



E.V. Ilyenkov and Creative Soviet Theory: An Introduction to ‘Dialectics of the Ideal’

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Abstract

This article aims to introduce E.V. Ilyenkov's ‘Dialectics of the Ideal’, first published in unabridged form in 2009, to an English-speaking readership. It does this in three ways: First, it contextualises his intervention in the history of Soviet and post-Soviet philosophy, offering a window into the subterranean tradition of *creative* theory that existed on the margins and in opposition to official *Diamat*. It explains what distinguishes Ilyenkov's philosophy from the crude materialism of *Diamat*, and examines his relationship to four central figures from the pre-*Diamat* period: Deborin, Lukács, Vygotsky, and Lenin. Second, it situates his concept of the *ideal* in relation to the history of Western philosophy, noting Ilyenkov's original reading of Marx through both Hegel and Spinoza, his criticism of Western theorists who identify the ideal with language, and his effort to articulate an anti-dualist conception of subjectivity. Third, it examines Ilyenkov's reception in the West, previous efforts to publish his work in the West, including the so-called ‘Italian Affair’, as well as existing scholarship on Ilyenkov in English.

Keywords

Ilyenkov, activity-theory, Soviet philosophy, anti-dualism, Western Marxism

‘Dialectics of the Ideal’ was written in the mid-1970s but remained unpublished in its complete form until 2009 – 30 years after the death of its author, Evlad Vasilyevich Ilyenkov. It is a pivotal intervention in Soviet philosophy, and one of the most insightful examples of the subterranean tradition of *creative* Soviet Marxism.¹ It provides an important window into the highly contested, yet

1. The term ‘creative [творческий]’ Soviet Marxism is used by some contemporary Russian theorists to distinguish certain currents in Marxist theory from ‘official’ Soviet Marxism in the form of *Diamat* (Maidansky 2009a, pp. 201–2; Tolstykh (ed.) 2008, p. 10; Levant 2008; Mezhuiev 1997). David Bakhurst uses the term ‘genuine’ (Bakhurst 1991, p. 3). This ‘creative’ Soviet Marxism could be found in various academic disciplines, most notably in the 1920s and 1960s. These currents are distinguished from official Soviet thought by their departure from positivist conceptions of subjectivity. However, a history that draws out the historical and theoretical

poorly researched, intellectual history of Marxist theory in the Soviet Union in the post-Stalin period. But perhaps even more significantly, it offers original insights into the nature of consciousness, which challenge both idealist and crude materialist forms of reductionism (what he called ‘neopositivism’).

E.V. Ilyenkov is the Soviet philosopher most closely associated with the attempt to break with official *Diamat*² following the Khrushchevite thaw. After Stalin’s death in 1953 a new group of theorists began to challenge the hegemony of *Diamat*. ‘The first to emerge as leading figures in this new movement were Evald Ilyenkov and Alexander Zinoviev’, write Guseinov and Lektorsky, who identify this period as a ‘philosophical Renaissance in the Soviet Union’.³ Similarly, V.I. Tolstykh writes, ‘At the end of the 1950s begins the crisis of official Soviet ideology, and [Ilyenkov] is among other young philosophers [who] together with Aleksandr Zinoviev, Gregory Shchedrovitsky, Merab Mamardashvili and others enter into polemics with philosophers of the type of Molodtsov and Mitin.’⁴

In 1954, as a junior lecturer at Moscow State University, Ilyenkov famously declared to the Chair of Dialectical Materialism that in Marxism there was no such thing as ‘dialectical materialism’ or ‘historical materialism’ (referring to *Diamat* and *Istmat*), but only a materialist conception of history.⁵ This view put him on a collision-course with the *Diamatchiki* and cost him his position. He managed to relocate for a time to the Institute of Philosophy, but his opponents eventually succeeded in isolating him and preventing him from teaching. He was denounced as a ‘revisionist’ and took his own life in March 1979. However, over a period of more than two decades, his original development of Marxist thought challenged the neopositivism of *Diamat* and inspired a critical current of creative Soviet Marxism which continues to this day. ‘It is to him that my generation owes the conscious break with dogmatic and scholastic official philosophy’,⁶ writes Vadim Mezhuev, who is considered to be ‘one of the most interesting post-Soviet Marxists in Russia at the moment’.⁷

connections between these currents, which articulates ‘creative’ Soviet Marxism as a coherent tradition, remains to be written (see Levant 2011).

2. The term is a Russian acronym for dialectical materialism. *Diamat* represented official Soviet-Marxist philosophy, which was schematised in the fourth chapter of the 1938 *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Short Course)* as ‘the world-outlook of the Marxist-Leninist party’ (*History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik): Short Course* 1939, cited in Bakhurst 1991, p. 96).

3. Guseinov and Lektorsky 2009, p. 13.

4. Tolstykh (ed.) 2008, p. 6.

5. Mareev 2008, p. 8; Bakhurst 1991, p. 6.

6. Mezhuev 1997, p. 47.

7. Oittinen 2010, p. 191.

Soviet *Diamat* was the official interpretation of Marxist theory as sanctioned by the state. It was codified in a text called *Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism*, which was written by Stalin and published as part of the *Short History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (1938).⁸ This text became ‘the Bible of Soviet philosophy’,⁹ as philosophy in the Soviet Union changed from argument to simply referencing Stalin’s writings and speeches. According to David Bakhurst, analytic philosopher and author of the only major book on Ilyenkov in English, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy: From the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov* (1991), it became ‘the definitive work on the subject [and] came to define the parameters of all Soviet philosophical discussion’.¹⁰ As Mezhuev writes,

To be a creative, thinking Marxist, in a state at the head of which were Marxists, was the most dangerous thing of all. This is where the state had its monopoly. It preferred to recognize its opponents, rather than rivals within the sphere of its own ideology. You could be a positivist, study the Vienna School . . . But to write a book about Marxism, that was dangerous. . . This is the paradox, you see? That is why all the talent began to leave. It was impossible to work here. One had to rehearse dogma, and nothing else.¹¹

Ilyenkov’s creative output challenged *Diamat*’s interpretation of Marxist theory. In contrast to the crude, mechanistic materialism of *Diamat*, which reduced consciousness to a reflection of matter, he reasserted the central rôle of human activity in the development of consciousness. This approach had consequences far beyond philosophy and directly impacted upon the field of psychology as well as early-childhood education. Most significantly, he challenged *Diamat*’s verity as an interpretation of Marxism and Leninism, and insisted that his interpretation was much closer to Marx’s own view and consistent with Lenin’s reading of Marx. Although articulated in the language of classical philosophy, his ideas had far-reaching political consequences.

The concept of the ideal

What principally distinguishes Ilyenkov’s philosophy from *Diamat* is his understanding of the nature of the ideal – i.e., non-material phenomena, such as laws, customs, moral imperatives, concepts, mathematical truths, and

8. Bakhurst 1991, p. 96.

9. Guseinov and Lektorsky 2009, p. 12.

10. Bakhurst 1991, p. 96.

11. Mezhuev quoted in Levant 2008, p. 31.

so on. How do they arise? Where do they exist? What is their relationship to the material world? What is ‘the objectivity (“truth-value [истинность]”) of knowledge’ (p. 153)?¹² This is a question of fundamental importance to Marx’s understanding of socialism as self-emancipation and to Lenin’s conception of the party, as both place the development of consciousness (i.e., seeing the world with ‘sober senses’) at the centre of their theories.¹³

Ilyenkov begins ‘Dialectics of the Ideal’ with a critique of idealist conceptions of the ideal, which identify it with consciousness, thought, creativity, the mind, the soul, spirit, and so on; however, his chief target is the crude materialism that understands the ideal as a purely physiological phenomenon, as a ‘cerebral neurodynamic process’.¹⁴ From this perspective, the ideal appears as a reflection of the material world produced by the physical brain of an individual. In contrast, Ilyenkov argues that the ideal is neither purely mental nor purely physiological, but something that exists outside the individual, and confronts her as a ‘special reality’ with a ‘peculiar objectivity’, as ‘all historically formed and socially legitimised *human representations* of the actual world . . . “things”, in the body of which is tangibly *represented something other than themselves.*’ (pp. 153, 184, 154–5)¹⁵ In essence he reframes the question, from the relationship between the material world and how it appears in the mind of an individual to a relationship between the material world and its representation in the ‘*intellectual culture* of a given people’, i.e., the state (in Hegel’s and Plato’s sense, as ‘the whole general ensemble of social institutions that regulate the life-activity of the individual’ (p. 156)).¹⁶

He situates the problem of the ideal in the context of its development in Western philosophy, crediting Plato with posing the problem of this ‘range of phenomena’, ‘as the *universal norms of that culture* within which an individual awakens to conscious life, as well as requirements that he [*sic*] must internalise as a necessary law of his own life-activity.’ (p. 153)¹⁷ He notes how, in the empiricist philosophy of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, the ideal took on a different meaning – as something that does not really exist, or as something that exists only in the mind of an individual – and how this meaning was challenged by German classical philosophy, returning to it an objectivity

12. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 9.

13. As regards Marx’s concept of self-emancipation, see Levant 2007, Draper 1978 and Löwy 2005; as regards Lenin’s focus on consciousness, see Lih 2006 and Molyneux 1978.

14. This was the position of one of Ilyenkov’s opponents, D.I. Dubrovsky, who wrote ‘The ideal is a purely individual phenomenon, realised by means of a certain type of cerebral neurodynamic process’ (Dubrovsky 1971, p. 189).

15. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 14.

16. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 15.

17. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 11.

outside the individual mind, albeit idealistically. ‘The real materialist solution to the problem in its proper formulation (already noted by Hegel) was found, as we know, by Marx, who “had in mind” an entirely real process, specifically inherent to human life-activity: the process by which the *material* life-activity of social man [*sic*] begins to produce not only a material, but also an *ideal* product, begins to produce the act of *idealisation* of reality (the process of transforming the “material” into the “ideal”), and then, having arisen, the “ideal” becomes a critical component of the material life-activity of social man, and then begins the opposite process – the process of the *materialisation* (objectification, reification, “incarnation”) of the ideal.’ (p. 158)¹⁸ His review of the concept of the ideal through the history of Western philosophy illustrates the achievements of ‘intelligent’ idealism, as well as the poverty of what Lenin called ‘silly’ materialism. Most significantly, it demonstrates Marx’s distinct solution to the problem of the ideal – how it differs from idealist, but also from crude materialist conceptions.

The essence of Marx’s breakthrough in philosophy is illustrated using his critique of the concept of value in political economy. According to Marx, the value-form of a commodity is purely ideal – it has no material properties, and it bears absolutely no relationship to the material properties of the commodity itself. ‘This is a purely universal form, completely indifferent to any sensuously perceptible material of its “incarnation [воплощения]”, of its “materialisation”. The value-form is absolutely independent of the characteristics of the “natural body” of the commodity in which it “dwells [вселяется]”, the form in which it is *represented*.’ (pp. 160–1)¹⁹ But the value-form is not a myth, something that exists only in the minds of individuals, expressed in market-price;²⁰ rather, it has an objective reality. ‘This mystical, mysterious reality does not have its own material body [but controls] the fate and movement of all those individual bodies that it inhabits, in which it temporarily “materialises”. Including the human body.’ (p. 161)²¹ This objective reality is, of course, for Marx not some mystical force (as it is for idealists), but human activity itself, as we see in his labour-theory of value.

Ilyenkov argues that Marx’s concept of value is an illustration of a deeper philosophical insight: the relationship between the value-form and the material form of the commodity is an example of the relationship between the ideal in general and the material in general. Similar to the fact that one cannot locate value in the material properties of a commodity, one also cannot locate the

18. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 18.

19. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 21.

20. Such as John Maynard Keynes believed – see Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 48; Ilyenkov 2012, p. 182.

21. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 21.

ideal form of a material object in the object itself. However, the ideal is not something that exists only in the minds of individuals, any more than does value. The ideal has an objective existence in human activity – in the process of creating ideal representations of the material world, and the reverse process in which these representations inform human activity.

The ideal form is a form of a thing, but outside this thing, namely in man [*sic*], as a form of his dynamic life-activity, as goals and needs. Or conversely, it is a form of man's dynamic life-activity, but outside man, namely in the form of the thing he creates, which represents, reflects another thing, including that which exists independently of man and humanity. 'Ideality' as such exists only in the constant transformation of these two forms of its 'external incarnation' and does not coincide with either of them taken separately. (p. 192)²²

Much like Marx was able to grasp value as neither a property of the commodity nor a mental projection onto the commodity, but as labour, Ilyenkov grasps the ideal as human activity – as the process of the human transformation of the material world.

In contrast to this dialectical-materialist understanding of the ideal, Ilyenkov identifies several examples of reductionist theories in the Soviet Union and in the West. Although his chief opponents (such as D.I. Dubrovsky) reduced the ideal to a property of the physical brain, he also includes among neopositivist theorists those who identify the ideal with language, dismissing 'the whole tricky Heideggerian construction, according to which "being" is revealed and exists only "in language"' (p. 172)²³ as another form of reductionism. 'Neopositivists, who identify thought (i.e., the ideal) with language, with a system of terms and expressions, therefore make the same mistake as scientists who identify the ideal with the structures and functions of brain tissue'.²⁴ Similarly, he takes aim at Popper's concept of 'World 3' – the world of human social constructions – which appears quite close to his concept of the ideal.²⁵ However, there is a significant difference between the two concepts. As Guseinov and Lektorsky write, "The substantive difference lay in the fact that, for Ilyenkov, ideal phenomena can exist only within the context of human activity."²⁶ The rôle of human activity distinguishes him from theorists who identify the ideal with the brain, or language, or with the world of social constructions in general.

22. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 61.

23. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 36.

24. Ilyenkov 2009b, p. 153.

25. For instance, Ilkka Niiniluoto conflates the two concepts in Oittinen (ed.) 2000, p. 8.

26. Guseinov and Lektorsky 2009, p. 15.

For Ilyenkov, the ideal is not a thing but part of a process that involves the human representation of things in the body of other things. As Maidansky writes, ‘the term “ideal” denotes a relation between at least two different things, one of which adequately represents the essence of the other.’²⁷ The question of the truth-value of knowledge must then be reframed to acknowledge the fact that the ideal content of a thing is always represented in another thing, and not in the thing itself. In other words, things assume significance only as they are reflected in other things, only in their relationship to other things.

This reflection of things in other things is not a mental projection onto the material world; rather, it exists objectively in the same physical space as the matter it reflects, namely in the actual activity of human beings. Consequently, the ideal representation of a material object always involves the activity into which that object is incorporated. ‘Since man [*sic*] is given the external thing in general only insofar as it is involved in the process of his activity, in the final product – in the idea – the image of the thing is always merged with the image of the activity in which this thing functions. *That constitutes the epistemological basis of the identification of the thing with the idea, of the real with the ideal.*’²⁸ He illustrates this point with the example of how the stars are idealised as they are incorporated into human activity. ‘Thus at first he directs his attention upon the stars exclusively as a natural clock, calendar and compass, as means and instruments of his life-activity, and observes their “natural” properties and regularities only insofar as they are natural properties and regularities of the material in which his activity is being performed, and with which he must, therefore, reckon as completely objective (in no way dependent on his will and consciousness) components of his activity.’ (p. 191)²⁹ The ideal, then, is not a purely mental phenomenon, which tries to grasp the real as an ‘object of contemplation’,³⁰ but is part of the same reality (i.e., ‘sensuous human activity, practice’). In this way, knowledge is objective.

This approach overcomes the various impasses that arise from both idealist and crude materialist forms of reductionism, as it does not proceed from the Cartesian ‘two-worlds’ approach which grasps thought and the body as two distinct objects. Cartesian dualism cannot resolve the question of the

27. Maidansky 2005, p. 296.

28. Ilyenkov 2009b, p. 162; my italics.

29. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 60.

30. Recall Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*; Thesis I: ‘The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism – which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such.’ As Bakhurst writes, Ilyenkov sought to rectify that defect.

relationship between these objects, and inevitably results in reductionism: either idealism, which privileges thought, or crude materialism, which privileges matter. In contrast, Ilyenkov overcomes these dualist dead-ends by drawing not only on Hegel's dialectics, but also on Spinoza's monism. As the contemporary Finnish philosopher Vesa Oittinen writes,

Ilyenkov stresses the methodological value of Spinoza's monism, which means a change for the better compared with the dualism of two substances in Descartes . . . The Cartesians had posed the whole question of the psycho-physical problem in a wrong way: they desperately sought to establish some kind of a causal relation between thought and extension, although such a relation simply doesn't exist. Thought and extension are simply two sides of the one and same matter.³¹

He quotes Ilyenkov's essay 'Thought as an Attribute of Substance' from *Dialectical Logic* (1974): 'There are not two different and originally contrary objects of investigation – body and thought – but only *one single* object, which is the *thinking body* [which] does not consist of two Cartesian halves – "thought lacking a body" and a "body lacking thought" . . . It is not a special "soul", installed by God in the human body as in a temporary residence, that thinks, but the *body of man* itself.'³²

This body, however, is not the physical body of the individual, but is what Marx called 'man's [*sic*] inorganic body'. As Maidansky writes,

Ilyenkov insisted that Marx had in mind not the bodily organ of an individual *Homo sapiens*, growing out of his neck at the mercy of Mother Nature, but precisely the *human* head – a tool of *culture*, not of nature. The ideal is not concealed in the heads of people. Its body does not consist only of the brain, but also of any thing that is created by people for people. Products of culture are nothing but 'the organs of the human brain created by the human hand, the reified power of knowledge,' Marx writes in the *Grundrisse*.³³

In other words, the thinking thing is not the individual with her brain, but the collective as it idealises the material and materialises the ideal.

Some theorists in the West – such as Althusser, Deleuze and Negri – have likewise attempted a Spinozist reading of Marx; however, these are largely efforts to articulate an alternative to Hegelian Marxism.³⁴ What sets Ilyenkov apart from these theorists is that he does not turn to Spinoza as an alternative to Hegel, but reads Marx through both Hegel and Spinoza. Far from being

31. Oittinen 2005b, p. 323.

32. Ilyenkov 1977a, pp. 31–2.

33. Maidansky 2005, p. 290.

34. Holland 1998.

Hegelian Marxism, Ilyenkov's target is neopositivism. According to Oittinen, 'it seems that the role of Spinoza in his attempts to develop a "humanist," that is, an anti-positivistic and anti-scientistic form of dialectics, was greater than hitherto has been assumed.'³⁵ There is a considerable amount of work to be done in order to bring the full weight of Ilyenkov's insights into conversation with Western theory.

Ilyenkov in the context of Soviet and post-Soviet theory

Situating Ilyenkov in his intellectual context is not a simple task. Soviet philosophy has not received much attention in the West, partly because it tends to be associated with *Diamat*. In fact, English-language accounts of Soviet philosophy often begin with an apology and a justification for studying something that has long been tossed into the recycling bin of history. As we saw above, Ilyenkov was certainly no *Diamatchik*; on the contrary, he was part of a group of theorists that sought to break with *Diamat*. This is part of the legacy of creative Soviet Marxism, which has remained largely out of sight, in the shadow of *Diamat* inside the USSR, in post-Soviet Russia and in the West. However, the history of Soviet Marxism is much richer than *Diamat* – it is a history whose lineages continue to be contested in current scholarship, one that is very much worth recovering, and which includes insights that are relevant to contemporary theoretical problems in the West.

Diamat dominated Soviet philosophy for most of its history; however, it remained virtually unchallenged for only a relatively short period. Its ascendancy can be pinpointed with a remarkable degree of accuracy. On 25 January 1931, the Central Committee of the CPSU endorsed the platform of 'Stalin's new philosophical leadership' and demanded a 'working-out [*razrabotka*] of the Leninist stage in the development of dialectical materialism'.³⁶ However, 'the true focus of the Leninist stage was not Lenin, but Stalin',³⁷ whom Mitin (one of the leaders of the *Diamatchiki*) called, 'Lenin's best pupil', 'the greatest Leninist of our epoch', 'Lenin today', and so on. In this way, a new philosophical establishment took control of the philosophy-departments and academic journals – the means of intellectual production of Marxist philosophy. In fact, state-control over the development of Marxist theory extended beyond the discipline of philosophy. For example, the well-known Marxist developmental psychologist L.S. Vygotsky was blacklisted in the Soviet Union for 20 years

35. Oittinen 2005b, p. 320.

36. Bakhurst 1991, pp. 91–3.

37. Bakhurst 1991, p. 94.

(1936–56) following the Central Committee's resolution of 4 June 1936 against pædology (the study of children's behaviour and development).³⁸ This state of affairs continued until the mid-1950s, when a new generation of theorists, led by Ilyenkov and others, challenged the hegemony of *Diamat*.

However, prior to 1931 the state did not exercise complete control over the development of Marxist theory.³⁹ Before the so-called 'Leninist stage of Soviet philosophy', philosophy in the Soviet Union was the site of vigorous debates, which by the mid-1920s coalesced into two schools: the Deborinites and the Mechanists. Their rivalry dominated Soviet philosophy for much of the 1920s and constitutes the 'prehistory' of what we know as Soviet philosophy in the form of *Diamat*. It was only in the 1930s that Soviet Marxism took the form of *Diamat*, and effectively erased its own prehistory.

It is widely acknowledged that Ilyenkov's work revives and develops certain themes from the pre-*Diamat* period;⁴⁰ however, the specific lines of continuity remain a subject of debate in current scholarship. In dominant Western accounts, Ilyenkov appears as an heir of the Deborinites⁴¹ – the group of philosophers that coalesced around A.M. Deborin, most of whom were involved in his seminar at the Institute of Red Professors. Between 1924 and 1929, the Deborinites conducted a vigorous intellectual and political battle with the Mechanists – a more eclectic group of theorists that included Bolshevik-Party activist I.I. Skvortsov-Stepanov, former Menshevik Lyubov Akselrod, the early Bolshevik philosopher Alexander Bogdanov, and who were supported by Nikolai Bukharin. What united this diverse group was 'the view that the explanatory resources of science are able to provide a complete account of objective reality'.⁴² In contrast, the Deborinites 'dismissed the Mechanists' optimism about the global explanatory potential of natural science' and 'held that the Mechanists were committed to blatant reductionism.'⁴³ Deborin argued, 'In our opinion, thought is a particular quality of matter, the subjective side of the objective, material, i.e., physiological processes, with which it is not identical and to which it cannot be reduced.'⁴⁴

This debate, however, was not resolved, but was muted in 1929 when, at the Second All-Union Conference of Marxist-Leninist Institutions of Scientific Research, the Mechanists were officially condemned. 'Mechanism was defeated

38. Bakhurst 1991, p. 60.

39. Mareev 2008, pp. 4–5.

40. Bakhurst 1991, pp. 26–7; Oittinen (ed.) 2000, p. 10; Dillon 2005, p. 285.

41. Maidansky 2009a, p. 202.

42. Bakhurst 1991, p. 31.

43. Bakhurst 1991, p. 37.

44. Bakhurst 1991, p. 38.

not by new philosophical arguments, but by the charge that it was a revisionist trend and, as such, a political danger.⁴⁵ Deborin and his followers accused the Mechanists of ‘gradualist’ politics, a charge that resonated at a time when the party was in the midst of a campaign against ‘right-deviationism’, which was associated with Bukharin.⁴⁶ Similar strong-arm tactics would be used against Deborin in the not-too-distant future.

Although they had tackled the Mechanists, the theorists of Right Deviationism, the Deborinites had failed to realize that the party now fought a ‘battle on two fronts.’ Consequently, they had ignored the party’s other enemy, Trotsky’s ‘Left Deviation’⁴⁷ with which they were associated by their opponents. Deborin was attacked for previously having been a Menshevik, and in December 1930 Stalin called the Deborinites ‘Menshevizing Idealists.’⁴⁸

Deborin’s defeat was a turning-point in Soviet philosophy, ending its prehistory and beginning the era of official Soviet-Marxist philosophy, which we know as *Diamat*.

In Bakhurst’s account, the philosophical debate between the Deborinites and the Mechanists reappeared in some ways during the thaw of the 1950s with Ilyenkov expressing the anti-positivism of the Deborinites. He writes, ‘Although contemporary Soviet philosophers may not see themselves as re-creating the early controversy, the continuity is undeniable. This is particularly so in the case of Ilyenkov, who can be seen as heir to the Deborinites’ project.’⁴⁹ The Deborinites’ effort to develop a theory of the relationship between thought and matter, without reducing thought to the physiological properties of matter, appears to be echoed in Ilyenkov’s own conception of the ideal.

In contrast, Sergey Mareev, one of the principal representatives of Ilyenkov’s legacy in contemporary Russia, denies this continuity, and challenges this reading of the development of Soviet philosophy, which has become dominant in Western scholarship. In Mareev’s account, Ilyenkov does not represent a revival of the Deborinite interpretation of Marxism, but rather a sharp break from it. According to Mareev, the positivism and reductionism that define *Diamat* were already present in the main currents of the 1920s. He locates the roots of *Diamat* not only among the Mechanists but also in the work of the Deborinites.⁵⁰ In fact, he traces its development back to Deborin himself: ‘this

45. Bakhurst 1991, pp. 45–6.

46. Bakhurst 1991, p. 47.

47. Bakhurst 1991, p. 48. Sten and Karev had been associated with Trotskyism.

48. Bakhurst 1991, p. 49.

49. Bakhurst 1991, pp. 26–7.

50. Mareev 2008, p. 18.

tradition in Soviet philosophy began with Deborin's book, *Dialectical Materialism*.⁵¹ However, it was Deborin's teacher, G.V. Plekhanov, whom he credits as the originator of this approach.

Plekhanov, widely seen as the 'father of Russian Social Democracy', is also largely known as Lenin's opponent who ultimately sided with the Mensheviks and lost. However, despite his defeat in the political sphere, he exercised considerable influence on the development of Marxist theory in the Soviet Union. He committed suicide on 5 May 1918, only a few months following the October Revolution; however, his followers, who eventually coalesced into Mechanists and Deborinites,

occupied practically all key positions in the newly-created Soviet ideological apparatus and the system of higher Marxist education. D.B. Ryazanov headed the Marx-Engels Institute [and] A.M. Deborin became in 1921 the editor-in-chief of the journal *Under the Banner of Marxism*. They determined the character of 'Marxist' philosophy in the 20s and 30s.⁵²

These students of Plekhanov, many of whom would soon lose their positions in Soviet academe, inherited a mechanistic reading of Marx, which continued to dominate Soviet philosophy during the reign of the *Diamatchiki*. Thus, there appears to be a line of continuity from Plekhanov to Deborin (themselves Mensheviks) to the *Diamatchiki*. 'Paradoxically, Lenin's line won in politics, but Plekhanov's line won in philosophy.'⁵³

Although Ilyenkov does not appear to be taking up the Deborinite project, there are undeniable continuities between his anti-positivism and that of other figures from pre-*Diamat* Soviet Marxism of the 1920s. In the Preface to Ilyenkov's posthumously published book, *Art and the Communist Ideal* (1984), Mikhail Lifshits – a close associate of Lukács who helped publish Marx's early works in 1932 – writes, 'By some miracle the seeds that were then sown on a favourable ground began to grow – although in a different, not immediately recognizable form. Evald Ilyenkov with his living interest in Hegel and the young Marx (who was discovered in the 20s and 30s here at home, not abroad, as is often claimed) . . . stood out as an heir of our thoughts.'⁵⁴ Rather than Deborin, there appears to be much greater affinity between Ilyenkov and thinkers such as Lifshits and Lukács.⁵⁵ 'Deborin proceeded from Plekhanov and in part from

51. Mareev 2008, p. 14.

52. Mareev 2008, p. 17.

53. Ibid.

54. Lifshits quoted in Oittinen (ed.) 2000, p. 10. Ilyenkov became a friend of Lifshits after a correspondence with Lukács who directed Ilyenkov to contact Lifshits.

55. Although as Maidansky 2009b argues, they had very different conceptions of the ideal.

Engels, whom it is common to blame for diamat... The only Marxist who spoke out against the doctrinal “diamat”-expression of Marxist philosophy and even personally against Engels, was Georg Lukács.⁵⁶

Lukács, who is largely seen as one of the founders of Western Marxism, was also a pivotal figure in the development of creative Soviet Marxism, specifically as a precursor to Ilyenkov. The polemics between Lukács and Deborin are well known. In 1924, Deborin published a scathing critique of Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), dismissing it as ‘idealist’.⁵⁷ Deborin's critique was part of a broad attack on Lukács, Korsch and other ‘professors’⁵⁸ who were denounced by Zinoviev at the Fifth Congress of the Comintern:

This theoretical revisionism cannot be allowed to pass with impunity. Neither will we tolerate our Hungarian Comrade Lukács doing the same thing in the domain of philosophy and sociology... We cannot tolerate such theoretical revisionism in our Communist International.⁵⁹

While Lukács recanted, his book, *Tailism and the Dialectic* (1925), was written in response to these charges.

In fact, Deborin's reductionism comes into sharp relief when examined against Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*. Taking aim at the determinism inherited from the Second International, Lukács posited a theory of subjectivity that afforded a much greater rôle to human agency in the development of class-consciousness. Lukács's central argument was that activity is organised in bourgeois society in a way that not only facilitates the development of class-consciousness, but also blocks its development primarily through the effects of the transformation of activity into the commodity, labour-power. He argued that the rôle of the Communist Party is to intervene in this dynamic in various ways, including counter-organising the activity of its members, by creating what he called a ‘world of activity’.⁶⁰ In *Tailism and the Dialectic*, he tried to demonstrate that this view was consistent with Lenin's organisational approach over the determinism of the Second International and the Mensheviks. By broadening the notion of activity from the labour-process to political practice

56. Mareev 2008, p. 42.

57. Deborin 1924, p. 4.

58. Rees 2000, p. 25.

59. Grigory Zinoviev quoted in Rees 2000, p. 25.

60. Lukács 1971, p. 337. He writes, ‘Freedom... is something practical, it is an activity. And only by becoming a *world of activity* [my italics] for every one of its members can the Communist Party really hope to overcome the passive role assumed by bourgeois man when he is confronted by the inevitable course of events that he cannot understand.’

and organisation⁶¹ he went beyond Deborin's reductionism, and prefigures Ilyenkov's work by several decades.

Ilyenkov's proper context in the development of Soviet Marxism continues to be a subject of debate. The rôle of Deborin and Lukács are contested,⁶² as is the rôle of Lenin. Ilyenkov considered himself a Leninist, although his 'Leninism' may confuse the Western reader who associates Leninism with the notion of the vanguard-party. In fact, Ilyenkov did not adhere to the Leninist principle of *partiinost* ['party-ness'], as can be seen from various examples of his breaking ranks.⁶³ He considered himself 'a communist, a Marxist, and a Leninist, but he was not a typical Marxist-Leninist'.⁶⁴ His self-understanding as a Leninist can be observed in the way he mobilises Lenin in support of his concept of the ideal.

In 'Dialectics of the Ideal', Lenin appears primarily as a critic of crude materialism. Ilyenkov reminds the reader of Lenin's appreciation of the insights of 'intelligent' idealism, and of his dismissal of crude materialism as 'silly' materialism.⁶⁵ He also invokes Lenin when arguing that the brain does not think, but that people think with the aid of the brain, returning human activity into the process, which otherwise becomes biologically reductionist.⁶⁶ He draws on Lenin on two additional occasions – both times on the distinction between the material and the ideal, identifying Lenin's view with Marx and Engels, as against crude materialist reductionism.⁶⁷ 'For Ilyenkov, Lenin's great contribution lay in his rejection of empiricism and positivism'.⁶⁸ In this way,

61. Rees 2000, pp. 20–1: 'All this is beyond Deborin, who can see only the labour process as the site of practice: "the one-sidedness of subject and object is overcome . . . through praxis. What is the praxis of social being? The labour process . . . production is the concrete unity of the whole social and historical process." Again, this is formally correct but in fact returns us to the old Second International insistence on the inevitable onward march of the productive process as the guarantor of social change, whereas Lukács, without ignoring this dimension, is concerned with political practice and organisation as well'.

62. For instance, Maidansky challenges the extent to which Lukács prefigures Ilyenkov, arguing that Ilyenkov's approach is much richer as a result of his reading of Spinoza (Maidansky 2009a).

63. For example, in 1965 he was prevented from accepting an invitation from the University of Notre Dame to speak at a conference called 'Marxism and the Western World'. In his paper, discussed in his absence, he criticises the 'formal democracy' of the Soviet state, and he 'writes not as a Soviet delegate presenting an official line, but as an autonomous scholar addressing the specific concerns of the symposium in his own voice' (Bakhurst 1991, p. 8). Subsequently, he spoke out against the Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968 (Tolstykh (ed.) 2008, p. 8).

64. Levant 2008, p. 37; Tolstykh (ed.) 2008, p. 8; Bakhurst 1991, p. 8.

65. Ilyenkov 2009a, pp. 25–6; Ilyenkov 2012, p. 164.

66. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 22; Ilyenkov 2012, p. 162.

67. Ilyenkov 2009a, pp. 23, 47; Ilyenkov 2012, pp. 163, 181. Neither of these passages appear in the English translation.

68. Bakhurst 1991, p. 122.

Ilyenkov mobilises Lenin against those who claim the mantle of Leninism in Soviet philosophy.

Using Lenin's authority against one's intellectual opponents is not new in the history of the Soviet philosophy. For instance, Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, which were published in 1929, were used by the Deborinites against the Mechanists to demonstrate the latter's crude materialism as anti-Leninist.⁶⁹ Similarly, the *Diamatchiki* used Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1909) in their battle against the Deborinites. There is no consensus on whether Ilyenkov invoked Lenin for philosophical or for political reasons; however, his interest in Lenin's philosophy appears to be more substantive than a matter of political expediency.

Lenin is largely known as a political actor and political theorist, and not as much as a philosopher. His philosophical work tends to be overshadowed by his political achievements, and it is often dismissed as crudely materialist and identified with the reductionism of *Diamat*. Sometimes it is acknowledged that his ideas developed beyond crude materialism, particularly in his reflections on Hegel's *Logic* in his *Philosophical Notebooks*, which were written at a time during which he has been said to break with Kautsky and the fatalism of the Second International.⁷⁰ In fact, some scholars have noted a similar break in his philosophy. For instance, Oittinen writes, 'It is rather obvious that there are many points of divergence between Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, written in 1909 against the Machist subjective idealist current which at this time was widespread among the Bolshevik intellectuals, on the one hand, and the *Philosophical Notebooks*, which is essentially a conspect of Hegel's *Logic* with Lenin's own commentaries which Lenin wrote down in the library of the canton of Bern (Switzerland) in 1914–1915, on the other.'⁷¹ Lenin's attempt to break with the Marxism of the Second International on the question of organisation during his Switzerland years also appears to have had a counterpart in the sphere of philosophy. Oittinen writes, 'Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* can be seen as an attempt to find an adequate formulation for a Marxist philosophy that would avoid the deterministic and objectivistic world-view of the Second International.'⁷²

In contrast, Ilyenkov denies this break in Lenin's philosophy, and identifies a critique of positivism not only in Lenin's later work, but in his early work as well. In *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism* (1979), his last book

69. Mareev 2008, p. 34.

70. However, this view is vigorously contested by Lih 2006, who argues that Lenin remained an 'Erfurtian Marxist' to the end, and that it was Kautsky who changed course.

71. Oittinen (ed.) 2000, p. 13.

72. Oittinen (ed.) 2000, p. 15.

published during his lifetime, he writes, ‘The conception of dialectics as the logic and theory of knowledge of modern materialism, which permeates the entire text of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, was formulated a bit later – in the *Philosophical Notebooks*. But “implicitly” it is the essence of Lenin’s position in 1908 as well.’⁷³ Ilyenkov’s interest in Lenin requires further research, as does Lenin’s influence on Soviet philosophy, which remains a subject of debate in post-Soviet Russian philosophy.⁷⁴

A major figure from the pre-*Diamat* period whose influence on Ilyenkov is acknowledged by all parties is the creative Soviet-Marxist psychologist, Lev Semenovich Vygotsky. The work of L.S. Vygotsky has received significantly more attention in the West than that of Ilyenkov. In his brief ten-year career, he left behind an entire school of thought, often referred to as the ‘Vygotsky School’ or the ‘cultural-historical’ school of Soviet psychology. This school of thought is distinguished by its ‘activity-approach [*dejatel’nostnyj podkhod*]’ to the study of the development of consciousness, or what has been referred to as ‘activity-theory’. Ilyenkov developed his main ideas prior to, and independently of, Vygotsky; however, he became attracted to this school, particularly its practical applications in pedagogy and developmental psychology, and he came to be known as the ‘philosophical mentor’⁷⁵ of the Vygotsky School.

Vygotsky’s focus on activity, language and inter-subjectivity in the development of consciousness strongly resonates with Ilyenkov’s views. Both theorists have an anti-essentialist approach to human consciousness in the sense that consciousness does not develop spontaneously along with the development of the human brain in the body of a child, but that consciousness is in its essence a social product. In Vygotsky’s account, children develop ‘higher mental functions’ as they develop the ability to speak; that is, as they internalise the system of signs that they inhabit. Vygotsky writes, ‘The system of signs restructures the whole psychological process and enables the child to master her movement. . . . This development represents a fundamental break with the natural history of behaviour and initiates the transition from the primitive behaviour of animals to the higher intellectual activity of humans’.⁷⁶ A new type of perception develops with this break, which Vygotsky calls

73. Ilyenkov 2009b, pp. 375–6.

74. For instance, Bakhurst writes, ‘the ambiguity in Lenin’s materialism has given rise to two opposing schools of thought within contemporary Soviet philosophy . . . While the germ of radical realism in Lenin’s philosophy exercised a formative influence on Ilyenkov’s philosophical concerns, Lenin also inspired the very school of scientific empiricism that Ilyenkov came to see as his principal opponent’ (Bakhurst 1991, p. 123). Similarly, Oittinen argues that the tension between positivist and anti-positivist readings of Marx in Lenin’s own work continued unresolved in Soviet philosophy (Oittinen (ed.) 2000, p. 15).

75. Bakhurst 1991, p. 218.

76. Vygotsky 1978, p. 35.

‘meaningful perception’, as opposed to ‘natural perception’.⁷⁷ Natural perception is the perception of animals and humans without speech. It involves a passive response to stimuli in one’s immediate visual field. Meaningful perception, on the other hand, involves an active response to stimuli that has been organised by language. It is active because one is not simply responding to reorganised stimuli, but is oneself engaged in organising stimuli through the use of speech.⁷⁸ From the perspective of this ‘activity-approach’, the ‘higher mental functions’ and ‘meaningful perception’ that are associated with human consciousness do not arise from the brain itself, but must be *acquired* by the child with the help of her brain, and that in the absence of this acquisition the child would not develop a genuinely human consciousness.

Vygotsky describes this process of acquisition using his concept of ‘internalisation’, a term Ilyenkov adopts in his later work. Vygotsky argues that internalisation – ‘the internal reconstruction of an external operation’⁷⁹ – is an active social process. He illustrates this with the example of a child who learns the significance of pointing. What begins as a child’s attempt to grasp something out of reach is seen by another person who brings that thing to the child. Consequently, the child recognises her own attempt at grasping as a meaningful gesture for someone else, and repeats the gesture for another person, as opposed to for the thing itself. In this way, pointing is internalised as a significant gesture by the child through an active process between herself and another.

We can see this very same anti-essentialist conception of consciousness in Ilyenkov’s ‘activity-approach’ in ‘Dialectics of the Ideal’. For Ilyenkov, the consciousness of an individual (including her sense of self)⁸⁰ likewise does not develop naturally, but only by means of acquiring

the *universal norms of that culture* within which an individual awakens to conscious life, as well as requirements that he must internalise as a necessary law of his own life-activity. These are the cultural norms, as well as the grammatical-syntactical

77. Vygotsky 1978, p. 32.

78. Vygotsky writes, ‘it is decisively important that speech not only facilitates that child’s effective manipulation of objects but also controls *the child’s own behaviour*. Thus, with the help of speech children, unlike apes, acquire the capacity to be both the subjects and objects of their own behaviour’ (Vygotsky 1978, p. 26).

79. Vygotsky 1978, p. 56.

80. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 54; Ilyenkov 2012, p. 186: ‘Consciousness and will become necessary forms of mental activity only where the individual is compelled to control his own organic body in answer not to the organic (natural) demands of this body but to demands presented from outside, by the “rules” accepted by the society in which he was born. It is only in these conditions that the individual is compelled to distinguish himself from his own organic body. These rules are not passed on to him by birth, through his “genes”, but are imposed upon him from outside, dictated by culture, and not by nature.’

linguistic norms on which he learned to speak, as well as the ‘laws of the state’ in which he was born, as well as the rules of thinking about the things around him since the world of his childhood, and so on and so forth. He must internalise [усваивать] all of these normative patterns as a special ‘reality’ that is clearly distinct from himself (and from his brain, of course) (p. 153).⁸¹

In fact, he directly draws on Leontyev (1972) and Meshcheryakov (1974) – both followers of Vygotsky’s cultural-historical school – to support his claims. He writes, ‘Psychology must necessarily proceed from the fact that between individual consciousness and objective reality there exists the “mediating link” of the historically formed culture, which acts as the prerequisite and condition of individual mental activity. This comprises the economic and legal forms of human relationships, the forms of everyday life and forms of language, and so on.’ (p. 187)⁸² He goes on to quote Leontyev at length,

Thus, meaning refracts the world in the consciousness of man. Although language is the bearer of meanings, it is not their demiurge. Behind linguistic meanings hide socially produced methods (operations) of activity, in the course of which people alter and cognise objective reality. In other words, meanings represent the ideal form of the existence of the objective world, its properties, connections and relations, transformed and folded in the matter of language, which are disclosed in the aggregate of social practice. This is why meanings themselves, that is to say, abstracted from their functions in individual consciousness, are by no means ‘mental’, as is that socially cognised reality, which lies behind them. (p. 188)⁸³

In this way, the ‘individual awakens to conscious life’ by actively acquiring ‘the ideal form of the existence of the objective world’, and this ‘ideal form’ is not language itself, but human activity.

This ‘activity-approach’ forms an unmistakable line of affinity between cultural-historical psychologists such as L.S. Vygotsky, A.N. Leontyev, A.R. Luria, and A.I. Meshcheryakov on the one hand, and philosophers who in the 1960s used this method in an attempt to revitalise Soviet philosophy on the other. These latter theorists are not as well known in the West as the cultural-historical school of Soviet psychology. They include G. Batishchev,⁸⁴ F.T. Mikhailov,⁸⁵ V.V. Davydov, philosophers of the ‘Kiev School’, and, most importantly, Ilyenkov

81. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 11.

82. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 55.

83. Ibid; Leontyev 1975, p. 134.

84. Batishchev later broke with activity-theory.

85. Mikhailov’s *The Riddle of the Self* (which exists in English translation (Mikhailov 1980)) is an interesting attempt to grasp the nature and origin of the self from the perspective of activity-theory.

himself, who sought to develop a philosophical foundation for activity-theory, and who ‘began to play the role of the philosophical spokesman of the Vygotsky School’.⁸⁶ This approach continues to be developed by contemporary Russian philosophers such as S. Mareev, A. Maidansky, and others.⁸⁷ This group of theorists are some of the current representatives of the ‘activity-approach’ in post-Soviet Marxist thought.

Ilyenkov and the Western world

This body of thought has much in common with ‘Western Marxism’. The term ‘Western Marxism’ is broadly associated with Perry Anderson’s influential work, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (1976), where it is understood as a body of theory that emerged in the wake of the defeat of ‘classical Marxism’, and is associated with names such as Lukács, Korsch, Gramsci, Benjamin, Della Volpe, Marcuse, Lefebvre, Adorno, Sartre, Goldmann, Althusser, and Colletti.⁸⁸ According to Anderson, what principally distinguishes this body of thought from classical Marxism is its divorce from revolutionary-political practice (i.e., that its main contributions were produced in a context of isolation from mass-movements and mass-political organisations). However, this tradition is also defined by its shift in emphasis from political economy to problems of culture and subjectivity. As Russell Jacoby argues, these theorists are to be distinguished not only from classical Marxism but also from Soviet Marxism in their concern ‘to rescue Marxism from positivism and crude materialism’.⁸⁹ In this way, Western Marxism shares a common concern with Soviet ‘activity-theory’, which could likewise be distinguished from ‘Soviet Marxism’ (understood as *Diamat*) for the same reasons. Furthermore, Mareev makes a powerful argument about the rôle of Lukács in the development of Soviet Marxism, which marks a significant point of contact between the two traditions,

86. Bakhurst 1991, p. 61.

87. See Oittinen 2010 for a summary of creative Marxism in Russia today, including proponents of activity-theory. These contemporary theorists organise an annual conference called the ‘Ilyenkov Readings’, where more than one-hundred papers are presented.

88. Incidentally, Colletti wrote a long forward to the Italian edition of Ilyenkov’s first book, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx’s ‘Capital’* (1960). See below on the ‘Italian Affair’.

89. Jacoby 1983, p. 524. This critique of positivism, scientism, and reductionism continues in contemporary Marxist theory in the West. The journal *Open Marxism*, for instance, sought to ‘emancipate Marxism’ from positivism and scientism, ‘to clear the massive deadweight of positivist and scientific/economistic strata’ (Bonefeld, Gunn, Holloway and Psychopedis (eds.) 1995, p. 1).

as this principal founder of Western Marxism also played a key rôle in the development of creative Soviet Marxism.

Despite these similarities – both in terms of theoretical concerns and certain key figures – this tradition has not received much attention in the West. Unlike the Vygotsky School from the 1920s and 1930s, ‘activity-theory’ from the post-Stalin period has not had a significant impact in the English-speaking world. The same holds true for Ilyenkov. Although he had a profound impact on Soviet philosophy in his own lifetime, he has not been as influential outside the Soviet Union. His philosophical insights have ‘to this day remained a Soviet phenomenon without much international influence’.⁹⁰

There have been several attempts to place Ilyenkov in conversation with Western-Marxist thought, and some work has been done in recent years to facilitate this process. The earliest was a failed attempt in the early 1960s – the so-called ‘Italian Affair’,⁹¹ which reveals an interesting point of contact with the Della Volpe School. Bakhurst’s *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy* (1991) remains the only major book on Ilyenkov in English. In 1999, on the twentieth anniversary of his death, a symposium was held in Helsinki, the proceedings of which were published in 2000 in *Evald Ilyenkov’s Philosophy Revisited*, edited by Oittinen. Paul Dillon reviewed this book for *Historical Materialism* in 2005. Some work has appeared in academic journals in the West, including a special issue of *Studies in East European Thought* on Ilyenkov in 2005 and a special issue of *Diogenes* on Russian philosophy in 2009, which includes an article by Abdusalam Guseinov and Vladislav Lektorsky that provides for English readers important insights into the historical context in which Ilyenkov wrote.

Ilyenkov was not overly prolific, although he published several key books and numerous articles. An archive of his publications can be found online at a site curated by Andrey Maidansky which includes a section with all existing English translations of his work.⁹² Many of his writings were published during his lifetime, and some of them have been translated into English. MIA recently

90. Oittinen 2005a, p. 228.

91. Oittinen 2005a, pp. 227–8. As Oittinen explains, the manuscript of Ilyenkov’s first book, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx’s ‘Capital’* (1960), had been smuggled into Italy before it was published in the USSR; however, it remained unpublished until its publication in the USSR so as not to make ‘life too difficult for Ilyenkov’. Oittinen writes, ‘the Foreword to the Italian edition was written by Lucio Colletti, a disciple of Galvano della Volpe, who expressly wanted to develop a non-Hegelian version of Marxist philosophy. Such a position is extremely difficult to reconcile with Ilyenkov’s Hegelian stance, which, far from abandoning dialectics, strives to make it the main tool of a reformed Marxism. So, both the Della Volpe school and Ilyenkov moved away from *Diamat*, but, unfortunately, they went in different directions’.

92. <<http://caute.ru/ilyenkov/>>.

produced a new volume called *The Ideal in Human Activity* (2009), which includes much of his work in English translation.

'Dialectics of the Ideal' remained unpublished until 2009, when a special issue of the Russian philosophy-journal *Logos* featured the complete article in its original form. The saga of its publication is worth recounting. In 1976 it was slated to be included as part of a two-volume set of articles written by several authors and prepared by the Department of Dialectical Materialism at the Institute of Philosophy. However, it was blocked from publication at a meeting of the governing council of the Institute, which was headed by B.S. Ukraintsev. A decision was taken to publish the two-volume set, but to remove two articles, including 'Dialectics of the Ideal'. Ilyenkov's former PhD supervisor T.I. Oizerman likewise voted for its removal.⁹³

It was prevented from publication six additional times, and it remained unpublished during Ilyenkov's lifetime. Shortly after his death in 1979, the Russian philosophy-journal *Voprosy Filosofii* [*Questions of Philosophy*] published 'Probl'ema Ideal'nogo [The Problem of the Ideal]', a truncated version of the original.⁹⁴ Two additional abridged versions appeared in the USSR: in *Izkhustvo I Kommunisticheskii Ideal* [*Art and the Communist Ideal*] (1984) and in *Filosofia I Kul'tura* [*Philosophy and Culture*] (1991).⁹⁵

The first English translation of this piece preceded its publication in Russian. In 1977, 'The Concept of the Ideal' was published in a volume called *Philosophy in the USSR: Problems of Dialectical Materialism*.⁹⁶ It was translated by the Cambridge Slavist Robert Daglish and includes a little more than one-half of the original. It begins approximately one-third of the way into the text, and leaves out a number of significant parts, including the entire section on Dubrovsky and two important passages where Ilyenkov cites Lenin in support of his argument. Substantial parts of the article have been summarised and completely rewritten, presumably by the translator.⁹⁷

The translation that follows provides for the first time the complete, unabridged and unedited text of 'Dialectics of the Ideal' in English translation. I have indicated some of the parts that have been entirely omitted from the Daglish translation; however, I have not indicated all of the differences in translation, as there are far too many. I have also included several footnotes to explain nuances with which an English reader might not be familiar. Following

93. Maidansky 2009c, p. 3.

94. Ilyenkov 1979a and 1979b.

95. Maidansky 2009c, p. 4.

96. Ilyenkov 1977b.

97. Maidansky 2005, p. 303. 'A few of the first paragraphs, I should venture to guess, belong to Daglish, not to Ilyenkov.'

the Russian edition, I have kept Ilyenkov's own additional remarks that he included in subsequent versions of the text. They appear in curly brackets, and changes in words and phrases are marked with a tilde. At times, I have kept the Russian original term in square brackets to ensure the precision of technical terminology.

I would like to sincerely thank Andrey Maidansky (Taganrog University) and Evgeni V. Pavlov (Metropolitan State College of Denver) for their invaluable comments on the translation, which helped to reflect with precision Ilyenkov's technical vocabulary, and also to capture the nuances and humour of his phraseology. As with any translation, something is always lost, for which I bear sole responsibility.

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