



Research Article

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The Tradition of Humanistic Consciousness in Marxian Materialism

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Abstract

Traditionally, the researchers of Marx ignored the Epicurean roots for the maturation of Marxian thoughts, insisting that Marx was engaged in it only during his writing of the doctoral dissertation of 1841. Indeed, Epicurus played a decisive role in Marx's subsequent works, although this reality is not explicitly mentioned. Epicurean atomism, through the theory of the declination of the atom, refers to a utilitarian consciousness for realizing human freedom and ethics. From the heretical tradition of humanism, Marx inherited Epicurean materialism as an important source of the "materialism of freedom", a materialism that may be considered as a philosophy of emancipation. Besides the freedom of nature from which it ultimately derives, this Marxian idea also combines with that of Epicurus in terms of history: Marxian historiography is actually narrating history in the present, by which we can recall our lack of humanity.

Keywords: Marx, Epicurus, materialism, humanism, historiography

1. A Lifelong Humanistic Awareness Presented in Marx

Marx was not only a philosopher, but also demonstrated a heterogeneous figure of the scientist, the economist, the historian and the politician in his self-summarisation. Strictly speaking, from a certain moment onwards (at the latest in 1845), he has explicitly claimed to no longer be a philosopher. The change of paradigm led him to theorise the death of "philosophy". Consequently, by discarding the philosophical space, Marx initialised the so-called "revolutionary practice".

In this perspective, Marx was neither a historian of philosophy nor a philosopher comparable to all the others; his relic is neither the history of his thoughts nor purely academic; on the contrary, it is certainly true that Marx inaugurated an absolutely new field of research, which achieved a breakdown with the past, but in dialogue with diverse traditions, with the eminent ancient humanists. Precisely, from this perspective, Marx was not just a revolutionist, nor merely a prophet without any "father".

Traditionally, the researchers of Marx reach a consensus that the "three sources" of the maturation of Marxian thought are German classical philosophy, French socialism and English

political economy. In addition to the three classic sources¹, the fourth source appears, and it seems that nobody has ever paid enough attention to.

The fourth predecessor of Marxian reference is Epicurus, from whom he borrowed the humanism as an important source of “materialism of freedom”, a materialism considered as philosophy of the emancipation. Through the Epicurean doctrine of the *clinamen*, namely atoms’ random deviation from which Marx inherited an eminently humanistic and metaphorical function of mind (Preve, 2007).

Usually, the scholars of Marx² ignore the Epicurean roots for the maturation of Marxian thoughts, insisting that Marx was engaged in it only during his writing of the doctoral dissertation of 1841, *The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*, and then completely abandoned it, without tracing back to the humanism subject.

Indeed, besides in the dissertation of 1841, Epicurus was nevertheless explicitly present in the *On the Jewish Question* (1844), the *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1844), also in *German Ideology* (1845) and in *Holy Family* (1845)³. As it will be shown, Epicurus played a decisive role in Marxian works in which are not explicitly mentioned. Louis Althusser has adequately insisted that in his original positions: The future development of Marxian thought is no other than an operation on this process that in turn, and would result in reading the “young Marx” in the light of the “mature Marx”. According to Althusser, the “young Marx”, before the writing of *German Ideology*, was characterized as a romantic humanist full of enthusiasm toward a better world; there would be another “mature Marx”, who arrived at a firmly scientific conception which further allowed him to read the collapse of the Capitalism and the consequent establishment of classless society as an inevitable necessity.

The risk is always potentially existing when one tries to follow such a path: Or rather, who disproportionately emphasizes the value of a young writer, ending up by understanding it as a decisive factor that orients all the following works. Similarly, regarding anachronistically an essay of 1841 as the eventual theoretical fulfilment of Marx that would have already fully developed in his historical materialism and in the critique of political economy many years later is a careless way of research. However, there is always a constant *substratum* in Marxian thought: Ernst Bloch recognizes it appropriately as a hope for a better future that is different from the past and the present (Fusaro, 2005).

Even a quite scientific work, such as *Capital*⁴ reveals the centrality of “hope” in several places: On the one hand, Marx explicitly stated that the aim of the work was “the mere critical analysis of actual facts, instead of writing receipts” (p. 42). On the other hand, subsequently, clearly transgressing this admonition, he drew a picture of what would be the upcoming communist society, namely the “true kingdom of freedom”. The economic science in Marx, according to the track of Althusserian interpretation, which could be placed after the so-called “epistemological break”, is utter functional to a goal that completely transcends science as a tool or a weapon of battle. In this

¹From which Marx would have deduced the egalitarian democratism and the idea of an association based on the direct participation of citizens in the general decision (Rousseau), the dialectical method and the crucial importance of history (Hegel), the concept that the foundation of wealth is labor (Adam Smith and David Ricardo).

²For example, Maximilien Rubel (2016), in his famous essay of intellectual biography on Marx, devotes a short paragraph to the Marxian comparison with Epicurus, without returning anymore to the subject in the further parts of his works. Then also Peter Thomas (2005) claimed that he does not grasp the importance of Marx’s encounter with the atomistic thought of Epicurus, more generally, of the ancient materialism as the genesis of Marxian theory.

³This is the most interesting aspect: Marx conceives the atomism of Democritus and Epicurus as the founder of a long atheistic and materialistic tradition, which flows directly into the communism and into the very materialistic conception of Marxian history. In our article, we will focus much more on the relationship between Marx and Epicurus than on what links him to Democritus.

⁴Thanks to the method of scientific analysis in the *Capital* and other rigorous works, Marx can overcome the fantastic utopians like Fourier and Saint-Simon, who limit themselves vaguely to hoping for an entirely fair world, without taking into account the real possibilities and the necessity of transition.

perspective, Marx is no longer a scientist; instead, he is a humanist to emancipate the human being, to demonstrate finally a human world in which the individuals consciously arrange the activities of production and reproduction, rather than being dominated by it. This image gives rise to a society in which the absolute priority is about to meet the satisfaction of the needs, rather than the accumulation of capital.

2. A Humanism as a Deviation Against the Greek Orthodox Mentality

In the dissertation, Marx further clarifies a point which we have already paid our attention to: The Epicurean atomism, through the theory of declination of atom (*clinamen* in Greek), refers to a utilitarianism for realizing human freedom and ethics appeal; while in Democritus, the atomism doctrine responds to merely scientific needs, or rather, the investigation of nature finds end-result in itself. The first is a humanist, the second a scientist. Criticizing mechanism (Democritus), finalism and providentialism (Plato and Aristotle), Marx intended to propose a sort of particular philosophy of history that interprets history as a succession of great theoretical interpretations. Precisely, when these thoughts seem to have reached the zenith with the impressive systematic constructions, the history orientates new theories that claim radically different demands. The originality what Marx insists on is the opposite *modus vivendi* between Democritus and Epicurus: According to Marx, the different conceptions of knowledge followed by the two philosophers result in their opposite model of life. Epicurus “is satisfied and blissful in philosophy” (Marx, 2000a) and he explained an existence in everything, for everything and finalized to be happiness: The secular happiness is legitimized as a pursue that is not inferior to that of the gods; the world in front of us is actual, in other words, it can be believed in and perceived correctly even through the senses. Democritus “is faced...with the world of sensation as the real world, full of content. True, this world is subjective semblance, but just because of this it is torn away from the principle, left in its own independent reality” (Marx, 2000a).

The fact is that the differences between the two philosophers should not be attributed to the accidental individuality of the two philosophers: On the contrary, “they embody two opposite tendencies” (Marx, 2000a, p. 20).

Democritus sacrificed his life to the philosophical investigation, to the exploration of the world and to the rejection of phenomenal similarity; Epicurus devoted everything else to the tranquility of the soul. When explaining the physical phenomena, Democritus was a good scientist that invariably resorted to necessity, and he believed that nothing can occur without a determinate cause; Contrarily, Epicurus left plenty room for the contingency, rejecting determinate and ultimate explanations.

In Epicurus, therefore, atomistics with all its contradictions has been carried through and completed as the natural science of self-consciousness. This self-consciousness under the form of abstract individuality is an absolute principle. Epicurus has thus carried atomistics to its final conclusion, which is its dissolution and conscious opposition to the universal. For Democritus, on the other hand, the atom is only the general objective expression of the empirical investigation of nature as a whole. Hence the atom remains for him a pure and abstract category, a hypothesis, the result of experience, not its active [energisches] principle. This hypothesis remains therefore without realisation, just as it plays no further part in determining the real investigation of nature. (Marx, 2000a, p. 66)

In this sense, the formulation of Democritean atomism is only regarded as background in Marxian context; the absolute protagonist is directing to Epicurus. By noting the extraordinary originality of the Epicurean theory, Marx explicitly warned that this rebel distinguishes itself not only from that of Democritus, but also from that of the entire Greek people. More generally, Marx observed that the Epicurean conception of atomism “stands in opposition not only to Democritus, but to the opinion of Greek philosophy as a whole” (Marx, 2000a).

Marx (2000a) pointed out that if we look at the Greek scenario of Plato and Aristotle, “the objective history of philosophy in Greece seems to come to an end with Aristotle” (p. 10), coming up

with its conclusion in those spectacular systems that are capable of accounting for every single aspect of the reality. Compared to these great and all-encompassing systems, the subsequent philosophy (particularly stoicism, skepticism and Epicureanism) seems completely worthless, which is “no relation to its powerful premises” (p. 10).

It is the turning point from where generates the “abnormal” opinion that differs Aristotle and Plato who represent the culmination of ancient thought, as if “after having reached its zenith in Aristotle, should then have withered” (Marx, 1841, p. 10).

Furthermore, Marx clearly stated, the post-systematic philosophy of the Stoics, the sceptics and especially of Epicurus, is not an irrelevant appendix, but the symbol of the birth of a different way to conceive philosophy. In particular, there is a new conception of the historical scenario that philosophy is no longer a disinterested and objective contemplation of the truth, but as a *praxis*, or rather something that must be experienced by the thinking subject and something must have an impact on the concrete reality. This new role of philosophy is certainly revealed in a way even in the Stoics, sceptics, and, above all in Epicurus: He does not ask himself metaphysically what the world is, what the nature is; rather, he asks what should be done to make people happy and then fully realize it. With the effort of Epicurus, philosophy was changed in its nature: By breaking with all the previous tradition, specifically from Thales to Aristotle, he reversed the traditional relationship between man and cosmos, between theory and practice. Marx indicated that the Epicurean mental vision was focused on man, and his particular interest was anthropocentric. After all, Marx summarizes that the Greeks, looking up at the sky, had contemplated their absolute perfection and had not hesitated to perceive a divine imprint, namely an insuperable superiority with respect to the terrestrial world.

Let us follow the Marxian analysis in detail. It is no doubt that Epicure thoroughly understood the paradigmatic image of Plato who distributed the existence of gods among the cosmos in *Timaeus*, fantasizing the stars as the seats of the divinities⁵.

Besides, in *De Caelo* (On the Heavens)⁶, Aristotle has precisely investigated the boundary between the terrestrial world (promoted by the bodies constantly formed by the four elements) and the celestial territory (driven by the eternal bodies composed by “ether” and obeys a circular physical motion), and he designated the moon as the boundary line between those two separate worlds. The result brings about an image of the two worlds that are radically different from each in every dimension, even though Aristotle permits the existence of an intermediate zone in which the meteorological factors would take place⁷.

The same controversy exists in the celestial bodies, which Aristotle has imagined, are constituted by the ether among their generis; but for Epicurus, there is no existing body that can escape from the atomic aggregation and disaggregation. Thus, what is given back to us by the philosopher of the Garden is the image of an absolutely unitary cosmos, where everything behaves rationally but, in a manner, neither entirely fatalistic nor determinable, just as act as man. Rejecting this Aristotelean “dualistic” perspective, Epicurus sorted out the field of the poets’ false beliefs and opposed any theological and teleological assumptions about the celestial phenomena. Marx commented that the Epicurean cosmology told us how the world can be explained “in multiple ways” (*Pollachòs* in Greek), instead of “in a unique and absolute way” (*aplòs* in Greek) or appealing to an intrinsic aim among them (as Plato and Aristotle believed). Rereading the *Epicurus’ Letter to Pythocles*, we can understand better his methodology of *Pollachòs*: As for the thunder, it

“...may be produced by the rushing about of wind in the hollows of the clouds, as happens in vessels on earth, or by the reverberation of fire filled with wind inside them, or by the rending and

⁵Definitely, the world picture that all the Greek people had is originally based on the mythical figure of Atlas.

⁶Philosophically, this Aristotelian paradigm would enjoy its great dominance and would rule human mind until the coming of scientific revolution.

⁷Explained by the Stagirite: Through the vicissitudes, the four constitutive elements of reality will encounter and gather among each.

tearing of clouds, or by the friction and bursting of clouds when they have been congealed into a form like ice: phenomena demand that we should say that this department of celestial events, just like them all, may be caused in several ways.” (Epicurus, 2019)

According to Marx, the theory of meteors of Epicurus should be considered as one of the most original point with respect to the entire Greek tradition, emancipating it from sense of fear and awe (toward the celestial world): “In the theory of meteors therefore appears the soul of the Epicurean philosophy of nature” (Marx, 1841, p. 77).

According to the theory of *Pollachòs*, or rather the “plurality of the explanations”, the rising and the setting of stars, the different duration of day and night, the light of the lunar belt and all the other phenomena that in regard to the sky, can be explained in multiple ways, as long as we refuse the myths that determinate all the correspondence and coincidence with the phenomena. In addition, if we provide a single explanation of celestial phenomena, this could easily be denied and would provoke a new circumstance of confusion and disturbance to the human civilization. For this reason, through carving a path to possible denials, Epicurus did not hesitate to reproach those philosophers who had provided the unitary explanation of all the clear phenomena merely by a conjectural way.

Marx concluded that we did not know all aspects of celestial phenomena, which, according to Epicurus, should not be a frighten to us, since it did not mean that we cannot know, simply that we have not known yet. Just like Prometheus, Epicurus has shifted the barycentre from gods to man, to the personal happiness. Marx cited the well-known verses of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* (I, 62-79) (Lucretius, 2017) in which the Roman atomist eulogizes Epicurus as the liberator of human being :

“When human life to view lay foully prostrate upon earth crushed down under the weight of religion, who shewed her head from the quarters of heaven with hideous aspect lowering upon mortals, a man of Greece ventured first to lift up his mortal eyes to her face and first to withstand her to her face. Him neither story of gods nor thunderbolts nor heaven with threatening roar could quell: they only chafed the more the eager courage of his soul, filling him with desire to be the first to burst the fast bars of nature's portals. Therefore the living force of his soul gained the day: on he passed far beyond the flaming walls of the world and traversed throughout in mind and spirit the immeasurable universe; whence he returns a conqueror to tell us what can, what cannot come into being; in short on what principle each thing has its powers defined, its deep-set boundary mark. Therefore religion is put under foot and trampled upon in turn; us his victory brings level with heaven.” (trans. R. E. Latham, 1955, modified)

3. A Humanism Disenchants All the Religious Illusions

It is extremely interesting that Marx was aware of the alliance between Epicurus and Prometheus in the dissertation. The latter is significantly qualified as “the most eminent saint and martyr in the philosophical calendar” (Marx, 1841, p. 8). At the mythological level, he represented the concrete and authentic realization of the Epicurean claim; his solitary battle was against everything that pretended itself to be divine or to be superior to man.

The declaration of Prometheus “is its own confession, its own aphorism against all heavenly and earthly gods who do not acknowledge human self-consciousness as the highest divinity”, or rather, “in simple words, I hate the pack of gods” (Marx, 1841, p. 7).

The theft of fire from the gods symbolised Prometheus and embodied the “self-consciousness” (a concept still strongly impacted by Hegel and Bruno Bauer in the thought of young Marx) of humanity. Insisting on the absolute anthropocentrism and the freedom of self-consciousness as the supreme principles of his philosophy, Epicurus fought with all his strength against everything that obstructed the secular principles, including the divine. Indeed, in a famous passage from another his letter, he warned his disciples to refuse understanding the gods as the causes of the celestial phenomena: “Do not let the divine nature be introduced at any point into these considerations, but let it be preserved free from burdensome duties and in entire blessedness” (Epicurus, 2019).

The viewpoint of Marx was shaped in such a way, “Epicurus is therefore the greatest

representative of Greek Enlightenment” (Marx, 1841, p. 78). He removed all kinds of superstition from men, brought the light of reason reflected on everyone’s reality. Certainly, Epicurus, as the son of his specific time, was able to fully develop the atheism: He preferred to fantasize the gods that consist of atoms and emptiness which totally conform to the principles of atomistic doctrine and thus, all the materials and the residents reside completely in their precise physical places.

As Marx noted, as a matter of fact, in Epicure’s theological discourse, every religious sentiment and every divine fear have already been wiped out: To read between the lines, the divine has no more influence on man, so that it does not make sense to pray to the gods nor to feel anxious about the punishment condemned by them. To make the gods reside “out of the world” is equal to recognize that they are unable to act in themselves.

During this period of his activity, which lasts no later than 1843 (together with the other “Young Hegelians”), Marx was still convinced that the greatest enemy to fight was religion, functioning as the disturbing element that prevented the State from becoming a fully rational entity.

Obviously, besides the archaic dissimulation of Epicurus, the critical position of Marx against the religion must contain the influence of Feuerbach, the philosopher who unmasked theology and brought back the discourse to anthropological area with his distinct work *The Essence of Christianity* (1841).

It is Feuerbach who supported the *Young Hegelians* with theoretical courage that

“The divine being is nothing else than the human being, or, rather, the human nature purified, freed from the limits of the individual man, made objective—i.e., contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being. All the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature.” (Feuerbach, 2012, p. 39)

From this point of view, God is nothing but the objectified essence of man, and religion comes to be dismissed as the objectification of the needs and desires of man. Therefore, their projection into a being is unjustly considered to be independent from the man. Following this reasoning, Feuerbach deduced that when the knowledge or the infinite love is attributed to God, in reality, we intend to show the infinity of the cognitive possibilities and the proper love of man. The young Marx adhered enthusiastically to this conception until to the year of 1843: In his paper *On the Jewish Question*, he defined the religion strictly in Feuerbachian manner, evaluating it as “a roundabout way, through an intermediary, although an essential intermediary” (Marx, 2019), by which man recognizes himself. The tone of Marx recalled us clearly the Feuerbachian definition in which the religion was regarded as “man’s earliest and also indirect form of self-knowledge” (Feuerbach, 2012, p. 39).

In this view, it is not surprising that Marx will always stay tied to the Feuerbachian critique of religion: Applying it in an analogical way, Marx spread the seed to the activities of production: Also in *Capital*, when he is dealing with the “fetish character of the goods”, he will make use of the image of Feuerbachian memory—and will rescue it from the “nebulous region of the religious world”—against the Fetishism, of the “God” invented by men themselves and then adored as an autonomous existence.

If it is true that Marx never denied the inspiration by Feuerbach, it is also the fact that, later soon, in 1843, showing its intimate contradictions, Marx would abandon the pure religious critique over the Left Hegelians: It is at this point that Epicurus—the ancient Greek philosopher—would leave the scene of being a pioneer of religious critique, instead, he would be increasingly indicated (especially in the *Holy Family*) as the founder of materialism, in which Marx—from 1844 onwards—was about to become fully awareness of his lifelong pursuit.

But since 1843, Marx has subtly changed his interest with the publication of *On the Jewish Question* and with the *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, discovering the realm of contradictions in the State and in the material sphere, with respect to which the religious moment was valued as the secondary. In this sense, Marx made a remarkable reversal against the position of *Young Hegelians*: Whether it derived from religion that results in a contradictory world composed by slaves and masters in the views of *Young Hegelians*, however, for Marx, it is the actual distorted world and its intrinsic contradictions that produce religion.

To survive in a world permeated by social contradictions and every kind injustice, men have fantasized a perfect celestial world after death in the human history, hoping that they would be endowed with strength to survive and be given a decent meaning to record an earthly life.

It is not the religious question, but the social one that the realistic world is inseparably connected to. It becomes the core of Marxian later analysis: Whoever criticizes religion, equals criticize its consequences, instead of criticising the cause of realistic and earthly misery.

It not only goes beyond the *Young Hegelians*, but also the Epicurean limit. In fact, Epicurus was convinced that it was sufficient to criticize the traditional religion and its absurd manifestations (sacrifices, divination, and so on) to release the man from all anxieties and from every worry, naturally, to make man fully free. In a famous passage of the essay *On the Jewish question*, Marx opportunely spited his way with the previous theoretical attachment in matters of religion: "We no longer regard religion as the cause, but only as the manifestation of secular narrowness" (Marx, 1844).

Starting from subsequent writings, such as the *Grundrisse* and the *Capital*, Marx continued to developing the conviction that the new religion was flourishing due to the fact that we still live in a religiously structured world: with its modern hierarchies (workers, bourgeois, capitalist), its transformed god (capital) and its stricter creed (the laws of economics and the market).

For this reason, religion is "the opium of the people" (Marx, 2000b), which paralyzes every revolutionary enthusiasm. Fighting against religion, as Bauer and comrades have done, means to merely challenging the imaginary unpleasant world that immersed in "the spiritual aroma" (Marx, 2000b). In Marx's perspective, the waking state means rather an action of breaking the real chain that bounds us, a practice of, "overthrowing all relationships in which man is a degraded, subjected, abandoned, despicable being" (Marx, 2000b), transforming the state of a fair world in which consolations and transcended legitimations are no longer necessary (this idea fits perfectly with the thought of Epicurus).

In other words, once the oppression on the realistic level is eliminated, the religion in the capitalism society will also collapse, to the extent that man will no longer need to "take drugs" for surviving in an unlivable material situation. In this regard, he writes significantly:

we explain the religious limitations of the free citizen by their secular limitations. We do not assert that they must overcome their religious narrowness in order to get rid of their secular restrictions, we assert that they will overcome their religious narrowness once they get rid of their secular restrictions. We do not turn secular questions into theological ones. History has long enough been merged in superstition, we now merge superstition in history. (Marx, 1844)

From the point of view that Marx noticed in the *Introduction* of 1844, we can proceed from the "criticism of Heaven turns into the criticism of Earth" (Marx, 1843): The place of Epicurus, in the mythical-philosophical scenario, is taken by Spartacus, who symbolised the humanity that redeemed himself and freed himself from the chains to which he is bound; further, he testified the passage from the struggle for the heavens of religion to the struggle for the terrestrial social injustice.

The greatness of Epicurus, at the time of the dissertation recognized in its anti-religious vocation, will be increasingly identified in its materialistic and anti-idealistic demand. Marx will gradually move away from his initial distrust of materialism.

4. Aleatory and the Materialism of Freedom

In the *Holy Family*, Marx excavated the potential of materialism from the source of the Greek atomism on which modern communism would be based. According to Epicurus, the human existence must faithfully reflect that of the atoms.

The theory of the *clinamen* (deviation) was read and interpreted by Marx as one of the most important differences between the philosophy of nature of Epicurus and that of Democritus: It became, in a certain sense, the Archimedean point on which Epicure placed all his other theories. When talking about the law of *clinamen*, as having pointed out by Marx (1841),

The declination of the atom from the straight line is, namely, not a particular determination

which appears accidentally in Epicurean physics. On the contrary, the law which it expresses goes through the whole Epicurean philosophy, in such a way, however, that, as goes without saying, the determination of its appearance depends on the domain in which it is applied. (Marx, 1841, p. 38)

Marx preferred frankly a “materialism of freedom” like that of Epicurus with respect to a “materialism of necessity” like that of Democritus.

In this regard, there is a very suggestive reflection of Epicurus which highlights the preferability of humanism with respect to the absolute scientism of the certain philosophers of nature. Because the radical scientific view of these thinkers (the target is Democritus) brings everything back to blind necessity.

For, indeed, it was better to follow the myths about the gods than to become a slave to the destiny of the natural philosophers: for the former suggests a hope of placating the gods by worship, whereas the latter involves a necessity which knows no placation. (Epicurus, 2019)

Considering the Epicurean deviation of atoms as a symbolic birth of something different, man is able to freely create something new. It is the “materialism of freedom” that Marx referred to and particularly with respect to which his “materialistic conception of history” is considered as a legitimate heir of humanism.

Apart from the freedom of nature from which it ultimately derives, Marxian idea is also perfectly combined with that of Epicurus even referring to the historical level: It is necessary to act in the necessity with which history evolves, to seize the concrete possibilities of transformations, “deviating” from the straight line of the historical process.

This association between the ideas must be related to the category of “objective possibility” and ontologically rooted in the subject itself, a category that has been theorized by Ernst Bloch in his paper on *Avicenna and the Aristotelian left*. Bloch maintained that the Marxian conceptions of active “matter” and indefinite “being” were heir to Epicurus, to Avicenna and to the so-called “Aristotelian left”. In this perspective, matter is implicitly assumed, in Marx, as “being-second-possibility” (*dynamei on* in Greek), as an emerging reality not yet transformed into accomplishment, whose horizon is a future that leaves space to the new historian and to the always fresh possibilities. Bloch claimed, in the Marxian perspective, matter, in its absolute dynamic potential, is always in ferment.

In the Epicurean perspective which Marx always adhered to faithfully, the advent of communism becomes an objective possibility resided in the internal capitalistic production, a possibility that must be conquered by fighting instead of waiting inertly an “inevitable necessity”⁸. As Norberto Bobbio adequately highlighted, “l’idea della libertà in Marx non è stoica ma epicurea” (the idea of freedom in Marx is not Stoic but Epicurean) (Bobbio, 2016, p. 229, translation mine).

Althusser argued that the importance of Epicurus of the early Marxian thought does not only emerge as regards the freedom of action, the deviation from necessity; it also emerges about a notion that in many verses is closely connected with that freedom of act (*praxis* in Greek) in Epicurus. Althusser named it as *matérialisme aléatoire* (aleatory materialism) (Althusser, 1994, p. 42, translation mine).

In this sense, it is possible to identify a subterranean clue in the Western tradition of the humanism, a hint that leads from the Epicurean atomism to the thought of Marx, passing through Machiavelli, Bruno, Spinoza and Rousseau: Marx’s encounter with Epicurus is decisive in the generation of his thought and represents a constant model for the German thinker, especially with regard to randomness and the aleatory element.

Althusser noted, in *Capital*, the birth of the capitalistic manner of production is highly random and germinated with the very specific conditions; more precisely, the random occurrence is based on a situation of individual exploitation of one class of dominants on an individual property of the dominated.

According to Althusser (1994, p. 45, translation mine), if there had been a different

⁸According to the “Stoic” interpretation claimed by Engels and Kautsky, the later Marxism then assumed the concept of “inevitable necessity” as a dominant guideline for the communist movement.

configuration (for example, collective property and collective withdrawal of the surplus, or collective property and individual withdrawal, or finally individual property and collective withdrawal), the capitalistic way of production would have never been born.

5. Conclusion

Through the learning and imitation from the ancients, the prediction of Marx reflects the direction of the whole human civilization and the crisis of it by the humanism of accidents that weaves the relationship between past and present, opening up new perspectives through the transverse and unknown paths that have not been taken into consideration. Michele Ciliberto (2017) explained this new Humanism tendency in *Il nuovo Umanesimo* (The New Humanism), "Life is more powerful than concepts, speeches, it overwhelms them like paper castles, constructions without foundation" (p. 13, translation mine).

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that nowadays we talk a lot about a new Humanism by reading the early Marx's works: Since humanism becomes a very realistic problem again once we rephrase the question on the condition of man and his destiny.

Marxian materialism seems to be an open process, a tough road of an "uncompleted history", but actually the history in the present, by which we can recall our lack of humanity. In our time, while the structures of the old history are disintegrating and a "new world" is emerging, what is the destiny of man and what is our future become a vital question. It is for this reason that today we should once again listen to the youthful voice of a "humanism" Marx who has collected and developed this conception from Epicurus and the relative humanistic tradition.

He records the end of the idea of historical necessity during the transition from capitalism to communism, highlighting how this transition should be recognized as both a fruit of randomness and of the free *praxis* of the individuals.

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