largely through systematically self-induced amnesia that enables them to accept the world as it is in these post-socialist, neoliberal times. (Fuller 2006a, p. 21)

This quote, both in content and form, aligns with Ilyenkov's perspective. Like him, Fuller identifies philosophical and sociological “zombies” (Bakhurst 2023). Interestingly, Fuller views adversaries similarly, particularly when identifying the perils of the “casualization” of human nature. The term refers to the tendency to categorize individuals based on the implicit assumption of the metaphysical view of bioliberalism.

Bioliberalism indirectly promotes the karmic worldview by easing the passage of humans in and out of existence, that is, the casualization of the human condition. It may be seen as the natural outcome of neoliberalism when the biomedical industries are the ascendent mode of production. (Fuller 2006a, p. 206)

This reduction of the discussion of human nature to the fields of cognitive sciences, sociobiology, and evolutionary psychology is a form of casualizing human nature. It presents a danger similar to the one Ilyenkov identified in innatism:

Anti-innatism is the criticism of naturalistic positions that naturalize and eternalize the conditions of human unfreedom. Everything specific to the human

<sup>6</sup>Ilyenkov's critique of cybernetics is taken into account in the critical analysis of cybernetics in the Soviet Union (Chukhrov 2020; Kirtchik 2023).

mind is socially mediated and (inter-)actively produced. The naturalistic and physicalist approaches seek genetically inherited (inborn, a priori) forms of brain activity that determine modes and forms of human social activity. (Azeri 2017, p. 18)

## Calling for a dialectical platform of sciences

Ilyenkov's voice and the state of Soviet philosophy resonates with Fuller's voice about the state of Western academia, but is more valuable than the latter's. Fuller, despite his criticism, frightened by the dominance of neoliberal, bioliberal approaches, began to seek alliances on the religious anti-modern side. In this sense, the timeliness of Ilyenkov's letter cannot be overestimated, as it reminds us that we do not have to slip into reactionary abysses, but can resurrect the tradition of a dynamic, dialectical science, based on both the Marxist and Hegelian traditions, but also capable of updating it. Of particular note is the activity of the International Friends of Ilyenkov group and the recently established journal *Marxism & Sciences: A Journal of Nature, Culture, Human and Society*.

The relevance of Ilyenkov's letter lies in its observation that contemporary philosophy lacks the unifying platform for social sciences and philosophy that Marxist dialectics had promised. This letter presents an opportunity for interdisciplinary researchers in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences to establish such a platform. The current relevance of Ilyenkov's letter prompts a renewed call to establish such a platform. This platform should fully incorporate the legacy of the dialectic as a way of thinking and living, which Ilyenkov remained steadfastly devoted to (Bakhurst 2021; Lotz 2019; Maidansky 2013)—one that is wiser to the historical experience of the generation of scientist-communists of the 1930s, as well as their counter-cultural critics. This platform should also unite researchers aware of the limitations of neo-positivism, learning from the sociology of science and STS, while critically aware of how some of the critique of science performed by Foucault, Latour, and others has become functional for neoliberalism.

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